

# **THE THE MENACE**

**Intrigue  
in the  
Kremlin  
brings down  
the chief of  
secret police**

Articles prepared  
for LIFE by Gene Farmer  
and Jerrold Scheeter

At Stalin's funeral on March 9, 1953 the leading pallbearers (Malenkov, left; Beria at extreme right) were in temporary command. Behind Malenkov: Stalin's son Vasilii, Molotov, Bulganin, Kaganovich and Nikolai Shvernik, then Chairman of the Presidium (President). Khrushchev, also a pallbearer, is hidden behind casket.



# DEATH OF STALIN, OF BERIA



*The most powerful personality during Stalin's last years was the secret police chief, Lavrenti P. Beria, who came to look more and more like the take-over man after Stalin's death. A fellow Georgian, Beria was about 32 when Stalin in 1931 named him head of the Party organization in Transcaucasia. Four years later Pravda prominently serialized a "history" of pre-Revolutionary Bolshevism, written by Beria; it was actually a preposterously fawning biography of Stalin. When Stalin wanted a new secret police chief to wind up the purges of the 1930s, he brought Beria to Moscow. In December 1938, Beria took full command of the police apparatus he was to control for nearly 15 years. It was Beria who institutionalized the terror and the concentration camps, and it was Beria who presided over the mass deportations. He was named to the Politburo in 1946—the only secret police chief ever admitted as a full member. Khrushchev's account of Beria's arrest, which is published in this issue, is likely to become the definitive one.*



A last look at Beria: bidding for power, the infamous police chief is shown in a picture taken about the time Stalin died.

**B**eria and I started to see each other frequently at Stalin's. At first I liked him. We had friendly chats and even joked together quite a bit, but gradually his political complexion came clearly into focus. I was shocked by his sinister, two-faced hypocrisy. Soon after Beria arrived in Moscow [in 1938], the atmosphere in Stalin's inner circle took on an entirely different character. Stalin once confided to me his own unhappiness with Beria's influence: "Before Beria arrived, dinner meetings used to be relaxed, productive affairs. Now he's always challenging people to drinking contests, and people are getting drunk all over the place."

Even though I agreed with Stalin, I knew I had to watch my step in answering him. One of Stalin's favorite tricks was to provoke you into making a statement—or even agreeing with a statement—which showed your true feelings about someone else. It was perfectly clear that Stalin and Beria were very close. Anyone who wanted to be sure of staying in Stalin's good graces had to fawn all over Beria too. I must say I never saw any of this debasing obsequiousness on Molotov's part. Nor did I ever kowtow to Beria myself, and as

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*This excerpt has been adapted for LIFE from the forthcoming book "Khrushchev Remembers," to be published in the United States and Canada by Little, Brown and Company in December 1970. The book was translated and edited by Strobe Talbott and carries an introduction and commentary by Edward Crankshaw.*

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## 'Beria's arrogance grew



## in direct proportion to his power'



Lying in state in Hall of Columns, Stalin's bier was flanked by old lieutenants already locked in a war of succession. Left to right: Molotov, Voroshilov, Beria, Malenkov, Bulganin, Khrushchev, Kaganovich and Mikoyan. Conspicuously missing are Aleksei Kosygin and Leonid Brezhnev, present rulers.

On the day of Stalin's funeral Muscovites turned out by the thousands to view spectacular floral tributes piled on wall of the Kremlin, where Soviet heroes are buried. The spire at left center is St. Basil's Cathedral, between GUM department store and Lenin Mausoleum.



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a result I often had to contend with Beria working against me. Beria was fiercely jealous of his power and influence over Stalin. Stalin's brother-in-law, [Stanislav] Redens, had once been Beria's deputy in Georgia. Before Beria himself was transferred to Moscow, he decided to have Redens bounced out of Georgia. Why? So that Stalin would have no informer in Georgia other than Beria himself. He instructed his men to lure Redens into a café, where they got him drunk and threw him out into a gutter. Beria saw to it that Stalin found out Redens had discredited himself.

You see what sort of provocateur Beria was? Many years later, after Beria's downfall, the Central Committee received a long letter from a Georgian ex-convict enumerating all the people in Georgia who had been victims of similar provocations.

Beria's arrogance and his treachery grew in direct proportion to his increasingly powerful position. A favorite remark of his kept running through my mind: "Listen, let me have him for one night, and I'll have him confessing he's the King of England."

As Stalin lost control and even lost his will during the period of our retreat from the Germans [1941], Beria became the terror of the Party. His growing influence was obvious to me from the composition of Stalin's entourage. When I returned to Moscow from the Ukrainian front, I noticed that Stalin was surrounded by Georgians. There was a Caucasian chef who made shashlik for Stalin. He had been made a major general. Every time I came to Moscow I saw this chef had more and more ribbons and medals, apparently in recognition of his skill at cooking shashlik. Once Stalin caught me staring at the chef's ribbons and medals and scowled at me. He knew what I was thinking, and I knew what he was thinking, but neither of us said anything. Everyone felt that having this chef around in his uniform was downright offensive, but we never mentioned it because it wouldn't have done any good.

In addition to the major general chef there was a Georgian in charge of supplying wine, lamb for shashlik and various other provisions for Stalin's kitchen. He was made a lieutenant general. Whenever I came back from the front I noticed he too had been awarded one or more decorations in my absence. I remember that once Stalin gave me a dressing down in front of this lieutenant general in charge of provisions. He had gotten drunk with Stalin and the rest of us. Nobody knew him, yet we were supposed to talk intimately and freely in his company.

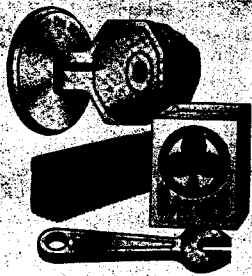
After the war, when Beria became a member of the Politburo, Stalin himself started to fear him. I didn't know at the time what the roots of this fear were, but later, when Beria's machinery for eliminating people was uncovered, it all became clear. Stalin realized that if Beria could eliminate anyone at whom Stalin pointed his finger, then Beria could also eliminate someone of his own choosing.

I first began to realize the intensity of Stalin's fear one day when I was at Stalin's for dinner. All of a sudden he looked around him and asked angrily, "Why am I surrounded by Georgians?"

Beria was immediately on his guard and said, "Comrade

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## KHRUSHCHEV REMEMBERS

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Stalin, these people are your faithful servants; they're all devoted to you."

Stalin became indignant: "Does that mean Russians are unfaithful? Does that mean Russians aren't devoted to me?"

"No," answered Beria, "I didn't say that. But the people who have been selected here are all loyal servants."

Stalin shouted, "I don't need their loyalty! Clear these people out of here!" The Georgians—including the shashlik cook and the provisions officer—were immediately whisked away, and Beria shuffled out of the room like a man who had been beaten up.

Once he had thrown out all the Georgian help and replaced them with Russians, Stalin probably believed he had closed off Beria's access to his kitchen through his entourage. However, Stalin was getting old. He didn't understand what was happening. Beria still did control Stalin's entourage, even after the Georgian service personnel had been thrown out. Beria had worked in the Cheka [secret police] for a long time, and all the Chekists were known to him. They were all trying to get in Beria's good graces, and it was easy for him to use these people for his own aims. Therefore Stalin couldn't even trust his Chekist bodyguard.

Beria's arrogance grew and grew. He was able—and I was astonished that Stalin stood for it—to make some point over dinner

## The Leningrad Affair: 'Kosygin's

*Until Khrushchev's 20th Party Congress secret speech in 1956, the Leningrad Affair was never mentioned officially in the Soviet Union. All the outer world knew was that after the sudden death in 1948 of Andrei Zhdanov, the former Party chieftain in Leningrad and once Stalin's likeliest heir, there was a vicious purge of Zhdanov's supporters in Leningrad and elsewhere. Malenkov and Beria, working in tandem and supported by Stalin, sought to destroy their rivals in the Leningrad Party apparatus. At the end of 1949, Stalin brought Khrushchev back from the Ukraine and installed him in Moscow in his old job as First Secretary of the Moscow City and Regional Party Committees.*

After taking up my job in Moscow I could see that my arrival on the scene got in the way of Beria's and Malenkov's plans. I even began to suspect that one of the reasons Stalin had called me back to Moscow was to influence the balance of power and to put a check on Beria and Malenkov. It seemed that Stalin would have been glad to get rid of Beria but didn't know how to do it. Stalin never told me this, but I could sense it.

Stalin certainly treated me well. Even though he frequently criticized me, he gave me support when I needed it. I was constantly running up against Beria and Malenkov. Malenkov had become a member of the Politburo after the war. Essentially he was a typical office clerk and paper-pusher. Such men can be the most dangerous of all if given any power. They'll freeze and kill anything that's alive if it oversteps its boundaries. Meanwhile the hunt was on in Leningrad. I don't know how Stalin really felt about the Leningrad case. He never spoke to me about it except when he touched on the matter of the "Moscow conspirators" in connection with my transfer from the Ukraine. By the time I started working as the Central Committee Secretary responsible for the Moscow organization, A. A. Kuznetsov [Zhdanov's top man in Leningrad] had already been arrested, and the Leningrad Party organization was being torn to shreds. The campaign was concentrated against a troika of promising young men—Kuznetsov, Voznesensky and Kosygin.

Before the whole Leningrad Affair started, Stalin had nourished high hopes for that troika of bright young men and in fact had been systematically promoting them. Voznesensky was often entrusted with the job of presiding over the Council of Ministers. Kosygin [Aleksi Kosygin, now Soviet Premier] had been given a responsible

and then, if Stalin rejected it, Beria would slap down someone else who tried to make the same point later in the meal. "I've already told you," Beria would say. "This question needn't be raised." Stalin wouldn't say anything even though he'd heard with his own ears that it had been Beria himself who had raised the question in the first place.

You couldn't even report to Stalin without getting Beria's support in advance; if you made a report to Stalin in Beria's presence and if you hadn't cleared it with him beforehand, he would be sure to tear your report down in Stalin's eyes with all sorts of questions and contradictions.

Stalin used to joke over dinner about Beria and [Georgi] Malenkov as "those two rogues." I watched with great interest as their "friendship" developed. I could see Beria neither liked nor respected Malenkov [who in the Politburo appeared to rank second only to Stalin]. Beria once said to me something like the following: "Listen, about this spineless fellow Malenkov. He's nothing but a billygoat. He'll bolt if you don't hold him on a leash. But he may come in handy."

Once Malenkov and I were together at Stalin's vacation home in Sochi. We went for a walk together and I said to him, "I'm surprised you don't realize what Beria's attitude is toward you. Don't

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## life hung by a thread'

post in charge of trade and finance.

I more or less knew Kuznetsov, and I knew Voznesensky very well. Voznesensky still hadn't been arrested when I arrived in Moscow, but he was out of work and was expecting them to come for him any day. [This was the state planner N. A. Voznesensky, not the well-known poet.]

It's my opinion that the downfall of these three men was determined by precisely this fact: Stalin had been preparing them as successors to the Kremlin old guard—Beria first and foremost, then Malenkov, Molotov and Mikoyan.

It's difficult for me to say exactly how the old guard managed to undermine Stalin's confidence in these young men and how he was, to put it crudely, siced on them. I can only offer the conclusions which I reached on the basis of my own observations: that Beria and Malenkov were doing everything they could to wreck the troika of Kuznetsov, Voznesensky and Kosygin, and that Beria was the most accomplished at undermining Stalin's confidence in others. Beria had Malenkov to use as a battering ram.

I assume that the charges against Kuznetsov's group were Russian nationalism and opposition to the Central Committee. The investigation began. And who directed the investigation? Stalin himself did. But if Stalin was the conductor, then Beria was the first violinist.

I was never really in on the case myself, but I admit that I may have signed the sentencing order. In those days when a case was closed—and if Stalin thought it necessary—he would sign the sentencing order at a Politburo session and then pass it around for the rest of us to sign. We would put our signatures on it without even looking at it. That's what was meant by "collective sentencing."

I was with Stalin when he was told about what Voznesensky said just before it was announced that he had been sentenced to be shot. Voznesensky stood up and spewed hatred against Leningrad. He cursed the day he had set foot in the city when he came there to study from the Donbas. I don't know what Kuznetsov and the others said in their last words.

As for Kosygin, his life was hanging by a thread. Kosygin was on shaky ground from the beginning because he was related by marriage to Kuznetsov. I simply can't explain how he was saved from being eliminated along with the others. Kosygin, as they say, must have drawn a lucky lottery ticket, and this cup passed from him.



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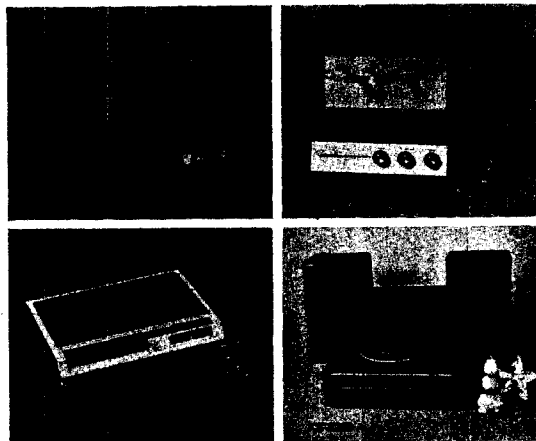
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## KHRUSHCHEV REMEMBERS

Cronies in the 1930s, Voroshilov (left) and Beria are shown in a previously unpublished picture. When Khrushchev began lining up the votes to "eliminate" Beria after Stalin's death in 1953, Voroshilov was Chairman of the Presidium. At first he seemed to hesitate, but then he cast a vote that was absolutely necessary if others were to go along.

# 'Our world turned into an asylum'



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you see what it is?" He was silent. "You think he respects you? I think he mocks you."

Finally Malenkov answered, "Yes, of course, I see. But what can I do?"

"What can you do? I would just like you to understand. It's true, right now you can't do anything. But the time will come."

*In late 1952 Stalin had only a few months to live, but he still had one monstrous judicial fabrication left: the weird "Doctors' Plot." It led to arrest of the Kremlin doctors in January 1953 for mishandling the illness of Andrei Zhdanov, who had died in 1948, and it is sometimes confused with the Leningrad Affair (see box), since the ghost of Zhdanov was in the background of both. The larger purposes of the Doctors' Plot are still obscure, but it appears to have been a preliminary move in what was intended to become Stalin's last great purge, aimed at Malenkov, Beria and many others—including, possibly, Khrushchev himself.*

One day Stalin read us a letter from a woman doctor named Timashuk. She claimed that Zhdanov died because the doctors purposely administered improper treatment. If Stalin had been a normal person, he wouldn't have given Timashuk's letter a second thought. But Stalin was more than receptive to this sort of literature. Stalin had instilled in the consciousness of us all the suspicion that we were surrounded by enemies and that we should try

to find an unexposed traitor or saboteur in everyone. Stalin called this "vigilance" and used to say that if there were 10% truth in a report, we should regard the entire report as fact. Stalin's version of vigilance turned our world into an insane asylum in which everyone was encouraged to search for nonexistent facts about everyone else. Son was turned against father, father against son, and comrade against comrade. The irrational policies of a sick man terrorized us all.

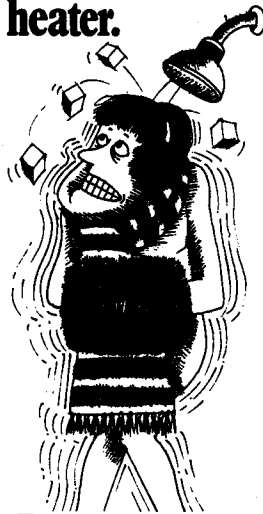
I should mention that Zhdanov had been treated by Kremlin physicians. Before his death, Zhdanov had been in poor health for some time. One of his ailments was that he had lost his willpower and wasn't able to control himself when it came to drinking. In the last days of Zhdanov's life Stalin used to shout at him to stop drinking. This was an astounding thing because Stalin usually encouraged people to get drunk. But he compelled Zhdanov to drink fruit juice while the rest of us were drinking wine or something stronger.

Anyway, the doctors connected with Zhdanov's case were arrested. Among them was V. N. Vinogradov. He had once treated Stalin, which was a rare distinction because Stalin almost never let doctors treat him. But Stalin had Vinogradov arrested and beaten. They also arrested V. K. Vasilenko, a reputable physician and professor. Vasilenko was in China when the arrests started. He was called home, and the minute he stepped across the Soviet border he was thrown in chains.

I remember after I made my report on the Party Statutes to the

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## KHRUSHCHEV REMEMBERS

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19th Party Congress [1952], I fell ill. I couldn't leave home when my report was being discussed at the Congress. An elderly doctor came to examine me. I was touched by his thoughtfulness and care. I felt terrible, but not because I was sick. I was tormented because I had already read the testimonies against this old doctor, whose concern for my health I found so touching, and I knew that no matter what I said Stalin wouldn't spare him.

Stalin circulated copies of Timashuk's letter with his own postscript in which he invoked the anger of the masses against the doctors who had "committed such villainry" by doing away with Zhdanov. More letters started pouring in branding the doctors as traitors. [Marshal [Ivan] Konev, himself a sick man at the time, sent a long letter to Stalin in which he claimed that he too was being poisoned with the same medicines which had allegedly been used to do in Zhdanov. Apparently all the members of the Presidium sensed the lack of substance in Konev's accusation, but we never discussed it openly. Once Stalin had made up his mind, there wasn't anything to do.

The interrogations began. I myself heard how Stalin talked to S. D. Ignatiev, who was then Minister of State Security. I knew Ignatiev personally, and I knew that he was a very sick man. Stalin used to berate him viciously over the phone. Stalin was crazy with rage, yelling at Ignatiev and threatening him, demanding that he throw the doctors in chains, beat them to a pulp and grind them into powder. It was no surprise when almost all the doctors confessed to their crimes.

It was a shameful business. After the crushing of the enemy in World War II, suddenly our intelligentsia—or at least the doctors in its midst—fell subject to Stalin's suspicion. The doctors' case was a cruel and contemptible thing.

*On Wednesday, March 4, 1953, Radio Moscow announced that Stalin had been stricken with a cerebral hemorrhage. Two days later, about four o'clock in the morning, came the announcement that Stalin was dead. Khrushchev's account of this momentous event and its aftermath is probably the most detailed that we will ever read.*

Malenkov, Beria, Bulganin and I had been at the dacha with Stalin on a Saturday night [Feb. 28] after watching a movie at the Kremlin. As usual, dinner lasted until five or six o'clock in the morning. Stalin was pretty drunk. He was jabbing me playfully in the stomach and calling me "Nikita" with a Ukrainian accent, which he always did when he was in a good mood. Dinners at Stalin's didn't always end on such a pleasant note.

On Sunday evening, expecting his call at any moment, I delayed dinner at home. Finally I had something to eat. It was very late when I undressed and got into bed.

Suddenly the telephone rang. It was Malenkov: "Listen, the Cheka boys have just called from Stalin's dacha. They think something has happened to him. We'd better get over there. I've already notified Beria and Bulganin."

It took 15 minutes to get there. We stopped to see the duty officers. They explained: "Comrade Stalin almost always calls someone and asks for tea or something to eat at 11 o'clock. Tonight he didn't." The Chekists sent Matryona Petrovna to check up. An aging maid, she wasn't very bright, but she was honest and devoted to Stalin. She came back and told the Chekists that Stalin was lying asleep on the floor of the large room where he usually slept. Apparently Stalin had gotten out of bed and fallen. The Chekists lifted him off the floor and laid him on a sofa in the small dining room next door.

We separated and all went home. Later that night there was another call from Malenkov. "The boys have called again," he said. "They say that something is definitely wrong with him. We'd better go back." We arranged for Malenkov to call Voroshilov and

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**'Something has happened to Stalin'**



Marshal Voroshilov, shown bending Khrushchev's ear in 1949, is described by Khrushchev as an incompetent war administrator (LWS, Dec. 4) but a most useful ally in the plot to overthrow Beria.



## KHRUSHCHEV REMEMBERS

Beria and Malenkov tried to take over after Stalin died. Mikoyan (right) was personally close to Beria and, according to Khrushchev, was lone voice raised in Beria's defense when he was arrested.



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Kaganovich, who hadn't been at dinner the night before. [All were members of the "inner Presidium" of nine men.] We arranged for doctors to come too. Among them I remember Professor [P. E.] Lukomsky. Shaking nervously, he touched Stalin's hand as though it were a hot iron. Beria said gruffly, "You're a doctor, aren't you? Go ahead and take hold of his hand properly."

Lukomsky said Stalin's right arm wouldn't move. His left leg was also paralyzed. His condition was grave. They undressed him and moved him back into the large room where he usually slept.

We arranged our own round-the-clock vigil among the Presid-

ium bureau members. Beria and Malenkov were on together; Kaganovich and Voroshilov; and Bulganin and I. The doctors told us that Stalin might live, but he wouldn't be able to work again, that usually illnesses like this don't last long and end fatally.

While the doctors were taking a urine sample, I noticed Stalin tried to cover himself. He must have felt the discomfort. Once he actually returned to consciousness. His face started to move. They had been spoon-feeding him soup and sweet tea. He raised his left hand and started to point to something on the wall. There was a picture hanging on the wall, a clipping from the magazine *Ogonyok*. It was a reproduction of a painting of a little girl feeding a lamb from a horn. Stalin was trying to say, "I'm in the same position as that lamb."

He began to shake hands with us one by one—with his left hand, because his right wouldn't move.

Beria had started spewing hatred against Stalin and mocking him. It was simply unbearable to listen to Beria. But as soon as Stalin showed these signs of consciousness and made us think he might recover, Beria threw himself on his knees, seized Stalin's hand and started kissing it. When Stalin lost consciousness again and closed his eyes, Beria stood up and spat.

I was more candid with Bulganin than with the others. I told him, "Stalin's not going to pull through. You know what kind of situation we're going to find ourselves in when Stalin passes away? You know what post Beria will take for himself? He'll try to make himself Minister of State Security. We can't let him do this. It will be the beginning of the end for us."

Bulganin said he agreed with me. I said, "I'll talk to Malenkov. I think he will see it our way. If we don't do something and do it right away, it will mean disaster for the Party. Beria could turn back the clock to 1937-38—and he could do worse."

Our watch ended and I went home. No sooner had I lain down

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**KHRUSHCHEV REMEMBERS**

**'Stop it! Can't you see the man is dead?'**

CONTINUED

than the telephone rang. It was Malenkov: "Come quickly. Stalin has had a setback."

I found that Stalin was indeed in a very bad way. The doctors told us that he was dying and that we were watching his death throes. Suddenly he stopped breathing. A huge man came from somewhere and started giving him artificial respiration, massaging him to get him breathing again. It was painful for me to watch. I said, "Listen! Stop it, please! Can't you see the man is dead?" They gave up. It was true—Stalin was dead.

The moment Stalin died, Beria got in his car and drove off.

*Beria was hurrying to take control of the security forces and put himself in the strongest possible position. He was bidding for supreme power. So was Malenkov, who emerged for a time as Stalin's nominal successor with Beria second in the hierarchy. But Khrushchev by now had also set his sights very high.*

As soon as Stalin died, Beria was radiant. To put it crudely, he had a housewarming over Stalin's corpse before it was even put in its coffin. Beria was sure that no power on earth could hold him back now. You could see these triumphant thoughts in his face as he drove off to the city, leaving us at the dacha.

I knew that Malenkov was just an errand boy. Stalin used to say, "This Malenkov is a good clerk. He can write out a resolution quickly, but he has no capacity for independent thought." Malenkov was sure to "come in handy" for Beria's plans.

Malenkov paced up and down nervously. I decided to have a talk with him then and there. I went over and said, "I want to talk to you."

"What about?" he asked coldly.

"Now that Stalin is dead, we have something to discuss. What do we do now?"

"What's there to talk about? We'll all get together and then we'll talk." I took this to mean that Malenkov had already talked things over with Beria. I already sensed that Beria would start bossing everyone around. He was a butcher and an assassin.

When the meeting was convened, Beria immediately proposed Malenkov for Chairman of the Council of Ministers. Malenkov proposed that Beria be appointed his first deputy. He also proposed the merger of two ministries into a single Ministry of Internal Affairs with Beria as Minister. I was silent. Bulganin was silent, too. If Bulganin and I had objected, we would have been accused of starting a fight before the corpse was cold. Things were moving in the direction I had feared.

Molotov and Kaganovich were nominated to be First Deputy Prime Ministers. Voroshilov was nominated to be Chairman of the Presidium. Beria was trying to make Voroshilov into someone whom he could rely on when he started his next round of butchery. Then Beria proposed that I be released from my duties as Secretary of the Moscow [Party] Committee so that I could concentrate on my work in the Central Committee secretariat. Then we decided on how best to announce Stalin's death.

During and right after the funeral Beria was attentive and respectful to me, which surprised me. Beria and Malenkov started including me in their strolls around the Kremlin grounds. It was Beria's Asiatic cunning coming into play. I knew that

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Beria was toying with me and trying to put me off my guard.

We had liquidated the large Presidium and the small [inner] bureau which Stalin had set up. We had reverted to a narrow circle of about 11 people. Then came the first clash. Beria made the following proposal: "Since many prison and exile terms are coming to an end and all these former convicts and exiles will be returning to their homes, I propose that we pass a resolution not allowing any of them to return without special permission from the Ministry of Internal Affairs."

I got angry and spoke against him: "I categorically object. We've already had this sort of thing in the past. These convicts and exiles you're talking about were arrested, interrogated, tried and sentenced by State Security troikas. They were never given the benefit of witnesses, prosecutors or judge. You're saying that those people should again be deprived of all their rights. This is totally unacceptable."

The others supported me. Beria shrewdly withdrew his proposal, and since Malenkov was taking the minutes, the motion was

never recorded. Later Beria introduced what seemed to be a liberal motion; he suggested lowering the maximum prison term from 20 to 10 years. I said, "I'm categorically opposed to this too. You can always sentence someone to 10 years and then another 10 years, right up until he dies." Once again Beria withdrew his motion.

And what was this scoundrel Beria's next move? One day we were walking together—Beria, Malenkov and I—and Beria began to develop the following idea: "We're not getting any younger. Anything could happen to any one of us, and we would leave our families behind. I'd like to propose that the government build dachas which it would then turn over to the leaders of the country for their personal use. I propose building these dachas in Sukhumi [on the Black Sea coast]. We could clear the center of the city and turn it into a park with peach trees."

We returned to our cars. Once we were alone I said to Malenkov, "Listen, what do you think about this idea of Beria's? It's the most blatant provocation."

"Why do you think so?"

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## The secret speech: Khrushchev's version

*When Khrushchev denounced Stalin in his sensational secret speech to the 20th Party Congress in 1956, he had great power but had not yet emerged supreme in his struggle to eclipse Malenkov. The speech was a 20,000-word document, packed with detail. Its substance apparently was drawn from a report on Stalinist repressions prepared—at Khrushchev's urging, according to him—by P. N. Pospelov, a dogmatic Party ideologist and a former editor of Pravda. But Khrushchev's decision to deliver the speech was a highly personal one. He had been forced into an exposed position by hostile colleagues, especially Malenkov, and he must have determined to turn the tables on them by sheer boldness. It was a gamble that paid off brilliantly.*

FOR three years we were unable to break with the past, unable to muster the courage to lift the curtain and see what had been hidden from us. We couldn't imagine that all those executions during the purges were, from a legal standpoint, crimes themselves. But it was true. Criminal acts had been committed by Stalin, acts which would be punishable in any state except fascist states like Hitler's.

I first sensed the falsity of our position when we went to Yugoslavia and talked with Tito in 1955. When we mentioned Beria as the culprit behind the crimes of the Stalin period, the Yugoslav comrades smiled scornfully and made sarcastic remarks. We launched into a long argument in defense of Stalin. It's now clear that my position was wrong.

I didn't want to give the general report at the 20th Party Congress. As the senior member among us, Molotov had the best credentials. But he and everyone else agreed that I should give the report. I prepared a draft and submitted it for approval.

The Congress opened. I delivered the report and discussion started. I would say the Congress was going well.

I wasn't satisfied. I was tormented by the thought: "The Congress will end, but then what? Hundreds of thousands of people shot will stay on our consciences." Finally, when only the members of the Presidium were in the room, I brought the whole matter up: "What are we going to do about Comrade Pospelov's findings? The Congress is coming to a close, and we'll all disperse without having said a single word about the abuses under Stalin. We can't keep people in exile or in the camps any longer."

Everyone started attacking me, especially Voroshilov:

"What's the matter with you? You think you can bring all this out and get away with it? What will we be able to say about our own roles under Stalin?" Kaganovich chimed in. He was arguing against me out of a selfish fear for his own hide.

I answered as calmly as I could: "I still think it's impossible to cover everything up. Sooner or later people will return to the cities. They'll tell their relatives and everyone back home what happened—and all for what? For nothing! How can we pretend not to know what happened?"

Once again the reaction was stormy. Voroshilov and Kaganovich repeated as though in one voice, "We'll be taken to task! Even if we didn't know what was happening, we'll still be made to pay!"

I replied, "Some of us didn't know many things because we were part of a regime in which you were told what you were supposed to know and you kept your nose out of everything else. I'm prepared, as a member of the Central Committee since the 17th Congress [in 1934], to bear my share of the responsibility—even if the Party should see fit to bring to task all those who were in the leadership under Stalin."

This time Molotov objected. Voroshilov kept saying, "Who's asking us to do this? Who says we have to tell the Congress these things?"

I saw that it would be impossible to get the Presidium to reach a decision. I decided to try the following device: "Now that the general report has been given, I remind you that every Presidium member has the right to speak at the Congress and to express his own point of view." I didn't need to tell them that I was prepared to make a speech myself. I added: "If we are going to make a clean breast of the abuses committed by Stalin, then we must do so now. The 21st Congress will be too late, even if we get that far without being brought to task."

Someone took the initiative and said, "All right, if that's where we stand, someone had better make a speech about Stalin's abuses."

That left the question of who should deliver the speech. I suggested Pospelov. The others objected. They said I should make the speech: "If Pospelov delivers the speech it will make people wonder, 'Why didn't Khrushchev say anything about this business in his general report?' It could contribute to the impression of dissension in the leadership."

Finally I gave in. Pospelov was instructed to adapt his report into a speech. We arranged for a

special closed session, and I delivered my speech.

The delegates listened in absolute silence. It was so quiet in the huge hall you could hear a fly buzzing. You must try to imagine how shocked people were by the revelations of the atrocities to which Party members had been subjected. This was the first thing that most of them had heard of the tragedy which our Party had undergone—a tragedy stemming from the sickness in Stalin's character which Lenin had warned us against in his Testament.

And so the 20th Party Congress speech on Stalin's abuses was born. It was supposed to have been secret, but in fact it was far from secret. We took measures to make sure that copies of the speech circulated to the fraternal Communist Parties. Our document fell into the hands of some Polish comrades who were hostile toward the Soviet Union. They used my speech for their own purposes and made copies. I was told that it was being sold for very little. So Khrushchev's speech wasn't worth much!

It would have been easier, perhaps, to continue blaming Beria and to have left the illusion unchallenged that Stalin was "the people's father and friend." But one thing is elementary: Beria didn't create Stalin; Stalin created Beria.

Just before the Congress I summoned Rudenko [the state prosecutor] and asked him: "I'm interested in the open trials [of the 1930s]. How much basis in actual fact was there for the accusations made against Bukharin, Rykov, Lominadze and many, many other people well known to the Central Committee?" Rudenko answered that from the standpoint of judicial norms, there was no evidence for condemning or even trying those men. The case against them had been based on confessions beaten out of them under physical and psychological torture.

Nevertheless, we decided not to say anything about the open trials in my speech. The reason was that there had been representatives of the fraternal Communist Parties present when Rykov, Bukharin and other leaders were tried and sentenced. These representatives had gone home and testified to the justice of the sentences. We didn't want to discredit them, so we indefinitely postponed the rehabilitation of Bukharin, Zinoviev, Rykov and the rest.

The decision was a mistake. It would have been better to tell everything. Murder will always out. But despite that one mistake, the 20th Party Congress still accomplished a great deal.

**KHRUSHCHEV  
REMEMBERS**

CONTINUED

"Beria's a provocateur. He wants to build these dachas as a provocation and nothing else. Let's not object for a while. He'll think no one knows what he's up to."

So Beria began to put his idea into effect. He ordered plans. He said that the site for Malenkov's dacha had been chosen so that Malenkov would be able to keep an eye on the Turks. Beria joked, "Yegor, you'll be able to see Turkey. You see what a nice house this will be?"

I stayed behind with Malenkov. I said to him, "This is no joke. You still don't see the point? Beria wants to start a sort of pogrom, to throw people out of their homes and tear down their houses to build you some kind of palace. Hatred against you will spread. Don't you see? Beria says he's going to have plans drawn up for a dacha of his own, but he won't have it built. He'll build one for you and then use it to discredit you."

This conversation started Malenkov thinking.

One day when Beria was showing me the plans, he said again, "Won't these be lovely houses?"

"Yes, very. It's a great idea."

"Why don't you take the plans home with you?"

So I took them home. Nina Petrovna [Khrushchev's wife] came across them and asked, "What's this here?" I told her and she was furious: "That's a disgraceful idea!"

I couldn't explain, so I said, "We'll talk about it later."

I took Malenkov aside and said, "We're heading for disaster. Beria is sharpening his knives."

"Well, what can we do?"

"The time has come to resist."

"You want me to oppose him all by myself?"

"What makes you think you'll be alone? There's you and me—that's two. I'm sure Bulganin will agree. I'm sure the others will join us if we put forward our argument from a firm position. The

trouble is that you never give anyone a chance to speak. As soon as Beria introduces a motion, you always jump immediately to support him. Control yourself. Don't be so jumpy. You'll see you're not the only one who thinks the way you do."

Malenkov finally agreed. I was surprised and delighted. We wrote up the agenda for the next Presidium session and included some issues on which the others supported us, and Beria was defeated. This pattern was repeated, and only then did Malenkov become confident that we could use Party methods against Beria. When Beria realized that the others were overriding him, he tried to speed things up. I felt it was time to force a confrontation. At last Malenkov agreed: "Yes, we must act."

To begin with, I would talk to Voroshilov. I went to Voroshilov's office, but I didn't accomplish what I'd come for. I was barely inside when Voroshilov started singing Beria's praises: "What a remarkable man we have! What a remarkable man!" I answered, "Maybe not. Maybe you overestimate him." If I'd said what I wanted to say, I would have put Voroshilov in a very awkward position. I quickly left to have dinner, as I'd arranged, with Malenkov.

Malenkov and I agreed that I should talk to Molotov, who as Minister of Foreign Affairs had called me earlier asking if we could meet to discuss some matter concerning Foreign Ministry personnel. I phoned him back: "If you can come over here right away, we'll talk about personnel." He arrived shortly and I said, "Let's talk about personnel, but not Foreign Ministry personnel." I gave him my views about Beria's role.

Apparently Molotov had been thinking a lot about this himself. He couldn't help but think about it, since he knew about everything that had happened during Stalin's rule.

"Yes," he said, "I agree with you fully. But what is Malenkov's position?"

CONTINUED

**'At last  
Malenkov  
agreed:  
Yes, we  
must act'**

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**'Beria  
could  
easily  
order our  
arrest'**

CONTINUED

"I am discussing this with you on Malenkov's and Bulganin's behalf."

"You'll have my complete support," Molotov said. "But tell me something else: what do you want to do exactly?"

"First, we have to relieve Beria of his duties."

Molotov said that wasn't enough: "Beria's very dangerous. I think we must, so to say, resort to more extreme measures."

"You think we should detain him for investigation?" I said "detain" rather than "arrest" because there were still no criminal charges against Beria. We had only our intuition to go on, and you can't arrest a man on intuition. Molotov and I agreed.

We decided that we'd better speed things up because we might be overheard by "Beria's ears" or someone might let the cat out of the bag. Beria could easily have us all arrested.

Everyone I talked to asked the same question: "What about Malenkov?" At that time Kaganovich was making an inspection tour of the lumber industry. When he returned to Moscow I asked him to stop in at the Central Committee office. I didn't try to interrupt him, although I had other things than sawmills on my mind. When he finished I said, "What you've told me is all very well. Now I want to tell you about what's going on here."

I told him what conclusions we had reached. Kaganovich pricked up his ears and asked, "Who is 'we'?" I said that Malenkov, Bulganin, Molotov, [Maxim] Saburov and I were of one mind, and that without him we had a majority. Kaganovich declared, "I'm with you, too. I was only asking." Then he asked me, "And what about Voroshilov?" I told him about my awkward meeting and how Voroshilov had praised Beria. "He really said that?" Kaganovich exclaimed. He was incredulous.

Kaganovich cursed Voroshilov, but not maliciously: "That sly old bastard! He's told me himself that he can't stand Beria, that Beria's dangerous and likely to be the ruin of us all. What

he said doesn't mean a thing."

"Then we'll have to try talking to him one last time. Perhaps Malenkov will talk to him."

Then Kaganovich said, "And what about Mikoyan?"

"I haven't talked to Mikoyan yet. His case is a bit more complicated." Everyone knew that Mikoyan was on the best of terms with Beria.

In this way we made the rounds of all the Presidium members except Voroshilov and Mikoyan. We arranged for me to speak to Mikoyan and for Malenkov to speak to Voroshilov. Later I went by to see Malenkov: "Well, what happened? Was he [Voroshilov] still singing Beria's praises?"

"As soon as I told him about our plan," said Malenkov, "Voroshilov embraced me and started crying."

Still another question arose. Once we had formally resolved to strip Beria of his posts, who would actually detain him? The Presidium bodyguard was obedient to him. His Chekists would be sitting in the next room, and Beria could easily order them to arrest us all. We would have been quite helpless because there was a sizable armed guard in the Kremlin.

Therefore we decided to enlist the military. First we entrusted the detention of Beria to Comrade Moskalenko, the air defense commander, and five generals. This was my idea. Then on the eve of the session Malenkov widened our circle to include Marshal Zhukov and some others. That meant 11 marshals and generals in all.

In those days all military personnel were required to check their weapons when coming into the Kremlin, so Bulganin was instructed to see that the marshals and generals were allowed to bring their guns with them. We arranged for Moskalenko's group to wait for a summons in a separate room. When Malenkov gave a signal, they were to come into the room where we were meeting and take Beria into custody.

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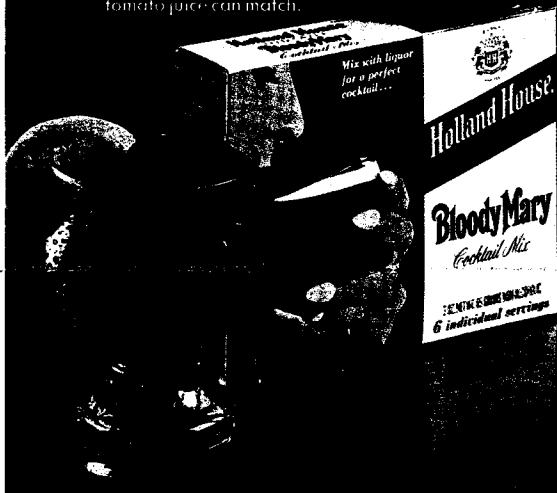
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## KHRUSHCHEV REMEMBERS

### Beria wrote, 'Khrushchev put you up to this'

CONTINUED

vent him from grabbing a weapon from the briefcase. We checked later and found that he had no gun, either in his briefcase or in his pockets. His quick movement had simply been a reflex action.

Beria was immediately put under armed guard in the Council of Ministers building next to Malenkov's office. At this point a new question arose. Now that we had detained Beria, where could we put him? We couldn't hand him over to the Ministry of Internal Affairs because those were all his own men. Finally we agreed to entrust him to Comrade Moskalenko, who had his men transfer Beria to a bunker at his headquarters. I could see that Comrade Moskalenko would do what was necessary for the Party cause. [This event took place in June 1953. In December, Beria was shot.]

After it was all over, Malenkov took me aside and said, "Listen to what my chief bodyguard has to say." The man came over to me and said, "I have only just heard that Beria has been arrested. I want to inform you that he raped my stepdaughter, a seventh-grader. A year or so ago her grandmother died and my wife had to go to the hospital, leaving the girl at home alone. One evening she went out to buy some bread near the building where Beria lives. There she came across an old man who watched her intently. She was frightened. Someone came and took her to Beria's home. Beria had her sit down with him for supper. She drank something, fell asleep, and he raped her."

I told this man, "I want you to tell the prosecutor during the investigation everything you've told me." Later we were given a list of more than a hundred girls and women who had been raped by Beria. He had used the same routine on all of them. He gave them some dinner and offered them wine with a sleeping potion in it.

When Beria was put in solitary confinement, he asked for pencil and paper. Some of us were doubtful, but we decided to give him what he wanted in case an urge had come over him to tell us candidly what he knew about the things we had charged him with. He started writing notes. The first was to Malenkov: "Yegor, don't you know me? Aren't we friends? Why did you trust Khrushchev? He's the one who put you up to this, isn't he?"

## NEXT WEEK: PART IV KHRUSHCHEV PLAYS FOR HIGH STAKES

- *When the Communists thought they were licked in South Vietnam*
- *Disillusionment with Mao Tse-tung*
- *Why he liked Kennedy and hated Nixon*
- *The Cuban missile crisis: his version*

## KHRUSHCHEV REMEMBERS

Marshal Zhukov, the most famous Soviet soldier of World War II, was the one who physically arrested Lavrenti Beria in the Kremlin.



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We arranged to convene a session of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers but invited all the members of the Presidium of the Central Committee as well. Malenkov opened the meeting as a Central Committee Presidium session rather than a Council of Ministers Presidium session so that we could discuss the situation in the Party. Voroshilov had to be especially invited, since he was Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and therefore didn't regularly attend sessions of either the Council of Ministers or the Party Presidium.

As soon as Malenkov opened the session he said, "Let us discuss Party questions. There are some matters which we must deal with right away." Everyone agreed. As had been arranged in advance, I requested the floor and proposed that we discuss the matter of Beria. Beria was sitting on my right. He gave a start, grabbed me by the hand, looked at me with a startled expression and said, "What's going on, Nikita? What's this you're mumbling about?"

I said, "Just pay attention. You'll find out soon enough." And here is what I said. I recalled the Central Committee plenum of February 1939 at which Comrade Grisha Kaminsky had accused Beria of having worked for the English intelligence service when he was Secretary of the Baku Party organization. I then recalled how immediately after that meeting Grisha Kaminsky had dropped out of sight like a stone in the water: "I've always wondered about Kaminsky's statement and why no one made any attempt to explain what he said." Then I reviewed the moves Beria had made since Stalin's death, his interference in the Party organizations of the Ukraine, Belorussia and the Baltic states. I described how Beria was relying on nationalist antagonisms to undermine Soviet unity. I mentioned his latest proposal concerning policy toward people in exile and in prison camps, stressing that Beria was trying to legalize arbitrary rule. I concluded by saying, "I have formed the impression that he is no Communist. He is a careerist who has wormed

his way into the Party for self-seeking reasons. His arrogance is intolerable. No honest Communist would ever behave the way he does in the Party."

Bulganin asked for the floor and said something very much along the same lines. Then the others spoke in turn. Molotov expressed the proper Party position on the matter. The other comrades stressed the same principles, with the exception of Mikoyan, who spoke last. He repeated what he had told me before the session when we had our talk: namely, that Beria would take our criticisms to heart, that he wasn't a hopeless case and that he could still be useful in the collective leadership.

When everyone had spoken, Malenkov, as chairman, was supposed to sum things up and to formulate a consensus, but at the last moment he lost his nerve. After the final speech, the session was hanging. There was a long pause. I saw we were in trouble, so I asked Comrade Malenkov for the floor in order to propose a motion. As we had arranged in advance, I proposed that the Central Committee Presidium should release Beria from his duties as Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Internal Affairs and from all other government posts he held.

Malenkov was still in a state of panic. As I recall, he didn't even put my motion to a vote. He pressed a secret button which gave the signal to the generals who were waiting in the next room. Zhukov was the first to appear. Then Moskalenko and the others came in. Malenkov said in a faint voice to Comrade Zhukov, "As Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R., I request that you take Beria into custody pending investigation of charges made against him."

"Hands up!" Zhukov commanded Beria.

Moskalenko and the others unbuckled their holsters in case Beria tried anything. Beria seemed to reach for his briefcase, which was lying behind him on the windowsill. I seized his arm to pre-

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