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THE YENUKIDZE CASE (1935-37)

Introduction

Avel Yenukidze* was Secretary of the Presidium of the Soviet Central Executive Committee i.e., head of the Soviet civil service, from 1918 to 1935. This post put him

" . . . in charge of the administration and personnel of the Kremlin".

(Adam B. Ulam: 'Stalin: The Man and his Era'; London; 1989; p. 396).

The Revision of Yenukidze's Biography (1935)

Yenukidze had published in 1930 a historical study entitled 'Our Illegal Printing Shops in the Caucasus'.

On 16 January 1935, in an article in 'Pravda',

". . . Yenukidze himself revised his biography in the 'Great Soviet Encyclopedia' to the effect that it was not he, Yenukidze, who played a role in the foundation of the (Baku Party -- Ed.) organisation but a group of other Georgian revolutionaries, including Stalin".

(Lazar Pistrak: 'The Grand Tactician: Khrushchev's Rise to Power'; London; 1961; p. 140-41).

Yenukidze's article

". . . amounted to a confession of grave errors in his own treatment of the history of the revolutionary movement in Transcaucasia. . . . He had written a short work in 1930 on illegal Bolshevik printing presses in Transcaucasia and had provided himself with highly favourable entries in some reference books".

(Robert H. McNeal: 'Stalin: Man and Ruler'; Basingstoke; 1988; p. 111).

In July 1935 Lavrenti Beria* delivered in Tiflis a series of lectures entitled 'On the History of the Bolshevik Organisation in Transcaucasia' which were published in book form. Beria claimed that Yenukidze had

". . . deliberately and with hostile intent falsified the history of the Bolshevik organisations of Transcaucasia in his authorised biography and in his pamphlet 'Our Illegal Printing Shops in the Caucasus', cynically and brazenly distorted well-known historical facts, crediting himself with alleged services in the establishment of the first illegal printing shop in Baku. . . .

As we know, in view of the imminent danger that these falsifications and distortions of his would be exposed, A. Yenukidze was obliged to admit these 'mistakes' in the columns of 'Pravda' on January 16 1935".
(Lavrenti P. Beria: 'On the History of the Bolshevik Organisations in Transcaucasia'; London; 1935; p. 35, 36).

Beria's book

". . . contained an open political denunciation of two prominent Bolsheviks, Yenukidze and Orakhelashvili*. . . . Orakhelashvili tried to protest by writing to Stalin and enclosing the draft of a rebuttal for

publication in 'Pravda'".

(Dmitri Volkogonov: 'Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy'; London; 1991; p. 213).

Stalin replied advising Yenukidze to accept that his book contained errors, and merely complain that Beria's criticism was 'too harsh':

"A letter to 'Pravda' ought to be printed, but I don't think the text of your letter is satisfactory. In your place I would take out all its 'polemical beauty', all the 'excursions' into history, plus the 'decisive protest', and I would say simply and briefly that such and such mistakes were made, but that Comrade Beria's criticism of these mistakes is, let's say, too harsh and is not justified by the nature of the mistakes. Or something in this vein".

(Josef V. Stalin: Letter to Mamia Orakhelashvili (July 1935), in: Dmitri Volkogonov: *ibid.*; p. 213, citing: Central Party Archives at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3179).

The Alleged Conspiracy in the Kremlin (1935)

However,

" . . . the charges against Yenukidze by Beria and others for his alleged historical mistake played a minor part, if any at all, in Yenukidze's downfall".

(Boris Nikolaevsky: 'Power and the Soviet Elite: "The Letter of an Old Bolshevik" and Other Essays'; New York; 1965; p. 220).

Early in 1935 it was announced that there had been discovered in the Kremlin

" . . . an alleged conspiracy against Stalin, a conspiracy involving a number of Kremlin guards".

(Adam B. Ulam: p. 396).

The Dismissal and Expulsion of Yenukidze (1935)

On 3 March 1935,

" . . . Yenukidze was relieved from his post in Moscow".

(Lazar Pistrak: *op. cit.*; p. 141).

At this time he was

" . . . blamed, evidently, only for negligence rather than complicity",

(Adam B. Ulam: *op. cit.*; p. 396-97).

since his change of position was stated to be due to

" . . . his promotion to the post of Chairman of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic".

(Lazar Pistrak: *op. cit.*; p. 141).

The charge against Yenukidze

" . . . was that he had, in his general supervisory capacity as Secretary of the Central Executive Committee, allowed former aristocrats

to take jobs in the Kremlin".

(Robert Conquest: 'Stalin: Breaker of Nations' (hereafter listed as 'Robert Conquest (1993)'; London; 1993; p. 195).

But Yenukidze's

" . . . 'promotion' . . . never materialised".
(Lazar Pistrak: op. cit.; p. 141)

and on 7 June 1935,

" . . . at the plenary session of the Party Central Committee , , ,
Yenukidze . . . was expelled from the Party".
(Lazar Pistrak: ibid.; p. 141)

after being denounced for

" . . . 'political and personal dissoluteness'. Over the following weeks, the papers printed violent attacks on him. . . . He was accused of taking 'enemies' under his wing — 'former princes, ministers, courtiers, Trotskyites, etc.; . . . a counter-revolutionary nest', and in general of rotten liberalism'.
(Robert Conquest: 'The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties'; London; 1969; p. 88-89), citing 'Pravda', 16, 19 June 1935).

On 13 June 1935, 'Pravda' reported Khrushchev as telling the Moscow Party aktiv:

"The shot which struck Comrade Kirov showed that our enemies stop at nothing. . . . All the necessary deductions should have been drawn from this signal. Yenukidze, however, having lost all the qualities of a Bolshevik, preferred to be a 'kind uncle' to the enemies of our Party. . . .

The Party showed great trust in Yenukidze, giving him responsible work to do, . . . but he did not justify that trust. He betrayed the cause of the revolution. He degenerated politically and morally".
(Nikita S. Khrushchev: Speech to Moscow Party Aktiv (June 1935), in: 'The Dethronement of Stalin'; Manchester; 1956; p. 11).

On 24 June 1935, Beria publicly denounced Yenukidze:

"Yenukidze turned out to be a traitor to our country and is enduring a well-deserved punishment".
(Lavrenti Beria: Speech reported in 'Zaria vostoka'(Eastern Dawn), 24 June 1935, in: Amy Knight: 'Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant'; Princeton (USA): 1993; p. 57).

The Arrest of Yenukidze (1936)

Yenukidze was arrested in

" . . . late 1936".
(Amy Knight: op. cit.; p. 68).

The Trial and Execution of Yenukidze (1937)

On 29 December 1937, 'Pravda' reported that eight people, including

Orakhelashvili and Yenukidze,

" . . . were all sentenced to death in camera for high treason, espionage, subversion and terrorist conspiracy".
(Gábor T. Rittersporn: 'Stalinist Simplifications and Soviet Complications: Social Tensions and Political Conflicts in the USSR: 1933-1953'; Reading; 1991; p. 197).

and

" . . . shot".
(Roy A. Medvedev: 'Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism'; London; 1972; p. 197).

It was charged that Orakhelashvili,

" . . . wishing to restore capitalism in Georgia, had committed diversionary acts 'linked to an imperialist state'".
(*'Pravda'*, 20 December 1936, cited in: Robert Conquest: 'Inside Stalin's Secret Police: NKVD Politics: 1936-39; Basingstoke; 1985; p. 52).

The 1938 Treason Trial (1938)

In March 1938, the Yenukidze case was referred to several times in the testimony given at the 1938 treason trial.

For example, defendant Aleksey Rykov testified:

"RYKOV: The next period (after the liquidation of the kulaks — Ed.) is characterised by the creation of an exclusively conspiratorial type of organisation and the employment of the sharpest methods of struggle against the Party and the government. This particularly includes one of the attempts that was made to prepare for a 'palace coup'. . . .

VYSHINSKY: To when does this refer?

RYKOV: This plan aimed to arrest the members of the government in connection with a violent coup carried out by the conspiratorial organisation. . . . As far as I remember, this idea arose among the Rights in 1933-34. . . . The mainstay of this counter-revolutionary plan was Yenukidze, who had become an active member of the Right organisation in 1933. . . .

For the purpose of carrying out the 'palace coup' . . . a centre was formed including the Trotskyites and Zinovievites: Kamenev, Pyatakov, Yenukidze, and also myself, Bukharin and Tomsy".

(Report of Court Proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet 'Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites' (March 1938) (hereafter listed as 'Trial (1938)'; Moscow; 1938; p. 176-77, 178).

Defendant Nikolay Bukharin* testified:

"BUKHARIN: The inception of the idea of the coup d'etat among us Right conspirators relates approximately to the years 1929-30. . . . It was an idea of a circumscribed coup d'etat, or a 'palace coup'. . . . Yenukidze, who was personally connected with Tomsy and was frequently in his company, had charge of the Kremlin guard. . . .

Why do I say 'palace coup'? This means by forces organisationally concentrated in the Kremlin. . . .

The forces of the conspiracy were: the forces of Yenukidze plus

Yagoda, the organisations in the Kremlin and in the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs; Yenukidze also succeeded around that time in enlisting, as far as I can remember, the former commandant of the Kremlin, Peterson, who, apropos, was in his time the commandant of Trotsky's train. . . .

An organisation of a criminal counter-revolutionary conspiracy was created, which included the forces of Yenukidze, of Yagoda, the organisation in the Kremlin, in the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, the military organisation and the forces of the Moscow garrison under the leadership of the conspirators of the military group". (Trial (1938): *ibid.*; p. 394-95, 419, 424-25).

The defendant Pavel Bulanov testified:

"One of the principal roles in the coup, according to him, (Yagoda -- Ed.) was to have been played by Yenukidze, and the second . . . fell on his, Yagoda's shoulders. They had spheres of influence: Yenukidze's was the Kremlin, and Yagoda's was the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. . . .

Yagoda was very much infatuated with Hitler. . . .

They considered that the armed coup must absolutely be timed to coincide with war. . . .

Yagoda had the closest connections with the leaders of the Rights. He was also connected with the Trotskyites. . . . More than once . . . he gave . . . direct or indirect orders not to proceed with cases against Trotskyites but, on the contrary, to terminate a number of cases against Trotskyites, as well as Rights and Zinovievites.

VYSHIMSKY: That is, he shielded them.

BULANOV: I would say that he not only shielded them, but directly assisted their activities".

(Trial (1938): *ibid.*; p. 553, 554, 555).

'Rehabilitation' by the Revisionists

In May 1962, Yenukidze was 'rehabilitated' by the revisionist authorities.

The alleged 'miscarriage of justice' in the Yenukidze case was attributed to Lavrenti Beria, on which even Boris Nikolaevsky felt compelled to comment:

"Why does 'Pravda' publish absurdities about . . . Beria as the chief culprit in Yenukidze's liquidation? Why this myth about the supposed omnipotence of Beria who, in 1935, was far away in his Party post in Tiflis?"

(Boris Nikolaevsky: *op. cit.*; p. 224).

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

- BERIA, Lavrenti P., Soviet Marxist-Leninist politician (1899-1953); director, GPU/OGPU, Transcaucasia (1921-31); 1st Secretary, CP Georgia (1931-38); USSR People's Commissar/Minister of Internal Affairs (1938-46); member, State Defence Committee (1941-45); Marshal (1945); member, Politburo, CPSU (1946-53); USSR Deputy Premier and Minister of Internal Affairs (1953); relieved of all posts and expelled from Party by revisionists (1953); tried by revisionists on false charges of treason and executed (1953).
- ORAKHELASHVILI, Ivan ('Mamia'), Soviet revisionist politician (1881-1937); First Secretary, Transcaucasian Regional Party Committee (1926-29); Premier, Transcaucasia, and 1st Secretary, Transcaucasian Regional Party Committee (1931-32); Deputy Director, Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute (1932-37); expelled from Party, arrested and transferred to Tiflis (1937); tried for and found guilty of treason and sabotage, sentenced to death and executed (1937).
- YENUKIDZE, Avel S., Soviet revisionist engineer and civil servant (1877-1937); head, military department, All-Russian Central Executive Committee (1917-18); Secretary, All-Russian/USSR Central Executive Committee (1918-35); expelled from Party (1935); arrested (1936); tried for and found guilty of treason and espionage, sentenced to death and executed (1937).

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