

Stephen Cohen's Biography of Bukharin: A Study in the Falsehood of Khrushchev-Era "Revelations"¹

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In 1929 Jules Humbert-Droz was a member of the Swiss communist party and a representative of the Communist International. He was also a close friend and political ally of Nikolai Bukharin, one of the most prominent Bolshevik leaders. By this time Bukharin had become a political opponent of Joseph Stalin, with whom he had recently been allied.

Humbert-Droz met and talked with Bukharin for the last time in early 1929. The Swiss communist was about to leave for a conference of Latin American communist parties. In his memoirs, published in Switzerland in 1971, Humbert-Droz recalled this incident as follows:

Before leaving I went to see Bukharin for one last time not knowing whether I would see him again upon my return. We had a long and frank conversation. He brought me up to date with the contacts made by his group with the Zinoviev-Kamenev fraction in order to coordinate the struggle against the power of Stalin. I did not hide from him that I did not approve of this liaison of the oppositions. "The struggle against Stalin is not a political programme. We had combatted with reason the programme of the Trotskyites on the essential questions, the danger of the kulaks in Russia, the struggle against the united front with the social-democrats, the Chinese problems, the very short-sighted revolutionary perspective, etc. On the morrow of a common victory against Stalin, the political problems will divide us. This bloc is a bloc without principles which will crumble away before achieving any results."

Bukharin also told me that they had decided to utilise individual terror in order to rid themselves of Stalin. On this point as well I expressed my reservation: the introduction of individual terror into the political struggles born

¹ A somewhat earlier Russian-language version of this essay has been published in Grover Furr and Vladimir Bobrov, *1937. Pravosudie Stalina. Obzhalovaniiu ne podlezhit!* Moscow: Iauza-Eksmo, 2010 pp. 195-333. The present essay has been revised for publication in *Cultural Logic*.

from the Russian Revolution would strongly risk turning against those who employed it. It had never been a revolutionary weapon. “My opinion is that we ought to continue the ideological and political struggle against Stalin. His line will lead in the near future to a catastrophe which will open the eyes of the communists and result in a changing of orientation. Fascism menaces Germany and our party of phrasemongers will be incapable of resisting it. Before the debacle of the Communist Party of Germany and the extension of fascism to Poland and to France, the International must change politics. That moment will then be our hour. It is necessary then to remain disciplined, to apply the sectarian decisions after having fought and opposed the leftist errors and measures, but to continue to struggle on the strictly political terrain.”

Bukharin doubtlessly had understood that I would not bind myself blindly to his fraction whose sole programme was to make Stalin disappear. / 380 / This was our last meeting. It was clear that he did not have confidence in the tactic that I proposed. He also certainly knew better than I what crimes Stalin was capable of. In short, **those who, after Lenin’s death and on the basis of his testament, could have destroyed Stalin politically, sought instead to eliminate him physically**, when he held firmly in his hand the Party and the police apparatus of the state. (Emphasis added.)²

² *Mémoires de Jules Humbert-Droz. De Lénine à Staline. Dix ans au service de l’internationale communiste 1921-1931.* Neufchâtel: A la Baconnière, 1971, pp. 379-80. The original French text is as follows:

Avant de partir, j’allai voir une dernière fois Boukharine, ne sachant si je le reverrais à mon retour. Nous eûmes une longue et franche conversation. Il me mit au courant des contacts pris par son groupe avec la fraction Zinoviev-Kamenev pour coordonner la lutte contre le pouvoir de Staline. Je ne lui cachai pas que je n’approuvais pas cette liaison des oppositions: «La lutte contre Staline n’est pas un programme politique. Nous avons combattu avec raison le programme des troskystes sur des problèmes essentiels, le danger des koulaks en Russie, la lutte contre le front unique avec les social-démocrates, les problèmes chinois, la perspective révolutionnaire très courte, etc. Au lendemain d’une victoire commune contre Staline, ces problèmes politiques nous diviseront. Ce bloc est un bloc sans principes, qui s’effritera même avant d’aboutir.»

Boukharine me dit aussi qu’ils avaient décidé d’utiliser la terreur individuelle pour se débarrasser de Staline. Sur ce point aussi je fis d’expresses réserves: l’introduction de la terreur individuelle dans les luttes politiques nées de la Révolution russe risquait fort de se tourner contre ceux qui l’emploieraient. Elle n’a jamais été une arme révolutionnaire. «Mon opinion est que nous devons continuer la lutte idéologique et politique contre Staline. Sa ligne conduira, dans un avenir proche, à une catastrophe qui ouvrira les yeux des communistes et aboutira à un changement d’orientation. Le fascisme menace l’Allemagne et notre parti de phraseurs sera incapable de lui résister. Devant la débâcle du Parti communiste allemande et l’extension du fascisme à la Pologne, à la France, l’Internationale devra changer de politique. Ce moment-là sera notre heure. Il faut donc rester disciplinés, appliquer les décisions sectaires après les avoir combattues et s’opposer aux fautes et aux mesures gauchistes, mais continuer la lutte sur le terrain strictement politique.»

Humbert-Droz published this account in 1971, written without any pressure from the NKVD. He wrote, and lived most of his life, in his native Switzerland. Moreover, he was Bukharin's friend and political ally. At the time of writing he hated Stalin, as is clear from his remark about "crimes Stalin was capable of."

Thus he had no motive that we know of to lie or to exaggerate what he knew. Furthermore, Humbert-Droz claims he heard of the plans to murder Stalin from Bukharin's own lips.

Many will consider this statement the single strongest piece of available corroborating evidence that Bukharin was guilty of what he was charged with at the third Moscow Trial of 1938. It is confirmation that Bukharin not only had no objection to forming a bloc with those who relied upon assassination (the best translation for the Russian term "individual terror") but advocated it himself. If he were capable of plotting to murder Stalin as early as early 1929, he was clearly capable of acts of that nature in later years.

In corroboration of this statement, we now have a confession statement by Valentin Astrov, one of Bukharin's students and followers, from January 1937 in which Astrov specifically accuses Bukharin of planning Stalin's assassination in 1932. When confronted by Astrov's claim, Bukharin repeatedly denied it. In his first confession, which we discovered and published in this journal a few years ago, Bukharin admits being in a bloc with Trotskyites and others who advocated terror and also admits that within his own faction, the Rights, "there grew up terrorist groups." But even then Bukharin did not admit to advocating Stalin's assassination himself.³ Yet Humbert-Droz affirms that he did.

While imprisoned Bukharin wrote Stalin a letter on December 10, 1937 in which he retracted all the confessions he had previously made. On page seven of his "touching" missive Bukharin wrote:

Boukharine a sans doute compris que j'ne me liais pas aveglément à sa fraction, don't le seul programme était de fair disparaître Staline. / 380 / Ce fut notre dernière entrevue. Manifestement il n'avait pas confiance dans la tactique que je proposais. Il savait aussi bien sûr, mieux que moi, de quells crimes Staline était capable. Bref, ceux qui, après la mort de Lénine, sur la base de son testament, auraient pu liquider politiquement Staline, cherchaient à l'élimier physiquement, alors qu'il tenait fermement en main le parti et l'appareil policier de l'Etat.

³ Grover Furr and Vladimir Bobrov. "Nikolai Bukharin's First Statement of Confession in the Lubianka." *Cultural Logic* 2007. At <http://clogic.eserver.org/2007/Furr_Bobrov.pdf>.

I know that N[atasha] S[ergeevna Allilueva] would never believe that I had plotted anything evil against you. . . .

Read literally, this has to be considered the truth, for Bukharin did not write that he had not taken part in the preparation to kill Stalin. He wrote only that *Stalin's wife (dead by this time) would not have believed* he was a part of any such plot! The difference in meaning between these two statements is obvious. Bukharin was using “weasel words” – saying one thing (“your wife would never believe I had plotted anything evil against you”) while intending Stalin to understand something else (“I never plotted anything evil against you.”) Again, thanks to Humbert-Droz’s memoir we now have substantial evidence that Bukharin was lying.

Humbert-Droz’s testimony has been available since 1971. Any scholar with an interest in historical truth would immediately recognize the importance of this passage as very strong, non-Soviet, non-“Stalinist” evidence that one of the leading defendants in the Moscow Trials, was in fact guilty. The anonymous reviewer of Humbert-Droz’s book in the *Times Literary Supplement* drew readers’ attention to this specific passage in a relatively brief review (*TLS* June 25 1971 p. 733).

Robert Conquest does not cite this statement by Humbert-Droz in *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (1990; many reprints), though in an earlier edition he wrote

On political matters basically the best, though not infallible, source is rumour at a high *political* or police level. (*The Great Terror*, 1968, p. 569).

Humbert-Droz’s testimony tends to disprove Conquest’s thesis that Stalin “framed” Bukharin and all the Moscow Trial defendants. Perhaps this is the reason Conquest failed to cite it, even in his 2008 “fortieth anniversary edition”, 37 years after Humbert-Droz’s memoir appeared.

However, the subject of the present study is Stephen F. Cohen’s biography of Bukharin, by far the most influential and best-known work on Bukharin in any language. Cohen does mention Humbert-Droz himself on twelve pages of his book. Moreover, Cohen cites

this specific book, *De Lénine à Staline*, five times: note 16, p. 391; note 19, p. 431; note 109, page 450; note 137, p. 451; note 170, p. 453.⁴

Yet nowhere does Cohen mention the book's most striking revelation: Humbert-Droz's claim that Bukharin had admitted in 1929 that he and his "fraction," or secret group within the Party, were already plotting to assassinate Stalin. Cohen's conspicuous silence may serve as a preface to the study that follows.

In this essay, we contend that the dominant paradigm of the political history of the Soviet Union in the 1930s is false. Documents from formerly secret Soviet archives that have been made public since the end of the USSR provide more than sufficient evidence to disprove the view of this period that has met with almost universal acceptance since Khrushchev's day. In the present essay we test this hypothesis through a close examination of one representative text: the tenth chapter of Stephen F. Cohen's 1973 book *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution. A Political Biography 1888-1938*.

For brevity's sake we call this historical paradigm or master narrative the "anti-Stalin" paradigm. A clumsier but more accurate term would be "the Trotsky-Khrushchev-Cold War-Gorbachev-post-Soviet" paradigm. From the time of his exile in January 1929 until his murder in August 1940, Leon Trotsky blamed what he regarded as the flaws and crimes of Soviet socialism on the personality of Joseph Stalin. Nikita Khrushchev picked up this same theme in 1956, and during the period of his leadership of the USSR attacks on Stalin were vastly amplified until Khrushchev's removal from office in October 1964.

Beginning in 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev sponsored an assault on Stalin and those associated with him that outdid even the Khrushchev period. The figure of Stalin suffered a virtual "demonization," while similar treatment was given to other Stalin-era Bolsheviks and to Khrushchev himself.

In the West, this paradigm is perhaps most often associated with Robert Conquest's 1968 book *The Great Terror. Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* and with Roy Medvedev's *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism* (1971). Khrushchev-era "revelations" form the core of what passes for evidence in the works of

⁴ Humbert-Droz's book is also cited in the "Selected Bibliography" on p. 491.

both authors. I have used the term “revelation” in scare quotes in order to signal to the reader that these supposed disclosures are virtually all false.

A huge number of primary source documents from former Soviet archives have been published since the end of the USSR in 1991. A great many books have been written in an effort to elaborate and adjust the anti-Stalin paradigm in order to accommodate some of this archival evidence. No work has been written to rival the virtually canonical position of Conquest’s and Medvedev’s works of four decades ago.

Both these books are far too long – Conquest’s at almost 700 pages, Medvedev’s at just short of 900 – for detailed treatment in a single essay. Instead, we use the tenth chapter of Cohen’s book as representative of the canonical interpretation of Soviet elite politics in the 1930s. Writing a few years later than Conquest and Medvedev, Cohen drew extensively on both of them and also relied on other works Conquest himself used – by writers such as Boris Nikolaevsky and Alexander Orlov.

Because of his much narrower focus on Bukharin alone rather than on the whole political history of the USSR, Cohen was able to present a scholarly, documented account of the period 1930-1938 in 45 pages. This chapter is short enough to permit a detailed examination of his evidence, yet well documented enough – 207 footnotes – to stand in for the “anti-Stalin paradigm” as a whole.

Brevity is not the only, or even the main, advantage that Cohen’s tenth chapter presents to the critic. Cohen’s book was a “classic” from the moment of its publication and remains so today. Originally published in 1973 by Alfred A. Knopf, it was reissued in 1980 by the prestigious Oxford University Press and has stayed in print ever since.

Cohen’s book is important in another way. Mikhail Gorbachev chose it as the first work of Western Sovietology to be published by a Soviet publishing house.⁵ Gorbachev reportedly told Cohen that he himself had been strongly influenced by the book in the early 1980s, when he had read it in Russian translation.

In late 1987, a conference on Bukharin, inspired in part by Cohen’s book, was held in Moscow. Not only was Cohen invited to address it, but Gorbachev himself held a

⁵ “Die Bedeutung, die dieser Arbeit zugemessen wurde, läßt sich daran ablesen, das es das erste Werk eines westlichen Sowjetologen war, das in der UdSSR erscheinen konnte.” Mark Junge. *Bucharins Rehabilitierung. Historisches Gedächtnis in der Sowjetunion 1953-1991* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1999), pp. 195-96.

press conference with Cohen (Junge 159-60). This event and the publication of the Russian translation by the government publishing house Progress in late 1988 (Junge 193 n.77) inaugurated the “Bukharin-Boom” during which enthusiasm for Bukharin as the “real” inheritor of Lenin’s mantle was promoted by the Gorbachev regime.⁶

Gorbachev and his associates in the Soviet leadership were mainly interested in using Bukharin’s support for market mechanisms in the 1920s to justify a massive increase in reliance on markets in the name of “Leninism” in the late 1980s.⁷ That is not our interest here. The tenth chapter of Cohen’s book is not concerned with Bukharin’s economic ideas, but rather with Bukharin’s life from 1930 to his trial and execution in March 1938.

Nevertheless, these last eight years of Bukharin’s career were central to Gorbachev’s purpose of rehabilitating Bukharin’s economic ideas for Gorbachev’s *perestroika*. Finding Bukharin innocent of the charges he was convicted of at his 1938 Trial was critical in establishing the supposedly Leninist legitimacy of Bukharin’s economic ideas.

If it were generally recognized that Bukharin had really been guilty of even one of the principal charges to which he had confessed his guilt: conspiring to overthrow the Soviet government and of plotting with the German General Staff to open the front to the German army in case of war – let alone being a party to a plan to assassinate Lenin in 1918, a charge he denied but of which he was convicted⁸ – he could not have been useful to Gorbachev. Furthermore, Bukharin himself had admitted at trial that the policies he stood for in the 1930s amounted to “the restoration of capitalism,” and this Gorbachev could in no way admit – at least not in 1988.

If Bukharin’s guilt had been acknowledged, then it would follow that the Soviet government – “Stalin,” in the reductive synecdoche of anticommunist parlance – had been justified in executing him. What’s more, since Bukharin implicated virtually all the other defendants in the three Moscow Trials and the defendants in the secret Military

⁶ “In den Jahren 1988/89 kam es zu einem regelrechten Bucharin-Boom.” Junge, p. 192.

⁷ “Schließlich bezeichnen die entsprechenden Autoren Bucharins Ideen übereinstimmend als hochaktuell für die ‘Perestrojka’.” The authors mentioned here were all supporters of “perestroika.” Junge, 206. See a similar remark on p. 196.

⁸ Bukharin admitted repeatedly that he had conspired with the Social-Revolutionaries to arrest Lenin, Stalin, and Iakov Sverdlov but denied any plan to kill them. This issue is discussed later in the present essay.

Trial of Marshal Tukhachevsky and others, admitting Bukharin's guilt would also tend to justify the Soviet government's repression against these figures. Portraying Stalin's policies as wrong, immoral, and un-Leninist was essential to the acceptability of Gorbachev's economic policy. So Bukharin's innocence was a cornerstone of the "rehabilitation" of both his name and the economic policies associated with him.

It has been assumed and asserted since the "Bukharin-Boom" of the late 1980s that Bukharin was compelled to confess to crimes he did not commit. This is the bedrock assumption of all mainstream discussion of Bukharin's career, of the Moscow Trials, and of the Soviet 1930s generally, reasserted over and over again until it has been taken for granted. Few voices – in the public sphere and scholarly mainstream, none at all – have subjected this assumption to any serious question.

As our previous research⁹ as well as the present essay show, there is no positive evidence that Bukharin was innocent. On the contrary: all the evidence we have is consistent with Bukharin having been guilty of the crimes he himself confessed to.

One problem for the Gorbachev-sponsored "Bukharin-Boom" emerged early, though we could only learn about it in 2004. The commission of the Central Committee set up to study and, in essence, to find evidence that Bukharin had been unjustly convicted at his trial in 1938 was unable to find any such evidence at all. The proceedings of this commission published in 2004 show the commission members' consternation at this failure.

The result was that the decree (*Postanovlenie*) of the Plenum of the Soviet Supreme Court which was issued on February 4, 1988 and which declared that Bukharin had been forced to make a false confession was never published and remains secret to this day. Its text, only recently discovered, shows that the central piece of evidence of Bukharin's innocence cited in it is, in fact, a deliberate falsification.¹⁰ In it the confession-statement of Mikhail Frinovsky, a document that provided strong evidence of Bukharin's guilt, was deliberately misquoted so it could be employed as evidence that he

⁹ Furr and Bobrov, "Nikolai Bukharin's First Statement of Confession in the Lubyanka." *Cultural Logic* 2007. At <http://clogic.eserver.org/2007/Furr_Bobrov.pdf>. This article was first published in Russian in the historical journal *Klio* (St. Petersburg) No. 1 (36), 2007, pp. 38-54. At <http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/furmbobrov_klio0107.pdf>.

¹⁰ We, Furr and Bobrov, have prepared an edition of this document and an accompanying article, to be published shortly in a book to be published in Russia.

was innocent.¹¹ In fact Gorbachev's experts could find no evidence whatever to support their theory that Bukharin was innocent.

Evidence and Objectivity

If the final chapter of Cohen's biography of Bukharin were simply an example of poor scholarship and nothing more, it would be of little interest. Soviet history of the Stalin period is awash with books in both English and Russian whose theses and presuppositions are jerry-rigged entirely of rumors, fabrications, and outright lies.

But the rest of Cohen's book is, on the whole, far more carefully done. Though not devoid of references to dubious sources, these at least do not predominate. No doubt the reason is that the economic and political struggles of the 1920s and earlier are far better documented.

When it came to the 1930s, however, many fewer primary sources were available. With Stalin's death the publication of the primary sources documenting events of the era virtually ceased. Even Soviet historians could not gain access to them, a fact that some Party historians complained about during an historians' conference in Moscow in 1962.¹² Historians were left with the choice of either doing careful detective work with the resources that existed or accepting the so-called "revelations" of the Khrushchev era at face value.

Every historian is faced with the choice between orthodoxy and objectivity. To be objective is to observe an attitude with regard to the evidence similar to that used in the physical sciences, including the following practices:

- To regard one's working hypothesis as provisional until one has gathered and carefully studied all the relevant evidence;
- To engage in the hard work of collecting and studying all the relevant evidence;
- To regard all evidence and sources with a critical eye;

¹¹ Frinovsky's confession-statement was published in early 2006 and is available on the web at <http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/frinovskyr.html>. I have put an English translation of it on the web here: <http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/frinovskyeng.html>. Both Russian and English web versions have the full bibliographical information of the original publication. For Frinovsky's statement of Bukharin's guilt see pp. 40; 42; 47-8, or just search for the word "Bukharin" («Бухарин»).

¹² See the section "Charges at trial false?" below.

- To question one's own preconceived ideas;
- To be especially skeptical of evidence that tends to support one's own preconceived ideas;
- To compensate for one's own biases by making sure to give diligent, even generous attention to evidence and theories that tend to cast doubt on one's own preconceived ideas.

The second choice – what we here call “orthodoxy” – is not to stray beyond the limits of the dominant historical paradigm, adherence to which is essential to professional acceptance and scholarly success. Once this choice is made, a logical “slippery slope” leads to the less and less critical examination of any materials that support conclusions consistent with the orthodox paradigm.

The works of Arch Getty and the so-called “Young Turk” or “revisionist” historians of the 1980s demonstrated what could be done by intelligent historians determined on being objective, unafraid to subject to critical examination the dominant historical paradigm and the evidence on which it is founded. For Getty and the other “Young Turks,” this meant they had to battle against the dominant paradigm of Soviet history – what we call the “anti-Stalin paradigm,” though they did not call it that. They had a hard time of it.

But for most scholars in the field of Soviet history, the anticommunist potential of the Khrushchev-era “revelations” proved to be too tempting to resist. The field itself is in the main a product of Cold-War anticommunism. It was, and remains, less concerned with uncovering the truth about the past than with providing propaganda politically useful to the sources that fund that research and the societal forces that reward the political uses of historiography.

Dedication to objectivity is the only way to write good history. A great many of the conclusions Getty reached in his 1979 dissertation and 1986 book have been borne out by research based on the evidence released from former Soviet archives since 1991. As this article will show, the same evidence shows Cohen's tenth chapter to have been fundamentally flawed, virtually all of its historical conclusions wildly wrong.

Whatever his specific reasons may have been, Cohen did not subject the orthodox, dominant paradigm of Soviet history during the Stalin years to appropriate scholarly suspicion and scrutiny. Instead Cohen simply adopted it in its entirety. It is accurate to say that Chapter Ten of his book is itself representative of this dominant paradigm. While keeping the focus on Bukharin, Cohen repeats the main features of the anti-Stalin master narrative that Conquest and Medvedev elaborated in greater detail by referring frequently to their works as well as to official Soviet Khrushchev-era “revelations” that are fraudulent, as we can now prove.

In this article we present a point-by-point refutation of the assertions made by Cohen in his tenth chapter. A close study of them, together with a careful demonstration that they are false, will serve to illustrate the bankruptcy of the “anti-Stalin” paradigm of the political history of the Soviet Union during the 1930s. It will show that evidence from the formerly secret Soviet archives refutes this paradigm in virtually every detail.

We shall see that this paradigm is beyond rescue. It is not false only in some of its details, but in total. The reader will understand that the history of the USSR during the 1930s needs to be completely reconceived along lines not simply different from but in contradiction to the “canonical” understanding.

The fine work of the “revisionist” historians proves that a devotion to objectivity – a careful, critical examination of the evidence available during the Brezhnev era, the era in which Cohen also wrote – permitted researchers as early as the 1970s, when Getty’s dissertation work was done, to reach conclusions broadly compatible with those we can now obtain with far greater documentation and certainty. Given an objective approach, good research was still possible even in default of so much of the evidence we now have.

Neither Cohen nor any other researcher was compelled in any way to adopt the “anti-Stalin” paradigm of Soviet history. Nobody was forced to “believe” Khrushchev and his minions. After all, they had not “believed” Stalin and the historical claims made in his day.

So why did Cohen choose to uncritically “believe” Khrushchev and the Khrushchev-era writers who attacked Stalin? Why was he not far more skeptical of their motives? In one sense we can’t know why Cohen failed to be appropriately skeptical of Khrushchev-era sources. However, no one can doubt that the road to professional success

lay then, as it does today, in refusing to question what the dominant figures in one's field accept.

Did Cohen know that this "Cold War" framework was wrong? The question is a fair one because he, like everyone interested in Soviet history, certainly should have suspected it, as Getty and others did. Today, with the benefit of documents from the former Soviet archives, we can prove that Khrushchev and his supporters knew they were lying.¹³

(We can be certain that Gorbachev and his supporters were consciously lying too. It is simply not credible that falsifications such as, for example, that of the Soviet Supreme Court decree "rehabilitating" Bukharin could have been done behind the back of the First Secretary. No one in the USSR would have dared to do that.)

To admit Bukharin's guilt would threaten, if not completely dismantle, the whole orthodox or "anti-Stalin" paradigm because Bukharin implicated by name virtually all the main figures in the Moscow Trials. It is generally assumed that Bukharin was coerced to falsify his confession. But if it can be proven that the most damning admissions of his confession were in fact true, then this would suggest that other allegations in his confession, or even his confessions as a whole, are in fact credible as evidence. It would follow from this that we have very strong evidence that the conspiracies against Stalin and the Soviet Union in the 1930s were quite real. Bukharin testified that the Soviet government – "Stalin" – stopped a fascist plot that would have put the USSR into the Axis camp, thus saving Europe and much of the rest of the world from fascist domination. Anticomunist ideology dictated then, as it does today, that this fact must be denied at any cost.

In addition anticommunism was then, and remains today, not just compatible with but obligatory for academic success in this field. Soviet studies is a branch of communist studies that has always been an intellectual adjunct to the anticommunist forces in the Cold War, and remains so to this day. The only way to achieve wide recognition, much less the fame that Cohen did in fact attain, is to "go along" – to elaborate a more nuanced

¹³ For the evidence that all the so-called "revelations" in Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" to the 20th Party Congress of February 25, 1956 are false see Grover Furr, *Khrushchev Lied* (Kettering, OH: Erythrós Press and Media, 2011). This is a revised and updated version of *Antistalinskaia podlost'* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2007).

version of the Soviet past that could fit comfortably inside the dominant Cold War paradigm. This essay, therefore, has in its sights not just Cohen himself, but a far larger and more important target – the false “anti-Stalin” paradigm, of Soviet history.

The Moscow Trials

If as this essay contends the “anti-Stalin” narrative of Soviet history in the Stalin period generally, and the 1930s specifically, is basically wrong and dishonest, the reader can’t fail to wonder: What really happened? Where can one turn, if not for a complete and truthful account of the major events of the 1930s, then at least for a more accurate paradigm? This is a fair and, moreover, a very important question. While the present essay can’t answer it with satisfaction, we’ll try to briefly give the broad outlines of such a picture, at least as it concerns Bukharin, Stalin, and the Moscow Trials generally.

There is no concrete evidence whatsoever that any of the defendants in the three public Moscow Trials, or any of the military commanders in the secret trial known as the “Tukhachevsky Affair,” were innocent. Moreover, there is no evidentiary basis for the widespread notion, frequently asserted, that they confessed to crimes they did not commit because of pressures of any kinds like torture, threat of torture, or threats to family. There is no evidence of any “Rubashov effect” – confession from some twisted notion of a “higher loyalty to the Party.” Despite official insistence that they were innocent and the refusal of the Russian government to release all but a small fraction of the documentation we know exists, it is clear that objectively – that is, on the evidence – these defendants appear to be guilty of everything they confessed to, and perhaps of some of what the prosecution charged them with but to which they did not confess.

Concerning Bukharin specifically we now have a great deal of evidence from the formerly Secret Soviet archives – more than about any other single defendant. All of this evidence points strongly towards Bukharin’s guilt. Not only do we have evidence directly concerning Bukharin himself but also concerning others – both those in one or another of the Moscow Trials and those who, like Avel’ Enukidze and Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, were tried secretly – who implicate Bukharin, while Bukharin’s testimony also incriminates them. Further, we have a great deal of evidence that Leon Trotsky

conspired with Germany and Japan as charged at the three Moscow “Show” Trials of 1936-38.

We now have a great deal of evidence of the guilt of these men. Meanwhile, we have no evidence at all that tends to suggest they were innocent. Certainly, many scholars in this field, and many opinionated persons beyond it, assert and believe the opposite. But the fact is that there is no solid evidence to support the hypothesis that they were innocent. We can be certain of one thing: any jury presented with this evidence; any scholar who examined it and who was not burdened with the preconceived idea that the “anti-Stalin” paradigm must be right, would have to conclude Bukharin and the other defendants were, in fact, guilty. Furthermore, we know that Gorbachev’s rehabilitation commission examined all the several hundred volumes of investigative materials that are mentioned in the transcripts of their hearings. Yet this commission could find no evidence that supported Bukharin’s acquittal. In addition, the one bit of documentary evidence of Bukharin’s innocence cited by the Soviet Supreme Court is cited falsely, and that original document in fact confirms Bukharin’s guilt. All this strongly suggests that even in the still-secret archives no exculpatory evidence is to be found.

We also have found no evidence to suggest that this evidence was fabricated or that it tends to exculpate Bukharin for any other reason. We know too that Stalin did not deliberately set out to construct any kind of mass “terror” by “targeting” Bukharin. In the specific case of Bukharin, much evidence shows that Stalin gave his former ally, colleague and friend the benefit of the doubt many times.

The present essay deals specifically with Cohen’s chapter and the statements he makes in it. But it is really not just “Cohen’s account” – it is the dominant paradigm itself upon which Cohen drew, that is in the dock here. Every aspect of this “anti-Stalin” paradigm is false – often, diametrically opposite from the truth.

The clear implication of this study’s conclusions is that the history of the Soviet Union in the Stalin period must be completely reconceived on the basis of the evidence we now have. Most important, those who aim to understand the course of events in the USSR during the 1930s will have to discard the paradigm that has become so familiar and whose dominance has so fatally distorted our understanding. The real history of the great socialist experiment of the USSR during the Stalin period is still to be written.

Analysis of Cohen's Chapter

Let's start by stressing the main error of this chapter: Cohen forces everything into the Procrustean bed of the "anti-Stalin" master narrative. Cohen's sources are virtually all taken from a few sources that are "canonical" or basic to this paradigm, or from the version promoted by Conquest, which is no more than a Westernized amalgam of Khrushchev-era falsehoods and anticommunist memoirs and works of propaganda, a few of which are tricked out as "scholarship." Gorbachev's later version would simply be a more intense variation of this same paradigm.

Still a valuable examination of the reasons to be skeptical of all these works is Arch Getty's "Bibliographical essay" at the end of his 1986 work *Origins of the Great Purges. The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938* (Cambridge U.P.), pp. 211-220 (hereafter Getty, *Origins*). Getty's discussion proves that a careful and properly skeptical scholar could discern the unreliability of most of Cohen's sources long before the end of the USSR. Getty wrote a draft of this "Bibliographical essay" in his Ph.D. dissertation finished in 1979; see Getty, *The Great Purges Reconsidered. The Soviet Communist Party 1933-1939*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Boston College, 1979, pp. 24-48 (hereafter Getty, Dissertation). We'll consider this too.

- Cohen "believes" – accepts at face value – Khrushchev's own statements in, for example, his 1956 "Secret Speech" to the 20th Party Congress.

We know now that virtually every single "revelation," major and minor, that Khrushchev made in this famous speech is false. Furthermore, we know that Khrushchev knew they were! But the unreliability of Khrushchev and his information has long been obvious. (Furr 2007; Getty, *Origins* 216-7; Getty, Dissertation 38-40)

- Cohen accepts Khrushchev-era sources as true also, even though the political origins and motivation of such assertions were obvious at the time. For example Cohen relies heavily upon Roy Medvedev's *Let History Judge*, a book that basically attempts to summarize Khrushchev-era "revelations" along with

Medvedev's own collection of stories and rumors from unpublished memoirs. Medvedev's is a "pro-Bukharin polemic" and extremely bitter against Stalin.

As Getty points out:

Nearly all Medvedev's work is based on the post-1956 recollections of surviving party members . . . [N]one of Medvedev's often anonymous informants was close enough to the center of power to tell *why* things were happening or indeed exactly what was happening. All his informants were on the 'outside' . . . Their speculations about why this happened or about Stalin's position are little better than ours. (Getty, *Origins* 218; cf. Getty, Dissertation 40-42)

In this essay, we refer both to the English translation of Medvedev's book and to the 1974 Russian language edition published by Knopf and printed in Belgium.

- Cohen also leans heavily on unreliable secondary sources like Conquest's *The Great Terror*. This book is itself an attempt, more successful and systematic than Medvedev's, to synthesize Khrushchev-era "revelations" or claims with anticommunist works of propaganda, treating them all as though they were thoroughly verified sources.

Of Conquest's lack of source criticism Getty wrote (*Origins*, 5 and 222, n.12; cf. Dissertation 64, n. 57):

For no other period or topic have historians been so eager to write and accept history-by-anecdote. Grand analytical generalizations have come from secondhand bits of overheard corridor gossip. Prison camp stories ('My friend met Bukharin's wife in a camp and she said . . .') have become primary sources on central political decision making. The need to generalize from isolated and unverified particulars has transformed rumors into sources and has equated repetition of stories with confirmation. Indeed, the leading expert on the Great

Purges [Conquest] has written that ‘truth can thus only percolate in the form of hearsay’ and that ‘basically the best, though not infallible, source is rumor.’

. . . Such statements would be astonishing in any other field of history. Of course, historians do not accept hearsay and rumor as evidence. Conquest goes on to say that the best way to check rumors is to compare them with one another. This procedure would be sound only if rumors were not repeated and if memoirists did not read each other’s works.

In his dissertation Getty had been even more critical of Conquest’s work:

Sometimes the “scholarship” had been more than simply careless. Recent investigations of British intelligence activities (following in the wake of U.S. post-Watergate revelations), suggest that Robert Conquest, author of the highly influential Great Terror, accepted payment from British intelligence agencies for consciously falsifying information about the Soviet Union. Consequently, the works of such an individual can hardly be considered valid scholarly works by his peers in the Western academic community. (Dissertation 48)

Getty usefully refers to the article by David Leigh, “Death of the department that never was” in *The Guardian* of January 27, 1978,¹⁴ which identifies Conquest as writing propaganda for the “Information Research Department,” or IRD, of the British Foreign Office, and publishing it through Praeger Publishers in the USA, which also published books for the American CIA.

But good research is good research no matter where it comes from. If Conquest’s work were honest and accurate, it would be very helpful irrespective of Conquest’s reactionary political orientation. It isn’t. Conquest collects rumors and relies on thoroughly worthless works so long as they have an anticommunist tendency. The first and most influential edition of his *magnum opus*, *The Great Terror*, cites Alexander Orlov’s book more than any other source by far.

¹⁴ Now available at <http://www.cambridgeclarion.org/e/fo_deceit_unit_graun_27jan1978.html>. One of the authors was told in 1980 by the late Professor John N. Hazard of Columbia University that it was widely believed in the field that much of Conquest’s research was in fact done by researchers working for British intelligence, who then sent the material on to him.

- Cohen too relies heavily on Alexander Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes* (NY: Random House, 1953). This work was understood as a fabrication long before Orlov's KGB file was opened in the early 1990s and the full extent of his falsifications uncovered. Arch Getty carefully dissected the reasons for rejecting Orlov's clearly fabricated account of events in his book (*Origins* 211-2) and remarked with acerbity:

Normally, the testimony of a sometime Stalinist agent, mass murderer, and former spy would be subjected to at least a modicum of critical attention and doubt. But the question of political bias only compounds the main problem with the Orlov source – the lack of proximity to events. (212)

Costello and Tsarev (*Deadly Illusions*, NY: Crown, 1993) cite many specific examples of Orlov's lies, uncovered with the aid of Orlov's KGB file (e.g. pp. 287, 297, 299, 304, 308, 314, 321.)

- Again like Conquest Cohen frequently cites Boris Nikolaevsky's "Letter of an Old Bolshevik." Nikolaevsky, a Menshevik and Rykov's brother-in-law, knew Bukharin, who visited him as late as 1936. We know now that this is basically a work of fiction by Nikolaevsky, who then claimed it was based on his talks with Bukharin. But Getty recognized this in the main in 1979 or earlier:

Clearly, the "Letter is a dubious source. (Dissertation 37; cf. discussion 33-38)

By 1985 Getty had reached a more categorical conclusion: the "Letter" is worthless.

Clearly, the "Letter" is a spurious source, and one should be at least circumspect and dubious about its claims. It represents only Nicolaevsky's collection of contradictory and unattributed rumors floating around Europe in the 1930s. (*Origins* 215)

The manifold contradictions and flaws in Nikolaevsky's material had been there for anyone to discern long before Getty wrote in the 1970s. They were there in the '60s, when Cohen, Conquest and others were writing. Evidently, though, like Orlov's, Nikolaevsky's utterly unreliable account was too tempting for anticommunists not to use it.

- Cohen also uses Menshevik sources like Theodore (Fyodor) Dan and publications like the *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik* published in Paris, and Trotsky's *Biulleten' oppositsii*. All were strongly biased and very far from the events in the USSR, though sometimes they received reports from their supporters inside the country. (Getty Origins 213-4).

As Getty had earlier suspected (Dissertation 32), Trotsky's personal communications, when opened to scholars in 1980, disclosed that Trotsky was lying when during the 1930s he denied he was in contact with his supporters within the USSR. In 2010 Sven-Eric Holmström showed that Trotsky lied several times about the "Hotel Bristol" incident, both to the Dewey Commission and in his *Biulleten'*, and that Trotsky suborned one of his defence witnesses to lie about it as well.¹⁵ Trotsky had no incentive to be truthful; was far from events in the USSR; and frequently contradicted himself. As one who spent the last dozen years of his life excoriating Stalin, chief defendant *in absentia* at the Moscow Trials and, after 1937, a person demonized above all others within the USSR, Trotsky was hardly an objective observer.

Accusations That the Charges Were False

In addition to his uncritical use of dubious or worthless sources, Cohen makes many important assertions without evidence of any kind. For example, he simply declares that all the defendants at the three Moscow Trials, including Bukharin's, were innocent and that the charges brought against them were "false":

¹⁵ Sven-Eric Holmström. "New Evidence Concerning the 'Hotel Bristol' Question in the First Moscow Trial of 1936." *Cultural Logic* 2008. At <<http://clogic.eserver.org/2008/Holmstrom.pdf>>. See also Grover Furr. "Evidence of Leon Trotsky's Collaboration with Germany and Japan." *Cultural Logic* 2009, at <<http://clogic.eserver.org/2009/Furr.pdf>>.

“. . . all of the criminal charges were false.” (341); “false charges” (366); “false charges and bizarre confessions.” (438)

He states “The confession of each [defendant], painfully extracted, was tailored to the bizarre indictment. Everything had again been rehearsed.” (373) In the Russian translation Cohen’s language is more forthright: “the confessions were extracted under torture” (441).

Cohen provides no evidence whatsoever for any of these sweeping statements. It would have been more forthright for him to have said something like this: “We have no evidence that these charges were false, but we are convinced that they were,” and then give us his reasoning. Instead, Cohen commits the cardinal logical error of “begging the question” or “assuming that which is to be proven.”

But the reason he did so is clear. Neither in the late 1960s and early 1970s when Cohen wrote, nor today with such formerly secret Soviet documents as have been released, do we have any evidence that the charges against the defendants were false. On the contrary: all the evidence now available strongly supports the hypothesis that the defendants at all the Moscow Trials were guilty of at least those crimes to which they confessed at trial. We’ll return to this point below, as it is of major importance.

There’s also the question of Cohen’s use of the term “bizarre.” This is a completely subjective description that says nothing about the charges at all. (Logically, it is the fallacy of incredulity: “I cannot believe it, therefore it must be false.”) Many observers at the time did not think the charges “bizarre” at all. Cohen cites Harold Denny of *The New York Times* as one of them. We could add a great many more. Cohen’s use of the adjective “bizarre” is a rhetorical ploy intended to justify dismissing without investigation all the testimony, including the confessions, in the transcripts of the three Moscow “Show Trials.”

What kind of historical procedure is it to make claims that the charges against the defendants were “false” without any evidence that they were, or to label confessions “bizarre,” as though that were some kind of objective statement about them, rather than about the person whose judgment this reflects? An utterly invalid historical method, of course.

Confessions

Confessions are important evidence in all legal systems. In American courts, most criminal cases are resolved by a “plea bargain” typically involving a confession by the accused person that he is in fact guilty of the crime to which is pleading guilty.

In the case of the Soviet Union in the 1930s writers, sometimes take the position that a confession by the accused is, somehow, prima facie evidence not of their guilt, but of their innocence, and, moreover, of the fact that they have been tortured or mistreated either to make a false confession or to sign a false confession written by the investigators. It’s important to restate this obvious fact: in any jurisdiction, a confession to a crime by a suspect is prima facie evidence of guilt, not of innocence, torture, or fabrication.

By affirming this basic prima facie principle, we do not deny that false confessions are possible, or that they did not occur in the Soviet Union. Nikolai Ezhov, head of the NKVD, and many of his assistants and investigators, were indeed accused, tried, and found guilty of fabricating confessions, torturing suspects to make false confessions, and other such abuses, and were executed for these crimes. We have letters to and from Politburo members who were horrified by such abuses and were investigating them and making appropriate arrests of investigators.

The Moscow Trials, including the March 1938 “Bukharin” Trial, proceeded mainly on the basis of confessions. Some material evidence was presented, although none of that material has been published.¹⁶ We do not know whether the prosecution had any other material evidence because the Russian government has kept all the investigative files secret to this day. We do know that, in the case of the military leaders tried and executed with Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, some material evidence – a document from a Japanese military figure – did exist as late as the 1960s, because a secret report made to Nikita Khrushchev in 1964 cited some.¹⁷

¹⁶ There was some documentary evidence. For example, during the second Moscow Trial Prosecutor Andrei Vyshinskii produced a notebook with the Moscow phone number of a German agent and other incriminating annotations in it. The defendant Stroilov identified it and the phone numbers and other notation as his own. See *Report of Court Proceedings in the case of the Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Centre Heard Before The Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the U.S.S.R. Moscow, January 23-30, 1937. Verbatim Report*. Moscow: People’s Commissariat of Justice of the U.S.S.R., 1937, pp. 271-74. In the much shorter Russian transcript see pp. 108-9.

¹⁷ Khrushchev’s investigators cited and quoted it, and then stated their belief that it had been “planted,” i.e. was faked – a story that is full of contradictions and obviously itself a fabrication. We examine this document in another work under preparation.

This raises an obvious point. Material evidence can also be fabricated. So the presence, or lack, of material evidence, does not necessarily speak to the question of guilt or innocence of the accused. That is to say, even if material evidence were lacking – and in this case it is not – that fact would not itself be evidence that the accused were innocent, on the principle that “lack of evidence is not evidence of lack.”¹⁸

In an interview with the German author Lion Feuchtwanger on January 8, 1937 Stalin spoke about the issue of the varying legal interpretations of the use of confessions, as he saw it.

Feuchtwanger. The transcript of the trial of Zinoviev and the others has been published. This account consists, in the main, of the confessions of the accused. Undoubtedly there exist other materials concerning this trial. Can't they also be published?

Stalin. What materials?

Feuchtwanger. The results of the preliminary investigation. Everything that demonstrates their guilt aside from their confessions.

Stalin. Among legal specialists there are two schools. One considers that the confession of the accused is the most significant evidence of their guilt. The Anglo-Saxon juridical school considers that material elements – knife, revolver, etc. – are insufficient to establish those guilty of a crime. The confession of the accused has greater significance.

There is also the German school. It concedes a preference to material evidence, but it also attributes importance to the confession of the accused. I don't understand why some people or writers abroad are not satisfied with the confession of the accused. Kirov was murdered – that's a fact. Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Trotsky were not present. But the people who committed this crime pointed to them as those who had instigated it. All of them are experienced conspirators – Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, et al. In such matters they do not

¹⁸ “The phrase ‘absence of evidence is not evidence of absence’ can be used as a shorthand rebuttal to the second form of the ignorance fallacy . . .” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argument_from_ignorance_-_Absence_of_evidence>.

leave documents behind. Their own people exposed them at face-to-face confrontations and then they had to admit their guilt.¹⁹

We have pointed out elsewhere that it was Bolshevik practice long before the 1930s not to write down elements of any serious conspiracy but to conduct all such conspiracy orally.²⁰

“Aesopian language”

Cohen claims that Bukharin never really confessed to any crimes during his March 1938 Trial.

Briefly stated, his tactic would be to make sweeping confessions that he was “politically responsible” for everything, thereby at once saving his family and underlining his symbolic role, while at the same time flatly denying or subtly disproving his complicity in any actual crime. (376)

Cohen repeated this claim in 1996:

No less important, his prison writings confirm that – as I argued in my book and Stalin's biographer Robert C. Tucker had done earlier – Bukharin was not “broken” during his year in Lubyanka, and he did not actually “confess” at the trial. Instead, he ultimately agreed to participate in the grotesque spectacle in order to save his family and to speak publicly for the last time, in every Aesopian way available to him, about crucial, even anti-Stalinist, matters. (“To Be Preserved Forever,” *The Nation*, Nov 27, 1995)

Cohen is perhaps more famous for this theory than for any other of his conclusions, even convincing at least one of the members of Gorbachev’s “rehabilitation commission” in

¹⁹ L. Maksimenkov. “Outlines of a ‘nomenklatura’ history of Soviet literature. Western pilgrims at Stalin’s throne (Feuchtwanger and others).” *Voprosy literatury* 2 (2004). <<http://magazines.russ.ru/voplit/2004/2/max13.html>>.

²⁰ Furr, “Evidence of Leon Trotsky’s Collaboration with Germany and Japan.” *Cultural Logic* 2009, pp. 29 ff. At <http://clogic.eserver.org/2009/Furr.pdf>

1988.²¹ It is entirely false, as we shall see when we devote special study to it towards the end of this essay.

The Refutation

We will examine one by one all the major factual assertions Cohen makes in his final chapter. The remarks above are intended to put our examination into context. They show the framework of which the “anti-Stalin” paradigm is composed, and the unreliability of the main sources Cohen employed in fleshing out a pseudo-history of Soviet politics and Bukharin’s life during the 1930s.

Now, thanks to the partial opening of former Soviet archives to researchers, we are in a position to go further than negative criticism of Cohen’s credulous and biased use of unreliable sources. We can begin to outline what really did happen.

The “Holodomor” – the Famine of 1932-33

“ . . . the deliberately created famine of 1932-3” (339)

Cohen cites no evidence whatever, not even a footnote, to support this statement. Though due to long repetition many people still believe this story, few except pro-Nazi Ukrainian nationalists and hard-core Cold Warriors seriously argue it in print any longer.

Robert Conquest, whose 1986 book *Harvest of Despair*, paid for by these same Ukrainian nationalist groups, popularized the “man-made famine” fiction, now denies it was “man-made.” According to Davies and Wheatcroft,

Our view of Stalin and the famine is close to that of Robert Conquest, who would earlier have been considered the champion of the argument that Stalin had intentionally caused the famine and had acted in a genocidal manner. In 2003, Dr Conquest wrote to us explaining that he does not hold the view that ‘Stalin purposely inflicted the 1933 famine. No. What I argue is that with resulting

²¹ See Demichev’s remark: “If one considers it carefully, in essence he denied all guilt.” *Reabilitatsiia. Kak Eto Bylo. Serekina 80-kh godov – 1991*. Moscow: MDF, “Materik” 2004, p. 40.

famine imminent, he could have prevented it, but put “Soviet interest” other than feeding the starving first – thus consciously abetting it’.²²

This was also true in the 1960s and 1970s, when Cohen was writing.²³

Ten Million Peasants?

Hard upon the statement above Cohen claims that

[a]t least 10 million peasants, possibly many more, died as a direct result of collectivization, about half during the imposed famine of 1932-3. (339)

We have already dealt with the falsehood of the “imposed famine.” The note to this statement informs us that the “10 million” figure comes from the following passage in Winston Churchill’s *Hinge of Fate*. Here is the text in question:

“‘Tell me,’ I asked, ‘have the stresses of this war been as bad to you personally as carrying through the policy of the collective farms?’

“This subject immediately aroused the Marshal.

“‘Oh, no,’ he said, ‘the collective farm policy was a terrible struggle.’

“‘I thought you would have found it bad,’ said I, ‘because you were not dealing with a few score thousands of aristocrats or big landowners, but with millions of small men.’

“‘Ten millions,’ he said, holding up his hands.” “It was fearful. Four years it lasted. It was absolutely necessary for Russia, if we were to avoid periodic famines, to plough the land with tractors.”²⁴

²² “Stalin and the Soviet Famine of 1932-33: A Reply to Ellman,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, 4 (June 2006), p. 629.

²³ As for Conquest’s charge of “abetting”: Had the Soviet government (“Stalin”) stopped industrialization to put all resources into famine relief, the famines would have continued every 2-3 years as they had done for a millennium. Mark Tauger of West Virginia University has done the best research on this subject. Much of this research may be downloaded at this own page: <<http://www.as.wvu.edu/history/Faculty/Tauger/soviet.htm>>. See also the October 2010 interview of Grover Furr by *Georgian Times* at <<http://www.geotimes.ge/index.php?m=home&newsid=22947>>, mirrored at <http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/collectivization_geotimes1010.pdf>. The unfortunate title was added by the editors of *Georgian Times*.

²⁴ Winston Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate* (Boston, 1950), p. 498.

Cohen has invidiously misconstrued this passage. Churchill said nothing at all about deaths. He spoke only of collectivization as an attempt undertaken by Stalin and his supporters to “avoid periodic famines.” There is no basis to assume that the figure of ten million refers to those who died. Even a defender of the myth of the “Holodomor” like Stanislav Kul’chinskii (Ukraine) agrees:

If one reads this passage with care one finds that it is not a question only of those who perished. . . .²⁵

Even assuming Churchill remembered this conversation accurately – and there is real uncertainty here as Churchill worked rapidly on these volumes with the aid of research assistants years after the fact – Churchill does not even claim that Stalin told him ten million peasants had died. Rather, Stalin said that there was “a terrible struggle” dealing with ten million peasants. According to V.N. Zemskov, a contemporary Russian researcher who is highly anticommunist, it seems as though the number of peasants “exiled” or sent away from their original homes did not exceed about 1,500,000 at any one time.²⁶

Stalin’s “Blood Purge” and “Three-Year Terror”

Stalin’s blood purge of 1936-9 constituted the second, political stage of his revolution from above. The three-year terror mass arrests and executions – directed by Stalin and his personal coterie operating through the secret police, or NKVD . . . (340)

As we’ll show in detail below, every statement here is wrong. There was no “blood purge of 1936-9.” Officially speaking, “purges” (*chistki*) were reviews of Party membership intended to weed out the inactive, immoral, incapable, and disloyal. The different trials, arrests, and the mass repressions were something completely different. They unfolded

²⁵ Kul’chinskii, S. “Skol’ko nas pogiblo ot golodomora 1933 goda?” [“How many of us died in the Holodomor of 1933?”]. *Zerkalo nedeli*, No. 45, November 23-29 2002, repr. At <<http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2003/0101/analit01.php>>.

²⁶ V.N. Zemskov, «Sud’ba ‘kulatskoi ssylki’». *Otechestvennaia Istoriiia* 1 (1994). At <<http://www.tuad.nsk.ru/~history/Author/Russ/Z/Zemskov/Articles/kulaki2.html>>.

gradually and unevenly, without any central direction and in response to the discovery of new conspiracies. To conflate the two is to confuse matters seriously.

Nor was there any “three-year terror.” The really massive repressions took place from mid-1937 through almost the end of 1938, under Nikolai Ezhov, head of the NKVD. They were promoted by the First Secretaries, who claimed there were serious organized groups in their areas that needed to be dealt with in an emergency fashion, and by Ezhov himself, who was using his power to try to seize control of the state. Ezhov was clearly out of control for much of this period, and the repression ceased immediately after he was removed in late 1938. We have a large and ever-increasing number of primary sources that document this.²⁷

Nine Million Inmates

Prisons and remote concentration camps swelled to 9 million inmates by late 1939 (compared to 30,000 in 1928 and 5 million in 1933-5). (341)

These figures are many times too high. V.N. Zemskov, a leading anticommunist researcher of these figures, refers specifically to this passage, and has refuted them:

Here, for example, is S. Cohen (referring to the book by R. Conquest, *The Great Terror*, published in the USA in 1968): [sentence above quoted]. . .

In reality, in January 1940 there were in the camps of the GULAG 1,334,408 prisoners, in the colonies of the GULAG – 314,584 and in prisons – 190,266 persons. In total, in camps, colonies and prisons there were 1,850,258 prisoners (Table 1, 2). That means that the statistics cited by R. Conquest and S. Cohen are exaggerated by almost a factor of five.²⁸

²⁷ See “Interrogations of Nikolai Ezhov, former People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs,” at <<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/ezhovinterrogs.html>>. For the views of one of us (Furr) in 2004-5 see Grover Furr, “Stalin and the Struggle for Democratic Reform. Part One,” *Cultural Logic* 2005, <<http://clogic.eserver.org/2005/furr.html>>, paragraphs 104 to end.

²⁸ “GULAG (istoricheskii-sotsiologicheskii aspekt). Sotsiologicheskii issledovanie 6-7 (1991). At <<http://www.hrono.ru/statii/2001/zemskov.html>>.

These figures are also found and discussed at more length in J. Arch Getty, Gabor T. Rittersporn, and Viktor N. Zemskov, “Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-war Years: A First Approach on the Basis of Archival Evidence.”²⁹

How Many Party Members Executed?

Cohen claims that

[o]f its [the Party] 2.8 million full and candidate members in 1934, at least a million, anti-Stalinist and Stalinist alike, were arrested and two-thirds of them executed. (341)

This too is a gigantic exaggeration. In his 1968 book *Communist Party membership in the U.S.S.R., 1917-1967* T.H. Rigby calculated that the maximum number of Party members who could have been “purged” between November 1936 and March 1939 was around 180,000 (212). This includes those who quit or were expelled for some reason – passivity, political illiteracy, etc. – as well as those who were arrested and tried.

Rigby’s study had long been available when Cohen wrote his book. Cohen had a scholarly obligation to refer to it and inform his readers why he thought Rigby was wrong. This he failed to do.

Oleg Mozokhin, a researcher for the FSB, successor to the KGB, has published figures for the number of members and candidate members of the Party and of the Komsomol, the Party’s youth organization, for 1937 and 1939.

1937

Former members and candidate members arrested	55,428
Former members and candidate members of the Komsomol	8,211
Total	63,639

1939

Former members and candidate members arrested	5,387
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²⁹ *American Historical Review* 98,4 (Oct. 1993), pp. 1017-49.

Former members and candidate members of the Komsomol	3,517
Total	8,904 ³⁰

Mozokhin has no Party breakdown for 1938. Since the total number of executions in 1937 and 1938 were similar³¹ we can assume that the total for that year was in the same range as that of 1937. This would suggest a total number of members and former members, candidates and former candidates, of both Party and Komsomol, at 136,000 arrested for all reasons during 1937-1939, the years of the “Ezhovshchina” (= “Bad Time of Ezhov”) for which Conquest invented the sobriquet “the Terror.” These figures correspond reasonably well with Rigby’s figure for expulsions (see above) since many of those expelled would not have been arrested.

Available to us today but not to Cohen are the “Stalin lists,” mainly of Party members to be tried. Corrected for duplicate entries they number roughly 40,000 names, by no means all of whom were executed.³²

If Cohen’s statement had been accurate, it would have meant that at least 2/3 of a million Party members would have been executed during 1936-1939 (that this is the period in question is clear from the previous paragraph). In fact we have the total numbers of all arrested persons, from the study by Mozokhin (2005),³³

1936	total number of persons arrested	131,168
1937		936,750
1938		638,509
1939		145,407

³⁰ Oleg Mozokhin. “Statistika repressivnoi deiatel’nosti organov bezopasnosti SSSR na period s 1921 po 1940 gg. At <http://www.rusproject.org/pages/analysis/analysis_3/statrepl.html>; Mozokhin, O. *Pravo na repressii* (Moscow-Zhukovskii: “Kuchkovo Pole,” 2006) p. 338; 348.

³¹ In fact the number executed in 1938 was about 7% lower than the 1937 figure; see below.

³² See “Vvedenie” (Introduction) at <<http://www.memo.ru/history/vkvs/images/intro1.htm>>.

³³ Oleg B. Mozokhin. “Statistika repressivnoi deiatel’nosti organov bezopasnosti SSSR na period s 1921 po 1940 gg.” Originally on the FSB (successor to the KGB – NKVD) site at <<http://fsb.ru/new/mozokhin.htm>>; now available widely; cf. <<http://stalinism.ru/Dokumenty/Statistika-repressivnoy-deyatelnosti-OGPU-NKVD-1921-1940-g.html>>. Cf. Mozokhin, *Pravo na repressii. Vnesudebnye polnomochiia organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti (1918-1953)*. Moscow-Zhukovskii: “Kuchkov Pole” (2006), pp. 331-50.

Total arrested persons 1936-1939	1,851,834
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Here are the numbers of people executed during these years:

1936	1,118
1937	353,074
1938	328,618
1939	2,601
1940	1,863

This means a total number of 685,411 people were sentenced to be executed during the period 1936-1939. This is not just Party members, but everybody! The total for 1937-38 is 681,692.³⁴

Getty makes a different calculation:

Based on the sources now available (which are probably incomplete) we can say that with Order No. 447 plus subsequent known limit increases, Moscow gave permission to shoot about 236,000 victims. We are fairly certain that some 386,798 persons were actually shot, leaving 151,716 people shot without currently documented central sanction either from the NKVD or the Politburo.⁷⁸

A note explains Getty's calculations thus:

⁷⁸ Calculated from Politburo protocols (special folders): RGASPI, f. 17, op. 162, dd. 21-23; TsA FSB, collection of documents; Kokurin and Petrov, *GULAG*, 97-104; Samosudov, *Bol'shoi terror*, 160-61, 241; Nikolai Il'kevich, "Rasstreliany v Viaz'me: Novoe o M. N. Goretskom," *Krai Smolenskii* 1-2 (1994): 129-44; Shearer, "Crime and Social Disorder," 139-41; *Moskovskie novosti*, 21 June 1992; *Izvestiia*, 3 April 1996; and Khlevniuk, "Les mecanismes," 204-6. Nikita Petrov believes that additional increase permissions were given orally or by

³⁴ Cohen did not take these totals and apply them to Party members alone. These figures were not published until the 1990s.

telegrams and puts the excess shooting figure at about thirty thousand (personal communication). Such evidence is not currently available to researchers.

The discrepancy between Mozokhin's and Getty's figures may be that the NKVD figures are for the whole years 1937 and 1938, while Getty's are from the issuance of Order No. 00447, issued on July 30, 1937 but part of an operation to regularize repression that began around July 3, 1937 (Getty, Excesses 127; Getty refers to this as No. 447), and that lasted until Order No. 00447 had been rescinded on November 17, 1938 but in practice some time later than that (Getty, Excesses 134). Other operations, especially the "nationalities" operations during which Ezhov and his men executed a huge number of people, are not counted as part of the total for Order No. 00447.

In any case even Mozokhin's figures, the higher of these two sets, apply to all persons in the USSR rather than just to Party members. All the data we have shows that Cohen's statement is vastly exaggerated. Even if all forty thousand people in the so-called "shooting lists" were Party members and all had been executed – and we know that many were not – that would still be only 6% of the 2/3 million Cohen claimed.³⁵

Charges at Trials False?

"Elaborated most fully at three show trials of old Bolsheviks . . . all of the criminal charges were false."¹⁶ (341)

Cohen's footnote to this statement reads as follows:

¹⁶ As has been acknowledged by the Soviet government since Stalin's death. For the charges against Bukharin, see *Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie*, p. 298.

³⁵ We insist that to scrutinize these figures carefully and to insist on accuracy concerning the numbers of people arrested or executed is not in any way to "justify" or to "make light" of those actual repressions and executions that did take place. The evidence is that Ezhov and his men were killing as many Soviet citizens as they could. See "Interrogations of Nikolai Ezhov, former People's Commissar for Internal Affairs," cited at note 27 above.

This statement is false. At the time of Cohen's writing the Soviet government had not "acknowledged" that all the criminal charges against all the defendants at all the three Moscow trials were false! The Soviet government did not make that claim until late in Gorbachev's day. As we have shown elsewhere, these governmental "acknowledgements," when they did come, were anything but objective evidence. Rather, they were politically motivated pronouncements, some of them demonstrably fabrications, and ought to be treated with critical skepticism by historians and others.³⁶

The reference to the Soviet book is also misleading. It is to a talk by Piotr Pospelov, at that time the director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. Pospelov had been editor of *Pravda* and later a close associate of Nikita Khrushchev's. It was Pospelov who wrote the first draft of Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" of 1956, in which, as we have shown elsewhere, virtually every statement about Stalin and Beria is false.³⁷ What follows is a brief examination of the source Cohen quotes above.

At an historians' conference in December 1962 Pospelov answered a question from the audience in the form of a written note, in this way.

Later in this same note it says: "Students are asking whether Bukharin and the rest were spies for foreign governments, and what you advise us to read."

I can declare that it is sufficient to study carefully the documents of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU to say that neither Bukharin, nor Rykov, of course, were spies or terrorists.³⁸

Pospelov was using "weasel words" – words that are literally correct but intended to create a false impression. In the 1938 Trial, Bukharin and Rykov were not convicted of carrying out espionage *themselves*, but of being leaders in the "bloc of Rights and Trotskyites" that did engage in espionage activities. Likewise both Bukharin and Rykov

³⁶ We have examined Bukharin's falsified "rehabilitation" report by the Soviet Supreme Court of February 4, 1988, in Grover Furr and Vladimir Bobrov, *1937. Pravosudie Stalina. Obzhalovaniiu ne podlezhit!* Moscow: Iauza-Eksmo, 2010 pp., Chapter 2, "Reabilitatsionnoe moshenichestvo" ["The Rehabilitation Deception"], 64-84. This report is still top-secret in Russia today, so the publishers of our book decided not to print it. We hope to publish this report and our article in English in the near future.

³⁷ Furr, *Khrushchev Lied*.

³⁸ *Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie o merakh uluchsheniia podgotovki nauchno-pedagogicheskikh kadrov po istoricheskim naukam. 18-21 dekabria 1962 g.* Moscow: "Nauka," 1964, p. 298.

were convicted of recruiting others to engage in acts of violence against others – the best Russian translation here of the word “terror,” which means something quite different in English – but not of engaging in it themselves.

Therefore Pospelov’s words are correct *in the sense most readers will understand* – that a “spy” is someone who himself spies, and a terrorist someone who himself commits acts of terror. But Pospelov is misleading insofar as he wishes his audience to understand that their confessions and the verdict against them were wrong. Furthermore, the question was about “Bukharin and the rest” – presumably, all the other defendants in the 1938 Trial, whereas Pospelov restricted his answer to Bukharin and Rykov only.

And it ought to have been obvious to Cohen as it surely was to Pospelov’s audience that Pospelov pointedly refused to answer the questioner’s request for recommendations of sources to read. “Read the speeches at the 22nd Party Congress!” means: *We are not going to allow you to read any of the materials related to the Bukharin case!*

Any reader might wonder: Why not? Those who speak the truth have nothing to hide. Unless what might be found there would compromise the Khrushchevite line on Bukharin, Stalin, and maybe more. As we know today, the latter is the case.

As we know for a fact today, but anyone might have guessed in 1973, Pospelov “knew where the bodies were buried.” He had prepared the historical report and first draft of Khrushchev’s famous 1956 “Secret Speech.” Therefore he knew that it was not just full of lies about Stalin and the history of his day – it was nothing but lies! This has been demonstrated in the recent book by one of the present authors (Furr 2011).

Elsewhere we have examined all the evidence concerning Bukharin.³⁹ There is no evidence extant today to clear Bukharin of these charges; to refute the charges made against him by others at the trial; or to refute his own repeated confessions – repeated, we may add, in his two secret Appeals to the Soviet Supreme Court after his conviction, which were published in the 1990s.

³⁹ Furr and Bobrov, “Nikolai Bukharin’s First Statement of Confession in the Lubyanka.” *Cultural Logic* 2007. At <http://clogic.eserver.org/2007/Furr_Bobrov.pdf>. This article was first published in Russian in the St. Petersburg journal *Klio* No. 1 (36), 2007, pp. 38-54. At <http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/furmbobrov_klio0107.pdf>.

Therefore although it is true that Pospelov implied Bukharin and Rykov had been innocent, any careful reading of this passage reveals its essential dishonesty. This is as close to their “rehabilitation” as the Soviet authorities came until Gorbachev took up the question again twenty-five years later.

Then as now, and contrary to ubiquitous claims that the defendants were coerced into giving false testimony, there has never been any evidence that the confessions of any of the Moscow Trial defendants were false. Khrushchev and his associates had declared many of the defendants innocent. But we can now see that the Khrushchev-era “rehabilitation studies” were done fraudulently – at least, as regards the defendants at the three public trials (here called “show trials”).⁴⁰ There is excellent evidence today, from former Soviet archives, that the defendants were in fact guilty.

In any case it is pertinent to ask why Cohen, or any historian, should have simply “believed” the Soviet government in this case. Did they “believe” the Stalin government? Of course not! Then why “believe” the Khrushchev regime?

The answer seems to be something like this: “Accept the claims of the Soviet government, or memoirists, or just about anybody – if those claims support the acceptable paradigm that Stalin was a mass murderer responsible for horrible crimes.” This is not historical research – an attempt to find, gather, and interpret the evidence in an unbiased manner. Rather it is an attempt to find any plausible document that supports one’s preconceived idea. Start with the desired conclusion – Bukharin was “innocent” – and amass anything that appears to support it. It is another example of “begging the question” by assuming that which ought to be proven.

As Getty pointed out, even when Cohen was writing, long before the end of the USSR some memoirists’ works had been published that claimed that opposition groups did exist; that the Military commanders tried and executed were guilty but that others escaped detection. But these sources were, and remain, rarely cited. Why? It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this is so because these accounts do not bolster the dominant paradigm, but rather complicate and threaten to undermine it.⁴¹

⁴⁰ These “rehabilitation reports” are analyzed in Furr 2011.

⁴¹ Getty cites Girgory Tokaev, *Betrayal of an Ideal*, 1955 and A. Svetlanin, *Dal’nevostochnyi Zagovor* (Frankfurt, 1953). *Origins of the Great Purges* p. 267 n. 22. Elsewhere Getty has also cited Tokaev, *Comrade X* (1956).

“Moderates in the Politburo”

In addition to assuming, without any evidence, the innocence of the defendants at the Moscow Trials Cohen’s chapter relies on a number of other false assumptions. One is the notion that Stalin was long challenged by a group of “moderates” in the Politburo.

. . . by 1933 a muted but fateful struggle over policy had developed between what may be termed moderates and Stalinists in the Politburo itself . . . (342)

There is no evidence even today that there was a “moderate bloc” in the Politburo who opposed Stalin (Getty, *Politics of Repression*, 131). More to the point: there was no evidence of such a bloc when Cohen wrote either! Cohen simply took this idea uncritically from Nikolaevsky and made it central to his interpretation of events in the 1930s.

Nikolaevsky didn’t have evidence to support any of this. He either made it up or reported rumors in the émigré community in Western Europe. Obviously Nikolaevsky knew he didn’t know for sure about any “bloc” of “moderates,” so he sometimes made other claims. For instance, as Getty explains:

Nikolaevsky (through the “Letter”) tagged Kirov as a “moderate,” but at the very time that Bukharin was *ending* his visit to Paris [1936 – GF], Nikolaevsky was publishing in *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* an account of how Kirov and Kaganovich formed a “hard-line” bloc against the “liberalism” of Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, and others in the Politburo! There were other stories about how Kirov was “conservative.” (Getty, *Origins* 215; cf Dissertation 36-7)⁴²

Cohen should have noticed this contradiction too. In short, Nikolaevsky was an irresponsible falsifier and this was obvious at the time. Nonetheless, he was a ferocious anticommunist and a leading Menshevik who became one of the founders of “Soviet

⁴² The original Russian-language text of “From a Letter of an Old Bolshevik” is at <<http://lib.ru/HISTORY/FELSHTINSKY/buharin.txt>>, “Appendix” (Prilozhenie) 7. The original edition is *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik* No. 23-4, Dec. 22, 1936, pp.22-33; *ibid.*, no. 1-2, Jan. 17, 1937, pp. 17-24. It was later published as *The Letter of an Old Bolshevik: A Key to the Moscow Trials* (London, 1938), and in Boris Nikolaevsky, *Power and the Soviet Elite: “The Letter of an Old Bolsheviks” and Other Essays* (New York, 1965).

studies” in the West. As such Nikolaevsky was a kind of icon before whom anticommunist researchers paid their obeisance. Cohen did likewise.

Most of Cohen’s references to the supposed “moderates” are very general ones. For example:

Bukharin’s relationship with the emerging moderate faction in the leadership . . . (353)

Politburo moderates . . . saved . . . three of Bukharin’s personal protégés [in the Riutin affair]; moderates were beginning to assert themselves on larger questions of policy . . . (354)

When on occasion Cohen attributes some specific act to these supposed “moderates” we can often prove he was wrong and sometimes even document what really happened. For example, Cohen states that Bukharin’s appointment to chief editor of *Izvestiia* was “dramatic evidence of the moderates’ progress” (355).

In reality Bukharin’s promotion to editor of *Izvestiia* was just one of a number of examples of Stalin’s reaching out to former oppositionists at or shortly after the time of the 17th Party Congress of January 1934, when Zinov’ev, Kamenev, Preobrazhensky, and Uglanov were also restored to the Party, and Bukharin made a major speech at the Congress. By August 1935, Stalin was considering Bukharin and Radek for the editorship of the journal of the Foreign Ministry *Journal de Moscou* (Stalin-Kaganovich No. 597 & No. 618). Rather than “moderates” making gains in opposition to the “Stalinists,” the available evidence makes it clear that it was Stalin who was in fact acting “moderately” by supporting the rise of Bukharin, Zinoviev, and others.

More on the “Moderates”: Ordzhonikidze

Politburo opponents of the terror, notably Ordzhonikidze and probably the Ukrainians Kosior, Chubar and Pavel Postyshev, now began their last resistance. . . . They moved to save Bukharin and Rykov. . . . (368)

This statement is a complete fabrication. Nothing of the kind occurred. Moreover, we have evidence that Ordzhonikidze did not “resist” – meaning, oppose – the arrests of those charged with conspiratorial activity. For example, we know that Ordzhonikidze spoke personally to Piatakov while the latter was in detention. Piatakov repeated his confessions of guilt to Ordzhonikidze, who believed them (Getty and Naumov 283-84; 290; 292).

Bukharin’s wife Larina describes the way she remembers Bukharin having described it to her:

Second to face Bukharin was Yury Pyatakov. For his adherence to the Trotskyist Opposition in the past, he had been briefly expelled from the Party. Later, at the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Party congresses, he was elected to the Central Committee and served until his arrest. In recent years, Pyatakov had worked as Sergo Ordzhonikidze’s assistant in the Commissariat of Heavy Industry. Since the work there was by definition concerned with industrialization, Pyatakov’s unique detail, and chief point, was the accusation of wrecking. . . .

Pyatakov spoke with lowered head, trying to cover his eyes with his palm. . . . Sergo Ordzhonikidze, peering intently at Pyatakov in amazement, distressed by the tortured look and improbable confessions of his hardworking aide, put his hand up to his ear (Sergo was hard of hearing) and asked, “Can your testimony really be voluntary?”

Pyatakov answered, “My testimony is voluntary.”

“Absolutely voluntary?” asked Ordzhonikidze in still greater amazement, but there was no reply.⁴³

The transcript of this same face-to-face interview with the imprisoned Piatakov, at which Bukharin and Ordzhonikidze were present along with Voroshilov, Ezhov and Stalin, and where they questioned the accused, was published in 2002. It took place in December 1936. In it Ordzhonikidze expressed no amazement at Piatakov’s testimony, nor did he ask whether Piatakov’s testimony was truthful. Instead Ordzhonikidze asked Piatakov such questions as: “In which year did you begin your [Trotskyist] work?” [Answer: since

⁴³ Anna Larina. *This I Cannot Forget. The Memoirs of Nikolai Bukharin’s Widow*. New York: Norton, 1993, p. 312.

returning from Berlin in 1932, where Piatakov had met with Sedov, Trotsky's son.] "You have been a saboteur in the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry all these years?" "Did you plant many saboteurs in industry?"⁴⁴

Either Larina, convinced not only of her husband's but also of Piatakov's innocence, misremembered what Bukharin had told her, or Bukharin had misinformed her in the first place. We know that Ordzhonikidze could not have been surprised at Piatakov's testimony in December 1936 because Ordzhonikidze was already convinced of Piatakov's guilt three months earlier.

From Piatigorsk to L.M. Kaganovich, the CC of the VKP(b)

11 September 1936

AM IN FULL AGREEMENT WITH POLITBURO'S [proposed] DECREE TO EXPEL [Piatakov] FROM CC OF VKP(B) AND ON INCOMPATIBILITY WITH HIS RETAINING HIS MEMBERSHIP IN VKP(B) IN THE FUTURE. I VOTE "YES."

Ordzhonikidze (Getty and Naumov 290)

Ordzhonikidze's speech to a meeting of heads of the chief directorates of the Commissariat for Heavy Industry on February 5, 1937 reflects his complete acceptance of Piatakov's admission of guilt (Getty and Naumov 292-4) and determination that saboteurs discovered in the future must be shot as Piatakov had already been by that date.

The criminals have been caught, they have been shot. If there are more criminals in the future, they too shall be caught. We shall shoot all the swine that we can find . . .

Who could imagine that Piatakov could be a saboteur, and yet he turned out to be a saboteur, and, more still, a fine talker. He told [the investigators] how he did it.

Ordzhonikidze then reveals that the Central Committee had reproached him for being too quick to punish without a hearing for those whom Piatakov had named.

⁴⁴ "Stenogrammy ochnykh stavok v TsK VKP(b). Dekabr' 1936 goda." *Voprosy Istorii* 4 (2002), pp. 3-12.

You saw the unhappy Todorsky when that scoundrel [Piatakov] named him. We kicked him out of the party, and the CC gave me a solid thrashing for daring to expel him from the party.

Look now how the CC of our party values its officials. Why should a person who has been sentenced to be shot have any apparent reason to name names? And yet, at the last minute he names Todorsky. Why should he⁴⁵ lie? Take him away, throw him in prison. Not only did the CC not do so, it even reprimanded the party organization for having expelled a person from the party. You see how attentive it is to each and every person. (Getty and Naumov 292)

Postyshev

Far from a moderate, Postyshev was one of the most bloodthirsty in killing party members. Getty and Naumov's study devotes a number of pages to documenting this. (498-517) In passages from the January 1938 Central Committee Plenum not in Getty and Naumov but published in Russian Stalin evaluated Postyshev's methods this way:

This is the massacre of the organization. They are very easy on themselves, but they're shooting everybody in the *raion* [= district] organizations. . . . This means stirring up the party masses against the CC, it can't be understood any other way.⁴⁶

For a final point concerning Cohen's "moderates," we note that he spoke of "Central Committee opponents of the terror who were gathering for their 'last stand'" (369). This introduces Cohen's discussion of the February-March 1937 Central Committee Plenum, about which we now know a great deal and which Cohen got completely wrong. We'll discuss this in more detail below.

⁴⁵ Getty and Naumov supposed that the person referred to here was Piatakov. In reality, according to the transcript of the January 1937 Moscow Trial, the person referred to was Rataichak, another defendant employed in the Commissariat of Heavy Industry along with Piatakov. See 1937 Trial, 420.

⁴⁶ Khlevniuk, Oleg V. ed. *Stalinskoe Politbiuro v 30-e gody*, p. 164. See fuller discussion in Furr, *Khrushchev Lied*, pp. 282-88.

Riutin

Cohen claimed that Stalin “demanded Riutin’s (and possibly his collaborators’) execution” (344). There has never been any evidence for this statement, which comes straight from Nikolaevsky’s imagination in the “Letter.” As Getty puts it,

The supposed contents of the Riutin platform, Stalin’s advocacy in the Politburo of the death penalty for Riutin (and the opposition of Kirov and others to it) and the general ‘moderation’ of Kirov and others (vs. Stalin) all originate in this document. (Dissertation 34)

In a note to this passage Getty continues:

In an interview with Severyn Bialer and Jane Zagoria, Nikolaevsky never indicated which parts of the “Letter” came from Bukharin, Charles Rappoport (a French communist), other sources, or from Nikolaevsky. Cohen and others nonetheless accept the “Letter” as a valid source. (Dissertation 64, n.57)

The passage from the “Letter” is as follows:

Riutin, who at that time was in exile or in an “isolator,” where he had worked out his plan, was brought to Moscow. Upon examination, he admitted the authorship. As an old Party leader who had rendered eminent service to the Party, he came within the classification of those who, in accordance with Lenin’s commandment, could not possibly receive the death penalty. The question was, therefore, considered by the Politburo, because the OGPU (naturally, at Stalin’s wish) had demanded his execution.

The discussions in the Politburo were heated. Stalin was in favor of granting the OGPU’s demand. His strongest argument was a reference to the growth of *terrorist sentiment among young people*, particularly in the Komsomol (Young Communist League). Reports of the OGPU were replete with stories of terroristic talk among *young workers and students*. Moreover, quite a number of terroristic acts against minor Soviet officials and Party officers had become known. Against such terrorists the Party did not shrink from resorting to the

“supreme penalty,” even when it was a question of members of the Komsomol, Stalin maintaining that it was politically illogical and unjust to administer such severe punishment to those who performed terroristic acts while sparing those whose political propaganda had inspired these acts. He recommended that no undue attention be given to the small fry, but that the Politburo go straight to the root and cause of the matter. Riutin’s program, Stalin said, was a direct justification of and an apology for the necessity of murdering him.

I can no longer recall the actual division of opinion in the Politburo when this question was being considered. I know only that Kirov spoke with particular force against recourse to the death penalty. Moreover, he succeeded in winning over the Politburo to this view. Stalin was prudent enough not to push matters to an open conflict. Riutin’s life was thus spared.⁴⁷

Even if Bukharin had been the source of these rumors, as Nikolaevsky dishonestly suggested, Getty has pointed out that he couldn’t possibly have heard any such discussions (*Origins*, 215).

We know now that the “Riutin platform” was modeled on an earlier platform that Bukharin had written, and that Riutin had not, in fact, written it. In his first confession of June 2, 1937 Bukharin stated:

The Riutin group was supposed to conceal the fact that the platform was the platform of the whole Rightist organization taken together: this was a pseudonym under which the organization of the Rights presented itself, a pseudonym that protected the center and the organization as a whole from attack.⁴⁸

In this same statement Bukharin said that Nikolaevsky had already known about this platform from Rykov. Bukharin, as well as Zelenskii and Ikramov, and other defendants, reaffirmed these statements about the Riutin platform at the March 1938 trial.

⁴⁷ Boris I. Nicolaevsky. *Power and the Soviet Elite. “The Letter of an Old Bolshevik” and Other Essays.* Hoover Institution – Praeger: New York and Washington, 1965, pp. 29-30.

⁴⁸ Furr and Bobrov, “Nikolai Bukharin’s First Statement of Confession in the Lubyanka.” *Cultural Logic* 2007. At <http://clogic.eserver.org/2007/Furr_Bobrov.pdf>, p. 30. Originally published as “Pervye priznatel’nye pokazaniia N.I. Bukharina na Lubianke.” *Klio* (St. Petersburg) 1 (36), 2007, p. 49.

Cohen states that the “Riutin affair dates Stalin’s determination to rid himself of all such restraints . . .” (344). This is also asserted in *Na koleni ne vstanu* (1992), a volume dedicated to Riutin and polemically hostile to Stalin (p.37). But this claim is not documented at all, in contrast to many other assertions in this volume, but instead is treated as “common knowledge.” Getty says this rumor is “unsubstantiated,” “appears to have originated in Paris,” and is recorded in Nikolaevsky, *Power and the Soviet Elite*. (Getty and Naumov 54) Cohen cites Medvedev and Conquest here, who also have no documentary basis for their statements.

Kirov’s Murder

“That Stalin plotted the murder [of Kirov] . . . is no longer seriously in doubt.”
(346)

On the contrary! There is absolutely no reason to believe that Stalin was involved in Kirov’s assassination in any way. Getty has a brief explanation of the many studies that have tried, and failed, to prove this on the H-RUSSIA mailing list of August 24, 2000.⁴⁹ Even adherents to the mainstream “anti-Stalin” paradigm have begun to abandon the “Stalin-killed-Kirov” story even though this gets them compared to “Holocaust deniers” by the likes of Robert Conquest and Amy Knight, who will have none of it.⁵⁰ The main specialist on the Kirov assassination in Russia is Alla Kirillina whose book *Neizvestniy Kirov*, “The Unknown Kirov,”⁵¹ includes her earlier work *Rikoshet*. Kirilina rejects the “Stalin-did-it” theory, though she embraces the new “mainstream” view that Nikolaev, Kirov’s assassin, acted alone.

A brief recent summary of all this is Igor’ Pykhalov, “Vystrel v Smol’nom.”⁵² Pykhalov is cautious, concluding that Kirov’s assassin, Nikolaev, probably acted alone. However, the primary source evidence contained in Matthew Lenoe’s recent book,

⁴⁹ At <<http://tinyurl.com/hjput>>.

⁵⁰ See Matthew Lenoe, “Did Stalin Kill Kirov and Does It Matter?” *JMH* 74 (June 2002) pp. 352-80, and now his book *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History* (Yale U.Press 2010). For the Holocaust denial accusations see p. 379 of his article.

⁵¹ St. Petersburg / Moscow, “Neva”/ “Olma-Press”, 2001.

⁵² *Spetsnaz Rossii* December 2004. At <<http://www.specnaz.ru/article/?621>>; reprinted at <http://www.zlev.ru/53_18.htm>.

combined with that in Alla Kirilina's earlier study, the confessions of Genrikh Iagoda published in 1997 and archival documents now available, provide very strong evidence that Kirov's assassination was indeed the act of an opposition conspiracy essentially as described in the transcript of the Third Moscow Trial of March 1938, the "Bukharin trial."⁵³

"In the years to come tens of thousands would be shot as conspiratorial accomplices in Kirov's assassination . . ." (346)

Cohen offers no evidence at all for this statement, and we have none today. Neither Soviet nor today's Russian authorities have ever released the investigative files on Kirov's assassination nor permitted even trusted scholars to study them. Nevertheless, the material published since the end of the USSR points to the membership of Kirov's assassin, Nikolaev, in an underground Zinov'evite opposition, itself connected to the broader Opposition conspiracies involving the defendants at all three Moscow Trials.⁵⁴

And this is without taking into account either the Trial testimony or the pre-trial interrogations of Iagoda, some of the latter of which we now have. Iagoda makes a differentiated confession concerning Kirov's murder. Iagoda confessed to giving his consent and protection to acts of assassination but insisted that he did not know about the specific assassination of Kirov in advance. He did say that E nukidze had spoken to him about the need to assassinate Kirov and that he had agreed not to stand in the way. But Iagoda firmly reiterated that he had not facilitated it in any active way.⁵⁵ We also now have pretrial interrogations of Kamenev (August 10, 1936) and of Zinov'ev (July 28, 1936), both of whom claimed prior knowledge of the Kirov assassination.⁵⁶ Those who

⁵³ We are preparing a study of the Kirov murder, including a detailed critique of both Lenoe's and Kirilina's books, for publication in the near future.

⁵⁴ "Protokol doprosa I.I. Kotolynova. 12 dekabria 1934 goda"; "Protokol doprosa L. Nikolaeva. 13 dekabria 1934 goda." *Lubianka. Stalin I VChK-GPU-OGPU-NKVD. Ianvar' 1922 – dekabr' 1936*. Moscow: IDF "Materik" 2003, Nos. 481 and 482, pp. 577-79. A note (819) claims that the first confession was falsified by NKVD man Agranov, but there is no evidence of this.

⁵⁵ *Genrikh Iagoda. Narkov vnutrennikh del SSSR. General'nyi Komissar Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti. Sbornik dokumentov*. (Kazan' 1997), pp. 121-22; 180-81.

⁵⁶ Volkogonov Archive, Library of Congress.

continue to hold to the “lone assassin” theory simply ignore all this evidence – as they must do, if the anti-Stalin paradigm of Soviet history is to be rescued.⁵⁷

The Issue of Confessions

What of the trial confessions and, now, these pretrial interrogation-confessions? Is it possible that they were made as a result of some kind of compulsion – threats, torture, etc.? Anything is “possible” – but historians demand evidence and we have no evidence that they were. Iagoda confessed that he promised to try to obtain leniency for Zinov’ev and Kamenev if they did not expose his own role and then made sure they were swiftly executed so they could not implicate him.

Cohen had edited the transcript of the March 1938 Bukharin Trial, which included Iagoda. Certainly he had read the abbreviated trial transcript of the Zinov’ev-Kamenev Trial in August 1936, a large part of which is dedicated to the rehearsal of the details of the planning of Kirov’s assassination by the defendants.⁵⁸ Had Cohen examined these accounts and then stated the obvious – that they might have been made under duress and that, like any piece of evidence, there are different possible interpretations of this evidence and they should not be simply taken at face value – he would have acted correctly. Evidence should never be simply “believed.” Nor, however, should it be simply “disbelieved” – which is the same thing – without evidence that it has been falsified. Cohen didn’t have any, and we still don’t today.

To ignore this testimony is to take the view that an historian can follow his or her own biases and discount whatever evidence he or she wants to, on the grounds that it might have been falsified, while welcoming other evidence that is consistent with his

⁵⁷ See Matthew Lenoe, “Khrushchev Era Politics and the Investigation of the Kirov Murder, 1956-1957.” *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 24 (2007) 47-73; Lenoe, “Key to the Kirov Murder on the Shelves of Hokkaido University Library.” *Annual Newsletter of the Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University* No. 13 (2006), at <<http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/eng/news/no13/enews13-essay3.html>>; and now his book *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History* (Yale University Press 2010). Lenoe simply ignores the documents from Lubianka 1 (2003) and Genrikh Iagoda (1997) though they were long available by the time he wrote. Lenoe also takes the propaganda statement of Genrikh S. Liushkov, an NKVD general who defected to Japan in June 1938, at face value. But Lenoe hides from his readers the fact that Liushkov privately assured the Japanese that real conspiracies against the Stalin government existed, including a real military conspiracy. He also conceals the fact that Liushkov wrote his article about the Kirov assassination while working for the propaganda division of the Japanese army.

⁵⁸ The abbreviated transcript of this trial was published as a book in English but only in official newspapers in the Soviet Union. Our version is from *Pravda* August 20-23 1936.

preconceived views or paradigm. The totality of evidence must always be considered. Cohen did not even try to do so.

Avel' Enukidze

Cohen claims that Avel' Enukidze “disappeared from the scene” “as a victim of Stalin’s intrigue in January 1935” (346) But lot of evidence concerning Enukidze has been published since the end of the USSR. All of it points towards his guilt. The most authoritative study of this affair, that by Russian historian IUrii Zhukov, also concludes that Enukidze and others in the so-called “Kremlin Affair” were guilty of plotting against the government.⁵⁹

We now have transcripts of two pretrial interrogation-confessions of Enukidze.⁶⁰ We also have the texts of several pretrial interrogations of Genrikh Iagoda, former NKVD chief, who inculpates Enukidze as well as many of the defendants in the three Moscow Trials. We will look closely at some of this material below.

Cohen blames Stalin for the deaths of Kuibyshev and Gorky in January 1935 and June 1936 (346).

. . . Kuibyshev by a mysterious death the same month, the influential writer Maxim Gorky probably murdered in June 1936 . . . (346)

But in pretrial interrogations now published, Genrikh Iagoda admits to having had four men murdered: Menzhinsky, head of the OGPU and Iagoda’s immediate superior; V.V. Kuibyshev, Maxim Gorky, and Gorky’s son Maxim Peshkov:

Answer: I affirm that, besides Marx, in the same manner and on my instructions were put to death V.P. Menzhinsky, V.V. Kuibyshev and A.M Gorky. I wish to note that, though only I am guilty in the death of Menzhinsky, but the deaths of V.V. Kuibyshev and A.M. Gorky were organized on the direct order of the united

⁵⁹ “Tainy ‘Kremlevskogo dela’ i sud’ba Avelia Enukidze,” *Voprosy Istorii* 2000, No. 9, pp. 83-113.

⁶⁰ *Lubianka...1937-1938*, No. 60, pp. 144-56; online at <<http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/61041>> *Genrikh Iagoda* No. 166, pp. 508-517. Iagoda’s interrogations published in 1997 are online at <<http://stalinism.ru/dokumentyi/protokolyyi-doprosov-yagodyi.html>>.

center of the Right-Trotskyite organization, which order was personally delivered to me by A.S. Enukidze, member of that center.

– Interrogation No. 7, December 28, 1937, in *Genrikh Iagoda* p. 209.

Answer: Both Levn and Enukidze spoke to me about this. Levin came to see me the following day after his talk with Enukidze and stated that now all was clear to him, that he asked me once again to summon Pletnev in order to save himself any superfluous talks with him. Enukidze informed me of this conversation as follows: He asked Levin whom he was treating and who among the members of the Politburo was ill. It turned out that Levin was supervising the care of Kuibyshev. Enukidze proposed that Levin set about preparing Kuibyshev's demise.

Aside from that, Enukidze informed me at the same time that the center of the organization considered it essential to prepare the death of A.M. Gorky in the same manner, and that the assignment in relation to him had also been given to Levin. In the interests of truthfulness I must say that this statement of Enukidze's astonished me. "What does Gorky have to do with this?" – I asked.

From Enukidze's answer I understood the following: the united center of the Right-Trotskyite organization, during a long period, had attempted to win over Gorky and detach him from his closeness to Stalin. Towards this end Kamenev, Tomsy, and a number of others had been assigned to Gorky. But this did not produce any real results. Gorky remained close to Stalin as before and a warm supporter and defender of his line. In any serious consideration of the question of the overthrow of the Stalinist leadership and seizure of power by the Rights and Trotskyites, the center could not help but take into account Gorky's exceptional influence in the country and his authority abroad.

If Gorky remained alive he would raise his voice of protest against us. We could not permit that. Therefore the united center became convinced that it was impossible to separate Gorky from Stalin and was compelled to reach the decision that Gorky would have to be liquidated. I was assigned to carry out this decision through the doctors who were treating Gorky. My attempts to protest did not achieve their results: Enukidze proposed to undertake the execution of the

center's decision. After a few days I called Levin to my office and once again confirmed to him what Enukidze had already told me beforehand.⁶¹

Dr. Pletnev

The accuracy and truthfulness of Iagoda's testimony can be verified by the confessions and post-trial letters of Dr. D.D. Pletnev, a secondary defendant in the March 1938 "Bukharin" trial. At his trial Pletnev admitted to having been recruited to the conspiracy to murder out of fear of Iagoda's threats. In a face-to-face confrontation with Iagoda arranged by the police on January 5, 1938 and published in 1997 Iagoda confirmed that he had not told Pletnev about the conspiracy to murder Kuibyshev and Gorky.⁶²

Pletnev claimed he did not know about the conspiracy until the trial and was recruited by Iagoda through threats and blackmail alone.⁶³ Iagoda had confirmed the latter and the Soviet court believed Pletnev. Prosecutor Vyshinsky's questioning makes it clear that Pletnev's real crime was that he failed to alert the authorities about Iagoda's plot even after Iagoda himself had been arrested and was no longer a threat to him. Pletnev was convicted at the Trial only of conspiracy, not of murder, and was sentenced to prison rather than to execution. Iagoda discusses the recruitment of Pletnev in this same interrogation.

Recently published materials have revealed that Pletnev was "rehabilitated" on April 5, 1985, but in a dishonest fashion: he was cleared of charges that he was never convicted of in the first place! The text of Pletnev's "rehabilitation" is not in the bulletin (*Vestnik*) of the Soviet Supreme Court for 1985 or thereafter. It has never been published anywhere.

Pletnev wrote some letters while in prison after the trial. To this day these letters have never been published in full. Some fragments from them have been cited in an attempt to argue that Pletnev was innocent. In fact those fragments do not suggest that

⁶¹ Interrogation No. 7, December 28, 1937, *Genrikh Iagoda* pp. 212-3. For a discussion of these confessions and evidence that they are accepted even by the most anticommunist scholars today see Furr, "Evidence of Leon Trotsky's Collaboration with Germany and Japan." *Cultural Logic* 2009, <<http://clogic.eserver.org/2009/Furr.pdf>> at p. 140 ff. and n. 92, p. 140.

⁶² 1938 Trial 590-597; *Genrikh Iagoda* 227-230.

⁶³ 1938 Trial 787-788.

Pletnev was innocent of what he was convicted of at trial. Rather, Pletnev's letters concern the original charges against him at the trial – the charges that were retracted and of which he was not convicted, and further charges leveled at him while in prison after the trial.⁶⁴

It is significant that while vigorously protesting his innocence of other charges not made against him at the Trial, Pletnev did not claim he was innocent of what he had been convicted of. The only explanation is that he was guilty of those charges. Given that Pletnev has been “rehabilitated” but without any evidence he was, in fact, innocent, we may conclude that Gorbachev-era Soviets and Russian authorities today have no evidence he was innocent.⁶⁵ In short, there is a huge amount of evidence, positive and negative, suggesting that the charges against the defendants in the 1938 Trial were true.

Ordzhonikidze's Death

Cohen likewise blames Stalin for Ordzhonikidze's “suicide or murder” in February 1937 (346-7). The ferociously anticommunist and anti-Stalin Oleg V. Khlevniuk reluctantly showed that this is not true.⁶⁶ Elsewhere we have summarized this account as follows:

According to Oleg Khlevniuk's research . . . Sergo committed suicide, most likely from bad health. He had been very sick a long time and, in fact, had had a normal work routine his last day of life.

His death had nothing whatsoever to do with Stalin. . . .

Sergo committed suicide on February 17 1937 (147). He had had a completely normal workday that day. . . . Khlevniuk, who has great hatred for Stalin, tries hard to come up with evidence that Stalin had something to do with Sergo's death, and attempts to “reconstruct” an argument over the telephone between the two men, but is finally unable to do so. Khlevniuk could not prove that such a phone call ever took place, much less what was said in it.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ The present authors have written a detailed study of Pletnev's case. It is awaiting publication in Russia.

⁶⁵ The present author has written an analysis of the Pletnev case that will appear in a collection of essays in Russia.

⁶⁶ *Stalin I Ordzhonikidze: Konflikty v Politbiuro v 30-ie gody*. Moscow, “Rossiia Molodaia,” 1993; English translation: Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's shadow: the career of “Sergo” Ordzhonikidze*. NY: M.E. Sharp, 1995.

⁶⁷ Furr, *Khrushchev Lied*, pp. 116-17.

In 2008 Vladimir Bobrov published a study of the stories about Ordzhonikidze's supposed suicide and traced their origins first to Nikita Khrushchev and, secondarily, to the memoirs of Anastas Mikoian. Bobrov shows conclusively that both of these sources contradict themselves and each other concerning Ordzhonikidze's death and that neither can be trusted. The official story – that Ordzhonikidze died of heart failure – is the only version consistent with the evidence.⁶⁸

According to Arch Getty:

Ordzhonikidze does not seem to have objected to terror in general, including that directed against Zinov'ev, Kamenev, and Bukharin, and was in fact asked by Stalin to give the main speech on wrecking in industry to the February 1937 Plenum of the Central Committee [n. 64]. The draft of the speech Ordzhonikidze was preparing to give to the February 1937 Plenum, as chief reporter on wrecking in industry, was approved by Stalin and was in character with the hard line of the times: RTsKhIDNI (TsPA), f.558, op.1 d. 3350, ll. 1-16.⁶⁹

Oleg Khlevniuk has tried to make it appear as though there were some disagreements between Ordzhonikidze and Stalin. He cites the same archival document as does Getty above, but only the draft resolution, not the speech itself. Khlevniuk says that “Stalin was very displeased with the draft resolution that Ordzhonikidze was proposing for the plenum” but can cite no evidence to that effect.⁷⁰ Khlevniuk's reputation is firmly linked to his theory that Ordzhonikidze committed suicide as a protest against Stalin, and he distorts everything to try to support this theory, which Bobrov has shown to be a Khrushchev-era lie.

Cohen continues:

⁶⁸ Vladimir L. Bobrov. “Taina smerti Ordzhonikidze” (The Mystery of Ordzhonikidze's Death). *Forum Karav Murzy* October 23, 2008. <<http://vif2ne.ru/nvz/forum/0/co/256309.htm>>. The fully documented version is available at <<http://tinyurl.com/sergo-ru>> in Russian; in English translation at <<http://tinyurl.com/sergo-eng>>.

⁶⁹ J. Arch Getty, “The Politics of Repression Revisited,” p. 131 and n. 64, p. 140. In Ward, Chris, ed. *The Stalinist Dictatorship*. London, New York: Arnold, 1998.

⁷⁰ Oleg V. Khlevniuk. *Master of the House. Stalin and His Inner Circle*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 160 and n.90 p. 291.

The moderates' last, desperate stand against the terror was an attempt to save Bukharin. . . (347)

Concerning Bukharin, the facts are completely the opposite: Stalin himself was by far the most “moderate” of all, proposing the most lenient measures against Bukharin and insisting that he and Rykov were not in the same category as the Trotskyists. As we’ve already mentioned, there was no group of what Cohen calls “Politburo and Central Committee moderates” seeking “a reform consensus” and “influence over Stalin” (346). We’ll discuss this a bit more below.

Bukharin and the Cult of Stalin

Cohen writes:

An interesting example of Bukharin’s public conduct was his refusal to join in the ritual of praising Stalin lavishly and acknowledging him as the leader and architect of the country’s achievements. (n. 69 p. 466 to p. 351)

For some reason Cohen limits the time he is speaking of to the years 1930-32. Cohen doesn’t document that anyone else was engaging in “the ritual of praising Stalin” during these very hard years. If few others were doing it then it is scarcely remarkable that Bukharin was not doing so either.

Perhaps he restricts his remarks to these years because in January 1934, in his speech to the Seventeenth Party Congress, Bukharin did lavishly praise Stalin as

. . . the best expression and inspirer of the Party line, Stalin, who won the victory in inter-Party struggle on the deeply principled basis of Leninist politics and on that same basis received the warm support of the overwhelming and more than overwhelming mass of the Party and the working class.

. . . Comrade Stalin was completely correct when, brilliantly bringing to bear Marxist-Leninist dialectics, he routed a whole series of theoretical presuppositions of the Right deviation, which I more than others had formulated.

. . . the rallying around comrade Stalin as the personal incarnation of the mind and will of the Party, its leader, its theoretical and practical Leader.

And finally, at the end of his speech,

. . . all victories under the leadership of the glorious field-marshal of proletarian forces, the best of the best, comrade Stalin.⁷¹

Evidently Bukharin also advised former Oppositionist writers in *Izvestiia* to engage in the “cult” of Stalin. For example, in a December 1936 face-to-face confrontation with Sosnovsky published in 2002 he excuses encouraging the lavish praise for the “cult” – as he calls it himself – of Stalin, even though Stalin himself strongly deplors it.

STALIN – These are servile attitudes, servility.

BUKHARIN – You don’t understand the life of the contemporary press. We very often insert appropriate words into one or another article because we believe that for former Oppositionists like me, for example, this is absolutely essential.

EZHOV – Who has been forcing you to do this, the Central Committee, or who?

STALIN – This is shameful behavior for a Party member.

BUKHARIN – I remember one such episode. At Kliment Efremovich’s [Voroshilov’s] direction I wrote an article concerning an exhibition of the Red Army. There were texts about Voroshilov, Stalin, and others. When Stalin said: What are you writing there? Someone replied: How could he dare not to write like that? I explain these matters very simply. I know that there’s no need to create a cult of Stalin, but for myself I consider it appropriate, normal, to do so.

SOSNOVSKI – And you also considered it necessary for me.

BUKHARIN – For a very simple reason – because you are a former Oppositionist. I don’t see anything wrong with this.⁷²

⁷¹ *XVII s”ezd Vsesoiuznoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (b). Stenograficheski otchiot*. Moscow: Partizdat, 1934. At <http://www.hrono.ru/vkpb_17/5_5.html>.

⁷² “Стенограммы очных ставок в ЦК ВКП(б). Декабрь 1936 года,” *Вопросы истории*. 2002. №3. С.3-31, at pp. 27-8.

Incidentally, this passage is one of many that could be cited to show that Stalin was no “dictator” in the sense of “someone whose word is law.” Bukharin is very clear: he is not going to stop writing fulsome praise of Stalin even though Stalin himself strongly opposes such language.⁷³

The Soviet Constitution

According to Nikolaevsky, Bukharin told him he had written the whole of the Constitution. Even Cohen doubts this, but says “it is likely that Bukharin prepared or edited the final draft” and refers to “his central role in preparation of the charter” (357).

As he so often did, Nikolaevsky was lying here. We know now that Bukharin had only a secondary role in drafting the constitution. He was named as one of twelve members of a commission chaired by Stalin (Getty, “State and Society” 19).⁷⁴ These subcommissions reported their findings to an editorial committee made up of A.I. Stetskii, head of Agitation and Propaganda; B.M. Tal’, head of the press department, and I.A. Iakovlev, head of Agriculture (Getty, “State and Society” 20; Zhukov, Inoi 197). Stalin himself took part in redrafting the rough draft presented by this subcommission in April 1936 (Zhukov, Inoi 223). A fifth draft version was submitted for national discussion on June 12, 1936.

Getty addresses Bukharin’s role this way:

One of the persistent rumors of Soviet history is that former oppositionists Nikolai Bukharin and Karl Radek played a decisive role in drafting the new constitution. It is said that Bukharin and Radek were “the active members of the commission” and that Bukharin in particular was “mainly responsible” for the document. (Getty, “State and Society” 22)

⁷³ The relevant sections of the OED’s definition of “dictator” are: “1. A ruler or governor whose word is law; . . . 2. A person exercising absolute authority of any kind or in any sphere; one who authoritatively prescribes a course of action or dictates what is to be done.”

⁷⁴ Getty, J. Arch. “State and Society under Stalin: Constitutions and Elections in the 1930s.” *Slavic Review* 50, 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 18-35.

At this point Getty refers to Robert Conquest, who himself cites Boris Nikolaevsky. Getty then cites a number of writers who hold that the Nikolaevsky's "Letter of an Old Bolshevik" is very inaccurate (Getty, "State and Society" 22 and n. 18). He continues;

The archival documents do not support this assertion. Although Bukharin and Radek chaired the subcommissions on law and on elections, their names do not appear very often in the documents. Their association with Mekhlis, the editor of *Pravda*, along with their subsequent writings in *Pravda* and elsewhere, suggest that they were responsible more for praising, than writing, the "most democratic constitution in the world." Akulov, Krylenko, Vyshinskii, Stetskii, Iakovlev, Tal', and Stalin all seem to have played much more substantial roles in the drafting. Moreover, the drafts produced by Bukharin's and Radek's subcommissions were rejected or changed by the editorial subcommission (of which they were not members) in the redaction that immediately followed theirs. Finally, neither Bukharin nor Radek were members of the ad hoc group (Iakovlev, Stetskii, Tal') that, with Stalin, produced the authoritative draft.

Stalin clearly played a major role in the process and devoted considerable time to it. . . .

Getty's analysis agrees with that of IUrii Zhukov in *Inoi Stalin*. Cohen, who took Nikolaevsky's word here as elsewhere, is wrong here.

Bukharin, Zinov'ev and Kamenev

While other former oppositionists, including Rykov, exhorted the court to show 'no mercy' to Zinov'ev and Kamenev in 1936, Bukharin remained silent. (358)

Cohen cites Conquest here, and once again he is wrong. Whatever he may have written publicly, in private Bukharin expressed the harshest possible views against these two opposition leaders. These statements are far worse than anything we have on record from Stalin.

We now have some of the letters that Bukharin wrote to Party leaders after the Zinov'ev-Kamenev trial. In his letter of August 27, 1936 to Stalin, Bukharin wrote:

Excellent that these scoundrels have been executed; the air became immediately cleaner.⁷⁵

In a letter to Voroshilov of a few days later, September 1, 1936, Bukharin calls Kamenev “cynic and murderer,” “most loathsome of men,” “human carrion.” It had been Kamenev who at the August 1936 Moscow Trial implicated Bukharin as one of the leaders of the Rights as late as 1934, something Bukharin loudly denied. Bukharin added that he was “fearfully glad” (*strashno rad*) that “the dogs” – he means Zinov'ev and Kamenev – “have been shot.”⁷⁶

Bukharin's words have the scent of someone who “doth protest too much.” Sure enough, in these letters Bukharin is trying hard to convince Stalin and others that what Zinov'ev and Kamenev said about him at their 1936 Trial was false. In fact, it was anything but!

German-Soviet Pact

Cohen describes the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty (often called the “Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact”) of August 1939 as “collaborative alliance” and speculates that Stalin may have foreseen it as early as 1934 (360). There are many academic studies today that show how the USSR was forced into the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty by the attempt of the UK and France to encourage Hitler to attack to the East, and by the refusal of the UK, even at the last minute, to engage in serious negotiations for a defensive alliance (Admiral Drax's embassy).⁷⁷ The present author has published a

⁷⁵ Pis'ma N.I. Bukharina poslednikh let). Avgust-dekabr' 1936 g.” *Istochnik* 2, 1993, p. 11.

⁷⁶ (“Vsiudu i Vезде Ia Budu Nastaivat' Na Svoei Polnoi i Absolutnoi Nevinovnosti . . .”) (Pis'ma N.I. Bukharina poslednikh let). Avgust-dekabr' 1936 g.” *Istochnik* 2, 1993, p. 15; also at http://perpetrator2004.narod.ru/documents/Bukharin/Bukharin_Letters.doc.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the struggle for collective security in Europe, 1933-39* (St. Martin's, 1984).

Clement Leibovitz, *The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal* (Edmonton, AB: Les Editions Duval, 1993) is an extremely well documented history of Allied machinations to encourage Hitler to attack the USSR. Leibovitz was hostile to the USSR but keeps his biases in check. A very useful collection of primary sources.

detailed account of the Nonaggression Treaty and subsequent Soviet incursion into Western Ukraine and Belorussia.⁷⁸

Of course there was such a “collaborative alliance” with Hitler – on the part of the UK and France! It was sealed at Munich in September 1938 where the leaders of the UK and France sold out Czechoslovakia supposedly for “peace in our time,” but in reality to encourage Hitler to attack the USSR. France unilaterally disregarded its military alliance with Czechoslovakia. Poland and Hungary also seized parts of Czechoslovakia, though that was nowhere sanctioned in the Munich accords. Neither the UK nor France objected to Polish and Hungarian aggression.

Evidence of all this was available to Cohen, as was the text of the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. There is no evidence of anything like a “collaborative alliance” between the USSR and Hitler’s Germany. By contrast the Munich Agreement could be accurately described as a “collaborative alliance.” Cohen is simply reproducing Cold-War falsifications here. In Cold War historiography, the USSR must be blamed for something more shameful than the Munich sellout, which is universally acknowledged as a leading cause of Hitler’s aggression. (For more discussion of the Pact see the article by Furr cited in the previous note.)

Suicide of Nadezhda Allilueva

According to Cohen, Stalin’s wife Nadezhda Allilueva “committed suicide in protest” against collectivization (364). Cohen cites no evidence whatsoever for this claim, which seems to reflect rumors. It was reported as fact by propagandist Isaac Don Levine in his book *Stalin’s Great Secret* (New York, 1956). Levine’s “great secret” – that Stalin

A good recent study in Russian is Igor’ Pykhalov, “Nado li stydit’sia ‘Pakta Molotova-Ribbentropa’” [Must we be ashamed of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact?], Chapter four of his book *Velikaia Obolgannaia Voina* [The Great Calumniated War]. Moscow: Yauza-Eksmo, 2005. This book is now available online in its entirety at <http://militera.lib.ru/research/pyhalov_i/index.html> ; the chapter in question is at <http://militera.lib.ru/research/pyhalov_i/04.html>.

⁷⁸ Grover Furr. “Did the Soviet Union Invade Poland in September 1939? (Answer: No, it did not).” *Cyrano’s Journal* September 1, 2009, at <<http://www.cjournal.info/2009/09/01/did-the-soviet-union-invade-poland-in-september-1939/>>. A much longer version, with 19 pages of evidence and documentation, is at <<http://www.tinyurl.com/furr-mlg09>>. A preliminary version of this article was presented at the June 2009 convention of the Marxist Literary Group – Institute for Cultural Studies at Portland State University.

had been an agent of the Tsar's secret police (Okhrana) – has long since been debunked, and in any case Levine was in no position to know anything about Stalin's wife.

According to Artem Sergeev, who was raised in Stalin's household,⁷⁹ Stalin's wife was chronically ill and prone to unbearable migraine headaches. She had been in a good mood a couple of days before, looking forward to having a party after her graduation. No one was present when she shot herself, but in Segeev's view desperation over the unbearable pain of a migraine is the most likely explanation. Stalin was overwrought with grief at his wife's death. As Sergeev writes:

The tragedy with Vasilii's mother took place in the second Kremlin apartment . . . Vasia and I, I recall, wanted very much to go to town after the November 7 parade, to ski. As I recall, Karolina Vasil'evna Til', the housekeeper, said the evening before to Nadezhda Sergeevna: "The children are on holiday, let them go skiing." And Nadezhda Sergeevna replied: "I am finishing up at the Academy, and then we will really have a celebration – we'll arrange a holiday for my graduation." She was studying in the Industrial Academy in the department of the textile industry, specializing in artificial fabrics. Her specific specialty would have been artificial silk and rayon.

So we went out to the dacha to ski. As I recall, about 9 a.m. someone called to say that Vasilii and I should return right away to Moscow. We returned to Moscow and I went home. No sooner did my mother and I settle ourselves to talk than there was a call. Mama took the receiver, gasped and cried: "Oh! Nadya is dead!" And we went there. I noted down what happened at the funeral.

You need to know that Nadezhda Sergeevna had constant, very powerful, completely unbearable headaches. She often held her head in her hands and cried out: "My head! My head!" She often went to Germany, supposedly to her older brother who was working there. But really it was to consult German professors. And the evening before November 7, and on the day of the parade too, she also held her head in her hands – the pains were tormenting her again. The parades used to last 4 hours: from 8 to 12. Nadezhda Sergeevna and we stood in front of the entrance to the Mausoleum. Then she went off early, holding her head in her

⁷⁹ Fedor Andreevich Sergeev was a leading Old Bolshevik and friend of Stalin's who was killed in an airplane crash in 1921. Stalin raised his son, Artiom Fedorovich (b. 1921) in his own household.

hands, and after the parade we went off to the dacha. That was how this terrible incident happened.

The coffin with the body stood in the GUM building. There, about in the center, on the side of Red Square there is a niche, and in it a staircase to the second floor. There is a door, and behind it a room in which the coffin was set. Stalin literally sobbed. Vasilii hung on his neck the whole time and pleaded with him: “Papa, don’t cry, don’t cry!” Stalin bent down over the coffin and sobbed.

When they carried the coffin away Stalin went right away to the catafalque. Then came the orchestra, and we walked behind the orchestra. The procession went to the Novodevichii monastery. Stalin stood at the grave on one side, and Vasya and I on the other. There was no one between us. Stalin was crushed with grief. He took a handful of earth and threw it into the grave. They told us to also take some earth and throw it in. We asked: “What for?” They told us, that’s what you must do.⁸⁰

Sergeev’s account has not been challenged. There is no evidence that Nadezhda Allilueva’s suicide had any political motive.

Kamenev and Zinov’ev

Cohen claims that the defendants at the Zinov’ev-Kamenev First Moscow Trial of August 1936 were “carefully tutored by [their] ‘interrogators’” into “pre-arranged confessions” (368). This claim of Cohen’s is, at the very least, disingenuous. Cohen had no evidence that this was the case, nor is there even today any evidence at all that Zinov’ev’s or Kamenev’s confessions were coerced in any way.

On the contrary: there is a great deal of evidence that their confessions were genuine and that both were guilty of at least what they confessed to. We now have

- pre-trial interrogations of Zinov’ev and Kamenev, in which they make incriminating confessions, including admitting their involvement in the assassination of Kirov;

⁸⁰ Artem Sergeev with Ekaterina Glushik, *Besedy o Staline* [Conversations about Stalin] (Moscow: Krymskii Most 9-D, 2006) pp. 37-9. An abbreviated selection from these pages is reproduced at <<http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/allilueva.html>>.

- some pretrial interrogation-confessions from other defendants in the same trial;
- interrogation-confessions from Avel' Enukidze and Genrikh Iagoda, in which they incriminate Zinov'ev and Kamenev, as well as Bukharin and others;
- a statement by Mikhail Frinovsky, Nikolai Ezhov's second-in-command of the NKVD in 1936-1938, in which Frinovsky makes clear that Zinov'ev and Kamenev were part of the Right conspiracy, along with himself, Ezhov, Bukharin, and many others;
- Zinov'ev's and Kamenev's appeals for clemency to the Soviet Supreme Court, which were of course secret. Had there been any "quid pro quo" – any agreement according to which their confessions were fraudulently obtained – we'd expect to read about it here. (*Izvestiia* September 2, 1992, p. 3). Or somewhere! But their secret appeals contain no claim of innocence – indeed, both reiterate their guilt in the strongest terms;
- the partial transcript of the trial itself (*Pravda* August 20–24, 1936), available of course to Cohen as well.

We also have a private letter from Stalin to Kaganovich in which Stalin makes it clear that interrogations were leading to new information which must be checked out.

. . . Second. From Reingol'd's confessions it is clear that Kamenev, through his wife Glebova, was feeling out the French ambassador Alfand⁸¹ concerning possible relations of the French government with a future "government" of the Trotskyite-Zinov'evite bloc. I think that Kamenev also felt out the English, German and American ambassadors. That means that Kamenev must have disclosed to these foreigners the plans of the plot and of the murders of the leaders of the Bolshevik Party. That also means that Kamenev had already disclosed to them these plans, or else the foreigners would not have agreed to have discussions with him about a future Zinov'ev-Trotskyite "government." This is the attempt of Kamenev and his friends to conclude a direct bloc with the bourgeois governments against the Soviet government. This explains the secret

⁸¹ Undoubtedly Hervé Alphand (1907-1994), who was financial attaché, not ambassador, to the USSR in the mid-1930s.

of the well-known advance obituaries of the American correspondents. Obviously, Glebova is well informed about all this sordid material. We must bring Glebova to Moscow and submit her to a series of meticulous interrogations. She might reveal many interesting things.⁸²

This letter is strong evidence that Stalin did not know in advance what Reingol'd was going to confess at the trial and was drawing conclusions based on those confessions at the time. In other words, Stalin was trying to figure out what was really going on. That means that Stalin, at any rate, had not stage-managed Kamenev's confession.

We also know that Zinoviev wrote a book-length manuscript of 540 pages in which he confessed his guilt in detail. It has been declassified, though as of this date only Getty has cited any of it. Getty writes:

In "A Deserved Sentence" ["Zasluzhennyi Prigovor"] he [Zinoviev] wrote:

There is no question about it. . . . It is a fact. Whoever plays with the idea of "opposition" to the socialist state plays with the idea of counterrevolutionary terror. . . . Before each who finds himself in my position this question stands in sharp relief. If tomorrow war comes – it stands yet a million times sharper and bigger. And for myself this question in prison for a long time is irreversibly decided. Rise from the dead! Be born again as a Bolshevik! Finish your human days conscious of your guilt before the party! Do everything in order to erase this guilt.⁸³

According to Getty, Zinoviev composed this right after he had been named as a conspirator by a number of other, lower-ranked conspirators. If enough of one's co-conspirators name the same person that person's conviction is assured. As Bukharin pointed out in his final statement at his March 1938 trial, the confession of the accused is

⁸² Stalin to Kaganovich, about testimony at the Zinov'ev-Kamenev "Trial of the 16," August 1936. In *Stalin i Kaganovich, Perepiska 1931-1936 gg.* [Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence, 1931-1936] (Russian), No. 763, pp. 642-43.

⁸³ Getty, *Yezhov. The Rise of Stalin's "Iron Fist."* New Haven: Yale U.P. 2008, p. 191. According to the *Bulletin of Declassified Documents of the State Federal Archives*, issue 5, section II, this document has been declassified. See <<http://www.rusarchives.ru/secret/bul5/70.shtml>>.

not at all necessary for the accused to be convicted, provided there is enough other evidence. Zinov'ev must have felt that it would be futile to persist in denial.

The few quotations from Zinoviev's prison letters that have been released by the Soviet and Russian governments record that he reiterated his guilt and said that he was being treated "humanely" and "given medical treatment."

May 6 1935. If only I could hope that sometime I would have the chance to expiate my guilt even a little. In prison I am treated humanely, I get medical care, etc.⁸⁴

We now have a number of statements from other high-ranking conspirators who implicate Zinov'ev and Kamenev in their own confessions. For instance, Mikhail Frinovsky:

At the time of the trial of Zinoviev, Kamenev and others, when the testimony about Bukharin was published in the press, Evdokimov was in Moscow. He became very upset and in a conversation with me, said: "The devil only knows how he will be able to extract himself from this whole affair. I just don't understand Yagoda at all, what he is doing, why he is broadening the circle of persons for repression, or maybe the nerves of these people are weak – they will give out. But it could have been possible to direct the course of the investigation in such a manner as to leave oneself safe in any case." (41)

Yagoda:

I can admit that, as for myself, after the murder of Kirov there was an attempt, or rather the intention, to "squench" this case, limit the arrests to Leningrad only. But the unrelenting supervision by the CC [Central Committee] and the

⁸⁴ "O tak nazyvaemom 'antisovetskom ob'edinennom trotskistsko-zinov'evskom tsentre." *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* 8 (1989), 90. Reprinted in *Reabilitatsiia. Politicheskie protsessy 30-50-kh godov*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1991, p. 184.

participation of Ezhov in the investigation hampered this effort. As you know, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bakaev and others were arrested in Moscow.⁸⁵

...

In relation to Zinoviev and Kamenev I had a duplex plan. I could not permit the investigation into their case to proceed very far. I feared that they would confess sincerely. They could have given up the whole conspiracy. (Genrikh Iagoda 191)

...

I took every measure to create for Zinoviev and Kamenev the most pleasant conditions in prison: books, paper, food, walks – all this they received without stint. But who knows what could happen? They were dangerous witnesses.

Therefore I reported their case to the CC and proposed that Zinoviev and Kamenev be shot, in order to be finished with them. (Genrikh Iagoda 192)

Bukharin probably felt the same way. He had been on his way back to Moscow to defend himself against the incriminating remarks that Kamenev had made about him during the trial, a partial transcript of which had been published in the national newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*.

Bukharin could not have avoided a face-to-face confrontation with Kamenev during which Kamenev, already condemned, might well have given yet more evidence against Bukharin, just as Iagoda feared that they might disclose his own role in the conspiracy. It was only a few days after their execution Bukharin wrote Voroshilov to call Zinov'ev and Kamenev “dogs” and worse to say that he was “fearfully glad” they had been shot.

Iagoda gave more detail about how he schemed to get rid of Zinov'ev and Kamenev.

In the summer of 1936 Zinoviev and Kamenev were brought from their political exile to Moscow for investigation in the case of the center of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite bloc. As I have already said, I had to get rid of them; they were already finished, under investigation for the third time, and I was very concerned that somewhere, somehow during the investigation they would say too much.

⁸⁵ Genrikh Iagoda No. 44, May 19, 1937, p. 184.

Therefore I considered it essential to speak with them. Clearly I couldn't attend the interrogations or call them into my office for a talk. Therefore I began to establish a practice of going around several cells in the inner prison. I went into almost all the cells with Popov, the chief of the prison. I also dropped in on Zinoviev and Kamenev (separately on each of them), having first told Popov to remain outside.

In 5-10 minutes I succeeded in warning Zinoviev and Kamenev about who had been arrested and what confessions we had. I told them that the investigation did not know any facts about other centers that were taking part in the conspiracy, much less about the overall [Iagoda says "general"] center.

"All is not yet lost, so don't give away anything yourselves. The center of the conspiracy still functions. No matter what the court's sentence is, you will be returned to me", I told them. And Zinoviev and Kamenev, both in the investigation and at the trial, as you know, carried out my directives. And after the sentence they were shot. This was in August 1936. (Genrikh Iagoda 198-199).

On April 25, 1937 Bulanov, one of Iagoda's right-hand men, confessed as follows:

In the Spring of 1931 Iagoda openly and directly told me that the political line of the Central Committee of the Party was incorrect, that this line will lead to defeat, that the CC is destroying the peasantry by the introduction of collective farms and Soviet farms and that the only correct line for such a backward country is the line of the Rights. Iagoda said that he himself was connected to the center of the Rights and that if I want to go on living then I just share his line, help him, and of course keep it secret. He said that all of Lenin's coworkers – Tomsky, Rykov, Bukharin, Kamenev, Zinoviev – all fully shared the platform of the Rights and that he too was with them.

I told Iagoda that he could rely on me fully. (No. 165, pp. 500-1)

...

After the murder of Kirov, when the roles of Kamenev and Zinoviev in preparing this murder had been revealed, Iagoda assigned me and Pauker to arrest Kamenev and to Molchanov and Volovich the arrest of Zinoviev. At that time he

ordered that they only be brought to the GPU, and not to carry out any search of their premises. (502)

Tomsky's Suicide

Kamenev, Zinov'ev, and Reingol'd (another defendant at the August 1936 Moscow Trial) implicated Tomsky as a leader of the Right opposition along with Bukharin. According to Cohen Tomsky killed himself because he “wanted to escape the abuse and degradation heaped on Zinov'ev and Kamenev” (368). Cohen ought to have at least informed his readers of the fact that he possessed no evidence to support this statement.

Furthermore, we know better now. In 1996, an excerpt from Tomsky's suicide letter was published in an official government journal.⁸⁶ Of course it is true that Tomsky did not want to go through a trial. But he expressed nothing but contempt for Zinoviev and Kamenev, whom he called “these counterrevolutionary dregs (*otreb'e*) who descended to the base role of fascist murderers.”

I saw with disgust how Zinoviev and Kamenev thrice promised and thrice betrayed.

Forgive me for explaining all this at such length, but my only hope is that you understand my outrage and pain when I once again in a document of the CC see my name in any kind of connection with these counterrevolutionary dregs who have fallen to the villainous role of fascist murderers.

This is not evidence that Tomsky disbelieved the charges against Zinov'ev and Kamenev – though of course he denied their accusations against him specifically. As we saw above, the same thing was true for Bukharin: we have no indication at all that he thought the charges against them or their confessions were false and lots of evidence that he believed the charges true. Furthermore, we have a great deal of evidence that both Tomsky and Bukharin were co-conspirators with Zinov'ev, Kamenev, and many others. We have no evidence whatsoever that all these statements, or those of Zinov'ev and Kamenev

⁸⁶ Published in *Rodina* 1, 1996, pp. 92-3. Online text at <<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/tomskyltr.html>>.

themselves, were fabricated. Cohen didn't either. No one has claimed that Tomsky's note is a forgery.

The February-March 1937 Central Committee Plenum

Cohen devotes four pages to an account of this important Plenum. Study of the actual transcript allows us to see that everything Cohen wrote about this important Plenum in his 1973 book is wrong. In 1992-1995 the whole transcript of the very long CC Plenum of February 23-March 5 1937 was published in sections in *Voprosy Istorii*. In 2006 these materials were scanned and put on the Internet in searchable text format.⁸⁷ All this material is therefore easily available for researchers.

Cohen asserts that Bukharin's followers were compelled to accuse him:

During the next two weeks, several lesser Bukharinists were 'worked over' in police cellars and their 'confessions' delivered to Bukharin as 'a sort of psychic torture'. (369)

Cohen cites Conquest and Medvedev here. We know they, and Cohen, are wrong thanks to the statements of one of the most prominent of these old Bukharinists, Valentin Astrov. Astrov had a face-to-face confrontation with Bukharin, and then lived till 1993, long enough to write about his experiences.⁸⁸

Astrov

Astrov published a self-serving statement in *Literaturnaiia Gazeta* of March 29, 1989 (V. Astrov, "Kak eto proizoshlo") in which he stated plainly that he was not mistreated in any way. According to Astrov, the NKVD investigators did not even call him "ty," the familiar second person singular which is disrespectful when not from a close friend or family member.

⁸⁷ At <<http://www.memo.ru/history/1937/index.htm>>.

⁸⁸ According to one biographical source Valentin Nikolaevich Astrov was born August 1 1898 and died July 15 1993. See <<http://persona.rin.ru/view/f/0/28956/astrov-valentin-hikolaevich>> [sic].

They did not beat or torture me, no one even referred to me as “ty” . . . but consistently, day and night, they demanded that I “tell about the terrorist activities of the Rights,” and stubbornly refused to hear that I don’t know anything about it!

Astrov said only that he had not actually heard Bukharin utter the word *terror*. It is far from certain that he was telling the truth even in that, since he certainly did make that claim in 1936 and 1937. But evidently Bukharin had tried to be very careful in what he himself said. Again according to Astrov,

Slepkov replied that Bukharin had said to him: It would be good if Stalin were to suddenly die. I asked, what do you mean “suddenly die”, things don’t happen like that, is Stalin perhaps ill? Slepkov answered, no, not that, it seems. Then does it mean that Stalin should be murdered? Slepkov replied: Understand it as you wish. I asked: That means that Bukharin proposes that we engage in assassination [Russian: “terror”]? Slepkov answered: No, he did not say that directly. I asked that, perhaps, Bukharin wants us to engage in violence but does not want to say that in so many words? Slepkov replied: That must be it.

Bukharin, as Slepkov said, was not talking with me about this subject for the first time, but until this time I thought that it was by chance. Now I see that this thought was insistently preoccupying Bukharin.⁸⁹

Astrov had said virtually the same thing during his interrogation two days earlier, as we shall see.

In this same face-to-face confrontation with Bukharin on January 13, 1937, Astrov said that Tomsy, one of the leaders of the Rights, boasted that when they (the Rights) took power, they would deal “without ceremony” with the current Party leaders. Astrov understood that to mean that they would kill them.

On this point Tomsy said that in a serious struggle for power, like the one we are engaged in, it’s impossible to do without arrests, that now they are arresting

⁸⁹ “. . . Ni razu ne govorilos’ otnositel’no terrora . . .” *Istochnik* 1 (2001), p. 91.

us, but later we will be arresting them. When we take power we will not stand on ceremony. This statement of Tomsy's was taken by those present as self-evident. (91)

But Astrov also stated that Bukharin did, in fact, once speak to him about "terror," i.e. assassination:

He [Bukharin] said that it was important to keep me free, since I would have to continue Slepko's terrorist activity in preparing to murder Stalin. (103)

Two days before this confrontation on January 11, 1937 Astrov gave a confession statement to the NKVD in which categorically stated that Bukharin had spoken about assassination:

I recall my conversation with BUKHARIN that took place in the summer of 1931 or 1932, during which BUKHARIN this time directly stated that it was essential that STALIN be murdered. Developing this thought further BUKHARIN emphasized that if STALIN were gone no one would be able to unify the Party, and that would create the possibility for us to seize the leadership in our hands. (Lubianka 2 29)

This is what Astrov retracted in 1989, at a time when no one could confront him with what he had actually said in 1937 because these documents were not yet available, including to Astrov himself. He withdrew no other aspect of his accusations against Bukharin.

If Astrov had falsely claimed in 1989 or later that he had been tortured or maltreated no one could have refuted him and few, if any, would have been surprised. Yet he insisted that just the opposite was the case! Far from being tortured, Astrov insisted that that he had been treated with respect.

There is no need to put scare quotes around Astrov's confession. It is clear that he was not "worked over," as Cohen claims. Astrov's testimony would be powerful evidence of Bukharin's guilt even if there were no other such statements. In fact there are

a large number of confessions implicating Bukharin. Bukharin stated that he received twenty of them on one day alone, February 15, 1937.⁹⁰ Aside from Astrov's none of these have been made available to researchers.

The Plenum

At this CC Plenum, according to Cohen, ““there was, in reality, only one item on the agenda – the expulsion of Bukharin and Rykov”” (370, quoting Conquest, *GT*). This is not true at all.

The Plenum lasted from the evening of February 23 to the evening of March 5, 1937. The cases of Bukharin and Rykov were discussed from the evening session of February 23 through the morning session of February 26, and again in the latter part of the session of February 27. This was indeed an important part of the Plenum, but far from even half of it. A number of other important questions were discussed, including the new Constitution and the lessons to be drawn from the second Moscow Trial that had just taken place in January 1937.

Cohen further claims that:

Stalin and his men took the floor to demand their arrest as ‘hired murderers, saboteurs, and wreckers in the service of fascism’. (370)

Once again this is completely false. Not only is there no evidence that Stalin said anything like this – the evidence shows that Stalin was the most lenient of all present towards Bukharin and Rykov! This is well discussed by Getty (Getty and Naumov 412-414). Chapter Ten of his book, “Party Discipline and the Fall of Bukharin,” is the most extended discussion of this Plenum in any language at present and includes significant quotations from the transcripts. Unfortunately Getty and Naumov discuss only that part of the Plenum that was devoted to Bukharin and Rykov and ignore the rest of it. But the

⁹⁰ *Voprosy Istorii* No.2-3, 1992, p. 30.

entire plenum transcript has now been published online and, what's more, can be searched online by key word.⁹¹

Cohen reproduces from Medvedev an alleged hostile exchange between Bukharin and Molotov (370). Nothing like it is to be found in the huge transcript of the Plenum; therefore, it never took place. This is also another passage that reminds us how unreliable is Medvedev's book, one of Cohen's main sources. On the following page (371), Cohen records an "angry, emotional statement" of Bukharin's that, according to the evidence, he never uttered. Cohen took it from Uralov, Medvedev, Trotsky, and Conquest. At best it was a rumor. Cohen had the responsibility to so inform his readers but failed to do so.

Bukharin's "Letter to Future Generations of Party Leaders"⁹²

At this point Cohen quotes from a document that first achieved wide circulation in Medvedev's *Let History Judge* in the early '70s.⁹³ According to Bukharin's widow, Anna Larina, her husband had written this "letter" shortly before his arrest, which occurred on February 27, 1937 at the conclusion of the discussion of his and Rykov's situation at the February-March 1937 Central Committee meeting.

Larina submitted this letter to the Party Control Commission in 1961 as part of her appeal, unsuccessful at that time, for her late husband's rehabilitation. She claimed that she had memorized the letter and then destroyed the original, as Bukharin had asked her to do, and had reproduced it in writing in 1956 after Khrushchev's "Secret Speech." As suggested by Marc Junge, however, it is unlikely that the text Larina produced is the same, in letter or in spirit, as whatever her husband dictated to her – if in fact he dictated anything at all. Junge observes:

⁹¹ "Fevral'sko-martovskii plenum 1937 goda." At <http://www.memo.ru/history/1937/feb_mart_1937/>. The present authors (Furr and Bobrov) possess "hard copies" of all 26 parts of this transcript, which we use to check the scanned text available here.

⁹² The Russian text can be found online in several places, among them: <http://perpetrator2004.narod.ru/documents/Bukharin/To_Future_Generation_of_Party_Leaders.doc>; in Larina's autobiography *Nezabyvaemoe* (Moscow, 1989), 362-3, at <http://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/auth/auth_pagesf6ec-2.html?Key=8276&page=349#362>. An English translation is in Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*. Revised and expanded edition. Translated by George Shriver. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, pp. 366-67.

⁹³ It was published in clandestine *samizdat* dissident publications before it appeared in Medvedev's book. The following online anthology of *samizdat* publications includes it in the period 1960-1965: <<http://antology.igrunov.ru/60-s/memo/>>.

We cannot determine at this point whether the letter that Anna Larina wrote down after the 20th Party Congress and which was published in the early 1970s corresponds to the handwritten original of 1937. Nevertheless it is worth noting that the analysis of the 1930s contained in the letter is typical of the framework of argument of the mid-1950s, that is, of Khrushchev's Secret Speech, and allows us to suppose that Larina-Bukharina tactically adapted this letter to the politics of the 1950s.⁹⁴

The letter's contents, a ferocious and personal criticism of Stalin, also fit well into Cohen's analysis, itself both a product and a reflection of the "anti-Stalin" paradigm that Khrushchev elaborated and Gorbachev utilized in justifying Bukharin's rehabilitation in 1987-88.

But when put into context with other texts of Bukharin's published since the end of the USSR, the "Letter to Future Generations" shows its author in a more critical light. For although the contents of this "Letter" are consistent with Cohen's account of Bukharin's defiance of Stalin at the Plenum, they are in complete contradiction with the evidence of what actually occurred there, as well as with what Bukharin wrote later.

In the letters Bukharin wrote to Stalin during his imprisonment, he claimed total loyalty, friendship, and even "love" towards Stalin. Even in his now-famous letter to Stalin of December 10, 1937, in which Bukharin retracted virtually all the confessions he had made to that point, he still professed love and loyalty to Stalin:

And here I speak the absolute truth: through all the last years I have honestly and sincerely put forth the party's line and have learned to value and love you wisely.

But I am prepared spiritually to leave this earthly vale, and there is nothing within me, as relates to all of you and to the party, and to our whole cause – nothing besides a great, unbounded love.

⁹⁴ Marc Junge, *Bucharins Rehabilitierung*. Berlin, 1999, 93. For further discussion of this document see Furr, post to H-RUSSIA August 16 2007, at <<http://tinyurl.com/3xh34m>>.

Bukharin even praised the “purge,” as he called it, directed not only against “the guilty” and “those under suspicion” but even against those “potentially under suspicion,” including himself!

There is some kind of *great and bold political idea* in a general purge a) in connection with a prewar period, b) in connection with the transition to democracy. This purge envelops a) the guilty, b) those under suspicion and c) those potentially under suspicion. Obviously I had to be involved here too. Some are rendered harmless in one way, other in another way, the third group in a third way.⁹⁵

If Larina’s “Letter” were genuine, then Bukharin’s credibility would be fatally compromised. He vowed his loyalty to and “love” for Stalin, and strong support for repressive measures against himself and many others, while in the letter supposedly given to his wife he denounced all these same things in the strongest terms. That Bukharin would change his tune so drastically would be consistent with his portrayal as hypocritical, as “two-faced,” by many of those who addressed the February-March Central Committee Plenum. The quotations below are just a sampling of many such accusations:

[Ezhov:] While continuing to stand on its Right-Trotskyite positions the center of the Rights, with the goal of preserving its cadres from decisive defeat, adopted the path of hypocritical [“two-faced”] capitulation. In the hope that they would succeed in starting a new attack on the Party in the very near future the center discussed a whole plan, a whole tactic of two-facedness. Here they tried to learn from the errors of the Trotskyists, the errors of the Zinovievists, and they worked out literally to the last details a plan for a two-faced plan of giving statement [i.e. of capitulation to the Party’s line – GF]. (*Voprosy Istorii* № 4-5, 1992, 6)

⁹⁵ *Rodina* № 2, 1993. C. 52, 54; *Istochnik* 0 [sic], 1993. C. 23-25. Translated in Getty and Naumov, pp. 556-60.

[Shkiriakov:] But obviously, it is hard to discern the truth from them after all their two-faced work, deception of the Party and the Central Committee. (*Vop. Ist.* № 6-7, 1992, 18)

[Kosior:] Hypocrites! (*ibid.*, 25)

[Andreev:] The Rights long ago, beginning in 1929, chose that same tactic of deceiving the Party by means of two-facedness. Confessions such as those of Shmidt, Uglanov, Radin and all the rest now disclose with complete clarity that they adopted the same tactic of deceiving the Party, of two-facedness, that the Trotskyists also adopted. . . . What, we may ask, are your statements of 1929 and 1930 worth, when you said that you had completely broken with the Opposition and had gone over to the positions of the Party? This fact speaks to the two-facedness of these same statements (Voice from the hall. Correct.) . . . You abused with all this the attitude of the party to you and instead of completely disarming yourselves and burning your bridges after you, you adopted the methods of two-facedness and deception of the Party, instead of helping the Party expose the Trotskyites and Zinovievites. (*Vop. Ist.* № 8-9, 1992, 3; 5; 7)

[Kabakov:] Permit me to ask you, who founded this school of two-facedness in the Party? (*ibid.*, 8)

[Molotov:] What they can do is only what anyone could do from behind the corner, secretly and in quiet, like a hypocrite, like a person who does something while hiding his face.

[Bykin:] Comrades, hypocrites are the most malevolent enemies of the Party and the working class. (*Vop. Ist.* № 10, 1992, 3)

And so on. “Two-facedness” – professing loyalty to Stalin and the Party line while secretly plotting to overthrow both – was the essence of the accusations against Bukharin. If genuine, the “Letter,” when set beside his other writings of 1937 and 1938, would strongly tend to confirm that accusation.

Some may well object that “two-facedness” – deception – is essential for clandestine, illegal work. Bukharin, however, claimed that he had ceased such work some years beforehand. Cohen thinks Bukharin was never involved in secret oppositional work at all! In short, it’s impossible to know whether Bukharin actually dictated a “last letter” to his wife at all, much less what it might have really said.

Postyshev’s Speech

Cohen alleges (371) that Postyshev protested the purge in the Party and blamed Stalin.

The choice clear, Postyshev, a candidate Politburo member, rose to speak for opponents of the purge: “I personally do not believe that . . . an honest Party member who had trodden the long road of unrelenting fight against enemies, for the Party and for socialism, would now be in the camp of enemies. I do not believe it. . . .” At this point, Stalin reportedly interrupted in a way so menacing that Postyshev’s determination was shattered.

No doubt Cohen took it from Khrushchev’s Secret Speech – something he should have told his readers. In any case, nothing of the kind happened. This passage is indeed in Postyshev’s speech. But Khrushchev took it completely out of context – yet another example of Khrushchev’s wholesale falsification in that famous speech (Furr 2011 46 ff.).

We now have Postyshev’s full remarks thanks to the publication of the transcript of this Plenum. Here is the whole passage:

I reason in this way: such difficult years, such changes took place, where people either were broken or stood on firm legs, or went over to the enemies – the period of industrialization, the period of collectivization, all the same the fight of the Party with the enemies was fierce in this period. I did not at all imagine that it was possible to endure all these periods, and then go to the camp of the enemies. And here now it turns out that since 1934 he has fallen into the clutches of the enemies and become an enemy. Of course, here one can believe this or not

believe it. I personally think that it is terribly hard after all these years for a person in 1934, who had gone through on firm legs the very fierce struggle, in 1934 could go over to the enemies. This is very hard to believe. (Molotov. Hard to believe that he became an enemy only in 1934? Probably he was one earlier too.) Of course, earlier. I cannot imagine how it is possible to go through the difficult years with the Party and then, in 1934, go over to the Trotskyists. It's strange. There was some kind of worm in him the whole time. When this worm appeared – in 1926, 1924, 1930, it's hard to say, but obviously there was some kind of worm that did some kind of work, so that he fell into the ranks of the enemies.⁹⁶

Stalin never interrupted Postyshev's speech at all, much less in any "threatening" way, as Cohen reports on the same page. We have already noted that Cohen chooses to "believe" communist leaders – Khrushchev, in this case – when doing so fits his "anti-Stalin" paradigm. But in this case even Khrushchev did not say that Stalin interrupted or menaced Postyshev. Cohen never informs his readers whence he took this false claim. Furthermore, the passage in question reveals that Postyshev did not protest the purge at all, but instead agreed to it.

According to Cohen

Feigning neutrality, he [Stalin] left the continuing attack on Bukharin and Rykov to his proconsuls of terror, and appointed a commission dominated by these same loyalists to decide their fate. (371-2)

His footnotes reveal that Cohen relied on Conquest here. But Conquest fabricated this story out of thin air. Thanks to the transcript we now know that Stalin did not "leave" anything to "his proconsuls," for he himself was on this same commission. Cohen continues, writing:

The commission reported its verdict to the meeting on February 17: 'Arrest, try, shoot.' (372)

⁹⁶ *Voprosy Istorii* № 5-6, 1995, 4. Interruptions of the main speaker are often indicated, as here, in parentheses.

Getty explicitly deals with this statement of Medvedev's ("The Politics of Repression Revisited" 133) to point out that it is completely false. The resolution was not to shoot, but to arrest and continue the investigation. The original minutes of the commission's conclusion survives and have been published – for example, by Getty and Naumov (406-419). Moreover, Getty shows that Stalin took the most lenient position of anyone present. Stalin himself had apparently first voted simply to exile Bukharin and was overruled by the other commission members, some of whom did vote to shoot him. Further evidence, if more were needed, that Stalin was not a "dictator"!⁹⁷

Getty and Naumov examine this in some detail, even reproducing a photographic copy of the commission's report (411-419). The very stark differences between Stalin's leniency and the positions of the other commission members were settled in a compromise that was nothing like what Cohen wrote.

Bukharin under Arrest

An important part of Cohen's chapter is devoted to Bukharin's March 1938 trial and what he said at it. Cohen has to deal with the stubborn fact that while all of the accused confessed to many serious crimes, most – notably including Bukharin, Rykov, and Yagoda – stoutly refused to confess to some charges even as they were willingly confessing to other accusations. As he writes:

The confession of each, painfully extracted, was tailored to the bizarre indictment. Everything had again been rehearsed. . . (373)

This is blatant dishonesty on Cohen's part. Both "painfully extracted" and "rehearsed" are, once again, "weasel words" that are intended to create the false impression that Cohen is imparting some knowledge about the trial that, in reality, he did not have. "Painfully," of course, can mean just about anything. But in this context it is clearly intended to imply some kind of mistreatment. More forthright than Cohen, his Russian translators use the word "pytka" meaning: torture (441).

⁹⁷ There are many examples of Stalin's will being thwarted, including several times during this very Plenum.

In fact Cohen was making baseless charges again. He knew absolutely nothing about any of this. Cohen has since admitted that Bukharin was not tortured.⁹⁸ As he wrote in 2003:

Unlike many other victims of repression, including the commanders of the Red Army, it seems that no physical tortures were used against him [Bukharin] in prison.

Parenthetically, there is no evidence that the Tukhachevsky defenders were “tortured” either. Cohen had no such evidence, nor do we have any today.

Other authors such as Asen Ignatov, another extremely anticommunist researcher, agree:

We may be confident that Bukharin did not undergo torture since, as has become known, in prison a special regime was set up for him, he received all literature, Soviet and Western, and also a typewriter and wrote philosophical works.⁹⁹

Bukharin had time to write a book of poetry, another of philosophy, a novel, and a number of letters, all while in prison. Naturally he could not have done all these things without the kind of privileges that in the USA today only convicts in minimum-security Federal prisons enjoy. This means that Bukharin was treated extremely well in prison.

Nor did Cohen know anything about “rehearsals,” any more than we do today. Once again he just invented this “fact” out of thin air.

Cohen continues:

On around June 2, 1937, he finally relented, ‘only after the investigators threatened to kill his wife and newborn son.’ . . . To save her and his infant son . . . he had to ‘confess’ and stand trial. (375)

⁹⁸ Koen [Cohen], “Bukharin na Lubianke.” *Svobodnaia Mysl’* 3 (2003), pp. 60-1.

⁹⁹ “Revoliutsiia pozhiraet svoikh vunderkindov. Sluchai Bukharina s psikhologicheskimi tochkami zreniia.” *Forum* 1 (2005). At <<http://www1.ku-eichstaett.de/ZIMOS/forum/docs/02Ignatow.pdf>> C. 13.

Cohen's footnote to this passage is to Medvedev's *Let History Judge*. A secondary source isn't evidence in any case, and Medvedev's book contains no evidence at all, only the claim that "there is much evidence that such blackmail occurred" (*LHJ* 382).

Since Medvedev had no evidence to support his statement and Cohen could have noted that fact, his footnoting Medvedev here appears to be a deliberate attempt to deceive his readers into believing that evidence in support of this statement existed, while Cohen knew very well it did not. Nor is there is no evidence of this today. Gorbachev's high-level "rehabilitation commission" tried and failed to find any evidence that Bukharin was either tortured, pressured, or promised his life in return for perjuring himself (*RKEB* 3, 55).

There is no evidence whatsoever that any intimidation at all was used against Bukharin. Even in his letter to Stalin of December 10, 1937 in which he denied the charges he had already confessed to (only to subsequently confess to them again) Bukharin did not allege that his previous confessions of guilt had been the result of any mistreatment or threats. Instead Bukharin claimed that he had confessed falsely to things he did not do in order to convince Stalin that he (Bukharin) had "disarmed."¹⁰⁰

Neither Bukharin's letter to Stalin nor that to his wife of about a month later (January 15, 1938) show any fear that his family might be mistreated. By far his biggest concern in this last letter is that his prison writings be preserved for posterity.¹⁰¹

We now have Bukharin's aforementioned confession of June 2, 1937. A careful study of it concludes there is no reason to believe it was anything but genuine. (Furr and Bobrov) As Getty hints, its timing suggests that Bukharin may have heard of the arrest of Marshal Tukhachevsky and the other high-ranking military officers. Bukharin claimed to

¹⁰⁰ Published in English translation, somewhat abridged, in Getty and Naumov 556-560. Getty (563) points out that even in this letter Bukharin revealed he had been lying previously. For a thorough analysis see Furr and Bobrov (2009) The Getty and Naumov translation is reprinted in George Walden, "The Evil that Stalin Did." At <http://www.yale.edu/annals/Reviews/review_texts/Walden_on_Getty_Ass_Newspapers_10.22.99.html>. Walden, a Conservative British M.P., naively or through wishful thinking takes Bukharin's innocence for granted. The original was considered so important that it was published twice in the same year, in two different prestigious Russian historical journals. See "Iz lichnogo arkhiva. 'Prostimenia, Koba . . .' Neizvestnoe pis'mo N. Bukharina." *Istochnik* 0 [sic] (1993), pp. 23-25; "Poslednoe Pis'mo." *Rodina* 2 (1993), pp. 52-54.

¹⁰¹ "Vse struny dushi." *Rodina* № 8-9, 1992, p. 68. The letter is published in English in Anna Larina-Bukharina, *This I Cannot Forget: The Memoirs of Bukharin's Widow* (New York: Norton, 1993), pp. 353 ff., and in Nikolai Bukharin, *How It All Began: The Prison Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 336-38.

be involved in a loose network of interlocking conspiracies with these men, as well as with other circles.

NKVD men apparently believed that Bukharin had been relying on Tukhachevsky and the military conspirators to save him (Getty and Naumov 446, quoting Larina):

And later, in September 1939, in the inner prison at the Lubyanka, one of the investigative workers, Matusov, said to me:

– You thought that Yakir and Tukhachevsky would save your Bukharin. But we work well. That’s why it didn’t happen.¹⁰²

Cohen suggests something similar (“Bukharin na Lubyanka” 60). If Bukharin had been hoping the military men would be successful in seizing power, then confessing once he had heard of their arrests might be an attempt to show himself to be cooperative in order to try for the best possible deal.

Cohen claims:

Within weeks of his arrest, Bukharin’s wife had been exiled . . . to Astrakhan in June 1937. (375)

Bukharin was arrested on February 27, 1937, the date the resolution in his and Rykov’s case was passed by the Central Committee Plenum. Bukharin’s family was moved out of their Kremlin apartment only after he had confessed; Stalin issued the order on June 19, 1937 (Lubyanka 2, No. 103, 226) This was not “within weeks of his arrest,” but almost four *months* later.

So why does Cohen write “within weeks . . .” and then “in June 1937”? Because “within weeks” sounds more callous? Bukharin’s wife Anna Larina claims she was sent to Astrakhan and not arrested until September 20, 1937¹⁰³ (Larina 43). So the opposite of

¹⁰² Russian text Larina, *Nezabyvaemoe*, 27. The corresponding English translation by Gary Kern is slightly different (*This I Cannot Forget*, pp. 59-60).

¹⁰³ Spouses of those arrested in national security cases were routinely arrested for further investigation, evidently on the assumption that they would have some knowledge at least of their spouse’s illegal activities but had not reported it to the police as required by law and so were likely to be accessories. This must have often been the case, but it seems that Bukharin did not tell Larina of his activities. She was Bukharin’s third wife, twenty-six years his junior (born 1914).

what Cohen said is in fact the truth. Bukharin's wife was not exiled after his arrest. Instead she and her son were allowed to remain *until after Bukharin had confessed*. This suggests the possibility that, had Bukharin not confessed, his family might not have been sent out of Moscow at all. Nor does Cohen report the date of Larina's arrest.

We can hardly overestimate the significance of Bukharin's June 2, 1937 confession. Bukharin's name had first been mentioned by Reingol'd and Kamenev at the August 1936 Zinov'ev-Kamenev Trial, at which time the NKVD had begun an investigation of his activities. Since then Bukharin had vehemently denied his guilt many times: in a very long document sent to all the delegates to the February-March 1937 Plenum; at the Plenum itself; at a minimum of five "face-to-face confrontations" with former associates and comrades who denounced him; and in private letters to Stalin.

His confession of June 2 and his subsequent confessions gave the lie to all his fervent and repeated oaths that he had never been involved in the oppositionists' conspiracies. When he did confess, it was to the most serious crimes imaginable.

So many other defendants, including the Military leaders, implicated Bukharin that perhaps he thought further denials would be futile. As he said in his own trial, the confession of the accused is not at all necessary to prove guilt. Doubtless Bukharin simply did as many criminals do – try to "get the best deal possible" from the prosecution once denial has become futile, the evidence against him so overwhelming that conviction was a foregone conclusion.

It would have been logical for Bukharin to attempt this tactic. At the second Moscow "Show Trial" of January 23 – 30, 1937, four of the convicted defendants had been given terms of imprisonment rather than the death penalty. Two of these four, Karl Radek and Grigori Sokol'nikov, had been leading figures in Trotsky's underground conspiratorial movement. Radek had been directly in touch with Trotsky and also with German and Japanese agents. Bukharin might well have reasoned that he himself had done nothing more serious than what Radek had done. Moreover, unlike Radek, he had been closely allied with Stalin in the past: both politically during the mid-1920s, and as a personal friend for many years.

But by confessing to crimes he had denied a great many times, Bukharin had burned his bridges. Thereafter no one could take anything he said at face value. It was

also reasonable for the State to suspect that his wives would have known something of his conspiratorial activities. All but the last one, Anna Larina, had been revolutionary activists in their own right, not unlike most of the other oppositionists (though her father had been a famous Bolshevik, Larina herself had not been an activist).

We now have four letters from Bukharin to Stalin while Bukharin was in prison. Not a single one of them shows any fear for his family except that they have no “material basis” – that is, income. In a very long letter he mentions them only in a few lines.¹⁰⁴

Bukharin on Trial

Cohen asserts that at his trial in March 1938 Bukharin did not in fact confess to anything specific.

In fact, however, as some understood at the time and others eventually came to see, Bukharin did not really confess to the criminal charges at all. (372)

This is perhaps Cohen’s major claim – or, at any rate, the one for which he has become most famous and of which he has somehow convinced many others. For example, a member of Gorbachev’s “rehabilitation commission” suggested that Bukharin had “in essence” denied his guilt in everything (*RKEB* 3, 40). This remark seems to have been completely ignored by the rest of the commission. They had good reason to ignore it, as we shall see.

Much of our discussion below will concentrate on showing that Cohen is wrong about this. For in reality, Bukharin did indeed confess many times and to many specific crimes.

Cohen states that when Bukharin accepted responsibility for “the bloc,” he meant something else. The Prosecutor meant “the bloc of Rights and Trotskyites.” But Cohen believed that no such “bloc” existed. So he wrote:

He [Bukharin] would accept the symbolic role of representative Bolshevik: “I bear responsibility for the bloc,” that is, for Bolshevism. (375)

¹⁰⁴ Letter from prison of April 15, 1937: “No ia to znaiu, chto ia prav,” *Istochnik* 3 (2000), p. 54.

Cohen is completely wrong here. We know from Trotsky's papers at Harvard University's Houghton Library that there was indeed a "bloc of Rights and Trotskyites." Trotsky denied this at the time, most notably at the Dewey Commission hearings in 1937. But we know that he was deliberately lying. Arch Getty found traces of the correspondence between Trotsky and, among others, Radek and Sokolnikov (two of the main defendants in the Piatakov-Radek trial) in the Trotsky Archive in Boston:

At the time of the Moscow show trials, Trotsky denied that he had any communications with the defendants since his exile in 1929. Yet it is now clear that in 1932 he sent secret personal letters to former leading oppositionists Karl Radek, G. Sokolnikov, E. Preobrazhensky, and others. While the contents of these letters are unknown, it seems reasonable to believe that they involved an attempt to persuade the addressees to return to opposition.¹⁰⁵

In Getty's words,

The meeting with Smirnov took place in 1932 in Berlin. Smirnov informed Sedov that a "bloc" had been formed in the USSR between the Trotskyists and Zinov'evists, with the rightists remaining aloof for the time being. Sedov relayed this to Trotsky.¹⁰⁶

Getty shows that Trotsky's secretary Jan van Heijenoort reminded Trotsky about this at the time of the Dewey Commission hearings. The late Trotskyist scholar Pierre Broué, who was of course intensely hostile to Stalin, was nevertheless forced to agree that the "bloc" really did exist and that Trotsky had lied in denying this.¹⁰⁷ Therefore when Bukharin referred to the "bloc," there is no reason to think that he meant anything else by this term.

Cohen takes the following nonsense straight from Orlov (282-3; Chapter 23, "Nikolai Bukharin"):

¹⁰⁵ J. Arch Getty: "Trotsky in Exile: The Founding of the Fourth International," *Soviet Studies*, vol. XXXVIII, no 1, January 1986, pp. 27-28.

¹⁰⁶ Getty, post to H-RUSSIA November 24 1998. At <<http://tinyurl.com/8ogmk>>.

¹⁰⁷ "Trotsky et le bloc des oppositions de 1932," *Cahiers Léon Trotsky* 5 (1980-81), pp. 5-37.

After seeing Stalin's personal revisions in the text of his initial confession, which had been agreed upon in a session with Yezhov and Stalin's emissary Voroshilov in June, Bukharin repudiated it. (376)

As Getty pointed out, Orlov was in no position to know any of this, a fact that ought to have been obvious to Cohen too. It is just another of Orlov's many fabrications. Cohen undoubtedly chose it because it fit his theory so well, but it was completely irresponsible of him to do so.

Did Bukharin Confess?

Cohen's theory is that

Briefly stated, his [Bukharin's] tactic would be to make sweeping confessions that he was 'politically responsible' for everything, thereby at once saving his family and underlining his symbolic role, while at the same time flatly denying or subtly disproving his complicity in any actual crime. The real political meaning of the criminal charges would then be clear to "the interested." (376)

This is yet another completely false statement by Cohen. Bukharin certainly did confess numerous times to many specific, "actual" crimes. We'll spend a good deal of space proving that by citing the text of the trial transcript. We are forced to conclude Cohen must have decided to deliberately lie here, since it is impossible for anyone to study the transcript of the trial and yet assert that Bukharin failed to confess to specific crimes, as Cohen does.

At the outset of his testimony Bukharin made the following statement:

BUKHARIN: Roughly since 1928. I plead guilty to being one of the outstanding leaders of this "bloc of Rights and Trotskyites." Consequently, I plead guilty to what directly follows from this, the sum total of crimes committed by this counter-revolutionary organization, irrespective of whether or not I knew of, whether or not I took a direct part, in any particular act. Because I am responsible

as one of the leaders and not as a cog of this counter- revolutionary organization.
(1938 Trial 370)

Cohen immediately claimed that “the second half of this statement made nonsense of the first.” This is not so at all. In many jurisdictions – for example, normally in the United States today – all of the participants in a criminal conspiracy are juridically guilty of the crimes of their co-conspirators. Moreover, it is obvious that the leader of a criminal enterprise – a Mafia don, for example – is responsible for the acts of his underlings.

What follows here is a rather lengthy account of the specific crimes to which Bukharin did in fact confess. We will accompany the discussion with specific quotations from the Trial transcript in order to prove that Bukharin did indeed confess to specific crimes. We have added **boldface** so the reader can more easily see Bukharin’s admissions.

Specific Confessions

In his own words, Bukharin explicitly confessed to plotting the dismemberment of the USSR “by forcible overthrow,” “with the help of foreign states,” and “with the help of a war” (1938 Trial 371).

VYSHINSKY: Was the organization of an insurrectionary movement one of your aims?

BUKHARIN: There was **an insurrectionary orientation**.

VYSHINSKY: There was an orientation? **Did you send Slepko to the North Caucasus to organize this business? Did you send Yakovenko to Biisk for the same purpose?**

BUKHARIN: **Yes.** (373)

BUKHARIN: I utilized legal opportunities for anti-Soviet, illegal purposes. In this talk, which took place in the summer of 1932, Pyatakov told me of his meeting with Sedov concerning Trotsky’s policy of terrorism. At that time Pyatakov and I considered that these were not our ideas, but we decided that we would find a common language very soon and that our differences in the struggle

against Soviet power would be overcome. Tomsy and Rykov, I may be mistaken, spoke with Kamenev and Sokolnikov. I remember that at that time **Tomsy particularly insisted on a coup d'état and a concentration of all forces, while the members of the Right centre orientated themselves on an insurrectionary movement.** (391)

BUKHARIN: That refers to the following period. Perhaps you will allow me to relate the facts in chronological order, as I have my material arranged, at first about the "palace coup," then the transition to an uprising, from an uprising to, strictly speaking, a coup d'état.

VYSHINSKY: Tell me, what was the main object of the group of plotters in this sphere?

BUKHARIN: **Even at that period the main object was the overthrow of the Soviet government by force.** (395)

VYSHINSKY: Well, tell us then how you were preparing for the overthrow of the Soviet government by force.

BUKHARIN: **At that period we were already discussing the question of the overthrow of the Soviet government by force, with the aid of a group of military participants in the plot.**

VYSHINSKY: A group?

BUKHARIN: Yes.

VYSHINSKY: A group of participants in your plot?

BUKHARIN: Absolutely correct.

VYSHINSKY: **In the persons of Tukhachevsky, Primakov and some others?**

BUKHARIN: **There was the Yenukidze group as well.** (395-6)

BUKHARIN: . . . I can mention here yet another fact which has not been referred to. At that time I spoke about myself. **I sent Slepkov to prepare a kulak revolt in the Kuban.** Rykov sent Eismont to the Caucasus, and he entered into connections with the Right-winger Pivovarov and the Trotskyite Beloborodov; this has been referred to during the Court investigation. (396)

VYSHINSKY: You wish to present matters as if you were not practically concerned with these crimes.

BUKHARIN: How so, when **I sent Yakovenko to Siberia to organize armed kulak insurrections, and sent Slepkov to the North Caucasus for the same purpose?** (397-8)

BUKHARIN: **I sent Slepkov there as an individual skilled in the organization of the insurrectionary movement. But once he got there, found his bearings and learnt what organizations there were, Slepkov could undertake certain steps without me.** (398)

BUKHARIN: I don't deny having sent Slepkov there. **I sent him to establish contact with Whiteguard Cossack circles.** (398)

VYSHINSKY: **I ask you, accused Bukharin, did you send Slepkov to organize Whiteguard kulak insurrections?**

BUKHARIN: **Yes.** (399)

VYSHINSKY: I revert to the first question. Consequently, **Karakhan engaged in negotiations with the Germans. Apparently this took place with the knowledge of your bloc. Did Bukharin know of this?**

RYKOV: Tomsy told me and Bukharin of this.

VYSHINSKY: So, then, was Bukharin aware of this?

Accused Bukharin, were you aware of this?

BUKHARIN: **Citizen Procurator, I have already said twice that I was.** (406-7)

THE PRESIDENT: Accused Bukharin, proceed.

BUKHARIN: In 1933-34 the kulaks were already smashed, an insurrectionary movement ceased to be a real possibility, and **therefore in the centre of the Right organization a period again set in when the orientation toward a counter-revolutionary conspiratorial coup became the central idea. Thus, from a "palace coup," from a combination of a coup with a mass insurrection, and from an orientation toward a mass insurrection with the**

corresponding practical conclusions, we passed on to counter-revolutionary plotting pure and simple. And the central idea became that of a coup d'état which was to be accomplished by means of an armed conspiracy.

The forces of the conspiracy were: the forces of Yenukidze plus Yagoda, their organizations 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.

Then there was the military organization of the conspirators: Tukhachevsky, Kork and others.

VYSHINSKY: What year was that?

BUKHARIN: I think it was in 1933-34. (419)

BUKHARIN: It was the first time in my life that I spoke to Khodjayevev about politics. This explains the nature of the conversation. **I told him that it was necessary for us to be prepared to overthrow the Soviet government by forcible means, and that for this purpose it was necessary to take advantage of possible mass movements which might occur there.** (421)

VYSHINSKY: **Did you talk with Khodjayevev about overthrowing the Soviet government, which your conspiratorial group was preparing for?**

BUKHARIN: **I spoke in vague nebulous formulas.**

VYSHINSKY: **But such formulas as he could understand?**

BUKHARIN: **Perfectly right.**

VYSHINSKY (to Khodjayevev): Did you understand?

KHOD JAYEV: Absolutely.

VYSHINSKY: Hence, it is not a question of words but of the contents. Did you say that it was necessary to orientate yourselves in your foreign relations towards various foreign states, and to make use of the internal contradictions and international contradictions in the interests of the struggle of your group of conspirators against the Soviet government.

BUKHARIN: Right.

VYSHINSKY: **Did you say it?**

BUKHARIN: **I did.** (423-4)

BUKHARIN: . . . I must say that **at a much earlier period I personally had already given instructions to Semyonov to organize terrorist groups and reported this to our Right centre. It was accepted. Thus, I, more than any other member of the centre, am responsible for the organization of Semyonov's terrorist groups.** (425)

. . . As regards my direct practical activities at that time, and not only my theoretical formulations, I must testify that I tried to establish a connection of this kind through a number of intermediaries and also personally. I also charged the Socialist-Revolutionary Semyonov – who was mentioned during the interrogation the day before yesterday – to get in touch with the underground members of the Socialist-Revolutionary Central Committee, who, if I am not mistaken, were then in exile (which does not alter the case), and **consequently I am directly responsible for it not only as a member of the Right centre, but directly responsible in the immediate sense of the word.** (425-6)

Secondly, I tried to establish contact with organizations and groups of Socialist-Revolutionaries abroad through a certain Chlenov. This was one of the men in our diplomatic service, whom I had known years ago, since our school days, when he was a member of a Social-Democratic organization of that time. I say this not by way of a digression into history, but to explain and show why I felt such confidence in him despite the conspiratorial nature of the work of that time. And he tried to establish connections with the Central Committee of the Socialist-Revolutionaries; when he returned, he had no time to discuss the matter with me in detail, but from this conversation I ascertained approximately the following. The Socialist-Revolutionaries agreed in principle to support the bloc and maintain contact with the Rights, Trotskyites, Zinov'evites, and the like. But they demanded formal guarantees, almost in written form, their conditions being that the peasant policy should be changed in the spirit of a kulak orientation, that the Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik Parties should be legalized – which obviously implied that the government which would be set up if the conspiracy were successful would be a coalition government. (426)

In the summer of 1934 Radek told me that directions had been received from Trotsky, that Trotsky was conducting negotiations with the Germans, that Trotsky had already promised the Germans a number of territorial concessions, including the Ukraine. If my memory does not fail me, territorial concessions to Japan were also mentioned. In general, in these negotiations Trotsky already behaved not only as a conspirator who hopes to get power by means of an armed coup at some future date, but already felt himself the master of Soviet land, which he wants to convert from Soviet to non-Soviet. (430)

VYSHINSKY: Permit me to read Bukharin's testimony, Vol.V, pp. 95-96: "Tomsy told me that two variants were discussed: The case where the new government would be formed in time of peace," and this meant that the conspirators would organize a new government in time of peace, and "the case where it would be organized in time of war; in the latter case the Germans were demanding big economic concessions," concessions of which I have already spoken, "and were insisting upon cessions of territory." Tell us, is this true or not?

BUKHARIN: Yes, that is all true.

VYSHINSKY (continues to read): **"I asked Tomsy how the mechanism of the coup was visualized in this connection. He said that this was the business of the military organization, which was to open the front to the Germans."**

BUKHARIN: **Yes, correct.** (433-4)

In the face of these quotations from the Trial transcript we are at a loss to explain how Cohen could honestly assert that Bukharin did not confess to any specific crimes. Was Cohen so blinded by his "brilliant" preconceived idea that Bukharin "never confessed" that he just could not understand the words of the transcript? This is hard to believe: Cohen actually published an edition of the transcript of the Bukharin trial in 1965.

Or did Cohen simply realize that the vast majority of readers would not attentively read the 800 pages of the trial transcript themselves but instead would "trust" whatever Cohen told them it said? Did Cohen deliberately conceal the truth from his readers? Whatever the explanation, it does Cohen no honor.

Did Bukharin Retract His Confessions?

At one point in his discussion it appears as though Cohen was modifying his assertion, changing it to a claim that Bukharin did confess but then subsequently “took back” his confession:

. . . Bukharin later devalued his entire “confession” with a single aside: ‘The confession of the accused is a medieval principle of jurisprudence.’ (377)

Cohen is simply wrong here. He has wrenched this sentence out of its context and so changed its meaning. Here is Bukharin’s fuller statement:

The point, of course, is not this repentance, or my personal repentance in particular. The Court can pass its verdict without it. *The confession of the accused is not essential. The confession of the accused is a medieval principle of jurisprudence.* But here we also have the internal demolition of the forces of counter-revolution. And one must be a Trotsky not to lay down one’s arms. (778, emphasis added GF)

This doesn’t mean “I am not guilty.” Much less does Bukharin mean that “confessions” are in themselves somehow “medieval.” Such a statement would be stupid indeed. Confessions are a very important part of many judicial proceedings and are taken into account at sentencing in the United States, Great Britain and elsewhere. In the United States most criminal cases are decided on the basis of plea bargaining – that is, confessions – to avoid trial. Bukharin is simply making the observation, obvious on its face, that a person may be convicted by other testimony and evidence whether or not he or she confesses. It is only the insistence that a person “confess” is that Bukharin was calling “medieval.”

Perhaps Bukharin was thinking of the belief, common in the Middle Ages and among some religious persons even today that confession is essential to save the soul of the accused. But whether he had this or something else in mind his statements does not “devalue,” “take back,” or in any way compromise the validity of the confessions had had previously made.

Bukharin also means that his own statement is not important in comparison to the smashing of the conspiracy.

I feel it my duty to say here that in the parallelogram of forces which went to make up the counter-revolutionary tactics, Trotsky was the principal motive force. And the most acute methods – terrorism, espionage, the dismemberment of the U.S.S.R. and wrecking – proceeded primarily from this source.” (778)

Bukharin’s Final Plea

Cohen claims:

As the trial progressed, he was careful – for his family’s sake – to emphasize repeatedly his extravagant confession of responsibility for all “the crimes of the bloc,” while specifically, in one manner or another, disclaiming each and every one. (377)

As we have amply demonstrated this is simply not true of the trial as a whole. It is a tribute to the dogmatic devotion to the “anti-Stalin” paradigm in the mainstream of Soviet history that no one, apparently, has ever taken the trouble to point out that “the Emperor has no clothes” – that this statement of Cohen’s is not just false, but blatantly false.

But in his final plea (Evening Session, March 12, 1938, Transcript pp.767ff.) and without any covert or “Aesopian” language, Bukharin did vigorously deny three of the most serious accusations against him: a plot to assassinate Lenin, Stalin and Sverdlov in 1918; personal involvement with foreign intelligence services; and prior knowledge of the assassination of Kirov and other alleged murders of the 1930s.

. . . I categorically deny that I was connected with foreign intelligence services, that they were my masters and that I acted in accordance with their wishes. (770)

I categorically deny my complicity in the assassination of Kirov, Menzhinsky, Kuibyshev, Gorky and Maxim Peshkov. According to Yagoda’s testimony, Kirov

was assassinated in accordance with a decision of the “bloc of Rights and Trotskyites.” I knew nothing of it. (771)

I refute the accusation of having plotted against the life of Vladimir Ilyich [Lenin] . . . (778)

VYSHINSKY: They [two Left Socialist-Revolutionary witnesses at the trial who testified against Bukharin] say that you, as a traitor to the revolution, were preparing to arrest Lenin, Stalin and Sverdlov.

BUKHARIN: That I admit.

VYSHINSKY: And they added that you were also preparing to assassinate them.

BUKHARIN: With this addition I absolutely do not agree; I categorically deny it. (509)

In many passages Bukharin vigorously denied having conspired to assassinate Lenin, or Lenin, Stalin and Sverdlov. This was one of the major charges against him, and one of which he was convicted despite his denials.

These denials are utterly inconsistent with Cohen’s unsupported claim that Bukharin confessed because his family had been threatened. In essence, Cohen wants it both ways. First, he would have it that Bukharin made only “sweeping confessions that he was ‘politically responsible’ for everything, thereby at once saving his family. . . .” Second, Cohen claimed that Bukharin was “flatly denying or subtly disproving his complicity in any actual crime” (376).

But if Bukharin confessed in order to “save his family,” then why did he stoutly fail to confess to so many of the serious crimes he was charged with? Why didn’t he just affirm everything? Gorbachev’s rehabilitation commission recognized this same dilemma and discussed it (*RKEB* 3, 39; 51; 55).

It may be replied that the plot to assassinate Lenin, Stalin and Sverdlov was not one of “the crimes of the bloc.” Perhaps it was only to those crimes that Bukharin felt he had to confess? But as we’ve already see, Bukharin denied responsibility for some of these same “crimes of the bloc” as well, such as the plot to kill Kirov and the connection with foreign intelligence services.

Had Bukharin falsely confessed to save his family, to spare himself torture, or for any other reason, why would he deny some of the most serious charges against him? Prosecutor Vyshinsky spent a great deal of time trying to prove Bukharin guilty of plotting Lenin's assassination, and Bukharin spent a great deal of effort denying this, all in open court. This fact alone is strong evidence that Bukharin's confessions – his admissions of guilt to certain crimes but not to others – were sincere.

Cohen quotes (380) a *New York Times* article in which reporter Harold Denny wrote that Bukharin was “. . . tremendously convincing . . . simply and intensely an earnest man completely unafraid but merely trying to get his story straight before the world.”

Cohen continues:

It should be noted, though it cannot be explained, that this same correspondent, Harold Denny, then wrote of the trials: “in the broad sense they are not fakes.”¹⁰⁸

It is not Denny's stance that is strange – it's Cohen's! Denny reported that Bukharin confessed to many crimes, and “his straight story” was that he was guilty of these crimes, though not of plotting to murder Lenin or involvement in the murders of “Gorky and others.” His description here is accurate.

To sum up: Bukharin did repeatedly confess to certain specific and very serious crimes. Meanwhile he steadfastly refused to confess to other crimes. Such behavior is incompatible with the assumption that Bukharin confessed because of threats to his family. Moreover, there never has been a shred of evidence that Bukharin's family was threatened in any way.

Cohen's affirmation that Bukharin “disclaimed” responsibility for any specific crime is nothing short of bizarre. It is directly contradicted by many very specific statements Bukharin made during the trial, some of which we have quoted above. As someone who had not simply read the trial transcript but had published his own edition of it, Cohen could not have “misread” these passages or been ignorant of them.

¹⁰⁸ *New York Times* March 14, 1938, p. 4; quoted at Cohen, p. 475 n. 203.

Was Bukharin's Final Plea "Falsified"?

Since the huge typescript of the preliminary text of the March 1938 trial was discovered in the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation, some scholars have claimed that the published version was "falsified" insofar as it reflects emendations and changes of this text.¹⁰⁹ This preliminary, much lengthier text has not been published.

But we do have an annotated edition of one part of it. We have the full version of Bukharin's Final Plea, showing additions, deletions, and changes. We can see that nothing of substance was changed. As one anticommunist scholar has put it,

Now these purely logical considerations can be considered to have been empirically proven thanks to the well-known difference between the genuine transcript and the transcript that was "corrected" by Stalin and was published in 1938. Stalin did in fact make changes but this at the same time proves that what Bukharin said came precisely from him and not from the NKVD. In addition, these changes are insignificant ones. Stalin's "corrections" did not change anything of substance.

By means of the "corrections" made by Stalin personally or at his direction by the judges Ul'rikh, Matulevich, and others, Stalin emphasizes his [Bukharin's] admissions and weakened his objections. The fundamental content remained the same as it had been before the "editors" began work on the text. Even before the involvement of Stalin and his flunkies there were fully enough confessions by Bukharin to declare him a serious criminal.

. . .

There is still another striking thing. "I also confess myself guilty of the preparation of a conspiracy, a "palace coup," in the preparation of a *coup d'état*," said Bukharin to the judge. The judges crossed out the words "in the preparation of a *coup d'état*." There was not only insufficient evidence of this but on the contrary this excision went against their primary political task. It would have been in their interest to cross out the term "palace coup," but not "*coup d'état*,"

¹⁰⁹ IU. G. Murin. "Kak fal'sifitsirovalos' delo Bukharina." *Novaia i Noveishaia Istoriiia*. 1 (1995), pp. 63 ff.; Wladislaw Hedeler, "Ezhov's Scenario for the Great Terror and the Falsified Record of the Third Moscow Show Trial." In McLoughlin, Barry, and Kevin McDermott, *Stalin's Terror. High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union*. New York: Palgrave – MacMillan, 2003, pp. 34-55. Despite the titles, neither article demonstrates any "falsification" of any importance.

since any comparison of the Soviet center of power with a “palace” was a crude provocation of official consciousness.¹¹⁰

Whatever the specific reasons for the changes made, nothing was imputed to Bukharin that he did not admit to, and at least one substantive admission he made was omitted, as Ignatov indicates. Stalin – or whoever was charged with editing the transcript – abbreviated it somewhat, but did not falsify it at all. Those like Iurii Murin and Wladislaw Hedeler who say it was falsified are – to put it politely – in error.

After the Trial

According to one account that circulated in Moscow, ‘Bukharin and Rykov died with curses against Stalin on their lips. And they died standing up – not groveling on the cellar floor and weeping for mercy like Zinov’ev and Kamenev. (Cohen 381)

We have no idea how Zinov’ev, Kamenev, Bukharin or Rykov acted at their executions. All this is utterly unfounded rumor. In any other field of study it would be recognized as such. As we have seen, such is the level of intellectual dishonesty within the field of Soviet history that the citation of such rumors as “evidence” is routine. And Cohen – or his Russian translator – tacitly acknowledges the unreliability of this rumor by omitting Zinov’ev’s and Kamenev’s names from the Russian translation at this point!

But now we do know something about the post-trial actions of Bukharin, Rykov, Zinov’ev and Kamenev. All of them filed appeals with the Soviet Supreme Court. Bukharin’s letter of appeal includes a renewed admission of guilt:

In my soul there is not a single word of protest. For my crimes it would be necessary to shoot me ten times over. A proletarian court has given its decision, one I earned by my criminal activity, and I am ready to bear my deserved

¹¹⁰ Ignatov, op.cit.

punishment and to die surrounded by the justified indignation, hatred and despite of the great, heroic people of the USSR, whom I so basely betrayed.¹¹¹

Bukharin composed *two* appeals: one a shorter letter, the other an essay four typewritten pages in length. In both of them he reiterates his guilt in the strongest terms. Rykov's, Zinov'ev's and Kamenev's appeals are simpler but also confirm their guilt.

These appeals present a serious problem for anyone who imagines that Bukharin or Rykov were really innocent. For will not a person who is innocent but has agreed to confess for some other reason – fear for his own life, fear for his family, of torture, etc. – at some point refer to the “agreement” that he has made? If he has confessed because he has been promised his life will be spared, his family unharmed, or no torture used, we should expect him to say: “I have carried out my part of the agreement. I have confessed to crimes I am not guilty of. Now it is your turn to carry out your part of the bargain.”

But we have nothing like that in either Bukharin's or Rykov's case. Instead they confirm their guilt and repentance, and humbly ask only for mercy. They did so in documents which were never intended to be made public, and where they could feel free to tell the truth or say whatever they wanted.

Evidence

The evidence we possess today is consistent with only one hypothesis: that Bukharin was, in fact, guilty of those crimes to which he himself confessed. However, some people will say that Bukharin might still have been innocent, or even that he must be innocent, despite this fact.

This is not very different from Cohen's position. Cohen assumes that Bukharin was innocent despite the fact that he had no evidence whatsoever that he was. There were rumors, and some unsubstantiated hints from the Khrushchev era. But despite Robert Conquest's view of hearsay and rumor as “the best, though not infallible, source” of evidence, in reality all historians know even then that such a statement would have been invalid – indeed, unimaginable – in any field save that of Soviet history.

¹¹¹ “A story of ten who were shot,” *Izvestiia* September 2, 1992, p. 3 col. 3. Photocopies of the originals are in the Volkogonov archive.

As a Soviet historical figure, Bukharin is particularly important in many ways. One of them is that we know a great deal more about his life after his arrest, during his imprisonment, than we do of any other defendant.

It is in principle impossible to prove that something did not happen. There can only be evidence of things that did happen. We have no evidence, or even indirect indication of any kind, that Bukharin's confessions were false, or given as a result of "torture" or threats. On the contrary: we know that Bukharin was imprisoned under conditions that made it possible for him to produce a large body of intellectual, historical, and literary work during the approximately one year of his imprisonment before trial.

We also know that, in addition to his confessions at his trial in March 1938, he produced at least four other confession-interrogations: one on June 2, 1937, which we have edited and examined, one on June 14, 1937 (cited in *RKEB* 2, 697, the "Shvernik Report" of 1964), and two in December, 1937, on the first and 25th, these last two cited by Vyshinskii at Bukharin's Trial. Bukharin made the last of these two weeks after his now-famous letter to Stalin of December 10, 1937 in which he claims that his previous confessions were not true.¹¹² If this last were publicly available (it has not been released), this confession would be important in assessing that letter. But we know that these documents exist, and that Bukharin confirmed them all at trial.

We also have another statement of Bukharin's dated February 20, 1938, shortly before the Trial. Though it is titled "confession" (*pokazaniia*), it consists mainly of Bukharin's denial, with clarification, of the charge that he had plotted to kill Lenin while at the same time fully confessing that he was in a conspiracy to arrest Lenin, Sverdlov, and Stalin, and effect a *coup d'état* (*gosudarstvennogo perevorota*). None of these have been officially released to researchers. All of these confessions are still secret in Russia, officially denied to any and all historians. The fact that one of them has been published (Furr and Bobrov) is due to its chance discovery rather than to any decision by Russian authorities, who still keep the original secret.

¹¹² For a discussion of this letter see Furr and Bobrov 2009.

Hypothesis, Evidence, and Paradigm

There is much more than this, though. Bukharin's guilt is consistent with a large and growing body of other materials related to the Moscow Trials that we now have. All of it is mutually reinforcing – that is, consistent with the actual existence of a set of interconnected conspiracies such as Soviet authorities alleged, and such as these individuals, of which Bukharin was only one, confessed to.

Moreover, in his June 2, 1937 confession and in his own testimony at the March 1938 Trial, Bukharin named virtually all the major defendants at the First and Second Moscow Trials, plus Tukhachevsky and the military conspirators tried and executed with him in June 1937, plus Trotsky, the chief indicted but absent defendant at all of the three Moscow Trials. Bukharin's guilt constitutes strong evidence against all of them.

According to the widely accepted “anti-Stalin paradigm” of Soviet history, Bukharin and all the rest of the Moscow Trial defendants were innocent. This is, in fact, a hypothesis, like its contrary: the hypothesis that the same defendants (or some of them, etc.) were guilty. One tacit hypothesis of this part of the “anti-Stalin paradigm” can be phrased as follows: “Bukharin was innocent.” Since it is generally impossible to prove a negative, we need to rephrase these contrary hypotheses positively.

Any attempt to prove Bukharin was innocent must confront the evidence that points to his guilt. We can rephrase the two hypotheses as follows:

- Hypothesis #1: Bukharin was guilty of at least those crimes to which he confessed.
- Hypothesis #2: All the evidence against Bukharin was fabricated by the NKVD – i.e., directly or indirectly by Stalin.

Concerning the first hypothesis, we have a great deal of evidence that Bukharin, and other Moscow Trials defendants, were guilty. This evidence begins with the confessions at the trials but does not stop there. Since the end of the USSR, a great deal of additional evidence has been made public.

What evidence exists to support the hypothesis that this evidence was fabricated? The answer is simple: We have no such evidence at all. No primary-source evidence

exists of any conspiracy or action by the NKVD, the Soviet prosecutor, or any person or institution, to fabricate or fake the evidence that Bukharin (or others) was guilty. No evidence against Bukharin, evidence that tends to prove his guilt, has been shown to have been fabricated.

All hypotheses must stand or fall on evidence. That is the basis of rationality in the discussion of historical questions. We are thus faced with the following problem:

How can it be that most researchers reject hypothesis #1, for which we have a great deal of evidence, and choose instead hypothesis #2, for which we have no evidence at all?

Anyone who would defend the hypothesis that Bukharin was innocent must contend that the evidence that points towards his guilt must have been fabricated. There is no evidence of fabrication. Put another way: Hypothesis #2 is not supported by any evidence. Yet this hypothesis remains the dominant, “orthodox” or “mainstream,” position. Meanwhile we have a great deal of evidence in support of the contrary hypothesis: that Bukharin was guilty of, at least, those crimes to which he confessed at trial.

How can we account for the fact that most scholars reject the hypothesis for which there is a great deal of evidence, and choose instead the hypothesis for which we have no evidence at all? How can most scholars choose to accept as valid a hypothesis that cannot be supported rationally – that is, with evidence? Lack of objectivity, political preconceptions, prejudices, bias: These explain why some people cling to the hypothesis that has no evidence to support it – that Bukharin (and other Moscow Trial defendants) was innocent – rather than the hypothesis that has a lot of evidence to support it – that Bukharin was guilty.

This essay is concerned with what we are calling the “anti-Stalin” paradigm of Soviet high politics in the 1930s. We have examined Cohen’s treatment of Bukharin in the 1930s as a representative work, a sort of synecdoche of the entire “anti-Stalin” paradigm. We have seen that insofar as this paradigm is represented by Cohen’s book, it falls. There is no evidence to support it.

The problem with what we call here the “anti-Stalin” paradigm, as with all paradigms, is as follows: What happens when a critical amount of evidence has been discovered that puts the entire former paradigm into question? What happens when there is a huge amount of evidence in that supports a different paradigm?

Concerning the Moscow Trials and Bukharin specifically, the “anti-Stalin,” or “Trotsky-Khrushchev-Cold War-Gorbachev-post-Soviet,” paradigm holds that all the defendants were innocent of the charges to which they confessed. Explanations differ over how they came to confess to crimes they never committed. But the paradigm itself will not permit a conclusion that they were all guilty. However, there is virtually no evidence to sustain the conclusion essential to the paradigm that the defendants, Bukharin included, were innocent.

Researchers devoted to the old paradigm, therefore, are faced with a serious dilemma. On the one hand, they continue to insist that the “anti-Stalin” paradigm is correct. They might try to explain the fact that evidence to support this paradigm has not yet been found by offering a further hypothesis that such evidence will eventually be found. A more desperate version of this further hypothesis would be that such evidence did exist at one time but was destroyed on Stalin’s orders in the past – destroyed so efficiently that no trace of the evidence nor of its destruction remains.

Either of these assumptions “saves” the paradigm, but at a cost. Evidence cannot be foregone forever. The more researchers have recourse to such assumptions, the less scientific – that is to say, rational – their conclusions appear.

The objective researcher will concede that there is another possibility: that the “anti-Stalin” paradigm is incorrect. It should be an easy choice. After all, it is not even a matter of determining which paradigm is supported by the preponderance of the available evidence. All the evidence we now have concerning the Moscow Trials is consistent with this hypothesis. Therefore, any objective student will come to that conclusion.

What, therefore, prevents researchers from accepting it? Doubtless such considerations as the following:

- “Bukharin’s innocence” is a constituent part of “the Moscow Trials as frameup” hypothesis. This in turn is a central feature of the larger “anti-Stalin” paradigm.

This paradigm cannot accommodate the hypothesis that Bukharin and the Moscow Trial defendants were guilty. Confirmation of this hypothesis by the evidence dismantles the “anti-Stalin” paradigm.

- The “anti-Stalin” paradigm has been central to the field of Soviet history since at least Khrushchev’s Secret Speech of February 1956. Its predecessor, the “Trotskyist” paradigm with which it is compatible and, in many essential respects, identical, dates back to the late 1920s.

Therefore, to abandon this paradigm means to reject several generations of scholarship on the Moscow Trials. More than that: it suggests that Soviet history of the Stalin period has to be thoroughly recast. This in turn would have serious implications for all mainstream interpretations of much of the history of the 20th century. Therefore those who embrace the “anti-Stalin” paradigm have a high degree of commitment to it.

This commitment is ideological; it transcends – indeed, is incompatible with – rationality. This ideological commitment extends to the component parts of the larger “anti-Stalin” paradigm, which is constituted by these parts. These commitments too are ideological and override the scholars’ commitment to rational argument.

We have briefly examined one such ideological component of the overall paradigm. That is Oleg Khlevniuk’s dogmatic insistence, in defiance of all existing evidence, that Sergo Ordzhonikidze committed suicide on February 17, 1937 because of some kind of opposition to Stalin. Khlevniuk’s commitment to the fictional “Ordzhonikidze suicide-protest” story is important for Khlevniuk’s own credibility. He has written about it so many times for so many years that to concede its purely ideological nature now might cause many to doubt all Khlevniuk’s other publications. We might wonder: How many more of Khlevniuk’s many works are also pseudo-scholarship? But however desperately Khlevniuk may cling to this fiction, the tale of Ordzhonikidze’s suicide in protest against Stalin is not critical for the “anti-Stalin” paradigm as a whole.

In contrast the sub-paradigm of the Moscow Trials – the premise that the defendants were innocent and thus were “framed” – is an essential component of the larger “anti-Stalin” paradigm. This sub-paradigm entails the dogmatic affirmation of Bukharin’s innocence. We now have a great deal of information about Bukharin. None of

it is consistent with the “anti-Stalin” paradigm. All of it is consistent only with the paradigm that Bukharin was guilty of what he confessed to. But Bukharin’s confessions and testimony implicate all the major defendants at the previous two Moscow Trials, plus the military leaders in the so-called “Tukhachevsky affair,” plus Trotsky, defendant *in absentia* in all the Moscow trials.

Therefore, to concede what the evidence suggests – that Bukharin was guilty of at least what he confessed to – means abandoning the whole “anti-Stalin” paradigm. In turn this would mean that the history of the Soviet Union during the crucial decade of the 1930s must be completely recast.

A Better Paradigm for the 1930s

The following paragraphs briefly outline a paradigm of Soviet political history of the 1930s that fits the available evidence.

During the 1930s the Soviet leadership was faced with a series of conspiracies at the highest levels of state, party, and military leadership. These conspiracies encompassed an undetermined number of conspiratorial groups all over the country. They involved assassinations, or “terror,” widespread sabotage, and espionage for and collaboration with hostile foreign states.

No police or military – no government – can possibly be prepared in advance to deal with such a catastrophic event, one that poses an immediate threat to the existence of the state itself. Widespread treason on the highest level is far beyond the ability of any government to handle in its normal bureaucratic, constitutional, manner. Confronted even with much lesser but still grave challenges, any government whether capitalist or socialist would react swiftly and with great force. Given this context large-scale inaccuracies – condemnation of innocent people, as well as passing over some of the guilty – are predictable, even inevitable.

So the mass repression was, in part, a reaction to a huge perceived threat. But it was much more than that as well. We now know that Ezhov, head of the NKVD, and a number of the First Secretaries used the understandable panic over the high-level conspiracies just discovered to repress many thousands of persons who had nothing to do with any such conspiracies. IUrii Zhukov and others have suggested that these were

persons who, in the event of contested elections under the new 1936 Constitution, would not have voted for Party candidates.

We also have evidence that Ezhov and his top NKVD men framed, through torture and intimidation, a great many people, including Party members, into confessing that they were participants in the anti-Soviet conspiracies when they were not. Ezhov and his right-hand man Frinovsky later admitted that they did this to cover up the fact that they were planning their own *coup d'état*, again in concert with other opposition groups and with Germany and Japan.

At this time Stalin and top leaders associated with him were pushing for a representative Soviet democracy, with universal, secret, equal, and – the crucial point – contested elections. Many Party leaders feared such elections and, in the political struggle that ensued, they were able to defeat Stalin's initiatives. Efforts to promote this program of Soviet democracy, spearheaded by Stalin, were attempted at least several more times: in the late war period; in 1947; and at the Nineteenth Party Congress of October 1952. After Stalin's death, Lavrentii Beria paid at least lip service to the same ideal: getting the Party out of governing the country, which was to be turned over to the Soviets. Once Khrushchev, abetted by the other Presidium members, ousted and then killed Beria, this push for Soviet democracy was never heard of again.

We began to outline this new paradigm in 2005, drawing heavily upon the pioneering research of Arch Getty and IUrii Zhukov.¹¹³ But the immediate question before us in this essay is not what a new paradigm of Soviet history in the Stalin period might be. Rather, it is the unwillingness of anticommunist scholarship to abandon the old “anti-Stalin” paradigm. The ideology of the Cold War and the legitimacy of the post-Soviet states of the former USSR and Eastern Europe are all founded, to a great extent, upon the “anti-Stalin” paradigm, even upon its extreme version, the equation of the USSR with Nazi Germany and of Stalin with Hitler. Abandoning this paradigm would go far to delegitimize them.

¹¹³ Grover Furr, “Stalin and the Struggle for Democratic Reform,” *Cultural Logic* 2005. Part One: <<http://clogic.eserver.org/2005/furr.html>>; Part Two: <<http://clogic.eserver.org/2005/furr2.html>>.

Evidence, once more

Established paradigms, whether in science or history, do not fall by themselves. In the final analysis, they fall when the weight of the evidence which they cannot accommodate becomes so great that researchers begin to abandon the old paradigm for one or more others that can accommodate the evidence. Often these are younger or newer scholars, those with fewer commitments to the old paradigm or with the boldness to challenge it directly. Eventually the force of the evidence is ineluctable. Sooner or later it wins out. The old paradigm is gradually abandoned, and the new one takes its place.

In the meantime it is legitimate to ask of those who refuse to question the old paradigm of Bukharin's innocence questions such as these: What evidence would you (a) reasonably expect to exist, and (b) accept as convincing evidence of Bukharin's guilt in those crimes to which he confessed – briefly, of his participation in a wide-flung conspiracy?

The question of “evidence” is important because it goes to the rational nature of one's conclusions. If no conceivable evidence could ever convince one that – say – a conspiracy existed, then one's preconceived ideas are “fixed,” unchangeable. That is, if no evidence *from among the kinds of evidence that might reasonably be expected to exist* could convince one that he is mistaken, then his opinion is prejudice rather than a judgment rationally held.

This latter is no simple question. Conspiracies of the kind alleged here, in the Moscow Trials, and elsewhere, are hardly likely to be formally written down and inserted into archives. This is especially so in the case of the – alleged, once again – Bukharin, or Trotsky (or, Tukhachevsky et al.) collaboration with the Germans, because it was allegedly not a conspiracy directly with representatives of Hitler or the German government but with the German General Staff, which in 1937 was still led by men who did not see eye to eye with Hitler and who worked behind his back in many ways.

Those who refuse to question, let alone abandon, the “anti-Stalin” paradigm, avoid the issue of evidence in one of a number of ways. For instance, they may assert that:

- “We know the NKVD did, in fact, torture many people to force them to agree to false confessions concocted by the investigators. Therefore, NO confessions of ANY defendants in political cases can EVER be believed.”

One of the present authors has been told this, in one form or another, by three historians of the Stalin period whose works we generally respect. It's worthwhile, therefore, to spend some time on this reasoning.

The statement reduces history to “belief.” What happened to the rational basis for drawing historical, or scientific, conclusions based upon the preponderance of the available evidence in a given case? The issue of “belief” here goes not to evidence, but past the evidence to the paradigm, which is to be held through “belief.” That is, “belief” is a statement, not about the matter at hand, but about the state of mind of the person doing the “believing.”

The subject of “torture” has been treated, by those who adhere to the “anti-Stalin” paradigm, as an incantation, a magic spell employed to exorcize or dismiss the spectre of evidence. It is still deployed even when, as is usually the case, there is no evidence that torture was used in a specific case to force a specific defendant to confess, for how can we know for certain that the defendant was not tortured? How can we know that he did not confess out of fear that he, or his family, might be tortured?

On the strength of this supposed “logic” all incriminating statements, by all defendants, can be simply dismissed. They count for nothing, need not be taken into account at all! It then swiftly follows that the defendants were innocent, for once the confessions of all defendants are wished away, there is little evidence whatsoever against any of them. And who can assert that a person was guilty of a crime when no evidence against them exists?

Of course, in some cases there is documentary evidence. We have cited Getty's and Broué's studies of some documents in Trotsky's correspondence that prove a “bloc of Rights and Trotskyites” did, in fact, exist even though Gorbachev-era “rehabilitators” declared that there was no such bloc. We have the memoir of Bukharin's friend, Swiss communist Jules Humbert-Droz, stating from the safety of Western Europe and more

than five decades later that Bukharin was advocating Stalin's assassination already in 1928.

Despite the fact that the investigative materials for all the Moscow Trials, plus those of the Tukhachevsky Affair, are still top-secret and have never been made available to researchers, we have a bit more evidence that has slipped out. Furthermore, it is “material evidence.”

- We have Iona Iakir's letter to Stalin of June 9, 1937, in which the military commander confesses his guilt of treason. No researcher has been permitted to actually see this letter – but it was reprinted in a Khrushchev-era study published in the early '90s.¹¹⁴
- We have the “Arao telegram,” published in the same Khrushchev-era study. It documents contact between a representative of Tukhachevsky and the Japanese military.¹¹⁵
- We have further evidence against Tukhachevsky & Co. in documentation from the prewar Czech government that Hitler was awaiting a military coup against the Stalin government, and had informed the Czech ambassador of this fact.¹¹⁶

The two most recent and supposedly authoritative books on Tukhachevsky do not even mention any of these documents.¹¹⁷ Nor does any other study of the Soviet 1930s. It cannot be the case that all these researchers are ignorant of them. This evidence is ignored because it contradicts the paradigm.

Some scholars – the term deserves scare quotes here – resort to fabricating phony “evidence” in an attempt to “save” the paradigm. One example is in Robert Service's recent biography of Stalin, in which we find the following statement:

¹¹⁴ “Spravka o proverke obvineniy . . .” *Voенно-Istoricheskii Arkhiv*. Vypusk 1. Moscow, 1994, p. 194; also *Reabilitatsiia. Kak Eto Bylo. Fevral' 1956 – nachalo 80-kh godov*. Ed. Artizov, A. et al. Moscow: MDF, Izdatel'stvo “Materik”, 2003, p. 688. Henceforth RKEB 2.

¹¹⁵ “Tragediia RKKA. M.N. Tukhachevskii i ‘Voенно-Fashistskii Zagovor.’” *Voенно-Istoricheskii Arkhiv*. Vypusk 2. Moscow, 1997, pp. 39-40. Also in RKEB 2, p. 753.

¹¹⁶ Igor Lukes, *Czechoslovakia Between Stalin and Hitler: The Diplomacy of Edvard Benes in the 1930s*. London: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 96-98.

¹¹⁷ Iulia Z. Kantor. *Voina i Mir Mikhaila Tukhachevskogo*. Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom ‘Ogoniok’, ‘Vremia’, 2005.; and idem, *Zakliataia druzhba. Sekretnoe sotrudnichestvo SSSR i Germanii v 1920-1930-e gody*. SPb: “Piter,” 2009.

Tukhachevski was shot on 11 June; he had signed a confession with a bloodstained hand after a horrific beating. (Service 349)

In plain language, this is simply a falsification. A few small brown stains do appear on one copy of one of Tukhachevsky's confession statements. Kantor, who had access to Tukhachevsky investigative files, reproduces it here¹¹⁸ in one of her articles in *Izvestiia.ru*. Khrushchev-era researchers claimed it is blood. If it is – this has never been verified – we have no idea whose blood it may be. It could be that of the typist or the interrogator. Perhaps someone – Tukhachevsky or someone else – pricked his finger?

It is even possible that the Khrushchev-era researchers put them there. They knew their job was not to find the truth, but to find evidence to support Khrushchev's rehabilitation of Tukhachevsky & Co, which had already taken place, before the study was done! The stains are not shaped in any way like a fingerprint. Nor are they associated with the signature. But Service doesn't mention the nature of the stains on the paper. He says "bloodstained hand" and "horrific beating." A regular beating won't do; it must be "horrific." Otherwise Stalin will not appear "horrific" himself.

Moreover, Service's claim is a fine example of circular reasoning. A small bloodstain (if that is what it is) is assumed to be evidence that Tukhachevsky was tortured. Then the hypothesis that he was tortured is deployed to explain the bloodstain! Then it can be asserted that Tukhachevsky was innocent even though we are in possession of multiple confessions by him and many others who implicate him and whom he implicates. At this stage of the false reasoning evidence has become otiose – it is simply regarded as unnecessary.

In short: we now have lots of evidence concerning these events. All of it is mutually reinforcing. All of it is consistent with the guilt of the defendants at the Moscow Trials and, incidentally, of Trotsky's guilt too. But it is ignored, or conjured away by the magic word "torture."

Because this notion of "torture" has paralyzed rationality for so long, a few more considerations about it are in order here.

¹¹⁸ <<http://images.izvestia.ru/lenta/35492.jpg>>. In case this image disappears we have put a copy online at <http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/Tukh_confess_with_blood.jpg>.

- That the fact that some persons were tortured, somewhere and at some time, does not mean that everyone was tortured everywhere and at all times.
- Persons who have been tortured can be guilty as well as innocent; can either confess, or refuse to confess.

Once again, to claim that someone might have been tortured even when we have no evidence that he was, and much evidence that he was not, and then to use that as a reason to reject his confession, implies that no possible evidence is acceptable. This is contrary to reason.

There is no rational basis for assuming that Bukharin was not guilty of what he confessed to. But, for those who hold to the “anti-Stalin” paradigm, this is a “slippery slope” – because there is likewise no rational basis for assuming the other figures in the Moscow Trials, plus the Tukhachevsky Affair defendants, were not guilty of what they confessed to either.

Even if we set aside the issue of whether other defendants might, or might not, have been tortured – Bukharin implicates virtually all of them! If Bukharin’s confessions of guilt were to be accepted as valid, then all the other defendants are then implicated as guilty regardless of whether they were tortured, mistreated, threatened, etc., or not.

For these reasons, those who refuse to seriously question the “anti-Stalin” paradigm are compelled to reject the evidence that Bukharin was guilty. But this means they must abandon a rational approach to historical research. If the “anti-Stalin” paradigm and all that depends on it is to be preserved, the possibility that Bukharin may have been guilty cannot be admitted, regardless of what evidence there is and how it should be read. Simply put, there is *no* evidence that “believers” in this paradigm would accept.

Conclusions

What does this mean for those who want to know the truth? It means that we can move beyond the simplistic “anti-Stalin” paradigm and can now turn in a serious way to studying the history of the USSR, its successes and failures. Whatever precise forms the descent of the Opposition into murder, terrorism, and collaboration with German and

Japanese fascism took, we now know enough about it to know that none of the Opposition conspiracies, whether “Rights,” “Trotskyites,” “Zinovievites,” Military conspirators, or others, offered principled, positive alternative to the policies represented by Stalin and his supporters.

We also know that the USSR in the '30s cannot be reduced to “terror.” The state violence that held sway for a terrible 18 months in 1937-38 represented a panicked reaction to a serious conspiracy – a panic that was hugely exacerbated by Ezhov’s plan to kill as many innocent people as possible in order to maximize discontent with the Soviet regime.¹¹⁹ If successful, the anti-Stalin conspirators meant to strengthen Japanese and German fascism to the point where they might well have won World War II.

There was a real, broad, and extremely dangerous conspiracy against the Soviet government. Drastic measures to counter it were essential, and many measures were taken. Those measures that were taken need to be evaluated, critically to be sure, and mined for lessons positive and negative. But this must be done against this proper historical context, a situation which constituted an existential crisis for the Soviet Union, and thus for the communist movement as a whole.

The investigative and punitive arms of the state, hijacked by Ezhov who himself was conspiring with Germany, killed and imprisoned hundreds of thousands of innocent people. Other scholars have written about the hasty convictions without right of appeal which doomed so many of the accused. Such a procedure was expressly employed by Ezhov, abetted by some Party First Secretaries and others, to commit mass murder. By the time that the Soviet Party and government leadership, headed by Stalin, had come to recognize this, however, it was too late for many victims. A large number of NKVD men who had tortured or otherwise trumped up cases against defendants were themselves tried and imprisoned or executed.

Paradigm Shift

The Khrushchev version of Soviet history in Stalin’s time and its Trotskyist cousin provided the basis for Cold-War anti-communism for the past half century. They have been continued and extended by Gorbachev and post-Gorbachev anticommunist

¹¹⁹ See references at note 27 above.

scholarship. All are exploded, destroyed by the evidence now available. It will take time for this fact to gain widespread recognition.

A great deal of resistance to it still exists among strongly anti-communist scholars. The demonization of the USSR, the world's first sustained experiment in working-class rule, is far too useful to communism's opponents. It is also essential in a somewhat different way for Trotskyists, for whom the preservation of their "cult" around Leon Trotsky has long since supplanted any desire to learn the truth about Soviet history.

In Russia itself, the historiography of the Soviet Union is sharply divided between those who share the demonized version of Soviet history under Stalin, and those who, rejecting it, are struggling towards new paradigms. Of course it helps those researchers who reject the Cold War paradigm that millions in Russia look back with respect and enthusiasm to the Stalin years, when, with all its weaknesses and failures, the USSR accomplished world-shaking things.

Aside from the stream of new documentary evidence, a further stimulus to rejection of the old paradigms in Russia is the fact that the proponents of the anti-Stalin paradigm continue to serve the interests of the elite – the former Party nomenklatura who are still in political and economic control in the former Soviet countries. They justified their "perestroika," the "restructuring" which privatized the collectively produced Soviet industries, bankrupted those with savings, and catastrophically reduced the living standards of the working population, by denigrating the Stalin years, just as Khrushchev and his cronies had done.

People everywhere who are concerned to learn the truth about Soviet history need to look back with new eyes – and a new sense of respect – to those who dared, the Bolsheviks and their magnificent though ultimately failed experiment in constructing a society free from capitalist exploitation. That can only be done by rejecting the anti-communist, anti-Stalinist lies and distortions whether from the right or the Trotskyist left. We have to work hard to study the lessons of the Soviet experiment, warts and all, but without the blinders of a false paradigm that ultimately dooms us to regard capitalist exploitation as eternal and beneficent.

We have to turn back to those who, little regarded today, began this task, primarily the Chinese Communist Party, during the “Sino-Soviet dispute” of the late 1950s and early 1960s, and those who, like Charles Bettelheim and others, reacting against the post-Mao rejection of socialism in China, struggled to develop an anti-revisionist, Marxist understanding of how and why the Comintern failed.

There are many, many more documents still in secret archives in the former USSR that will gradually see the light of day. We should face these disclosures with confidence. The explosion of the old anti-Stalinist paradigm can only encourage us in that task.