

30, 1937, he stated that in 1937 more than 12,000 people were arrested, of which 7,374 (5,236 people by the Troika) were convicted at the end of October 1937. In this report, complaining about overcrowding of prisons, Beria asked Stalin to resolve the issue with an acceleration of the process of repression and to delegate functions of the court of military collegiums to the local authorities (to the Troika or the Supreme Court of Georgian SSR)²².

It seems that Beria had taken into account lessons of the May Congress, and proved in the first order to Stalin his readiness to deal ruthlessly with his enemies, and to strictly abide by the orders of the senior management. Beria and his team (Goglidze, Kobulov, Mamulov, Tsereteli, Rapava and others) exceeded the plan for the “Great Terror.” They fought their way to the top and in this way, combined the interests of Moscow with their personal interests.

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22 Appendix to the Archival Bulletin no. 3, Fall 2008—Correspondence Between L. Beria and J. Stalin (1937). The Journal of Archive Administration of MOIA.

Repressions in 1930s Soviet Armenia

By Eduard Melkonian, Yerevan

Abstract

One of the characteristics of Soviet history is the mass political repression that began in Russia in 1917 when the Bolsheviks came to power. Soviet power was established in Armenia at the end of 1920 following the collapse of the First Republic of Armenia (May 1918–November 1920). Where goals and implementation methods are concerned, Armenia’s repressions were generally conducted in accordance with standards developed and tested in Moscow.

Three Waves of Repressions

Armenak Manukian, author of the first studies examining the history of repression in Soviet Armenia during the prewar years, identifies three basic stages in their development. The first wave of repressions took place in 1921–1922. At that time, 1,400 former officers who served during the First Republic, were arrested and deported to Ryazan, among them prominent generals like Tovmas Nazarbekov and Movses Silikov. The second wave took place in 1929–1933 during the process of forced collectivization: 5,615 people were repressed, mostly rural inhabitants, of whom 104 were sentenced to death. The beginning of the next mass campaign of repression is associated with the name of a famous political figure from those years, the director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Communist Party of Armenia, Nersik Stepanian, who was arrested in May 1936 on charges of counterrevolutionary nationalist-Trotskyite activity. This arrest marked a turning point: up to that

moment, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia Aghassi Khanjian had been able to resist the demands of the Transcaucasian Regional Committee of the Communist Party (Zakkraykom), led since October 1932 by Lavrentiy Beria, to persecute intellectuals and political elite. A month later, on July 9, 1936 in Tbilisi at a meeting of the Bureau of the Zakkraykom it was Khanjian’s turn to be criticized for nationalism on the grounds that he did not fight against right-Trotskyite forces and protected N. Stepanian. On the same day, according to the official version, he committed suicide; but according to the rumor that was later confirmed by Nikita Khrushchev to the Twentieth Party Congress, Khanjian was shot either by Beria himself or by Beria’s henchman.

In terms of goals and methods, Beria’s policies as the first secretary of the Zakkraykom precisely copied Stalin’s policies that were implemented throughout the Soviet Union. In asserting his personal and abso-

lute power, he used all possible means to discredit and destroy all inconvenient state and party leaders in the three Transcaucasian republics. In order to increase his influence in Armenia, Beria skillfully took advantage of the Armenians who received his protection and were employed by the Transcaucasian Federation in Tbilisi. Beria occasionally moved them in small groups to Armenia, where as trusted subordinates, he employed them in senior government and party posts. Well-known figures from Beria's so-called "Tiflis" cadres included Communist Party of Armenia Central Committee secretaries Amatoun Amatouni and Stepan Akopov; People's Commissar of Internal Affairs Khachik Moughdousi, his deputies Ivan Gevorkov and Georgi Tsaturov. A. Amatuni became first secretary of the Central Committee of Communist Party of Armenia.

Whether by design or coincidence remains unclear, but twenty days after the assassination of Khanjian, a new campaign of repressions was announced. On July 29, 1936, the Central Committee of the Communist Party sent all republican and other major party organizations a "Closed letter describing the terrorist activities of the Trotsky-Zinoviev counter-revolutionary block"; the letter listed the "crimes" of the group and demanded efforts to strengthen the fight against any kind of anti-Soviet elements in order to identify hidden enemies in state and party bodies. The new Armenian government reacted immediately. An "Informational Letter" addressed to the Head of the Department of the Leading Party Organs of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) Georgi Malenkov and the Zakkraykom Secretary of Sergey Kudryavtsev explained in detail the work done to identify the "enemies" in Armenia, even listing the ones who had been defeated. Yet this letter did not impress its intended audience since it listed only three senior officials—the above mentioned A. Stepanian, Drastamat Ter-Simonian (the Head of the Department for Arts at the Council of People's Commissars) and Aghassi Galoyan (the Secretary of the Party Collegium of the Supervisory Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia). The main problem was the fact that no enemy groups, units, centers or similar structures had been identified in Armenia.

So the new government of Armenia, guided by the leadership of the Zakkraykom, began to create a fictitious organization to satisfy their superiors. Acting efficiently, they primarily used individuals who had already been arrested, extracting from them testimony about the members and activities of nonexistent groups. Simultaneously, in the middle of 1936, mass arrests began among various social strata, principally targeting government and political figures and intellectuals. This method of identifying "enemies" made it possible to

quickly "reveal" a "Trotskyite-nationalist" group, whose members were N. Stepanian, Sahak Ter-Gabrielian (former chairman of the Council of People's Commissars), Arsen Yesayan and Danoush Shahverdian (Chairmen of the Relief Committee of Armenia, called HOK in Armenian), Aramayis Yertzinkian (former People's Commissar of Agriculture), and Artavazd Yeghiazarian (former People's Commissar of Education), among others. These people were selected for a reason. As committed communists, prominent statesmen and party leaders, they had served as protectors of the national interests of Armenia and the Armenian people. The political goals and means of implementation adopted by Stalin in the Soviet Union and Beria in the Transcaucasus were unacceptable to them. Naturally, they were the first to fall victim to the political terror. In the following months virtually all of the party-state elite of the republic was repressed, in particular, in various years, the secretaries of the Communist Party Gevork Alikhanian (father of the prominent human rights defender Elena Bonner), Haikaz Kostanian, Sarkis Lukashin (Srapionian), the Chairmen of the Council of People's Commissars and Central Executive Committee Moushegh Danielyan, Sarkis Kassian, Sergo Martikian, People's Commissars Stepanian, Vahan Yeremian, Garegin Goumedin (Melik-Dadayan), and many others, almost all of whom were shot.

Attacking Ties to the Diaspora

It is worthwhile to note that an important part of the standard accusation of nationalism in Armenia was cooperation with the "anti-Soviet" organizations of the Armenian Diaspora, even though this co-operation was sanctioned by the Soviet authorities; and moreover, in the case of the Relief Committee of Armenia (HOK), even initiated by them. Beginning from 1921, HOK branches in various countries provided various forms of assistance to Soviet Armenians, including about 300,000 refugees who escaped the 1915 Armenian genocide in Turkey. The second channel of communication between Soviet Armenia and the Diaspora had become the large charitable organization founded in Cairo in 1906, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU). A cooperation agreement with the AGBU was concluded in late 1923, and in subsequent years it carried out a number of major programs in the fields of health, education and culture. Both these organizations, with the consent of the Armenian authorities, also took active part in organizing mass immigration into the country in 1921–1936, bringing more than 40,000 Armenian exiles from various countries in Asia and Europe. In this new phase of eliminating their real or imaginary political opponents, the authorities began to consider any connections with the Arme-

nian Diaspora, irrespective of form and content, as a political crime.

In June 1937 the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs Mugdusi in a memo to the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia Amatuni writes about Ter-Gabrielian: "In 1931 S. M. Ter-Gabrielian together with Erzinkian, Yesayan, Ter-Simonian, and others established an anti-Soviet, Armenian nationalist-Trotskyite Center. The Center and the core of leadership include 14 people, among them 10 former members of the Communist Party of Armenia". According to Mugdusi, the anti-Soviet activities of the Center were carried out as follows: "anti-Soviet, nationalist work in foreign Armenian colonies; connections with the capitalists and the bourgeois parties of the Ramkavars and Dashnaks; collecting funds through them for Armenia in exchange for adopting policy positions that were identical to those of these parties, the disorientation of Armenians workers abroad, drowning out their fight against a local national bourgeoisie, squashing the struggle against the Dashnaks inside the country, stopping the fight against Ramkavar here and abroad, declaring them to be friends of the Armenian people".

However, the case of Ter-Gabrielian took a completely unexpected turn for its instigators Amatuni, Mugdusi and their "godfather" Beria. Arrested in Moscow and delivered to Armenia in August 1937, during his interrogation Ter-Gabrielian either jumped or was thrown from the window of the second floor of the NKVD. Whether it was suicide or murder, in the light of subsequent events, it is important that the local government decided not to inform Moscow about it. Of course, Stalin soon learned about the incident and on September 8 sent a letter to Malenkov and A. Mikoyan. With his usual skill, Stalin plays on the absurd miscalculation of the Armenian leaders: "It's hard to imagine that Ter-Gabrielian jumped out of the window, it is totally incompatible with his timid and pragmatic mind. Most likely he was thrown out to shut his mouth so that he could not expose the enemies of Soviet power. Oddly enough, the Armenian leadership has not informed the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR or the Communist Party. Apparently, they wanted to hide this glaring fact and naively assumed that it would be possible to hide it". And the most important part – "The Central Committee of the Communist Party and Council of People's Commissars cannot allow patrons of the enemies of the Armenian people to hide from the people the failure of the leadership and in order to hide these failures – to sell the murder of the enemy of the nation as a 'suicide'". Such a clever interpretation of the incident made the enemy of the people not only Ter-Gabrielian, but the existing leaders of the republic, including those who

with such zeal previously carried out the repressions of their party colleagues. The first two names were written by Stalin himself, in a letter announcing the arrest of the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs Mougdousi and Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars Abraham Gouloyan. At a plenary Session of the Communist Party of Armenia that included the participation of Mikoyan, Malenkov and Beria, a discussion of Stalin's letter led to the expulsion from the party of the Central Committee secretaries Amatuni and Akopov, as well as a number of party and government officials; they immediately found themselves in the prison of the NKVD – no one needed them any longer.

In Yerevan, the trials were held along scenarios developed during the Moscow trials – the former leaders of the Soviet Union were accused of collaborating with the secret services of foreign countries, with the only difference being that in the Armenian version intelligence services were replaced with the political parties Dashnaktsutyun and Ramkavar Azatakan active in the Armenian Diaspora. With this very purpose, the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs invented the myth that the overseas center of the Dashnak-Ramkavar parties supposedly cooperated with the Trotskyite-nationalist center in Armenia. Now, all that was required was to exert the right testimony from the accused. Under torture, the defendants supplied more and more "information" about the anti-Soviet activities of Armenian Diaspora organizations. On November 13, 1937, at a regular meeting of the Bureau of the Communist Party of Armenia, a resolution was adopted to shut down the Armenian branches of the HOK and the AGBU, which led to the cessation of all contacts with the Armenian Diaspora. By that time, the chairmen of HOK during all previous years, including Grigor Vardanian, Shahverdian, Yesayan, Aram Manoucharian, as well as an AGBU representative in Armenia Haikaz Karagheusian had already been arrested and shot.

Going After the Intellectuals

As is known, the victims of the 1930s repressions were intellectuals as well as political figures. One of the worst blows was dealt to Armenian literature and science: victims included poets and writers Yeghishe Charents, Axel Bakounts, Zabel Yessayan, Vahan Totovents; professors Poghos Makintsian, Tigran Djr bashian, Hovhannes Hagopian, Tatevos Avdalbekian. In 1939 as a result of the so-called "professors' case," Karo Melik-Ohandjanian, Hovhannes Navakatikian, Levon Rotinian and Ashot Hovhannissian were sentenced to various jail terms and Papa Kalantarian was shot.

Communist ideology's rejection of religion led to the constant persecution of priests across the coun-

try, including within Soviet Armenia. And if at first the authorities only confiscated church property and arrested priests from rural areas, starting in 1937 they began repressing the top leadership of the Armenian Apostolic Church with its Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin. In the 1930–1940s, more than 160 priests were arrested, including seven from the Armenian Catholic Church and one from the Armenian Protestant church; 91 of them were shot. According to some reports, in 1938 the head of the Armenian Church, Catholicos of All Armenians Khoren I Mouradbekian was strangled by the secret agents of the NKVD.

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1937: “Great Terror” in Azerbaijan

By Eldar Ismailov, Baku

Abstract

This article describes the “Great Terror” in Azerbaijan. It began with Beria’s order and proceeded to kill thousands of individuals. There is ample evidence of the brutal methods used to kill and torture innocent people. Posterity will remember these events for the crimes that they were.

The Significance of the Terror

The phenomenon of “1937” is one of the most horrible pages in Soviet history. Chronologically, it is broader than its one-year dimension. The mass repressions associated with “1937” encompass more than two years—from summer 1936 to autumn 1938. It is understandable that this period has a particular place in the history and in the historical memories of the peoples of the former Soviet republics. In this relatively short historical period of time, the Soviet totalitarian system systematically used the methods of state terror in order to achieve its goals and objectives, going even farther than before in openly violating the rights of its citizens, including their personal security. This was a period of outright lawlessness, which led to heavy casualties and

According to Manukian, a total of 14,904 individuals fell victim to the purges in 1930–1938 in Soviet Armenia, 8,837 of them in 1937–1938. Out of the 4,639 people who were executed, the vast majority (4,530) were shot in 1937–1938. Only one person was shot in 1936. This brutal repression campaign waged by Stalin and later called the “Great Terror of 1937–1938,” resulted in the death of the young elite and has largely predetermined the country’s future history.

the denial of rights and freedoms to the great mass of people. These events are properly called “The Great Terror.”

Azerbaijan has not yet attempted a comprehensive study of this phenomenon. Meanwhile, a study of this topic could provide a better understanding of the origins of many contemporary national problems and contribute to the elimination of many obstacles that stand in the way of historical progress for the independent state of Azerbaijan and its people, the Azerbaijani nation.

Beginnings

In Azerbaijan, as throughout the entire South Caucasus, the signal for the beginning of the “Great Terror” was an article written by Lavrentiy Beria—First Secre-