

This is a first draft of a chapter for my forthcoming book, “The Assassination of Sergei Kirov.” The book will integrate documents from various Soviet investigations of the Kirov murder. This chapter examines the political context for the release by the KGB to higher-level party officials of documents in April 1956.

I attach below a copy of my recent short article in the Slavic Research Newsletter, which summarizes the central argument of the book about the Kirov murder. After the SRC Newsletter article comes the text of the chapter.

Matthew Lenoe

Not for Citation

Key to the Kirov Murder on the Shelves of Hokkaido University Library

Matthew E. Lenoe
Foreign Visiting Fellow, 2005-2006

During my fellowship at the Slavic Research Center I have been researching the 1934 assassination of Leningrad Communist Party chief Sergei Kirov. Kirov was shot at Leningrad party headquarters on December 1, 1934 by Leonid Nikolaev, a disaffected Communist Party member with a history of conflict with his work supervisors and local Communist officials. In the following four years Joseph Stalin used the Kirov murder as one of the main pretexts for the Great Terror. The NKVD and the Soviet prosecutorial apparatus put Stalin’s former political rivals Grigorii Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, Nikolai Bukharin, and Aleksei Rykov on trial for conspiracy to kill Kirov and Stalin himself. Ultimately most of the prerevolutionary leadership of the Communist Party (the so-called “Old Bolsheviks”) was charged with participating in the supposed conspiracy and imprisoned or shot.

Stalin’s obvious use of the assassination for his own political purposes, combined with two suspicious incidents (the murderer Nikolaev had been detained once previously by the NKVD, Kirov’s bodyguard died in an “auto accident” the day after the killing) led by the late 1930s to speculation that the dictator himself had ordered a hit on Kirov. Boris Nicolaevsky, a Menshevik living in Paris, and NKVD defectors Alexander Orlov and Walter Krivitsky fueled the speculation by reporting rumors from inside the USSR that Stalin or some of his closest associates were involved. Nicolaevsky also claimed that in his last years Kirov became a significant “moderate” counterweight to Stalin’s terroristic inclinations, and challenged Stalin for leadership of the party.

In his 1956 “Secret Speech” denouncing Stalin’s “cult of personality,” new Communist Party chief Nikita Khrushchev implied that Stalin might have been behind Kirov’s execution. Confirmation of their suspicions from inside the USSR led Western Sovietologists to conclude that Stalin almost certainly had ordered the assassination. Although individual scholars such as Harvard’s Adam Ulam and University of California’s J. Arch Getty dissented, by the late 1980s the conventional wisdom among scholars outside the Soviet Union was that Stalin had ordered Kirov’s killing as part of his preparations for the eradication of the Old Bolshevik leadership. With the opening of Soviet public discourse to outside influences under perestroika, this version spread rapidly also inside Russia.

However, in 1990-1991 the KGB, the Soviet Supreme Court, and other instances released a number of documents from top-secret post-Stalin investigations of the Kirov murder done at Politburo order in the 1950s and 1960s. Based on these documents and her own encyclopedic knowledge of Leningrad regional archives, Alla Kirilina, an historian and former curator of the Kirov museum in

Petersburg, published a number of works arguing that Nikolaev was a lone gunman. Kirilina also traced in detail Stalin's use of the murder as a pretext to attack his former political rivals. Oleg Khlevniuk strengthened Kirilina's conclusions by demonstrating that there was practically no evidence inside central party archives that Kirov was a rival to Stalin or challenged any of the latter's policies. The picture revealed by the new archival evidence was consistent – Nikolaev was a lone gunman who had delusions of grandeur. He was disappointed in the failure of Communism to improve the workers' lot and he hoped to make a name for himself in history as the executor of one of the Bolshevik tyrants. The documents also made clear how Stalin decided in the week after the murder to implicate his former party opponents in Kirov's death.

In 1999 Amy Knight published a renewed argument that Stalin plotted to assassinate Kirov, entitled *Who Killed Kirov?*. Knight defended some of the pre-1990 Western sources on the murder, including Nicolaevsky's articles, and she pointed out certain inconsistencies in the archival documents released after 1989. She also expressed doubt about the recently released archival documents, in particular excerpts from Nikolaev's diary and the records of early witness interrogations. These documents had been processed by the security police (NKVD-MGB-KGB) and they could well be forgeries designed to hide Stalin's guilt.

The picture of the murder presented by the new archival documents did not fit well with Knight's forgery thesis. If the documents had been forged in the Stalin era, one would expect them to show the murder as the product of a plot by Zinoviev, Kamenev, and their associates. But they did not. If the documents had been forged in the Khrushchev era, then one would probably expect them to show Stalin's involvement clearly (newly published evidence on the de-Stalinization process indicates that Khrushchev was quite serious about demonstrating Stalin's guilt in the Kirov murder). But they did not.

Nevertheless, Knight's doubts about the new archival evidence had to be taken seriously. It would not do to accept uncritically documents selectively released from the KGB archives.

And thus we come to prewar Japan, and to Genrikh Samoilevich Liushkov, an NKVD commissar who defected to Japan in June 1938 as Stalin's net closed around him. At that time Liushkov was commissar of the Far Eastern Regional NKVD directorate. At Stalin's orders he had led the purge of the Far Eastern NKVD organization and the Far East army command. After Manchurian police detained Liushkov on the border, the Japanese Korea Army quickly took custody of him and sent him to Tokyo, where he was debriefed by the Russian section of the Army's Intelligence Department. Liushkov lived until 1945 in Tokyo, more or less under house arrest, working for the Japanese Army's intelligence and propaganda apparatus. In 1945 the Japanese military sent him back to Manchuria to advise the Kwantung Army, which faced a massive Soviet assault in August 1945. There a young Japanese intelligence officer shot him.

Based on his own claims and on KGB archives, it is certain that Liushkov had been one of the head investigators of the Kirov murder. He arrived in Leningrad on the morning after the assassination on the same train with Stalin and NKVD chief Genrikh Yagoda, and he interrogated a number of the key witnesses in the case as well as Nikolaev himself. Thus, he is a key witness about the investigation and the murder itself.

The American Japan specialist Alvin Coox and Japanese journalist Nishino Tatsukichi (*Nazo no bomeisha Riyushikofu*) have chronicled Liushkov's life in Japan. According to Japanese intelligence officers who handled Liushkov's case, the defector was passionately anti-Stalin and wrote reams of memoirs and commentary on Soviet affairs while in Tokyo. Unfortunately the Japanese military burnt most or all of his manuscripts at the end of World War II. However, there remain the articles that Liushkov published in Japanese journals and newspapers, and one English translation of a Japanese

interrogation of Liushkov released secretly to the US embassy in 1938 by Japanese diplomats in Moscow.

The information Liushkov provided the Japanese about NKVD insider politics, number of executions during the Great Terror, Soviet military dispositions, and other matters correlates extremely well with newly released archival documents. This applies, for example, to his account of the purges of the Far Eastern NKVD and military commands. Unlike defectors such as Alexander Orlov, Liushkov was well-informed and provided very accurate data both in his interrogations and in his published articles.

In April of 1939 the Japanese journal *Kaizo* published a Japanese translation of an article by Liushkov entitled “An Open Letter to Stalin” (*Sutarin e no kokaijo*) which was largely about the Kirov assassination and its deployment by Stalin against his former political competitors. The article confirms in remarkable detail the picture of the murder and subsequent investigation that has emerged in recent years from the newly released archival documents. Nikolaev was a psychologically unbalanced lone assassin who longed to go down in history as a hero. The bodyguard’s death really had been an accident, caused by a broken spring in the steering mechanism of the truck he rode in. Stalin used the murder to put his rivals out of the way.

Liushkov’s evidence is of great importance because it provides independent confirmation of the archival documents released by the KGB-FSB since 1989. This confirmation is of an early date – 1939, and from a reliable source. Liushkov had direct inside knowledge of the Kirov investigation and of NKVD leadership politics. He wrote outside the Soviet Union from an anti-Stalin perspective. He certainly was not trying to whitewash the dictator (his whole article is an anti-Stalin polemic), nor did he accept the official version of Kirov’s assassination.

We will never be able to eliminate the possibility that Stalin had a hand in Kirov’s murder. But Liushkov’s confirmation of the archival evidence gets us as close as we can come to certainty about the crime. We can see that it is very unlikely that Stalin had a hand in ordering the assassination, just as we can see that he used it to fabricate false and murderous charges against thousands of Soviet subjects, inside and outside the party. When I first arrived at the Slavic Research Center, I could not have imagined that I would find the key to the Kirov mystery on the shelves of the Hokkaido University library. But that is how it turned out.

The Politics of Rehabilitation and the Investigation of the Kirov Murder, 1953-1957

Matthew Leno

Not for Citation

Joseph Stalin’s death on March 5, 1953 began a succession struggle between his collaborators in the party leadership. Continuing practices established by Stalin himself, Lavrentii Beria, Nikita Khrushchev, Georgii Malenkov and their respective allies scrambled to find or fabricate compromising information on one another and to pose as reformers. Compromising one another was not difficult, as all of the rivals were directly implicated in the mass violence wrought by the Stalinist regime. Khrushchev, the victor in the succession battles, proved the master of mobilizing archival documents and party memory against his competitors, but Beria, the first loser, employed the same tactics. It was Beria who, just days after the dictator’s death, began the process of reexamining Stalin-era legal cases and “rehabilitating” many of those convicted. Simultaneously, he accumulated materials incriminating other party leaders in his safe. After the other Central Committee Presidium members managed to arrest Beria on June 26, 1953, they portrayed him as the mastermind of state terror and a foreign spy.

In the next four years Khrushchev, who emerged on top in the months following Beria's arrest, took on the mantle of white knight, defeating his rivals Malenkov, Molotov, and Kaganovich in part by using the KGB to expose their participation in Stalin's terror. Thus, ironically, the conflict between Stalin's henchmen led step-by-step toward exposure of the atrocities they and their dead leader had committed.

There were also other motives, (beyond seizure of power) involved in the drama of de-Stalinization. Khrushchev himself and many of his allies genuinely did want to end mass terror and improve life for ordinary Soviet subjects. Self-interest strengthened moral qualms about mass repression. Party leaders and lower-level apparatchiks had an obvious interest in changing the Stalin-era rules of political struggle, in which the penalty for defeat was often arrest or death. Stalin had operated a de facto hostage system, imprisoning or exiling close relatives and political associates of his lieutenants on the usual trumped-up charges of espionage. Among these hostages were Molotov's wife, Anastas Mikoian's sons, Khrushchev's daughter-in-law, and Beria's political protégés from Mingrelia, accused of "bourgeois nationalism." In the first two months following Stalin's death, Beria freed all of these hostages with the approval of the other members of the Central Committee Presidium.¹

The process of "rehabilitation" of "repressed" (i.e. arrested, exiled, or executed) persons, begun by Beria and expanded by Khrushchev and his allies, was a complex struggle in which political power and the creation of some kind of coherent party history of the Stalin years were tightly bound together. It was confined almost entirely to party and professional elites, with the *narod*, "the common people," excluded. Participants in the struggle had sundry motivations. Communist survivors of prisons and labor camps sought to drive a stake through the heart of Stalinism by revealing Stalin's crimes. Molotov, Malenkov, and Kaganovich, who because of their higher-level positions in the 1930s and longer history with Stalin arguably were more culpable than Khrushchev for the Great Terror of 1937-1938, sought to evade responsibility. Khrushchev aimed to secure his own position as party leader by exposing them. Other players, mainly associated with Khrushchev, worked to create a useable, heroic party history that would nonetheless acknowledge Stalinist terror. This history would legitimate the rule of a reformed Communist Party. Yet others, such as Dmitrii Shepilov in June 1957 and Mikhail Suslov in June 1956, wished to put the brakes on public reevaluation of the Stalin years because they believed such discussion undermined the foundations of Communist rule. At the same time they did not advocate a return to full-blown Stalinist repression.

Feuds, friendships, and factional resentments going all the way back to the days of the revolution shaped the battle over de-Stalinization. Anastas Mikoian quietly encouraged surviving comrades from the Bolshevik revolution in Baku to research and publicize the Great Terror. Veterans of the Leningrad Party leadership who survived Stalin's purge of the city organization in the notorious "Leningrad Affair" of 1949-1950 proved eager to attack Malenkov for his role in organizing those repressions. Ivan Serov, who ran the KGB for Khrushchev from 1954-1958, had worked together with his boss in the Ukraine in 1939-1941. There are many more examples.

Thus, the usual distinctions between reformers and Stalinists, or "liberals" and "conservatives," which still tend to dominate discussion of the Khrushchev years, do not capture the complexity of the political battles around the rehabilitation of Stalin's victims. The history of the Khrushchev-era commissions that reexamined Sergei Kirov's assassination, and ultimately tried to create a new narrative of Soviet history, must be understood in this context – of desperate struggles for power and an equally desperate desire to escape from the Stalinist nightmare and return to the revolutionary dreams of 1917.

*

Between 1956 and 1967 the Presidium/Politburo of the party Central Committee created five different commissions to study the show trials of 1936-1938 and the annihilation of party cadres in the same period. The first commission, headed by former *Pravda* editor and CC secretary for ideology Petr Pospelov, was appointed on December 31, 1955; the second, created in April 1956, was chaired by former Stalin number two Molotov; the third, established sometime in 1960, was chaired by second-level party veteran N. M. Shvernik; the fourth, established in May 1961, was also chaired by Shvernik. A fifth commission was established in 1963.² None of these commissions were devoted exclusively to study of the Kirov murder. Rather, they were charged with investigating what we now call the Great Terror as a whole. As Alla Kirilina and J. Arch Getty have observed, these investigations were politically motivated. Their findings depended greatly on the balance of forces in the Central Committee leadership. The argument presented in this chapter derives from Kirilina's, with additional data and conclusions.³

The practical work of the commissions was done by the staff of the Party Control Committee (KPK), the disciplinary and investigative organ of the Central Committee. N. M. Shvernik, chairman of the KPK from 1956 through 1966, chaired the 1960 and 1961 commissions. The KPK Chief Controller (*otvetstvennyi kontroler*), Olga Shatunovskaia from 1955-1956 and G. Klimov from 1956-1967, played an important role in directing commission work and authoring reports to the Presidium of the Central Committee. KPK staff conducted interviews and did archival research. It was usually the KPK which requested information from the chief prosecutor's office of the Soviet Union and the KGB. The role of the special investigative commissions seems to have been to bring some senior party leaders in to review the KPK conclusions and provide guidelines for future work.

A three-year submerged history preceded Khrushchev's not-very-secret "Secret Speech" at the Twentieth Party Congress (February 1956) that began open de-Stalinization. It was a history of conversations, speeches, amnesties, and personnel appointments about which rank-and-file party members, not to mention ordinary Soviet subjects, knew next to nothing. It was a history of business conducted inside the closed circles of the party elite, often in private one-on-one conversations. During these years Mikoian and Khrushchev quietly sponsored labor camp returnees and scholars who laid the groundwork for de-Stalinization and the investigation of the Terror.

As noted, the review and dismissal of high profile espionage/murder cases, such as the "Doctors Plot," began within days of Stalin's death. Direct criticism of the dictator was another matter. The Soviet press would not undertake this until years after Stalin's death. However, party leaders were feeling each other out on the subject as early as July 1953. With the possible exception of Beria (there is one report of him referring to Stalin as "a son-of-a-bitch" and a "tyrant" in private between March and June 1953),⁴ they did so with great circumspection. The attitudes of Stalin's former lieutenants toward their dead master were conflicted, and conditioned by powerful taboos. They might best be compared to the psychology of hostages or of children severely traumatized by their parents. Khrushchev and his fellows hated the tyrant who had abused them, but they also identified with him (they were all his collaborators), and they feared the consequences of denouncing him. Most of all they felt a supernatural awe of him. On the day of Stalin's death the Presidium discussed a proposal to build a huge "pantheon" in Moscow to the memory of "the boss." According to Dmitrii Shepilov, Khrushchev spoke in favor.⁵

But three months later, at the July 1953 Central Committee plenum, Khrushchev pointed out that the dictator was not infallible, saying "we all respect comrade Stalin but the years tell, and recently comrade stalin did not read documents, didn't receive visitors, had weak health..."⁶ Mikoian observed that worship of Stalin had gone too far, using the phrase "cult of personality" that later became the

Soviet shorthand for denunciation of Stalin-era crimes and incompetence. Conveniently, he blamed Beria for inflating the cult of personality and cited Stalin's own complaints about it.⁷ It is important to note that this was a closed discussion of the top several hundred party members in the country, and in 1953 all present would have understood the need not to disseminate Khrushchev's and Mikoian's comments. These words were strictly for those at the top.

Khrushchev emerged as the most powerful man inside the "collective leadership" of the party earlier than Western observers recognized – according to William Taubman, as early as the spring of 1954. Key to his consolidation of power was his appointment as first secretary of the Central Committee (September 1953), Stalin's old party position.⁸ In the early expansion of his political network, Khrushchev secured two appointments with great consequences for de-Stalinization and rehabilitation of the repressed – R. A. Rudenko as Chief Prosecutor of the USSR (at the July 1953 CC Plenum), and Ivan A. Serov as head of the KGB (March 1954).⁹

On June 29, 1953, three days after Beria's arrest, the Presidium appointed Rudenko as chief prosecutor of the USSR, ordering him to investigate the deposed security chief. Rudenko was a Khrushchev client. As first secretary of the Ukrainian Republic Central Committee, Khrushchev promoted Rudenko in 1942 from a position as chief prosecutor of Lugansk province to assistant prosecutor of the republic. Rudenko served in the post from 1942-1944 and then as Chief Prosecutor of Ukraine from 1944-1953. In addition, he gained international fame as the chief Soviet prosecutor at the Nuremberg Nazi war crimes trial in 1945-1946. In his memoirs, Khrushchev implies that Rudenko was in debt to him – during the Terror of the late 1930s arrested "enemies of the people" gave evidence against Rudenko, and in 1942 Khrushchev prevented his promotion to a higher-profile position in Moscow where that evidence might have been used against him. Instead Khrushchev promoted Rudenko to assistant prosecutor in his own bailiwick, "with the provision that there were denunciations against him, and it was necessary to keep an eye on him..."¹⁰

Ivan A. Serov also had longtime ties to Khrushchev. Serov began his career as an artillery officer but transferred into the NKVD in February 1939. As newly appointed commissar Beria purged the NKVD of officers associated with N. I. Yezhov (the second NKVD purge in two years), he promoted masses of new recruits from the party and the Red Army. Serov was one. In September 1939 Serov became NKVD chief for the Ukrainian Republic, where he worked closely with Khrushchev, and with General Georgii Zhukov. During this period Serov ran the "cleansing" of the occupied city of Lvov of "bourgeois and nationalist elements" (i.e. mass deportations) and participated in the mass execution of captured Polish officers in the Katyn forest in 1940. Soon after Serov's transfer from the Ukrainian post in February 1941, Germany and her allies invaded the USSR. During the war, Serov, as one of the deputy chiefs of the NKVD, specialized in mass arrests and mass deportations from areas recaptured by the Red Army. He took part in the mass deportations of the Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush, and Volga Germans, and the purges of suspected collaborators and "bourgeois nationalists" in Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania. He served as the NKVD chief for the First Belorussian Front commanded by Zhukov. In the course of the Red Army advance through Ukraine and Belorussia, he maintained close working relationships with both Khrushchev and Zhukov.¹¹

Serov served at the center of Stalin's state security apparatus, and he was deeply compromised. Not only had he taken part in mass repressions, but one of his mistresses, whom he recruited as an intelligence agent, had defected to Romania. He was also implicated in lucrative illegal business dealings while stationed in occupied Lvov (1939-1941) and occupied Germany after victory in World War II. Multiple observers have concluded that Serov was Khrushchev's creature during the post-Stalin years precisely because his shady past made him vulnerable to pressure. Khrushchev's rivals feared Serov both because he was a Khrushchev loyalist and because of his Stalinist history. In his

memoirs Dmitrii Shepilov, expelled from the leadership after participating in the 1957 attempt to replace Khrushchev, described Serov as “a deeply amoral...person,” but “close to Khrushchev and ready to carry out any illegal order of his and satisfy his personal caprices with slavish devotion.” Until his removal from the chairmanship of the KGB in 1958, Serov accompanied Khrushchev on his foreign tours as chief of his bodyguard. Shepilov remembers Serov personally serving Khrushchev soup in China.¹²

There is plenty of other evidence that Serov was Khrushchev’s man in the years 1953 -1958. Khrushchev himself reports proposing that Serov take charge of guarding Beria after latter’s arrest on June 26, 1953. Other leaders of the coup did not trust Serov, and rejected the idea.¹³ Serov’s biographer, N. V. Petrov, notes a case in 1956 where Serov prevented a sensitive intelligence report on Khrushchev’s own more “heretical” views from reaching fellow Presidium members Malenkov and Bulganin. During their attempt to oust Khrushchev from the party leadership in June 1957, the anti-Khrushchev plotters Malenkov, Molotov, Kaganovich, et al, wanted to fire Serov as KGB chief, complaining that his agents were eavesdropping on them.¹⁴

In his memoirs Khrushchev is defensive about Serov, repeating several times that in his view Serov was “an honorable person.” At the same time, he shows clear awareness that Serov was tainted by his participation in state terrorism. “If there was something on him,” the former Soviet leader writes, “as there was something on all chekists (Soviet security police), then he was a victim of the overall policies made by Stalin.”¹⁵

As is evident from Khrushchev’s patronage of Rudenko and Serov, de-Stalinization was conducted using Stalinist methods (with the very important difference that after Beria the losers were not arrested or executed). This is paradoxical, but not surprising. Lazar Kaganovich and Stalin himself were Khrushchev’s political mentors. Khrushchev’s political style after 1953 resembled Stalin’s in a number of ways.¹⁶ These included his reliance on trusted cronies, his readiness to undermine stealthily and then abandon those same cronies, his use of highly compromised persons in key positions, his pretend modesty covering a ravenous hunger for adulation, and his predilection for keeping those around him guessing by maintaining at least two different “lines” on a given issue. On the other hand, Khrushchev was more flamboyant than Stalin, more impulsive, and a lot less bloodthirsty.

In the spring of 1954, Khrushchev and Mikoian were both taking the first steps toward de-Stalinization. In the case of Khrushchev, at least, these steps also eroded the position of his rivals, in particular Georgii Malenkov. On May 3, 1954, the Presidium passed a resolution that in effect annulled the convictions of the accused in the “Leningrad Case (1950),” in which Leningrad party leader and war hero A. Kuznetsov and a number of associates and subordinates were executed or imprisoned on trumped-up charges of treason. The resolution blamed the unjust persecution of Kuznetsov and others on Beria and his old lieutenant V. S. Abakumov. In the background, however, was Malenkov, who played an important role in organizing the Kuznetsov trial (three years later Frol Kozlov, Khrushchev’s party chief in Leningrad, would say, “the blood of Leningraders is on Malenkov’s hands”).¹⁷ Two days after the passage of the Presidium resolution, Khrushchev and Rudenko travelled to Leningrad, where they spoke to a meeting of leading Leningrad party activists. In his presentation Rudenko denounced Beria and Abakumov using the rhetoric of Stalinist show trials, claiming that they aimed at “the seizure of power, the overthrow of the Soviet state, and the restoration of capitalism.” Khrushchev asserted that Stalin, although he was “a big man, a brilliant Marxist,” had had too much power, and his “cult of personality” had been “inflated.” He suggested that a few of the Communist victims of the Great Terror of 1937-1938 may have been innocent. He also told the activists that there were political limitations on how far he could go in investigating Stalinist repressions. When an activist asked in an anonymous note why Serov, a longtime associate of Beria,

was still in the leadership, Khrushchev replied that “the Central Committee trusts Serov.” If one questioned Serov about his role in the repressions, Khrushchev continued (on a perhaps unconsciously premonitory note), one would also have to question Khrushchev himself, Malenkov, Molotov, and Bulganin.¹⁸

Mikoian and Khrushchev also sponsored the return of high-ranking Communists accused of “counterrevolutionary crimes” from exile, labor camps, and prison. On May 4, 1954, the same day as the rehabilitation of the leading figures in the Leningrad Case, the CC Presidium established a commission including Rudenko and Serov to review cases of persons accused of “counterrevolutionary crimes.”¹⁹ Several of the men and women released from state custody in the following months became key advocates of full-scale de-Stalinization. Those with personal ties to Mikoian and Khrushchev in particular became important players.

A. I. Snegov was one early rehabilitee who immediately took on an important political role. Khrushchev had worked with Snegov, a Communist veteran of the Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War, in the Ukrainian Republic in the late 1920s. Snegov was also an old and close friend of Rudenko. According to accounts originating with Khrushchev and his relatives, Khrushchev released Snegov from the camps so that the latter could testify against Beria at his secret trial (Snegov had also been a department head in the Transcaucasus party committee and had incriminating information on Beria). It appears from party documentation that immediately after testifying (presumably in December 1953), Snegov was sent out of Moscow again, but to exile in the Komi Autonomous Republic. Two months later, in February 1954, he was again “summoned to Moscow”. On March 6, 1954 Rudenko’s office annulled his criminal conviction, and on March 13 the Party Control Commission reinstated him as a Communist Party member. Khrushchev soon appointed him as head of the corrective labor camp department of the MVD, charged with reforming the camp system.²⁰

Snegov’s case is instructive first because it shows Khrushchev using personal connections with Communist camp survivors to take down his political enemies and accomplish his goals. It also shows how the battle for de-Stalinization became mythologized and memories distorted. In his 1990 memoirs Khrushchev’s son Sergei relates what he says Snegov told him about his own rehabilitation in the early 1960s. In this account Rudenko returned Snegov to the labor camps for *two years* after Beria’s trial. Then on the eve of the Twentieth Party Congress, Khrushchev recalled Snegov’s name and asked where he was. Khrushchev’s assistants rescued Snegov from prison – “he was brought to Moscow straight from prison, hungry and unshaven. There he exchanged his prison outfit for a suit and was given a guest pass to the Kremlin.” This is a good story, but does not stand up upon comparison with party documentation. Snegov was exiled to Komi for two months, not sent back to a concentration camp for two years after Beria’s trial. He did not make a last-minute return to Moscow on the eve of the Twentieth Party Congress. When William Taubman asked Sergei Khrushchev to explain these discrepancies, the latter replied that, “(Snegov) could hardly have forgotten the date of his own liberation; the version he recounted to me must have seemed more dramatic to him. In any event, I didn’t want to alter his account to correct the inaccuracy.”²¹

De-Stalinization was a just struggle against heavy odds. It is not surprising that in later years those who fought to expose Stalinist mass murder would mythologize the conflict to some extent. And historians, memoirists, and journalists who respected the legacy of the de-Stalinizers would be reluctant to question any part of the history, including the mythologized elements. Sergei Khrushchev’s brief comment reveals this dynamic. Out of respect for Snegov, Khrushchev says, he transmitted the more dramatic, but factually inaccurate, version of his release.

A second early returnee from the camps, and one crucial to the investigation of the Kirov murder, was Olga Shatunovskaia. Born in 1901, Shatunovskaia was the child of a Jewish lawyer in

Baku. She attended the same gymnasium with the children of Suren Shaumian, the leader of the Baku Bolsheviks. In 1917 Shatunovskaia threw herself into the Bolshevik revolutionary movement in Baku. In addition to her activities as a street activist, she served as Suren Shaumian's secretary and head of the Baku Council of People's Commissars Press Department in the months after the October Revolution. When Turkish forces helped Mensheviks and Azerbaidjani nationalists (the Mussavat) overthrow Soviet rule in Baku in September 1918, Shatunovskaia was captured and by her own account nearly executed (the new regime did execute Suren Shaumian and 25 other leaders of the Baku Soviet, turning the "twenty-six commissars" into Bolshevik martyrs). Released, she joined the Bolshevik underground movement in the Caucasus, working closely with Anastas Mikoian, among others.²²

In the following years Shatunovskaia started a family with her second husband, Iurii Kutin, and established herself as an important party official. She served in Baku, Briansk, Siberia, and Moscow. She was acting chief of the Moscow Party Committee's Department of Leading Party Organs when the NKVD arrested her in November 1938 on charges of Trotskyite activity. During her imprisonment Shatunovskaia sent several letters to Mikoian disputing the case against her and seeking his help. Mikoian did not reply or take any action until 1945, when he forwarded one of her appeals to Beria and secured her release (according to Shatunovskaia, Mikoian was still afraid to meet her when she returned to Moscow). In August 1948 the NKVD returned to her case, exiling her to Krasnoiarsk Region. Through her childhood friend Lev Shaumian, son of the Baku Commissar Stepan, she again appealed to Mikoian, and Mikoian supposedly appealed to Stalin for clemency. Stalin refused it.²³

When M. A. Bagirov, author of one of the denunciations that led to Shatunovskaia's arrest, was himself arrested in March 1954 (the longtime chief of the Azerbaidjani Communist Party was under investigation for collaborating with Beria) Shatunovskaia petitioned Khrushchev for release from her sentence. Notified of her rehabilitation in May, Shatunovskaia made her way to Moscow, where, she writes, Khrushchev invited her for a private meeting. Khrushchev's assistants soon provided her with an apartment in the capital, a car, and a position as Chief Controller of the Party Control Commission. Khrushchev told her he wanted to accelerate rehabilitation.²⁴

In the coming years Shatunovskaia became the most dedicated proponent inside the party apparatus of the theory that Stalin had organized Kirov's killing. Hence it is important to give a fuller description of her character and the reliability of her assertions. Shatunovskaia was courageous, histrionic, and combative. Late in life she described herself in childhood as a "hooligan girl," and she never seems to have stopped being one. She served in the Red Army in the revolutionary years, in addition to her very risky underground work in Baku. In the course of these struggles she adopted as her own the party's practices of vehement political denunciation. In the 1920s she was a very active supporter of the evolving Central Committee "general line" defined by Stalin and his allies. She fought with enthusiasm against "Trotskyites" in Baku, participating in debates and meetings of party cells all over the city. In 1928-1929 she joined the struggle against the "Right Deviation," leading a campaign to oust Azerbaidjani Communist Party secretary Mirzoian, whom she charged with being soft on the Rightists. After Mirzoian had her fired from her position in one of the Baku ward party committees, Shatunovskaia denounced him to the Central Committee. Stalin used the hubbub to remove Mirzoian from Baku, but in a private letter to Molotov he also expressed contempt for Shatunovskaia and her allies as noisy do-nothings. He ordered Shatunovskaia's transfer into an intensive course of study at the Communist Academy in Moscow, a common enough move at the time for elite party members who had gotten into trouble with their local organizations.²⁵

According to her daughter, Jana Kutin, Shatunovskaia either loved or hated people. "She loved to death and she scorned to death," Kutin writes. When she felt someone had slighted her, or had made an immoral choice, she was capable of rejecting them utterly. This character trait comes across in

Shatunovskaia's memoirs of the rehabilitation period. In her account, the protagonists are either "Leninists" (good) or "Stalinists" (evil). In at least two cases she summarily dismisses loyal supporters of Khrushchev as enemies of reform.²⁶ Her readiness to dismiss those with whom she had work conflicts as crypto-Stalinists puts in doubt a number of Shatunovskaia's claims about obstruction of the rehabilitation process, in particular about the supposed destruction of documents.

In her memoirs, dictated from the early 1970s through the late 1980s, Shatunovskaia tells and retells stories from Communist Party history. But the details sometimes conflict with party documents and others' memoirs. She claims, for example, that during the Great Terror Mikoian signed no execution or arrest lists, but Mikoian in his memoirs admits signing at least one, in Armenia.²⁷ She describes a supposed episode in 1920, when Beria, arrested by the Menshevik government of independent Georgia, escaped to Baku. Kirov, who was at the time the Soviet ambassador to Georgia, telegraphed Baku to arrest Beria as soon as he arrived, because he was under suspicion of having served as a Mussavat (Azerbaijani nationalist) spy against the Bolsheviks. Shatunovskaia's tale seems to be a topsy-turvy re-working of two different events, one well attested to, the other more obscure. Beria was an agent of Bolshevik intelligence and was arrested twice by Georgian authorities. After the first arrest, he was freed and went underground working for Kirov in the Soviet embassy under an assumed name. When Beria was arrested again, Kirov *petitioned the Georgian government for his release*. The second event that may have influenced Shatunovskaia's story is more uncertain. Based on the 1953 testimony of former Chekist N. F. Safronov, it is possible that Azerbaijani Communist authorities briefly arrested Beria in Baku in 1920. But there is no evidence Kirov had anything to do with this.²⁸ The well-documented narrative of Beria's arrest in Georgia shows Kirov doing his job as Soviet ambassador, petitioning for Beria's release and aiding Bolshevik espionage in Georgia. But the story as Shatunovskaia tells it fits better with the requirements of her narrative – Kirov, the "good" Leninist, denounces the evil Beria.

Shatunovskaia's account of Stalin's relations with his brother-in-law Aleksandr Svanidze, probably based on rumors, also has a "good" Bolshevik, in this case Svanidze himself, opposing the evil Stalin. According to Shatunovskaia, Svanidze protested the arrest of Avel Enukidze to Stalin. But from his wife's diary and other documents Svanidze emerges as a relentless flatterer of Stalin, desperate to improve his position. In fact, Iurii Zhukov, who has had privileged access to KGB/FSB archives, writes that Svanidze *initiated the case against Enukidze* by writing a denunciation of him (quite possibly at Stalin's suggestion) to the NKVD.²⁹

Shatunovskaia also repeats numerous unsubstantiated rumors, such as that Stalin hired some bandits to attack fellow Bolshevik Iakov Sverdlov when they were both in exile in Siberia, that Stalin had been an agent of the Tsarist secret police, and that Lenin told his wife before his death that he wanted Rudzutak to replace Stalin as General Secretary of the party.³⁰

Another problem is that Shatunovskaia gives obviously exaggerated numbers for the victims of Stalinism. She claims, for example, that during the forced collectivization of the peasantry 22 million people died and that in the Great Terror nearly 20 million persons were arrested and 7 million shot.³¹ No reputable scholar today believes that the numbers are this high.

There are several explanations for Shatunovskaia's imprecisions. First, she seems to have been a gossip with talent for dramatic story-telling (she loved telling stories of her old romances, including one with Anastas Mikoian). Second, when she dictated the memoirs, Shatunovskaia had to recall from memory Party Control Commission documents she had not seen for ten years or more. It is not surprising that she did not remember all of them exactly. Third, Shatunovskaia was not a historian, but a political activist engaged in a crusade for justice. It appears that she collected any stories she heard that reflected poorly on Stalin, no matter what the source.

On the other hand, Shatunovskaia got a lot right in her memoirs. Her accounts of Sergo Ordzhonikidze's final conflict with Stalin, of Bukharin's letters to Stalin from jail, and of the late 1930s show trials all square with currently available documents. And she was undoubtedly right that Stalin was a sadistic tyrant. Although her memoirs and interviews late in life are unreliable on details, one has to sympathize with a woman whom anti-Semitic Stalinists referred to in the 1990s as "the provocateur Shatunovskaia" and "the prevaricator Shatunovskaia."³²

Shatunovskaia's long history with Anastas Mikoian and his circle is also a central part of the story of the investigation into Kirov's assassination. As already noted, she worked closely with Mikoian in the Baku underground and claimed in old age that he had been her suitor. She also had attended gymnasium with Lev Shaumian, whom Mikoian in effect adopted after the execution of his father,³³ the Baku commissar. In 1954-1955 these three Baku Commune veterans laid the groundwork for Khrushchev's complete overturn of the official history of Stalin's rule at the Twentieth Party Congress.

In Mikoian's account, Lev Shaumian (who, as we have seen, was effectively a member of Mikoian's family and the intermediary for Shatunovskaia's appeals for clemency to Mikoian) was instrumental in the early rehabilitation efforts of 1954-1955. Shaumian himself had never been repressed. But, while working in the party apparatus as an editor of newspapers and also the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, he did maintain contact with some in the camps. Following Stalin's death, many imprisoned Communists used Shaumian as an intermediary to petition Mikoian for review of their cases. Mikoian says that it was Shaumian who "brought to me" Shatunovskaia and Snegov, and that he (Mikoian) in turn brought them to Khrushchev's notice.³⁴ Shatunovskaia and Snegov, Mikoian writes, "opened my eyes to a great deal, telling me of their arrests, the tortures used during the interrogation process, and the fate of dozens of our acquaintances..."³⁵

Approximately half a year before the Twentieth Party Congress of February 1956, Mikoian claims that he asked Shaumian to do some quiet research into the fate of delegates to the Seventeenth Party Congress of 1934. Specifically, he wanted a list of the Central Committee members and candidate members elected at that Congress who were arrested or executed during the Terror. When Shaumian gave him the list about one month later, Mikoian claims that he was "shocked" (like the Holocaust, it seems that no one knew about the mass arrests and executions of the Stalin era, least of all any of the leaders close to Stalin!). He went to Khrushchev and persuaded the latter that they were going to have to tackle the issue of Stalinist repressions at the Twentieth Party Congress.³⁶ It is worth noting that whatever general desire Mikoian and Khrushchev felt to review Stalinist history and rehabilitate the dictator's victims, there was also a very concrete motivation for bringing the issue up at the forthcoming congress. At the July 1955 plenary meeting of the Central Committee, Khrushchev and Molotov clashed openly.³⁷ Mikoian's conversations with Shaumian would have come after that plenum, and one of the purposes of Shaumian's research was probably to gather material compromising Molotov.

Around the time that Mikoian asked Shaumian to research the fate of the 1934 Central Committee, or soon after, he also requested that Shatunovskaia send him an official letter recounting a story she had told him related to the Kirov assassination. The letter was forthcoming. In it Shatunovskaia described conversations she had with one Dr. Kirchakov and the nurse Dusia Trunina while hospitalized at the Kolyma labor camp in 1943-1944. Kirchakov, she wrote, had heard directly from Filip Medved an eyewitness account of Stalin's interrogation of Leonid Nikolaev the day after Kirov was killed. Medved was in exile at the time (1937), working at Kolyma in the NKVD, and expected to be rearrested soon. He supposedly told Kirchakov that when Stalin asked Nikolaev "Why did you kill Kirov?" Nikolaev accused officers of the Leningrad NKVD who were in the room at the

time of providing him with the murder weapon and “persecuting” him until he agreed to assassinate Kirov. When Nikolaev said this, “they beat (him) on the head with their Nagans, he collapsed, and they carried him out...” Medved also noted, according to Shatunovskaia, that Nikolaev had been detained and released before the murder.³⁸

Medved was “shocked” by what Nikolaev had said.

Before proceeding, a couple of notes about Shatunovskaia’s story. First, it was third-hand by her own account – Medved had supposedly told Kirchakov, who told her. Second, the story places Zaporozhets in the interrogation room with Stalin, Medved, Nikolaev, Iagoda, and a number of other Leningrad NKVD officers. But as we have seen, several sources indicate that Zaporozhets was not in Leningrad at the time. On multiple counts the story conflicts with the account of Mikhail Rosliakov, who was waiting at the time of interrogation in a room one floor below, in case Stalin wanted to interview him. Rosliakov heard from Kodatskii and others that day that Leningrad number two Mikhail Chudov was in the room with Stalin, along with the Central Committee members who accompanied Stalin to Leningrad (this would have included Molotov, Voroshilov, Ezhov, and Iagoda). Shatunovskaia’s version mentions none of these in the room. Rosliakov also heard that Nikolaev had been carried into the interrogation “in a semi-conscious state” and initially failed to recognize Stalin. He supposedly cried and repeated the words “What have I done, what have I done!” He demonstrated only a “foggy” recollection of events. Finally the tale Shatunovskaia repeated in her letter placed the interrogation at Leningrad NKVD headquarters, while Rosliakov and other sources place it in Kirov’s office in Smolnyi.³⁹

Mikoian forwarded Shatunovskaia’s letter to Khrushchev with a note on the envelope – “To Comrade N. S. Khrushchev – only to be opened by him.”⁴⁰ Khrushchev evidently put the letter on the agenda of the Presidium of December 31, 1955. The only record of the meeting is a “working summary” of the discussion, which indicates that Bulganin read the letter out loud. While he was reading Voroshilov interrupted with a shout of “Lies!”. Molotov, according to the summary, noted that he was present when Stalin interviewed Nikolaev and “no one was hit.” Mikoian asserted that “Stalin was extremely upset. The Chekists had a hand in the whole thing.” Khrushchev agreed that “if you look at the business, it doesn’t smell right,” and proposed interviewing the doctor (Kirchakov), the driver of the car in which Borisov died, and “Kuprianov”. Molotov, perhaps afraid of what charges might surface in oral interrogations, expressed skepticism that interviews would provide useful information, and suggested “checking the documents.” Kaganovich seems to have taken the claim that NKVD officers were involved, and tried to defuse it by interpreting in the spirit of the 1934-1935 investigation into the Leningrad NKVD – the Chekists’ negligence had allowed the assassination to happen. The Presidium resolved to look at the files of the 1930s cases against Iagoda, Ezhov, and Medved.⁴¹

Khrushchev, with the help of Mikoian and his associates, was clearly preparing for a serious discussion of Stalinist repressions (at least of Communists after 1934) at the forthcoming party congress. Molotov, Kaganovich, Malenkov, Voroshilov, and other party leaders not inside Khrushchev’s inner circle had to be nervous. But Khrushchev, who controlled the KGB (Serov), and the USSR prosecutor’s office (Rudenko), and had key allies in the Army and the party’s Central Control Commission (Shatunovskaia and others) had the upper hand. He was able to force a very uncomfortable discussion of the Stalinist years on his rivals on his own terms. At the same time, his power was not unlimited. He proceeded cautiously, using Mikoian’s people, whom he could always cast loose, to do the research, and forbearing to charge Molotov and the others directly with collaboration in the Terror. The discussion of Shatunovskaia’s letter was typical. Khrushchev and Mikoian suggested that something “didn’t smell right,” and that NKVD officers might have had

something to do with Kirov's murder. Shatunovskaia's letter did imply that Stalin might have been involved, but Khrushchev and Mikoian did not go that far. It was possible to interpret Mikoian's statement that "Chekists had a hand" in the killing as suggesting a local conspiracy. As noted, Kaganovich sought to downplay such statements by interpreting NKVD "guilt" as referring to NKVD negligence, and not a plot to kill Kirov.

Khrushchev's colleagues had much to fear, but they had to proceed very carefully. They acceded to the proposal for an informal inquiry into the Kirov murder. At other Presidium meetings in the months before the Twentieth Party Congress Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, Bulganin, and Malenkov all voiced their support for revealing to the Party Congress some of Stalin's unjustified persecutions of Communists. At the same time they called for doing so "with a cool head," and for reaffirming Stalin's great accomplishments in building socialism. In reply a chorus of junior Presidium members who supported Khrushchev (Aristov, Saburov, Suslov, Pervukhin, and others) insisted that the Presidium had to tell the congress "everything" (Suslov), that Stalin had no good points (Pervukhin), and that Stalinist repressions were not "faults" but "crimes" (Saburov). By early February 1956 everyone knew what the party line was – even Kaganovich was saying "we can't deceive history...Khrushchev's proposal for a report (on Stalinist repression to the upcoming congress) is correct."⁴²

In the meantime, the Presidium appointed a commission consisting of junior Presidium members Petr Pospelov, Komarov, Aristov and Nikolai Shvernik to investigate issues related to "rehabilitation." On February 9 this commission reported to the Presidium on "reasons for the mass repressions against members and candidates of the Central Committee elected at the Seventeenth Party Congress." Almost certainly the commission relied in part on the evidence on the same topic gathered earlier by Lev Shaumian. Using documents that were top secret at the time, the commission reported that 1.5 million persons were arrested and 681,692 executed in 1937-1938. The report stated that of 139 members and candidates elected to the Central Committee by the Seventeenth Party Congress, 98 were arrested and shot – numbers Khrushchev used in his "Secret Speech" weeks later. It described the methods by which cases were fabricated against high-ranking party members in 1937 and after. It also identified as key to the Terror's development Kirov's murder and the subsequent Law of December 1 setting up special tribunals (the *troiki*). There was no discussion of the possibility that Stalin had deliberately organized the assassination himself.⁴³

The Twentieth Party Congress and After: Serov and Rudenko Investigate

On February 25, 1956, at the conclusion of the Twentieth Party Congress, Khrushchev gave his "Secret Speech," denouncing Stalin's "cult of personality," his arrests and executions of party members after 1934, and his failure to prepare for the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941. Khrushchev also acknowledged Stalin's supposed accomplishments (such as industrialization of the USSR). He did not suggest that there were systemic problems other than "the cult of personality," nor did he question the forced collectivization of agriculture, or the expulsion of Trotskyites, "Rightists," and other oppositionists from the party.

Following up on the February 9 Pospelov report and Mikoian's earlier question to Lev Shaumian, Khrushchev addressed the question of the mass annihilation of Central Committee members after the Seventeenth Party Congress. He attributed the extermination to Stalin's unchecked power, but did not offer more specifics. Immediately following this part of the speech, he noted that "mass repressions and gross violations of socialist legality" began after Kirov's murder. With regard to the assassination itself, he said:

One has to note that the circumstances connected with the murder of Comrade Kirov are to this day befogged with much that is incomprehensible and mysterious, and demand careful investigation. There is reason to believe that someone among those charged with guarding Comrade Kirov aided the murderer Nikolaev. One and one half months before the murder of Kirov Nikolaev was arrested for suspicious behavior, but was released and not even searched. The fact that the Chekist attached to Kirov ended up dead in an auto “accident” on December 2, 1934 while being driven to interrogation is extremely suspicious. After the murder of Kirov the leading officers of the Leningrad NKVD were removed from their posts and given very light punishments, but in 1937 were shot. It is conceivable that they were shot in order to clean up the traces of the organizers of Kirov’s murder.⁴⁴

Khrushchev’s speech reveals him to be a “master of dosing” almost as great as Stalin himself. He did not directly state that Stalin or other party leaders were involved in preparing Kirov’s murder. But by placing his suggestion that there had been a conspiracy to kill the Leningrad party leader immediately after his discussion of the destruction of the CC membership after 1934 and his note that the orgy of killing followed Kirov’s death, he signalled his readiness to accept a specific narrative of the Terror. This would be one in which Stalin himself and/or his closest assistants at the time (Molotov, Kaganovich) had plotted the killing to justify the subsequent extermination of party cadres. This narrative would make sense of the Terror, and it would also bring Khrushchev’s major rivals for power – Molotov, Kaganovich, and Malenkov - crashing down. It would exonerate “true” Bolshevism of responsibility for the Terror, laying it all at the feet of Stalin and his closest lieutenants in 1934-1938. It would also exonerate junior members of the Bolshevik leadership who supported Khrushchev in 1956 – they “had no idea” about the mass repressions in the 1930s, they just followed orders.

Many party officials, ambitious or afraid, or both, responded with alacrity to Khrushchev’s signal. This response followed the Stalinist pattern, in which subordinates rushed to carry out wishes the leader expressed only in hints and insinuations. Petr Pospelov was one such subordinate.

As part of his work on the commission on Stalinist repressions created on Dec. 31, 1955, Pospelov prepared a report on Kirov’s murder, which he presented to the Presidium on April 23, 1956. This report is important for the light it sheds both on the rumors about the assassination reported by Shatunovskaia in her 1955 letter and the construction of an alternative history of the murder. Pospelov and his colleagues looked into Shatunovskaia’s letter, summoning the doctor and nurse she cited to Moscow for interviews. Doctor Kirchakov indicated he *had not* heard the story he told Shatunovskaia about Nikolaev’s interview with Stalin directly from former Leningrad NKVD chief Medved, but from an ex-NKVD officer Olskii. Olskii had told Kirchakov that his friend Medved had insisted that he had been punished unjustly for Kirov’s murder – that he was Kirov’s “closest and most true friend.” Olskii also repeated, ostensibly from Medved’s mouth, the story about Nikolaev’s supposed dramatic interview with Stalin, in which he denounced Leningrad NKVD officers for putting him up to the assassination. The nurse Trunina simply averred that Kirchakov had told her the same story he told Shatunovskaia.⁴⁵

In short, the story that Nikolaev denounced the Leningrad NKVD officers in his interview with Stalin was not third-hand, but *fourth-hand* (Medved to Olskii to Kirchakov to Shatunovskaia) when Shatunovskaia put it to paper. Moreover, in Kirchakov’s retelling, the Nikolaev episode was merely a postscript to an otherwise believable account of Medved denying his guilt in Kirov’s murder. Understandably, Pospelov concluded that Kirchakov’s tale could not be relied upon.

Can we believe Pospelov's account of his interviews with Kirchakov and Trunina? Perhaps, as a longtime Stalinist he was simply trying to discredit evidence that might link Stalin to the murder. The answer is that he was not. In the remainder of his report, Pospelov constructed a case that Stalin *did* order Kirov's murder. He began by dismissing Leningrad NKVD number two Fomin's testimony (probably given on March 26, 1956) that Borisov's death really was an accident ("obviously false evidence"). He also dismissed the 1934-1935 investigative materials as tainted by the efforts to build a case against Kamenev and Zinoviev, and as going too easy on the Leningrad NKVD. Pospelov then proceeded to state his preference for materials from 1937-1938 investigations of Iagoda, Enukidze, Zaporozhets, and the Leningrad NKVD officers accused of murdering Borisov. In other words, in order to implicate Stalin, he chose to rely on "evidence" that was extracted under torture in the process of fabricating a case against arrested NKVD chief Iagoda. As discussed in earlier chapters, the confessions obtained by torture for the great Stalinist show trials are untrustworthy, and many of those who confessed (including Iagoda) retracted their confessions. Pospelov's version of the crime duplicated the March 1938 show trial version, except that Stalin replaced the "Right-Trotskyite Center" as the source of the order to kill Kirov.⁴⁶

A very likely interpretation of Pospelov's report is this. The author, an old Stalinist (like Khrushchev, Shatunovskaia, Mikoian, and nearly everyone else at the top of party in the 1950s), was producing what he knew "the boss" (once Stalin, now Khrushchev) wanted. Regarding Shatunovskaia's fourth-hand tale as too far-fetched even for his purposes, he cherry-picked the 1937-1938 confessions, which at least were on paper and usually signed by their supposed authors, to produce a coherent story of how Stalin had Kirov killed. He generated the narrative that Khrushchev demanded. Now it was up to Khrushchev how, when, and in what forum to use that story-line.

Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" on de-Stalinization set off a furor that in many ways resembled a traditional Bolshevik "self-criticism" campaign. At upper levels of the party potential targets of the campaign (i.e. Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich) publicly applauded but behind the scenes strove to protect themselves by obstructionism and delaying tactics. Inside the CC executive apparatus officials like Pospelov worked to produce texts that Khrushchev might need in pursuit of the campaign. Professional elites and lower-ranking party members disgusted by Stalin's tyranny and often victimized by it spoke out against him. At public meetings a few even dared to discuss the responsibility of the entire party leadership for the reign of fear. At some workplaces employees tore down or defaced portraits of Stalin. Meanwhile Stalin's defenders were at least as vociferous. In Georgia the republic leaders imposed martial law after pro-Stalin riots on the anniversary of the dictator's death. Soviet security forces killed twenty people in the suppression of the riots.⁴⁷

An integral part of any "self-criticism" campaign was letters of denunciation "from below." After party meetings to explain Khrushchev's speech in Leningrad former police and NKVD officers began sending letters to the province party committee concerning the Kirov murder. V. M. Iakushev, the NKVD officer who had conducted the second (1937) investigation of Borisov's death (Borisov was one of Kirov's bodyguards – M. L.), wrote one that captured the attention of Frol Kozlov, Leningrad party chief and Khrushchev ally. In late March or early April, Kozlov wrote to Khrushchev that "From Iakushev's statement it is clear that Borisov's murder was accomplished according to a plan worked out beforehand." Iakushev based his report on the 1937 testimony of Kuzin, the driver of the truck Borisov died in, and Vinogradov, one of the officers accompanying Borisov. His account followed the 1937-1938 show trial scenario prepared to incriminate Iagoda. According to Iakushev, Zaporozhets (Medved's number two in the Leningrad NKVD) feared that Borisov would reveal the supposed Iagoda-run plot against Kirov. Zaporozhets ordered Khviuzov (second-in-command of the Leningrad NKVD Operations Department) to have Borisov killed. A plan was hatched to do away with him under

the guise of a car “accident.” When Borisov on the way to Smolnyi for interrogation by Stalin, Malyi, one of the accompanying officers, grabbed the steering wheel from Kuzin and ran the truck off the street against a wall. Simultaneously, Vinogradov, the officer in the back of the truck with Borisov, smashed the latter’s head with a steel bludgeon, killing him (for more details of this version of events see Chapter 1).⁴⁸

As discussed in Chapter 2, evidence from the 1934-1935 investigation and other sources contradicts the 1937-1938 narrative Iakushev presented on almost every point. Moreover Iakushev himself extracted the 1937-1938 version of events from Kuzin, Malyi, Vinogradov, and others by torture. Kuzin, Malyi, and Vinogradov all denied any wrongdoing in Borisov’s death during several weeks of torture before confessing. Malyi and Vinogradov recanted their confessions at their court hearing on September 2, 1937.⁴⁹

Iakushev was a perpetrator, a torturer, and a collaborator in Stalin’s fabrication of false cases against Iagoda and dozens of others. His 1956 letter seems to have been a preemptive strike – by providing his version of events to party leaders, he not only insured himself against prosecution, he also curried favor with them. And Kozlov, Khrushchev’s associate, was buying what Iakushev had to sell. In his letter to Khrushchev, Kozlov also accepted uncritically statements from former members of the Criminal Investigations Department of the Leningrad police that they had uncovered plots against Kirov’s life in 1933-1934. These officers claimed that the NKVD had dismissed their findings out of hand. Two of the officers’ statements were based on the evidence of M. A. Volkova, the psychologically ill compulsive denouncer Stalin had used in the aftermath of the Kirov murder to arrest dozens of Leningraders on bogus charges of terrorist plots (see Chapter 3). Based on these highly dubious claims, Kozlov concluded “These facts demonstrate, obviously, that several different plans for killing Kirov were worked out in the organs of the MVD (i.e. NKVD).”⁵⁰

While Pospelov, Aristov,⁵¹ Kozlov, and other CC members worked to create a narrative that would implicate Stalin (and probably also Molotov or Kaganovich) in Kirov’s assassination, the KGB and the USSR prosecutor’s office had begun interviewing surviving witnesses about the case, and someone inside the CC or Party Control Commission apparatus was soliciting letters from people who might have first-hand knowledge of the circumstances of the crime. On March 26, 1956 Fomin, who had been one of Medved’s seconds in the Leningrad NKVD, sent a formal statement to the Secretariat of the CC. As early as April 3, 1956 the KGB began interviewing the NKVD officers who had guarded Nikolaev during his imprisonment and trial, as well as a number of ex-senior officers of the Leningrad NKVD. Also sometime in April the Prosecutor’s Office interviewed two members of the military tribunal that sentenced Nikolaev and the other 13 defendants to death.⁵²

On April 13, 1956 the Presidium created a commission to investigate “materials of the open trials of the cases of Bukharin, Rykov, Zinoviev, Tukhachevskii, and others.” This commission would look into the Kirov case as well, but it is important to note that its mandate was much broader – in effect, to explain that part of the Terror directed against the upper levels of the Communist Party. At first glance, the composition of the commission was strange. Of nine members, three, Molotov, Kaganovich, and Voroshilov, had been involved at the highest level in orchestrating the Terror, and thus were themselves potential targets of investigation. They were, however, outnumbered by the six members of the commission from the junior ranks of the CC leadership, all of whom supported Khrushchev during this period – Suslov, Furtseva, Shvernik, Aristov, Pospelov, and Rudenko. Shvernik, a Khrushchev supporter during the Thaw, had just been appointed chairman of the Party Control Commission on which Shatunovskaia served.⁵³

Putting Molotov, Kaganovich, and Voroshilov on the commission may have been a sop to them and to others nervous about where the party’s investigation of the Terror might lead. It may also have

been an exercise in harassment and disciplinary power by Khrushchev. At the commission sessions Molotov and the others would be subject to insinuations, badgering, and generally uncomfortable discussions. Finally, Khrushchev may have considered that getting the signatures of the veteran Stalinists would be the final validation of commission findings. Given the party tradition of unanimous approval of such reports, he may have hoped that all three could ultimately be forced into signing whatever report the commission issued, and, perhaps, incriminating themselves.⁵⁴

On April 16 the commission met for the first time. All members were present except for Rudenko, the head of the prosecutor's office, who was represented by one of his deputies, Baranov. Also present was Khrushchev's KGB chief Serov. The commission (hereafter the Molotov commission) began its work with a consideration of the Kirov assassination. This was in accordance with Khrushchev's identification at the Twentieth Party Congress of the murder as the starting point of the Terror. The commission resolved as follows.

- I. On the schedule for reviewing materials on the trials....
 1. Begin the review of trial materials with the case of the murder of Comrade Kirov.
 2. Order Comrades Serov and Baranov:
 - a. to forward to the members of the commission within three days a report (*spravka*) on documents and agent materials (primary sources) held by the KGB and the Prosecutor's Office on the assassination of S. M. Kirov and the stenographic record of the trial of Nikolaev, Kotolynov, and others in this case.
 - b. to prepare the basic documents in the case of S. M. Kirov's murder and send them to the members of the commission within one week. Review them at the next session of the commission.
- II. On the next session of the commission. Schedule for Monday, April 23 at 3 p.m.

Commission Chairman: V. Molotov⁵⁵

In response to the commission's request, Serov and Baranov forwarded on April 20 a "Report on Investigative Materials in the Case of the Villainous Murder of S. M. Kirov." Attached to the report were copies of selected materials from the case (including excerpts from Nikolaev's diary) and a note that commission members could examine *all* documents related to the murder at the KGB headquarters.⁵⁶

The next commission meeting came off as scheduled, on April 23.

Protocol No. 2
Session of the Central Committee Commission for Study of Materials of the (Open)
Trials
April 23, 1956

Present: comrade Molotov (Chairman).
Commission members: comrades Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Suslov, Shvernik, Furtseva, Aristov, Pospelov.
Comrades Serov, Baranov.

At the session there was an exchange of opinion regarding the materials on the case of the murder of S. M. Kirov presented by the KGB...and the USSR Prosecutor's Office on April 20.

1. The commission considers that the murder of S. M. Kirov by Nikolaev had a political character, that Nikolaev had a hostile attitude towards the party and its leadership. Based on his psychological condition, Nikolaev could and should bear responsibility for the crime he committed.
2. Instruct the KGB (Comrade Serov) to present to the commission by April 28:
 - a. Detailed data on Nikolaev's political characteristics, his political ties and relationships, on his political moods in the last years before the assassination of S. M. Kirov, and etc.
 - b. Materials on the anti-party work and terrorist moods of the Trotsky-Zinoviev group in the period 1932-1934 (prior to the murder of S. M. Kirov) in Moscow and Leningrad.
 - c. Material on the political behavior, connections, and political moods of the group including Kotolynov, Shatskii, et al (**i.e. the defendants convicted and executed together with Nikolaev in December 1934 – M. Lenoe**) before their trial for the murder of S. M. Kirov.
 - d. A report as to how satisfactorily the NKVD guard of comrade Kirov was organized in 1934.
3. Instruct comrade Shvernik (Party Control Commission) to prepare by April 28 for the commission as complete information as possible on Nikolaev's political makeup during his time in the party, the reasons for his exclusion from the party and his restoration to the party, and etc.
4. Order the USSR Prosecutor (comrade Baranov) to study and present to the commission materials on the validity and legality of the preliminary investigation, inquest, and trial in the case of the murder of S. M. Kirov.
5. Schedule the next session of the Central Committee commission for May 3, 1956.

Commission Chairman: V. Molotov.⁵⁷

The Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI) holds three reports to the Molotov Commission from late April 1956, as well as one apparent draft report. One of these reports *may* have been delivered on April 20. Based on internal evidence (reports of interview dates with witnesses, etc.) the other three were prepared and handed over several days later, after the Molotov commission's request for more information on April 23. But whatever the precise dates of the reports, comparison of their contents with the April 23 Molotov commission minutes reveals two radically different agendas at work. On the one hand, the April 23 commission meeting resolved, probably at the prompting of Molotov, Kaganovich and/or Voroshilov, that Nikolaev's murder was a "political" act, and dismissed the issue of Nikolaev's psychological state. Commission members asked Baranov, the KGB, and the Party Control Commission (Shvernik) to answer a series of questions related to the official 1934-1935 version of the crime. These questions boiled down to: was Nikolaev a Zinovievite? What were his ties to Zinovievite groups? What activities in Leningrad were the Zinovievites up to? These questions are attributable to the desire of Molotov and his allies to defend at least the 1934-1935 version of the crime as presented at the trials of the Moscow and Leningrad Centers. Nikolaev was a

Zinovievite terrorist, and hence his trial, the trials of Kamenev and Zinoviev, and probably also the later show trials of 1937-1938 were all justified.

On the other hand, item four of the April 23 minutes looks more like something pushed for by the “reformers,” probably Aristov for one, and points toward *questioning* the official 1934-1935 official version of events. And the reports produced in late April by the KGB (Serov) and the prosecutor’s office (Rudenko’s bailiwick) took precisely this direction. Using investigation records from 1934-1935 and the April interviews with witnesses from the NKVD, the prosecutor’s office, and the military tribunal, all of these reports explicitly denied the argument that the murder was political or that Nikolaev had connections with actual Zinovievite oppositionists. The trial of Nikolaev and the “Leningrad Center,” according to these memoranda, was a fabrication created by the NKVD leadership in collaboration with Stalin. Nikolaev was a lone “psychopathic” killer. An undated document that *may* be the first report to the commission (April 20) made the following points.

We have examined materials of the investigation into the villainous murder of S. M. Kirov and interrogated the following persons: former officers of the NKVD Katsafa, A. I., Radin, L. D., Makarov, N. I., Lobov, P. M., Tsomaev, Iu. Kh., and also...Gusev K. S., who guarded Nikolaev during the trial, and Ianovskii, A. V., who conversed with Tsomaev in 1935.

On the basis of these materials we conclude that the murderer of S. M. Kirov – Nikolaev L. V., was undoubtedly a psychologically ill person.

Nikolaev’s father was an alcoholic, Nikolaev himself suffered from an aggravated case of rickets in childhood, he (only) began to walk at age 11, at age 12 he had some sort of attack, (and) he was regularly sick as an adult.

The notes, diaries, letters, and declarations taken from Nikolaev at the time of his arrest demonstrate his psychological defectiveness (*nepolnotsennosti*)....

In the first days after his arrest Nikolaev asserted in interrogations that he killed S. M. Kirov for personal reasons and did not say anything about any kind of anti-Soviet organization.

Colonel N. N. Makarov, of the reserves, who was working on (surveillance of) the Zinovievites in Leningrad in 1934, claims that there were no materials regarding Nikolaev’s belonging to the Opposition in the Province NKVD (files), and that he personally heard the family name (Nikolaev) only in connection with the murder of S. M. Kirov.

Also deserving of attention is Makarov’s evidence that on December 2, 1934 the files on Kotolynov, Rumiantsev, Shatskii, and others (Nikolaev was not in these files) were taken from him and presented to I. V. Stalin. Two days later, that is on December 4, the family names of Kotolynov, Shatskii, and others first appeared in Nikolaev’s interrogations. From the investigative materials it is clear that Nikolaev was acquainted with Kotolynov and others in the period 1921-1924 from his work in the Vyborg Komsomol organization, and after that he had (only) two to three chance meetings with them, in the course of which no political conversations occurred. Kotolynov confirmed this, stating that “I did not know Nikolaev as a member of a counterrevolutionary Zinovievite organization..”

However, in our review of the investigative materials we came upon a plan of work, composed by one of the leaders of the USSR NKVD who came (to Leningrad) to carry out the investigation of Nikolaev’s case. In this plan the first issue noted is:

- “1. Direction of investigation into the counterrevolutionary Zinovievite organization:
 - “a. the Moscow Center,
 - “b. the Leningrad organization.”

It can be inferred that Stalin, who was in Leningrad at that time, was (acquainted) with this plan, for on the typewritten plan several questions were noted in pencil (**1990 handwriting analysis indicates that Ezhov, not Stalin, wrote the questions – M. Lenoë**).

Our proposal is backed up by the fact that on December 6 Nikolaev...named Kotolynov, Shatskii, and the others as his collaborators, and on December 13 he turned them into the leaders of a terrorist Zinovievite organization.⁵⁸

This particular report went on to explain evidence given by Nikolaev's guards, Katsafa and Radin, only days or weeks before. Katsafa had testified that several days after his arrest, Nikolaev said in his sleep, "If they arrest Kotolynov, there's no need to worry; he's got a strong will, but if they arrest Shatskii, it's all over, he'll tell everything." Katsafa supposedly wrote this down in his notebook and reported it to the chief investigators from Moscow, Agranov and Mironov. Radin, on the other hand, testified that Nikolaev often talked in his sleep, and even named names, but that he never pronounced connected phrases. The report noted that Katsafa was a relative of Leplevskii, a senior official in the Moscow NKVD, and proposed that he had simply made up the story about Nikolaev's sleep talk to fulfill an upper-level order to link Nikolaev to the former oppositionists Kotolynov and Shatskii. Immediately after Nikolaev supposedly mentioned these two in his sleep, he was interrogated about them. Both men were soon arrested.⁵⁹

A second report may be Serov's response to the Molotov commission's April 23 request for more information on Nikolaev's political connections, the Zinovievite Opposition in Leningrad, and Kirov's guard. Based on internal evidence it must have been produced soon after April 20. This memorandum added substantially to the picture of a lone gunman and a fabricated criminal case against the Zinovievites. It used citations from interrogations and the stenogram of the trial of the "Leningrad Center" to argue that no such "Center" had ever existed. It demonstrated that the trial had violated standard Soviet rules for criminal trials. The authors also analyzed the changing testimony of the witnesses in the death of the guard Borisov, contending that the 1937-1938 "confessions" implicating NKVD officers in murdering him were bogus.

Report on Materials in the Case of the Villainous Murder of S. M. Kirov

....

IV. Trial of the Case

The trial of the case of Nikolaev, Kotolynov, and the others took place with gross violations of procedural norms.

After receiving copies of the charges a number of the accused petitioned to call additional witnesses before the court and attach documents (to their case files), but the court did not review these petitions.

At the outset of the trial the accused were not explained their rights in court and they were not asked whether they had any petitions to present before the trial began. The indictments were not read in court and the accused were not asked whether they pled guilty to the charges or not....

Despite the fact that Nikolaev was the main defendant in the case, he was the one who denounced all the others for participating in the murder of S. M. Kirov; the presiding judge Ulrikh established an illegal trial procedure by removing from the courtroom all of the accused except for Nikolaev, questioning the latter in the absence of the other accused....

The former member of the Military Tribunal A. D. Goriachev, interrogated by us, testified that at the beginning of the trial Nikolaev announced that he had carried out the murder

of S. M. Kirov for his own reasons independent of any ties with the Zinovievites, and he took this back only after Ulrikh began to tax him with his earlier statements (to interrogators).

The majority of the (other) accused denied Nikolaev's claims....

The accused Zvezdov testified to the court that he knew absolutely nothing about the preparation of the assassination of S. M. Kirov, that such a thought had never even entered his head....

Nor did the accused....Shatskii admit himself guilty of belonging to any counterrevolutionary organization or participating in the murder of Kirov.

The accused Rumiantsev denied categorically his participation in the terrorist group and stated that he did not even know Nikolaev....

VI. Circumstances of the Death of M. V. Borisov

....Khviiuzov (head of the Third Department of the Leningrad NKVD in 1934), Kuzin (driver of the truck in which Borisov died), Malyi and Vinogradov (both accompanying NKVD officers) categorically asserted (during the 1934-1935 investigation) that Borisov's death was the chance result of an automobile accident and that they never got from anyone an order to murder Borisov.

In June 1937 Khviiuzov, Vinogradov, and Malyi were arrested and in the preliminary investigation confessed their guilt in the premeditated murder of Borisov. They asserted that at their interrogations in December 1934 they gave false evidence as to the reasons for Borisov's death....

At the trial of his case Vinogradov recanted his confessions, declaring, "I gave them falsely, hoping thus to save my life."...

In June 1937 the driver Kuzin was arrested and with regard to the death of Borisov testified:

"...The accident occurred not because the truck was not in working order, as I stated in 1934, but was caused by Malyi, who grabbed the steering wheel while we were driving at high speed, turned the truck to the left, which caused it to crash and kill Kirov."⁶⁰

In later testimony (June 29, 1937) Kuzin gave a more detailed account of events, claiming that the "accident" involved no more than the truck scraping a building wall at low speed, and that in fact Malyi had left the cab, jumped into the back of the truck, and he and Vinogradov had killed Borisov with a blow to the head ("soon after accident, I heard from the back a dull thud...." However, the 1956 report stated, Kuzin's whole account was dubious.

Interrogated on April 19, 1956 Kuzin fundamentally changed his testimony of 1937, confirming only that the auto accident happened because Malyi, riding in the cab with him, grabbed the wheel.

Now Kuzin claims that Malyi did not get into the back of the truck after the accident, but stood by the radiator, that he heard no dull thuds from the back of the truck, that he saw no foreign objects in the back of the truck, nor did he see Borisov bang his head on the wall (of the building).

Explaining the contradictions in his testimony from 1934, 1937, and 1956, Kuzin stated that he always had said the same thing, but the investigators had not noted down his words precisely....

At a face-to-face confrontation with his former (1937) interrogator Iakushev on April 20, 1956, Kuzin asserted that soon after his arrest in 1937 he was subjected to beatings, and then had to stand in a corner for about twenty days, until he collapsed. All this time he was interrogated on the “conveyor” by four to five investigators who demanded that he confess to belonging to a Trotskyite-Zinovievite organization (**later evidence would also emerge that Malyi, Vinogradov, and Khviuzov were also severely tortured before confessing, and that Khviuzov too had recanted his confession in court – M. Lenoë**).

As is evident from the materials of our review, the 1937 investigation of Borisov’s death was carried out in very tendentious fashion (!!-**M. Lenoë**)....materials of the investigation into this matter in 1937 were falsified.⁶¹

The thrust of this report, then, was that the accused former oppositionists in the Leningrad Center trial had almost certainly not conspired with Nikolaev, and that the 1937 version of Borisov’s death (murdered by Leningrad NKVD officers) was extracted under torture and probably false. The report also discredited Iakushev, author of the March-April letter claiming that the Leningrad NKVD had killed Borisov (forwarded by Kozlov to Khrushchev – discussed above). Iakushev had tortured Kuzin and the other witnesses to Borisov’s death for weeks until they “confessed” to the murder. Kuzin himself, who had incriminated Malyi and Vinogradov, and was responsible in part for their executions, temporized in 1956, protecting himself and pursuing his own agenda. He denounced Iakushev for torturing him, while at the same denying that any of his earlier testimony was false. Thus, he could not be held responsible for the executions of Vinogradov and Malyi in 1937.⁶²

The report contained an interesting coda, covering the trial of Leningrad NKVD officials for negligence in the Kirov case in January 1935. This section, excerpted below, could be used to suggest a conspiracy to assassinate Kirov, not among Zinovievite oppositionists, but within the Leningrad NKVD. Such a conspiracy could, of course, be fit within a larger story of Stalin planning Kirov’s murder (following the outlines of the 1938 show trial narrative, but with Stalin replacing the “Right-Trotskyite Center”). The April 1956 report did not make any such suggestions, but the potential of the evidence was probably important.

After the murder of S. M. Kirov the former head of the Leningrad oblast NKVD F. D. Medved, his deputies I. V. Zaporozhets and F. T. Fomin, the chief of the Operations Department A. A. Gubin, the chief of the Secret Political Department A. S. Gorin-Lundin, the section chief M. I. Kotomin of the Operations Department, and other officers of the Leningrad province NKVD, 12 persons in all, were arrested and charged with criminal negligence of their professional duties....

Medved, Zaporozhets, and Fomin were charged with failure to maintain a satisfactory guard for S. M. Kirov and failure to take measures to uncover and halt in timely fashion the activities of the counterrevolutionary terrorist Zinovievite group in Leningrad....

During the investigation....Medved testified that there were no written instructions for the persons guarding S. M. Kirov, and there was no general plan for the guard. He did not undertake any checks of the guard posts.

Medved confessed himself guilty in that he “was not able to arrest in Leningrad a number of counterrevolutionaries among the Trotskii-Zinovievite activists, among them Rumiantsev, Levin, and others, and I did not put this question before the former OGPU or NKVD”....

During the investigation Zaporozhets, *who was interrogated only once (all italics in this section mine – M. Lenoë)* on January 14, 1935, testified that direct control over Kirov's guard was in the hands of Medved, and he dealt with issues related to the guard only when Medved was absent....

Gubin and Kotomin were accused of “illegally freeing L. V. Nikolaev, *who was bearing a revolver and counterrevolutionary writings at the time, without checking his identity or searching him,*” and of not taking necessary measures to guard S. M. Kirov....

The checking of Nikolaev's identity, as Gubin testified further, was inadequate, and his release was made only on the basis of personal impressions of him (Gubin gathered) from Kotomin's (oral) report....

In addition Gubin testified that neither Medved nor Zaporozhets gave him special instructions for the guard of S. M. Kirov, and they heard reports from him (Gubin) on the guard only on a case-by-case basis.

Medved, Zaporozhets, and Fomin were not interrogated about the incident of Nikolaev's detention....

Lobov, interrogated in April 1956 testified that after the trial he, Medved, Zaporozhets, and others were transferred to Kolyma (**forced labor camp – M. Lenoë**) to serve out their terms of imprisonment. Although they rode in a prison train car, in fact their freedom during the trip was not limited in any way.

According to Lobov, upon arrival in Magadan (near Kolyma) they were immediately appointed to supervisory positions in the Dalstroï system....

While at Kolyma, Zaporozhets told Lobov, that before he was sent to Kolyma *Iagoda had called him in and announced that supposedly Stalin had issued an order not to punish harshly the NKVD officers guilty of failure to maintain an adequate guard for Kirov, and after a short period of time, to restore them to their work and to the party.*⁶³

The italicized sections of the excerpt above all hint at the possibility that there was some kind of conspiracy within the Leningrad NKVD to let Nikolaev get at Kirov. The last section, taken from the 1956 testimony of P. M. Lobov, deserves special attention. Lobov, who had been Zaporozhets' deputy in Leningrad (Assistant to the Chief of the Special Department), was clearly hinting that Stalin had taken it easy on the Leningrad NKVD for a reason – perhaps their negligence had not been unwelcome. Serov (if this report was indeed from Serov) probably also included this testimony in his report for a reason. It opened a possible line of inquiry that would point from the Leningrad NKVD to the center – to Stalin, or perhaps one of his closest lieutenants, like Molotov.

While Lobov's testimony seems dramatic, it may have been tainted by 1937 testimony against his boss Zaporozhets, and against Iagoda. Lobov may have testified at that time that *Iagoda* had ordered soft treatment of the Leningrad NKVD, because they had helped in the supposed anti-Stalinist plot to kill Kirov. By “tainted,” I mean that he may have chosen to confirm his 1937 testimony in 1956, regardless of its truth or falsity. Whatever the case, in the years after 1956 Lobov would repeatedly enlarge upon his testimony until Zaporozhets at Kolyma was telling him the whole story of a putative Stalin-Iagoda-Zaporozhets plot to kill Kirov – again, almost precisely the storyline of the 1938 show trial of Iagoda and the leaders of the “Right-Trotskyite Bloc.”

The memorandum in some ways contradicted itself. It did not point towards a single version of Kirov's assassination (in contrast, for example, to Kozlov's letter to Khrushchev in March). Its account of Borisov's death as an accident undermined the hints of Leningrad NKVD involvement in Kirov's death in the last section. This could be due to two reasons, not mutually exclusive. First the

memorandum's authors (presumably Serov's deputies) seem to have made an effort to grapple with the actual evidence at hand, which was in some ways contradictory. Second (see below), they wished at once to undermine any claim that Nikolaev was part of a real Zinovievite conspiracy, while simultaneously leaving open the possibility that the Leningrad NKVD, and perhaps Stalin or his underlings, were involved the murder.

A third report from April 1956 came from the USSR prosecutor's office in response to the April 23 query from the Molotov commission for "materials on the validity and legality of the preliminary investigation, inquest, and trial in the case of the murder of S. M. Kirov." This memorandum repeated the contents of the two already analyzed, albeit with some different data. The authors contended forcefully that Nikolaev was a lone gunman, psychologically disturbed, who had no conspiratorial connections to any of the other accused in the trial of the Leningrad Center. They argued that the trial was an obvious fabrication that was "in direct violation of the law" of December 1, 1934 on expedited trials for accused terrorists. The document gave a definitive "no" in answer to the Molotov commission's implied queries as to whether Nikolaev was a Zinovievite and whether there was a Zinovievite terrorist group involved in the Kirov murder. In other words, it took what was almost certainly a strongly anti-Molotov position. Unlike Serov's (?) memorandum, it did not discuss Borisov's death or the issue of Leningrad NKVD negligence in organizing Kirov's guard.⁶⁴

Central to this book is the question of what, if anything, the KGB might have concealed when it released documents from the Kirov investigation to the party Central Committee.. Was Serov, for example, concealing key evidence against Stalin or key evidence against Leningrad NKVD officers when he released investigation materials to the Molotov commission on April 20, 1956? Given the facts covered in this chapter so far, this seems very unlikely. Serov was Khrushchev's man throughout this period. There was no reason for him not to be. Khrushchev controlled the situation in the spring of 1956. He had key men in other positions by this time, most importantly Rudenko as USSR prosecutor and Shvernik as head of the Party Control Commission. And he had made it clear both in the Secret Speech and in Presidium meetings that he was interested in "solving" the Kirov murder, and that the solution might implicate Stalin or his closest lieutenants at the time in the murder. Khrushchev had looked favorably upon Shatunovskaia's letter reporting rumors that Leningrad NKVD officers had "run" Nikolaev, and that Stalin had turned a blind eye.

With Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" it was open season on the Leningrad NKVD. Kozlov reported rumors from Leningrad that the city's "organs" had facilitated Kirov's murder and Lobov gave testimony in April hinting at the same thing (and also hinting that Stalin had approved). As seen above, Serov's April report to the Molotov commission used Lobov's testimony and evidence from the Leningrad NKVD officers' 1935 trial to make the same insinuation. Moreover, Serov's later behavior shows his willingness to deploy KGB documents to incriminate Stalin, Molotov, and Kaganovich. At the June 1957 CC plenum where Khrushchev and his allies defeated the coup attempt by Molotov's "anti-party group" it was Serov who provided documentary evidence from the KGB archives of Stalin's, Molotov's and Kaganovich's involvement in the murder of hundreds of thousands of Soviet subjects. If there were materials in the KGB archives implicating the Leningrad NKVD, Stalin, Molotov, or Kaganovich in Kirov's assassination, Serov would most likely have revealed their existence, at least to the top party leaders. But he did not. The documents we now have on the Kirov murder may be incomplete, but not because Serov destroyed or concealed evidence of Stalin's complicity.

To understand the positions that Serov and the USSR prosecutor's office took in their memoranda, it is necessary to see precisely what was at stake in the deliberations of the Molotov commission. The commission was charged with investigating the show trials of the later 1930s and

determining whether the charges were valid. The Kirov murder and the trials of the “Leningrad Center” and “Moscow Center” that immediately followed were just the starting point of the inquiry, but everything that followed depended on these events. If the official charges in the first two trials – that former Zinoviev supporters had conspired to murder Kirov – were entirely bogus, then the indictments in all of the succeeding show trials collapsed. The later indictments were built on the earlier ones, albeit in a confused and illogical way. But if there was some truth to the charge that Zinovievites conspired to kill Kirov, then that preserved the possibility of arguing that the later charges (against Trotskyites, former Rightists like Bukharin, and Iagoda) were also valid, at least in part. Therefore Serov and Rudenko (or their subordinates who authored the memoranda) chose to make a clear-cut argument that Nikolaev had had no relationship at all with the ex-Zinoviev supporters convicted in the trial of the “Leningrad Center.” At the same time Serov apparently chose, in his late April 1956 report, to offer some evidence suggesting shenanigans in the Leningrad NKVD, evidence that could point upward toward party leadership involvement in the murder.

At the time the Molotov commission was debating these issues, Rudenko, Serov, and Party Control Commission officials were already taking actions based on the assumption that the show trials charges were bogus. In his memoirs Khrushchev reports a conversation with Rudenko some time before the creation of the Pospelov commission (i.e. before Dec. 31, 1955), in which the prosecutor told him that the charges against Bukharin, Rykov, Krestinskii, and others in the 1930s show trials were baseless.⁶⁵ Moreover, in early 1956 the ongoing rehabilitations of Central Committee members who perished in 1936-1938 were creeping in the direction of the accused in the open show trials. On April 25, A. I. Stetskii, executed in late 1938 for supposed conspiratorial ties with the “Right-Trotskyite Bloc,” and a former close associate of Bukharin, was rehabilitated by the USSR prosecutor’s office. On May 5, 1956, the same office rehabilitated former Leningrad official N. K. Antipov, who at one point had been slated for public trial together with Bukharin and Rykov.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, Molotov, famous for his stubbornness, continued to defend the show trials.⁶⁷ On May 9, 1956 the Molotov commission met for the third time and discussed the reports on the Kirov case submitted by the KGB and the USSR prosecutor’s office. Apparently the commission members could reach no consensus on an interpretation of the assassination and trial of the “Leningrad Center.” Therefore, they resolved to lay aside consideration of the case for the moment and move on to investigate later proceedings. The commission would return to the Kirov affair at a later date.⁶⁸

In the meantime reaction to the “Secret Speech” inside and outside the USSR led to doubts among some Central Committee leaders about further public revelations of Stalinist repression. In the USSR the pro-Stalin riots in Georgia and numerous reports of party members questioning the entire Soviet system at meetings caused uneasiness. Then the “Secret Speech” went public on the international scene, as the *New York Times* published the text on June 4, 1956. In late June thousands of strikers in the Polish city of Poznan demanded “Bread and Freedom,” while in Hungary participants in a youth forum established by the party leadership turned on the Communist leader, Matyas Rakosi. In June the Italian journal *Nuovi Argumenti* published an interview with Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti in which the latter suggested that under Stalin the Soviet Union might have undergone “a bureaucratic degeneration” (this was Trotsky’s old formula about Stalinism). In response the Central Committee Presidium tasked Pospelov with drafting a resolution on the “Secret Speech.” The draft, with minor changes, was approved by the Presidium on June 30, 1956 under the title “On Overcoming the Cult of Personality and its Consequences.”⁶⁹

Soviet reformers of the time and many Western historians came to view the June 30, 1956 Presidium resolution as a fundamental setback to, or even a reversal of de-Stalinization. But the impact of the resolution and its regressive content have been exaggerated. It is hard to see what other reaction

the party leadership could have had to condemnations of the entire Soviet system as corrupt and degenerate - unsalvageable, in short. The leaders, including Khrushchev, naturally assumed that the system of one-party rule and state ownership of the economy was sound in every sense – indeed, that it represented the future of humanity. That assumption may have been false, but, again, what other assumption would one expect the Soviet leaders to have? In response to the disorders and to criticisms of the Soviet system as a whole, then, they reaffirmed that Stalin had made great mistakes and committed many crimes, but that he was a genuine fighter for socialism. Flaws in his personality, noted by Lenin, together with the pressures of fighting capitalist enemies without and their collaborators within, had been too much for Stalin, and the sad result was the cult of personality. The “cult of personality,” the resolution stated, was “in contradiction to the nature of Soviet society (*stroï*).” It was an alien growth that needed to be removed. At the same time, the Soviet people “were justified in their pride that our Motherland was the first to build the road to socialism.”⁷⁰

The June 30 resolution did put a damper on denunciation of Stalin in the upper-levels of the Soviet Communist Party. And it did follow Molotov’s formula of noting Stalin’s accomplishments as well as his “shortcomings.” But the resolution did not signal the end of de-Stalinization. Work continued on the rehabilitation of party members repressed in the Terror, on restoring the rights of deported peoples and former POWs, and on compensating released camp survivors for property confiscated at the time of their arrest or sentencing. Over two hundred letters demanding the removal of Stalin’s mummy from the Lenin Mausoleum came in to the Central Committee and this was reported to the leadership.⁷¹

The changing atmosphere seems to have made the old Stalinists on the commission, led by Molotov, bolder. Between May 10 and July 30 the Molotov commission met seven times. Protocols of the meetings provide scanty information on proceedings, but combined with other evidence suggest an escalating struggle between the old Stalinists and the younger Khrushchev backers. The commission examined documents of the major trials of 1935-1938 provided by Serov and Rudenko. On May 30, members were unprepared to deliver a scheduled written report to the Presidium on its findings, and resolved instead to present an oral summary. On June 1, the Presidium agreed to postpone the report. Questions put by the commission to Serov on July 25 suggest that Molotov was pushing hard his view that the defendants in the trials were guilty of at least some of the charges. On that date, commission members requested Serov to provide information on meetings of various of the accused with Trotskyites abroad, on Bukharin’s possible connections with the old Socialist Revolutionary Party, and on Nikolaev’s connections with foreign consuls in Leningrad. On July 30 the commission resolved to return to discussion of the Kirov murder, requesting “detailed conclusions” on the matter from Rudenko and Serov before breaking for the summer holidays.⁷²

Khrushchev’s pointman on the commission, Aristov, continued to work with Serov on the Kirov murder. On July 18, 1956 Serov sent a memorandum to Aristov headed “on the results of investigation of M. N. Volkova’s letter on the murder of S. M. Kirov.” Volkova, familiar from earlier chapters as the denouncer Stalin pulled out of a mental hospital on December 2, 1934 and used to purge Leningrad of supposed anti-terrorist plotters, had written a denunciation to the Central Committee in May 1956. She claimed that she had known Nikolaev personally, that he had been a member of a counterrevolutionary organization dedicated to assassinating Kirov, Molotov, and Voroshilov, and that some participants in the conspiracy were still alive and well in Leningrad. Serov attached a report from KGB colonels Dobrokhov and Kallistov that destroyed Volkova’s credibility. Volkova, who worked in the early 1930s as a passport processor in Leningrad, had been an agent of the security organs from 1931. Prior to Kirov’s murder she had a history of denouncing friends and acquaintances for counterrevolutionary plots. The Leningrad NKVD ignored her and then, in October 1934, forceably

committed her to a mental hospital. After Stalin had her released from the mental hospital and ordered the NKVD to pay attention to her denunciations, the government provided Volkova with a good apartment and passes to high-level party resorts and sanatoria. Prior to 1936, two years after Kirov's assassination, she said nothing about knowing Nikolaev or any of the accused in the "Leningrad Center" trial.

Volkova constantly produced denunciations. From 1948-1955 the Leningrad security organs received 90 such letters and generated eleven volumes of material investigating them. She had denounced her boyfriend when he broke up with her, her daughter, and many neighbors and acquaintances, all of capital crimes. At an interview with KGB officers on June 8, 1956, Volkova admitted that she in fact did *not* know Nikolaev or the other accused in the "Leningrad Center" trial. Her description of Nikolaev did not match other descriptions or his photograph. Immediately after the June 8 interview Volkova wrote a letter denouncing her interrogators, and disclosing their involvement in a "terrorist plot."⁷³

Serov concluded that Volkova was wholly unreliable.

Given that Serov's letter was addressed to Aristov, it seems that the latter probably asked for a KGB evaluation of Volkova's denunciation. The denunciation itself could have been used by Molotov or his antagonists on the Molotov commission. It suggested a wide-ranging conspiracy to murder Kirov, true, but one directed against the Stalinist leadership as a whole (which would fit the 1938 show trial version of events). The KGB debunked the denunciation completely. It is worth noting that a later commission, on which Shatunovskaia played a decisive role, would return to Volkova's evidence in an effort to find evidence implicating Stalin in the murder.

Late in the summer, Serov (or his assistants) produced yet another report on the Kirov murder, in response to the Molotov commission's July 30 demand for "detailed conclusions." This memorandum squarely opposed the efforts of Molotov and his allies to suggest that there had been a real Zinovievite conspiracy to kill Kirov. The authors marshaled a great deal of evidence from the 1934-1935 investigations to argue that Nikolaev was a lone gunman and Borisov had died in an auto accident. They also went over testimony about the Kirov murder in the later show trials, demonstrating that the defendants, including Iagoda, were almost certainly innocent of any conspiracy.

To Comrade Shvernik, N. M.

I am sending to you this report re: the questions raised in the protocol of the Central Committee commission of July 30, 1956.

I. Serov.

August 31, 1956

...III. Evolution of Interpretation of the Evidence in the Murder of S. M. Kirov between 1934 and 1938.

In the beginning the investigators in the murder of S. M. Kirov interpreted the circumstances as follows – Nikolaev, a person with anti-Soviet inclinations, was a lone terrorist, acting without collaborators.

From the available documents it is clear that later, without any basis, the investigation changed tracks in the direction of collecting "proofs" that supposedly confirmed the existence of criminal connections between Nikolaev and the group of former participants in the Zinovievite opposition. In this way the case against Kotolynov, Rumiantsev, and others appeared. Moreover it is worth noting that even on the eve of trial the investigators had no

evidence of any interest on Nikolaev's part in any of the former oppositionists, much less of (closer) connections between him and Kotolynov, Rumiantsev, or others among the accused.

Before the case went to trial, Zinoviev, Kamenev and...a series of other former participants in the opposition were arrested without any evidence of participation in the assassination of S. M. Kirov. This (second) case was then carried through under the banner of the "moral responsibility" of the former leaders of the opposition for the murder of S. M. Kirov, insofar as the assassin (for no reason whatsoever) was labelled as one of the Zinovievites. On this charge, that of moral responsibility, the accused confessed themselves guilty.

However, later, when Nikolaev, Kotolynov, Rumiantsev and the others were no longer among the living, and hence, there were no persons who could confirm or deny any new versions of the murder of S. M. Kirov, an entirely new interpretation of the role of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and the others was accepted.

Based only the statements of the accused, and in spite of the fact that these clearly contradicted their earlier explanations and materials made at previous trials, it was presented as proven, that the Trotskii-Zinovievite Center directly managed the organization of S. M. Kirov's murder, and its representative Bakaev personally met with and instructed the killer Nikolaev.

Even later, after Zinoviev, Kamenev, Evdokimov, Bakaev and others had been shot, yet another new version appeared, viz., that the murder of S. M. Kirov was carried out at the order of a Right-Trotskyite Bloc. Moreover, this version was accepted as proven based only on the statements of Iagoda, which he himself...retracted in his last words to the court. (This version) was accepted as proven in spite of the fact that it was debunked by Bukharin and Rykov, and by all the materials of the earlier trials.

Thus it turned out that, given the absence of documentary evidence, the fewer persons remained alive whose evidence the court should have considered in its decision (and this includes the investigators who took part in the inquiries for the previous trials), the larger the circle of persons grew who turned out to be guilty in participating in the murder of Kirov....

V. The (Question of) Participation of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Others in the Murder of S. M. Kirov at the trials of 1935-1936

In the sentences in the case of the "United Trotskyite-Zinovievite Center" (**August 1936 – M. Lenoë**) all of the accused were convicted in the assassination of S. M. Kirov.

During the investigation and during the trial Zinoviev, Kamenev, Evdokimov and Bakaev testified that S. M. Kirov was killed in accord with the decisions of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Center. If one accepts the formal approach to this testimony, as the court did, it is possible to accept as proven the guilt of the accused, and the sentence in this sense justified. However, comparison of the various statements with one another, with consideration of the other materials at the disposal of the court and the investigation, and the data collected during the review of 1956, gives reason to affirm that the accusations against Zinoviev, Kamenev, and other persons on trial in the case of the "United Trotskyite-Zinovievite Center" on charges of murdering S. M. Kirov were falsified. None of them were complicit in the murder.

The statements of Zinoviev, Kamenev, Evdokimov, and Bakaev, unsupported by any other evidence, are diametrically opposed to the statements they gave to the court in January 1935. Previously they all asserted that the murder of S. M. Kirov was as unexpected to them as for all Soviet persons. These statements (of August 1936) are also refuted by all the investigative materials on the case of Nikolaev, Kotolynov, Rumiantsev, et al, as none of the accused in this case gave any evidence of the participation of Bakaev, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and others in the murder of S. M. Kirov.

It also should be noted, that the statements of Zinoviev, Kamenev, et al in 1936 do not stand up when compared directly to one another, and in a number of instances include obviously untrue assertions. For example, Bakaev said that the decision to kill Kirov was taken in 1934, while Evdokimov said it was 1932. Some (of the accused) testify that Bakaev was charged with managing the organization of the terrorist act against S. M. Kirov, but he says that he had just a one-time assignment – to check up on preparations (for the murder). Bakaev...testifies that Evdokimov recommended Nikolaev to carry out the terrorist act, as he had known him for many years. Evdokimov himself did not testify to this, although he did state in court that he recognized the photograph of Nikolaev as a person he'd known in 1925-1926. *At this time Evdokimov was secretary of the Leningrad province committee of the party, and Nikolaev – the manager of the Luga county committee of the Komsomol. For this reason Nikolaev could hardly have been acquainted with Evdokimov...*(italics mine-M. Lenoe).

VI. Participation of the Rightists in the Murder of S. M. Kirov

On March 13, 1938 the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR found Bukharin, Rykov, Iagoda, and other accused, tried in the case of the so-called “Right-Trotskyite Bloc,” guilty in carrying out the villainous murder of S. M. Kirov....

Rykov and Bukharin, who supposedly made the decision to carry out this terrorist act, during the investigation and in court categorically denied not just participating in, but even knowing anything about this affair....

In his final words to the court Iagoda declared:

“Not only is it not true that I was the organizer of the murder of Kirov, it is not true that I was a co-conspirator. I am guilty of a most serious criminal dereliction of professional duty (**he refers to negligence in protecting Kirov and in investigating the murder – M. Lenoe**), that is true. I will answer for that in full measure, but I am not a co-conspirator. Conspiracy, comrade Prosecutor, you know as well as I what conspiracy is. None of the materials of this trial or the preliminary investigation demonstrate that I was a co-conspirator in this villainous murder.

In this declaration Iagoda in essence recanted his earlier testimony with regard to the participation of the Rightists in the murder of Kirov....

It has been determined by the inquiry of 1956 that during the investigation process measures of physical pressure (**torture**) were used against Iagoda, and before the trial Ezhov promised him his life, if he said in court what was demanded of him....

IX. Conclusions...

1. Nikolaev, the murder of S. M. Kirov, was a person with anti-Soviet inclinations.
2. In the period of the struggle of the party against the oppositions, Trotskii, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and their supporters strove to sow distrust in the leadership of the party and the country. Their slanderous assertions about degeneration of the party, about the necessity of changing the composition of the party leadership, their attempts to take the intra-party struggle “to the streets” ... facilitated the growth of terrorist moods among politically immature, unstable persons....However, neither in ...the investigation nor...the results of recent reviews was any evidence found of the existence of any connection of Trotskii, Zinoviev, et al, with the concrete facts of S. M. Kirov’s assassination. The version of the direct participation of Zinovievites, Trotskyites, and ...”Rights” in the murder of S.

- M. Kirov is completely made-up, and their false testimony...was obtained as a result of use of measures forbidden by law (**torture**)....
3. The death of Borisov was the result of an (auto) accident.
 4. The officers of the Leningrad province NKVD, accused of the murder of Borisov, were executed without reason based on falsified materials.⁷⁴

In this report Serov omitted any evidence that might point to a conspiracy by Stalin, Iagoda, and/or local NKVD officials to kill Kirov. Yet investigators continued to gather such evidence, even if it was dubious. On July 20, P. M. Lobov, Zaporozhets' former deputy, enlarged on his April testimony. Not only had Zaporozhets told him about Stalin's order to Iagoda to take it easy on the Leningrad NKVD, Lobov said, he had also told him that the Leningrad NKVD had detained Nikolaev more than once, and that Iagoda, through Zaporozhets, had ordered Nikolaev's release. Here again, Lobov's testimony followed the story-line of the March 1938 show trial on the purported conspiracy to murder Kirov.⁷⁵

Why did Serov omit material suggesting an upper-level conspiracy to murder Kirov? Perhaps he and his staff believed that available material was false (as they believed with Volkova's letter). Perhaps they were responding to the new doubts about public denunciation of Stalin. Or perhaps they chose to focus their memorandum on refuting Molotov's contention that there had really been some kind of an oppositionist plot to assassinate Kirov.

Serov, or his investigators, did go to great lengths in this report to deny any possible connections between Nikolaev and the Zinovievites tried in the case of the "Leningrad Center." For example, the italicized section of the document above claims that Nikolaev could not have been acquainted with the local Zinovievite leader Evdokimov, because he was in Luga, outside Leningrad, doing Komsomol work in 1925-1926. But this claim is disingenuous, Nikolaev was in Leningrad doing party/Komsomol work for years before January 1925, and Evdokimov was a prominent leader in the Leningrad organization.⁷⁶

The Molotov commission did not meet again until November 19, 1956, perhaps because the discussions had reached an impasse, perhaps because the Soviet leaders were occupied with summer holidays, the Suez war in Egypt, and revolution in Hungary. But when it did meet, members moved quickly to produce a report to the Presidium. After discussion of the memoranda on the Kirov murder from Serov (excerpted above) and Rudenko, the commission charged Rudenko with preparing a draft report to the Presidium. On December 4 the commission approved Rudenko's draft, recommending minor changes.⁷⁷

The commission's conclusions were an incoherent and contradictory mess, but an overall victory for Molotov. The memorandum emphasized that because there were real enemies inside and outside the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s (Trotskyites, kulaks, Rightists, the Germans and Japanese) the repressions of the period were justified. Because Kirov had fought Zinovievites and Trotskyites in Leningrad, they hated him. The result was Nikolaev's shooting of Kirov. The report stated that Nikolaev had "sharply anti-Soviet attitudes" and strongly implied that he was a Zinovievite. He knew personally the ex-Zinovievites who were tried with him. At the same time the memorandum admitted that there was no conclusive evidence of "criminal ties" between Nikolaev and the other accused in the "Trial of the Leningrad Center." Indeed, the Leningrad Center as such probably never existed.⁷⁸

The commission found that the sentences in the 1935 trial of the "Moscow Center" supposedly headed by Zinoviev and Kamenev were justified. The Zinovievite leaders really did bear responsibility for encouraging terrorism by struggling against the party majority. On the other hand, there was no

evidence that Zinoviev, Kamenev or their associates were directly involved in plotting Kirov's murder. Yet, there was no reason to review the convictions of the 1936-1938 show trials, because the principals in those trials had undermined the construction of socialism in the USSR. The implication was that while no specific crime could be hung on the necks of the ex-opposition leaders, they had still deserved execution for struggling against "the party".⁷⁹

Without explanation, the report concluded that the generals tried *in camera* as part of the "Military-Fascist Plot" in 1937 (Tukhachevskii, Iakir, and others) were innocent and should be rehabilitated.

And finally, the report stated that Stalin's unlimited power had allowed him to undertake a full-scale attack on the party itself in the wake of Kirov's murder, aided by "careerists and provocateurs" in the NKVD.

The commission report was a cut-and-paste job of mutually exclusive propositions, some from Serov's and Rudenko's reports, some harking back to the era of the show trials themselves. It was a wholly inadequate compromise. In that context, it is significant that Rudenko included and the commission accepted a phrase stating that Nikolaev had carried out his crime with the "criminal *poputitelstvo*" of "persons inside the NKVD responsible for guarding S. M. Kirov." Rudenko or other commission members probably selected the word *poputitelstvo* because its interpretation was ambiguous. It might signify that through criminal negligence the Leningrad NKVD had inadvertently allowed Nikolaev to get at Kirov, or it might mean that Leningrad NKVD officers actively connived with Nikolaev. Like the single word *poputitelstvo*, the significance of the entire phrase bringing the Leningrad NKVD into the murder was ambiguous. If the Leningrad NKVD was involved, Molotov could argue that the entire 1938 show trial narrative – Iagoda and the Right plotted to murder Kirov using Zaporozhets and the Leningrad NKVD – was correct. On the other hand, anti-Stalinists could then argue that Iagoda had been working for Stalin (or Molotov or Kaganovich) when he ordered Kirov's murder. Both sides could approve of the ambiguous language. The possibility of Leningrad NKVD connivance in Kirov's death was back on the table.

Khrushchev evidently was unhappy with the report. Given his actions and statements before and afterwards, it seems quite likely that he had wanted a complete rejection of the show trial verdicts and some sort of indictment of Stalin. On December 14, 1956 the Presidium resolved to "take note of" the Molotov commission's report and order it back to work. The Presidium also put Serov on the commission (previously he had attended sessions only as a *rappporteur*, not as a member). Presumably this was because Khrushchev wanted to strengthen his influence on the deliberations.⁸⁰

In the following months relations rapidly deteriorated between Khrushchev and a number of other party leaders. Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, and Malenkov must all have feared that the personal consequences of further public de-Stalinization. But others, including Bulganin and USSR Foreign Minister Shepilov, also came to view Khrushchev as out-of-control and dangerously power-hungry. De-Stalinization was not the only issue for this group. While Shepilov for one has written that he feared further public denunciations of Stalinist repression would undermine the stability of the Soviet regime, none of these men wished to return to the extreme state terror of the Stalin era. Rather, they were afraid of Khrushchev's accumulation of power, they were afraid of his control of the KGB through Serov, and they were appalled at some of his policy initiatives, most notably his January 1957 proposal to decentralize the management of industry. There was also a general perception that Khrushchev was a rash big-mouth, exacerbated by his boast in May 1957 that the Soviet Union would soon produce more meat and dairy products per capita than the United States. Other Soviet leaders viewed this as completely unrealistic.⁸¹

Although Khrushchev has been portrayed as unaware of the widespread dissatisfaction with his power,⁸² there is some evidence that he was deliberately pushing affairs towards a confrontation. Petr Demichev, a Khrushchev assistant in 1957, and Shepilov both believed Khrushchev knew that the attempt to remove him was in the works. Shepilov asserted that Serov, who was eavesdropping on the other party leaders, must have told him.⁸³ Putting these claims together with Khrushchev's aggressive behavior towards Molotov, Malenkov, and Kaganovich in the spring of 1957, it appears quite plausible that the Soviet leader was pressing towards a final showdown with his rivals.⁸⁴

The scanty records of the Molotov commission suggest that Khrushchev used it to apply heavy pressure to the Molotov group. On April 8, 1957 the commission met for the first time after a four-month hiatus, with Serov now on board as a full member. Members chose to define a narrow issue for investigation, namely the death of Kirov's guard Borisov. Serov and Rudenko were assigned to prepare a draft report to the Central Committee. On April 13 the commission discussed the draft, but apparently Aristov, Khrushchev ally and aggressive de-Stalinizer, was unhappy with it. The commission agreed to postpone presentation of a report to the Central Committee for ten days, while Aristov gathered new materials on Borisov's death. Unfortunately, we do not know what materials, if any, Aristov provided.⁸⁵

On April 23, after some discussion, commission members assigned Rudenko, Serov, and Pospelov to prepare by the end of the day another draft memorandum on Borisov. Apparently they were under pressure to present their report quickly to the Presidium. The final report was, like the December memorandum on the 1930s show trials, an awkward, inconclusive document. It was clear why there were "doubts" about Borisov's death – he was the only one seriously hurt in the truck accident, and his failure to maintain a close guard on Kirov led to the latter's death. But the 1937 testimony of the driver and guards who accompanied Borisov on December 2 was extracted under torture, and was therefore untrustworthy. Hence, there was no hard evidence of foul play. The commission stated that since events had occurred so long ago, there was no possibility of finally determining the truth, and therefore the inquiry should be closed. The report concluded that the commission stuck by its December conclusion that the "terrorist Nikolaev" had killed Kirov for political reasons, with the *poputitelstvo* of persons in charge of Kirov's guard.⁸⁶

Again, Molotov seems to have succeeded in placing key elements of his version of events into the document. Nikolaev was a "political terrorist" and he did have the help of Kirov's guard – again, a repetition of fragments of the storyline from the March 1938 trial of Bukharin et al. Whereas Serov's August 31, 1956 memorandum had concluded that Borisov's death was an accident, the April 23, 1957 commission report asserted that no conclusion was possible. It is true that claims that the Leningrad NKVD officers connived in Kirov's death and killed Borisov could be (and later were) fit into a storyline in which Stalin ordered Kirov's assassination. However these were also key elements of the 1938 version of the murder incriminating the "Right-Trotskyite Bloc." It is likely that Molotov supported their inclusion in the April 1957 report because he was struggling to maintain the validity of the show trials and the Stalinist version of the Kirov murder.

How was Molotov able to influence the commission report so greatly? There were ten commission members. Three, Molotov, Kaganovich, and Voroshilov, had a clearcut interest in defending the validity of the 1930s show trials and the bulk of the charges against "enemies of the people." These had been the men who stood side-by-side with Stalin during the Terror. Shvernik, Serov, Aristov, and Rudenko were Khrushchev's men and deeply involved in the rehabilitation and de-Stalinization efforts. This left three remaining members – Suslov, Furtseva, and Pospelov. Suslov has often been labelled a "Stalinist," but this is an oversimplification. Whatever his private opinions, he spoke strongly in favor of telling the Central Committee membership about Stalinist repressions in the

winter of 1955-1956. In June 1957 he stood by Khrushchev against Molotov's "anti-party group." But later in his career he stood above all for regime stability, and thus against further open discussion of the Stalin era. He played a key role in Khrushchev's overthrow in October 1964. It is quite plausible that in April 1957, with disillusion with Khrushchev rising among the top leaders, Suslov might have supported Molotov on some points. The same holds for Furtseva, head of the Moscow party organization and the only woman in the upper levels of the party leadership. Although Furtseva supported Khrushchev during the June-July battle with the Molotov group, she apparently wavered during the spring.⁸⁷ Pospelov, although he authored key early reports on Stalin's repressions, was an opportunist who followed whatever he perceived the dominant political line to be.

At the April 23, 1957 meeting that authorized the report on Borisov's death, Suslov, Pospelov, and Furtseva probably supported Molotov on some points, for Voroshilov was absent. With nine commission members present, Molotov, Kaganovich, and the three waverers would have constituted a majority.

Khrushchev, however, was determined to expose the Molotov group's ties to Stalinist terror. On the afternoon of April 25 the Presidium met to discuss the rehabilitation of Tukhachevskii, Iakir, and Uborevich, the generals executed for treason in 1937, as well as other cases. (The Presidium may also have considered the report on Borisov's death, the final version of which was issued on the same day.) Khrushchev threw down the gauntlet to Molotov and company. During discussion of the rehabilitation of E. E. Rubinchik, a former factory director convicted for sabotaging the design of an amphibious tank, Khrushchev stated sarcastically that "my friend Georgii Malenkov played an unseemly role in this affair." When the Presidium considered the Tukhachevskii rehabilitation, Khrushchev challenged, "let the old members of the Politburo tell us how they decided the question of bringing Iakir to trial, how this first step was prepared." Marshal Zhukov seconded Khrushchev with "we've got to get to the bottom of this." According to Brezhnev's account two months later, at the June 1957 CC plenum, Khrushchev asked at this meeting, "What are we going to do with those guilty of these executions? Will we return to this issue, or will we just continue to keep our mouths shut about them...". Perhaps Khrushchev was frustrated with the lack of results from the Molotov commission.⁸⁸

During May Rudenko and Serov continued to press rehabilitation in a direction that the old Politburo cohort could not have liked. On May 18, 1957 the two recommended the rehabilitation of Akmal Ikramov, tried and convicted together with Bukharin in the March 1938 trial of the "Right-Trotskyite Bloc." Ikramov was the first rehabilitee from among those convicted in the open show trials of the Terror. In their memorandum, Serov and Rudenko debunked the evidence presented against Ikramov, including his own "confessions." The rehabilitations moved one step closer to the leaders of the Right themselves, Bukharin and Rykov, and to a complete rejection of the show trials.⁸⁹

On June 18, 1957 tensions between Khrushchev and the Molotov group erupted. With the support of seven of eleven full members of the Presidium, the old Stalin guard attempted to fire Khrushchev from the post of First Secretary of the Central Committee. For four days Presidium members locked in intense debate, with the majority of full members savaging Khrushchev for arrogance, incompetence in management of agriculture and foreign relations, and construction of his own cult of personality. A number of Khrushchev's rivals complained that Serov was spying on them, and there was apparently a proposal to remove Serov as KGB chief. Kaganovich argued that Khrushchev's supposed sympathies with the Trotskyites were motivating his efforts to review the great show trials of the Terror.

The Khrushchev faction fought back. Zhukov and Shvernik denounced Molotov's, Kaganovich's, and Malenkov's prominent roles in the Terror, with Zhukov apparently reading aloud

from archival documents. Khrushchev rallied candidate members of the Presidium and a number of CC secretaries to his side. Behind the scenes Serov and Zhukov flew dozens of Central Committee members to Moscow on military transport aircraft. With the military, the KGB, and the majority of the party elite below Presidium level on his side, Khrushchev forced his opponents to agree to a full session of the Central Committee, which began on June 22.⁹⁰

Khrushchev was in undisputed control of the CC plenum that followed, which was devoted to denunciation of the “anti-party group” of Molotov, Malenkov, and Kaganovich. These three, together with Shepilov, were expelled from their leadership posts and from the Central Committee. Pervukhin, Saburov, and Bulganin “confessed” their errors early in the plenum and got off with demotions for the time in being. Khrushchev let Voroshilov off the hook, more a gesture of contempt than anything else.⁹¹

The June 1957 CC plenum was about the history of the Stalin era more than anything else. With Khrushchev victorious, dozens of Central Committee members jostled to denounce Molotov, Malenkov, and Kaganovich for participating in the annihilation of party higher-ups under Stalin. Furtseva referred to their “monstrous crimes,” Brezhnev denounced their “fanatical approach to cadres,” Kozlov criticized Malenkov’s leading role in the execution of Leningrad leader Kuznetsov in 1949, and first secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party Mukhitdinov said that in trying to remove Khrushchev the three leaders of the “anti-party group” were mainly concerned with hiding their role “in the mass extermination of leading cadres.”⁹² Speakers cited documents from the KGB archives on the scale of repressions, with Khrushchev himself giving total numbers for the repressed in the Terror that had previously only been revealed at Presidium meetings – 1.5 million arrested, 681,692 shot in 1937-1938.⁹³ Serov had a major part in the denunciation of Kaganovich, describing his leadership of mass purges in Ukraine and his marginal note of “kudos” (*privetstviuu*) on an arrest list.⁹⁴ Rudenko described working with Serov on the rehabilitation of thousands of repressed party members. He also savaged Malenkov and Kaganovich for obstructing the investigations into the Stalin era, and Molotov for justifying the murder of party cadres.⁹⁵

Aristov in particular shed light on the history of the Molotov commission, albeit from the point of view of the Khrushchevites. According to him, “we sat on that commission endlessly. The debates were extremely harsh.” Voroshilov “just got outraged,” while Kaganovich and Molotov said the trials during the Terror were “correct,” “in the interests of the party,” and “the right thing to do.” Serov and Rudenko provided documents, Aristov said, that ultimately forced Molotov and Kaganovich to recognize “maybe half” of the crimes committed. Kaganovich confessed “there were excesses,” while Molotov stated, “there were good political reasons for all of that.” Because of Serov and Rudenko’s services in providing documents on the crimes of the Stalinist leadership, Aristov said, the anti-party group had aimed to fire Serov after Khrushchev’s removal. Molotov, Malenkov, and Kaganovich, he claimed, had wanted to “break through” into the archives of the KGB and the CC commissions on repressions, in order to destroy documents that incriminated them.⁹⁶

The real bomb-thrower was V. N. Malin, head of the Central Committee General Affairs Department (*obshchii otdel*) and one-time Leningrad official who had witnessed Kuznetsov’s trial in 1949. Malin asserted that the mass executions of the later 1930s were not just Stalin’s doing. “No, Kaganovich and Molotov – they’re guilty (too). I’ll go further – Kirov’s ghost hangs over Molotov. Let him answer why Medved was destroyed, why Enukidze was destroyed.... The case of Kirov’s assassination is a case that has not yet been deeply examined. Based on the documentary materials we have, I’m prepared to say that.”⁹⁷

In his concluding speech to the plenum, Khrushchev disavowed Malin’s assertions, but somewhat in the manner of a Mafia boss rueing the excessive enthusiasm of his enforcers to a

restaurant owner who has just been shaken down. “I respect (Malin), but he has his character, yesterday you saw that character.” Malin may have taken things too far, Khrushchev indicated, but he was also giving an implied threat about what accusations could be deployed against the “anti-party group.” Indeed, later in the same speech, Khrushchev returned to the Kirov murder, and while he did not mention Molotov’s name, he did indicate that further investigation was necessary.

I still can’t make sense of all the circumstances of Kirov’s murder. There is much that remains unexplained. It’s not clear why, after Kirov’s death, it was necessary to kill Borisov when Stalin arrived in Leningrad and Borisov – Kirov’s guard – was being driven to an interrogation. They killed Borisov and said that he died as the result of an auto crash. The driver who survived said that the Chekist grabbed the wheel from him, and directed the truck against a building, and he heard noise in the back, and when he got out, the guard Borisov was dead. And now we’ve determined that the two Chekists in the (back of the) truck, killed Borisov with picks (*lomikami* – possibly “crowbars”). Who needed this? It’s clear that this was necessary to cover the traces (of the plot to murder Kirov). Even today I do not believe that Zinoviev had anything to do with this. We had a battle of ideas with Trotskii, Bukharin, and Zinoviev, and we smashed them. But after Kirov’s murder hundreds of thousands of heads were laid on the execution block. Why was this necessary? Even today this is a mystery, and it would be a good thing to look into. But does Molotov get it? No. He trembles before this, he fears even hints about this question; Kaganovich is in the same situation.⁹⁸

If the KGB or other instances had documents that might connect Stalin or any of the “anti-party group” to Kirov’s assassination, directly or indirectly, Khrushchev supporters at this plenum would have revealed them, or at least mentioned their existence. No one was “covering” for Stalin at this moment – the Khrushchevites revealed many of his most heinous crimes, as well as the collaboration of Molotov, Kaganovich, Malenkov, Beria, and others in mass murder. Malin’s assertion that Kirov’s ghost “hung over Molotov” was in a certain sense plausible, because Molotov and Ordzhonikidze, Kirov’s closest friend in the party leadership, had often butted heads as the chiefs of rival bureaucratic organizations, and because Molotov was an old Petersburg Bolshevik who in the mid-1930s retained connections in the city (one was Mikhail Chudov, Kirov’s deputy). Ultimately, however, Malin’s words have to be viewed as speculative, a kind of threatening hyperbole aimed at intimidating Molotov. Again, if Aristov, Serov, Rudenko, or Malin had had evidence to back Malin’s claim, they would have unveiled it at this plenum. This would not have been for the general population, but strictly for members of the party elite, to discredit for good the “anti-party group.”

Khrushchev’s words to the plenum on the Kirov murder are also revealing. In order to suggest the involvement of Stalin and the Molotov group in the assassination, Khrushchev resorted to the 1937-1938 show trial version of events, and to testimony extracted under torture (that of the truck driver in Borisov’s death). In doing so he omitted any reference to the 1934-1935 investigation results, with which Serov had acquainted him and the Molotov commission. Instead he presented as simple truth a version of Borisov’s death that was unsubstantiated and dubious - that two NKVD officers had murdered Borisov with picks in the back of the truck transporting him to his meeting with Stalin.

Most of the documentary evidence on the Kirov murder presented in this book was released to the Molotov commission by Serov in April 1956. To evaluate the documents, it is absolutely necessary to understand the political context in which they were released. That context was a sustained campaign by Khrushchev and his closest associates – Serov and Rudenko, to name two – to mine the archives for evidence showing how Stalin and his closest lieutenants in the mid- to late-1930s had masterminded

the destruction of much of the party leadership. My conclusion is that it is highly unlikely that Serov was concealing documents that might have incriminated Stalin, Molotov, Malenkov, or Kaganovich in Kirov's killing.

*

Serov was, however, concealing something. On January 27, 1956, just as serious preparations for Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" to the XXth Party Congress began, the KGB destroyed the case file "Svoiak," which contained data on the surveillance of former Zinovievites in Leningrad in the early 1930s.⁹⁹ Most of those accused together with Nikolaev at the trial of the "Leningrad Center" in December 1934 were arrested based on their appearance in the "Svoiak" files, which Stalin had examined on December 2, the day after Kirov's assassination.

The destruction of "Svoiak" is very suspicious. But Serov's reports to the Molotov commission and bits of information on Nikolaev's diaries released during *perestroika* provide the clues necessary to understanding what was destroyed. We know from Serov's reports that the KGB chief's overall aim was to present Nikolaev as a lone gunman, so as to refute Molotov's arguments that there really had been an oppositionist plot to murder Soviet leaders. And Serov's presentation was most likely close to the truth, for it is confirmed by the 1939 account of NKVD defector Genrikh Liushkov, who was a leading investigator of the Kirov murder in 1934-1935. However, Liushkov does mention that Nikolaev had limited help from one of the ex-oppositionists accused in the case of the "Leningrad Center" – Shatskii.¹⁰⁰ It seems likely that "Svoiak" contained more evidence of Nikolaev's connections with the accused in the "Leningrad Center" than Serov wanted Molotov to see. Based on Liushkov's account, the ex-Zinovievites did not actually aid Nikolaev's plot, or even know about it. But many of them did interact with Nikolaev from time to time. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that there is no mention of the ex-Zinovievites Kotolynov, Shatskii or others in the excerpts from Nikolaev's diary that Serov released to the Molotov commission in April 1956.¹⁰¹ But we know from later releases of data that Nikolaev's diary *does* mention Kotolynov, Antonov, and Shatskii.¹⁰² Here again we see Serov concealing data that did not change the essence of the case, but that Molotov could have used to argue that Nikolaev did have oppositionist connections and that therefore the Stalinist Terror against party oppositionists was justified.

END OF CHAPTER

The succeeding chapter will look at the history of the 1960-1961 Shvernik commission, on which Shatunovskaia played a leading role, and later commissions. It will argue that this particular commission used very dubious and in some cases (the claim that 289 CC members voted against Stalin's CC membership at the XVIIth Party Congress in 1934) even manufactured evidence to create an alternative narrative of the history of the Stalin era. This narrative served party reformers who wanted to return to "good Leninism" by showing how "good" leaders within the party (above all, Kirov) supposedly opposed Stalin in the early 1930s. By implicating Stalin in Kirov's murder, this narrative also completely discredited the former, showing him as the evil genius who singlehandedly side-tracked the October Revolution.

Again, however, this chapter will argue that the narrative was constructed on dubious sources, including a number of contradictory and confused "oral histories" which were provided by close members of Mikoian's entourage to the Shvernik commission. The narrative also failed to deal with

the systemic dysfunctions of state socialism, idolized Lenin, and obscured the guilt of large numbers of party members who supported and participated in the 1930s Terror.

The chapter will also link the 1960-1961 commission's work with the XXIIInd Party Congress (October 1961) and Khrushchev's drive to expel Molotov, Kaganovich, Shepilov and others from the party altogether.

¹ See William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 160 and documents in V. Naumov, et al., eds., *Lavrentii Beria. 1953. Stenogramma iul'skogo plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1999), 17-55. It is also worth noting that during the 1930s Terror the security services arrested and tried Sergo Ordzhonikidze's brother (Ordzhonikidze himself committed suicide soon afterwards) and Lazar Kaganovich's brother.

² N. Petukhov and V. Khomchik, "Delo o 'Leningradskom tsentre'," *Vestnik verkhovnogo suda SSSR* no. 5, 1991, 15-18 and Pelshe report, RGANI, Razdel I, doc. 43.

³ See Alla Kirilina, *L'assassinat de Kirov: Destin d'un stalinien, 1888-1934* (Paris: Seuil, 1995), 223, and J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 216-217.

⁴ Reported by Iu. Krotkov, cited in Taubman, 246.

⁵ Dmitrii Shepilov reports the proposal to build a "pantheon" to Stalin in *Neprimknvshii* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001), 26.

⁶ *Lavrentii Beria. 1953*, 95.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁸ Taubman, 240-241, 258, 264. Shepilov confirms the importance of Khrushchev's appointment as first secretary in September 1953 (Shepilov, 294).

⁹ On the appointment of Rudenko, see *Lavrentii Beria. 1953*, 216-217. On Serov's appointment, see Taubman, 264.

¹⁰ On Rudenko's biography, see N. S. Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia. Vremia. Liudi. Vlast*, vol. 1 (Moskva: "Moskovskie novosti," 1999), 144, n. 29, 185-86; vol. 3, 572; *Lavrentii Beria. 1953*, 480.

¹¹ N. V. Petrov, "Pervyi predsedatel KGB general Ivan Serov," *Otechestvennaia istoriia* 5 (1997): 23-42. Source found through Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 741, n.48.

¹² *Ibid.*, Shepilov, 159, 269, 353-354, Taubman, 370, and Anastas Mikoian, *Tak bylo – razmyshlenie o mimvshem* (Moskva: Vagrius, 1999), 607.

¹³ Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 2, 174.

¹⁴ Petrov, "Pervyi predsedatel," 38.

¹⁵ Quotations from Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 2, 174.

¹⁶ This observation is made by Shepilov (*Neprimknvshii*, 397), Taubman (*Khrushchev*, 241), and Sergo Mikoian, Anastas Mikoian's son (*Stalinism as I Saw It* [Washington D. C.: Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, 1991], 43).

¹⁷ Presidium resolution in A. Artizov, et al, eds., *Reabilitatsiia: Kak eto bylo. Dokumenty Prezidiuma TsK KPSS i drugie materialy*, vol. 1 (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 2000), 115-116. See also N. Kovaleva, et al, eds., *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich. 1957. Stenogramma iul'skogo plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1998), 201-203. Kozlov quote from 202. See also Taubman, 263-264.

¹⁸ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 117-142. Aleksandr Iakovlev also reports hearing Khrushchev speak in surprisingly frank terms about Stalinism to party activists in the Far East in 1954-1955.

¹⁹ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 116-117.

²⁰ See Taubman, 277-278, Khrushchev speech to Leningrad *aktiv* in *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 133, and biographical material on Snegov in *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 891.

²¹ See biographical material on Snegov in *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 891, and Sergei Khrushchev, *Khrushchev on Khrushchev* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1990), 11-13.

²² See Olga Shatunovsky (*sic*), "Gone Century: Memoirs Edited by Jana Kutin and Andrei Broido,"

www.caida.org/broido/ola/ola.html, rasskazy 1, 2, and biographical data on Shatunovskaia in *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 904.

²³ Shatunovsky, "Gone Century," *passim*, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 904.

²⁴ Shatunovsky, "Gone Century," rasskaz 20, information on Bagirov case in *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 407, n.61.

²⁵ Shatunovsky, "Gone Century," rasskaz 10, L. Kosheleva, et al, eds., *Pisma I. V. Stalina V. M. Molotovu, 1925-1936 g.g.* (Moskva: "Molodaia gvardiia," 1995), 144-149.

- ²⁶ The two men are Vladimir Lebedev, Khrushchev's longtime personal assistant, and Zinovy Serdiuk, a Khrushchev supporter and Central Committee member from Ukraine. See Shatunovskaia, "Gone Century," rasskazy 20, 22. According to Sergei Khrushchev, both of these men maintained their loyalty to Khrushchev after his fall from power and lost their high-level jobs as a result. Not just Shatunovskaia, but also Snegov, believed Lebedev to be a "hidden Stalinist." See S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev on Khrushchev*, 10, 160. Nikita Khrushchev reports in his memoirs on Serdiuk calling him in 1967 to congratulate him on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Red Army. It took courage and personal devotion to do this – very few members of the party elite remained in touch with Khrushchev after he was ousted. See Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 1, 324.
- ²⁷ Shatunovskaia, "Gone Century," rasskaz 20, Mikoian, *Tak bylo*, 583. Throughout her memoirs, Shatunovskaia aims to differentiate Mikoian from "the other butchers" during the Terror.
- ²⁸ Shatunovskaia, "Gone Century," rasskaz 9, Mikhail Rosliakov, *Ubiistvo Kirova* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1991, 91-92), B. S. Popov and V. G. Opponokov, "Berievshchina," *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 1, 1990: 68-78 (last source found through Amy Knight, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 18.
- ²⁹ Shatunovskaia, "Gone Century," rasskaz 1, Iurii Zhukov, *Inoi Stalin, ...*, Iu. G. Murin, ed., *Iosif Stalin v obiatiiakh semi* (Moskva: "Rodina," 1993), 154-196.
- ³⁰ Shatunovskaia, "Gone Century," rasskazy 3, 8, 16.
- ³¹ Shatunovskaia, "Gone Century," rasskazy 9, 16.
- ³² See A. T. Rybin, *Stalin i Kirov (zapiski telokhranitelii)* (1995, publishing house unidentified). Rybin was an ex-bodyguard for Stalin and later head of security at the Bolshoi Theater. His pamphlet presents an unreconstructed Stalinist account of the Kirov murder, naming Trotsky as the organizer.
- ³³ Mikoian, *Tak bylo*, 90.
- ³⁴ In their memoirs Khrushchev and Mikoian competed for the credit for initiating de-Stalinization. Therefore it is difficult to determine precisely who was first in touch with Snegov and Shatunovskaia.
- ³⁵ Mikoian, *Tak bylo*, 589-590.
- ³⁶ Mikoian, *Tak bylo*, 590-592.
- ³⁷ Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 266-269.
- ³⁸ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 816, n. 5.
- ³⁹ Rosliakov, 45-46.
- ⁴⁰ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 816, n. 5.
- ⁴¹ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 296.
- ⁴² See notes on Presidium sessions of Nov. 5, 1955, Feb. 1, 1956, and Feb. 9, 1956 in *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 275-276, 308-309, 349-351.
- ⁴³ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 317-348.
- ⁴⁴ Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 2, 758-759.
- ⁴⁵ "Zapiska P. N. Pospelova ob ubiistve Kirova," *Svobodnaia mysl*, no. 8, 1992: 64-71.
- ⁴⁶ "Zapiska P. N. Pospelova," 66-71.
- ⁴⁷ On the disorders in local party and professional organizations following the "Secret Speech," see *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 21-65.
- ⁴⁸ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 36-38.
- ⁴⁹ Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestnyi Kirov* (Moskva: "OLMA_PRESS," 2001), 344-349.
- ⁵⁰ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 38.
- ⁵¹ Pospelov and Aristov were joint authors of one draft of Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" (Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 280).
- ⁵² See RGANI, razdel I, docs. 64, 65, 69.
- ⁵³ See A. I. Melchin, *Nikolai Shverniki: Biograficheskii ocherk* (Moskva: Politizdat, 1977), 208, 216. Shverniki was appointed on February 27, 1956, at the plenum of the Central Committee that immediately followed the XXth Party Congress.
- ⁵⁴ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 70.
- ⁵⁵ RGANI, razdel I, doc. 48.
- ⁵⁶ Email to author from M. Iu. Prozumenshchikov, deputy director of RGANI, Sept. 5, 2005.
- ⁵⁷ RGANI, razdel I, doc. 49.
- ⁵⁸ RGANI, razdel I, doc. 65.
- ⁵⁹ RGANI, razdel I, doc. 65.
- ⁶⁰ RGANI, razdel I, doc. 69.
- ⁶¹ RGANI, razdel I, doc. 69.

-
- ⁶² On Kuzin's motivations, see N. Petukhov and V. Khomchuk, "Delo o Leningradskom tsentr," *Vestnik verkhovnogo suda SSSR*, no. 6 (1991), 19-21.
- ⁶³ RGANI, razdel I, doc. 69.
- ⁶⁴ RGANI, razdel I, doc. 64.
- ⁶⁵ Khrushchev, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 2, 178-179.
- ⁶⁶ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 77-78, 83-84.
- ⁶⁷ See the ex post facto comments on Molotov commission work by Aristov at the July 1957 plenum of the Central Committee, N.Kovaleva, et al, eds., *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957. Stenogramma iul'skogo plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1998), 189.
- ⁶⁸ RGANI, razdel 1, doc. 50.
- ⁶⁹ See Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 283-294, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 128, 132-148.
- ⁷⁰ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 146.
- ⁷¹ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 162-163, 172, 181-183, 172-176.
- ⁷² RGANI, razdel 1, docs. 51-57. For Presidium decision postponing Molotov commission report, see *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 114.
- ⁷³ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 163-167.
- ⁷⁴ RGANI, razdel 1, doc. 46.
- ⁷⁵ RGANI, razdel 1, doc. 66.
- ⁷⁶ Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestnyi Kirov* (Moskva: "OLMA-PRESS," 2001), 236-241.
- ⁷⁷ RGANI, razdel 1, docs. 58, 59.
- ⁷⁸ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 204-207.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁰ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 207-208.
- ⁸¹ Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 300-306, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 10-13, Shepilov, *Neprimknvshii*, 36-38, 387-396.
- ⁸² Taubman acknowledges claims that Khrushchev knew about the June 1957 overthrow attempt against him, but concludes, "The last thing (Khrushchev) let himself believe was that the power and glory he craved were about to be taken from him," Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 316-317.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, Shepilov, *Neprimknvshii*, 393.
- ⁸⁴ Further evidence for this proposition is Brezhnev's claim at the June 1957 plenum of the CC that the "anti-party group" made their coup attempt against Khrushchev in part because Party Control Commission chief Shvernik was presenting documents to the Presidium on the rehabilitation of Communist repressed at the orders of Molotov, Malenkov, and Kaganovich. *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich*, 245.
- ⁸⁵ RGANI, razdel 1, docs. 60-61.
- ⁸⁶ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 269-270.
- ⁸⁷ On Furtseva's attitude towards Khrushchev in the spring of 1957, see Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 314-315.
- ⁸⁸ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 270-271. For Brezhnev quote, see *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich*, 245-246.
- ⁸⁹ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 271-272.
- ⁹⁰ Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 317-320, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich*, 14-15, 183, Shepilov, *Neprimknvshii*, 393-396.
- ⁹¹ *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich*, 567.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, 199-201, 205, 246, 250, 258.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, 479.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 176, 247.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 417-419.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 188-197.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 429.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 479.
- ⁹⁹ *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 3, 469.
- ¹⁰⁰ G. S. Liushkov, "Open Letter to Stalin," *Kaizo*, April 1939
- ¹⁰¹ Email to author from M. Iu. Prozumenshchikov, deputy director of RGANI, Sept. 5, 2005.
- ¹⁰² *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 3, 462 ("Spravka rabotnikov prokuratury SSSR i sledstvennogo otdela KGB SSSR po povodu zapiski A. N. Iakovleva 'Nekotorye soobrazheniia po itogam izucheniia obstoiatelstv ubiistva S. M. Kirov,'" June 14, 1990).