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Archival Revelations

Boston University Center for the Study of Conflict, Ideology, and Policy

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[The following are excerpts from Nezavisimaya gazeta(1) and Rossiiskie vesti(2) featuring revelations by Professor Rudolf Pikhoya, director of the Russian Federation State Archival Service (Rosarkhiv). The interviews were conducted by Aleksandr Nadzharov of Nezavisimaya gazeta and Roza Sergazieva of Rossiiskie vesti. Nadzharov introduces Pikhoya: "Rudolf Germanovich Pikhoya, age 46, [is] ... a native of the Urals, the first member of his family to have had a university education, [and] one of the people whom Boris Yeltsin brought to prominence when he started on his political route from Yekaterinburg (still Sverdlovsk at the time) to Moscow."

Gorbachev's Organizational Incompetence

NADZHEROV: Tell me, have there been any finds recently related to the activity of the Politburo?

PIKHOYA: Mainly confirming the extraordinary organizational incapacity of Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, which makes one conclude that perhaps it was precisely this quality of his, i.e., his inability to function as an organizer with the slightest degree of competence, that resulted in the "process getting under way"--and then going bust.

NADZHEROV: Facts, Rudolf Germanovich, let's have some facts, please.

PIKHOYA: Well, for instance, just take Mikhail Sergeyevich's inability to chair a meeting properly. He shocked even his own stenographers, who would note down in the process of recording his remarks, "Gorbachev again interrupts" and "Gorbachev again didn't give him a chance to speak." Probably they never even suspected that in this way they were
describing his "principal weapon" for the reformation of "real socialism." I am convinced that he was not even capable of organizing what he wanted to achieve. On the basis of my familiarity with history I've come to have the following feeling: In 20th-century Russia there have been two people who were absolutely incapable of coping with their governmental responsibilities--Nicholas II and Mikhail Gorbachev.

NADZHAROV: Both of them found themselves at a moment of transition between two eras.

PIKHOYA: Yes, their incapacity to come up to the obligations of their positions made both of them historic figures.

NADZHAROV: --Victims as well...

PIKHOYA: Yes, victims. Victims of the careless handling of power. At one time there was the anecdote told about Nicholas II that he ought to have been given the Order of the October Revolution as a reward for creating a revolutionary situation in Russia. I think that's true of Gorbachev too.

NADZHAROV: Let's not forget, however, that it's to him that we owe such a trifle as freedom.

PIKHOYA: I don't know, maybe, maybe. I only consider that as an administrator he didn't exist. During the time of stagnation even the sclerotic Politburo would have left Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev standing. I can imagine the fury he aroused in people who had reached the summit of the party hierarchy after working in industry and saw what he was doing.

Lenin's Instigation of Terror & Subversion

PIKHOYA: In front of me I have a document dealing with a major portion of Lenin's legacy, the publication of which was banned right in our own time--just a few months,
indeed, before the August 1991 putsch. In this document classified "Top Secret," G.L. Smirnov, director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, writes to the CPSU Deputy General Secretary, V.A. Ivashko. Smirnov notes that among the documents "relating to the concrete political activity of V.I. Lenin as a state leader there are some documents the publication of which would arouse an extremely mixed reaction. Thus there are documents, the content of which may be interpreted as an encouragement to acts of force against sovereign states. [All italics in original]

In some cases various secret methods of work of state organizations of the Soviet republic are revealed (concentration camps for foreign subjects, the organization of the shadowing of foreign delegations visiting the country, and campaigns aimed to discredit them, as was the case, for example, with a British trade union delegation).

There are annotations made by Lenin on material sent to him that puts the Red Army in an unfavorable light (for example, participation by units of the First Cavalry Army in anti-Semitic pogroms, etc.).

In some documents a policy of terror and repression is encouraged:

"Prepare terror secretly--this must be done urgently."

"Try to punish Latvia and [Estonia] militarily (for example, making use of Balakhovich, cross the border as far as about a verst on the other side and hang 100-1,000 of their officials and rich individuals)."

"Making it look like the work of the "Greens" (afterward we'll put the blame on them), let's advance 10-20 versts and hang a number of kulaks, priests, and landowners--Reward: 100,000 rubles for each person hanged'..."
Archival Material as a Political Weapon

NADZHAROV: In the Russian state, for political reasons, your Rosarkhiv possesses far greater importance than it does in any other state.

PIKHOYA: I agree... Currently I'm studying 20th century history. And I see how the archives were used during the 1950s in connection with political activity. They were used in fact in a most interesting way. For instance, in the course of addressing a Central Committee Plenum in the summer of 1957, such a great "specialist in the CPSU archives" as Marshal Georgi Konstantinovich Zhukov cited an enormous amount of information from the archives about the involvement of Malenkov and his myrmidons in the political repressions carried out during the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s. Zhukov quoted files literally by the page, referring to concrete documents. All this was done for a quite specific reason. As a result of this plenum the whole band was ejected, while Zhukov became a member of the CPSU Central Committee Presidium.

NADZHAROV: Nonetheless he himself was gotten rid of soon afterward.

PIKHOYA: Not only that. In the concluding report of the Plenum, which was "carefully studied by all Soviet people," you won't find any information on the complicity of Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Voroshilov in the mass repressions of the 30s, 40s, and 50s. And then three months later, in October 1957, Zhukov himself was thrown out of the Central Committee Presidium, and lost his membership of the Central Committee as well, as a result of the stupid accusation of Bonapartism made against him, which they didn't even attempt to prove. On the other hand, the documents that Zhukov referred to were inaccessible--and they remained inaccessible right up to 1992.

Malenkov's Complicity in Repression

NADZHAROV: So this is an example of the use of documents purely for political purposes.
PIKHOYA: Yes, unfortunately. Meanwhile it's time people finally understood that political, selective use of documents always leads to more and more lies for a longer and longer time. Certain documents surely will become inaccessible, in the same way as the documents relating to Malenkov's complicity in the most appalling repressions were inaccessible. Incidentally, it wasn't just chance that I talked about Malenkov's complicity. You hadn't known about that before, had you?

NADZHAROV: No, I had not. I had assumed, though, that the members of Stalin's entourage could not possibly remain nice and clean.

PIKHOYA: That's what you had assumed. However, Malenkov was a key figure in the repressions of the 30s, 40s, and 50s.

NADZHAROV: A key figure? Malenkov, not Beria? You appreciate that this will upset many people's views? Then tell me why, during the thaw period in the 1960s and then later during perestroika, Malenkov was depicted practically as an angel with little wings?

PIKHOYA: Because he was not merely a key figure in bloody repressions, but also a transitional figure between one power system and another. The situation was the same as with the czarist security police documents relating to Bolshevik leaders. Or with information regarding the very ambiguous figure of Yuri Andropov. In these cases information along with transgressions emerged that were equally disadvantageous to the new as well as to the old people in power. For this reason it was considered that there are situations in which it is better to leave the past untouched. To bring it up would have had immediate implications for the current situation.

The "Doctors' Plot" & Khrushchev's Role
NADZHAROV: Maybe you could say something about your own emotions when this bottomless pit of unresearched documents opened up before your eyes?
PIKHOYA: It's just incredible--life went on all that time, but scholarly study of the 1950s and 1960s was carried out parallel to it, without intersecting with real life. Just take the well-known repressions during 1952-53, the so-called "doctors' affair" ["Doctors' Plot"]. Well, there never was any such affair. What in fact there was, was a different affair--the "Abakumov affair." At a certain point this business was given the name of the "doctors' affair." However, all this had little relation even to the State Security Minister concerned. It was a typical struggle for power, in which to some extent people who had nothing at all to do with it became involved, individuals who had the misfortune to be used in the course of this battle. Or let me give you another example. We're both very familiar with the evil figure of Lavrenti Beria. As far as we're concerned, he is beyond question a bloody symbol of lawlessness. But let's recollect what post Beria held during the second half of the 1940s...

NADZHAROV: --Deputy chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, I believe?

PIKHOYA: I'm referring to the fact that, at the time, he was neither Minister of State Security nor Minister of Internal Affairs. During that period, what role did Beria play within the ruling circle?

NADZHAROV: The nuclear project?

PIKHOYA: Aside from the nuclear project, it's pure guesswork. At the same time it's now known for a fact that the Ministry of Security was gathering compromising material on Beria. In the early 1950s even his mother's apartment was bugged. I believe that he himself was being shadowed, while Stalin personally set up the "Mingrelian affair," which led directly to Beria. Incidentally, despite his despicable nature it was none other than Beria who started the mass rehabilitations. While, immediately after Beria's arrest, Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev, the famous creator of the "thaw," restored Semyon Denisovich Ignat'yev to his CPSU Central Committee membership--the very man who in reality had organized the fake "doctors' affair," and [who,] in reality had been responsible for carrying out the entire investigation. Yet Khrushchev reinstated Ignat'yev,
stating at the Plenum that his expulsion from membership of the Central Committee "had been decided in consequence of well-known slanders made against him"--here I'm quoting verbatim!

NADZHAROV: What well-known slanders?

PIKHOYA: As it turns out, this referred to a decree of the Central Committee Presidium which stated that Ignat'yev, together with the MGB [State Security Ministry], participated in the falsification of the "doctors' affair." In other words, the reinstatement of Ignat'yev to Central Committee membership meant in practice a rejection of the declarations the Central Committee Presidium had made in April in the course of the rehabilitation of the victims of illegal repression.

Khrushchev's Repression of Ukrainians

NADZHAROV: So that the political games were still going on?

PIKHOYA: Exactly. And nobody needed the truth. In this respect Khrushchev emerges as a very different, far from lily-white figure. On the basis of irrefutable documentation, Nikita Sergeyevich [Khrushchev] appears above all as the organizer of the killings of the Ukrainian nationalists in the 1940s in accordance with orders from above. In this regard he displayed a touching readiness to collaborate with Abakumov's MGB. In 1954, Kobulov, the brother of a Beria associate, wrote an enormously lengthy denunciation against Khrushchev--at one time Kobulov had been an NKVD plenipotentiary in the Ukraine. In this denunciation Kobulov cited facts proving that, even in cases where he could have done something during the period of mass repressions in the Ukraine, Khrushchev didn't move a finger to save anyone whatsoever. Instead he even provided assistance in carrying out the repressions.

NADZHAROV: How is Khrushchev's role in Russian history to be assessed now?
PIKHOYA: He was an extremely experienced tactician who successfully pushed his way through to [be the] power behind Malenkov, and then outplayed Malenkov himself.

NADZHAROV: That makes the 20th Congress look even stranger. How was Khrushchev able to bring himself to go through with all that?

PIKHOYA: It's very simple. There was the normal logic of a struggle for power and a different understanding of the principle of collective leadership, on which, by the way, Malenkov insisted as well. What did "collective leadership" mean? In general, it was a party concept. In Malenkov's view, collective leadership was when he chaired the Central Committee Presidium as chairman of the Council of Ministers, while for Khrushchev it meant when he was the top leader as Central Committee secretary. Behind this dispute lay the main issue—which was more important, the party or the state.

Khrushchev & the Party State

PIKHOYA: Khrushchev completed the transformation of our state into what amounted to a party state, thus bringing to its ultimate development a tendency that had begun under Lenin and had been maintained under Stalin. But Stalin himself had been chairman of the Council of Ministers, and not just Central Committee secretary. It was precisely during Khrushchev's time that the party apparatus took charge of this great country, after destroying the MGB as well as Zhukov, and crushing the Council of Ministers. Indeed, the party apparatus governed the state right up until August 1991.

NADZHAROV: History provides other similar examples—theocratic states do not survive long.

PIKHOYA: Of course not. In fact, that's why the archives were kept secret, in order to prevent people from realizing the fatal consequences of following an ideological path. Incidentally, it was during Khrushchev's time that the USSR finally took shape as an essentially theocratic state. One shouldn't indulge in illusions: Khrushchev was never a
democrat, any more than he was a supporter of any rights or liberties. All that is complete nonsense.

Pamyat' and the KGB

NADZHAROV: What is one to make of your conflict with the famous Pamyat' organization, which at the time was supported virtually openly by "certain forces" in the CPSU Central Committee and the USSR KGB?

PIKHOYA: That was probably one of the first political clashes in the country. It was in our town--Sverdlovsk--that Dmitri Vasil'yev first got it in the neck, as they say. And the first to speak were Burbulis and then yours truly. However, in general Gennadi spoke in philosophical terms, while I told Vasil'yev, "You know, when we were trying to rescue ancient books and manuscripts from destruction, somehow I didn't see any of your guys. And what you're saying about Dmitri Sergeyevich Likhachev shows that you're a provocateur and an enemy of Russian culture." In response all that Dmitri Vasil'yev could find to say was, "That's just the way 'Sionists' talk." At this point of course the hall burst into...laughter. Because I obviously didn't look at all like a Zionist.

NADZHAROV: At the time we newspaper reporters were officially instructed that Pamyat' was a healthy thing, but if there were stupidities in there, they needed to be winnowed out, while the healthy tendencies should be supported in every way possible. Probably it was as a result of this demagogic approach that Vasil'yev and his band grew in size.

PIKHOYA: The funniest thing about it all is that it was precisely the conflict with Pamyat' that gave us great prominence and made us get into politics. Because it was simply impossible not to do so. We were confronted with a huge wave of demagoguery and a real split throughout society. And in general, whether you want to engage in politics or not, when fascism rises up again before your eyes, pardon me, but one has to take action.
**Future Revelations**

NADZHAROV: *Let's talk about secrets--other than those regarding individuals. What revelations from the former secret archives can we expect in the foreseeable future?*

PIKHOYA: I have to tell you at once that the time when sensations just tumbled out of sealed envelopes is now over. What's on our agenda now is much more serious, professional work. I'm convinced that exciting finds and sensations will crop up--certainly to no less an extent, indeed to an even greater extent. But they'll have a different character from the finds that were made in recent months--for example the Katyn tragedy or the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop protocols.

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SERGAZIEVA: *Over the last year and a half, the most secret documents have passed through your hands and before your eyes. Was there any one of these that particularly shook you?*

PIKHOYA: There were a lot of documents like that. But in the purely archival sense I was surprised most of all by the way in which the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact were preserved. Frankly, I didn't think I would ever see them. The classification system made any access to this material impossible. It lay in a sealed envelope on which was written in black and white, "Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact." Even Aleksandr Yakovlev, who should have known about this document by virtue of his position, and who was attacked at the First Congress of USSR People's Deputies, could only speak of indirect proofs of the existence of the protocol. And he saw it for the first time after I called him up...

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