

July 2, 1953

Transcript of the CPSU CC Plenum Meetings Regarding Beria's Views on the German Question

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Summary:

Malenkov, Khrushchev, and Mologov express negative opinions about Beria's proposals about the 'German question,' accusing him of sympathizing with the 'imperialist' side in his plan for a neutral Germany. Bulganin accuses Beria of threatening the positions of the current Ministers in the Presidium if they rejected his 'bourgeois' proposals.

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Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

The First Session--2 July 1953

[....]

Malenkov: Or another fact. The Government has been discussing the German question. There was talk of serious trouble in the situation in the GDR. We all concluded that the wrong policy in the GDR resulted in many mistakes. Among the German population there is great dissatisfaction, which is particularly obvious, since the population has begun to flee from East Germany to West Germany. Recently, for approximately the past 2 years, around 500,000 persons have escaped to West Germany.

We explained to our German friends--and they completely agree--that in today's international situation we cannot lay a course to force them to build socialism in the GDR.

Why did we come to this conclusion, and why do we feel that at the present time we should not set a course to force them to build socialism in the GDR?

The analysis of the internal political and economic situation in the GDR, the mass flight of the population of East Germany to West Germany (around 500,000 have already fled!) quite obviously show that we have here the danger of an internal catastrophe. We were obliged to soberly face the truth and admit that without the presence of Soviet troops the existing regime in the GDR is unstable. The political and economic situation in the GDR at the present time is extremely unfavorable.

We thought that the most pressing task was for our German friends to quickly and decisively implement measures to revive the political and economic situation in the GDR. Events in the GDR have shown the correctness of these measures. In fact, we were late in implementing them, which the enemy, as you know, took advantage of.

Consequently we felt--and we feel--together with our German friends, that we must establish a course to force the building of socialism.

We must say that, in discussing the German question, Beria proposed not to correct that course to force the building of socialism, but to reject any course for socialism in the GDR, and to maintain a course for a bourgeois Germany. In light of everything that we now know about Beria, we must re-evaluate this point of view. This clearly characterizes him as a bourgeois degenerate.

[....]

Khrushchev: Beria most clearly showed himself to be an instigator, an agent of the imperialists, during the discussion of the German question, when he raised the question of rejecting socialist construction in the GDR and making concessions to the West. This meant handing over 18 million Germans to the rule of the American imperialists. He said, "We must create a neutral, democratic Germany."

Can a democratic bourgeois Germany be truly neutral? Is this possible? Beria said, "We'll conclude a treaty." And what is this treaty worth? We know what treaties are worth. A treaty has force if it is reinforced with cannons. If a treaty is not reinforced by might, then it is worth nothing, they'll be laughing at us, thinking us naive. But Beria is not naive, not stupid, not a fool. He is smart, cunning, and treacherous. He has behaved not as a Communist, but as an instigator, God only knows, perhaps he was getting orders from foreign espionage agents.

Comrades, the impudence of this man was simply impossible to bear. Recently we listened to the Germans. The leaders of the GDR have allowed errors, they needed to be corrected, but not slighted. When we were discussing this question, Beria screamed at Comrade Ulbricht and at the other German comrades so much that it was embarrassing to hear. There are ministers here, they know what an insult they received from Beria, and yet sometimes were forced to smile (movement in the auditorium), thinking that this was a necessary evil. Now I think that you will change your mind about this cheeky fellow.

[. . .]

Molotov: A fourth fact which confirmed our fears about Beria.

For the majority of us Beria's true political face was shown when in May we took up the discussion of [the] German question.

A number of facts which we recently learned made it very clear that an unfavorable political and economic situation has been created in the German Democratic Republic, that there is serious, widespread, dissatisfaction among the population of the GDR. This can be seen, by the way, in the fact that from January 1951 through April 1953, 450,000 persons moved from the GDR to West Germany. It has been established that this movement of the population into West Germany particularly increased in the first months of this year. Among the refugees were many workers, including several thousand members of the SED and the Union of Free German Youth [FDJ]. This clearly indicated serious shortcomings in the work of our friends in East Germany. This situation could only be useful for the government of Adenauer, for the West German bourgeoisie, and for foreign imperialist circles.

Upon examination of the matter it is quite apparent that in the German Democratic Republic a very fast course was taken for industrialization, and that new construction was undertaken which was too great for actual capabilities. All of this was undertaken in conditions, when East Germany also had to bear significant occupational expenses and pay reparations, not to mention the necessity to conduct large scale restoration projects after the war. Furthermore, we must not forget that East Germany is in the particularly complicated position wherein, using their position as occupying powers in Berlin, the powers of [the] USA, England and France, as well as the powers of West Germany, can take many steps which have a disorganizing effect on the political and economic situation in the GDR. We must also not forget that Germany continues to remain divided in 2 parts, and that traces of Hitler's effects are still far from eliminated in the whole of Germany. Under these conditions we felt it our obligation to take immediate measures to help our German friends more quickly correct their obviously ultra-left course, which was taken in the GDR especially beginning in the summer of 1952. This is what we did.

However, while discussing the German question in the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, it became apparent that Beria was for positions completely foreign to our Party. At that time he said there was no reason to be building socialism in East Germany, that all that was necessary was for West and East Germany to [be] united as a bourgeois, peace-loving state.

These speeches of Beria could not go unnoticed. None of us could forget that Germany should be held responsible for unleashing the First World War, and that bourgeois Germany is responsible for unleashing the Second World War. For us as Marxists, it was clear and is still clear that in the existing situation, that is, under conditions of today's imperialist era, coming from the perspective that bourgeois Germany can supposedly become a peace-loving or neutral state vis-a-vis the USSR is not only an illusion, but also signifies a virtual transition to position[s] which are foreign to Communism. The question arose that perhaps Beria's words on "a

peace-loving" bourgeois Germany are an accidental polemic exaggeration, that perhaps this was spoken in the heat of the moment. Soon, however, it became apparent that this was certainly not the case.

The draft resolution of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, introduced by Beria on this question, proposed to recognize that "in the present circumstances, the course for building socialism, undertaken in the German Democratic Republic" was incorrect. Therefore it was proposed to "reject a course for building socialism in the GDR at the present time." Of course we could not accept this. To my objection, Beria attempted to reply that he was proposing to reject a course for building socialism in the GDR only "at the present time," but not altogether. However, this trick didn't help him either.

In the draft resolution I proposed, in both cases noted earlier, to introduce the corrections: instead of the words about the error of the "course for building socialism," to say the error of the "course for a rapid building of socialism." Everyone agreed with this. So that's how it was written in the resolution of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers on May 27, in spite of Beria's initial proposal. From what has been said it is apparent that Beria's speeches at previous sessions of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers on the German question were not accidental. Even then he had gone so far, that he openly proposed to reject a course for building socialism in East Germany, and fought in many ways for our agreement that our Party reject its fundamental line vis-a-vis Germany. He talked big about how it was sufficient for the Soviet Union if Germany would unite as a single state--on a bourgeois foundation, as if today's bourgeois Germany could not help but have close ties to other imperialist states, and as if in the present circumstances there could exist a bourgeois Germany which would not also be aggressive and imperialist. It became quite clear that Beria did not hold Communist positions. In this situation we felt that in Beria we were dealing with someone who had nothing in common with our Party, a person of the bourgeois camp, the enemy of the Soviet Union.

The capitulating essence of Beria's proposals regarding the German question is obvious. He virtually demanded capitulation before the so-called "Western" bourgeois states. He insisted that we reject the course to strengthen the people's democratic order in the GDR, which would lead to socialism. He insisted on untying the hands of German imperialism, not only in West Germany but in East Germany. This meant rejecting everything that had been won by the blood of our soldiers, the blood of our people, in a difficult struggle against Hitlerism, since it must be clear to us that the existence of a German Democratic Republic--strengthening the people's democratic order and gradually implementing a course for building socialism--is a serious blow not only to German imperialism but to the whole imperialist system in Europe. Under the correct political course, the German Democratic Republic will become an ever more reliable friend of the Soviet Union, and will become a serious obstacle to the realization of imperialist plans in Europe.

You see how what Beria had previously concealed in his political persona was now exposed. Also, what we previously saw only vaguely in Beria, we now began to see clearly. We now clearly saw that here was someone alien to us, a man from the anti-Soviet camp.

Voices: That's right!

[....]

Second Session--Morning, 3 July 1953

[....]

Bulganin: I want to mention one more fact, which I told Beria at the session of the Presidium, which the comrades in the Presidium know. We were discussing the German question. Beria had been rebuffed at the session of the Presidium on this serious question. From the speeches of Comrade Malenkov and Comrade Molotov you heard that that question was about which road we should take--the road toward strengthening the German Democratic Republic, that is the road of socialism, or the road of liquidating the German Democratic Republic and creating a bourgeois Germany. Beria took the latter point of view. Members of the Presidium expressed their opinions against Beria.

The next day there was a session of the Special Committee, chaired by Beria in whose complement from the members of the Presidium was myself. Arriving at the session of the committee, Beria postponed the session for one hour, to speak with me about the German question. This was the nature of our conversation. I gave him examples on the neutrality of Germany in its time and said that nothing would come of this. For an example I pointed out that there were such facts in history as the Versailles Treaty, according to which Germany was disarmed, and then what happened? Germany rearmed and attacked the Soviet Union. Beria grossly and rather impudently announced the following, "This can't go on any longer. If things are going to go like this, then we'll have to remove certain ministers from the Presidium, from the post of Minister."

I said that in the Presidium there were Ministers Molotov, Bulganin, Beria, and Mikoyan, who was he talking about? He said, "The leadership which has formed will have to be changed." Of course, this was a direct threat. As if to say, if you're going to continue this line, not vote for my proposals, then we'll simply expel you.

If you add to this the conversation with Stroykach, about which Malenkov spoke here, "We'll expel you, arrest you, throw you into the camps, beat you into camp dust," then there is no need to speak further about with whom we are dealing.

These facts speak for themselves.

[....]

Third Session—Evening, 3 July 1953

[....]

Zavenyagin: Regarding the German Democratic Republic. The average members of the Party, the average workers could not understand how you can promote a unification of West and East Germany. This meant handing a population of 18 million and the German Democratic Republic into the paws of bourgeois bosses. This is completely obvious. The question of Germany could not be resolved in this manner. Besides this, there are yet other factors, which we can't not consider. Much uranium is extracted in the GDR, perhaps no less than the Americans have at their disposal. Beria knew this fact, he should have mentioned it to the Central Committee, so that they might consider it.

[....]