

January 31, 1955

Central Committee Plenum of the CPSU Ninth Session, Morning

Citation:

"Central Committee Plenum of the CPSU Ninth Session, Morning", January 31, 1955, Wilson Center Digital Archive, TsKhSD, f. 2, op. 1, d. 127. Obtained for CWIHP and translated by Vladislav Zubok. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/111995>

Summary:

The Soviet leadership discusses the state of Soviet foreign affairs. Khrushchev reviews Soviet policy after Stalin's death, blaming Molotov and Malenkov for mistakes in Soviet policy towards Germany. The role of executed Soviet leader Lavrentii Beria is also discussed.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Khrushchev: ... Comrades, now the issue of Germany of which we spoke [in July 1953]. We then calculated, comrade Malenkov, we debated about Beria and Germany, but, I should say here bluntly, if it comes down to this, that comrade Malenkov had been entirely together with Beria on this issue. Voroshilov was not [a supporter of Beria on the German issue], because this issue was discussed not at the CC Presidium, but at the Presidium of the Council of Ministers. All the members of the CC Presidium, who were members of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, were against [the proposal to abrogate "the construction of socialism in the GDR"], except for Beria and Malenkov. And all argued, comrades. It was a big fight [bol'shaia draka]. But what was actually Malenkov's stand? Sometimes a person can get things wrong, can let himself slip in a big issue and this should not always be held against him. But what did Malenkov do when he saw that everyone was against [Beria's proposal] and not only that they voted against it, but argued against it? He continued to fight for this proposal, along with Beria.

Bulganin later calls me, I do not remember, it was a day or two afterwards, and asks: So, have they called you? I respond: No, they have not. And they have already called me, he says. First the one, then the other called and warned: if you behave like this and if you read Molotov's lips-since it was about Molotov's proposal [that Beria and Malenkov opposed], well, you would not remain the minister [of Defense] for long. That was the gist [of that conversation]. This is a fact, although I do not know who of the two of them called first. He [Bulganin] asks me-have they called you? I said: they will not call me. Indeed, they did not call. They believed I would come over to their side.

After the session [of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers] there was a talk that if Molotov speaks this way [i.e. stubbornly fights against Beria's proposal on the GDR-trans.], then he should be relegated to be minister of culture. I then said: comrade Malenkov, if there were a proposal to remove Molotov, I would consider this as an attempt [to overthrow the collective] leadership and to smash the leadership of the Presidium.

This is the fact how far [the power struggle] reached. It was no good at all. [Kuda zhe eto goditsia?]

Now, comrades, I will speak on [Malenkov's] speech [on 8 August 1953]. We all read it, and I read it, too. It is cheap stuff [deshovka]. Malenkov told us later: you read it [before he presented it-trans.]. Yes, we read it. I read it, too. Am I responsible for this speech? Yes, I am, but the author should be a bit more responsible. It is one thing, when you read the speech and it sounds to you sort of fine and even attractive. But the author, who composes it-he is more responsible, since he thinks it [and its implications] through. So, when we later looked at it again and read it, it became clear to us what that speech was driving at. It was designed to buy personal popularity. It was not a leader's speech. It was a truly opportunistic speech. Perhaps comrade [I.F.] Tevosian remembers, when the commission [probably of the Presidium of Council of Ministers or the CC Presidium-trans.] discussed [the production of] "shirpotreb" [consumer goods of great demand-trans.], Malenkov then said: I will not let anybody disrupt this decision. Then I said in passing: Of course, "shirpotreb" is necessary, but we must develop metal and coal industries. Did I say it?

Tevosian: That is correct.

Khrushchev: That's how it was...

Now, about the speech [i.e.] with regard to the destruction of civilization [on 12 March 1954]. He [Malenkov] says again, why, you looked at it [in advance.] He managed to confuse several comrades, because his speech was quoted abroad and our comrades considered it was the line of the Central Committee to a certain extent since Malenkov spoke this way. And we must protect our authority, which is a great authority for brotherly communist parties. That assumption was theoretically incorrect and it did not work to the benefit of our party.

Com. [Semen D.] Ignat'ev is present here. In another two weeks or so, Beria would have probably locked him up, because everything was ready by the moment he was removed. [Nevertheless] I believe that he [Ignat'ev] was correctly removed from the post of Minister of State Security. He is anybody but the minister of State Security. Do not take offense at me, com. Ignat'ev. You should not have accepted the ministerial post; you are not qualified for it.

Kaganovich: He did not want to accept it.

Khrushchev: He did not want it, but he was offered the post.

I'll speak directly-I do not doubt the integrity of com. Malenkov, but I doubt very much his abilities in pursuing the [policy] line: he lacks character and backbone [kharaktera i khrebt ne khvataet].

I used to say to other comrades, in particular to comrade Molotov: now [in April-May 1953] Churchill is so terribly eager to have a [summit] meeting and I, by golly, am afraid that if he comes [to Moscow] to speak face to face with Malenkov, then Malenkov would get frightened and surrender. I do not ask comrade Malenkov to prove the opposite, since this cannot be confirmed or proved like a mathematical formula. However, I see that if a person gets confused, if he tries to ingratiate himself, [it means] he lacks character.

This is a serious matter, and I look at it in a straightforward way. The leadership of such a great party, of such a great country, growth and further development [of everything] that has been accumulated by our party, all this will depend, comrades, again on who will stand at the head of the leadership.

...You can see for yourselves what is the situation today, how skillfully the Americans stewed the porridge [zavarili kashu] in Taiwan, how they sent [publisher Randolph] Hearst and [other] messengers [to Moscow]. What for? To deafen us, to test if we have guts, if we are nervous or not. This is being done to test us.

Malenkov: I have no right to not say that I was wrong, when in April or May [of 1953], during the discussion of the German question, I believed that in the existing international situation, when we had started a big political campaign ["peace initiative" after Stalin's death-trans.], we should not have put forward the task of socialist development in Democratic Germany [i.e. the GDR-trans.] in the question of Germany's reunification.

I viewed this question at that time from a tactical side. I fully understand that defending this view essentially is politically harmful, politically dangerous, incorrect. And I did not adopt such a position. The decision that was passed at that time at the suggestion of comrade Molotov I consider to be the correct one.

Bulganin: At that time you thought it was incorrect.

Malenkov: In the course of discussion I considered it to be incorrect.

Bulganin: You then said: For how long will we feed ourselves with the cud from Molotov's mouth, why do you read Molotov's lips.

Malenkov: You must have confused my words with Beria's.

Khrushchev: You simply lack courage even now to admit it, and Bulganin told me about [your words] exactly at that time.

Malenkov: Today I admit that I essentially took a wrong position on the German question.

Khrushchev: At that time you and Beria believed you could get away with anything.

Molotov: You should summon your courage and speak more frankly. Even now you beat around the bush [pletesh], even now you prevaricate [krutish].

Malenkov: Where exactly?

Molotov: You did not make the distinction between communism and capitalism.

Malenkov: Had we dug deeper, then this question would have been discussed in this way.

Khrushchev: That was how the question was discussed: so what, we had spilt our blood and now we should retreat to the [Polish] borders. If we withdraw behind the Polish borders, then the enemy would say: If they are leaving, then one must chase them to the devil [k chortovoi materi]. You took the position of capitulationism, and now you are afraid to admit it...

Pervukhin: [to Malenkov] You have explained nothing about why it happened this way on the German question.

Malenkov: I misunderstood this question from a tactical viewpoint.

Bulganin: Fuzzy...The discussion was about liquidating the GDR and turning it over to Western Germany.

Malenkov: We spoke then about conducting a political campaign on the question of German reunification and I believed that one should not have set the task of the development of socialism in the Democratic Germany.

Molotov: Comrades, we have heard the draft resolution proposed by the Central Committee's Presidium for approval of the Plenum and we have heard two speeches of comrade Malenkov on this issue. I think that there is a very big difference between them, and to put it simply, both the first and the second speeches of comrade Malenkov are fraudulent. Fakes!

Both the first and the second speeches are not truthful, not quite honest. This is a shortcoming to which I would like to draw your attention. But we must look at this issue fundamentally. Comrades, we are discussing, in essence, a political issue. We should draw lessons from it, to learn certain things for the future.

What is the main fault of comrade Malenkov? It seems (and it is written in the decision of the Presidium of the Central Committee that is proposed for your consideration and approval) that the main errors of comrade Malenkov are the following. First: absence of principles in policy-making. Second, carelessness in the realm of theory. This is not simply a mistake, comrades, not simply a drawback: a communist cannot be unprincipled, a leading figure cannot be careless on the questions of theory. It will not do, comrades. I can admit everything: blindness, blindness. But no, it is not blindness, it is the lack of principles. No, it was not blindness, when comrade Malenkov was in cahoots, was inseparable for a decade with that scoundrel Beria. It was not blindness, comrades, but the absence of political principles, and for that he received the post of Chairman of the Council of Ministers [from Beria-trans.]. He did not stay in cahoots [with Beria] for free; it was not all that simple an enterprise: Lavrentii and Georgii. Lavrentii and Georgii drank together, drove in a car together, traveled from dacha to dacha, etc. No, comrades, we should admit that we are dealing with a very profound phenomenon that exists not only

inside the CC, but exists even lower: in regional committees, in district committees, but here it took a very dangerous turn, comrades. The absence of principles in party life, particularly for the leader of the whole party, the whole state-this is a dangerous affair. And that comrade Malenkov overlooked criminal tendencies in Beria's activities-this was not a coincidence, not merely blindness. Regarding this blindness we all share the blame, here are all the members of the Presidium-we all were a little bit blind, even too much, since we took Beria until Stalin's death (I am speaking for myself) for an honest communist, even though a careerist, even though a crook, who would frame you up behind your back [okhulki na ruku ne dast]. As a careerist, he would not stop at any machinations, but on the surface, he seemed an honest person. I must say that on the day of Beria's arrest, when we sat at the Presidium, and Beria sat in the CC Presidium, here in the Kremlin, I gave a speech: here is a turn-coat [pererozhdenets], but comrade Khrushchev turned out to be more correct and said that Beria was not a turn-coat, but he was not a communist and had never been, which is more correct.

(Voice from the audience: That is right).

I was convinced myself. This is a more correct, sensible, truthful assessment. He was not a communist, he was a scoundrel, rogue to the core, who insinuated his way into our party, a smart fellow, a good organizer, but he made it to the top, ingratiated himself with comrade Stalin so that his role was very dangerous, not to mention that it was mean and depraved. Yet I must say that I did not take part in the talks between Malenkov and Beria, and they were in communication every day, between them two, and they must have spoken about certain subjects which would make comrade Malenkov blush, but we do not ask him to speak about them.

What happened, comrades? Comrade Stalin's death. We stand at the bed of the sick, dying man. An exchange of opinions would be appropriate, but nobody talks to us. Here are the two [who talk to each other -trans.]-Malenkov and Beria. We sit on the second floor: me, Khrushchev, Bulganin, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, and these two are up there. They bring down the prepared, well-formulated proposals, an announcement of the CC, draft decisions of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, the composition of the government, the head of the government, of the Ministry [of Security], such and such ministries should be merged, etc. All that was presented to us by Beria and Malenkov. And they were not people of some special tone. We do not need a special tone, but we need the truth, principles, integrity in policy.

So this shortcoming has reached so far that he [Malenkov] did not stand out. He worked as a CC secretary for decades and happened to become Chairman of the Council of Ministries, and we should admit now, before all the people-we made a mistake, we are removing [him] from the post of Chairman of the Council of Ministers. This is what lack of principles can lead to, but it will not make a home for itself in our party. The party will sort it out and will take measures.

The second shortcoming of comrade Malenkov is carelessness on issues of theory. Comrades, for the leading cadres of the party this is inadmissible. One can not simply say about Marxism-this is wrong, let's turn it upside down; or this is Leninism and this is not; this does not fit; communism or capitalism-let me try communism. What kind of a party leader are you if you do not know on the elementary level which way you are going-towards communism or capitalism-and have to choose. What kind of party secretary are you then? Can such a man be a secretary of a [low-level party] cell? I believe not. In the regional committee, in the district committee there is no place for such a man, not to mention the Central Committee...

Another issue is about the destruction of civilization. This [was] a very dangerous theoretical error. Comrade Malenkov remarked: "I overlooked it." We also fear responsibility for what he said in the speech. But what is this actually about? That allegedly if there were a third world war, atomic war, the conclusion is only one-the death of civilization, the death of mankind. [The French physicist], Joliot Curie, wrote some goddamn gibberish: "the destruction of humankind." When we looked [at his

pronouncement-trans.] we did not even know if we should publish it or not. Joliot Curie said, they published it there [abroad]. We reflected on it and finally published it with all that gibberish, because we did not want to put Joliot Curie in an uncomfortable situation. But not only Joliot Curie commits such errors. Read the newspaper "For stable peace, for people's democracy." Comrade Mitin, a CC editor is present here. In the issue dated 21 January of this year the newspaper "For stable peace, for people's democracy" published a speech of comrade [Palmiro] Togliatti [leader of the Italian communist party-trans.] and again [he repeats] the same gibberish, that the war would be the end of civilization. We confused even such outstanding leaders of communism as Togliatti. We have no better than him. This speech [of Malenkov] was politically incorrect, and even today it plays a demoralizing role, although almost a year has passed. We took measures to correct [Malenkov's statement, but nevertheless] comrade Togliatti got himself confused.

That this [statement] is theoretically illiterate is apparent-communists simply should not exist in this world for any other reason than overthrowing capitalism. We have the Communist Manifesto that Marx had written more than 100 years ago. He wrote that the crash of capitalism was nearing and that communism would triumph. And if we, with the countries of people's democracy and with such a powerful mechanism as the Soviet Union and the Communist Party, if we talk ourselves into admitting that some kind of war allegedly would lead to the end of capitalism and the end of civilization, it means that we do not have our head on our shoulders, but on the totally opposite part of the body (laughter). Therefore, no science, no political considerations can justify [such a statement of Malenkov]. It merely proves how harmful is carelessness in the questions of theory and the lack of principles in politics.

###