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Stalin's Butcher - Lavrentiy Beria - I

Lead: In a history punctuated by rulers noted for their villainy, Russia produced few leaders as efficiently cruel or as feared as Stalin's exterminator, Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria.

Intro.: A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts.

Content: In his long rule over the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin acquired a reputation for ruthlessness and near barbarity in the pursuit and maintenance of his power, yet it was some of his henchmen, anxious to do

his bidding and please him, who brought a whole new dimension to the practice of state sponsored terrorism.

There was Feliks Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky, son of a polish nobleman. He rose out of the ranks of the Lithuanian Socialist Party and was repeatedly arrested for revolutionary activity in the years leading up to the Bolshevik Revolution. Released after the October uprising in 1917, he was the founder and head of the first Soviet secret police, the All Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage or CHEKA, which helped stabilize Lenin's dictatorship. In that capacity Dzerzhinsky gained the reputation as an incorruptible,

ruthless, and fanatical communist. In 1924 he became an absolute supporter of Joseph Stalin in the struggle for leadership after Lenin's death and was made a candidate member of the Politburo. Two years later, during a frenzied debate in the party's central committee, he collapsed and died.

Then there was Nikolai Ivanovich Yeshov, the "Dwarf" or 'Evil Dwarf' by popular reputation. He joined the Bolsheviks in March, 1917 rising through several posts until he became one of Stalin's favorites. As head of the NKVD, the successor to the CHEKA, he presided over the worst excesses of the *Yezhovshchina*, the terrible and ruthless elimination of Stalin's enemies in the Great Purge Trials of the mid-

1930s. Despite his smarmy behavior and precise and faithful execution of Stalin's will, his tactics became an embarrassment even to Stalin. Finally the great leader realized that the Purges were dislocating the entire life of the country. Yezhov was consumed by his own machine. Dismissed, he was arrested in 1939 and summarily shot a year later.

Yet, it was Lavrentiy Beria who more than most defined the predator state. If anyone was the soul mate of Joseph Stalin, it was this son of a Georgian peasant. Next time: Stalin's butcher.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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