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Purging the Communist Party of the Soviet Union:
The Death of Sergo Ordzhonikidze

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines Sergo Ordzhonikidze's suicide within the context of Stalin's authoritarian regime. Specifically, it focuses on the intersection of politics and personal relationships between high-ranking Party members. The Soviet Union of the late 1930s was notably different from the Soviet Russia of 1917. Whereas a degree of disagreement within private discussions had been previously allowed, by the end of the 1930s Stalin demanded near absolute loyalty and unity within the Party. Despite the changing political dynamic within the Party, Ordzhonikidze repeatedly challenged Stalin when he believed that his policies were not in line with Lenin's conception of Communism. In turn, he became a threat to Stalin's Soviet Union.

The first section analyzes Ordzhonikidze's opposition to some of Stalin's policies that he believed contradicted Lenin's conception of Communism. It focuses on the differences of how Ordzhonikidze and Stalin believed the role that violence played in terms of establishing and maintaining control. The second section examines the aftermath of Ordzhonikidze's death and highlights Stalin's attempt to control the situation to maintain the appearance of Party unity. It demonstrates that Ordzhonikidze's death signified a shift within the Party toward favoring loyalty. Within the broader context of Soviet history, Ordzhonikidze's death is emblematic of a transition to a more authoritarian Soviet state where disagreement within the Party was largely forbidden.

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Introduction

This thesis examines the nature of Stalin's totalitarian regime within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (the Party) through exploring the death of Grigori Konstantinovich "Sergo" Ordzhonikidze. Specifically, it focuses on the interplay between politics and personal relationships of high-ranking Party members in Stalin's Soviet Union. During Stalin's reign over the Soviet Union, Ordzhonikidze was one of the more vocal objectors to Stalin's more extreme policies.¹ Unlike other objectors to Stalin, such as Trotsky or Bukharin, Ordzhonikidze initially supported Stalin. Stalin could likely tolerate some objections from Party members who had always objected to Stalin; however, Ordzhonikidze's break likely upset Stalin as a previously loyal Party member turned against him. While it was not a complete break with Stalin, it was a significant fracture in terms of maintaining the appearance of Party unity. In many ways, Ordzhonikidze's break with Stalin in the early 1930s and his suicide in 1937 can be seen as emblematic of the shift within the Party that occurred under Stalin. In part, this shift manifested as an intolerance for intra-party conflict.

Ordzhonikidze was an Old Bolshevik who had worked closely under Lenin and Stalin creating Communism in the Caucasus region. As a child, Ordzhonikidze despised injustice. His hatred of injustice led him to Noi Buachidze. Buachidze's philosophy showed Ordzhonikidze that the Russian tsar and the Georgian landlords had the same goal: to rob the working people.² In other words, it is likely that Buachidze influenced Ordzhonikidze's early involvement with the local workers' movements and eventually the Bolsheviks. As Ordzhonikidze grew older, became

¹ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 193.

² Ordzhonikidze, *Put' bolshevika*, 8,13.

a devoted follower of Lenin and his ideology and believed that Communism would improve the lives of the people. In the early 20th-century, Ordzhonikidze was a member of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party and was involved in local workers' movements.³ Following the successful Russian Revolutions in 1917, he continued to push for Sovietization in the Caucasus region.⁴ His efforts were instrumental in the creation of Soviet Azerbaijan and Soviet Georgia.

While Lenin, Ordzhonikidze, and Stalin worked together they did not always completely agree. Ordzhonikidze was a follower of Lenin but he held more extreme positions in terms of the Sovietization of Georgia as he wanted to create rapid Sovietization.⁵ At one point, Lenin wanted Ordzhonikidze and other top Bolsheviks in Soviet Georgia punished for their inappropriate and violent behavior towards Georgians to speed up unification.⁶ Lenin's annoyance was not unfounded as Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, and other top Bolsheviks had gone against his wishes in Georgia. In 1920, Lenin urged Ordzhonikidze to take Baku, Azerbaijan and Georgia; however, he urged that Ordzhonikidze must be extremely careful and "come to an understanding with the commander-in-chief about the transfer of troops."⁷ In other words, while Lenin understood the necessity of Sovietizing the Caucasus region, he also understood the need to be diplomatic as to not turn the people against the Soviet Union. As evident by Lenin's later telegram, Ordzhonikidze did not have the same understanding of the importance of a peaceful transfer of power.⁸ The Central Committee demanded that Ordzhonikidze remove his troops from Georgia and that he not advance his troops into Georgia as the Central Committee believed that peace

³ Ordzhonikidze, *Put' bolshevika*, 15-16.

⁴ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 215-216.

⁵ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 210.

⁶ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 217.

⁷ Lenin, "Telegram to I. T. Smilga and G. K. Orjonikidze."

⁸ See, Lenin, "Telegram to G. K. Orjonikidze," 4 May 1920.

was still an option in Georgia.⁹ Shortly following the Sovietization of Georgia in January 1921, Lenin cautioned Ordzhonikidze against immediately nationalizing Georgia and destroying the intelligentsia and merchant class.

Lenin understood that the rapid Sovietization that occurred in Russia in 1917 would have disastrous effects in Georgia.¹⁰ Rapid Sovietization meant the immediate nationalization of nearly all industry. In 1917, this drastic change was at least partially responsible for the near economic collapse that occurred following the Bolshevik takeover.¹¹ Further, rapid Sovietization turned certain groups of people against the Soviet government as it destroyed their way of life. As Soviet Russia was now established, Lenin believed that it could help Georgia Sovietize more gradually and hopefully avoid some of the temporary repercussions of Sovietization that occurred in Soviet Russia.¹²

Based on Lenin's multiple telegrams to Ordzhonikidze in the early 1920s, it was evident that Ordzhonikidze was closer to Stalin than Lenin in terms of the implementation of policy in the Caucasus region. Lenin adamantly opposed Stalin and Ordzhonikidze's aggressive integration tactics. While true, it appeared that Lenin was far more critical of Stalin than Ordzhonikidze.¹³ While Lenin was critical of Ordzhonikidze's actions in direct correspondence, he was not included in Lenin's "Letter to the Congress," which outlined his opinions of several high-ranking Party members.¹⁴ It is possible that Lenin did not see Ordzhonikidze as a strong

⁹ Lenin, "Telegram to G. K. Orjonikidze," 4 May 1920.

¹⁰ Lenin, "Letter To G. K. Orjonikidze," 2 March 1921.

¹¹ Other likely factors include the end of World War I, the Russian Civil War, and the inherent weakness of the economic system of tsarist Russia.

¹² Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 210-211.

¹³ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 216-217.

Lenin, "Letter to the Congress."

¹⁴ Lenin, "Letter to the Congress."

contender as his replacement given that Ordzhonikidze was subordinate to Stalin throughout the Sovietization of the Caucasus region.¹⁵ It is also possible that while Lenin disagreed with Ordzhonikidze on certain matters of policy he respected his passion for building Communism and felt that his somewhat aggressive personality would resolve itself. Additionally, Lenin's acceptance of Ordzhonikidze despite their differences of political options suggested that Lenin was willing to accept a degree of disagreement within the Party.

After the successful Sovietization of the Caucasus region, Ordzhonikidze became more moderate and his behavior fell more inline with Lenin's conception of Communism.¹⁶ His leadership role continued as People's Commissar for Heavy Industry and member of the Politburo. In other words, while Ordzhonikidze had always believed in Lenin's ideas he started to behave in a manner that was consistent with them. Like Ordzhonikidze, the Party was also notably different by the late 1920s. The death of Lenin and the subsequent rise of Stalin led to an irreversible shift within Party dynamics. However, while Ordzhonikidze's ideology became closer to Lenin's Communism, the Party started to split from the ideology of its initial leader, Lenin. By the 1930s, the majority of the Party members were still there but Lenin had died and Stalin replaced him as head of the Party. While the majority of the Politburo members were submissive to Stalin's possible perversions of Lenin's ideology, Ordzhonikidze criticized Stalin's transgressions. It appeared that Ordzhonikidze believed the Stalin took the Party in a direction that preferred loyalty to Lenin's ideology. As Stalin valued Party loyalty, Ordzhonikidze's

¹⁵ See, "Pis'mo V. I. Leniny" 6 November 1919.

¹⁶ Ordzhonikidze was still had violent outbursts; however, they were no longer directed at members of the opposition.

commitment to Lenin's ideology and objections to Stalin's changes were seen as a threat to Stalin's control of the Soviet Union.

While Ordzhonikidze's actions were instrumental in the Sovietization of South Russia and the Caucasus region, little scholarship is devoted solely to his role in the Soviet Union. Instead, his story is typically intertwined within the complex fabric of the history of the early Soviet Union. In other words, Ordzhonikidze is almost always discussed within the context of the creation of the Transcaucasian republic or Stalin's Soviet Union. While Ordzhonikidze was mostly a team player, his individual contributions to the creation of the Soviet Union are also worth making more explicit. His complex relationship with other Party members may further deepen the understanding of the Soviet government under Stalin. Further, his role in the Soviet Union may broaden the interpretation of the acceptability of dissent within the Party as it appeared the dissent became less permissible under Stalin.

In *The Making of The Georgian Nation*, Ronald Grigor Suny highlighted Ordzhonikidze's relationship to Lenin, as it related to the creation of Soviet Georgia. In doing so, he demonstrated Ordzhonikidze's role as a revolutionary and his commitment to Lenin's ideology. Additionally, Suny stated that Lenin did not always agree with Ordzhonikidze's line of thinking. For example, Suny emphasized Lenin's objection to Ordzhonikidze's desire to Sovietize Georgia at all costs. He illustrated that Lenin was concerned about Ordzhonikidze's drive to quickly take over Georgia as Lenin argued that Ordzhonikidze's plan was too abrupt and would cause unnecessary suffering for the Georgian people.¹⁷ In addition to discussing Ordzhonikidze's relationship with Lenin, he also demonstrated that Ordzhonikidze was opposed to the arbitrary nature of certain

¹⁷ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 210.

policies under Stalin.¹⁸ Further, he drew a line between Stalin and Ordzhonikidze by stating that Ordzhonikidze's suicide was in protest of Stalin.¹⁹

Sheila Fitzpatrick, in the books *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* and *On Stalin's Team: The Years of Living Dangerously in Soviet Politics*, examined Ordzhonikidze's role in Stalin's regime. Like Suny, she considered Ordzhonikidze's suicide to be a political move.²⁰ Her assessment largely considered Ordzhonikidze as a willing participant in Stalin's regime. However, she is not entirely critical of his actions as she demonstrated that Ordzhonikidze was willing to break with Stalin when he felt that Stalin betrayed Lenin's ideals. After assuming control of the Party, it became apparent the Stalin was more concerned with loyalty and less about creating a Communist society that benefited the people than Lenin had been. In discussing his tendency towards splitting with Stalin, she demonstrated Ordzhonikidze's commitment to how he interpreted Lenin's ideology. Additionally, she examined the complex relationship between Bukharin, Stalin, and Ordzhonikidze and Ordzhonikidze's transition to the more right-leaning faction of the Bolshevik party.²¹

In the book *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*, Roy Medvedev demonstrated that Ordzhonikidze was opposed to Stalin's tactics and was, instead, a devoted follower of Lenin. He highlighted Ordzhonikidze's role in an attempt to replace Stalin with Kirov as General Secretary.²² Medvedev also argued that Ordzhonikidze's devotion to Lenin's principles hindered Stalin's crimes as Ordzhonikidze objected to some of Stalin's more

¹⁸ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 229-230.

¹⁹ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 274.

²⁰ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 189.

²¹ Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team*, 59-60, 123.

²² Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 156.

extreme tactics as they did not follow Marxist thought.²³ Like Suny and Fitzpatrick, Medvedev considered Ordzhonikidze's suicide a political move. However, he further suggested that Stalin's actions drove Ordzhonikidze to kill himself.²⁴

While each of these historians discussed Ordzhonikidze in connection with different aspects of Soviet history, they all drew the conclusion that Ordzhonikidze's suicide was at least in part tied to the complicated personal relationships between Ordzhonikidze and members of the Politburo, particularly Stalin. As Ordzhonikidze was only part of their larger arguments, these historians do not provide a thorough examination of these political motivations. In this thesis, I further explore the role of personal relationships in the Soviet government, suggesting that Ordzhonikidze's death was emblematic of fundamental clashes within Party ideology given that Ordzhonikidze substituted his interpretation of Lenin's conception of Communism when he disagreed with Stalin's ideology.

In the first section, I argue that Ordzhonikidze opposed some of Stalin's policies as they contradicted what he believed was Lenin's conception of Communism and, in turn, substituted his ideology despite it being at odds with Stalin policies. In the second section, I argue that Stalin attempted to prevent the ideological and personal underpinnings of Ordzhonikidze's death from becoming known as he understood that the realities of Ordzhonikidze's death could harm the appearance of Party unity.

Challenging Stalin's Policies

In this section, I examine why Ordzhonikidze appeared to shift towards the more right-wing Bolsheviks by the 1930s. I argue that Ordzhonikidze opposed some of Stalin's policies

²³ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 193.

²⁴ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 193.

because he believed that they were in contradiction to Lenin's conception of Communism as they targeted more than direct threats and that these policies were not productive. While Ordzhonikidze did not oppose the entirety of Stalin's policies, he was critical of his policies when he believed that they diverged from Lenin's conception of Communism. Due to this disagreement and, probably Ordzhonikidze's personality, he challenged Stalin's policies and substituted his own ideology. Despite the changing political climate, Ordzhonikidze remained a committed follower of Lenin's ideals and rejected Stalin's tendency to reframe politics around loyalty to Stalin.²⁵

It is important to note that Stalin did not believe that he was changing the Party's trajectory. Rather, he saw himself as continuing Lenin's conception of Communism. While Stalin believed that he was continuing Lenin's ideology, Lenin, towards the end of his life, expressed a fear that Stalin was not the most suitable leader of the Soviet Union. In 1922, he stated that Stalin was likely incapable of exercising an appropriate level of caution that was required to head the Soviet Union. In 1923, Lenin outrightly called Stalin "too rude" and called for his removal on the basis that he was intolerant and inconsiderate to other comrades.²⁶

Other high-ranking Party members privately expressed opposition toward Stalin's policies. However, Ordzhonikidze was the only member who would openly oppose Stalin who was not a member of another faction of the Party. Members of other factions also openly opposed Stalin. In other words, Ordzhonikidze set himself apart from the other Bolsheviks not because he merely objected to Stalin but because he did so publicly to Stalin. Fitzpatrick further

²⁵ See, for example, Ordzhonikidze, *Put' bolshevika*.

²⁶ Lenin, "Letter to the Congress."

It is worth noting the Stalin and Lenin's personal fallout over Stalin's rude behavior toward Lenin's wife may have played a role in Lenin's opinion of Stalin.

noted that this silence from other loyal Party members was likely intentional; while the members argued during meetings, they rarely intentionally were in opposition with Stalin's ideas.²⁷ In many ways, Stalin created a circle of loyalists that, publicly at least, supported his policies. Even though the Politburo was an organization of mostly equals, it appeared that Stalin was the definite leader.²⁸ After Lenin's death, Stalin positioned himself as a moderate between the left (Trotsky) and the right (Zinoviev). Stalin's middle position allowed him to outlast the other factions as the other two factions fought primarily against each other.²⁹ This loyalty and Stalin's status as first among equals theoretically allowed Stalin to enact policies that were less than perfectly consistent with Lenin's ideals without major consequences.³⁰ In many ways, Stalin's suppression of opposing opinions was successful in the immediate term as Ordzhonikidze stood alone in terms of Party members who did not belong to opposition factions in publicly voicing his objections to Stalin's policies when he believed that they crossed a line. Further, it is unclear the extent to which Ordzhonikidze's objections caused changes in terms of policy.³¹

Although it was not his initial reaction, Ordzhonikidze objected to the Five Year Plans as he saw that they caused unnecessary harm to the people.³² It became apparent that the goals of the Five Year Plans were unattainable. Rather than solving the systemic economic issues, Stalin blamed the shortcomings on the people. As such, Ordzhonikidze began to understand that the

²⁷ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 25.

²⁸ Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team*, 14.

Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 329.

²⁹ Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team*, 33.

³⁰ It is, however, important to note that Stalin believed that his policies were the continuation of Lenin's conception of Communism.

³¹ Medvedev noted that Ordzhonikidze's objections prevented some of Stalin's more extreme policies.

Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 193.

³² It is worth noting that the majority of the Party initially saw the Five Year Plans as a better alternative to the NEP.

Five Year Plans harmed the people and the Soviet economy. Ordzhonikidze had always been committed to reducing people's suffering. As a child, "Sergo [Ordzhonikidze] hated all kinds of injustice."³³ He stood up to older kids when they beat up younger kids, often coming home with a broken nose.³⁴ As an adult, he graduated from paramedic school in 1905 and in 1916 starting working at a hospital in Yakutsk.³⁵ Given Ordzhonikidze's non-revolutionary career that focused on improving the lives of those around him, it is not surprising that he took action to change the trajectory of the Five Year Plans.

When Ordzhonikidze saw that Stalin's absurdly high economic goals were wreaking havoc on people's everyday lives despite the fact that the Five Year Plans aimed to create a stronger economy he tried to address the issues. While these Five Year Plans may have had the potential to be successful if done correctly, the early Five Year Plans fell short of expectations and threatened to weaken the economy. Perhaps, Stalin could not anticipate the disastrous effects of the Five Year Plans, but Stalin's actions after discovering issues with the Five Year Plans would reflect that. In other words, he would have attempted to correct issues after they became apparent. However, rather than reassess the Five Year Plans, he blamed the people for the failures and continued to demand such absurd production outputs.³⁶

As Ordzhonikidze was the People's Commissar of Heavy Industry, Stalin looked to him for answers for why this section of the economy was lagging. Since 1930, Ordzhonikidze had been a key figure in understanding and strengthening the Soviet economy. He oversaw the creation of heavy industry, making him one of the most knowledgeable on it. After receiving the

³³ Ordzhonikidze, *Put' bolsheviks*, 8.

³⁴ Ordzhonikidze, *Put' bolsheviks*, 8.

³⁵ Ordzhonikidze, *Put' bolsheviks*, 14, 148-150.

³⁶ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 154.

official report, Stalin criticized Ordzhonikidze and his deputy for an incorrect report as it did not indicate that the workers were the reason for the shortcomings.³⁷ Stalin's reaction suggested that he was not really interested in solving the issue and instead simply wanted to know that it was the peoples' fault, not his. While it is possible to suggest that Stalin did not know that his economic policies would have a detrimental effect on production, it appeared that Stalin was more irritated by the fact that the production shortfalls were blamed on his shortcomings, rather than the factory workers themselves. In other words, Stalin's reaction suggested that he had other priorities than simply solving the economic problem. As Stalin valued loyalty, it is possible that Stalin assumed that Ordzhonikidze would take Stalin's side and also criticize the deputy (Gurevich) for what had to be a false report.

Stalin ordered officials from the Main Administration of the Metallurgical Industry to visit factories and report back on why the factories were not producing expected outputs. A. I. Gurevich, deputy to Ordzhonikidze, reported on the backwardness of the factories, citing poor worker nutrition.³⁸ The lack of worker nutrition was seen as a problem that would have to be addressed by the government. In response to the report, Stalin verbally attacked Ordzhonikidze and the quality of his deputy's report.³⁹ Stalin's reaction signaled that Stalin did not place the same value on truth as Ordzhonikidze did. The deputy's report noted the problem which could have been solved to improve the outputs of heavy industry. However, this answer was not the answer that Stalin was looking for. Ordzhonikidze's report does not suggest that he did not value loyalty, however; he simply understood that the truth was more useful in terms of solving the

³⁷ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 154-155.

³⁸ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 154-155.

³⁹ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 155.

current economic problem than appeasing Stalin. In turn, Ordzhonikidze likely stood up to Stalin and defended his deputy as he knew that the deputy was not corrupt and that lying to Stalin would not solve the issue.

This interaction between Ordzhonikidze and Stalin suggested that Ordzhonikidze valued the truth in addition to unconditional loyalty. However, the reality was not that simple as Ordzhonikidze was known for being loyal to his people.⁴⁰ Fitzpatrick argued, “from those who worked for him, Ordzhonikidze expected dedication, results, and loyalty. But he also offered protection, intervening energetically on behalf of ‘his people’ when they got into trouble with the party, the secret police, or other control agencies.”⁴¹ In other words, Ordzhonikidze was willing to protect those loyal to him from Stalin. Indeed, this exchange between Stalin and Ordzhonikidze about the deputy indicated that Ordzhonikidze was willing to protect those close to him as Ordzhonikidze took a stand that contradicted Stalin.

Moreover, Stalin and Ordzhonikidze disagreed on what to do with specialists and members of the intelligentsia. Stalin asserted that they were a part of society that needed to be removed as they had been trained in pre-Revolutionary Russia. Essentially, they were unable to be reformed into loyal Soviet citizens.⁴² Ordzhonikidze’s understanding of the value of specialists was more complicated. On one hand, he understood that Lenin valued specialists.⁴³ As a result, Ordzhonikidze, sort of, advocated for an approach that was inline with Lenin’s understanding of the necessity of specialists.⁴⁴ On the other hand, Ordzhonikidze applauded the removal of people who were believed to be loyal to the old regime. In 1937, Ordzhonikidze

⁴⁰ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 32.

⁴¹ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 32.

⁴² Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 110, 112-113.

⁴³ Lenin, “Letter To G. K. Orjonikidze,” 2 March 1921.

⁴⁴ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 138.

claimed that there were “old engineers, former factory workers, privileged nobility, and members of joint-stock companies” sabotaging heavy industry.⁴⁵ However, he noted that not all of them were spies and some were willing to work towards Communism.⁴⁶ In other words, Ordzhonikidze understood that these specialists were necessary for a functioning society but they needed to be willing to cooperate with the new regime. Despite the fact that these specialists were a product of the old regime, it did not mean that these people could not be reformed to have a use in the new Soviet society.⁴⁷ In many ways, Ordzhonikidze was correct in that the newly formed Soviet Union could not simply wipe out a large number of its educated population and expect to function. At the same time, the Soviet Union could not simply ignore this section of the population and hope that the small number of problematic specialists would eventually assimilate into society as the potential risk of a counterrevolution was too great. However, as the majority of the specialists were, in fact, not interested in undermining the Soviet Union, the potential risk was fairly low.

Ordzhonikidze advocated for rehabilitating these specialists and allowing them to work because he believed that, in general, they were willing to work hard as long as their bosses did not bring up their past.⁴⁸ Ordzhonikidze’s assessment suggested that, unlike Stalin, Ordzhonikidze did not seem to believe that unwavering loyalty was critical. Instead, it appeared that Ordzhonikidze understood that former members of the upper class can still have a place in Soviet society as long as they were willing to support the new society. It is likely that Ordzhonikidze’s willingness to compromise with members of the former upper class as he was

⁴⁵ Ordzhonikidze, “Dobit’ vruga i sdelat’, chtoby on k nam prohik!,” 515.

⁴⁶ Ordzhonikidze, “Dobit’ vruga i sdelat’, chtoby on k nam prohik!,” 515.

⁴⁷ Ordzhonikidze, “Dobit’ vruga i sdelat’, chtoby on k nam prohik!,” 515.

⁴⁸ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 138.

“unquestionably the most powerful official in Transcaucasia.”⁴⁹ This fact meant that he had a solid understanding of the complex relationship between the Transcaucasian republic and the Soviet Union. Further, he had spent the majority of the beginning of the 20th-century organizing workers’ movements in this region.⁵⁰ This knowledge made him an authority on how to best proceed in the newly created Transcaucasian Republic. It is evident that he understood that Stalin’s aggressive collectivization policies were not working in this republic. Rather than encourage participation, these policies made already skeptical Georgians convinced that the Soviet Union intended to destroy their way of life given the realities of the Soviet annexation of Georgia.⁵¹ This conclusion is not surprising as following the annexation of Georgia, the Soviet Union began rapid Sovietization. Initially, this process attacked members of the Georgian government, Mensheviks, and religious leaders.

Ordzhonikidze’s disapproval of violence in certain circumstances should not be taken as a blanket disapproval of violence. On the contrary, it appeared that Ordzhonikidze believed that violence was a tool to remove certain aspects of society that could not be reformed. This belief further suggested that Ordzhonikidze objected to Stalin’s policies as his understanding of the value of violence was different from Stalin’s as Stalin tended to use violence as a wide-scale method to force compliance. Stalin seemed to have a black and white understanding in terms of loyalty. People were either loyal to him (and the Soviet Union) or they were opposition and needed to be removed. Stalin was threatened by the groups of people that were not loyal to him but were also not hostile to him either. Stalin tended to use violence against these groups of

⁴⁹ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 228.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Ordzhonikidze, *Put’ bolshevika*.

⁵¹ See, Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 186-236.

people to force compliance. On the other hand, it seemed that Ordzhonikidze saw violence as a last resort to force compliance and instead believed that the majority of the people would willingly convert to Communism after seeing its benefits. In other words, while Ordzhonikidze was loyal to 'his people' and valued truth in addition to loyalty, he was not fully opposed to violence against the people who were proven members of the opposition.

Where violence against certain groups proved ideologically consistent with Lenin's conception of Communism, Ordzhonikidze tended to support it. It seemed that Ordzhonikidze understood that certain aspects of the previous Georgian society could not coexist with the new Soviet society.⁵² Certain groups, such as the Georgian ruling class, had unquestionably demonstrated that they would not peacefully participate in the new Soviet society as they attempted to infiltrate the ranks of the Soviet government.⁵³ While this line of thinking was consistent with Soviet conspiracy theories that enemies had infiltrated the new Soviet government, there was some degree of truth to Ordzhonikidze's assessment in Soviet Georgia. As a result, Ordzhonikidze fully supported and advocated for the removal of the Georgian intelligentsia as it was a remnant of the ruling class and presented a similar threat as the Russian counterrevolution had in 1917:

The Georgian intelligentsia — Mensheviks, National Democrats, Federalists — is flesh and blood, skin and bones part of the Russian counterrevolution. Instead of open sabotage it has chosen a different path; to enter the Soviet service and to try in every way to defend the interests of the nobles and princes against the workers and peasants.⁵⁴

⁵² Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 226.

⁵³ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 226.

⁵⁴ *Bor'ba za uprochenie sovetkoi vlasti v Gruzii (Sobornik dokumentov i materialov) (1921-1925gg.)*, compiled by Iu. M. Kacharava et al., 176, in, Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 226.

Ordzhonikidze's identification of the Georgian intelligentsia signaled that he believed that they were a legitimate threat to Soviet society. While Ordzhonikidze agreed with Stalin on the use of violence, in this case, it is not an indication that Ordzhonikidze was a frequent advocate for violence against opposition groups.

In identifying the former Georgian ruling class as an opponent that needed to be removed, Ordzhonikidze demonstrated that he supported violence against a group as long the group presented a real and present danger. Indeed, Ordzhonikidze's assessment is somewhat consistent with Lenin's ideology as the Georgian ruling class did, in fact, represent a hostile threat to the new Soviet government.⁵⁵ However, it is worth noting that Lenin encouraged Ordzhonikidze to work with the Georgian government rather than enact violent measures against them.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, the Georgian ruling class represented a threat in a similar way that the former Russian ruling class did directly following the October 1917 Revolution. They did violently object to the 1921 Soviet annexation and continued to object following 1921.⁵⁷ However, this Georgian ruling class was weaker than the Russian ruling class had been in 1917.

Based on the fact that the Georgian ruling class was an actual threat, it is difficult to suggest that this example of targeted violence is an indication that Ordzhonikidze favored violence in the same way that Stalin did. Rather, it is more likely that Ordzhonikidze understood the value of targeted violence in terms of achieving control over certain groups. Despite the fact that Ordzhonikidze saw the value of violence in controlling the counterrevolution, he did not advocate for its widespread use. In fact, he opposed the wide-scale use of violence as it violated

⁵⁵ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 226.

⁵⁶ Lenin, "Telegram to G. K. Orjonikidze," 4 May 1920.

Lenin, "Telegram to I. T. Smilga and G. K. Orjonikidze."

⁵⁷ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 222-223, 226.

the rights of people who were not actual threats. As Ordzhonikidze seemed to care about people on a human level, it is not entirely surprising that he held such contradictory views. On one hand, he grew up valuing the truth and was committed to helping people.⁵⁸ On the other hand, he was a member of the Politburo under Stalin and, to some degree, had to conform to Stalin's policies. In turn, Ordzhonikidze's opinions tended to exist between two somewhat contradictory ideas, resulting in complex and nuanced understandings of the situation. While he likely believed in the humanity of people, he also understood that some members of the opposition had actually infiltrated Soviet ranks (although not on the scale that Stalin claimed).

While Ordzhonikidze was generally committed to not using large-scale violence, the same cannot be said about Stalin. Ordzhonikidze tended to approve of violence against active threats to the Party. Stalin, on the other hand, enacted several policies that targeted potential threats (wealthy non-Party members including *kulaks* and religious groups). In other words, Ordzhonikidze understood the value of violence in certain circumstances but objected to its wide-scale use. Like the violent policies that Ordzhonikidze agreed with, these policies were intended to further strengthen Soviet control over the Soviet Union by removing opposition. However, these wealthy non-Party members, who were the targets of Stalin's policies, were not a violent opposition group as the Georgian ruling class was. In turn, these policies resulted in heavy taxation that Ordzhonikidze argued violated their legal rights as their existence was not inherently a threat to Soviet society.⁵⁹

Ordzhonikidze believed that Stalin's violent policies toward wealthy non-Party members contradicted Lenin's conception of Communism as they were a loosely defined, non-violent

⁵⁸ See, Ordzhonikidze, *Put' bolshevika*, 8, 14, 148-150.

⁵⁹ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 199.

opposition group. Specifically, Ordzhonikidze argued that these policies directed at members of religious organizations and *kulaks* were inhumane as the taxation was so severe that it left them unable to pay.⁶⁰ This inability to pay meant that they were forced to surrender everything to the state and were forced to work for the state. Ordzhonikidze further explained, “sometimes this harassment of members of the clergy literally becomes mockery. For example, there have been cases in Barnaul district where ministers of religion were conscripted to clean pigsties, stables, toilets, etc.”⁶¹ Indeed, there appeared to be a substantial difference between the wealthy non-Party members and the Georgian ruling class. The former was targeted for merely existing, whereas the latter was an actual violent threat.

In addition to taking a stand against Stalin’s specific policies when he believed that they violated Lenin’s ideals, Ordzhonikidze also supported anti-Stalin factions of the Communist party. Ordzhonikidze did not always oppose Stalin, however. It would be incorrect to suggest that Ordzhonikidze was always anti-Stalin as they had been close allies in the years leading up to 1917 and during the early years of the Soviet Union. In fact, during the early years of the Soviet Union, Ordzhonikidze actively supported Stalin’s rapid Sovietization of the Georgian countryside over Lenin’s objections.⁶² It is possible that Ordzhonikidze’s opposite opinion on the rate of Sovietization was due to the fact that he was actively in Georgia. Lenin objected primarily on the grounds that rapid Sovietization in Georgia would likely turn the Georgian people away

⁶⁰ GARF, f. 5263, op. 1, d. 7 (1930), in, Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 119.

⁶¹ GARF, f. 5263, op. 1, d. 7 (1930), in, Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 119.

⁶² Lenin objected to the rapid Sovietization of Georgia on the grounds that it would cause a similar economic problem as had occurred in 1917 in Russia. To avoid this economic problem, Lenin advocated for a more controlled approach as he did not believe that rapid Sovietization was necessary as it had been in 1917.

Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 210-212.

from Communism.⁶³ Throughout the creating of Soviet Georgia, Lenin advocated for a gradual approach that allowed the Georgian people to willingly become part of the Soviet Union. While Lenin spent most of this period in Moscow, Ordzhonikidze was on the ground in Georgia. As a result, Lenin likely had a limited understanding of the immediate situation and was more focused on the big picture. Ordzhonikidze, on the other hand, was forced to deal with the immediate needs of the Soviet people in Georgia. Throughout the period surrounding the Sovietization of Georgia, Ordzhonikidze sent frantic telegrams and letters requesting food or money.⁶⁴ As such, it is likely that he understood a Soviet Georgia would be able to produce these needed items so he pushed for rapid Sovietization.

Ordzhonikidze's opposition to Stalin and his policies increased as time progressed and his policies tended to be more authoritarian in practice. As a result, Ordzhonikidze found himself looking towards the policies of Bukharin and the other more right-leaning Bolsheviks. This change to the opposite faction suggested that Ordzhonikidze believed that Stalin's policies were no longer consistent with Lenin's conception of Communism as Ordzhonikidze continued to view Lenin's conception of Communism as the correct path. In turn, he was more inclined to follow whichever faction best aligned with how he interpreted Lenin's conception of Communism.

By the late 1920s, the Party had already begun to split into factions. Bukharin was part of the right-leaning faction and Stalin was part of the more moderate faction; therefore, Bukharin and Stalin were opponents. While Bukharin and Stalin were unquestionable opponents,

⁶³ Lenin, "Letter To G. K. Orjonikidze."

⁶⁴ See, for example, Lenin, "Telegram to G. K. Orjonikidze," 22 January (4 February) 1918. Lenin, "Telegram to G. K. Orjonikidze," 9 April 1918.

Ordzhonikidze's relationship with Bukharin and Stalin is more complicated. This complexity is largely due to his commitment to Lenin's ideology and belief that some of Stalin's policies contradicted Lenin's Communist goals. In addition to loyalty, he was willing to accept whichever faction he believed was more ideologically consistent. His willingness to accept other factions when they were closer to his interpretation of Lenin's conception of Communism was likely the result of Ordzhonikidze's general interest in improving the lives of people. Before the late 1920s, Ordzhonikidze was a supporter of Stalin, but by the 1930s he began to reject Stalin's policies and began to favor more right-wing policies. Initially, Ordzhonikidze found himself in favor of Stalin's more practical policies as they seemed more likely to work than Bukharin's more theoretical policies.⁶⁵ Only after the nature of Stalin's policies became known did Ordzhonikidze shift sides.

In the late 1920s, the relationship between Ordzhonikidze and Bukharin was fairly ambiguous but it appeared that the two were opponents. The two verbally attacked each other at Politburo meetings.⁶⁶ Additionally, several Party members including Ordzhonikidze felt that Bukharin was whiny and manipulative. In a letter to Voroshoilov, Ordzhonikidze expressed his opinion of Bukharin's behavior at a recent Politburo meeting:

To hell with him [Bukharin]," Ordzhonikidze wrote to Voroshoilov, who had complained to him after Bukharin's perfidy. "To our complete surprise, he turned out not to be a particularly decent person. He will do everything he can to create the impression that people are insulting and suppressing him, and at the same time he himself will pour shit on us."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 327.

⁶⁶ Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team*, 60.

⁶⁷ RGASPI, f. 74, op. 2, d. 43, ll. 38-39; RGASPI, f. 74, op. 2, d. 43, ll. 50-51, in Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team*, 60.

Indeed, this letter implied that Ordzhonikidze and Bukharin did not get along. However, this interpretation may not be the direct result of the fact the two did not agree on matters of policy. Rather, it may be the result of Ordzhonikidze's mildly hotheaded personality as Ordzhonikidze tended to lash out at his political opponents.⁶⁸ Amirkhahian noted the while people may claim that Ordzhonikidze was hotheaded it was not entirely correct. Instead, he noted how calm and collected Ordzhonikidze was. Ordzhonikidze sometimes swore but never at people and people rarely took offense at him.⁶⁹ Despite the fact that Ordzhonikidze's interactions not in private Party meetings may have been calm and respectful, it appeared that there were moments where he was aggressive toward other Party members. In other words, while Ordzhonikidze did not appear to be inherently aggressive, it seemed that he had moments where he passionately attacked other member's ideas. It is also likely that Ordzhonikidze's outburst may also be the result of Stalin turning the majority of the Party toward his factions and in opposition to Bukharin's ideas. In turn, it is possible to suggest that Ordzhonikidze did not hate Bukharin or his policies exactly.

In the late 1920s, Ordzhonikidze found himself in agreement with Stalin over economic policies as, like Stalin, Ordzhonikidze believed that the NEP was not a sustainable economic policy and that it would result in a more backward economy.⁷⁰ Essentially, they believed that the NEP would crash and burn, undoing the progress that it had made.⁷¹ Ordzhonikidze advocated

⁶⁸ Several historians have noted that Ordzhonikidze was prone to violent outbursts over political disagreements.

See, for example, Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team*, 8.

⁶⁹ Ordzhonikidze, *Put' bolshevika*, 386.

⁷⁰ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 329.

⁷¹ Given the instability of state-controlled capitalism and the lack of understanding of how to manage this economic structure, they were probably correct that the NEP was not a viable long-term economic policy.

Johnson and Temin, "The Macroeconomics of NEP," 763-767.

for Stalin's more practical approach to collectivization. However, at this point in time, Ordzhonikidze was unaware of how collectivization would be accomplished.⁷² While Ordzhonikidze, and the majority of the Party supported Stalin's plan, "Ordzhonikidze, conceding Bukharin's good intentions, stated their worry: 'it is not a question of wishing but of policies. And Comrade Bukharin's policies will drag us backward, not forward.'"⁷³ Indeed, in the late 1920s, Bukharin's policy to continue the NEP seemed impractical as its creator and biggest advocate was dead. Additionally, the initial economic boom for the NEP had started to slow.⁷⁴ Rather than try to fix a possibly inherently flawed economic policy, it seemed more logical to create a new, more long-term economic solution as the NEP was never intended to be a permanent economic policy.⁷⁵

By the 1930s, Ordzhonikidze became convinced that Stalin's policies were no longer consistent with Communism and he began to shift away from Stalin and towards the more right-leaning Party members (including Bukharin) whose policies he had previously been opposed to. Perhaps unsurprisingly, his shift away from Stalin's policies was not generally shown through direct public opposition. Instead, it appeared the Ordzhonikidze attempted to maintain a public appearance of being loyal to Stalin. For example, at a delegation of engineers, Ordzhonikidze described the achievements of removing opposition groups from the ranks of factory workers.⁷⁶ This statement was constant with the Party line. However, he continued and stated that not all

⁷² Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 329.

⁷³ Kuibyshev quoted in *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, No. 10, 1967, 76; S. M. Kirov, *Izbrannyye stat'i i rechi (1912-1934)*, Vol II (Moscow, 1957), 539; G. K. Ordzhonikidze, *Stat'i i rechi*, Vol. II (Moscow, 1957), 174, in, Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 329.

⁷⁴ Johnson and Temin, "The Macroeconomics of NEP," 753, 763-764.

⁷⁵ Lenin, "The New Economic Policy."

⁷⁶ Ordzhonikidze, "Dobit' vruga i sdelat', chtoby on k nam prohik!," 512-519.

wealthy individuals were inherently in objection to Soviet ideals.⁷⁷ This continuation suggested that Ordzhonikidze was not simply blindly following the Party line. Rather, he blended his convictions into the Party's ideology.

Ordzhonikidze's delayed realization that Stalin's policies were not entirely consistent with how he interpreted Lenin's conception of Communism was likely the result of Stalin's attempt to craft his political position in between the two extremes to seem like a more moderate option. This middle position likely gave him the best chance at his ideas becoming policy as they were not at either extreme. Cohen characterized the situation and suggested that Stalin had successfully convinced the members of the Politburo that he was reserved and had not been swept up by either faction of extremism:

In short, Stalin built an anti-Bukharin majority and emerged as *primus inter pares* inside the leadership not as the reckless architect of 'revolution from above' but as a self-proclaimed sober-minded statesman pledged to a 'sober and calm' course between the timidity of the Right and the extremism of the Left - as the true defender of the line of the Fifteenth Congress.* For all his warfare rhetoric, he won in his familiar role of the twenties as the man of the golden middle, who had impressed fellow administrators with his pragmatic efficiency, 'calm tone and quiet voice.'^{** 78}

While Stalin temporarily convinced the other members of the Politburo that his policies were moderate, it did not last long. Cohen argued, "Seven months later, he [Stalin] was to set out upon a wholly different course with unimagined goal and risks: 'great change,' which for many Bolsheviks, including some who had supported him against Bukharin, was to come, like the day of the Lord, as a thief in the night."⁷⁹ Indeed, after Stalin began to enact his policies it became

⁷⁷ Ordzhonikidze, "Dobit' vraga i sdelat', chtoby on k nam prohik!," 512-519.

* See, for example, *Works*, XI, 217, 257, 290-3. (Citation in original).

** See, for example, A. I Mikoian, *Mysli i vospominaniia o Lenine* (Moscow, 1970), 145, 196, 233; and *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston, 1970), 27, 50. (Citation in original).

⁷⁸ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 329.

⁷⁹ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 329.

clear that they were not as moderate as he initially claimed. In turn, previously supportive Party members, including Ordzhonikidze, began to have their doubts about these policies.

Where Stalin's policies contradicted Lenin's conception of Communism, Ordzhonikidze objected which indicated his preference for truth rather than unconditional loyalty as Lenin's ideal was seen as the truth. In 1924, Ordzhonikidze proclaimed that "our red army will preserve the peace of the workers and peasants of the Union of Soviet Republics and prepare for the great future battles for the implementation of the ideas of Vladimir Ilyich [Lenin] - for world communism."⁸⁰ It appeared that this newspaper article originally published in *Zaria Vostoka* demonstrated that fact that Lenin's Communism was the true path as Ordzhonikidze defended Lenin's Red Army and called for its continuation of protecting Communism.⁸¹

Despite the appearance that Ordzhonikidze shifted ideological commitments, his belief in Lenin's initial conception of Communism remained constant. Instead, it appeared that Ordzhonikidze believed that Stalin's policies diverged from the initial conception of Communism and became more authoritarian in nature. In turn, Ordzhonikidze objected to Stalin's assessment of the deputy's report on the reasons why heavy industry was lagging behind which showed his commitment to truth over unconditional loyalty to Stalin as he understood that agreeing with Stalin's incorrect assessment would be detrimental for economic progress. Further, Ordzhonikidze disagreed with Stalin on his violent policies toward loosely defined opposition groups as they did not create a threat to the Soviet state which further illustrated the fact that Ordzhonikidze valued Lenin's conception of Communism over absolute loyalty to Stalin. While Ordzhonikidze's break with Stalin was not immediate, by the 1930s he concluded that as a whole

⁸⁰ Ordzhonikidze, "Lenin i krasnaia armia," 306.

⁸¹ See, Ordzhonikidze, "Lenin i krasnaia armia."

Stalin's policies were largely in contradiction with Lenin's conception of Communism and began to reject his policies.

Ordzhonikidze's Death as a Shift within Party Dynamics

In this section, I examine why Stalin obscured facts surrounding the death of Ordzhonikidze, demonstrating that the events surrounding his death indicate a shift within the Party. Stalin crafted a version of Ordzhonikidze's death that claimed he died from a heart attack which minimized the potential negative impact of his death on Party unity. I argue that Stalin's narrative maintained an appearance of a unified Party to the public as it hid Ordzhonikidze's true motivations for committing suicide. While Ordzhonikidze's exact motivations remain unclear, the changing Party dynamics undoubtedly were a contributing factor in his suicide. Stalin's false narrative continued in *Pravda's* announcement of Ordzhonikidze's death. In controlling the narrative, Stalin illustrated that he favored Party unity over inconvenient facts because he understood that the truth had the potential to further divide the Party and make it known that Stalin's policies were contradictory to Lenin's conception of Communism.

The death of Ordzhonikidze signaled a shift within the Party as it exemplified the internal disunity of the party as Ordzhonikidze had been a long-time follower of Lenin and a critic of Stalin's policy changes. Ordzhonikidze's criticisms did not go unnoticed. In the years leading up to Ordzhonikidze's death, Molotov refused to fulfill orders from the Commissariat of Heavy Industry, headed by Ordzhonikidze. Medvedev argued that Molotov's refusal to fulfill these orders indicated that the Party persecuted Ordzhonikidze as Molotov believed that "enemies of the people" could secretly infiltrate the Party and silently undermine it from within.⁸² As

⁸² Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 346.

Molotov was a loyal supporter of Stalin's extreme policies and rejected the notion that Lenin's Communism was the correct path, it is plausible that he targeted Ordzhonikidze's economic sector as he was a loyal supporter of Lenin's ideology.⁸³ While Molotov's actions did not necessarily make sense in terms of economics, they are consistent with Stalin's ideology as Stalin valued loyalty above everything else. Just as Stalin blamed the failures of collectivization on the corruption of local leadership and failed to implement new, more effective policies, Molotov chose loyalty to Stalin over improving economic situation.

Ordzhonikidze's suicide can be seen as the result of the Party splitting into factions and diverging from its initial Communist goals. It is possible to suggest that Ordzhonikidze's personal commitments became contradictory to Stalin's policies as Ordzhonikidze did not share the same commitment to loyalty that Stalin did. For example, on 5 February 1937 at a meeting with the heads of the department of Heavy Industry, Ordzhonikidze expressed his disapproval concerning being forced to answer for all of the issues with heavy industry.⁸⁴ In his speech, he seemed to attack bureaucracy and simply blaming saboteurs for all of the problems. Instead, he suggested, "it is necessary to approach them, to talk with the workers, to talk with the directors, to help, to cheer up, to say that this is a matter of ten days - of one month, it can be no longer."⁸⁵ Ordzhonikidze's speech suggested that he did not fully agree with Stalin as he substituted his interpretation of Lenin's Communism for Stalin's ideology where he believed the two were in

⁸³ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 346.

⁸⁴ Ordzhonikidze, "Iz vystupleniia S. Ordzhonikidze na soveshchanii nachal'nikov glavnykh upravlenii tyazheloi promyshlennosti. — Ob otnoshenii k kadram v svyazi s antitrotskistskimi protsessami," RGASPI, f. 85, op. 29, d. 156, l. 5-14, copy.

⁸⁵ Ordzhonikidze, "Iz vystupleniia S. Ordzhonikidze na soveshchanii nachal'nikov glavnykh upravlenii tyazheloi promyshlennosti. — Ob otnoshenii k kadram v svyazi s antitrotskistskimi protsessami," RGASPI, f. 85, op. 29, d. 156, l. 5-14, copy.

contradiction. In turn, he emphasized the importance of strong workplace relationships, rather than simply blaming saboteurs.

This disunity within the Party was largely the result of establishing the direction of the Party following the death of Lenin. By 1937 (the year of Ordzhonikidze's death), there was a noticeable difference between the current Soviet Union and Lenin's conception of Communism. These changes resulted in some Party members, including Ordzhonikidze, reaching the conclusion that Stalin betrayed the initial conception of the Soviet Union. In many ways, Stalin's policies altered the fundamental values of the Soviet Union as they created a more authoritarian state that appeared to have shifted away from Lenin's initial conception of Communism. For example, Stalin took a less tolerant approach toward members of the former upper class. Instead of focusing on reforming, Stalin classified entire groups as a threat to Soviet society and removed them.⁸⁶ While some divergence from Lenin's initial conception of the Soviet Union is expected, Stalin's changes exceeded what could have been reasonably expected or anticipated.

As Ordzhonikidze opposed Stalin's policies, it is not surprising that Stalin attempted to craft a narrative that distracted from this Party disunity following his death. Rather than deal with the issue of disunity within the Party directly, Stalin tended to try to remove it. It seemed that Stalin's preferred method was execution given the scale of terror committed in the late 1930s.⁸⁷ While it is possible that Stalin was convinced that the Party was overrun by opposition groups, this position is generally rejected based on the lack of evidence. In fact, historians have suggested that Stalin's actions were intentional. Medvedev characterized Stalin's purges in the 1930s as counterrevolutionary and suggested that they attacked the Party's values:

⁸⁶ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 191-194.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 190-217.

In 1936-38 Stalin was not engaged in a real struggle with counterrevolutionaries. On the contrary, it was Stalin's actions in those years were objectively like a counterrevolutionary's. The main tendency of the mass repression of 1936-38 was an assault on the Party, on old Bolshevik cadre, on proletarian revolutionaries, on intelligentsia that were honorably serving the interests of the masses. Of course real counterrevolutionaries were occasionally caught up in the vast flood of arrests. But they were rare cases.⁸⁸

Indeed, it appeared that Stalin's actions in the late 1930s were somewhat contradictory to Communist ideology as they attacked the Party itself rather than actual threats. In some ways, it appeared that Stalin attempted to consolidate power by claiming that his opponents were not Communists and thus trying to make it inline with the Communist ideology.

While the Great Terror in the late 1930s is the most obvious example of Stalin's attempt to consolidate power, it was not his first attempt at consolidation. Stalin attempted to consolidate power from the onset of becoming in charge of the Party in the late 1920s. Like the Great Terror, his initial consolidation of power may seem fairly successful as the Party appeared to be a unified front. With an increased fear of being removed, Party members generally maintained a unified public appearance. However, the reality of intra-party dynamics was far different. The Party had started to split into factions and privately fought along these lines. The older Bolsheviks, those who have been members of the party before Stalin's ascent to power, had no inherent loyalty to Stalin. Instead, they tended to be more concerned with maintaining Lenin's original Communist goals. The newer Bolsheviks, on the other hand, had been placed in high-ranking positions by Stalin and, therefore, more likely to be loyal to Stalin. As time progressed, it became apparent that Stalin could not simply control the building opposition from some older

⁸⁸ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 562.

Bolsheviks by simply adding more new members that were loyal to him. While this opposition was not a majority, it was significant enough that it could not be simply ignored.

Initially, Stalin and the older Party members were friendly with each other. The majority of them had participated in the creation of Soviet Russia and other Soviet republics.⁸⁹ After the death of Lenin in 1924, the friendly nature of the Party began to erode and was replaced with ideological disagreements. While friendship was still important to Stalin, loyalty and Party unity became more important.⁹⁰ Stalin did not enjoy disagreement and feared that it would erode public confidence in the Party. For example, Fitzpatrick noted that after a heated debate in the Politburo, Stalin condemned Ordzhonikidze's actions, suggesting that this kind of behavior might ruin the Party.⁹¹ Stalin's condemnation of Ordzhonikidze's actions failed to change his overall behavior with other Party members. Obviously, Ordzhonikidze presented a large problem for Stalin as he was unable to pressure Ordzhonikidze into submission.

Ordzhonikidze's status as a well-known Bolshevik further complicated Stalin's problem as Ordzhonikidze could not simply be quietly purged from the Party despite the fact that he disagreed with Stalin. Their disagreement over fundamental Communist ideology in conjunction with Ordzhonikidze's vocal objections and aggressive personality likely led Stalin to believe that Ordzhonikidze was a threat to Party unity. In 1933, Stalin wrote Molotov questioning Ordzhonikidze's actions and suggested that they were anti-Party. Ordzhonikidze defended "reactionary elements of the Party against the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the

⁸⁹ Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team*, 64-65.

⁹⁰ It appeared that friendship became a meaningless word for Stalin. Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 330.

⁹¹ Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team*, 73.

Soviet Union (Bolsheviks).”⁹² Stalin argued that Ordzhonikidze’s action violated the Party line as the Party had already decided how to deal with “reactionary elements.”⁹³

In many ways, Stalin’s assessment of the potential threat of Ordzhonikidze was not incorrect as he was passionate about creating Communism and seemed less concerned with Party unity. He demonstrated a willingness to break with the Party line when he felt that his opinion was better. This willingness was likely the result of the fact that he was a strong-willed individual who fought for what he believed was in the best interest of the people and consistent with Lenin’s ideology.⁹⁴ Given the fact that Ordzhonikidze demonstrated his willingness to go against Stalin’s ideology (the Party line), it is not surprising that Stalin decided the something needed to do done with Ordzhonikidze after he committed suicide as to prevent the truth from becoming known.

Despite the fact that Stalin did not order Ordzhonikidze’s death, he needed to find a way to minimize the potential damage that Ordzhonikidze’s suicide would cause to the Party and its image.⁹⁵ Regardless of Stalin’s direct role, Ordzhonikidze’s death gave Stalin an opportunity to strengthen the appearance of Party unity. Through fabricating medical records and front page headlines which mourned the passing and celebrated the revolutionary character of Ordzhonikidze, Stalin managed to cover up Ordzhonikidze’s death, claiming it was the result of a heart attack.⁹⁶ Stalin’s cover-up was likely done in an effort to hide Ordzhonikidze’s true opinions on the Party from the public.

⁹² Stalin, “Pis’mo Stalina I. V. Molotovu V. M.,” RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 5388, doc. 74.

⁹³ Stalin, “Pis’mo Stalina I. V. Molotovu V. M.,” RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 5388, doc. 74.

⁹⁴ Ordzhonikidze, *Put’ bolshevika*, 135, 386.

⁹⁵ It is unclear exactly how much direct influence pressure from Stalin or other Bolsheviks had on Ordzhonikidze’s choice to commit suicide.

⁹⁶ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 195-196.

By turning Ordzhonikidze's suicide into a tragic death from natural causes, Stalin was able to deal with a significant political opponent while minimizing negative repercussions. It is likely that Stalin understood that if Ordzhonikidze's opinions on the Party became public, they would have likely had disastrous implications for the Party. In the short term, Stalin's tactics were largely successful as Ordzhonikidze's death was considered a heart attack until after Stalin's death.⁹⁷ It is worth noting, however, that it is unclear how many Party members knew the truth about Ordzhonikidze's death during Stalin's reign. Most likely, some of the higher-ranking members had to have known. However, it appeared that general Party membership and the public were largely unaware of the real circumstances of Ordzhonikidze's death. Ultimately, Stalin's success in hiding the true nature of Ordzhonikidze's death was short-lived as Khrushchev, as a part of the process of Destalinization, revealed that Ordzhonikidze had, in fact, committed suicide in objection to Stalin's policies.⁹⁸

While the Party mourned the death of Ordzhonikidze, his death also became a point of contention. It seemed that Bukharin, who had spent the last few years working under Ordzhonikidze, tried to convince the Party that he and Ordzhonikidze had become close. He wrote Stalin about the significance of Ordzhonikidze to the Party, highlighting Ordzhonikidze's humanity and his status as an influential revolutionary.⁹⁹ On 20 February, Bukharin wrote Stalin about his personal struggles surrounding the death of Ordzhonikidze. He emphasized the impact of Ordzhonikidze's death, writing: "the death of Sergo [Ordzhonikidze] shook me to the core (I

⁹⁷ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 193.

⁹⁸ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 193.

Khrushchev, "Speech to 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U."

⁹⁹ Bukharin, "Stikhi N. I. Bukharina posvyashchennye G. K. Ordzhonikidze." RGASPI f. 17, op 171, d. 291, l. 7-11.

sobbed out loud for hours, I loved this man very, very much, like he was my own), this death revealed all of the horror of my situation to the end.”¹⁰⁰ Indeed, it appeared that Ordzhonikidze’s death had a great impact on Bukharin and that he had lost a close friend. Further, it appeared the Bukharin had lost an ally and felt that the rest of the Party members were going to attack him.¹⁰¹ While Bukharin and Ordzhonikidze may have been close, the rest of the Party did not believe Bukharin’s story. Instead, they attacked Bukharin and suggested he was simply using his untimely death as a way to redeem himself within the Party.¹⁰² Unsurprisingly, Bukharin’s attempt at redemption within the Party failed.

Likely fearing that Ordzhonikidze’s death would lead to weakened confidence in the Party, Stalin devised a plan to cover up the nature of Ordzhonikidze’s death. Despite Zinaida’s insistence that “‘Sergo loved the truth; the truth must be printed,’” Stalin decided that Ordzhonikidze must have died from a heart attack.¹⁰³ As it was known the Ordzhonikidze had heart problems, Stalin likely believed that this would be a plausible natural cause of death. To further back up his opinion, Stalin ordered that the Commissar of Health and several doctors create medical records indicating the Ordzhonikidze’s death was the result of heart problems.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, those close to Ordzhonikidze were arrested in the aftermath of his death.¹⁰⁵ It is likely that these arrests were the result of these individuals knowing the real circumstances of Ordzhonikidze’s death and his relationship with Stalin and the Party. In other words, these arrests further suggested that Stalin had a vested interest in obscuring the realities of Ordzhonikidze’s

¹⁰⁰ Bukharin, “Pis'mo N. I. Bukharina I. V. Stalinu,” RGASPI f. 17, op 171, d. 291, l. 12-14.

¹⁰¹ Bukharin, “Stikhi N. I. Bukharina posvyashchennye G. K. Ordzhonikidze.” RGASPI f. 17, op 171, d. 291, l. 7-11.

¹⁰² Kaganovich, “Iz rechi t. Kaganovicha.”

¹⁰³ Konstantin Ordzhonikidze, in, Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 195-196.

¹⁰⁴ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 193.

¹⁰⁵ Konstantin Ordzhonikidze, in, Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 196.

death. As further evidence that Stalin was not interested in the truth being known, Ordzhonikidze's body was cremated and no autopsy was done.¹⁰⁶ It is likely that these funeral preparations moved quickly as to prevent "unnecessary" investigations and so that Stalin's narrative could remain the truth. By removing existing facts and creating new ones, Stalin was able to temporarily obscure the existence of dissent within the Party.

The discrepancy between the official account of Ordzhonikidze's death and the realities of his death were telling as they indicated that Stalin understood the potential harm of Ordzhonikidze's suicide to the Party. While Stalin's actions were ideologically inconsistent with Lenin's conception of Communism, they were consistent with Stalin's commitment to loyalty and consolidating the Party around him. In turn, Stalin's reaction to Ordzhonikidze's death can be seen as an indication that Party politics had shifted away from Lenin's conception of Communism.

In the immediate aftermath of finding her husband's lifeless body lying on bloodstained sheets, Zinaida (Ordzhonikidze's wife) called Stalin. The events of the situation after Stalin arrived suggested that Stalin understood the broader implications of Ordzhonikidze's death as he behaved in an aggressive manner that focused on controlling the potential damage to the Party. Medvedev described the seemingly unnatural nature of the situation. His description highlighted the fact that Stalin did not rush to the scene. Instead, he called the other members of the Politburo. While it is possible that Stalin simply wanted to inform the other members of the death, his actions at Ordzhonikidze's apartment suggest otherwise:

Sergo's wife immediately phoned Stalin. Although his apartment was just opposite Ordzhonikidze's building, he did not come at once to see his former friend. First Stalin

¹⁰⁶ Konstantin Ordzhonikidze, in, Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 196.

sent for all the Politburo members. Ordzhonikidze's sister-in-law Vera ran in before Stalin. Entering the bedroom, she saw some sheets of paper on the desk, covered with Ordzhonikidze's tiny hand writing. She automatically picked them up and clutched them in her hand, but she did not manage to read them. When Stalin and the other Politburo members finally arrived, Stalin somehow saw the papers and almost tore them out of Vera Gavrilovna's hand. Sobbing, Ordzhonikidze's wife shouted at Stalin, "You didn't protect Sergo for me or for the Party." "Shut up, you idiot," Stalin replied.¹⁰⁷

Based on this brief exchange between Stalin and Zinaida, it is doubtful that Stalin came to Ordzhonikidze's apartment simply to comfort Ordzhonikidze's grieving wife and pay his respects to his fallen comrade. While it is impossible to know what Stalin was thinking, his actions suggest that he understood that Ordzhonikidze's death potentially meant more than just the death of a comrade and Party member. Rather, it is likely that he understood the need to control the situation and make sure that the Party understood an acceptable version of Ordzhonikidze's death. In turn, it seemed that Stalin came to assess the scene and decided that the facts surrounding Ordzhonikidze's death would not go over favorably with the general public. He then tried to confiscate documents written by Ordzhonikidze and attacked Zinaida after she accused him of not protecting Ordzhonikidze. Stalin's actions established that he wanted control over the situation given the fact that he tried to remove evidence and demanded that no one question his role in Ordzhonikidze's death.¹⁰⁸

While Medvedev's compilation of eyewitness accounts is, perhaps, one of the closest account to what actually happened that night, it presented an extremely different narrative than the official narrative in *Pravda*. In contrast with the scene described by Medvedev, the front page of *Pravda* implied that Stalin and other Party members had come to pay their respects and mourned the loss of Ordzhonikidze. Of course, this stark contrast should not be surprising as

¹⁰⁷ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 195.

¹⁰⁸ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 195.

Stalin create a false account of Ordzhonikidze's death to maintain an image of Party unity.¹⁰⁹

This discrepancy between the actual events and the official narrative suggested that Ordzhonikidze's death symbolized a turning point within the Party as Stalin tried to obscure the role of Party politics in Ordzhonikidze's suicide.

Directly following Ordzhonikidze's death, *Pravda* published several articles about Ordzhonikidze's death which further added credibility to Stalin's manufactured history as they reinforced the impact of the loss of a member of the Party.¹¹⁰ It seemed that the normal circumstances of Ordzhonikidze's death were an attempt to preclude the existence of a deeper meaning of his death. The brief message and photo on the front page seemed to illustrate that Ordzhonikidze's death was due to natural causes, which aided in maintaining Stalin's manufactured narrative as it removed any doubt that something abnormal happened.

The front-page headline of *Pravda* from 19 February 1937, the morning after Ordzhonikidze's death, read, "Government Message: 18th of February at 17:30 in Moscow, at his own apartment in the Kremlin, the People's Commissar of Heavy Industry and member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Comrade Grigorii Konstantinovich Ordzhonikidze died of heart failure."¹¹¹ Below the headline was a photo of Ordzhonikidze peacefully lying surrounded by his wife (Zinaida), Stalin, and several other high-ranking Bolsheviks. This photo appeared to demonstrate that Stalin (and other

¹⁰⁹ This is most evident from the fact that Stalin decided the Ordzhonikidze died from a heart attack and ordered medical records that reflected this cause of death to be created.

¹¹⁰ It goes without saying that the loss of Ordzhonikidze caused some degree of grief for Stalin and his loyal Party members. However, the grief expressed by the Party in *Pravda* seemed performative at best. In private, Bukharin called out Stalin for his superficial actions.

Bukharin, "Pis'mo N. I. Bukharina I. V. Stalinu." RGASPI f. 17, op 171, d. 291, l. 12-14.

¹¹¹ "Pravitel'stvennoye soobshcheniye," *Pravda*, (Moscow), 19 February 1937.

members of the Party) were there to comfort Ordzhonikidze's grieving wife given that Stalin stands in the center with his head slightly bowed, paying respects to his fallen comrade.

In the days following Ordzhonikidze's death, *Pravda* ran several articles and notices from members of the Party which acknowledged the death of Ordzhonikidze. These articles further reinforced Stalin's account of the death which further minimized the role of internal Party conflict in the death of Ordzhonikidze. Since these articles only discussed aspects of Ordzhonikidze's life that were ideologically consistent and left out key elements of his work as a revolutionary, these articles were likely an attempt to disprove the notion that Ordzhonikidze's objections to Stalin's policies and his death were related. While it is not surprising that the Party's newspaper would only run ideologically consistent material, the articles not only ignored ideological inconsistencies but sort of conflated facts in an effort to craft a new, acceptable version of Ordzhonikidze's revolutionary trajectory.

For example, the front page of *Pravda* contained an article titled "Memories of Comrade Ordzhonikidze" written by the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and an article titled "Great Proletarian Revolutionary." Unsurprisingly, these two articles selectively highlighted Ordzhonikidze's accomplishments which demonstrated that the Party intended to further create a narrative surrounding Ordzhonikidze's revolutionary activity. These newspaper articles indicated the Ordzhonikidze had worked closely under Stalin to establish cadres. They indicated that "Sergo [Ordzhonikidze] learned from Comrade Stalin an attentive, loving attitude towards the pioneers of communist labor"¹¹² While this article is not necessarily the most accurate as Stalin did not teach Ordzhonikidze how to love Communist

¹¹² "Velikii proletarskii revolyutsioner," *Pravda*, (Moscow), 19 February 1937.

labor, it illustrated that the Party intended to show that Stalin's actions were the basis for Ordzhonikidze's commitment to the values of the Communist Party. In turn, this article highlighted the fact that Ordzhonikidze and Stalin agreed and further demonstrated that the Party was unified.

Further, they highlighted Ordzhonikidze's commitment to Communism and the Party line.

The article "Great Proletarian Revolutionary" proclaimed:

The name Sergo, the memory about him, all his glorious life will shine for centuries for builders of Communism. He was the image of a person for whom Communism is built for and the model of a builder of Communism: knight, in the best, in the noble sense of the word, a fearless protector of humanity, a hero in which bravery and modesty, courage and simplicity created true beauty.¹¹³

Indeed, Ordzhonikidze was a key figure in the creation of Communism in the Caucasus region as he worked tirelessly in Azerbaijan and Georgia rallying the people against the existing governments. He was also committed to creating a better Communist society as he believed that it would reduce suffering for the people.¹¹⁴ However, his revolutionary nature also was the primary reason that Ordzhonikidze did not follow Stalin's policies when he believed that certain policies went against Lenin's Communist ideology.

Moreover, the second page of *Pravda* contained a biography of Ordzhonikidze's life that exemplified an acceptable version of Ordzhonikidze's legacy. Interestingly, this biography included excerpts from Ordzhonikidze's speeches at the 15th and 16th Party Congress where he denounced the right-leaning faction of the Party in favor of Stalin's faction. These excerpts from his speeches indicated that Ordzhonikidze agreed with Stalin's understanding of Communism and opposed the ideas of other Party members. Ordzhonikidze's remarks highlighted the struggle

¹¹³ "Velikii proletarskii revolyutsioner," *Pravda*, (Moscow), 19 February 1937.

¹¹⁴ Ordzhonikidze, *Put' bolshevika*, 135, 386.

over the Party's path following the death of Lenin in 1924. The Trotskyite-Zinovievist (right-leaning) faction opposed Stalin's way forward. In turn, Stalin's faction asserted that the Trotskyite-Zinovievist faction was not following Lenin's ideals. These excerpts demonstrated that Ordzhonikidze thought that Stalin's ideas were a continuation of Lenin's ideology and that he rejected the other faction's ideas on the grounds that they were not in line with Lenin's conception of Communism:

At the 15th Party Congress, Ordzhonikidze, giving a report on the work of the CCC-RCI [Central Control Commission-Workers' and Peasants' Inspection], said:

"The opposition believed that the CCC should have all kinds of political physiognomy, and how, a bad matchmaker, should run away from one to the other, that you were not able to achieve reconciliation. We believe that first of all you must be a Bolshevik, a Leninist, and then you can be a member of the CCC, a member of the CC [Central Committee], a regional committee, a cell, etc. We believe that first of all one must be a Bolshevik, and the opposition demanded that we, members of the CCC, stop being Bolsheviks."

Soon after the defeat of the bloc of Trotskyite-Zinovievist restorers of capitalism, the true opposition, led by Bukharin, Tomsk, and Rykov, raised its head. In their struggle against the party, the right-wing renegades merged with the Trotskyists, agreeing with them to unite all counterrevolutionary forces for the struggle against the party, against the CC and Comrade Stalin.

"The fight against Comrade Stalin," said Ordzhonikidze at the 16th Party Congress, "was a fight against the general Leninist line of the CC of our party. The party followed its own CC. The party sees in the person of Comrade Stalin a staunch defender of the general line of the party and the best student of Vladimir Ilyich. And therefore, our party and the working class quite correctly identify Comrade Stalin with the general line of our party, leading the USSR from victory to victories ..."¹¹⁵

It is true that there were elements of Stalin's ideology that Ordzhonikidze agreed with. In addition to agreeing on how to proceed with the NEP, the two agreed on how to Sovietize Georgia. They believed that rapid Sovietization would be more effective than slow, regulated Sovietization as Lenin wanted. However, Ordzhonikidze was always loyal as these excerpts

¹¹⁵ "Biografiia," *Pravda*, (Moscow), 19 February 1937.

imply. These excerpts of his speeches relate to Ordzhonikidze's opinion on whether or not NEP-era economic policies should be continued.¹¹⁶ More right-wing Bolsheviks, such as Bukharin, advocated for a continuation of NEP policies. Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, and others, on the other hand, believed that the NEP was not in line with Communism and that continuing its policies would lead to disastrous effects.¹¹⁷

It is worth noting, however, that while Ordzhonikidze agreed with Stalin about the NEP, he did not foresee that Stalin's reforms would lead to mass collectivization.¹¹⁸ In other words, his agreement at this particular juncture should not be interpreted as complete agreement with Stalin's policies as the excerpts implied. Rather, his agreement is reflective of the complexity of understanding Ordzhonikidze's political position within the Party. To some degree, Ordzhonikidze's political opinions seem contradictory in nature as he tended to agree with one position and then take the other position after it became apparent that the initial position was not what he originally thought. In many ways, the contradictory nature of his positions is indicative of the influence of intra-party relations as they demonstrated Ordzhonikidze's shift in terms of Party loyalty. In turn, *Pravda* needed to dictate what Ordzhonikidze's opinion was to prevent his actual opinion from becoming known.

Moreover, *Pravda's* use of these excerpts demonstrated that Stalin was interested in controlling the narrative concerning Ordzhonikidze's loyalty within the Party as they highlighted how Ordzhonikidze and Stalin agreed. In turn, this agreement further minimized the threat of the public figuring out the truth of the relationship between Ordzhonikidze and Stalin. While the

¹¹⁶ The years of the 15th and 16th Party Congress match the years when the Party discussed how to proceed with the NEP.

¹¹⁷ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 328-329.

¹¹⁸ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 328-329.

material in these articles is not factually inaccurate, these articles told a well-groomed version of Ordzhonikidze's life which suggested that Stalin was interested in crafting an acceptable narrative of events. He likely understood that the realities of Ordzhonikidze's death could have a disastrous impact on the Party's image. In addition, it is likely that Stalin understood that he needed a believable backstory (in this case, an explicit history of agreement) for his plan to be successful.

Stalin's actions in the immediate aftermath of Ordzhonikidze's death implied that he needed to control the situation. The emphasis on Ordzhonikidze's earlier activities within the Party in a state-sanctioned newspaper is not surprising as Ordzhonikidze and Stalin were mostly in agreement during the late 1920s. Additionally, these aspects of Ordzhonikidze's life were seen as generally positive as they were characteristics of a revolutionary. Therefore, these moments allowed *Pravda* to demonstrate how Ordzhonikidze was a hero while avoiding the fact that Stalin and Ordzhonikidze often disagreed in the 1930s. As *Pravda* told the people the most significant aspects of Ordzhonikidze's life Stalin was able to, at least temporarily, hide the fact the Ordzhonikidze was adamant that Stalin's later policies went against the original principles of the Soviet Union.

Stalin's response to Ordzhonikidze's death indicated that the Party had undergone a significant shift in terms of ideology because Stalin's action actively obscured the actual circumstances of his death and created a false narrative that was consistent with Stalin's ideology. As evident by several personal squabbles within the Party and arguments over Party policy, personal convictions became an important aspect of Party politics. While Stalin did not directly cause Ordzhonikidze's death, he used the unfortunate circumstances to reinforce the

appearance of Party unity. In turn, Ordzhonikidze's death and the aftermath are symbolic of a change within the Party as an appearance of unity was preferred over often heated disagreements and objections of Party members. Stalin's anger at Ordzhonikidze's wife and Stalin's attempt at destroying evidence suggested that Stalin understood that Ordzhonikidze's death was plausibly connected with his objections to Stalin's policies. Further, the selective nature of the narrative published by *Pravda* demonstrated that Stalin (and the Party more broadly) was committed to creating an acceptable version of Ordzhonikidze's life.

Conclusion

Previous historical scholarship on the Soviet Union under Stalin has alluded to the idea that Ordzhonikidze's death is, in itself, significant as he was a prominent Bolshevik and devoted follower of Lenin. This thesis built on this previous research in an effort to further understand the implications of Ordzhonikidze's death as well as the significance of personal relationships in the Politburo under Stalin. Specifically, it examined the relationship between Ordzhonikidze and Stalin, focusing on why Ordzhonikidze broke with the Party line and its implications in terms of his relationship with other Party members. I aimed to better understand why these relationships signified a shift within Party dynamics as well as policy.

The first section discussed Ordzhonikidze's objections to Stalin's policies, arguing that he opposed Stalin's policies when he believed that they were in contradiction to Lenin's conception of Communism. His objections highlighted some of the differences in terms of implementing Communism between Lenin and Stalin's ruling of the Soviet Union as Ordzhonikidze, like Lenin, valued addressing the issue at hand in addition to loyalty. Moreover, Ordzhonikidze objected to Stalin's more extreme measures towards non-violent wealthy individuals as he

understood the value of these individuals in the new Soviet society. Section two discussed Stalin attempted to obscure any relation between Ordzhonikidze's death and the personal relationships between Party members. The obscuring of the facts seemed to indicate that Stalin understood that the realities of Ordzhonikidze's death would undermine Party unity. As a result, Stalin's actions, and *Pravda's* subsequent newspaper publications, hid the facts surrounding his death and instead stated that he died from a heart attack. Stalin's reaction toward Ordzhonikidze's death indicated that the Party had undergone an irreversible shift toward valuing loyalty and the appearance of unity above all.

In terms of the larger history of the creation of the Soviet Union and Stalin's control of the Soviet Union, Ordzhonikidze's death can be seen as part of Stalin's larger efforts to consolidate power around himself through coercion and purging Party members who objected to his new ideology. Ordzhonikidze was not purged from the Party as he committed suicide. There is evidence, however, that the Party tried to pressure him into submission. Unlike the majority of the pressured Party members, Ordzhonikidze held firm to his commitment and belief in Lenin's conception of Communism. In other words, he continued to disagree with Stalin when he believed that Stalin was incorrect. In turn, his suicide is, perhaps, symbolic of the greater loss of the Soviet Union's acceptance of dissenting opinions as Ordzhonikidze was one of the most vocal critics of Stalin's policies in the 1930s.

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