

## 7. Miscellaneous

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### Miscellaneous

THE YOUNG STALIN. By *Edward Ellis Smith*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. 1967. 470 pp. \$8.50.)

This book is built around the thesis that Stalin was an Okhrana agent throughout his prerevolutionary career, and all the evidence presented—the product of a very substantial research effort—is shaped to fit this view. The results are sometimes persuasive but frequently awkward and incredible, even to a reader who was originally predisposed toward the author's thesis.

For Mr. Smith tries too hard. All too often, when evidence is either lacking or completely ambiguous, he constructs a highly speculative and improbable hypothesis which he later alludes to as established fact. (His depiction of Stalin's supposed conspiratorial relationship in 1913 with the Bolshevik leader and known Okhrana agent Ramon Malinovsky—at a time when by Smith's own showing Stalin was in very bad odor with the Okhrana—is an example of such a hypothesis.) More than once he sets forth an impressive generalization which he himself subsequently undermines, apparently unwittingly: thus he attaches (p. 59) tremendous sinister significance to the fact that Stalin "alone" escaped arrest in the Okhrana raids in Tiflis in March 1901 but three pages later alludes in passing to a more important Georgian revolutionary, Ketskhoveli, who had similarly escaped. This overenthusiastic approach to the facts creates unnecessary distrust in the reader and weakens confidence in some conclusions which may nevertheless be correct.

The author does best in the first third of his narrative: although he does not *prove* his thesis, there seems nothing inherently impossible and much that is reasonable in his suggestion that Dzhugashvili may have been tapped by the Okhrana as a low-level agent shortly after his expulsion from the Tiflis seminary in 1899, that he systematically informed on comrades in party organizations in Tiflis, Baku, and Batum over the next few years, that he acquired a highly unsavory reputation among the Social Democrats of each city in turn, that he was finally arrested for cover purposes in 1902 when revolutionary suspicions about him were about to boil over, and that the Okhrana furnished

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the otherwise invisible means of support for the family he acquired after 1904.

It is after this that Smith begins increasingly to strain the evidence. He insists that the Okhrana was behind Stalin's masterminding of the particularly bloody and ill-fated Yerevan Square robbery in Tiflis in June 1907, although he is not consistent enough even to examine the question of whether the Okhrana endorsed all the other Caucasus "expropriations" Stalin is believed to have planned for the Bolsheviks in 1906 and 1907. These operations were congenial work for Stalin, and it was through them that he first acquired importance in Lenin's eyes—surely sufficient motivation in itself for performing them. From here on the effort to explain Stalin's behavior in terms of supposed Okhrana operations becomes ludicrous in the light of what both the Okhrana and Stalin actually did. The Okhrana arrested Stalin five times in the nine years between March 1908 and the February Revolution, and it left him at large a total of 3 months in 1908, 6 months in 1909, 3 months in 1910, 2 months in 1911, 6 months in 1912, 2 months in 1913, and not at all in 1914, 1915, or 1916. In September 1911 Stalin had barely been in St. Petersburg two days before he was picked up again and sent back to his term in exile. This seems to go well beyond any conceivable requirements of cover. For Stalin's part, when he was helping to run *Pravda* in St. Petersburg late in 1912 he took a temporarily conciliatory line toward the Mensheviks—which, as Smith admits, was precisely the opposite of what was wanted by both the Okhrana and Lenin.

Smith recognizes that Stalin was not at all under Okhrana control by 1912, yet stubbornly insists (p. 202) that he must have continued to have a regular contact in the Department of Police in St. Petersburg to whom he supposedly could plan to denounce Roman Malinovsky for disloyalty to the Okhrana. One of the weakest aspects of the book is the failure to consider carefully when such links must have disappeared, at what point Stalin must have decided to opt for the Bolsheviks rather than the police. The evidence provided in the book itself suggests strongly that this occurred much earlier than the author is willing to admit, and that if Stalin had once had a foot in the Okhrana camp it was probably withdrawn by 1907 or 1908.

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