

Mirjafar Bagirov: Bolshevik, Musavatist, Proponent of the Nation

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Soviet historians' first studies of the Stalinist mass repressions of the 1930s were published in the second half of the 1980s amid the Communist Party's stranglehold on power and discourse. These studies tried to convince the public that the mass repressions were directed against the Leninist communists in key posts. Historians needed only ten years to recognize that those who suffered the most from these repressions were the common people: workers and peasants, teachers and writers, scientists. Archives that had previously been *completely secret* gave the historians at that time the opportunity both to determine the scale of the tragedy and to analyze the Stalinist mechanisms of repression. However, despite the fact that they were made public, no one was held accountable for crimes organized at the Soviet government's highest level, while only two persons occupying high positions were ever punished for the implementation of these repressions. One of them was Lavrentiy Beria, People's Commissar/Minister of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union at the time of Stalin's death, and Mirjafar Bagirov, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan for many years.

Today, Stalin has been rehabilitated and statues in his honor are erected.[\[i\]](#) His birthday is celebrated across many cities of the Russian Federation. The organization Memorial, which had been studying political repression in the USSR since 1989, was closed in 2021 under pressure from the Russian government. In September 2024, the Russian General Prosecutor's Office announced that it would "permanently" cancel the rehabilitation of victims of political repression.[\[ii\]](#) The new approach of modern Russian authorities to Stalinist

repressions denies their mass character and does not recognize that repressions were state-sponsored. Instead, the new narrative exaggerates the role of denunciations in the creation of the repression, i.e. the Russian state argues that these denunciations, not Stalin, were the driving force behind the purges.[\[iii\]](#)

Modern Azerbaijan also shows a tendency to justify Soviet political repression. In particular, the state has whitewashed Mirjafar Bagirov's political career. The media has falsified his biography and distorted his political activity. One example is the television documentary entitled *There was a Time*, which aired on Khazar TV in September this year.[\[iv\]](#) Historian Jamil Hasanli opposed the historical falsifications in the documentary, but comments to his protest show that a certain part of the public remains skeptical as to whether Bagirov was personally responsible for the political repression.[\[v\]](#)

In today's Azerbaijan, the attitude towards Bagirov is ambiguous. A portion of the population recognizes that he was directly responsible for the mass repressions of the 1930s as a cruel Bolshevik devoted to party politics. Another portion believes he executed Stalin's policies rather than personally sanctioning the repressions; they believe that because Bagirov was determined and fair, he might have been a better leader in other circumstances.

A third portion considers Bagirov a proponent of the nation and therefore claim that he decreased the level of repression in Azerbaijan compared to other union republics and saved the people from possible deportation. Who was Mirjafar Bagirov? Which of these imaginations most fits the historical facts? To answer this question, I will refer to Bagirov's autobiographies and his personal reports and letters.

The Bolshevik Bagirov

Bagirov sought to present himself as a convinced Bolshevik,

faithful to the party's policy. However, an analysis of his biography and political activities reveals that the reason for Bagirov's joining the Bolsheviks was not his belief in the idea of socialist revolution, but rather his desire for power.

It is not clear when Bagirov joined the party. No documents on this matter have been found in archives. Bagirov himself claimed that he had been a member of the party since 1918.[\[vi\]](#) He wrote that he worked as a teacher in a number of schools until 1917 and around the same time entered politics. Bagirov gave contradictory and mixed information about his political activities before the establishment of Soviet power in Azerbaijan in 1920. But his name can be found in many documents related to the activities of politicians of the time. According to these documents, Bagirov's political career began with the Muslim Social Democratic Party, usually referred to as Hummet. When, during the March 1918 events, disagreements arose between members of the government over the future of Azerbaijan, Bagirov was among those who supported party leader Nariman Narimanov. This political conflict affected Bagirov's political activities, and his relations with many political figures suffered. Narimanov defended Azerbaijan's early independence and Turkism. It soon became clear that Moscow did not support this idea. Thus, Bagirov deserted the Narimanov camp and opposed Turkism. For example, his report as the secretary of the Central Committee sent in 1922 to Deputy People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan SSR Gerasimov said that "All cultural and educational institutions in Azerbaijan are under the strong influence of Turkish intellectuals. The People's Commissar of Education invites teachers from Turkey, who also develop the ideas of pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism in Azerbaijan."[\[vii\]](#) In the 1920s, Bagirov continued to fight against people he considered his rivals. For this purpose he employed slander, dirt and blackmail. In 1921, as the People's Commissar for Internal Affairs, he organized provocations against Abdul Baghi Mammadzade, a head Baku customs who was supported by

Aliheydar Garayev, by arresting Baku customs officers and attempting to damage Mammadzade's reputation. As a result, Mammadzade was suspended from both his position and the party.[\[viii\]](#) When Ayyub Khanbudagov raised the issue of nationalization of state organs for the second time after Narimanov in 1924, Bagirov first supported him, but opposed him when Khanbudagov's attempts were evaluated as factionalism and deviation from the party line.[\[ix\]](#)

In the 1920s, a major rivalry began between Bagirov and Garayev. The latter was the only Azerbaijani in a high position in the party. While Bagirov was in charge of law enforcement structures, he collected compromising materials against him.[\[x\]](#)

Having learned about Bagirov's attempts to blackmail him, Garayev tried to distance him from the law enforcement structures and succeeded in this in February 1928. In response, Bagirov sent two letters exposing the leadership of the State Political Department of Azerbaijan from Tbilisi to the Transcaucasian Inspection Commission (TIC) and the Central Committee of the ACP(b). In one of the letters, Bagirov reported that in 1928 two employees of the State Political Department illegally arrested, while under the influence, four workers for "disrespectful attitude" towards them. One of those arrested was executed in the basement of the department, and three were severely beaten.[\[xi\]](#) Bagirov accused employees of the State Political Department of shooting a Soviet citizen without trial and of concealing this fact from the party. Bagirov's compromising letters went unanswered, and, contrary to his hopes, he was accused of provocations against the State Political Department.[\[xii\]](#) In his second letter, Bagirov took pride in his Bolshevik biography. He wrote that his efforts to defend revolutionary legislation and Soviet power in Azerbaijan led to his being called "a loyal town governor, a bloody executioner and a Moscow gendarme" (*source language preserved*). Bagirov went on writing: In the November 1927 issue of *New Caucasus*, M. A. Rasulzade wrote that "the waters

of Transcaucasia can hardly wash away the blood of Azerbaijani youth from the hands of the executioner, the only means to cleanse the blood in the hands of the executioner is the sword of the rebellious Azerbaijani son.” After this, Bagirov added, “no Leninist-Bolshevik had ever received such an assessment: ‘the only Bolshevik who is so distinguished is me at the moment.’”[\[xiii\]](#)

Rasulzade likely called Bagirov an executioner in 1927 when he was not yet First Party Secretary and did not have much power. The first is that Bagirov, as a Bolshevik, sided with the Bolshevik-Dashnak forces, not the Azerbaijanis, in the Musavat-Baku Soviet conflict. In one of his autobiographies, Bagirov noted that in the spring of 1918 he represented the Baku Soviet in Guba. He wrote, “Having prepared a detachment consisting of “soldiers who had returned from the front [World War I is meant]”, I fought against Musavat forces, but was defeated and forced to retreat with the help of Dashnak detachments.” Bagirov’s detachment was assisted by Amazasp Srvantsyan’s military detachment. Thus, Bagirov wrote that during the March-April conflict of 1918 he sided with the Baku commune and not with Musavat.[\[xiv\]](#) The second case could have been when Bagirov in May 1920 stood at the head of a military detachment advancing to Guba to establish Soviet power. In both processes Azerbaijanis suffered heavy losses.

Bagirov committed a number of crimes during his leadership of law enforcement agencies, but it is highly doubtful that these crimes were known to Rasulzade. One of these crimes was reported by Aliheydar Garayev’s wife Khaver Shabanova-Garayeva during interrogation. Shabanova-Garayeva noted that Bagirov and Garayev had good relations until 1926. According to her, “In 1926, being the chairman of the Extraordinary Commission of Azerbaijan, Bagirov shot one person in his office,” and this fact became known to the party leadership. She was probably referring to the fact that in 1926 Bagirov shot two employees of the State Political Department – Gazan Papaq oglu and Bebir Huseynov.[\[xv\]](#) When party leadership learned of the

incident, Bagirov claimed that the two persons were bandits and that he had killed them for armed resistance. However, Bagirov could not explain how they entered the State Political Department building with weapons, and so he appealed to Garayev, the second secretary of the Central Committee of the ACP(b), to halt investigation of the incident. But Garayev rejected Bagirov's request.[\[xvi\]](#)

The campaign launched by Bagirov from Tbilisi in the late 1920s against the party leadership of Azerbaijan, in particular against Aliheydar Garayev, turned against him. Garayev forced one of the prisoners held in prison in the State Political Department and accused of the activities of the underground party organization Musavat to testify against Bagirov. After this testimony, Bagirov retreated: He sent a letter to the Central Committee to drop charges against the the State Political Department's leadership. At the end of the letter Bagirov wrote: "The future will show who is the stronger and more stubborn and who will not turn his back on the enemy."[\[xvii\]](#)

Bagirov's struggle against the party leadership of Azerbaijan does not end with the two above-mentioned letters. On 29 July 1929, Bagirov included incriminating materials about Gazanfar Musabayov, Huseynbala Agaverdiyev, Teymur Aliyev, Soltan Medjid Efendiyev, Samadaga Agamalyoglu, and Yusif Gasimov, all of whom he considered his opponents, in a letter he wrote to Mikhail Kakovikhin, chairman of the Central Revision Commission (CRC) of the All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks).[\[xviii\]](#)

Bagirov's activities as a Bolshevik until he became the supreme authority in the republic may include the suppression of the Nukha-Zagatala uprising in 1930. The suppression of the uprising was personally led by Bagirov, Chairman-designate of the State Political Department. During the suppression of the uprising, both the rebels and the innocent population were punished. According to the Department's official documents, 80

people were killed, 40 wounded and 400 arrested when the town of Nukha was taken.[\[xix\]](#)

Sent to Moscow in 1930, Bagirov, through Beria, had a chance to get close to senior-level Bolsheviks. Bagirov, now in the same city with his political rival Aliheydar Garayev,[\[xx\]](#) made attempts to influence the center through his supporters in Baku. This opinion is confirmed by letters from Baku to Moscow. Bagirov's supporters emphasized in letters addressed to Stalin that he enjoyed great authority in the republic and had earned the trust of the people. One of the letters read: "Even today, when Bagirov is not among us, we solve our problems by threatening to write a letter of complaint to him. After he left, our condition has deteriorated considerably. Please return him to his former position."[\[xxi\]](#) His followers also warned him of discord and political conflict in the republic, giving him detailed information about each event. One of the letters from Baku written to Bagirov in 1931 said: "In Baku, we live in a world where the Gikalo period is coming to a close, and Yusif [Gasimov] is thinking about revenge, which contradicts the resolution adopted on Azerbaijani leaderships in 1929 by the All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks)."[\[xxii\]](#) Another letter described the Polonsky period: "Polonsky tries to fulfill his economic plans, but forgets about the issue of organizing local cadres, thus distancing local cadres from himself. Dadash [Bunyadzade], as usual, does not express his opinion. They have arrested your 'friend Nakhchivanski' from the division."[\[xxiii\]](#)

In 1932, Bagirov returned to the republic as chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of Azerbaijan SSR, and the 5th joint meeting with the Central Committee and Baku's Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan held in February 1933 decided to appoint Mirjafar Bagirov as First Party Secretary.[\[xxiv\]](#) In the 1920s, Bagirov's activities were connected with the security forces; during this period he was far from party work. At that time the primary task of establishing Soviet power fell on law enforcement

organizations because the party's authority, credibility and power were insufficient. This was evidenced by intra-party groupings, disagreements, and campaigns of exposés. By the mid-1920s, the situation had changed. All state structures were subordinated to party leadership and were held accountable before party organs. The center of power changed. This led Bagirov to transition from the law enforcement organizations to the party sphere.

Executor of Stalin's policy

In October 1953, Mirjafar Bagirov, deputy head of the Kuibyshev Oil Production Association, testified as a witness in the case of Lavrentiy Beria, the arrested USSR Minister of Internal Affairs. Bagirov was questioned personally by the USSR Prosecutor General Roman Andreevich Rudenko. Rudenko's accusation against Beria was based on the fact that the latter had once worked for Musavat's counterintelligence. Bagirov stated in his testimony that until 1937 he did not know about Beria's connection with Musavat and that he first received information about it when Grigory Kaminsky^[xxv] officially appealed to the All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks). In response to Rudenko's question about Vsevolod Merkulov's destruction of materials^[xxvi] exposing Beria's ties with Musavat counterintelligence, Bagirov responded as follows: "Many officials traveled from Tbilisi to the Baku Party Archives. Merkulov also often travelled to Baku as Beria's assistant. But I did not know whether he came to Baku for materials on Beria's ties to Musavat counterintelligence. Perhaps he came with the express purpose of studying documents on party history and was looking for documents concerning Beria's connection with Musavat counterintelligence. But I had no information that Merkulov was looking for these documents."^[xxvii]

Mirjafar Bagirov's support for Beria became the main accusation in his arrest. The court verdict issued in April 1956 states that Bagirov committed crimes for many years in

collusion with Beria, an enemy of the Soviet state. Bagirov hid the facts about Beria's activities in Musavat counterintelligence, while Beria concealed the facts of Bagirov's work as an assistant to the district commissioner in Guba city during the anti-revolutionary Musavat government and his involvement in banditry during the civil war.[\[xxviii\]](#) The main accusation against Bagirov was that he was a Musavatist. Bagirov was accused of mass arrests and murders of "innocent Soviet people" and "former secretaries of the Central Committee" committed from 1935 onwards, while at the same time protecting Musavatists and enemies of the class.

Researchers believe that the scope, coverage and implementation mechanisms of the repressions of the 1930s were determined in Stalin's speech at the February-March 1937 plenum of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks). Summarizing the statements made by others before him at the plenum, which began on 23 February, Stalin declared that they were facing three main enemies: sabotage, subversion and espionage activities of agents of foreign states in economic, administrative and party organizations; activities of agents of foreign states, especially Trotskyists, found in lower party organizations; and foreign state agents appointed to high positions by high-ranking officials both at the center and in the regions.[\[xxix\]](#) Bagirov expressed his support for Stalin's repressions at the Second All-Azerbaijan Congress of Soviets held in March 1937. Bagirov linked the Trotskyist-Zinovievist groups in Azerbaijan to the nationalist Musavat, as well as Musavat to pan-Turkism and pan-Turkism to Ruhulla Akhundov.[\[xxx\]](#)

Most of the high-ranking party figures in Azerbaijan – Akhundov, Garayev, Efendiyev, Huseynov, Sultanov and others – were arrested and shot in 1937-1938. Mass repressions allowed Bagirov to bring charges for the arrest and execution of people he considered his personal rivals, including a number of former secretaries of the Central Committee and high-ranking party members. The main accusation against Ruhulla

Akhundov and Habib Jabiyev was that they served Musavat. At one of the Central Committee meetings in 1937, Bagirov quoted a letter from Habib Jabiyev to Ruhulla Akhundov, noting that in the letter Habib Jabiyev highly appreciated the activities, political professionalism and intellectual level of former Musavat parliament members Aslan Safikurdski, Mammad Hajinski and Ahmad Pepinov. Bagirov regards this as “an attempt to give the Bolshevik party card to the leaders of the Musavat party and hand over the fate of Soviet Azerbaijan to Musavatists.” [\[xxxii\]](#)

Stalin and Bagirov personally knew almost all of the high-ranking Bolsheviks repressed in the 1930s. However, the vast majority of those killed, tortured and arrested during the repressions were people from the provinces and cities of Azerbaijan, whom Stalin and Bagirov could not have known personally. By what criteria were people persecuted during the repressions and how can one prove that Bagirov personally bore responsibility for determining these criteria, that is, for carrying out these repressions? What counts as sufficient proof: Bagirov’s signature on the documents sanctioning the repressions or the fact that these repressions took place under his rule?

Unlike the “Red Terror” of the early 1920s, the repressions of the 1930s were thoroughly documented and the archives contain thousands of investigative documents detailing who, when, in what sequence and under what accusations was arrested, as well as what punishments were imposed on those arrested. These documents cover correspondence between the Union republics and the centre, i.e. Moscow, in the course of organizing repressions, the determination and clarification of quotas related to repressions and proposals by local authorities regarding repressions (mainly increasing quotas and extending the duration of repressions). These documents are marked with the classification “for permanent preservation” in the archives. The accusations made against Mirjafar Bagirov in 1956 were formulated based on these documents. Documents

bearing Bagirov's signature were used as evidence when these accusations were brought against him. Whose deaths did Bagirov personally sanction?

In 1935-36, Bagirov demanded the identification of Trotskyist-Zinovievist elements in various organizations and state bodies at all party meetings he attended.[\[xxxii\]](#) As part of this campaign, in 1936, people labeled as part of the "fourth faction" of the Musavat party were executed. Following this, five "Dashnak" groups of thirty people were "exposed" in the republic and destroyed. Mass arrests took place in the working-class settlements of Zabrat, Lenin, Stalin, Shaumyan (now Khatai) and Shahar (now Sabail) districts of Baku. At that time 129 people were imprisoned.[\[xxxiii\]](#) In his speech at the fifth joint plenum of the Central Committee (CC) and Bolshevik Committee (BK) of the Azerbaijan Communist Party (CP), Bagirov accused the employees of the higher party organs of being involved in "anti-national, anti-party and fascist activities."[\[xxxiv\]](#)

Among those arrested in 1938 were high-ranking officials from state bodies, including Deputy Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars Manaf Khalilov, the People's Commissar of Agriculture Abulfat Mammadov, the People's Commissar of Internal Trade Ibrahim Asadullayev and others. The testimonies collected as a result of these arrests, which were associated with the "exposure" of the "Reserve Trotskyite Center of the Counter-Revolutionary Nationalist Organization", gave Bagirov the grounds for arresting 32 district party secretaries, 28 district chairmen of the executive committee, 15 people's commissars and their deputies, 66 engineers, 88 commanders from the Soviet Army and Navy, 8 professors and a number of other high-ranking officials. Sometimes arrests were made on the basis of oral testimonies.[\[xxxv\]](#) For example, Ayyub Khanbudagov was arrested based on the oral testimony of Sarkis Srapionyan. However, when Sarkis accused Levon Mirzoyan of counter-revolutionary activities, Bagirov demanded a written report. After receiving the written report, Bagirov placed the

following resolution on the document: "Please ensure that A. Khanbudagov is interrogated and note that comrade Sarkis also referred to Levon Mirzoyan. I will talk to the latter in person tomorrow." At the time, Levon Mirzoyan was not an ordinary party worker; he was Bagirov's colleague and held the post of First Secretary of the Kazakhstan Party Committee.

In 1937-1940, under Bagirov's signature, a number of high-ranking individuals from the oil industry and machine-building plants, as well as geologists, engineers, employees of the Caspian Sea Shipping Company and secretaries of the Baku Party Committee were arrested. Some of Bagirov's associates, realizing what the arrests would entail, asked for clemency, but these requests went unanswered. One of those who addressed Bagirov with such a letter was Hamid Sultanov. Bagirov marked his pleading letter with the following resolution: "To be discussed at the next Bureau meeting of the Central Committee, 23.03.1936." [\[xxxvi\]](#)

The June-July 1937 plenum of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) ordered to create extra-judicial tribunals, known as "Troika," under the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD). The Union republics were given full freedom to determine the people to be shot or exiled.

Since then, there had been no need to seek instructions and directions from Stalin about the repressions carried out by the ruling troikas in Azerbaijan. Because they mainly targeted and killed ordinary Soviet citizens, workers, collective farmers, teachers, engineers and doctors, among others. As the Troikas coordinated these repressions with Bagirov, we can say that Bagirov was directly responsible for these murders.

Bagirov participated personally in the preparation and dissemination of information about the identification, arrest and punishment of victims of mass repressions. In 1937, after the Central Committee discussed the issue of the International

Organization for Aid to Revolutionary Fighters (MOPR), Bagirov gave a direction similar to the following to send a telegram to the secretaries of local party organization: "Prepare a telegram saying that there are enemies (list their names) in the Azerbaijani organizations of the MOPR (International Organization for Aid to Revolutionary Fighters) who have led sabotage activity for a long time. Party organizations not only fought against these anti-Soviet elements, but sometimes even justified them. Take the case of Y. Mammadov as an example. Regional Communist Committees should use all means to defend the MOPR organizations against all extraneous elements and strengthen them at the expense of clean, reliable workers" (*the language of the source has been preserved*).[\[xxxvii\]](#)

The mass repressions initiated by Stalin in the 1930s enabled Bagirov to eliminate Bolsheviks whom he considered political rivals, accusing them of being Musavatists. But not only high-ranking officials and specialists were affected by the repression: during this period, thousands of working people were shot or arrested on charges of counter-revolutionary activities. During punitive operations carried out in the regions under Bagirov's leadership, not only adults, but also children, pregnant women and the elderly were killed.[\[xxxviii\]](#)

Proponent of the Nation or In Lieu of a Final Word

Various myths about Mirjafar Bagirov have circulated in Azerbaijani society for many years. He is presented to the public as a leader who led a simple life, free from bribery, corruption and tribalism. Another fundamental issue associated with Bagirov's leadership is related to his rescuing of the Azerbaijani people from the exile faced by some peoples in the Caucasus.

In Soviet times, the most common opinion about Bagirov was that he ruthlessly fought bribery of officials. In light of widespread bribery and injustice during the late-Soviet period, the older generation regards the Bagirov period as "a

period of fairness and justice.” To what extent are these ideas true?

First of all, I will try to determine Bagirov’s attitude to bribery, and let me offer an episode from Baku city life. In the summer of 1952, an expensive watch was stolen from one of the guests at the Baku wedding of the son of a certain Shaburov, head of the department for the control over cotton harvesting of the Union of Azerbaijani Consumer Society. The thief was identified, and the watch returned to its owner. But this event led to rumors among the townspeople, which in turn sparked debates about bribery of high-ranking officials. At one of the meetings of the Central Committee held in October 1952, Bagirov referred to the case of theft that occurred at this Shaburov wedding. Bagirov apparently had been given detailed information about who was present at the wedding, the price of the stolen watch, and the pageantry of the wedding reception. After describing the details of the wedding, Bagirov accused participants in the CC meeting of losing their communist vigilance and added that “none of the communists there asked what money Shaburov, who received a salary of 950 rubles a month, was able to arrange such a lavish wedding for his son.”[\[xxxix\]](#) Bagirov then emphasized the growth in bribery among high-ranking officials and explained the mechanisms of bribe-taking in various fields. Bagirov, for example, said that the head of the department of the state administration dealing with the sale of tractors never offered any farm a tractor or spare parts without a bribe. This event illustrates that Bagirov had accurate information about how those in leadership positions in the republic took bribes and became rich. Most of them were able to successfully continue their illegal activities and pass their acquired wealth onto their children without incurring Bagirov’s wrath or attracting the attention of Soviet law enforcement agencies. The archives contain a great deal of material on the looting of public assets and a flourishing underground economy in the years of Bagirov’s rule. Much of this material was discovered during

the Bagirov period, but some during financial audits conducted after his ouster. [\[xl\]](#) The largest offenses, including bribery, took place in law enforcement agencies. These documents show that no serious fight was waged against bribery under Bagirov. Such a fight might have been directed only against the lower classes, while high officials could circumvent it.

There are also archive documents that attest to Bagirov's personal involvement in bribery. One of these documents notes his comfortable lifestyle. In 1948, when Aziz Azizbeyov, the Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the AzSSR and son of Mashadi Azizbeyov, was under investigation for involvement in financial fraud, it came out that, along with him, other high-ranking officials of the republic, including Secretary of the Central Committee Mirjafar Bagirov, did not lead a simple life. Bagirov realized that this scandal would not end well for him. On 30 July 1948, he personally went to meet with Stalin. The fact that this meeting took place is evidenced by the information in the registration book of persons who came to meet Stalin in the Kremlin. On that day, Bagirov was with Stalin from 22:50 to 23:20, i.e. half an hour, and after this meeting inspections exposing the leadership of the republic were suspended. [\[xli\]](#)

Bagirov cannot be blamed for localism and tribalism. However, this has nothing to do with his personal qualities. This is because until the end of World War II, party leaders of the Union republics did not have the right to make appointments to state organs; all these issues were coordinated in Moscow. During personnel appointments, Bagirov's opinion was taken into account, but it was not taken as a basis. In 1940, Bagirov tried to prevent the dismissal of the director of the experimental station for dry subtropics in Mardakan, but he could not. The reason was that the director was appointed centrally by decree of the People's Commissariat for Agriculture of the USSR. [\[xlii\]](#) On the other hand, given the peculiarities of the period when Bagirov led the republic, we

can also assume that engaging in nepotism and tribalism could have done more damage to him. Nevertheless, there were people in every state structure whom Bagirov trusted. These people helped Bagirov collect compromising material on less loyal personnel.[\[xliiii\]](#)

Finally, there is only one thing to say about the rumors that Bagirov prevented the deportation of Azerbaijanis from Azerbaijan. So far, it has not been possible to ferret out any document about the existence of such a Stalinist project from either the central or republican archives. Historian Eldar Ismayilov correctly notes that Stalin could not have had a plan to expel Azerbaijanis from the republic because he himself expressed a desire to annex Southern Azerbaijan (northern Iran) to the Soviet Union.[\[xliv\]](#)

Mirjafar Bagirov's political career challenges the popular belief that he was a staunch Bolshevik, but it does not disprove that he was a faithful comrade-in-arms to Stalin. Bagirov was able to fully capitalize on the circumstances of the changing times in order to win power and authority. During the period of mass repressions in the 1930s, Bagirov acted not only as an executor, but also as an initiator, directly sanctioning repression in the regions exerted by troikas and judicial authorities. Bagirov did not seek to reduce the number of those repressed; on the contrary, he asked Moscow to increase their scale and extend their duration. As the designated official, Bagirov endorsed most of the documents related to the organization and implementation of repressions. As the politician with the highest authority in the republic at that time, he was directly responsible for the mass repressions.

Notes and References

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[iv] *Vaxt Var Idi – 29.09.2024 (Mircəfər Bağırov)*, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUNSQXcf3PQ>.

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[vi] Azərbaycan Respublikası Dövlət Arxivi (bundan sonra ARDA), f.379, siy.40 c, iş 198, v.117; Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin İşlər İdarəsi İctimai-Siyasi Sənədlər Arxivində (bundan sonra ARPİİİSSA), f.1, siy. 88, iş 14, v.2; f.1., siy. 88, iş 90, v.33.

[vii] Azərbaycan Respublikası Mərkəzi Dövlət Arxivi, (ARMDA), f.1, siy.88, iş 3, v.13.

[viii] ARPİİİSSA, f.1, siy. 74, iş 257, v.134.

[ix] Ibid.

[x] ARPİİİSSA, f.1siy.88, iş 37, v.34.

[xi] ARPİİİSSA, f.1, siy. 77, iş 31, v.1.

[\[xii\]](#) ARPIİİSSA, f.1, siy. 74, iş 257, v.91

[\[xiii\]](#)ARPIİİSSA, f.1, siy. 74, iş 257, v.132

[\[xiv\]](#)ARPIİİSSA, f.1, siy. 122, iş 107, v.28-31; see also: Исмаилов Э. Власть и народ: послевоенный сталинизм в Азербайджане.1945-1953. Баку: Адильоглу, 2003, 39.

[\[xv\]](#) Мамедова Ш. Интерпретация тоталитаризма. Сталинизм в Азербайджане. 1920–1930. Баку: Адильоглу, 2004, 180.

[\[xvi\]](#) Milli Təhlükəsizlik Nazirliyinin (hazırkı DTX) Arxivi, Pr16645, 12493 sayılı istintaq işi, v.13-14.

[\[xvii\]](#) ARPIİİSSA, f.1, siy. 88, iş 14, v.52

[\[xviii\]](#) ARPIİİSSA, f.1, siy. 88, iş 14, v.26-31.

[\[xix\]](#)ARPIİİSSA, f.1, siy. 231, iş 25, v.252

[\[xx\]](#)After being expelled from party leadership in 1929, Garayev studied for some time at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, and after graduating he was appointed director of the evening department of the Red Professorship of the Institute of Party History.

[\[xxi\]](#)ARPIİİSSA, f.1, siy. 88, iş 14, v.26-31.

[\[xxii\]](#) ARPIİİSSA, f.1, siy.88, iş 14, v.90

[\[xxiii\]](#) Ibid.

[\[xxiv\]](#) Маммадова, 184.

[\[xxv\]](#)In 1920-1921 he was executive secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, and when he was arrested in 1937, he was serving as USSR Minister of Health.

[\[xxvi\]](#)Vsevolod Merkulov was from Zagatala, held the high post of Minister of State Security of the USSR, was arrested and executed in 1953 as a person close to Beria.

- [\[xxvii\]](#) Российский-Государственный Архив Социально-Политической Истории (РГАСПИ), ф.17, оп.171, д.470, л.215-225.
- [\[xxviii\]](#) РГАСПИ, ф.17, оп.171, д.479, л.49-63.
- [\[xxix\]](#) Материалы февральско-мартовского пленума ЦК ВКП(б) 1937 года. Вопросы истории. 1995, №3, с.3-15.
- [\[xxx\]](#) ARPIİİSSA, f.1, siy.77, iş. 101, v.47-48.
- [\[xxxı\]](#) ARPIİİSSA, f.1, siy.74, iş 99, v.525.
- [\[xxxii\]](#) ARPIİİSSA, f.1, siy.142, iş 149. v.56
- [\[xxxiii\]](#) Azərbaycan Respublikası MTNA: PR-28787, v.76
- [\[xxxiv\]](#) Ibid.
- [\[xxxv\]](#) РГАСПИ, ф.17, оп.171, д.479, л.49-63.
- [\[xxxvi\]](#) MTNA: PR-28787ç v.144.
- [\[xxxvii\]](#) ARPIİİSSA, f.1, siy.142, iş 199, v.13-14.
- [\[xxxviii\]](#) ARPIİİSSA, f.1siy. 43, iş. 94, v. 95-96.
- [\[xxxix\]](#) Məmmədova Ş. Yaddaşımızdakı tarix. Stalindən sonrakı Azərbaycan. Bakı: Elm və Təhsil, 2022, 474.
- [\[xl\]](#) ARDA, f.2878, siy.2, iş 164, v.104-105, 108-109, 55-56, 128-129; ARDA, f.411, siy.28, iş 1358, v.96-99.
- [\[xli\]](#) РГАСПИ, ф.17, siy.171, iş 472, v.199-212; Нәмçинин бах: На приеме у Сталина. Тетради (журналы) записей лиц, принятых И.В. Сталиным (1924-1953 гг.). Москва: Новый Хронограф, 2008.
- [\[xlii\]](#) ARPIİİSSA, f.1, siy.53, iş 2, v.1-2.
- [\[xliiii\]](#) Гуськов А.М. Под грифом правды. Исповедь военного контрразведчика. Люди. Факты. Спецоперации. Под грифом 'сугубо лично',
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9 avqust 2021.

[\[xliv\]](#) Исмаилов, 47.