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# 'Iron Felix,' as a Soviet Role Model, Is Still Fearsome

3 By DIMITRI K. SIMES

Is it possible that the whole affair concerning the defection of Col. Vitaly Yurchenko was a KGB setup? An editorial in *Kommunist*, the Soviet party's top monthly, suggests an answer.

The editorial reveals who Mikhail S. Gorbachev and his bunch of Communist yuppies take for a role model. His name is Felix E. Dzerdzhinski, and he was none other than the founding father of CHEKA, the dreaded Bolshevik secret police. "The Iron Felix," as Dzerdzhinski was called at the time, was a cunning man of exceptional ruthlessness. Yet, according to *Kommunist*, Dzerdzhinski was a model Communist, a revolutionary of great integrity and dedication, and a true "knight of the revolution," as Vladimir I. Lenin used to describe his favorite hatchetman.

There is an element of truth to this image. Unlike the pure thugs who succeeded him during Josef Stalin's era, Dzerdzhinski was not corrupt in the sense of compromising his duty. He would not blackmail women into sex, as did Lavrenti P. Beria. He would not abuse his office to go after personal rivals. And his "sword of the revolution," as CHEKA was described by its masters, was used strictly to promote the Bolshevik cause rather than to destroy the party faithful as it was done under Stalin.

It is no wonder that *Kommunist* recommends Dzerdzhinski as a standard for the ideal party functionary. He was honest with his party comrades. He was also effective in destroying all real and potential enemies of Bolshevik rule. Mercy was not among his virtues. The purge of "class enemies" that he presided over was so wholesale that it would impress even Pol Pot. And, very importantly, he died early enough from natural causes (or so we believe) to avoid being destroyed and disgraced by Stalin.

If Gorbachev wants to change the Soviet Union with a sweeping stroke, his enthusiasm for Dzerdzhinski may be understandable. After all, it is not unusual for reformers in Russia to employ the most barbaric means to modernize the country. Just recall the rule of Peter the Great.

But as far as the Western world is concerned, Gorbachev's potential as a reformer—still unclear at this point—is not good news in itself. Giving Soviet communism more punch, without making it more benign and humane, would hardly be in the American interest. And here Gorbachev's choice of role models is of more than purely academic interest. Under Dzerdzhinski's direct orders, thousands upon thousands of innocent people—women and children included—were butchered by CHEKA simply because they came from "the exploiting classes." Massacring them was one of the more efficient ways of terrorizing the nation in the name of creating the "czardom of freedom."

If Dzerdzhinski was a loyal colleague to the party, to everyone else he was evil incarnate. One of his greatest contributions was the invention of the Gulag. He was no less inventive in tricking Bolshevik opponents abroad. CHEKA organized what was probably the ultimate disinformation operation of all times. Under the code name TRUST, Dzerdzhinski and associates created a fake organization devoted to overthrowing the Bolsheviks. Allegedly working against CHEKA, TRUST was in fact its brainchild and obedient tool.

A number of Western intelligence services, not accustomed to such deception *par excellence*, became TRUST's devoted admirers. The emigre community's efforts were neutralized as a result of the struggle between TRUST's supporters (including outright agents) and detractors. In



Mikhail S. Gorbachev ANTONIO, *Espresso*, Lisbon

the end, everyone in the emigre community suspected everyone else.

And once Western intelligence services had been sufficiently duped and emigre organizations sufficiently discredited, TRUST was used to lure some of the Bolsheviks' enemies into the Soviet Union, where they met their deaths.

Granted, times have changed considerably. But if Yurchenko—as was suggested by his extraordinary self-confidence and cool professionalism during his press conference in Washington on Monday—was a KGB plant from the beginning, then Gorbachev is not above repeating the Dzerdzhinski tricks.

A great power like the Soviet Union has many ways of using influence to change circumstances. If the opportunity for new influence arose, by what means and toward what end would it be directed? The Soviet superpower remains, and there are no signs that it will collapse or change in the foreseeable future. No rational alternative exists to talking to Gorbachev and, moreover, to seeking deals with him when American and Soviet interests overlap.

Still, as long as Soviet leaders are trying to fill Dzerdzhinski's shoes, the East-West relationship is bound to be dominated by rivalry. The lesson of the Yurchenko affairs shows us that, pre-summit cheerleading notwithstanding, no historic opportunity to transform adversaries into friends is on the horizon.

*Kommunist's* praise for Dzerdzhinski is a powerful reminder that the source of international tension is not some unfortunate misunderstanding. On the contrary, it is exactly because we understand each other all too well that the heirs of Washington and the heirs of Dzerdzhinski have difficulty living together in harmony.

*Dimitri K. Simes is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington.*