

The Persecution of the Russian Bolshevik Opposition

By N. MARKIN

Since the Spring of this year, the Stalinist leadership has again been compelled to pose as a task of the moment the question of the "extermination of the Opposition". This task arises out of the fact that, in spite of the boastings to the contrary by the members of the apparatus, the Opposition lives, works and will continue to work. It is enough to run through the Soviet papers to be convinced that rarely does a nucleus meeting or Party conference take place without Oppositionists or semi-Oppositionists taking the floor. The apparatus struggle against the Left Opposition is developed exclusively by means of repression. In connection with this Congress, the repression mounted frightfully. The rotten monolithism of the top is guaranteed by the coercion, the arrests, the banishments at the bottom. The Solitaries replace the discussion that should have preceded the Congress. That is how the Congress of the Party was prepared.

The aim of this article is to give the genuine facts, particularly on the "preparations" for the Congress. In January-February there was a strong wave of arrests of Oppositionists, of comrades who sympathized with them, and even of comrades simply suspected of sympathizing with them. According to an approximate reckoning more or less correct, 300 comrades were arrested in Moscow alone. A large number of comrades arrested in the provinces passed through Moscow to the Butirskaya prison, coming mainly from the Ukraine, and especially from the Donbas (the proletarian mining district).

Non-Party Workers Arrested

At Butirki, there were a few dozen non-Party workers of Moscow, arrested for the sympathy they expressed for the Opposition, who are now deported to Siberia. Among the prisoners, there was also a certain percentage of capitulators, mainly of those who repented under the influence of a momentary weakness, and who subsequently declared, almost openly, that they had made a mistake. Many of them are no longer just deported, but sent to the Solitaries. They now demand from the capitulators not only the complete and absolute disavowal of their convictions but also that they disclose all their connections. For refusal—there is the Solitary (Zabrovskaya, Blumenfeld, and dozens of others).

The lengths to which they will go in arrests and deportations can be seen by the fact that among those arrested there is a big percentage of people arrested by chance, "seized" for reasons of relationship or simply because of saying Hello to an Oppositionist. That is how dozens of people were arrested who have no connection with the Opposition (it frequently happens that they become real Oppositionists in prison or deportation!) During this period the Moscow comrades have distributed a leaflet and have assumed charge of a whole series of strikes which were provoked by the policy of the bureaucracy (in Serpuchov at Moscow, four factories of Mostriutaga and elsewhere). This has still further irritated the bureaucracy.

A wave of arrests that began at the end of the winter continued to rise up to the month of May. The number of persons arrested in this period is at least 500, without counting more than 100 arrested persons who were transported to the Solitaries. By this time the figure has further increased.

A remark must be made here. The Stalinist repression exercised against the Bolshevik-Leninists is distinguished from that practised against the Mensheviks and S.R.s. While the latter are simply isolated from the social life of the country, to hamper them in their counter-revolutionary action against the proletarian dictatorship for the Oppositionists who fight Centrism which upsets the dictatorship of the proletariat—the Stalinist course is directed toward their moral strangulation and their physical extermination.

Among the Oppositionists arrested in Winter were comrades Silov and Rabinovitch, who had unleashed against them the special hatred of the apparatus: they have been shot. How comrade Blumkin was shot before them—this crime is known to the whole world.

The repression has been sharpened against all the deportees. A regime of horrors has been established: they have lost the right to work, that is, the right to serve, and by that they have acquired the right to be hungry. The official aid a deportee receives has long ago been reduced to 15 rubles (\$7.50 a month) and

that means hunger, and cold in winter. Since they have no right to be members of the cooperatives, they can frequently buy nothing, even with these 15 rubles; they live in lodgings without fire, remaining for weeks without warm food, often without light. Especially painful is the situation of the deportees in Narym, one of the most terrible places of deportation in Siberia. The Narym deportees are literally condemned to death by hunger. Moreover at Narym which, by the harshness of living conditions, is similar to a Solitary, they transport the Bolsheviks originally deported elsewhere, in an ever growing number. It is a course deliberately directed towards the physical extermination of the Opposition.

Over and above the material privations, every deportee is exposed to innumerable "little" vexations, the fruit of the absolute arbitrariness and impunity of the local G.P.U. The already tiny aid is kept back (a case is cited where it was withheld for four months and where the only reply to the demand for it was mockery of this sort: "Go to Moscow!")—that is: Capitulat! In a similar situation a comrade reduced to despair asked that he be led to a Solitary, and that is not the only instance; people simply suspected of knowing a deported Oppositionist are arrested, thus sowing terror among the local population in order to cast the Oppositionists into absolute isolation.

Systematic raids are organized, in which not only political works are seized from comrade L.S. Sosnovsky, in prison, his work on the agrarian policy of Centrism was seized; at comrade C.G. Rakovsky, his declaration to the Party was taken, etc.)—but also quotations from the works of Marx and Lenin. This is accompanied by a courier blockade so as to isolate the deportees politically. During the Congress, the G.P.U. did not let a single letter go through in order to prevent the elaboration of a collective declaration of the Opposition. But this did not succeed, and a declaration bearing the signatures of comrades Rakovsky, Meralov, Kasparova and Kossior, was presented (all the deportees joined with it). In deportation the receipt of a letter is an event! We are not speaking even of political, but of family letters.

All the deportees live under the constant threat of being transferred to a Solitary (and this threat exists for the smallest thing: for instance, a delay of five minutes for the compulsory registration at the G.P.U.) Often they do not even give formal reasons. The real aim is to shatter the revolutionary intransigence of the Oppositionist. At the same time with an open tendency to transfer the points of deportation to the harshest regions of the North, the Solitaries are filled up more and more. Their number is always growing because those that exist are already full. The regime in the prisons and Solitaries is incomparably worse than that of deportation. In the prisons there is rarely any light (the windows are covered with an opaque panel), the damp cells are occupied by two or three times as many prisoners as the rules provide for; place is lacking for sleep, not only on the cots, but even on the floor.

In the Solitaries

What the sanitary conditions are is not difficult to judge. In their cells, the Oppositionists, kept separate from each other, are mixed up with counter-revolutionaries and criminals who not only detest our comrades as the representatives of Bolshevism but hate and jeer at them, casting upon them all the hatred they nurture against the Soviet power. The system of the G.P.U.—holding Oppositionists in common cells with criminals—did not even exist in the prisons of czarism. This system is applied only to Oppositionists. The Mensheviks (at Butyrki, for instance) enjoy all the rights of political prisoners; they are kept separate from criminals, their cell doors are open; they have a small library at their disposal.

The cells of the Oppositionists are closed, nowhere is visiting allowed them, they have no rights to anything sent from the outside. And in addition to all this, they are treated coarsely and laughed at. Under such a regime, hunger strikes break out without end, and sometimes last until a mortal end (let us remember the heroic death of comrade Butov) To the hunger strikes, to the minimum demands of the prisoners, the prison direction replies by having them systematically beaten, by soak-

ing them with water in the bitter cold of winter, etc. Beatings are a system known in the prison of Kharkov, in the Verchne-Uralsk Solitary, in the Leningrad prison, and in a whole number of others. It was through blows that comrade Haenrichsen was killed in the Leningrad prison.

The colony of Oppositionists deported at Tomsk has gathered a great deal of information on the absolutely terrible crimes Stalin has perpetrated against our comrades. It has presented a document of protest to which all the other colonies of deportees have rallied. In this document it is learned that hunger prevails in all the places of deportation for Oppositionists; it is established that for Bolsheviks, the conditions of Stalinist deportation are incomparably worse than those of czarism. Many deportees have become invalids (there are dozens of them) for lack of any medical succor, at Narym and similar places elsewhere. The seriously ill are not even transported to the nearest inhabited regions where a doctor might be found. When it is decided to transport an ill comrade, it is only when he is in a hopeless state. This winter, many comrades had their limbs frozen, and some had to undergo amputations because no medical aid was given them in time.

Babies, right after their birth, have been taken from their mother, and the latter sent into Solitaries (comrade Yanovskaia among others). The same document informs us that a new shooting of Oppositionists took place at Solovki; it is no rare thing for the G.P.U. now to pronounce sentences, not of 3 to 5 years, but of 10 years, in vengeance for the political conduct of a comrade. For instance, without any formal proof, comrade Golodni was condemned to 10 years in Solitary. In all the colonies of deportees, before the 16th Congress, comrades were arrested and sent to the Solitaries. We do not give here the names of the colonies nor the names of the comrades arrested; we will deal only with the most striking facts.

A Hunger Strike in Ichim

In May, at Ichim, the whole colony was arrested—9 comrades—as well as 15 inhabitants of the city who, according to the accusation of the G.P.U., had been propagandized by Oppositionists. All are now in terrible condition, our comrades write us—they are locked up in the Sverdolsk prison. Two of them are seriously ill, they do not receive the political prisoner's ration, they are locked up in different cells, and have been compelled to declare a hunger strike. How this hunger strike ended, and above all, what was subsequently the fate of the Ichim deportees, we do not know.

The comrades informing us, call this arrest together with 15 non-Oppositionists an "amalgam", which means an artificial liaison for the purpose of discrediting our comrades by means of people alien to the Opposition. The destruction of the colony and the creation of a Thermidorian amalgam are the work of a provocateur. The provocations practised against the Opposition recently have assumed Homeric proportions.

Not only are the Opposition groups still filled with provocateurs, but these "operate" also in the deportation and in prison. There, their task is to disclose the most intransigent, to provoke decomposition by leading comrades to capitulate, etc. A provocateur showing himself under the mask of a "capitulator" is now a current phenomenon in the deportation.

That is how the colony of deportees at Kaminsk was destroyed. Two comrades, Stolovsky and Densov, were transferred to the Tomsk prison, the others, to the furthest corners of Siberia. This colony was dispersed only because it didn't produce a single capitulator. In their declaration to the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U., the Kaminsk comrades showed how the cadres of the local Party organizations are recruited. Basing themselves on exact information, they name more than 30 members of the Party now occupying responsible posts who were agents of the White terror during the days of Kolchak and who shot Reds. These elements are leaders of this district to this very day. The Kolchakists are chiefly to be found in great numbers in the G.P.U. This fact throws a striking light on the question: who is carrying out the Stalinist policy which hounds the deported Bolsheviks, which aids in their extermination? Ex-Whites, and not accidentally!

At Rubtsevsk, Siberia, without any ac-

cusation being formulated against them, four Oppositionists were arrested: Abramsky, Antokolsky, Veskresensky, Evingelstaedt. From the Rubtsevsk prison, they sent a declaration to the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. on June 4, in which they said: "We can only consider this repressive act exercised against us only as a preparation by unusual means for the 16th Party Congress..." "The repression will not halt the struggle for the redressment of the Party, just as the damage done will not prevent the Party from returning to the positions of Leninism". What was subsequently the fate of the Rubtsevsk comrades is not known to us. But there is no doubt that they will be imprisoned in the Solitaries.

A similar destruction took place at Kansk (comrades Kusminsky and Landau), at Alma-Ata (comrades Goldin and others), at Slavgorod, Chimkent, and many other places. Raids have taken place everywhere. The impudent raid upon comrade Rakovsky has been told everywhere and is well known. Upon him, as the leader of the Russian Opposition, the Stalinists are concentrating their hatred. Seriously ill (afflicted with heart trouble and malaria), comrade Rakovsky, far from being sent to a more clement climate (as the doctors ordered) has been transported from Astrakhan to Barnaul. Comrade Rakovsky, who is 57 years old, of which 40 have been devoted to the struggle for Communism, passed a very painful Winter, his sick organism having to undergo cold of 40 to 50 degrees. The isolation in which he is held is more rigorous than for anybody else. The game of Stalin is clear: slowly but surely to finish off Rakovsky.

Sosnovsky in Danger

It is in an even more painful situation that another eminent leader of the Opposition, an old Bolshevik, comrade L.S. Sosnovsky is to be found. He is incarcerated in the Tomsk prison, in a regime of isolation more severe than any known in the czarist prisons for those condemned to death. No correspondence is allowed him, no authorized mail, no relation with the other prisoners; he must take his walks in company with a special agent of the G.P.U. The state of health of comrade Sosnovsky is critical. A prolonged imprisonment under such conditions means the end for him. It is under similar conditions than another old Bolshevik, E.D. Eltsin, is to be found (in the Supdalsk Solitary): this comrade is afflicted by spinal meningitis.

That is how the 16th Congress was prepared on the back of the Left Opposition. By using the power of coercion of the apparatus for factional ends, the Stalinist leadership has set this apparatus against the Left proletarian wing of the Party. Fire to the Left! the more terrible this fire will be, the clearer will appear in the eyes of the proletarians the lamentable bankruptcy of Centrism policy.

By hunger, by cold, by the blockade, by outrages, by blows and by shootings, Centrism aims to squeeze out of the weakest ones a capitulation, and the strongest ones it condemns to ruin. Only the working class can thwart this Thermidorian plan. There is its duty, there is its task. By making an end of the Left wing, Stalin will make an end of the October revolution. That must be understood, that must be prevented, that must not be permitted.

We take this occasion to inform the foreign comrades that in reply to the greetings of the international conference in Paris to the deported and imprisoned Russian Oppositionists, there have arrived in the editorial Board of the *Bulletin of the Russian Oppositions* numerous greetings not only from the places of deportation but also from the Solitaries.

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