

THE CASE OF RIAZANOV

By LEON TROTSKY

At the moment we write these lines, we know nothing about the expulsion from the party of Riazanov except what is communicated by the official telegrams of the T. A. S. agency. Riazanov is expelled from the party not for any differences with the so-called general line, but for "treason" to the party. Riazanov is accused—no more and no less—of having conspired with the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionists allied with the conspirators of the industrial bourgeoisie. This is the version of the official communication. What does not seem clear at first sight is that for Riazanov the affair is limited to his exclusion from the party. Why has he not been arrested and arraigned before the Supreme Tribunal for conspiracy against the dictatorship of the proletariat. Such a question must pose itself before every man who reflects, even for anybody who does not know the persons in question. The latest communications say that Riazanov is named in the indictment by Krylenko. As an accused of tomorrow?

The Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionists represent parties which seek the re-establishment of capitalism. The Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionists are distinguished from other parties of capitalist restoration by the fact that they hope to give the bourgeois régime in Russia "democratic" forms. There are very strong currents in these parties which consider that any régime in Russia, regardless of its political form, would be more progressive than the Bolshevik régime. The position of the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionists is counter-revolutionary in the most precise and objective sense of the word, that is, in the class sense. This position cannot but lead to attempts to utilize the discontent of the masses for a social uprising. The activity of the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionists is nothing but the preparation for such an uprising. Are blocs of the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionists with the industrial bourgeoisie excluded? Not at all. The policy of the social democracy throughout the world is based upon the idea of a coalition with the bourgeoisie against the "reaction" and the revolutionary proletariat. The policy of the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionists in 1917 was entirely based upon the principle of the coalition with the liberal bourgeoisie, republican as well as monarchical. The parties which consider that there is no way out for Russia other than the return to the bourgeois régime cannot but make a bloc with the bourgeoisie. The latter cannot refuse aid, including financial aid, to its democratic auxiliaries. Within these limits everything is clear, for it flows from the very nature of things. But how could comrade Riazanov happen to be among the participants in the Menshevik conspiracy? Here we are confronted by an obvious enigma.

THE MARXIST RIAZANOV A MENSHEVIK?

When Syrsov was accused of "double dealing", every conscious worker had to ask himself: How could an old Bolshevik who, not so long ago, was put by the Central Committee into the post of chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, suddenly become the illegal defender of opinions which he refuted and condemned officially? From this fact, one could only establish the extreme duplicity of the Stalinist régime, in which the real opinions of the members of the government are determined by the intermediary of the G. P. U.

But in the Syrsov affair, it was only a matter of conflicts between the Centrists and the Right wing of the party, and nothing more. The Riazanov "affair" is incomparably more significant and more striking. All of Riazanov's activity was manifested in the realm of ideas, of books, of publications, and already by that alone, it was under the constant control of hundreds of thousands of readers throughout the world. Finally, and this is the most important thing, Riazanov is accused not of sympathy for the deviation of the Rights in the party, but of participation in the counter-revolutionary conspiracy.

That numerous members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, theoreticians and practitioners of the general line, are Mensheviks without knowing it: that numerous former Mensheviks, who had changed names but not their essence, successfully occupy the most responsible posts (People's Commissars, ambassadors, etc.): finally, that within the framework of the C. P. S. U., no mean place is occupied, by the side of the Bessedovskys, the Agabekovs and other corrupted and demoralized elements, by direct agents of the Mensheviks—on that score we have no doubts at all. The Stalinist régime is the culture of all sorts of microbes of decomposition in the

party. But the Riazanov "affair" cannot be set into this framework. Riazanov is not an upstart, an adventurist, a Bessedovsky or any sort of agent of the Mensheviks. Riazanov's line of development can be retraced year by year, in accordance with facts and documents, articles and books. In the person of Riazanov we have a man who for more than forty years has participated in the revolutionary movement: and every stage of his activity has in one way or another entered into the history of the proletarian party. Riazanov had serious differences with the party at various times, including the time of Lenin, or rather, especially in the time of Lenin, when Riazanov participated actively in the daily policy of the party. In one of his speeches, Lenin spoke directly of the strong sides of Riazanov and of his weak sides. Lenin did not see a politician in Riazanov. Speaking of his strong sides, Lenin had in mind his idealism, his deep devotion to the Marxian doctrine, his exceptional erudition, his honesty in principle, his intransigence in the defense of the heritage of Marx and Engels. That is precisely why the party put Riazanov at the head of the Marx-Engels Institute which he himself had created. The work of Riazanov had an international importance, not only of a historico-scientific, but also a revolutionary and political character. Marxism is inconceivable without the acceptance of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. Menshevism is the bourgeois democratic refutation of this dictatorship. In defending Marxism against revisionism, Riazanov, by all of his activity, conducted a struggle against the social democracy and consequently against the Russian Mensheviks. How then is Riazanov's position in principle to be reconciled with his participation in the Menshevik conspiracy? To this question there is no reply. And we think that there cannot be such a reply. We do not doubt for an instant that Riazanov did not participate in any conspiracy. But in that case, where does the accusation come from? If it is invented, then by whom and with what object?

THE MENSHEVIK "COLLABORATORS" AND THE MARX-ENGELS INSTITUTE

To this, we can only give hypothetical explanations, based, nevertheless, upon a sufficiently sure acquaintance with the people and the circumstances. We will assist ourselves, moreover, with political logic and revolutionary psychology. Neither the one nor the other can be abolished by the telegrams of T. A. S. S.

Comrade Riazanov directed a vast scientific institution. He required a numerous qualified personnel, of collaborators, of people initiated in Marxism, the history of the revolutionary movement, the problems of the class struggle, and those who knew

foreign languages. Bolsheviks having the same qualities occupy, almost without exception, responsible administrative posts and are not available for a scientific institution. On the other hand, among the Mensheviks there are numerous demobilized politicians who have retired from the struggle or who, at least, feign to have retired. In the domain of historical research, of commentary, of annotation, of translation, of important correction, etc., comrade Riazanov based himself to a certain point upon this species of Menshevik in retreat. In the Institute, they played about the same rôle that the bourgeois engineers play in the State Planning Commission and the other economic organs. A Communist who directs any institution, as a general rule defends "his" specialists, sometimes even those who lead him around by the nose. The most illuminating example of it is the former chairman of the State Planning Commission, the member of the Central Committee, Krzhyhanovsky, who for many years, foaming at the mouth, defended against the Opposition the minimal programs and plans of his subordinates—saboteurs. The director of the Marx-Engels Institute could not but assume the defense of his Menshevik collaborators when they were threatened with arrest and deportation. This rôle of defender, not always crowned with success, has not been practised by Riazanov since yesterday. Everybody, beginning with Lenin, knew it; some joked about it, understanding perfectly the "administrative" interests that guided Riazanov.

There is no doubt that certain Menshevik collaborators, perhaps the majority used the Institute to cover up their conspirative work concealment of archives and documents: correspondence, contact with abroad, etc.) One can imagine that Riazanov was not always sufficiently attentive to the admonitions coming from the party, and showed an excessive benevolence towards his perfidious collaborators. But we think that this is the extreme limit of the accusation that might be addressed to comrade Riazanov. The books edited by Riazanov are before the eyes of everybody: there is neither Menshevism nor sabotage in them, as in the economic plans of Stalin-Krzhyhanovsky.

But if one accepts the fact that Riazanov's mistake does not exceed credulous protection of the Menshevik-specialists, where then does the accusation of treason come from? We know, from a recent experience, that the Stalinist G. P. U. is capable of casting into the ranks of irreproachable revolutionists an officer of Wrangel. Menzhinsky and Yagoda would not hesitate for a moment to attribute any crime whatsoever to Riazanov as soon as they were ordered to do it. But who ordered it? Who

Behind the Scenes in the Russian Party

MOSCOW.—

These recent weeks the newspapers have devoted a lot of space to greetings addressed to Molotov. In this respect, everything seems to be in order. Everything has the air of being as it should be, and the rumors about the quarrel between the "first secretary" and the "second" are apparently denied. But better informed people and a number of objective symptoms, slight though they are, show that things are otherwise. The post of chairman of the Council of Commissars, since Rikov occupied it for two years under attack, has lost all political importance, and from this point of view the designation of Molotov is one of the most honorable forms of administrative exile. But Molotov, it is said, has been stubborn for a long time. He had a fit of blues, did not show himself; that is, he made use of the Stalinist policy towards Lenin. The "greetings" have as their object to console Molotov and to reconcile him to his fate. For, it seems, Stalin does fear a new conflict after all: even without that, the number of people who consider that his leadership is costing the party too dear, is already pretty high. And on the other hand, Molotov is also unable to pull the cord any tighter, considering that Stalin is well enough armed against him: in private conversations Stalin throws all the responsibility for the "third period" upon Molotov and tells how foreign delegates have come and begged him: "Free us from the 'third period' and . . . from Molotov." It is likely that all this will rise to the surface at the next operation.

I inform you belatedly on some details about the Syrsov-Lominadze faction. The faction was especially strong in Caucasia, where Lominadze proceeded in the following

would have gained by that? Who sought this international scandal around the name of Riazanov?

It is precisely on this that we can advance explanations that flow with exceptional force from all the circumstances. In recent years, Riazanov, as is said, has withdrawn from active politics. In this sense he has shared the fate of many old members of the party who, despair in their hearts, have quite the internal life of the party and have shut themselves up in economic or cultural work. It is only this resignation that has permitted Riazanov to insure his Institute against devastation in the whole post-Leninist period. But in the last year it became impossible to maintain oneself in this position. The life of the party, especially since the Sixteenth Congress, has been converted into a continual examination into loyalty to the chief, the one and only. In every nucleus, there are now agents fresh from the plebiscite who on every occasion, interrogate the hesitant and the irresolute: do they regard Stalin as an infallible chief, as a great theoretician, as a classic of Marxism? Are they ready on the New Year to swear fidelity to the chief of the party—to Stalin? The less the party shows itself capable of controlling itself by an ideological struggle, the more the bureaucracy is forced to control the party with the aid of agents provocateurs.

THE PLEBISCITARY REGIME . . . AND ITS VICTIMS

For many years Riazanov was able to hold his tongue very prudently—too prudently—on a whole series of burning questions. But Riazanov was organically incapable of cowardice, of platitudes; all ostentatious display of the sentiment of fidelity was repugnant to him. One can imagine that in the meetings of the nucleus of the Institute, he often flew into a passion against the debauched youngsters of that innumerable order of young professors who usually understand very little of Marxism but for that excel in falsehood and informing. This sort of internal clique, no doubt, for a long time had its candidate for the post of director of the Institute and, what is still more important, its relations in the G. P. U. and the Secretariat of the Central Committee. Had Riazanov alluded somewhere, even if only in a few words, to the fact that Marx and Engels were only forerunners of Stalin, then all the stratagems of the debauched youngsters would collapse and no Krylenko would dare to make a complaint against Riazanov for his benevolence towards the Menshevik translators. But Riazanov did not accept this. As for the general secretariat, it was unable to go any further in concessions.

After having acquired the power of the apparatus, Stalin feels himself internally weaker than ever. He knows himself too well and that is why he fears his own situation. He needs a daily confirmation of his rôle of dictator. The plebiscitary régime is pitiless; it does not reconcile itself with doubt, it always demands new enthusiastic acknowledgments. That is how Riazanov's turn came. If Bucharin and Rykov feel victims of their "platform" which, it is true, they have renounced two or three times, Riazanov fell victim . . . of his personal honesty. The old revolutionist said to himself: "To serve while holding one's tongue, with teeth gritted—good; to be an enthusiastic lackey—impossible." That is why Riazanov fell under the justice of the party of the Yaroslavskys. Then Yagoda furnished the elements of the accusation. In conclusion, Riazanov was declared a traitor to the party and an agent of the counter-revolution.

In the C. P. S. U. and in the Western sections of the Comintern, many are the Communists who observe with consternation the work of the Stalinist bureaucracy, but justify their passivity, saying: "What can be done? One must hold his tongue so as not to convulse the foundations of the dictatorship." This possibilism is not only poltroonish but more than that, it is blind. From the foundation of the dictatorship, the apparatus of the official party is being converted more and more into an instrument for its decomposition. This process cannot be arrested with silence. Internal explosions are becoming more and more frequent and each time assume ever more threatening forms. The struggle against the Stalinist régime is a struggle for the Marxian foundations of a proletarian policy. This foundation cannot be won without party democracy. The plebiscitary régime of Stalin is not durable by its very nature. So that it shall not be liquidated by the class enemies it is indispensable to liquidate it by the efforts of the advanced elements of the Communist International. This is the lesson of the Riazanov "affair"! Prinkpo, March 8, 1931.

Continued on page 5)