

The Wave of Trials In The U.S.S.R.

Mass Executions, Disrupting Economy, Reveal Reactionary Role of Stalin

The corrosion of the very foundations of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist police regime is increasingly exposed to view by the wave of trials. These trials occur with such almost monotonous regularity that one picks up the paper wondering only who Stalin's next victims will be. But even for the least class-conscious worker there emerges from the news the conviction that the Soviet Union is passing through a severe and deep-going crisis. The very mass nature of the trials, their wholesale character, the systematic pattern which they all follow, lay bare not only the reality of the crisis, but its nature as well.

The bureaucratic methods of planning and the usurpation of special privileges by the Stalinist ruling caste have brought Russian economy to the brink of disaster. How explain the fact, after reporting such resounding successes in the fulfillment of the five year plans, that production in such varied and important industries as coal, oil, pig iron production, cement, lumber, textiles, should not only be lagging behind the norms set for them, but in many instances should be considerably below the figures reported for the year 1936? A similar situation exists in the agricultural field, fruit, vegetables, sugar, cotton, flax, butter and margarine showing alarming drops.

Stalin's Alibi

Stalin has an infallible explanation which has "worked" by and large up till now. It is the work of Trotskyist wreckers and scoundrels from the right and from the left (some are already included from the center, Stalinists from beginning to end!). Such scapegoats serve a double purpose for Stalin: they divert attention from the real culprits in the Kremlin and, so Stalin hopes, allay the discontent among the masses by punishing the ones supposedly responsible for goods shortages and for the unbearable living conditions of the workers and peasants.

It is impossible to give more than a brief summary of some of the cases reported in the press recently. Most of the trials, even that small number that reaches the press of the outside world, are held (if they are held at all) behind closed doors. Rarely is the public admitted to the courtroom and that only when some spectacular, and therefore all the more unconvincing, confession has been extorted from some unfortunate prisoner. Then a "show" can be made of the trial.

Some Recent Trials

The press of August 27 reports that "A Show Trial Is Being Made of Seven Important Agricultural Executives in a Leningrad Province near the Finnish Border". In this case Chief Agronomist Samokhvalov confessed to disruption of collective farming by false planning to reduce yields, all for the purpose of seeing capitalism restored. One Tarasink, Chairman of the District Executive Committee of the CP, confessed that he led a group of Rightists since 1935 in a campaign to disrupt collective agriculture. In resolutions demanding the death penalty for these executives, significantly enough, the demand is also made for the death of Bukharin, their "real" leader!

On Aug. 20 eight people were shot for "Trotskyist counter-revolutionary activities in two factories". On Aug. 12 we learn that the lumber industry is chock full

of "enemies of the people" some of whom have been executed for sabotage. The Civil Aviation Administration is also honey-combed with "enemies of the people" and numerous engineers and executives have been dismissed and arrested, including the recently appointed head Petrozhitsky. At Azov in the Black Sea Region 13 veterinarians and minor agricultural functionaries were placed on trial for spreading disease among cattle in order to disrupt the economy. These disrupters were, naturally, in contact with Trotskyists.

Far Eastern Trials

In the Far East the Military Tribunals have been extremely active. No doubt many spies are at work in Siberia, particularly along the border and along the railroads. But we will perhaps never know how many of those who were shot, allegedly as spies were in actuality merely scapegoats or really revolutionists in unyielding opposition to the present bloody regime. For all these trials are shot through and through with the clumsy attempts at amalgams of real scoundrels with framed-up oppositionist victims. The press of July 5 reports laconically that 22 more were executed as spies in the Far East. On July 8 we learn that 64 more were shot, etc. Some of these "spies" were accused of sabotage on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, some of sabotage of gold production. The Orsk Gold Trust in the Urals is raked over the coals for being run by Trotskyists who reported a higher production of gold than was actually achieved!

The National Problem

The Stalinist bureaucracy acts as the greatest disrupter not only of the economic system but of the political and social system in the USSR. The completely democratic methods of the October Revolution in the handling of the national question served to tie the national republics firmly together in a close economic union. Stalinism acts as a centrifugal force, driving them apart.

Evidence of this is clear in the trials and executions in the outlying republics. It is nothing new for Stalin, the Georgian, to act, in the fashion of a Great Russian oppressor of nationalities. When Stalin and Erdjonikidze first removed Mdivani from his leading post in Georgia in 1922-3 Lenin, even though on a sick-bed, entered into a fierce controversy against Stalin precisely on this score. Now on July 13 of this year Stalin takes his final revenge. After a closed trial Mdivani and 7 others are executed as terrorists and conspiratorial plotters.

Similarly whole executive committees, heads of the republic, are removed in such places as Uzbekistan and Kazakstan for resisting the adventurist agricultural plans of the bureaucrats who would have caused wholesale starvation of the local peasants in order to make a "showing" in their particular sector of planned economy. Most recently Tursun Khodpieff, Commissar of Domestic Trade, has been removed in Uzbekistan. The utter disregard of national rights and of the peculiarities of local economy have brought about a tense situation in the smaller republics which Stalin seeks to "liquidate" by the methods of bureaucratic terrorism.

Since the liquidation of Mdivani, a further drive has been made against the Georgians. Eleven minor executives are

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doomed as a Rightist organization which sabotaged and disrupted socialized agriculture and ordered an armed rebellion and assassinations in Georgia. No doubt the resulting trials will include "confessions" to besmirch the name of Mdivani. Already one Zitlidze, former leader of the Signakh regional committee of the CP, has confessed terrorist orders from the premier Mgaloglishvili, removed from office in June, and from the vice-premier Agnyashvili.

Some Revealing Trials

Stalin must stop the mouths of all those who are capable of revealing the truth about the frame-ups, whether that involves the death of a Yagoda, one of those mainly responsible and "in the know", or of some obscure relative of a Gamarnick or Tukhachevsky who knows the truth and can prove the falsehood. But as the circle widens the number of such people becomes legion and Stalin's task becomes utterly impossible. The truth will out!

Some of the trials take on a macabre comic air. There is the case of the Izvestia editorial writer Suvinsky. Evidently he either took the matter of sabotage seriously or pretended so. When certain bureaucrats in the Saratov region hastened to charge the farm workers with deliberate sabotage (thereby getting the jump on some of these workers who might have been inclined to reverse the charge) Suvinsky defended the maligned workers against the heads of the collectives, saying that they were raising the cry of sabotage to cover their own inefficiency. This was too much for the bureaucracy. It touched home too closely and involved by generalization an exposé of the entire bureaucracy. Hence Suvinsky was hastily removed and arrested.

The motive behind the attack made on the Young Guard Publishing House, producing works for youth, is transparent also. It is stated that the Director Leschner, is a friend of Feinberg, recently removed from the Central Executive Committee of the YCL. That is surely reason enough for removing him. But we learn of a far more important motive: the director of the division of history had spent a whole year writing a biography on Tukhachevsky. Could this have been anything but laudatory? What a danger for the youth to know the truth about the brilliant Tukhachevsky!

Economy & Bureaucracy

In the early stages of planned economy, the bureaucracy, despite all its inefficiency and adventurism, could play a certain "progressive" role by acting to achieve the plans set. The only method they knew, however, was to whip the workers and peasants into over-exhausting and underpaid labor. The speed-up system in its worst forms was adopted quite naturally by the "fists" put in charge of industry. The extreme top layers put added pressure on the layers just below in order to have them apply the proper pressure to the lowest strata. When the pressure became too great and lack of fulfillment might easily lead to the prison cell, if not worse, the lesser bureaucrats and those further up defended themselves by falsifying the accounts to make things appear more rosy. In the present period the mass of falsification

of accounts is reacting sharply against the whole system of planning. The plans were laid on the basis of the swollen figures and were therefore bound to be at variance with the possibilities.

Instead of the amount of coal or cotton figured to enter into the various fields of production, less was available. The top layer of the bureaucracy, which was primarily responsible for creating this situation by its methods, then turned on the lower layers in a fury for having in part misled it. But in doing this, arresting thousands of experts and specialists for "sabotage", the bureaucracy merely disrupted economy all the more by removing (in the process of choosing scapegoats) the ones best acquainted with the industry. Thus we see this peculiar contradiction: the wholesale arrest of scapegoats, and at the same time the attempt to reassure these same elements when they are paralyzed by fear and really sabotage by refusing to take any initiative. Thus on July 27 the Donetsk Basin coal industry had been so disrupted by the imprisonment of so many of the technicians, that 445 of these specialists had to be released from prison for "false arrest" to try and straighten matters out. Stalin learned that the method of choosing scapegoats has its limits!

Nevertheless the bureaucracy can only continue to act in the fashion of a whip. It can in no sense evoke the initiative that has become essential for the carrying on of planned production by the masses. Such initiative can only be exerted against the bureaucracy and in antagonism to it. Precisely because of that the Stalinist bureaucracy has become a tremendous brake on the forces of production. It is also, of course, a tremendous overhead. Not only by its recognized privileges but by the bribery and corruption, and above all by the diverting of all sorts of raw material and finished products for its own purposes. The Stalinist bureaucracy are the true "diversionists"!

Hidden Strikes

The masses are beginning to realize that the bureaucracy stands in the way. Under the present apparatus of suppression the workers have not yet managed to organize themselves independently and to strike against the bureaucracy. But the mass walk-outs in many plants, the tremendous turnovers of labor, take on the character not merely of individual resentment against low wages and frightful conditions, but of a hidden form of strike aimed at the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy finds itself in the sharpest antagonism to the masses of workers and collectivized peasants. It is fearful above everything else that centers may develop around which the masses will rally for political action. Hence Stalin, in the name of the bureaucracy, must act to keep the workers disunited, must establish a completely totalitarian regime.

To create a psychological terror which will prevent one worker from talking frankly to his neighbor, and which will frighten the worker away from any "group", Stalin starts a spy scare campaign. "Russians Are Told Informing Is a Duty". The police regime must establish itself right among the masses! Every worker must learn to distrust his neighbor. Make it difficult for people to visit each other. The

janitors are ordered to remove all names of their tenants so that any visitor must inquire from the janitor where so-and-so lives. And janitors the world over are used by the police. If anybody has too many visitors: he must be a central figure in a spy plot. Report him!

Youth Endangers Stalin

But it is the youth especially that must be watched. The youth that grew up under the Soviet regime and knows no other. Even the Stalinized YCL is a constant source of danger, if only because it permits the youth to come together—and youth can be so engagingly frank! Since the youth cannot be kept entirely apart, the next best thing is to establish the closest surveillance over them. The YCL becomes a tool of the police. Kosariëff performed this function of police agent not so well, hence he is reprimanded and given a warning for next time. Evidently he allowed too much freedom among the youth to suit the apparatus. But freedom and initiative are precisely what the youth demand. Hence the bureaucracy finds itself at every turn in the sharpest antagonism to the younger generation.

The wave of trials in the USSR are clear indications, therefore, of the deep-going crisis through which the Soviet Union is passing. The crisis is one which shows the growing antagonism between the bureaucracy and the masses. It reveals that the bureaucracy can play no progressive role in Soviet economy, but can only serve as a brake on the productive forces. The bureaucracy stands in the way of the initiative of the working masses, it stands in the way of planned economy, it stands in the way of the youth. In order to maintain its power the bureaucracy resorts to an oppressive and bloody police regime worse even than that of Hitler.

Stalin Teaches Hitler

For it teaches Hitler the art of extorting confessions by torture for the purpose of bolstering up a regime. How such confessions are wrung from the victims is heart-rendingly told in the book "I Confess" containing the account of the experiences of the German communist Weiss in the Soviet Union. The entire apparatus of the Stalinist regime, above all the GPU, is devoted to the task of keeping the workers disunited. To terrorize the masses into complete silence Stalin resorts to systematic frame-ups on a scale never before seen in history. These frame-ups, the stock-in-trade of Thermidorean reaction, are used against real and fancied opposition, and also against perfectly innocent victims who are dragged in haphazardly to suit the schemes of the GPU. The earlier frame-ups of the engineers, the Mensheviks, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Trotsky and all the Old Bolsheviks, engendered the need for more and more. The present wave of trials thus gathers momentum, but at the same time represents the death agony of the Stalinist regime. For it indicates that the bloody and oppressive regime comes into more and more violent conflict with the masses and their needs. It is this sharpening conflict that will inevitably bring about the sweeping aside of the Stalinist bureaucracy as outworn, corrupt reactionary to the core.