

# Answers to Questions of Journalists On Verdict of Dewey Commission

By Leon Trotsky

**Question:** If we are to admit that the Moscow trials represent a frame-up then how could Stalin have decided upon such a crime?

**Answer:** We have to distinguish in this matter two aspects, the social and the individual. The bureaucracy, arrived at judicial frame-ups not at one stroke but gradually, in the process of the struggle for domination. Lying and frame-up are lodged in the very essence of the Soviet bureaucracy. In words, it fights for communism. In actuality, it fights for its income, its privileges, its power. With the fright and maliciousness of a social upstart, it exterminates all oppositionists. To justify this mad terror before the people, it is forced to attribute to its victims ever more monstrous and fantastic crimes. Such is the social basis of the Moscow crimes.

However, not by accident has Stalin become the leader of the Moscow bureaucracy. His personal qualities correspond to its political needs. In March 1921 Lenin had already given the advice not to choose Stalin as the General Secretary since, as he put it, "This cook will prepare only

peppery dishes." In his "Testament" (January 1924) Lenin advised that Stalin be removed from the post of General Secretary, invoking the fact that Stalin is rude, disloyal, and has propensities for misuse of power. These personal qualities have greatly developed in Stalin in proportion to the growth of power and the appetite of the bureaucracy. Thus the Kremlin "cook" came to the most peppery "dishes" in the form of the Moscow trials.

One could raise the objection: but a frame-up of such dimensions could not help being revealed in the end, how then could the "cautious" Stalin decide upon such risky actions? To this I answer: (a) he had no other choice; (b) from lesser frame-ups, he gradually went over to big ones; (c) with all his political perspicacity and shrewdness Stalin is very limited and believes in the omnipotence of police violence; (d) Stalin does not know either foreign languages or foreign life. He seriously takes the voices of his agents and every kind of paid friend abroad for the voice of world public opinion. Thus in the end he becomes the victim of his own system.

**Question:** You say that Stalin has become a victim.... but meanwhile the victims appear to be others.

**Answer:** Completely correct. Stalin still has the possibility of exterminating his opponents and not only in the U.S.S.R. but also abroad. For the past year the agents of the GPU have committed a series of murders in Spain, in Switzerland, and in France. One can expect such actions in a series of other countries. These murders, as the recent exposures demonstrate, are also very risky undertakings; however, Stalin has no other choice than adding new victims to the old ones. In that sense your remark is correct. However, in a broader sense, Stalin is the victim of his own system. Those ideas against which he fights gain ever more defenders. The opponents, slandered and murdered by Stalin, will be rehabilitated in world public opinion. For Stalin there is no rehabilitation. It is not a question of the severity of his measures but of their inner falsity and putridness. His system is condemned. Stalin will leave the stage, covered with disgrace.

**Question:** What, according to your opinion, are the possible political consequences of the verdict of the Commission?

**Answer:** I do not, it is understood, expect that the sound of a trumpet, even though it be the trumpet of truth, will immediately cause the walls of Jericho to fall. But, considered from a more lengthy perspective, the decision of the Commission will have tremendous political consequences both in relation to the Comintern and to the Soviet bureaucracy.

The Comintern will suffer in the first place. It is necessary to clearly understand that the apparatus of the Comintern consists of people exactly the opposite to the type of a revolutionist. A real revolutionist has his own self-conquered opinion, in the name of which he is ready to make sacrifices, including even the sacrifice of his life. The revolutionist prepares the future and because of that it is easy for him to endure all sorts of difficulties, deprivations, and persecutions during the present. In counterpoise to this the bureaucrats of the Comintern are full-blown careerists. They have no kind of opinion and subordinate themselves to the orders of the authority which pays them. Since they are agents of the omnipotent Kremlin, each of them feels himself a small "superman." Everything is permitted them.

They lightly libel the honor of others since they have no honor of their own. This organization, completely degenerated and demoralized to the marrow, maintains itself in radical public opinion, including the workers, only through the authority of the Kremlin as the alleged builder of socialist society. The exposure of the role of the Kremlin oligarchy will deliver an irreparable blow to the authority of the Comintern.

On the other hand, the power of Stalin continues not only through violence and bureaucratic inertia but also through his artificial authority as a supposed "leader of the world proletariat." To uphold this reputation in the eyes of the Soviet workers, the Comintern is necessary to Stalin.

The downfall of the Comintern will deliver a severe blow to the positions of the oligarchy inside the U.S.S.R.

**Question:** Who can, in your opinion, replace Stalin?

**Answer:** First of all, I will answer this negatively: in no case bourgeois democracy. Before our eyes bourgeois democracy is tottering even in those countries where it has behind it a long tradition. There can be no talk about its revival in the U.S.S.R. If the Stalinist bureaucracy should be overthrown from the right, then its place will be taken by the most savage and unbridled fascism, alongside of which even the regime of Hitler will look like a philanthropic institution. Such an overturn is possible only as a result of long convulsions, economic chaos, the destruction of nationalized economy and the re-establishment of private ownership. If on the contrary Stalin will be overthrown from the left, i.e. by the working class, then Soviet democracy will take the place of the bureaucracy. Nationalized economy will be preserved and reformed in the interests of the people. Development toward socialism will receive a new powerful impetus.

**Question:** Which of these two is the more probable?

**Answer:** I prefer on this account not to occupy myself with guesses. The outcome will be decided in the struggle. The verdict of the Commission becomes from now on one of the elements of this struggle. It is hard to overestimate its significance. In the eyes of the whole world this verdict clears the left opposition of the U.S.S.R. from the disgusting slander and by that token helps the working class in its struggle against the bureaucracy. The verdict thus heightens the chances for a progressive uprising. In this lies its greatest historical service.

**Question:** From the stenographic Report of the Coyoacan sessions and from the verdict of the Commission, it follows that a series of crude contradictions and incongruities occurred in the Moscow trials. If Stalin himself, the Chief Judge of the Court, Ulrich, prosecutor Vishinsky, the head of the GPU, Yezhov and their helpers occupied themselves with organizing the juridical frame-up, then how could they allow such crude mistakes?

**Answer:** All these people, beginning with Stalin, have become depraved through impunity and lack of control. In the articles and speeches of Stalin we meet at every step not only political contradictions but also the crudest factual distortions, not to speak of the errors in grammar. Since no one dares to criticize him, Stalin has gradually lost the custom of controlling himself. The same is true of the remaining bureaucrats. They do not learn, they do not think, they only order. A totalitarian regime assures the apparent success of orders. The Chief Judge of the Court, the prosecutor, the accused, the defenders, witnesses—all executed an assigned lesson. The newspapers subordinate themselves to the ring of the telephone. There is no discussion, there is no criticism. The people have the right only to give thanks. Under such conditions the

stimulus for good work falls to the ground, even in the sphere of frame-ups.

To this there is added another circumstance of no less importance. The construction of a scheme of alleged conspiracy involving hundreds of people, and not people we meet for the first time, but people known to the whole world, with their own past, with their definite political physiognomies, with their intricate personal ties and relationships,—the construction of such a scheme without crude contradictions in a police office is a problem completely insoluble. Of course, if we assign such a task to a dozen people of the type of Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe, Freud, then they would carry out the task in a much more competent manner than Stalin, Vishinsky and Yezhov. But people of genius, as a general rule, do not occupy themselves with frame-ups. In any case, there have not remained even capable people at the disposal of Stalin. Vishinsky and Yezhov are miserable nonentities. Stalin himself is only a grandiose mediocrity, and at that the grandiosity is due to his historical position and the mediocrity to his own personality. It is not surprising that these people proved doubly impotent before a problem which is insoluble in itself.

**Question:** What is the position of the Soviet ambassador Troyanovsky in relation to the New York Commission?

**Answer:** His position is little to be envied. Diego Rivera told me Saturday: "Troyanovsky has lost his career and, together with the career, perhaps his head." I think that my friend is right. It is true that Troyanovsky has a great advantage: during the revolution he was in the camp of the Whites. But this alone is not sufficient. The most important problem that faced Troyanovsky for the past year was to compel American public opinion to believe in the justice of Stalin. However, nothing came of this. Stalin, as always, needs a scapegoat. One should not be surprised if Troyanovsky were invited to Moscow for "explanations."

Incidentally, if you publish the answer to your question, you can show Troyanovsky a serious service since it will not be easy for Stalin to act in strict accordance with the prediction of Diego Rivera.

**Question:** Do not pessimistic conclusions in regard to socialism flow from the Moscow trials and from the verdict of the Commission?

**Answer:** No, I do not see any basis for pessimism. It is necessary to take history as it is. Humanity moves forward as did some pilgrims: two steps ahead, one step back. During the time of the backward movement, all seems lost to skeptics and pessimists. But this is an error of historical vision. Nothing is lost. Humanity has developed from the ape to the Comintern. It will advance from the Comintern to actual Socialism. The judgement of the Commission demonstrates once more that the correct idea is stronger than the most powerful police force. In this conviction lies the unshakable basis of revolutionary optimism.

Coyoacan, D. F.  
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## Stalin's Cultural Inquisition

By John Glenner

The press reports the fall of one of the greatest figures of the Russian and general contemporary theater, V. E. Meyerhold. The fact that among the accusations one concerns a play with Trotsky as the hero, produced in 1921, under Meyerhold's direction, shows again how Stalin cannot allow those forces which had even the slightest contact with the fighting and victorious revolution to live in any realm of human activity.

### Meyerhold's Genius

Meyerhold has accomplished mighty things in his effort to break through the rigid forms of the traditional theater, to bring them closer to the life of the modern industrial age, and to stimulate the imagination and the participation of the spectator through the simplicity and abrupt contrasts of the scene. If, thereby, he gave preference to classical pieces, it was not only to emphasize these features of his art but also because he was rooted less in the proletarian revolution than in the radical petty-bourgeois intelligentsia.

The victorious revolution, however, proved in Meyerhold's case that it alone can offer unlimited possibilities to these circles for creative expansion. And what a tremendous leap forward could have been accomplished by the combination of pioneering theater-forms with the thematical inspiration of the greatest revolution in world history, unhampered by bureaucratic fetters!

In the International Theater Festival in Moscow in 1934, Meyerhold experienced true triumphs. The sterility of the modern theater in decadent capitalist countries could not but make the novel exploitation of classical themes especially attractive to the foreign visitors. Everything which the modern theater in the Old and New World has since produced in this field has been only a pale image of Meyerhold's art.

But Meyerhold's school was to know another fate in Russia. The reactionary bureaucratic fever of the last years has penetrated rapidly from politics and economics into the domains of cultural expression. Like every parvenu, who tries to conceal the briefness of his career among the privileged, the bureaucracy accomplishes its "adaptation to the West" by insipid imitation of the "solid" bourgeoisie. One need think only of the sad destiny of film-direction (Eisenstein) and the decadence of architecture!

The degradation of young artistic creators into scribblers for the "general line", on the other hand, has, during the last years, inevitably deepened the desire to turn away from present-day themes. When the impulse toward the new was deprived of expression in the word, there remained for it only flight into a revolution of forms.

### Mediocre Uniformity— The Rule

Here also the ever-present Stalinist police-snout sniffed rebellion and protest. And with reason. The Soviet press accuses Meyerhold of "left formalism," of sabotage of Soviet plays, of refusal to "portray Bolshevism" (i.e., Stalin; similarly, Riazanov, the greatest expert on Marx's writings, refused to "portray" Stalin).

If, moreover, we keep in mind that under a regime of totalitarian constraint, many, especially young, elements of the stifled political opposition are pushed into the back-alleys of cultural activity, it would not be astonishing if Meyerhold's school had become, probably against its own will, a little hearth of non-conformism, stamped immediately as "Trotskyite counter-revolution."

With the elimination of Meyerhold, the Stalin regime has taken another step in the adaptation of Soviet society to its own provincial narrowness, in the replacement of originality by mediocre uniformity.