Why the Russian Purge?

by Jay Lovestone

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By JAY LOVESTONE

WHAT is going on in the Soviet Union? Why all these trials, shootings and suicides? Why the terror against workers who have contributed so much to make the revolution? And all this more than twenty years after its victory?

The trials of so many of the founders of the Bolshevik party and the Comintern, the "suicides" and firing-squad justice imposed on so many of the leaders of the Soviet government, have quite naturally aroused the gravest concern in the ranks of the workers of all countries for the fate of the first proletarian state.

These apprehensions multiply and become increasingly intense as the roster of Bolshevik luminaries denounced, dragged thru the mud and executed, continues to mount.

How does all this come about?

Only the most purblind can fail to see that there must be something rotten in the state of Denmark. Unfortunately, in this instance, it is in the Soviet Union. But why?

The explanations given by the Soviet prosecutor in the trial satisfy no one. Really, not even those in the U.S.S.R. who have to choose between saying "yes" to everything and facing a firing-squad at dawn. The answers given by the Stalin-made leaders of the various sections of the Comintern are just as worthless.

The explanation made by the Socialist International theoreticians is that the whole tragedy is the inevitable inherent logic of the principles of Bolshevism, of the theories of Lenin. And Stalin himself hastens to take the same view as the reformists do by insisting—even to the point of the gun—that he is acting as "the best pupil of Lenin"!

We reject without the slightest reservations all these "explanations."

What is the real situation in the U.S.S.R.?

The savage terror against party members who have never been critical of Stalin, against dissenting or dissatisfied party, government, trade-union, economic foreign-affairs and cultural leaders is the expression of the antagonism between the social-economic advance registered in recent years and the obsolete, historically outlived Stalin regime.

Here is a burocratic clique which is trying to perpetuate itself by sheer brute force, barbaric terror, blackest frame-up and wanton blood spilling. The Soviet masses who have lived thru the famine, fought thru the civil war or made great sacrifices insuring heavy industrialization and rural collectivization, now feel that the time has arrived for the expansion of their democratic rights.

They were ready to tighten their belts; they were prepared to submit to the ugly methods of the Stalin leadership and burocratism when they thought that it was all necessary for laying a foundation for socialist economy. Now, these same masses feel that there is no longer any need for restricting their democratic rights and that there is today—especially after the social-economic and cultural advances of recent years—every reason for continuous extension of genuine democracy in the U.S.S.R.

It is these wants and desires of

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the masses that Stalin and Co. have been trying to eradicate and crush. Stalin and his narrowing burocratic clique have sensed this mood of the masses. First, they thought that they could manipulate and derail it by making some concessions. Hence, there were held, for the first time in eight years, elections of local party functionaries. Then, the Soviet Constitution was put forward.

The expanding desires of the masses for more freedom, for an end to the ruthless burocratism and tight regime—as a result of these concessions—frightened Stalin into making a sharp shift towards savage terror. But, by now, many of his closest co-workers were feeling this pressure of the masses for greater democracy and began to reflect it directly or indirectly. It was to be expected that, under a regime which does not permit the solution of issues thru democratic procedure, the opposition may and sometimes does tend—at least in thought and mood if not in deed—to the sharpest measures.

All of this caused Stalin and Yezhov to lose their balance completely and to unleash a blood orgy seldom seen in history. The Kirov assassination—the real origin of which is more mysterious than ever today—was the signal for many thousands of old Bolsheviks "disappearing," for throwing into prison anyone with even half a critical head on his shoulders.

To attempt to examine in detail all the weird charges would be fantastic.

Everyone knows that Gorky had been suffering from tuberculosis for years, and that, during the last years of his life, he did not get along so well with Stalin. That Trotsky was in Italy in 1933 is a crude police fabrication, for Trotsky was then under constant French police surveillance and could not move about freely. Bukharin's opposition to Lenin in regard to the Brest-Litovsk Treaty is very old history in Bolshevik annals. It was after this opposition of his, which did express itself in impermissible forms, that Lenin put Bukharin on the Russian Politburo, that Stalin was only too glad to work closely with him and to put him at the head of the Comintern, make him editor of Pravda and, after a number of "confessions" growing out of subsequent factional conflicts, appoint him editor of Izvestia.

The charge that Trotsky arranged the Arcos raid is a piece of filthy fantasy. The writer has for years been a consistent opponent of Trotskyism. At the Eighth Plenum of the E.C. of the Comintern in July 1927, I saw Trotsky as an active participant and as an openly bitter opponent—in Moscow. It was then that Thaelmann and I appeared before Stalin and Bukharin to demand the expulsion of Trotsky from the C.P.S.U. It was none other than Stalin who then resisted the expulsion of Trotsky—at the very time now alleged that Trotsky was working for the British Secret Service!

If even a fragment of these vile accusations were true, then the G.P.U. has for some years been thoroly incompetent or controlled by imperialist agents, then the C. P.S.U. leadership has been a pack of scoundrels and spies, the Soviet government itself, except for Stalin, of course, largely in the hands of capitalist agents and the Comintern has been led by tools of the ruling class. Incidentally, the present program of the Comintern is in no small measure the work of Bukharin, and the present Soviet Constitution is in a large measure the work of Bukharin and Radek!

It is to the credit of Krestinsky that he was able for even a few hours to stand up and retract the "confession" wrung out of him in the enlightenment chambers of the G.P.U. and its present genius, Yezhov. Great credit is due to Bukharin for the way he threw back into the teeth of the bloodthirsty Vishinsky the insane charge of espionage.

It is only out of sheerest despair and shattered spirit, out of blind loyalty to the party as the symbol of a faith, only after many months of police inquisition that the so-called confessions were manufactured.

At that, this method of confession has its roots in historical peculiarities and a psychology that is specifically Russian. Nor is it an accident that Yaroslavsky in the London Daily Worker of March 3, 1938, boasts, and the indictment itself declares that, "all the accused have been convinced of their crime. . . ." Who "convinced" them? What methods were employed to "convince" the accused?

We must confess that Stalin has succeeded in soiling the fine name of the Bolshevik party in the eyes of many. We must further confess that this terror regime has rendered inestimable service to fascism in particular and to capitalist reaction in general. But, notwithstanding Stalin, Vishinsky and Yezhov, we deny categorically that Lenin was the leader of a pack of spies and that the Russian revolution was the handiwork of German, Japanese, British and Polish imperialist agents.

Far be it from us to deny the gravity of the crisis and the counter-revolutionary features of Stalin's present mad course. But of one thing we are convinced—and here is our hope: The economic advances towards socialism must, sooner or later, have their appropriate political expressions or manifestations. Progress towards socialism on the social-economic field cannot for long continue without progress towards socialism on the political field. Stalin is burning up his political capital with the masses of the U.S.S.R. and the international workers movement.

The working-class movement outside the Soviet Union must leave nothing undone to hasten the dawn of a better day in the U.S. S R.—to bring to an end a savage regime unworthy of a free working class and of a socialist state.

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to take over the plant, offer to pay just compensation in cash payments spread over a period of ten years and attempt to produce and sell oil. The companies have responded with an international boycott of Mexican oil and an attempt at a financial raid thru the cutting off of silver purchases. But here, too, the Mexican government has so far shown firmness and foresight. A week in advance, it untied the peso from the dollar and began coining silver pesos in quantity to redeem paper money in silver.

The United States government, while playing its imperialist role,