# The Soviet "Purge"

*by August Thalheimer*

*(concluded from last issue)*

IF, in recent years, Stalin and his circle have used ever more severe methods of terror against certain sections of the party and of the administration, we must conclude from this that the opposition elements against this system built up by Stalin have increased, that they threatened the system, and that the people, who have been sacrificed to this terror, were giving expression to this opposition or were considered as possible leaders of it. The contradiction between, on the one hand, the economic and social development of the Soviet Union and, on the other, the political superstructure (as it had definitely become under Stalin's leadership), must have become evident and have grown greatly.

### Source Of Contradiction

Whence this contradiction?

From the very successes in socialist reconstruction themselves! The material conditions of the working masses in the Soviet Union still leave much indeed to be desired, but, in the course of the Second Five-Year Plan, the coarsest and crudest need disappeared. The feeding of the great masses was assured. At the same time, however, these masses developed culturally. In the school of big industry, of industrialized agriculture, and directly in the schools themselves, they acquired all kinds of knowledge, abilities, capacities, and, therewith of course, other requirements too. These masses no longer want just bread and games. They want a mitigation of political oppression; they want democratic self-determination and control; and today they have the ability for that in a far higher measure than some ten or fifteen years ago. They want this democracy and this control on a socialist basis in the frame of the Soviet state.

And here they came up against and still come up against the Stalinist system of oriental satraps. They had suffered this system for a long time, as long as it seemed to them to be still an unavoidable evil. Now, however, it appears in an ever-growing measure as a hindrance. Inside the party and in the state administration, this contradiction has found expression in one way or another. The Stalinist terror suppresses it. The increased severity of the terror, as seen in the "trial of the twenty-one," gives a clear indication of the fact that this contradiction and this opposition are becoming more acute.

The quite natural question arises: Are there facts, and what facts, which indicate that the opposition to the Stalinist regime has increased?

It is here that, thru the hermetic isolation of the Soviet Union, we are most in the dark.

It was always difficult even for members of the C.P. in the Soviet Union to get acquainted with the real mood and movement of the masses in that country. Today, it is ten or a hundred times more difficult. For foreigners and non-party members it is almost impossible. How can it be otherwise where the most fearsome terror suppresses the slightest word of criticism—yes, even the merest grumble or expression of dissatisfaction? Terror is intimidation. The masses are still silent. A leaden silence is entrenched thruout the Soviet Union. For any person who knows the Soviet Union, the mass resolutions which "enthusiastically" agree with the terror sentences signify nothing at all. They are extorted by the pressure of hunger, just as the Byzantine hymns of praise to the great and small leaders are extorted.

### The Mood Of The Masses

The condition of the masses, as is plain from the reports which we have at our disposal, is one of an ever-growing bitterness, at the same time, however, one of great perplexity. To all appearances there is no organized opposition; the Trotskyists, Bukharinists, etc., no longer have real organizations —these have long been exploded and there remains only a loose, social connection. The opposition against the regime is, for the present, still formless, both organizationally and politically.

Precisely because the opposition is formless, the Stalinist terror is, after all, like a blow into water. The real enemy of Stalinism is invisible and intangible—but omnipresent. The "conspiracies" that Stalin has "discovered" thru the G.P.U., and has extirpated partly by it and partly by his courts of justice, are crude police inventions.

But, behind these clumsy and cynical inventions, there exists a reality which escapes police methods: "sabotage," etc., are not acts of individuals or of organized groups—they are mass phenomena. Passive opposition is the instinctive answer of the broad masses to the Stalinist regime. And the fury of Stalin points to the conclusion that this mass opinion in some form or other must have found supporters in both the party and the administration, as far up as in the highest party and Soviet courts, in the Polburo, in the Central Committee, among military leaders, economists, and so on.

Stalin cannot put his finger on the particular force which is concerned here. Hence, there are always new and ever wilder blows, new and ever more absurd inventions. Stalin is the organizational monomaniac, who dashes to pieces "organizers" of "organizations" which are non-existent and which have been invented by his police. Yet there is something there which is much more dangerous and which, perhaps because of these blows against the old oppositional names and leaders, against the old revolutionary cadres of the party, grows all the stronger—the drive of the broad masses towards independent activity and their capacity for such activity. That is the real thing against which the terror is directed, that is the only power which can really conquer the present system.

The Asiatic satrap class at the key points of the party and Soviet administration, like the incompleteness of the independence of the masses, which has allowed this system to evolve, is, however, not merely the product of the developments since the October Revolution. Its roots spread beyond into the peculiar circumstances of Russian history in the last eight centuries, but it is not possible here to go further into this particular aspect.

### The Questions Answered

In the light of what has been said, the answers to the editorial questions present themselves as follow:

1. The explanation of the crisis in the Soviet Union is as much social as political and personal.

2. The causes of the terror are within the Stalinist regime and are not temporary; they have become lasting. The terror will therefore end only with the fall of this regime. This system of power no longer depends only on the person of Stalin. After creating the system, Stalin has become the mere tool of it. The system is no longer merely personal. Stalin cannot go back now. For it is clear that the first act of the masses from whom the pressure of the terror is removed would have to be to settle accounts with those who have sacrificed hundreds of thousands of men to a physical and moral terror which is without parallel in the whole of history (even in Russian history), and who have held the people for years under the leaden yoke of a murderous and barbarous horror. Stalin and his group are fighting for their heads. They know that. And for this reason they are letting other heads fall.

3. The result of this regime, as is already evident, is a growing disorganization in economics, in administration, in the army and in cultural life. All creative initiative is stifled under such a system. Everybody fears responsibility. All the more, therefore, must the oppression of the central administrative power be strengthened—and all the less powerful does it become. The over-centralization above corresponds to anarchy below. Both increase simultaneously. Finally this regime, engaged in self-destruction, turns against its own organization of force. That, too, has begun already, as is shown in the "trial of the twenty-one," which, from the point of view of the technique of the police and of the tribunal, is just a deplorable piece of bungling.

The longer this regime lasts, and the longer it rages, the more it threatens the existence of the Soviet power itself and the more destructively does it operate in the international working-class movement.

# *Cardenas Regime and Needs of Mexican Masses*

*(Continued from Page 3)*

for Mexico's labor movement, a leadership which would tie the labor movement more closely to him.

Simultaneously he began in earnest to tackle some of the problems created for him by Calles and his court of intriguers.

First claim on his concern was the hostility of the Church. Cardenas prevented the execution of the harshest laws against the Church and arranged for the courts to "revise" the legal seizures of Church lands—and the Church tension grew immediately less.

To consolidate his peasant following, Cardenas speeded up the and-distribution program. In the first two years of his administration, he awarded close to 5 million hectares of land to over 3,000 villages. Thus, he alone distributed over half as much land as all the administrations before him put together. Yet, tho his land distribution has continued steadily, it would be mistaken to believe that the Mexican agrarian problem is approaching solution. It is not. In the first place, only the larger villages have received land thus far; but over two-thirds of rural life in Mexico does not fall under the classification of village and therefore is not entitled to land grants at all. In the second place, in order to make these land grants yield an adequate livelihood to the peasant, funds and machinery are necessary for the proper irrigation and the development of the land. This, due to the essential poverty of the central government, has in the main been lacking. One or two show-places, like the Laguna region, do not alter this fact. And, in those strategic regions where funds were made available thru hastily formed agrarian banks, the burocrats put in charge of these institutions have robbed right and left, have enriched themselves, while the peasant remains in the same distressed economic condition as before. At this very moment, the whole system of corruption and abuse in the agrarian banking setup is under investigation.

In the third place, Cardenas has not really planned to expropriate the large landed estates to satisfy the land hunger of Mexico's peasant masses. All that he has done is to carve off and trim the great estates and generally he has chosen only the poorest lands.

In the fourth place, the land is not being confiscated except in such instances where original robbery can be proved with legal documents. And, of some 2,000 distributions, less than 100 cases have been "restitution" of stolen land.

### Landowners Retain Power

In the fifth place, as long as the economic power of the landowners is not being seriously disturbed, they can continue to rule and control politics. As recently as last year, for example, over 40 peasants in the State of Yucatan were strung up on lamp-posts and two score or more in the State of Vera Cruz. The "crime" of both of these groups was active agitation for land or for a higher living wage, which even today often reaches the munificent level of from 25 to 30 cents (Mexican) a day. Almost overnight, a photograph of this gruesome lynching appeared simultaneously on every wall and kiosk of the capital. The names of those guilty were passed by word of mouth so that, in one day, the entire population knew who they were. But was any investigation ordered or any prosecution undertaken? No! The political power of the hacendados is still too strong to permit the criminal assassins to be punished!

And these same hacendados, when pieces of their lands have been carved off, are still powerful enough to collect payment, often in cold cash, sometimes from the recipients of the land and sometimes in agrarian bonds which the government accepts in payment of taxes. It is obvious from these facts that the Mexican agrarian problem, despite progress within narrow and carefully marked-off limits, is still a long way from a satisfactory solution. All claims to the contrary are conscious deception.

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*(Another article, dealing with the labor policy of the Cardenas regime, will appear in the next issue of this paper.*—Editor.)


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