

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RUSSIAN TRIALS

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THE sensational trials resulting in the execution of once powerful makers of the Revolution, as well as the shooting without trial of persons in high places in the Soviet hierarchy, make us wonder what are the real political conditions within the Soviet Union. This is an attempt to reconstruct the background against which these events must be considered.

If statements of the official Soviet press are accepted at their face value, the picture is clear. The Party (throughout this article the "Party" stands for the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R.), under the wise direction of the "father of nations", "genius of all ages", the "leader of world's proletariat", etc. etc., the "beloved comrade" Stalin, succeeded in constructing a "classless society" in the country of "completed Socialism" and thereby achieved almost perfect stabilization in the social, economic and political life of the U.S.S.R. Since a political party, according to Communist interpretation, is a manifestation of a class, the classless Soviet Union cannot have parties, and the Communist "party" is actually a group of the most progressive and active citizens, destined to be leaders. That was the rôle assigned to the Communist Party by the "Stalin" Soviet Constitution; seemingly it heralded the advent of a new era in the political life of the Union, and it appeared to confirm the validity of the official claim to established social harmony.

All of a sudden, the calm skies of the Soviet "happy land" were darkened with ominous disturbances. All well-wishers of the Russian people began to fear that the harmony may not be as complete as the official press has so eloquently and so loudly declared. The statements made by Molotov and Stalin at the plenary session of the Party's Central Committee held in February and March, 1937, as well as developments in recent months, substantiated the fear. From Stalin's own statement we learn that: "... the wrecking and spying activities of agents of foreign states, among whom the Trotskyists played a pretty active part, affected in a greater or lesser degree all, or nearly all, our economic, as well as political and party organizations". And from the discussions of "wrecking

activities", to which the whole session was largely devoted, we clearly see that actually all links of the Soviet social structure are permeated with subversive activities of "wreckers", "spies", and other "enemies" of the Soviet State. Not only was the conception of social harmony thus dispersed, but it became obvious that the statements by the official press of placid contentment within the Union could not be accepted uncritically. From this source, therefore, it is impossible to construct an unbiassed picture of internal conditions. The recent trials in particular have been subject to a very partial interpretation by the Soviet press, and therefore the statements concerning them must be scrutinized very rigidly before they can be accepted.

More specifically, the reasons why the official explanations of the recent trials cannot be uncritically accepted may be summed up in these two respects. First is the purely juridical aspect of the trials. Entirely apart from considerations of the whole system of Soviet justice, and apart from our complete inability to reconcile the spectacular confessions, self-indictments and demands for their own deaths by the accused, with free and unforced trials, there are a few cases in which it was possible to prove inaccuracy in certain factual evidence presented at the trials. In the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial one of the accused (E. S. Goltzman, an "old Bolshevik"), giving evidence referring to 1932, said: "I arranged with Sedov (son of Trotzky) that in two or three days I should go to Copenhagen to stay in the *Hotel Bristol* and to meet him there. I went direct from the station to the hotel and met Sedov in the lobby"; and later in the evidence, describing his conversation with Trotzky, he said: "Very frequently the son of Trotzky, Sedov, came into and went out of the room." A check of this evidence revealed that an *Hotel Bristol* does not exist in Copenhagen, that there had formerly been an *Hotel Bristol*, but it was closed in 1917, and the very building in which it had been operated was demolished. Never in his life had Sedov visited Copenhagen. In the Radek-Piatakov trial, evidence was given that Piatakov flew from Berlin to Oslo to see Trotzky, while according to flying records not a single aeroplane flew from Berlin to Oslo in that winter month to which the evidence referred. And we still remember the trial of the so-called "industrialist party" of some years ago, during which reference was made to conversations with the Chairman of that party, Ryabushinsky, who was dead at the time to which the evidence referred. These are only a few of those points which have been checked and proved inaccurate, but they will suffice to justify a skeptical attitude towards the juridical conduct of the trials.

The other aspect is a political one. All the confessions at the trials centred around plotting instigated by Trotzky for the restoration of capitalism; dissolution of the collective and State farms; introduction of private ownership; concessions to international capital for the exploitation of Russian resources; dismembering of Soviet territory; terroristic acts against leaders of the Party and the Government; wrecking activities in all corners of the Union and in all phases of its life with the object of overthrowing the Soviet régime. All this is embraced in the term "Trotzkyism" as used in the Soviet vocabulary of to-day. Stalin gave it an exhaustive definition when speaking at the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Party. He said: "Trotzkyism underwent . . . a profound evolution which has radically changed its face. . . . From a political movement within the working class as it was seven or eight years ago, Trotzkyism is now in the hands of riffraff and an unprincipled gang of wreckers, spies and murderers who are acting on instructions received from the intelligence service of foreign States." "Trotzkyism" was described in the Soviet press as "the bitterest enemy of Socialism, peace and democracy," while Stalin's policy was proclaimed the only safeguard of the purity of the principles of the October Revolution. Actually any opposition to Stalin is being termed "Trotzkyism," and this implies that opposition to the party policy is denied any "ideological" merits; it is considered as coming from a "gang of murderers" and is being dealt with accordingly. Being so interpreted, Trotzkyism has, of course, no chance to defend itself before the Soviet citizen.

To understand the validity of these accusations, it is necessary to listen to what Trotzkyism is saying in its own defence. Individual Trotskyists may of course express views which are not shared by the movement as a whole; they may be left out of account, however, at the present moment. It is the statements of the leaders through the official organ (*Bulletin of the Opposition—Bolsheviks-Leninists—published in Paris*) that must be taken if one desires to appraise the controversy and the validity of the interpretation of Trotzkyism made by Stalin. First of all, if the Trotzkyism of seven or eight years ago was a "movement", the Trotzkyism of to-day must also be accorded the same honourable status of a political movement, if ideals and methods are to be taken as criteria. So little have these latter been changed, so surprisingly little, that it seems almost incredible that the experience gained from the revolution failed to produce any impression upon them. The reaction of the *Bulletin of the Opposition* to the baiting

of "Trotzkyism" in Russia takes the form of an attack on Stalin. The terms of this attack are actually the same as those hurled at Trotzkyism by Stalin. The difference in the official positions of Stalin and the *Bulletin* explains the difference in the consequences: while "Trotzkyism" is being physically destroyed in Russia, the voice of the *Bulletin* is hardly heard by the reading public of the civilized world.

The gist of the accusations hurled by the *Bulletin of the Opposition* at Stalin is that by betraying the October Revolution he has led Russia into an impasse. In particular the *Bulletin* contends that in spite of the statements by Stalin that "Socialism" has been built up in Russia and social "classes" abolished, never before was economic and social inequality so conspicuous a feature of the Soviet Union as it is now, and this inequality increases with each passing year. "Socialism is built up" and consequently the coercive rôle of the State must be diminishing, but, the *Bulletin* alleges, never before in Russian history has repression had such a universal and cruel application as now, and that directed chiefly against the proletariat. The proletariat is pitted against the newly created bureaucratic classes which divert from the proletariat enormous portions of the national income. The *Bulletin* accuses Stalin of retreating from the October Revolution in very many departments of life, and of creating a class of bureaucrats which actually steers the ship of state directly away from the "October". The only serious obstacle to this retreat is presented by the Bolsheviki-Leninists, or the Trotzkyists. Hence Stalin's policy of discrediting Trotzkyism by demagogical and terroristic methods, and by physical destruction of persons in influential positions in the Trotzkyist movement.

It is not difficult to see that so far as the "retreat from the October" or the "betrayal of the October Revolution" is concerned, Stalin's position is indefensible and the charges of the *Bulletin* have real grounds in the changes in Soviet Russia during the last two or more years. The legalization of small private enterprises in industry and agriculture; the strengthening of the piece-work principle in remuneration of labour; the re-introduction of ranks in the Army and Navy; the introduction of the principle "Socialism in one country" and a harmonious co-operation with capitalist countries; the instilling of sentimental local patriotism in youth and the rise of strong nationalistic sentiment—these and many other changes indicate plainly the departure from the principles proclaimed at the beginning of the Revolution. It is possible to argue that these changes were introduced to satisfy the demands of

rising public opinion, or were dictated by international relations. It is justifiable to say that the Union's internal as well as external policies of recent years have become more realistic and less adventurous. It is also safe to say that these changes, or at least the direction of these changes, met with the approval of the masses, and that if there is any regret on their part, it is that these changes did not go far enough. But Stalin's retreat from the "October" is unmistakable. The Trotzkyists of the *Bulletin* are ready to admit that there has been progress in the economic life of the U.S.S.R., but they think that it has been too slow, and they ascribe this retardation to the departure from the original principles of the Revolution. Hence the remedy they offer is to return to the "October", to establish a "permanent revolution", and to instigate revolutions in other countries of the world.

This very cursory analysis of the controversy between the two factions of the Communist Party renders untenable accusations made at the trials, and compels us to make a further search for an adequate explanation of these occurrences. The clue to understanding is provided in Molotov's address delivered on February 28th, 1937. He said, in part:

The peculiar characteristic of the sabotage as it has been uncovered at the present time is the fact that men with party tickets, the deserters from our party, play an active part in the wrecking organizations. A particular danger of the present wrecking organizations lies in the fact that these wreckers, "diversionists" and spies pretend to be Communists, very warm supporters of the Soviet Government and are, not infrequently, credited even with services to the party and to the Soviet State. This facilitates their deceit of our organs, and our leaders, particularly those who suffer from carelessness and political short-sightedness. It has been established, however, that not only have Trotzkyists merged with bourgeois wreckers and intelligence service agents of Fascist and other foreign States, but they became direct organizers and leaders of wrecking, "diversion", and espionage. Pretending to be Communists, putting on the disguise of our friends, they managed to occupy most conspicuous posts in the Soviet administration and in party organizations in order to carry on their criminal work more effectively. Trotzkyists transformed into a gang of wreckers and murderers working for foreign States and fulfilling tasks of Fascist intelligence service.

The significance of this statement lies in the assertion that "wrecking" activities at the present emanate from the very stronghold of the Soviet State—from its Communist Party.

Indeed there have been many trials in the U.S.S.R. not less sensational than the recent ones. The main feature by which the

recent trials differ from their predecessors is that the accused were men with whose names the success of the Revolution has been inseparably associated, and whose contributions to Communistic thought are second only to Lenin's. Another novel feature is the fact that opposition within the party was dealt with so drastically. This is contrary to one of Lenin's commandments written by him in expectation of death. This commandment warned his followers not to court self-destruction by resorting to execution of oppositionists within the Party. Stalin had heeded this warning until quite recent years. It is true that there had been cases when followers of Trotzky and Mensheviks were executed, but they were put to death not for their opposition but for gross neglect of duties with which they had been entrusted.

It is in the light of these two novel features that the recent trials should be examined.

The first difficulty, a formidable difficulty one must admit, is to penetrate the thick veil of secrecy with which the doings within the Party are clothed, to hide them from all but the few high priests of Communism faithful to Stalin. Some future historian, to whom all the archives will be made accessible, will systematically relate the truth to an astonished world. We contemporaries are denied this opportunity. Such help as we can get in the attempt to understand Russian events comes from sporadic windfalls of several kinds. There are times when Soviet leaders, in the heat of oratory, say things which they had not intended to say; these slips may be denied later, or given certain interpretations, or the speaker may be rebuked for them, but as Russians say: "A word is not a sparrow: if once let loose, it is never to be caught again." Another source is the stories we hear from those foreign Communists who were delegated by their countries to represent them at the Third International. Believing that the principles of freedom of thought and speech were upheld in the U.S.S.R., they indulged in outspoken "self-criticism" and criticism of the Communist Party from within. Some of them had to flee from Russia to escape punishment for their naiveté. Occasionally Russian Communists escape, or do not return to Russia after having been sent abroad on some mission; they then tell their reasons for preferring the "Capitalist prison" to the "Communist freedom," and thus help us to understand aspects otherwise obscured from our vision. Finally, there are occasionally placed at the public disposal important items of information which even the future historian will be advised to consult. They are rare observations by "old Bolsheviks" who, because of their long standing as members of the Party, have been in

positions of trust. They therefore had opportunities to know the "behind the scenes" motives governing the course of history. Such is, for instance, the letter of "An Old Bolshevik" (in the "Socialist Messenger" — *Sozialistichesky Vestnik* — central organ of the Russian Social Democratic Party, Nos. 379-380 and 381-382, published in Paris, France) which treats with a scholarly impartiality the recent policies of the Communist Party in Russia. This letter has been extensively drawn upon in what follows.

The end of 1932 and the beginning of 1933 was a very difficult period for Stalin. The poor crop of 1932 caused famine in some and near-famine in other districts of the Union. Not only were peasants affected by the shortage of food, but also the industrial workers, as a rule better off than the peasants, were placed on a curtailed food ration. An appalling inefficiency of labour was the natural result, and everybody knew that the low productiveness of labour was caused by malnutrition and not by sabotage. Widespread concern over the situation within the Party led to discussions of possible remedial measures. The general trend of the discussion was that Stalin's policy of collectivization in agriculture had set the peasants against the Party; to save the situation, Stalin must be removed from his position of authority and an internal policy giving more consideration to the peasants' interests must supersede Stalin's policy. Many written suggestions of actions and policies were circulated. One of these programmes, by Rutin, enjoyed particular popularity. The wide interest in it was evoked not by anything new so far as the general policies were concerned, for in this respect it did not differ materially from many others circulated at the time, but by the fact that more than fifty pages out of about two hundred were devoted to personal attacks on Stalin, to an evaluation of his activities in the Party, and to the belief that recovery was impossible so long as Stalin was at the helm. There was a great deal of talk about this programme, and it is not to be wondered that soon it appeared on Stalin's desk. The author did not deny his authorship, and was condemned to death by the G.P.U., but because he was an old party member and credited with many contributions to the cause of the revolution, he was under the protection of Lenin's commandment not to inflict violent punishments; and his case was referred to the all-powerful Politbureau (Political Committee of the Communist Party, which was instituted shortly after the Revolution and which gives general direction to the Party's policies). Stalin supported the G.P.U., but met with strong opposition led by Kirov, who was definitely against the death sentence. Stalin was careful; he preferred to avoid an open breach within the Politbureau,

and yielded. The life of the author was saved, but everybody was aware that the issue raised in connection with this case would have to be faced again, sooner or later.

The summer and autumn of 1935 brought a turning-point for the Stalin régime. Undoubtedly Stalin understood that a further crop failure would decide his fate. Dissatisfaction in the Party and in the country was too great to risk a continued shortage of food, so he mobilized all the resources at his command and concentrated upon the sowing and harvesting campaigns. He was favoured with luck:—the crop of that year was good. That had a very deep psychological effect. Even those who saw gloomy prospects for the future recognized the success of Stalin, and it was at this period that the general policy with which Stalin's name is inseparably associated was accepted by the general membership of the Party. Stalin won! How did this affect the internal policies of the Party?

Meantime the international relations of the Soviets underwent a profound change. Germany, a traditional ally of Soviet Russia against western democracies, almost from the time of the Versailles Treaty, changed her attitude radically with the advent of National Socialism. At first the Soviet politicians looked upon the Hitler ascendancy as a temporary phenomenon, and certainly did not believe that both France and Great Britain would allow Germany to violate the terms of the Versailles Treaty. As it was, however, Germany gradually liberated herself from the terms imposed by the Treaty, and committed herself to the strengthening of her military power. Once more the threat of the German *Drang nach Osten* received a tangible backing. Slowly, and entirely against their wishes, the Soviet politicians came to realize the need of revising the international alignment of Russia. It required a great deal of self-suppression to knock humbly at the door of those whom they had so loudly denounced as "imperialistic sharks"; but the rapprochement with Great Britain and France and membership in the League of Nations meant more: it required respect for the democratic principles of these countries not only in international relations but at least to some extent in internal policies. So this volte-face in Russia's foreign policy was beset with many political and psychological difficulties, but being the least of two evils it had to be chosen.

The man who gave expression to these new ideas was Kirov, who lived at Leningrad at that time. He was an uncompromising supporter of the prevailing policies of the Party. He was very active during the first five-year plan, and he certainly could not



have been accused of being too scrupulous in regard to human life. Under his direct jurisdiction was the construction of the canal connecting the White and Baltic Seas, with the notorious concentration camp ("Belmorlag") in the North. He inspired punitive expeditions against peasants during the dark days of general collectivization. On many occasions he demonstrated very convincingly his loyalty to the "party general line," which term actually meant a policy supported by Stalin, and his readiness to employ the ruthless methods of "liquidation" of all those who in some form or other showed their disapproval. Stalin could not afford to neglect all these qualities, but at the same time he did not like the spirit of independence with which Kirov was richly endowed. He was obviously irritated by the stubbornness which Kirov displayed on many occasions. Perhaps for this reason Kirov was not invited to many meetings of the Politbureau, though his absence was invariably explained by an urgent need of his presence in Leningrad at the time the meeting was held. In Leningrad Kirov enjoyed spectacular popularity among the party members; he also managed to surround himself with men who were truly loyal to him. An open breach with him would certainly have been undiplomatic, to say the least.

By the winter of 1933-34 Kirov's position was so firm that he could indulge in the liberty of inaugurating his own "line" of policy. The main features of this "line" were a political alignment with western democracies, participation in the League of Nations in the sphere of international relations, and a conciliatory attitude towards all classes within the Union. After the victory of Stalin and his policy, he thought that no irreconcilable enemies were left in the country, and that a lenient policy would bring about complete domestic peace. In particular he advocated reconciliation with those party members who were serving terms of punishment for opposition. This programme of Kirov had conspicuous success within the Party, particularly among the most prominent members, and Stalin did not oppose it, at least openly. Stalin's attitude is explained, in part, by the fact that he was under the very strong, and on the whole very wholesome, influence of Gorky, who was in complete agreement with Kirov's programme. To show how widely Kirov's programme was accepted, it may suffice to say that under the direct influence of Kirov's ideas Kamenev, Zinoviev and many other former critics of Stalin's policy were re-instated as members of the Party in the summer of 1933, and were given the opportunity to select work according to their own desires.

Kirov's popularity was growing by leaps and bounds, and everything possible was done by his friends to demonstrate the fact.

His appearance at the Party Conference in February 1934 was marked with thunderous applause, and he was re-elected to the Politbureau and a secretary of the Central Committee of the Party. He was to take over directorship of many important departments occupied at the time by Kaganovich and Postyshev. After the Conference he was to go to Leningrad to wind up his duties there, to install his successor, and return to Moscow to take up permanent residence. There was a great deal of talk and speculation among the members of the Conference as to who received the more enthusiastic applause, Kirov or Stalin; although there can be no doubt that Stalin was accorded a more imposing ovation than Kirov, yet the very fact that they were compared is significant, and indicates the position occupied by Kirov in the Party.

Meantime Kirov's new ideas were gaining ground steadily; even some of the "irreconcilable" oppositionists, such as Rakovsky, yielded and pledged their loyalty to the Party leaders. This was considered as a great success. A chance to test the new policy presented itself in the spring of 1934. The G.P.U. (now known officially as the N.K.V.D.—*People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs*) reported the discovery of several youth-groups—university students and members of the Komsomol—who at their meetings discussed the possibility of terroristic acts against certain members of the Party. No terroristic acts were actually charged to these groups; they were charged with discussion, and rather vaguely at that, of the way in which a party opposition can assert itself. The general attitude was that in view of the complete absence of party democracy, and the actual suppression of the Soviet constitution, terroristic acts were the only recourse of the opposition. Before the advent of the new policy that charge would have been sufficient to invoke the death sentence, but in view of the new policy the G.P.U. was asking for a ruling. It may be possible, as some suggested, that this report was made on the instruction of Stalin and his followers, who wanted to test how far the Politbureau would go in its liberalism. At any rate, the Politbureau, after having considered the Report, gave out rather flexible instructions recommending the individual consideration of each case and permitting capital punishment only in extreme cases where the "incurability" of the accused was proved beyond any doubt. The result of this was that those accused of discussing terrorism were given comparatively light sentences; concentration camps, the more rigid disciplined "isolators", and exile to some far off settlements.

The popularity of Kirov reached its climax at the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Party, held in November,

1934. The Central Committee was to work out practical measures to implement the resolutions passed at the Party Conference earlier in the year. Kirov was the chief speaker, his suggestions were enthusiastically accepted, and he was the "hero" of the day. He still resided in Leningrad. His moving to Moscow was postponed under the pretext that no suitable successor could be found to take his place in Leningrad. That delay irritated the Central Committee, and they passed a motion that Kirov be moved to Moscow within a few weeks and, in any case, before the following New Year (1935). He was to direct work in *all* branches of the Party which are connected with the "ideology" of the system. After the session was over, Kirov went to Leningrad intending to remain there a very short time, sufficient to enable him to appoint a successor and to return to Moscow. Shortly after, and almost on the eve of his departure to Moscow, he was killed by a certain Nikolayev. This assassination marked the end of one and the beginning of another period of Soviet political life.

Who was this Nikolayev, and what were the motives which led to the assassination of Kirov? As a young man of about sixteen, he joined the Red Army at the very beginning of the Civil War; he was enrolled since 1920 in the Communist Party, and although he does not seem to have been very active, yet he retained membership in it until the assassination. Between 1929 and 1933 he was absent from Leningrad; the Party sent him to the Murman District, where he occupied an insignificant position in connection with the supervision of compulsory labour camps. After his return to Leningrad, he had some connection with the G.P.U., but this side of his activities has been carefully concealed by the official reports. Since his return to Leningrad at the beginning of 1933 he kept a diary, into which he entered very out-spokenly all that interested him. Life outside the Party did not seem to interest him at all. It was not so much the political aspect of the party life that interested him; what he valued most of all was the comradely, almost brotherly, relation between the members of the Party, which were particularly noticeable in the early years after the Revolution. After his absence from Leningrad he found that bureaucratic formalism had taken the place of the brotherly spirit of the early period, and this formalism was growing. He yearned for the return of those vanished relations that were so dear to him. He had several collisions with members who were senior to him in the Party, and could not accept this new atmosphere. Something heroic had to be done, in his opinion, to stem and reverse these new tendencies. Personal terrorism seemed to him to be the proper means by which

to draw the attention of the membership to this most undesirable turn in Party relations. In private conversation with members he expressed these views many times, and the G.P.U. knew of them only too well. At the moment of the assassination a statement was found upon Nikolayev in which he explained the motives of his act.

It was thus obvious that Kirov's was a political assassination. But it was difficult to understand why Kirov should be assassinated by a representative of the opposition to which he was just then extending the olive branch, and just on the eve of his departure to Moscow to implement the new policy of reconciliation. Therefore a version was circulated that Nikolayev was a tool in the hands of a foreign Government unfriendly to the Soviets. Many of those who were suspected as being in touch with that Government were arrested, and many of them were killed. However, this version of foreign interference did not gain ground, and was not stated officially.

Stalin did not give any directions in the case of Nikolayev. He went to Leningrad to give personal supervision to the investigation, which was entrusted to Agranov, one of the most reliable of Stalin's entourage. The investigation followed two main lines: first, to find the accomplices and instigators of Nikolayev's crime and, second, to settle the question of the guilt of the Leningrad Branch of the G.P.U. in not preventing the crime. The second matter was very slippery indeed. Nikolayev almost boasted that he would do some terroristic act, as the G.P.U. knew, and yet no steps were taken to prevent his approach to Kirov. Was it just an omission? Or criminal neglect of duties? Or, perhaps, done deliberately? If so, who would gain by the removal of Kirov from the Soviet political scene? This latter question was not put openly, but unquestionably it was hinted at in many conversations. The leaders of the Leningrad G.P.U. could exonerate themselves from the charge of a criminal neglect of duties by referring to many verbal and written instructions received from Kirov to be more tolerant and not to irritate the opposition, as well as by referring to the general trend in party policies which was rapidly gaining ground just before the assassination of Kirov.

The investigation then concentrated on finding accomplices and instigators. It was obvious from Nikolayev's diary, from the statement found on him, and from investigation, that there was no one else who could be directly or indirectly involved in the act or in the preparation of it. Nikolayev acted altogether independently. But long ago the conception of an accomplice or instigator had been broadened to include not only those who directly or indirectly

participated in the act, but also those who were morally responsible and who, by throwing out ideas which might have given rise to the opposition movement, paved the way for the crime. Having defined instigation and complicity in this broad manner, it was not difficult to find any number of people responsible for the crime. Agranov, with all his indomitable detective energy, pushed the investigation along this line.

In the diary which figured so prominently in the investigation, Nikolayev described dissatisfaction within the Party. The dissatisfied elements were former oppositionists who once occupied high places, but lost them and served terms according to the degree of their opposition. With the advent of the new liberal policy, they returned to Leningrad, but not to the positions they once held. They had no organization of any kind, but naturally they met occasionally and exchanged thoughts, news, rumors, gossips, maybe hopes, and undoubtedly criticisms of their rivals. That was the limit of their activities. Occasionally some of them read papers on some aspect or period of the history of the Party at the meeting of the circles of Party History scattered all over the city. The existence of these "not disarmed mentally" oppositionists was not a secret; the G.P.U. knew of them, and tolerated them because of the prevailing party liberalism. This was a very fertile field in which Agranov's efforts were lavishly rewarded. He submitted to the Politbureau a detailed report, a picture of an imposing terroristic plot, with ramifications outside Leningrad, and painted in very lurid colours. The meetings of the Party History Clubs were represented as regular meetings of the conspirators. Nikolayev attended these meetings, hence the idea that he was inspired there to commit the crime; occasional visits of Kamenev and Zinoviev in Leningrad, and their rather thoughtless meetings with some of the oppositionists, were given as a proof of ramifications of the plot, and of their participation in it. Particular emphasis was laid on the complicity of Kamenev, and this must be explained.

Up to 1933 all opposition within the Party took the form of an opposition against Stalin, but then it took on a different form. All factions in the Party reiterated their loyalty to Stalin, and while warring against each other they tried to win Stalin to their side, so that a fight within the Party was reduced to the struggle for Stalin, for an influence upon him. Stalin's behaviour, however, was lacking in decision. He did not oppose the new ideas introduced by Kirov and his followers; on the other hand, he did not support them throughout; at times he would seem to be wholeheartedly with the innovators, while at others he would check them

very abruptly. Yet there was a definite change in him during 1934. He grew kinder, more tolerant; he seemed to become more humanly interested in men. He liked to meet authors, artists, actors, he liked to talk to them, to listen to them, and he seemed to enjoy himself thoroughly in their company. This change is usually attributed to the influence of Gorky. With his keen understanding of men, Gorky guessed the weak points of Stalin's nature, his extreme Asiatic suspiciousness, his sensitiveness as to how he will be pictured by his biographers, his love of flattery. In his approach to Stalin he proceeded from them. He impressed upon him that he and his wisdom have been recognised by all, that his position in the hearts of men is beyond any suspicion, and that under these circumstances magnanimity towards former oppositionists would only strengthen his moral authority. Whether Stalin sincerely changed under that influence or whether he was just posing, one cannot say, but his relations towards former enemies underwent a remarkable change. This change may be illustrated by his relation to Kamenev. Kamenev was expelled from the Party several times and, after recantation, was admitted again. When it was discovered that he "read and did not report" Rutin's rebellious programme (of which mention was made earlier), he seemed to be doomed. Gorky, who valued Kamenev, succeeded in arranging a friendly meeting between him and Stalin and, so the rumours have it, the meeting took a very sentimental turn. Kamenev gave *parole d'honneur* that never again would he be in opposition to Stalin, and Stalin admitted that he took Kamenev's word for the sincerity of his repentance. The participation of Kamenev in the plot, as emphasised in Agranov's report on Nikolayev's crime, was to serve as a convincing argument against trusting any of the former oppositionists, and as an eloquent proof of treachery beyond reformation, on the part of him and others.

While Stalin's behaviour, in view of the launching of the new party policy, was marked with a lack of definiteness, his closest collaborators were decidedly against it. The materialization of Kirov's plans meant a change in the personnel of the central organs of the Party, and those who resisted him throughout knew that their chances of retaining their positions were extremely doubtful. It was through their intrigues that Kirov's moving to Moscow was delayed for so long a time. Their opposition to his moving, however, was overcome at the November plenary session of the Party's Central Committee but... Kirov was killed before his influence in Moscow could have affected their position near Stalin. In this group of Stalin's satellites the ascendancy of Yezhov has been very spectacular.

He is probably the man whose personal characteristics fit most admirably into the period through which the Party is passing at the present time. A man of mediocre abilities, he is not distinguished by any outstanding talent except the talent for underground intrigues; in this respect it would be difficult to find his equal. The first steps in his partisan career were marked by humiliating neglect from all more or less prominent members of the Party. For his promotions he has himself and his only talent to thank. But such a path is difficult for anyone, and particularly to one who by nature was not very kindly disposed to humanity. The accounts of those who knew Yezhov leave one astonished that a single human being could accumulate so much hatred. Certainly, the discharge of his hatred must have given satisfaction, perhaps sadistic in character, to one who nurtured the idea of "sweet revenge" for a long neglect which he felt as embittering insult and contempt.

Another who, together with Yezhov, displayed an irreconcilable attitude towards all opposition in the party, is Kaganovich. He is a much abler man than Yezhov, but he is known among his associates as a man who is not to be trusted.

Their voices were subdued by the ascending popularity of Kirov, but after his death they did not waste any time in asserting themselves in the Party. Kaganovich was appointed to all positions for which Kirov had been intended, while Yezhov's ambition was to achieve the post from which he could revenge himself on enemies most effectively and could give vent to his ill-feelings more completely—the post of the head of the G.P.U. That post was then in the hands of all-powerful Yagoda, but nearly two years ago Yezhov succeeded to it, while Yagoda, a "dastard traitor and enemy of Socialism", is in jail and, according to rumours is slowly dying under a prison régime prepared especially for him. It is significant that Agranov was the only important officer in the G.P.U. who retained his post after Yezhov was appointed head, although later he too was accused of Trotzkyism and dismissed. Unquestionably Yezhov has entered the peak of his career. On July 17, 1937, he was decorated with the Order of Lenin, the highest honorary reward, for "outstanding success in directing the organs of the N.K.V.D. for fulfilment of tasks given by the Government." Later he was promoted to the highest positions of trust, and received the highest honorary awards which are available under the present régime.

The report submitted to the Politbureau by Agranov was discussed in an atmosphere of extreme tension. There were actually two decisions to be made; first, what to do with those whose partici-

pation in the alleged plot was reported, and second, what conclusions affecting the party policies were to be made from the uncovered plot. Stalin took the stand that Kirov's programme must be continued, but it must be revised in the part dealing with attitude towards oppositionists. Since the treachery of the oppositionists was proved by the Report it was necessary, as a self-defensive measure, to clean the Party of all the opposition elements. As to the persons mentioned in the Report as plotters—their case must go through the juridical channels. Though not without protests from some members of the Politbureau, this stand was accepted as the policy of the Party.

The realization of the policy was commenced almost immediately after the meeting of the Politbureau. At the plenary sessions of both the Moscow and Leningrad Committees, which were held on one and the same day with exaggerated pomp, the Report and the decision of the Politbureau were discussed, and a ruthless offensive against the opposition was launched. Attacks were concentrated at first on former "Trotskyists" and "followers of Zinoviev and Kamenev". Later other species of oppositionists were added, until lately they were all merged into "gangs of murderers and spies". The policy of extermination of the opposition, according to statements made repeatedly by the official Soviet press, will continue until the Party is entirely free of these elements. It has been estimated that at least 25% of the party membership has been connected in varying degrees with the opposition. There are some 2,800,000 members, from which it is inferred that the participation in the opposition of some 700,000 members will have to be scrutinized, after which they will be dealt with according to their crime. This campaign is coloured with the personal traits of the commander in chief of all the exterminators, which, according to "Pravda", are ideally combined in Yezhov; they are: "greatest revolutionary watchfulness, and an iron will; keen Bolshevik eye and organizational talent; outstanding mind and a keen proletarian farsightedness". Moral qualifications are conspicuously absent from this list of attributes of the purifier-in-chief of Soviet Russia.

A detailed discussion of the trials themselves must be left out of this article. Undoubtedly Trotsky, the chief accused, though absent bodily, will write about the trials; he is interested in rehabilitation before the world's public opinion not only for his own sake but also for the sake of his followers. Only a very cursory review of some trials will be made here.

Immediately after the assassination of Kirov, and very hurriedly to facilitate use of it in the case of Nikolayev, an amendment to



the criminal code was passed and became law on December 1, 1934. This amendment deals with "terroristic organizations and terroristic acts against workers of Soviet Government". It is made up of five sentences as follows:

1. Investigations of these cases must be completed within ten days.
2. Indictment must be handed to the accused one day before the deliberations on the case by the court.
3. The trials must be heard without participation of defence.
4. No petition to a Court of Appeal nor an appeal for pardon is allowed.
5. Sentence to the highest measure of punishment must be executed immediately after its pronouncement.

On September 27, 1937, it was extended to include "cases of counter-revolutionary wrecking and diversion."

This law widens the range within which the Government can manoeuvre, from an absolute secrecy to a very wide publicity attained with the aid of the microphone, moving pictures, newspaper reporters, as well as the public admitted to the court-room.

Very little has been heard of the trial of alleged participants in the Nikolayev plot. Nobody was admitted to the court-room, not even the closest relatives of the accused. It is known that all the accused denied everything they were charged with; but, of course, that did not help them to escape death. They had been doomed before the trial. Still less is known about the trial of the members of the Leningrad G.P.U.; a complete secrecy veiled it from the outside world. One astonishing thing in connection with this latter trial is the light sentences passed on all the accused. There have been many trials of which nothing at all has been heard, and executions under the provisions of the law of December 1, 1934, also of Sep. 27, 1937, have been numerous, and no end to them is to be seen in the near future. The execution of the eight generals in the high command of the Red Army last June belongs in this category. Officially they were accused of high treason; after their execution, they were accused in an official statement of plotting against certain Soviet leaders. Official London and Paris know definitely that the eight generals did not sell any military secrets to any foreign Government, and that they could not have been passed for traitors as the world understands this crime. Some light has been thrown upon the case by investigating parties such as A. F. Kerensky, P.N. Miliukov, "Socialist Messenger", "Peasants' Russia", to name those whose writings have been consulted, and who are eagerly interested

in everything which takes place in Russia. According to this source of information, there is but little doubt that they actually were the leaders of a plot aiming to effect a radical change in internal policies. Some of their plans were: to extend the limits of private ownership but to retain large industries as socialized enterprises; to change the constitution from union to a federation, and to retain the word "Russia" in the name of the federation; and others. These changes they felt would improve the defence of the U.S.S.R. It is quite possible that foreign policy would have taken a different direction had they succeeded in their plot, but nothing definite has been made known on this aspect.

On the other hand, trials in which Zinoviev, Kamenev, Radek, Sokolnikov, Piatakov and others were the accused were conceived and conducted in an entirely different way. The main object was to discredit the leaders of the opposition, and thereby to suppress all dissension within the Party. The accused leaders were told that the Party demands of them their assistance in crushing the opposition for which they were held responsible; a political self-sacrifice was expected of them. They were to denounce their policies, and by confession to discredit their opposition. Kamenev was one of those among the accused who insisted on compliance with this Party demand. Probably he had hoped to save his life. . . . It is therefore particularly pathetic to read the description by an eye-witness of the last minutes of Kamenev's life. . . until the very last minute he seems to have nourished that hope.

The ascendancy of Yezhov means unmistakably the victory of the new party policy aiming at political stabilization within the Union. As was shown earlier, Kirov's aim was the same stabilization. He had hoped, however, to achieve it by the method of reconciliation, by a more lenient attitude towards oppositionists, and by gradual relaxation of the dictatorial methods and their replacement by democratic policies, and his conception of democracy was approaching nearer to that of the world outside Russia. Yezhov's method of achieving stabilization is to suppress opposition ruthlessly. The suppression may mean in some cases the physical destruction of influential persons, or those whose punishment may have a psychological effect upon their followers. In other cases prison or concentration camp may seem sufficient, while in still other cases expulsion from the Party or dismissal from position and reduction of social status will serve. In some cases a rebuke or a threat of a punishment is all that is needed to induce conformity to the "general line" of the Party. This policy is intended to continue in force until all opposition is wiped out and political

stabilization, by which is meant a complete uniformity of thought and a complete accordance with the "general line" of the Party, has become an accomplished fact. And it will continue to its logical end, or until it will result in a crisis of some form. The wholesale dismissal of party members occupying responsible positions, and their replacement by young and inexperienced ones, brought the work of many departments almost to a standstill. The discouraging effect upon the morale of responsible workers is another consequence of the present party policy, which undoubtedly will precipitate the crisis. Already hints have been made that the Party Conference, not held for more than three and a half years, may be called in the near future to deal with "new conditions" arising from the general overhauling of Soviet and Party machinery.

In Russian heroic epic there is a legend which describes "how giants ceased to exist on Russian land". There was a very powerful giant; he could not tolerate any rivals, and in accordance with the custom of the time he met all of them in single combat and beat them all. He grew so proud of himself and so sure of his superior power that he defied all the forces of heaven and earth to combat him. Thereupon he met another giant of whom he had not heard before, and immediately challenged him to fight. The challenge was accepted. The challenger smote with his sword, and with one blow cut the unknown giant into two parts. Much to his astonishment, each of the two parts became transformed into a giant threatening him. Again he smote with his sword, again he cut asunder each of the giants, and again each part was transformed into a giant threatening him. He continued to swing with his sword, and the more he smote, the more giants he had to combat. He was fighting all day long. The sun went down, and he was still wielding his sword and increasing the number of his enemies. Finally, exhausted, he fell on the earth, but the earth didn't wish to accept him and he was turned into a stone.

Thus, according to the legend, the pagan giants ceased to exist on Russian land. . . .