

The struggle against bureaucracy

Trotsky invented the infamous term ‘Stalinist bureaucracy’. While Lenin was still living, late in 1923, he was already maneuvering to seize power within the Party:

‘[B]ureaucratization threatens to . . . provoke a more or less opportunistic degeneration of the Old Guard’.¹

In his opposition platform, written in July 1926, his foremost attack was against ‘unbridled bureaucratism’.² And once the Second World War had begun, Trotsky spent his time provoking the Soviet people in ‘acting against the Stalinist bureaucracy as it did previously against the Tsarist bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie.’³

Trotsky always used the word ‘bureaucracy’ to denigrate socialism.

Given this context, it might come as some surprise that throughout the thirties, the Party leaders, principally Stalin, Kirov and Zhdanov, devoted a lot of energy to the struggle against the bureaucratic elements within the Party and State apparatus.

How did the struggle against bureaucratization and bureaucracy define itself in the thirties?

Anti-Communists against ‘bureaucracy’

First we should make sure that we agree about the meaning of terms.

As soon as the Bolsheviks seized power, the Right used the word ‘bureaucracy’ to describe and denigrate the revolutionary régime itself. For the Right, any socialist and revolutionary enterprise was detestable, and automatically received the defamatory label of ‘bureaucratic’. Right from October 26, 1917, the Mensheviks declared their irreconcilable hostility with the ‘bureaucratic’ Bolshevik régime, the result of a ‘coup d’état’, a régime that could not be socialist because most of the country was peasant, a régime characterized by ‘state capitalism’ and by the ‘dictatorship against the peasants’. This propaganda clearly intended the reversal of the dictatorship of the proletariat imposed under the Bolshevik régime.

But, in 1922, faced with the destruction of the productive forces in the countryside and trying to preserve the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Bolsheviks were

forced to back off, to make concessions to the individual peasants, to allow them the freedom to buy and sell. The Bolsheviks wanted to create in the countryside a kind of 'state capitalism', i.e. the development of a small capitalism constrained and controlled by the (Socialist) State. At the same time, the Bolsheviks declared war on bureaucracy: they combatted the unchanged habits of the old bureaucratic apparatus and the tendency of new Soviet civil servants to adapt to it.

The Mensheviks sought then to return to the political scene by stating: 'You, the Bolsheviks, you are now against bureaucracy and you admit to building state capitalism. This is what we said, what we have always said. We were correct.' Here is Lenin's answer:

'[T]he sermons . . . the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries preach express their true nature — "The revolution has gone too far. What you are saying now we have been saying all the time, permit us to say again." But we say in reply: "Permit us to put you before a firing squad for saying that. Either you refrain from expressing your views, or, if you insist on expressing your political views publicly in the present circumstances, when our position is far more difficult than it was when the whiteguards were directly attacking us, then you will have only yourselves to blame if we treat you as the worst and most pernicious whiteguard elements." ' 4

As can be seen above, Lenin vehemently dealt with counter-revolutionaries attacking the so-called 'bureaucracy' to overthrow the socialist régime.

Bolsheviks against bureaucratization

Lenin and the Bolsheviks always led a revolutionary struggle against the bureaucratic deviations that, in a backward country, inevitably occurred within the apparatus of the dictatorship of the proletariat. They estimated that the dictatorship was also menaced 'from inside' by the bureaucratization of the Soviet state apparatus.

The Bolsheviks had to 'retake' part of the old Tsarist state apparatus, which had only been partially transformed in the socialist sense.

Furthermore, the Party and government apparatus in the countryside posed great problems, throughout the country. Between 1928 and 1931, the Party accepted 1,400,000 new members. Among this mass, many were in fact political illiterates. They had revolutionary sentiments, but no real Communist knowledge. Kulaks, old Tsarist officers and other reactionaries easily succeeded in infiltrating the Party. All those who had a certain capacity for organization were automatically accepted into the Party, as there were so few cadres. Between 1928 and 1938, the weight of the Party in the countryside remained weak, and its members were heavily influenced by the upper strata that intellectually and economically dominated the rural world. These factors all lead to problems of bureaucratic degeneration.

The first generation of revolutionary peasants had experienced the Civil War, when they were fighting the reactionary forces. The War Communism spirit, giving and receiving orders, maintained itself and gave birth to a bureaucratic style of work that was little based on patient political work.

For all these reasons, the struggle against the bureaucracy was always considered by Lenin and Stalin as a struggle for the purity of the Bolshevik line, against the influences of the old society, the old social classes and oppressive structures.

Under Lenin as under Stalin, the Party sought to concentrate the best revolutionaries, the most far-seeing, active, firm and organically tied to the masses, within the Central Committee and the leading organs. The leadership of the Party always sought to mobilize the masses to implement the tasks of socialist construction. It was at the intermediate levels, most notably in the Republic apparatuses, that bureaucratic elements, careerists and opportunists could most easily set up and hide. Throughout the period in which Stalin was the leader of the Party, Stalin called for the leadership and the base to mobilize to hound out the bureaucrats from above and from below. Here is a 1928 directive, typical of Stalin's view.

'Bureaucracy is one of the worst enemies of our progress. It exists in all our organizations The trouble is that it is not a matter of the old bureaucrats. It is a matter of the new bureaucrats, bureaucrats who sympathize with the Soviet Government and finally, communist bureaucrats. The communist bureaucrat is the most dangerous type of bureaucrat. Why? Because he masks his bureaucracy with the title of Party member.'⁵ After having presented several grave cases, Stalin continued:

'What is the explanation of these shameful instances of corruption and moral deterioration in certain of our Party organizations? The fact that Party monopoly was carried to absurd lengths, that the voice of the rank and file was stifled, that inner-Party democracy was abolished and bureaucracy became rife I think that there is not and cannot be any other way of combating this evil than by organizing control from below by the Party masses, by implanting inner-Party democracy. What objection can there be to rousing the fury of the mass of the Party membership against these corrupt elements and giving it the opportunity to send these elements packing?'⁶

'There is talk of crit(i)cism from above, criticism by the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, by the Central Committee of the Party and so on. That, of course, is all very good. But it is still far from enough. More, it is by no means the chief thing now. The chief thing now is to start a broad tide of criticism against bureaucracy in general, against shortcomings in our work in particular. Only (then) . . . can we count on waging a successful struggle against bureaucracy and on rooting it out.'⁷

Reinforce public education

First, to struggle against bureaucracy, Stalin and the leadership of the Bolshevik Party reinforced public education.

At the beginning of the thirties, they created Party schools to give elementary courses to people in the rural world who had never had a basic political education. The first systematic course about the history of the Party was published in 1929 by Yaroslavsky: *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*. It is a well written book. In 1938, a second shorter version, was written under Stalin's

supervision: *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*.

Between 1930 and 1933, the number of Party schools increased from 52,000 to more than 200,000 and the number of students from one million to 4,500,000. It was a remarkable effort to give a minimum of political coherence to hundreds of thousands who had just entered the Party.⁸

Regularly purge the Party

One of the most effective methods in the struggle against bureaucratic disintegration is the verification-purge.

In 1917, the Party had 30,000 members. In 1921, there were almost 600,000. In 1929, there were 1,500,000. In 1932, they were 2,500,000. After each massive recruitment wave, the leadership had to sort. The first verification campaign was conducted in 1921, under Lenin. At that moment, 45 per cent of the Party members in the countryside were excluded, 25 per cent in the entire Party. It was the largest purge campaign that was ever done. One fourth of the members did not meet the most elementary criteria.

In 1929, 11 per cent of the members left the Party during a second verification campaign.

In 1933, there was a new purge. It was thought that it would last four months. In fact, it lasted two years. The Party structures, the control mechanisms and the actual control of the central leadership were so lacking that it was not even possible to plan and to effect a verification campaign. Eventually, 18 per cent of the members would be expelled.

What were the criteria for expulsion?

- Those who were expelled were people who had once been kulaks, white officers or counter-revolutionaries.

- Corrupt or overly ambitious people, or unrepentant bureaucrats.

- People who rejected Party discipline and simply ignored directives of the Central Committee.

- People who had committed crimes or sexually abused others, drunkards.

During the verification campaign of 1932–1933, the leadership remarked that not only did it have a difficult time in ensuring that its instructions were followed, but also that the Party's administration in the countryside was quite deficient. No one knew who was a member and who was not. There were 250,000 lost and stolen cards and more than 60,000 blank cards had disappeared.

At this time, the situation was so critical that the central leadership threatened to expel regional leaders who were not personally implicated in the campaign.

But the carefree attitude of regional leaders often transformed into bureaucratic interventionism: members of the base were purged without any careful political inquiry. This problem was regularly discussed at the highest level between 1933 and 1938. The January 18, 1938 issue of *Pravda* published a Central Committee directive, putting forth one more time this theme of Stalin's:

‘Certain of our Party leaders suffer from an insufficiently attentive attitude toward people, toward party members, toward workers. What is more, they do not study the party workers, do not know how they are coming along and how they are developing, do not know their cadres at all And precisely because they do not take an individualized approach to the evaluation of party members and party workers they usually act aimlessly — either praising them indiscriminately and beyond measure, or chastising them also indiscriminately and beyond measure, expelling them from the party by the thousands and tens of thousands But only persons who are in essence profoundly anti-party can take such an approach to party members.’⁹

In this document, Stalin and the rest of the leadership deal with the correct means for purging the Party of undesirable elements who infiltrated the base. But the text was already outlining a completely new form of purge: the one that would clean out the Party leadership of the most bureaucratized elements. Two of Stalin’s preoccupations can be found therein: an individual approach must be adopted towards all cadres and members, and one must know personally and in depth one’s collaborators and subordinates. In the chapter on the anti-fascist work, we will show how Stalin himself undertook these tasks.

The struggle for revolutionary democracy

To finish with bureaucracy, the leadership began a struggle for democracy within the Party.

It is on this basis of difficulties in applying the instructions during the purification campaign that on December 17, 1934, the Central Committee focused for the first time on more fundamental problems. It criticized ‘bureaucratic methods of leadership’, where essential questions are treated by small groups of cadres without any participation from the base.

On March 29, 1935, Zhdanov passed a resolution in Leningrad, criticizing certain leaders for neglecting education work and only doing economic tasks. Ideological tasks disappeared in paperwork and bureaucracy. The resolution underscored that the leaders must know the qualities and capacities of their subordinates. Evaluation reports of their work were needed, as were closer contacts between leaders and cadres and a political line of promoting new cadres.¹⁰

On May 4, Stalin spoke about this subject. He condemned

‘(T)he outrageous attitude towards people, towards cadres, towards workers, which we not infrequently observe in practice. The slogan “Cadres decide everything” demands that our leaders should display the most solicitous attitude towards our workers, “little” and “big,” assisting them when they need support, encouraging them when they show their first successes, promoting them, and so forth. Yet in practice we meet in a number of cases with a soulless, bureaucratic, and positively outrageous attitude towards workers.’¹¹

Arch Getty, in his brilliant study, *Origins of the great purges*, makes the following comment.

‘The party had become bureaucratic, economic, mechanical, and administrative to an intolerable degree. Stalin and other leaders at the center perceived this as an ossification, a breakdown, and a perversion of the party’s function. Local party and government leaders were no longer political leaders but economic administrators. They resisted political control from both above and below and did not want to be bothered with ideology, education, political mass campaigns, or the individual rights and careers of party members. The logical extension of this process would have been the conversion of the party apparatus into a network of locally despotic economic administrations. The evidence shows that Stalin, Zhdanov, and others preferred to revive the educational and agitational functions of the party, to reduce the absolute authority of local satraps, and to encourage certain forms of rank-and-file leadership.’¹²

The Party elections in 1937: a ‘revolution’

Finally, in February 1937, a crucial meeting of the Central Committee addressed the question of democracy and the struggle against bureaucratization. It was that same meeting that decided upon the organization of the purge against enemy elements.

It is important to note that several days of the February 1937 Central Committee dealt with the problem of democracy within the Party, democracy which should reinforce the revolutionary character of the organization, hence its capacity to discover enemy elements that had infiltrated it. Reports by Stalin and Zhdanov dealt with the development of criticism and self-criticism, about the necessity of cadres to submit reports to their respective bases. For the first time, secret elections were organized in the Party, with several candidates and after a public discussion of all candidatures. The February 27, 1937 Central Committee resolution indicates:

‘The practice of co-opting members of party committees must be liquidated . . . each party member must be afforded an unlimited right of recalling candidates and criticizing them.’¹³

When the German fascists occupied the Soviet Union, they discovered all the archives of the Party Committee for the Western Region of Smolensk. All the meetings, all the discussions, all the Regional Committee and Central Committee directives, everything was there. The archive contains the proceedings of the electoral meetings that followed the Central Committee meeting of February 1937. It is therefore possible to know how things actually took place, at the local level.

Arch Getty described a number of typical examples of the 1937 elections in the Western Region. For the positions of district committee, thirty-four candidates were first presented for seven positions. There was a discussion of each candidate. Should a candidate wish to withdraw, a vote was made to see if the members accepted. All votes were secret.

Finally, during the May 1937 electoral campaign, for the 54,000 Party base organizations for which we have data, 55 per cent of the directing committees were replaced. In the Leningrad region, 48 per cent of the members of the local

committees were replaced.¹⁴ Getty noted that this was the most important, most general and most effective antibureaucratic campaign that the Party ever effected.

But at the Regional level, which constituted the main level of decision-making, very little changed. In the Regions, since the beginning of the twenties, individuals and clans had solidly entrenched themselves and held a virtual power monopoly. Even this massive antibureaucratic campaign could not budge them. The Smolensk archives contain the written proof.

The Party Secretary of the Western Region Committee was named Rumiantsev. He was a Central Committee member, as were several other regional leaders. The report of the meeting electing the Regional Secretary is in the Smolensk archive. Five pages state that the situation was good and satisfactory. Then follow nine pages of harsh criticism that indicate that nothing was working well. All the criticisms that the Central Committee had formulated against bureaucracy within the Party were taken up by the base against Rumiantsev: arbitrary expulsions, worker complaints that were never treated by the Regional Committee, lack of attention to the economic development of the region, leadership with no connection with the base, etc. The two opposing lines within the meeting were clearly expressed in the proceedings. The document shows that the base was able to express itself, but that it was incapable of getting rid of the clans that held a firm grip on the regional apparatus.¹⁵

The same thing took place in almost all the big cities. Krinitskii, the first secretary of Saratov, had been criticized by name in the Party press by Zhdanov. However, he succeeded in getting himself re-elected. Under fire from both the central leadership of the Party and from the base, the regional 'fiefdoms' were able to hold on.¹⁶ They would be destroyed by the Great Purge of 1937–1938.

The Great Purge

No episode in Soviet history has provoked more rage from the old bourgeois world than the purge of 1937–1938. The unnuanced denunciation of the purge can be read in identical terms in a neo-Nazi pamphlet, in a work with academic pretensions by Zbigniew Brzezinski, in a Trotskyist pamphlet or in a book by the Belgian army chief ideologue.

Let us just consider the last, Henri Bernard, a former Belgian Secret Service officer, professor emeritus at the Belgian Royal Military College. He published in 1982 a book called *Le communisme et l'aveuglement occidental* (Communism and Western Blindness). In this work, Bernard mobilizes the sane forces of the West against an imminent Russian invasion. Regarding the history of the USSR, Bernard's opinion about the 1937 purge is interesting on many counts:

'Stalin would use methods that would have appalled Lenin. The Georgian had no trace of human sentiment. Starting with Kirov's assassination (in 1934), the Soviet Union underwent a bloodbath, presenting the spectacle of the Revolution devouring its own sons. Stalin, said Deutscher, offered to the people a régime made of terror and illusions. Hence, the new liberal measures corresponded with the flow of blood of the years 1936–1939. It was the time of those terrible purges, of that 'dreadful spasm'. The interminable series of trials started. The 'old guard' of heroic times would be annihilated. The main accused of all these trials was Trotsky, who was absent. He continued without fail to lead the struggle against Stalin, unmasking his methods and denouncing his collusion with Hitler.'¹

So, the historian of the Belgian Army likes to quote Trotsky and Trotskyists, he defends the 'old Bolshevik guard', and he even has a kind word for Lenin; but under Stalin, the inhuman monster, blind and dreadful terror dominated.

Before describing the conditions that led the Bolsheviks to purge the Party in 1937–1938, let us consider what a bourgeois specialist who respects the facts knows about this period of Soviet history.

Gábor Tamás Rittersporn, born in Budapest, Hungary, published a study of the purges in 1988 (English version, 1991), under the title *Stalinist Simplifications and*

Soviet Complications. He forthrightly states his opposition to communism and states that ‘we have no intention of denying in any way, much less of justifying, the very real horrors of the age we are about to treat of; we would surely be among the first to bring them to light if that was still necessary’.²

However, the official bourgeois version is so grotesque and its untruthfulness so obvious that in the long run it could lead to a complete rejection of the standard Western interpretation of the Soviet Revolution. Rittersporn admirably defined the problems he encountered when trying to correct some of the most grotesque bourgeois lies.

‘If . . . one tries to publish a tentative analysis of some almost totally unknown material, and to use it to throw new light on the history of the Soviet Union in the 1930s and the part that Stalin played in it, one discovers that opinion tolerates challenges to the received wisdom far less than one would have thought The traditional image of the “Stalin phenomenon” is in truth so powerful, and the political and ideological value-judgments which underlie it are so deeply emotional, that any attempt to correct it must also inevitably appear to be taking a stand for or against the generally accepted norms that it implies

‘To claim to show that the traditional representation of the “Stalin period” is in many ways quite inaccurate is tantamount to issuing a hopeless challenge to the time-honoured patterns of thought which we are used to applying to political realities in the USSR, indeed against the common patterns of speech itself Research of this kind can be justified above all by the extreme inconsistency of the writing devoted to what historical orthodoxy considers to be a major event — the “Great Purge” of 1936–1938.

‘Strange as it may seem, there are few periods of Soviet history that have been studied so superficially.’³

‘There is . . . every reason to believe that if the elementary rules of source analysis have tended to be so long ignored in an important area of Soviet studies, it is because the motives of delving in this period of the Soviet past have differed markedly from the usual ones of historical research.

‘In fact even the most cursory reading of the “classic” works makes it hard to avoid the impression that in many respects these are often more inspired by the state of mind prevailing in some circles in the West, than by the reality of Soviet life under Stalin. The defence of hallowed Western values against all sorts of real or imaginary threats from Russia; the assertion of genuine historical experiences as well as of all sorts of ideological assumptions.’⁴

In other words, Rittersporn is saying: Look, I can prove that most of the current ideas about Stalin are absolutely false. But to say this requires a giant hurdle. If you state, even timidly, certain undeniable truths about the Soviet Union in the thirties, you are immediately labeled ‘Stalinist’. Bourgeois propaganda has spread a false but very powerful image of Stalin, an image that is almost impossible to correct, since emotions run so high as soon as the subject is broached. The books about the purges written by great Western specialists, such as Conquest,

Deutscher, Schapiro and Fainsod, are worthless, superficial, and written with the utmost contempt for the most elementary rules learnt by a first-year history student. In fact, these works are written to give an academic and scientific cover for the anti-Communist policies of the Western leaders. They present under a scientific cover the defence of capitalist interests and values and the ideological preconceptions of the big bourgeoisie.

Here is how the purge was presented by the Communists who thought that it was necessary to undertake it in 1937–1938. Here is the central thesis developed by Stalin in his March 3, 1937 report, which initiated the purge.

Stalin affirmed that certain Party leaders ‘proved to be so careless, complacent and naive’,⁵ and lacked vigilance with respect to the enemies and the anti-Communists infiltrated in the Party. Stalin spoke of the assassination of Kirov, number two in the Bolshevik Party at the time:

‘The foul murder of Comrade Kirov was the first serious warning which showed that the enemies of the people would resort to duplicity, and resorting to duplicity would disguise themselves as Bolsheviks, as Party members, in order to worm their way into our confidence and gain access to our organizations

‘The trial of the “Zinovievite–Trotskyite bloc” (in 1936) broadened the lessons of the preceding trials and strikingly demonstrated that the Zinovievites and Trotskyites had united around themselves all the hostile bourgeois elements, that they had become transformed into an espionage, diversionist and terrorist agency of the German secret police, that duplicity and camouflage are the only means by which the Zinovievites and Trotskyites can penetrate into our organizations, that vigilance and political insight are the surest means of preventing such penetration.’⁶

‘(T)he further forward we advance, the greater the successes we achieve, the greater will be the fury of the remnants of the defeated exploiting classes, the more ready will they be to resort to sharper forms of struggle, the more will they seek to harm the Soviet state, and the more will they clutch at the most desperate means of struggle as the last resort of the doomed.’⁷

How did the class enemy problem pose itself?

So, in truth, who were these enemies of the people, infiltrated in the Bolshevik Party? We give four important examples.

Boris Bazhanov

During the Civil War that killed nine million, the bourgeoisie fought the Bolsheviks with arms. Defeated, what could it do? Commit suicide? Drown its sorrow in vodka? Convert to Bolshevism? There were better options. As soon as it became clear that the Bolshevik Revolution was victorious, elements of the bourgeoisie consciously infiltrated the Party, to combat it from within and to prepare the conditions for a bourgeois coup d’état.

Boris Bazhanov wrote a very instructive book about this subject, called *Avec Staline dans le Kremlin* (With Stalin in the Kremlin). Bazhanov was born in 1900, so he was 17 to 19 years old during the revolution in Ukraine, his native region. In his book, Bazhanov proudly published a photocopy of a document, dated August 9, 1923, naming him assistant to Stalin. The decision of the organization bureau reads: ‘Comrade Bazhanov is named assistant to Comrade Stalin, Secretary of the CC’. Bazhanov made this comment: ‘Soldier of the anti-Bolshevik army, I had imposed upon myself the difficult and perilous task of penetrating right into the heart of the enemy headquarters. I had succeeded’.⁸

The young Bazhanov, as Stalin’s assistant, had become Secretary of the Politburo and had to take notes of the meetings. He was 23 years old. In his book, written in 1930, he explained how his political career started, when he saw the Bolshevik Army arrive in Kiev. He was 19 years old.

‘The Bolsheviks seized it in 1919, sowing terror. To spit at them in their face would have only given me 10 bullets. I took another path. To save the élite of my city, I covered myself with the mask of communist ideology.’⁹

‘Starting in 1920, the open struggle against the Bolshevik plague ended. To fight against it from outside had become impossible. It had to be mined from within. A Trojan Horse had to be infiltrated into the communist fortress All the threads of the dictatorship converged in the single knot of the Politburo. The coup d’état would have to come from there.’¹⁰

During the years 1923–1924, Bazhanov attended all the meetings of the Politburo. He was able to hold on to different positions until his flight in 1928.

Many other bourgeois intellectuals had the genius of this young nineteen-year-old Ukrainian.

The workers and the peasants who made the Revolution by shedding their blood had little culture or education. They could defeat the bourgeoisie with their courage, their heroism, their hatred of oppression. But to organize the new society, culture and education were necessary. Intellectuals from the old society, both young and old, sufficiently able and flexible people, recognized the opportunities. They decided to change arms and battle tactics. They would confront these uncouth brutes by working for them. Boris Bazhanov’s path was exemplary.

George Solomon

Consider another testimonial work. The career of its author, George Solomon, is even more interesting. Solomon was a Bolshevik Party cadre, named in July 1919 assistant to the People’s Commissar for Commerce and Industry. He was an intimate friend of Krassin, an old Bolshevik, who was simultaneously Commissar of Railroads and Communications and Commissar of Commerce and Industry. In short, we have two members of the ‘old guard of the heroic times’ so dear to Henri Bernard of the Belgian Military Academy.

In December 1919, Solomon returned from Stockholm to Petrograd, where he hurried to see his friend Krassin and ask him about the political situation. Ac-

according to Solomon, the response was:

‘You want a résumé of the situation? . . . it is . . . the immediate installation of socialism . . . an imposed utopia, including the most extreme of stupidities. They have all become crazy, Lenin included! . . . forgotten the laws of natural evolution, forgotten our warnings about the danger of trying the socialist experience under the actual conditions As for Lenin . . . he suffers from permanent delirium in fact we are living under a completely autocratic régime.’¹¹

This analysis in no way differs from that of the Mensheviks: Russia is not ready for socialism, and those who want to introduce it will have to use autocratic methods.

In the beginning of 1918, Solomon and Krassin were together in Stockholm. The Germans had started up the offensive and had occupied Ukraine. Anti-Bolshevik insurrections were more and more frequent. It was not at all clear who was going to rule Russia, the Bolsheviks or the Mensheviks and their industrialist friends. Solomon summarized his conversations with Krassin.

‘We had understood that the new régime had introduced a series of absurd measures, by destroying the technical forces, by demoralizing the technical experts and by substituting worker committees for them we understood that the line of annihilating the bourgeoisie was no less absurd This bourgeoisie was destined to still bring us many positive elements this class . . . needed to fill its historic and civilizing rôle.’¹²

Solomon and Krassin appeared to hesitate as to whether they should join the ‘real’ Marxists, the Mensheviks, with whom they shared concern for the bourgeoisie, which was to bring progress. What could be done without it? Surely not develop the country with ‘factories run by committees of ignorant workers’?¹³

But Bolshevik power stabilized:

‘(A) gradual change . . . took place in our assessment of the situation. We asked ourselves if we had the right to remain aloof Should we not, in the interests of the people that we wanted to serve, give the Soviets our support and our experience, in order to bring to this task some sane elements? Would we not have a better chance to fight against this policy of general destruction that marked the Bolsheviks’ activity . . . ? We could also oppose the total destruction of the bourgeoisie We thought that the restoration of normal diplomatic relations with the West . . . would necessarily force our leaders to fall in line with other nations and . . . that the tendency towards immediate and direct communism would start to shrink and ultimately disappear forever

‘Given these new thoughts, we decided, Krassin and myself, to join the Soviets.’¹⁴

So, according to Solomon, he and Krassin formulated a secret program that they followed by reaching the post of Minister and vice-Minister under Lenin: they opposed all measures of the dictatorship of the proletariat, they protected as much as they could the bourgeoisie and they intended to create links with the imperialist world, all to ‘progressively and completely erase’ the Communist line of the Party! Good Bolshevik, Comrade Solomon.

On August 1, 1923, during a visit to Belgium, he joined the other side. His tes-

timony appeared in 1930, published by the Belgo-French 'International Centre for the Active Struggle Against Communism' (CILACC). Solomon the old Bolshevik now had set ideas:

'(T)he Moscow government (is) formed of a small group of men who, with the help of the G.P.U., inflicts slavery and terror on our great and admirable country'¹⁵

'Already the Soviet despots see themselves as surrounded everywhere by anger, the great collective anger. Seized by crazed terror They become more and more vicious, shedding rivers of human blood.'¹⁶

These are the same terms used by the Mensheviks a few years earlier. They would soon be taken up by Trotsky and, fifty years later, the Belgian Army's chief ideologue would say things no better. It is important to note that the terms 'crazed terror', 'slavery' and 'rivers of blood' were used by the 'old Bolshevik' Solomon to describe the situation in the Soviet Union under Lenin and during the liberal period of 1924–1929, before collectivization. All the slanders of 'terrorist and bloodthirsty régime', hurled by the bourgeoisie against the Soviet régime under Stalin, were hurled, word for word, against Lenin's Soviet Union.

Solomon presented an interesting case of an 'old Bolshevik' who was fundamentally opposed to Lenin's project, but who chose to disrupt and 'distort' it from the inside. Already in 1918, some Bolsheviks had, in front of Lenin, accused Solomon of being a bourgeois, a speculator and a German spy. Solomon denied everything in a self-righteous manner. But it is interesting to note that as soon as he left the Soviet Union, he publicly declared himself to be an avowed anti-Communist.

Frunze

Bazhanov's book, mentioned above, contains another particularly interesting passage. He spoke of the contacts that he had with superior officers in the Red Army:

'(Frunze) was perhaps the only man among the communist leaders who wished the liquidation of the régime and Russia's return to a more human existence.

'At the beginning of the revolution, Frunze was Bolshevik. But he entered the army, fell under the influence of old officers and generals, acquired their traditions and became, to the core, a soldier. As his passion for the army grew, so did his hatred for communism. But he knew how to shut up and hide his thoughts

'(H)e felt that his ambition was to replay in the future the rôle of Napoleon

'Frunze had a well defined plan. He sought most of all to eliminate the Party's power within the Red Army. To start with, he succeeded in abolishing the commissars who, as representatives of the Party, were above the commanders Then, energetically following his plans for a Bonapartist coup d'état, Frunze carefully chose for the various commander positions real military men in whom he could place his trust so that the army could succeed in its coup d'état, an exceptional situation was required, a situation that war, for example, might have brought

'His ability to give a Communist flavor to each of his acts was remarkable.

Nevertheless, Stalin found him out.¹⁷

It is difficult to ascertain whether Bazhanov's judgment of Frunze was correct. But his text clearly showed that in 1926, people were already speculating about militarist and Bonapartist tendencies within the army to put an end to the Soviet régime. Tokaev would write in 1935, 'the Frunze Central Military Aerodrome (was) one of the centres of (Stalin's) irreconcilable enemies'.¹⁸ When Tukhachevsky was arrested and shot in 1937, he was accused of exactly the same intentions that were imputed to Frunze by Bazhanov in 1930.

Alexander Zinoviev

In 1939, Alexander Zinoviev, a brilliant student, was seventeen years old. 'I could see the differences between the reality and the ideals of communism, I made Stalin responsible for this difference'.¹⁹ This sentence perfectly describes petit-bourgeois idealism, which is quite willing to accept Communist ideals, but abstracts itself from social and economic reality, as well as from the international context under which the working class built socialism. Petit-bourgeois idealists reject Communist ideals when they must face the bitterness of class struggle and the material difficulties they meet when building socialism. 'I was already a confirmed anti-Stalinist at the age of seventeen', claimed Zinoviev.²⁰ 'I considered myself a neo-anarchist'.²¹ He passionately read Bakunin and Kropotkin's works, then those of Zheliabov and the populists.²² The October Revolution was made in fact 'so that apparatchiks ... could have their state car for personal use, live in sumptuous apartments and dachas;' it aimed at 'setting up a centralized and bureaucratic State'.²³ 'The idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat was nonsense'.²⁴

Zinoviev continued:

'The idea of killing Stalin filled my thoughts and feelings I already had a penchant for terrorism We studied the "technical" possibilities of an attack ...: during the parade in Red Square ... we would provoke a diversion that would allow me, armed with a pistol and grenades, to attack the leaders.'²⁵

Soon after, with his friend Alexey, he prepared a new attack 'programmed for November 7, 1939'.²⁶

Zinoviev entered a philosophy department in an élite school.

'Upon entry ... I understood that sooner or later I would have to join the CP I had no intention of openly expressing my convictions: I would only get myself in trouble

'I had already chosen my course. I wanted to be a revolutionary struggling for a new society I therefore decided to hide myself for a time and to hide my real nature from my entourage, except for a few intimate friends.'²⁷

These four cases give us an idea of the great difficulty that the Soviet leadership had to face against relentless enemies, hidden and acting in secret, enemies that did everything they possibly could to undermine and destroy the Party and Soviet power from within.

The struggle against opportunism in the Party

During the twenties and thirties, Stalin and other Bolshevnik leaders led many struggles against opportunist tendencies within the Party. The refutation of anti-Leninist ideas coming from Trotsky, then Zinoviev and Kamenev, finally Bukharin, played a central rôle. These ideological and political struggles were led correctly, according to Leninist principles, firmly and patiently.

The Bolshevnik Party led a decisive ideological and political struggle against Trotsky during the period 1922–1937, over the question of the possibility of building socialism in one country, the Soviet Union. Using ‘leftist’ ideology, Trotsky pretended that socialist construction was impossible in the Soviet Union, given the absence of a victorious revolution in a large industrialized country. This defeatist and capitulationist thesis was the one held since 1918 by the Mensheviks, who had concluded that it was impossible to build socialism in a backward peasant country. Many texts by Bolshevnik leaders, essentially by Stalin and Bukharin, show that this struggle was correctly led.

In 1926–1927, Zinoviev and Kamenev joined Trotsky in his struggle against the Party. Together, they formed the United Opposition. The latter denounced the rise of the kulak class, criticized ‘bureaucratism’ and organized clandestine factions within the Party. When Ossovsky defended the right to form ‘opposition parties’, Trotsky and Kamenev voted in the Politburo against his exclusion. Zinoviev took up Trotsky’s ‘impossibility of building socialism in one country’, a theory that he had violently fought against only two years previous, and spoke of the danger of the degeneration of the Party.²⁸

Trotsky invented in 1927 the ‘Soviet thermidor’, analogous with the French counter-revolution where the right-wing Jacobins executed the left-wing Jacobins.

Then Trotsky explained that at the beginning of World War I, when the German army was 80 kilometres (50 miles) from Paris, Clémenceau overthrew the weak government of Painlevé to organize an effective defence without concessions. Trotsky was insinuating that in the case of imperialist attack, he would implement a Clémenceau-like coup d’état.²⁹ Through these acts and his writings, the opposition was thoroughly discredited and, during a vote, received only 6000 votes as against 725,000.³⁰ On December 27, 1927, the Central Committee declared that the opposition had allied itself with anti-Soviet forces and that those who held its positions would be expelled from the Party. All the Trotskyist and Zinovievite leaders were expelled.³¹

However, in June 1928, several Zinovievites recanted and were re-integrated, as were their leaders Zinoviev, Kamenev and Evdokimov.³² A large number of Trotskyists were also re-integrated, including Preobrazhensky and Radek.³³ Trotsky, however, maintained his irreconcilable opposition to the Party and was expelled from the Soviet Union.

The next great ideological struggle was led against Bukharin’s rightist deviation during the collectivization. Bukharin put forward a social-democratic line, based on the idea of class re-conciliation. In fact, he was protecting the development

of the kulaks in the countryside and represented their interests. He insisted on a slowing down of the industrialization of the country. Bukharin was torn asunder by the bitterness of the class struggle in the countryside, whose 'horrors' he described and denounced.

During this struggle, former 'Left Opposition' members made unprincipled alliances with Bukharin in order to overthrow Stalin and the Marxist-Leninist leadership. On July 11, 1928, during the violent debates that took place before the collectivization, Bukharin held a clandestine meeting with Kamenev. He stated that he was ready to 'give up Stalin for Kamenev and Zinoviev', and hoped for 'a bloc to remove Stalin'.³⁴ In September 1928, Kamenev contacted some Trotskyists, asking them to rejoin the Party and to wait 'till the crisis matures'.³⁵

After the success of the collectivization of 1932–1933, Bukharin's defeatist theories were completely discredited.

By that time, Zinoviev and Kamenev had started up once again their struggle against the Party line, in particular by supporting the counter-revolutionary program put forward by Riutin in 1931–1932 (see page 135). They were expelled a second time from the Party and exiled in Siberia.

From 1933 on, the leadership thought that the hardest battles for industrialization and collectivization were behind them. In May 1933, Stalin and Molotov signed a decision to liberate 50 per cent of the people sent to work camps during the collectivization. In November 1934, the kolkhoz management system took its definite form, the kolkhozians having the right to cultivate for themselves a private plot and to raise livestock.³⁶ The social and economic atmosphere relaxed throughout the country.

The general direction of the Party had proven correct. Kamenev, Zinoviev, Bukharin and a number of Trotskyists recognized that they had erred. The Party leadership thought that the striking victories in building socialism would encourage these former opposition leaders to criticize their wrong ideas and to accept Leninist ones. It hoped that all the leading cadres would apply Leninist principles of criticism and self-criticism, the materialist and dialectical method that allows each Communist to improve their political education and to assess their understanding, in order to reinforce the political unity of the Party. For that reason, almost all the leaders of the three opportunist movements, the Trotskyists Pyatakov, Radek, Smirnov and Preobrazhensky, as well as Zinoviev and Kamenev and Bukharin, who in fact had remained in an important position, were invited to the 17th Congress, where they made speeches.

That Congress was the congress of victory and unity.

In his report to the Seventeenth Congress, presented on January 26, 1934, Stalin enumerated the impressive achievements in industrialization, collectivization and cultural development. After having noted the political victory over the Trotskyist group and over the bourgeois nationalists, he stated:

'The anti-Leninist group of the Right deviators has been smashed and scattered. Its organizers have long ago renounced their views and are now trying in every way to expiate the sins they committed against the Party.'³⁷

During the congress, all the old opponents acknowledged the tremendous successes achieved since 1930. In his concluding speech, Stalin stated:

‘(I)t has been revealed that there is extraordinary ideological, political and organizational solidarity in the ranks of the Party.’³⁸

Stalin was convinced that the former deviationists would in the future work loyally to build socialism.

‘We have smashed the enemies of the Party But remnants of their ideology still live in the minds of individual members of the Party, and not infrequently they find expression.’

And he underscored the persistence of ‘the survivals of capitalism in economic life’ and ‘Still less . . . in the minds of people’. ‘That is why we cannot say that the fight is ended and that there is no longer any need for the policy of the socialist offensive.’³⁹

A detailed study of the ideological and political struggle that took place in the Bolshevik leadership from 1922 to 1934 refutes many well-ingrained lies and prejudices. It is patently false that Stalin did not allow other leaders to express themselves freely and that he ruled like a ‘tyrant’ over the Party. Debates and struggles took place openly and over an extended period of time. Fundamentally different ideas confronted each other violently, and socialism’s very future was at stake. Both in theory and in practice, the leadership around Stalin showed that it followed a Leninist line and the different opportunist factions expressed the interests of the old and new bourgeoisies. Stalin was not only careful and patient in the struggle, he even allowed opponents who claimed that they had understood their errors to return to the leadership. Stalin really believed in the honesty of the self-criticisms presented by his former opponents.

The trials and struggle against revisionism and enemy infiltration

On December 1, 1934, Kirov, number two in the Party, was assassinated in his office in the Party Headquarters in Leningrad. The assassin, Nikolayev, had entered simply by showing his Party card. He had been expelled from the Party, but had kept his card.

The counter-revolutionaries in the prisons and in the camps started up their typical slanderous campaign:

‘It was Stalin who killed Kirov!’ This ‘interpretation’ of Kirov’s murder was spread in the West by the dissident Orlov in 1953. At the time, Orlov was in Spain! In a book that he published after he left for the West in 1938, Orlov wrote about hearsay that he picked up during his brief stays in Moscow. But it was only fifteen years later, during the Cold War, that the dissident Orlov would have sufficient insight to make his sensational revelation.

Tokaev, a member of a clandestine anti-Communist organization, wrote that

Kirov was killed by an opposition group and that he, Tokaev, had carefully followed the preparations for the assassination. Liuskov, a member of the NKVD who fled to Japan, confirmed that Stalin had nothing to do with this assassination.⁴⁰

Kirov's assassination took place just as the Party leadership thought that the most difficult struggles were behind them and that Party unity had been re-established. Stalin's first reaction was disorganized and reflected panic. The leadership thought that the assassination of the number two man in the Party meant the beginning of a coup d'état. A new decree was immediately published, calling for the use of summary procedures for the arrest and execution of terrorists. This draconian measure was the result of the feeling of mortal danger for the socialist régime.

At first, the Party looked for the guilty within traditional enemy circles, the Whites. A few of them were executed.

Then, the police found Nikolayev's journal. In it, there was no reference to an opposition movement that had prepared the attack. The inquiry finally concluded that Zinoviev's group had 'influenced' Nikolayev and his friends, but found no evidence of direct implication of Zinoviev, who was sent back to internal exile.

The Party's reaction showed great disarray. The thesis by which Stalin 'prepared' the attack to implement his 'diabolical plan' to exterminate the opposition is not verified by the facts.

The trial of the Trotskyite-Zinovievist Centre

The attack was followed by a purge from the Party of Zinoviev's followers. There was no massive violence. The next few months focused on the great preparations for the new Constitution, based on the concept of socialist democracy.⁴¹

Only sixteen months later, in June 1936, the Kirov dossier was re-opened with the discovery of new information. It turned out that in October 1932, a secret organization, including Zinoviev and Kamenev, had been formed.

The police had proof that Trotsky had sent, early in 1932, clandestine letters to Radek, Sokolnikov, Preobrazhensky and others to incite them to more energetic actions against Stalin. Getty found traces to these letters in Trotsky's archives.⁴²

In October 1932, the former Trotskyist Goltsman clandestinely met Trotsky's son, Sedov, in Berlin. They discussed a proposal by Smirnov to create a United Opposition Block, including Trotskyists, Zinovievites and Lominadze's followers. Trotsky insisted on 'anonymity and clandestinity'. Soon after, Sedov wrote to his father that the Bloc was officially created and that the Safarov-Tarkhanov group was being courted.⁴³ Trotsky's Bulletin published, using pseudonyms, Goltsman's and Smirnov's reports.

Hence, the leadership of the Party had irrefutable proof that a plot existed to overthrow the Bolshevik leadership and to put into power a gang of opportunists walking in step with the old exploiting classes.

The existence of this plot was a major alarming sign.

Trotsky and counter-revolution

It was clear in 1936 to anyone who was carefully analyzing the class struggle on the international scale that Trotsky had degenerated to the point where he was a pawn of all sorts of anti-Communist forces. Full of himself, he assigned himself a planetary and historic rôle, more and more grandiose as the clique around him became insignificant. All his energy focused on one thing: the destruction of the Bolshevik Party, thereby allowing Trotsky and the Trotskyists to seize power. In fact, knowing in detail the Bolshevik Party and its history, Trotsky became one of the world's specialists in the anti-Bolshevik struggle.

To show his idea, we present here some of the public declarations that Trotsky made before the re-opening of the Kirov affair in June 1936. They throw new light on Zinoviev, Kamenev, Smirnov and all those who plotted with Trotsky.

'Destroy the communist movement'

Trotsky declared in 1934 that Stalin and the Communist Parties were responsible for Hitler's rise to power; to overthrow Hitler, the Communist Parties had to be destroyed 'mercilessly'!

'Hitler's victory ... (arose) ... by the despicable and criminal policy of the Comintern. "No Stalin — no victory for Hitler."'⁴⁴

'(T)he Stalinist Comintern, as well as the Stalinist diplomacy, assisted Hitler into the saddle from either side.'⁴⁵

'(T)he Comintern bureaucracy, together with social-democracy, is doing everything it possibly can to transform Europe, in fact the entire world, into a fascist concentration camp.'⁴⁶

'(T)he Comintern provided one of the most important conditions for the victory of fascism. ... to overthrow Hitler it is necessary to finish with the Comintern.'⁴⁷

'Workers, learn to despise this bureaucratic rabble!'⁴⁸

'(The workers must) drive the theory and practice of bureaucratic adventurism out of the ranks of the workers' movement!'⁴⁹

So, early in 1934, Hitler in power less than a year, Trotsky claimed that to overthrow fascism, the international Communist movement had to be destroyed! Perfect example of the 'anti-fascist unity' of which Trotskyists speak so demagogically. Recall that during the same period, Trotsky claimed that the German Communist Party had refused 'the policies of the united front with the Social Democracy'⁵⁰ and that, consequently, it was responsible, by its 'outrageous sectarianism', for Hitler's coming to power. In fact, it was the German Social-Democratic Party that, because of its policy of unconditional defence of the German capitalist régime, refused any anti-fascist and anti-capitalist unity. And Trotsky proposed to 'mercilessly extirpate' the only force that had truly fought against Nazism!

Still in 1934, to incite the more backward masses against the Bolshevik Party, Trotsky put forward his famous thesis that the Soviet Union resembled, in numerous ways, a fascist state.

'(I)n the last period the Soviet bureaucracy has familiarized itself with many

traits of victorious fascism, first of all by getting rid of the control of the party and establishing the cult of the leader.’⁵¹

Capitalist restoration is impossible

In the beginning of 1935, Trotsky’s position was the following: the restoration of capitalism in the USSR is impossible; the economic and political base of the Soviet régime is safe, but the summit, i.e. the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, is the most corrupt, the most anti-democratic and the most reactionary part of society.

Hence, Trotsky took under his wing all the anti-Communist forces that were struggling ‘against the most corrupt part’ of the Bolshevik Party. Within the Party, Trotsky systematically defended opportunists, careerists and defeatists whose actions undermined the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Here is what Trotsky wrote at the end of 1934, just after Kirov’s assassination, just after Zinoviev and Kamenev were excluded from the Party and sentenced to internal exile.

‘(H)ow could it come to pass that at a time like this, after all the economic successes, after the “abolition” — according to official assurances — of classes in the USSR and the “construction” of the socialist society, how could it come to pass that Old Bolsheviks . . . could have posed for their task the *restoration of capitalism* . . . ?

‘Only utter imbeciles would be capable of thinking that capitalist relations, that is to say, the private ownership of the means of production, including the land, can be reestablished in the USSR by peaceful methods and lead to the régime of bourgeois democracy. As a matter of fact, even if it were possible *in general*, capitalism could not be regenerated in Russia except as the result of a savage counterrevolutionary coup d’etat that would cost ten times as many victims as the October Revolution and the civil war.’⁵²

This passage leads one to think. Trotsky led a relentless struggle from 1922 to 1927 within the leadership of the Party, claiming that it was impossible to build socialism in one country, the Soviet Union. But, this unscrupulous individual declared in 1934 that socialism was so solidly established in the Soviet Union that overthrowing it would claim tens of millions of lives!

Then, Trotsky claimed to defend the ‘Old Bolsheviks’. But the ‘Old Bolsheviks’ Zinoviev and Kamenev were diametrically opposed to the ‘Old Bolsheviks’ Stalin, Kirov, Molotov, Kaganovich and Zhdanov. The latter showed that in the bitter class struggle taking place in the Soviet Union, the opportunist positions of Zinoviev and Kamenev opened up the way for the old exploiting classes and for the new bureaucrats.

Trotsky used the age-old bourgeois argument: ‘he is an old revolutionary, how could he have changed sides?’ Khrushchev would take up this slogan in his Secret Report.⁵³

However, Kautsky, once hailed as the spiritual child of Marx and Engels, became, after the death of the founders of scientific socialism, the main Marxist renegade.

Martov was one of the Marxist pioneers in Russia and participated in the creation of the first revolutionary organizations; nevertheless, he became a Menshevik leader and fought against socialist revolution right from October 1917. And what about the ‘Old Bolsheviks’ Khrushchev and Mikoyan, who effectively set the Soviet Union on the path of capitalist restoration.

Trotsky claimed that counter-revolution was impossible without a bloodbath that would cost tens of million lives. He pretended that capitalism could not be retored ‘from inside’, by the internal political degeneration of the Party, by enemy infiltration, by bureaucratization, by the social-democratization of the Party. However, Lenin insisted on this possibility.

Politically, Kamenev and Zinoviev were precursors of Khrushchev. Nevertheless, to ridicule the vigilance against opportunists such as Kamenev, Trotsky used an argument that would be taken up, almost word for word, by Khrushchev in his ‘Secret Report’:

‘(The) “liquidation” (of the former ruling classes) concurrently with the economic successes of the new society must necessarily lead to the mitigation and the withering away of the dictatorship’.⁵⁴

Just as a clandestine organization succeeded in killing the number two of the socialist régime, Trotsky declared that the dictatorship of the proletariat should logically begin to disappear. At the same time that he was pointing a dagger at the heart of the Bolsheviks who were defending the Soviet régime, Trotsky was calling for leniency toward the plotters.

In the same essay, Trotsky painted the terrorists in a favorable light. Trotsky declared that Kirov’s assassination was ‘a new fact that must be considered of great *symptomatic* importance’. He explained:

‘(A) terrorist act prepared beforehand and committed by order of a definite organization is . . . inconceivable unless there exists a political atmosphere favorable to it. The hostility to the leaders in power must have been widespread and must have assumed the sharpest forms for a terrorist group to crystallize out within the ranks of the party youth

‘If . . . discontent is spreading within the masses of the people . . . which isolated the bureaucracy as a whole; if the youth itself feels that it is spurned, oppressed and deprived of the chance for independent development, the atmosphere for terroristic groupings is created.’⁵⁵

Trotsky, while keeping a public distance from individual terrorism, said all he could in favor of Kirov’s assassination! You see, the plot and the assassination were proof of a ‘general atmosphere of hostility that isolated the entire bureaucracy’. Kirov’s assassination proved that ‘the youth feels oppressed and deprived of the chance for independent development’ — this last remark was a direct encouragement for the reactionary youth, who did in fact feel ‘oppressed’ and ‘deprived of the chance for independent development’.

In support of terror and insurrection

Trotsky finished by calling for individual terrorism and armed insurrection to destroy the 'Stalinist' power. Hence, as early as 1935, Trotsky acted as an open counter-revolutionary, as an irreconcilable anti-Communist. Here is a portion of a 1935 text, which he wrote one and a half years before the Great Purge of 1937.

'Stalin ... is the living incarnation of a bureaucratic Thermidor. In his hands, the terror has been and still remains an instrument designed to crush the Party, the unions and the Soviets, and to establish a personal dictatorship that only lacks the imperial crown ...

'The insane atrocities provoked by the bureaucratic collectivization methods, or the cowardly reprisals against the best elements of the proletarian vanguard, have inevitably provoked exasperation, hatred and a spirit of vengeance. This atmosphere generates a readiness among the youth to commit individual acts of terror ...

'Only the successes of the world proletariat can revive the Soviet proletariat's belief in itself. The essential condition of the revolution's victory is the unification of the international revolutionary vanguard under the flag of the Fourth International. The struggle for this banner must be conducted in the Soviet Union, with prudence but without compromise ... The proletariat that made three revolutions will lift up its head one more time. The bureaucratic *absurdity* will try to resist? The proletariat will find a big enough broom. And we will help it.'⁵⁶

Hence, Trotsky discretely encouraged 'individual terror' and openly called for 'a fourth revolution'.

In this text, Trotsky claimed that Stalin 'crushed' the Bolshevik Party, the unions and the Soviets. Such an 'atrocious' counter-revolution, declared Trotsky, would necessarily provoke hatred among the youth, a spirit of vengeance and terrorism. This was a thinly veiled call for the assassination of Stalin and other Bolshevik leaders. Trotsky declared that the activity of his acolytes in the Soviet Union had to follow the strictest rules of a conspiracy; it was clear that he would not directly call for individual terror. But he made it clear that such individual terror would 'inevitably' be provoked by the Stalinist crimes. For conspiratorial language, difficult to be clearer.

If there were any doubt among his followers that they had to follow the armed path, Trotsky added: in Russia, we led an armed revolution in 1905, another one in February 1917 and a third one in October 1917. We are now preparing a fourth revolution against the 'Stalinists'. If they should dare resist, we will treat them as we treated the Tsarists and the bourgeois in 1905 and 1917. By calling for an armed revolution in the Soviet Union, Trotsky became the spokesperson for all the defeated reactionary classes, from the kulaks, who had suffered such 'senseless atrocities' at the hands of the 'bureaucrats' during the collectivization, to the Tsarists, including the bourgeois and the White officers! To drag some workers into his anti-Communist enterprise, Trotsky promised them 'the success of the world proletariat' that would 'give back the confidence to the Soviet proletariat'.

After reading these texts, it is clear that any Soviet Communist who learned of clandestine links between Trotsky and existing members of the Party would have to immediately denounce those members to the state security. All those who maintained clandestine relations with Trotsky were part of a counter-revolutionary plot aiming to destroy the very foundations of Soviet power, notwithstanding the 'leftist' arguments they used to justify their anti-Communist subversion.

The Zinoviev–Kamenev–Smirnov counter-revolutionary group

Let us come back to the discovery, in 1936, of links between Zinoviev–Kamenev–Smirnov and Trotsky's anti-Communist group outside the country.

The trial of the Zinovievites took place in August 1936. It essentially dealt with elements that had been marginal in the Party for several years. The repression against Trotskyists and Zinovievites left the Party structures intact. During the trial, the accused referred to Bukharin. But the prosecutor felt that there was not sufficient proof implicating Bukharin and did not pursue investigations in this direction, i.e. towards the leading cadre circles of the Party.

Nevertheless, the radical tendency within the Party leadership published in July 1936 an internal letter that focused on the fact that enemies had penetrated the Party apparatus itself, that they were hiding their real intentions and that they were noisily showing their support for the general line in order to better sabotage. It was very difficult to unmask them, the letter noted.

The July letter also contained this affirmation: 'Under present conditions, the inalienable quality of every Bolshevik must be the ability to detect the enemy of the party, however well he may be masked'.⁵⁷

This sentence may appear to some as a summary of 'Stalinist' paranoia. They should carefully read the admission of Tokaev, a member of an anti-Communist organization within the CPSU. Tokaev described his reaction to Zinoviev during a Party assembly at the Zhukovsky Military Academy, where he occupied an important position.

'In this atmosphere, there was only one thing for me to do: go with the tide I concentrated on Zinoviev and Kamenev. I avoided all mention of Bukharin. But the chairman would not let this pass: did I or did I not approve of the conclusions Vishinsky had drawn in regard to Bukharin?

'I said that Vishinsky's decision to investigate the activity of Bukharin, Rykov, Tomsky and Uglanov had the approval of the people and the Party, and that I 'completely agreed' — that the 'peoples of the Soviet Union and our Party had the right to know about the two-faced intrigues of Bukharin and Rykov

'(F)rom this statement alone my other readers will grasp in what a turgid atmosphere, in what an ultra-conspiratorial manner — not even knowing one another's characters — we oppositionists of the U.S.S.R. have to work.'⁵⁸

It is therefore clear that at the time of the trial of the Trotskyist–Zinovievite Bloc, Stalin did not support the radical tendency and kept his faith in the head of the NKVD, Yagoda. The latter was able to orient the trial and significantly

restricted the scope of the purge that took place after the discovery of the plot.

However, there was already doubt about Yagoda. Several people, including Van Heijenoort, Trotsky's secretary, and Orlov, an NKVD turncoat, have since affirmed that Mark Zborowsky, Sedov's closest collaborator, worked for the Soviet secret services.⁵⁹ Under these conditions, could Yagoda really have known nothing about the existence of the Trotsky–Zinoviev bloc until 1936? Or did he hide it? Some within the Party were already asking this question. For this reason, in the beginning of 1936, Yezhov, a member of the radical tendency, was named Yagoda's second.

The trial of Pyatakov and the Trotskyists

On September 23, 1936 a wave of explosions hit the Siberian mines, the second in nine months. There were 12 dead. Three days later, Yagoda became Commissar of Communications and Yezhov chief of the NKVD. At least until that time, Stalin had sustained the more or less liberal policies of Yagoda.

Investigations in Siberia led to the arrest of Pyatakov, an old Trotskyist, assistant to Ordzhonikidze, Commissar of Heavy Industry since 1932. Close to Stalin, Ordzhonikidze had followed a policy of using and re-educating bourgeois specialists. Hence, in February 1936, he had amnestied nine 'bourgeois engineers', condemned in 1930 during an major trial on sabotage.

On the question of industry, there had been for several years debates and divisions within the Party. Radicals, led by Molotov, opposed most of the bourgeois specialists, in whom they had little political trust. They had long called for a purge. Ordzhonikidze, on the other hand, said that they were needed and that their specialties had to be used.

This recurring debate about old specialists with a suspect past resurfaced with the sabotage in the Siberian mines. Inquiries revealed that Pyatakov, Ordzhonikidze's assistant, had widely used bourgeois specialists to sabotage the mines.

In January 1937, the trial of Pyatakov, Radek and other old Trotskyists was held; they admitted their clandestine activities. For Ordzhonikidze, the blow was so hard that he committed suicide.

Of course, several bourgeois authors have claimed that the accusations of systematic sabotage were completely invented, that these were frameups whose sole rôle was to eliminate political opponents. But there was a U.S. engineer who worked between 1928 and 1937 as a leading cadre in the mines of Ural and Siberia, many of which had been sabotaged. The testimony of this apolitical technician John Littlepage is interesting on many counts.

Littlepage described how, as soon as he arrived in the Soviet mines in 1928, he became aware of the scope of industrial sabotage, the method of struggle preferred by enemies of the Soviet régime. There was therefore a large base fighting against the Bolshevik leadership, and if some well-placed Party cadres were encouraging or simply protecting the saboteurs, they could seriously weaken the régime. Here

is Littlepage's description.

'One day in 1928 I went into a power-station at the Kochbar gold-mines. I just happened to drop my hand on one of the main bearings of a large Diesel engine as I walked by, and felt something gritty in the oil. I had the engine stopped immediately, and we removed from the oil reservoir about two pints of quartz sand, which could have been placed there only by design. On several other occasions in the new milling plants at Kochkar we found sand inside such equipment as speed-reducers, which are entirely enclosed, and can be reached only by removing the hand-hold covers.

'Such petty industrial sabotage was — and still is — so common in all branches of Soviet industry that Russian engineers can do little about it, and were surprised at my own concern when I first encountered it

'Why, I have been asked, is sabotage of this description so common in Soviet Russia, and so rare in most other countries? Do Russians have a peculiar bent for industrial wrecking?

'People who ask such questions apparently haven't realized that the authorities in Russia have been — and still are — fighting a whole series of open or disguised civil wars. In the beginning they fought and dispossessed the aristocracy, the bankers and landowners and merchants of the Tsarist *régime* they later fought and dispossessed the little independent farmers and the little retail merchants and the nomad herders in Asia.

'Of course it's all for their own good, say the Communists. But many of these people can't see things that way, and remain bitter enemies of the Communists and their ideas, even after they have been put back to work in State industries. From these groups have come a considerable number of disgruntled workers who dislike Communists so much that they would gladly damage any of their enterprises if they could.'⁶⁰

Sabotage in the Urals

During his work in the Kalata mines, in the Ural region, Littlepage was confronted by deliberate sabotage by engineers and Party cadres. It was clear to him that these acts were a deliberate attempt to weaken the Bolshevik régime, and that such blatant sabotage could only take place with the approval of the highest authorities in the Ural Region. Here is his important summary:

'Conditions were reported to be especially bad in the copper-mines of the Ural Mountain region, at that time Russia's most promising mineral-producing area, which had been selected for a lion's share of the funds available for production. American mining engineers had been engaged by the dozens for use in this area, and hundreds of American foremen had likewise been brought over for instructional purposes in mines and mills. Four or five American mining engineers had been assigned to each of the large copper-mines in the Urals, and American metallurgists as well.

'These men had all been selected carefully; they had excellent records in the

United States. But, with very few exceptions, they had proved disappointing in the results they were obtaining in Russia. When Serebrovsky was given control of copper- and lead-mines, as well as gold, he wanted to find out why these imported experts weren't producing as they should; and in January 1931 he sent me off, together with an American metallurgist and a Russian Communist manager, to investigate conditions in the Ural mines, and try to find out what was wrong and how to correct it

'We discovered, in the first place, that the American engineers and metallurgists were not getting any co-operation at all; no attempt had been made to provide them with competent interpreters They had carefully surveyed the properties to which they were assigned and drawn up recommendations for exploitation which could have been immediately useful if applied. But these recommendations had either never been translated into Russian or had been stuck into pigeonholes and never brought out again

'The mining methods used were so obviously wrong that a first-year engineering student could have pointed out most of their faults. Areas too large for control were being opened up, and ore was being removed without the proper timbering and filling. In an effort to speed up production before suitable preparations had been completed several of the best mines had been badly damaged, and some ore bodies were on the verge of being lost beyond recovery

'I shall never forget the situation we found at Kalata. Here, in the Northern Urals, was one of the most important copper properties in Russia, consisting of six mines, a flotation concentrator, and a smelter, with blast and reverberatory furnaces. Seven American mining engineers of the first rank, drawing very large salaries, had been assigned to this place some time before. Any one of them, if he had been given the opportunity, could have put this property in good running order in a few weeks.

'But at the time our commission arrived they were completely tied down by red tape. Their recommendations were ignored; they were assigned no particular work; they were unable to convey their ideas to Russian engineers through ignorance of the language and lack of competent interpreters Of course, they knew what was technically wrong with the mines and mills at Kalata, and why production was a small fraction of what it should have been with the amount of equipment and *personnel* available.

'Our commission visited practically all the big copper-mines in the Urals and gave them a thorough inspection

'(I)n spite of the deplorable conditions I have described there had been few howls in the Soviet newspapers about "wreckers" in the Ural copper-mines. This was a curious circumstance, because the Communists were accustomed to attribute to deliberate sabotage much of the confusion and disorder in industry at the time. But the Communists in the Urals, who controlled the copper-mines, had kept surprisingly quiet about them.

'In July 1931, after Serebrovsky had examined the report of conditions made by our commission, he decided to send me back to Kalata as chief engineer, to see if

we couldn't do something with this big property. He sent along with me a Russian Communist manager, who had no special knowledge of mining, but who was given complete authority, and apparently was instructed to allow me free rein

'The seven American engineers brightened up considerably when they discovered we really had sufficient authority to cut through the red tape and give them a chance to work. They . . . went down into the mines alongside their workmen, in the American mining tradition. Before long things were picking up fast, and within five months production rose by 90 per cent.

'The Communist manager was an earnest fellow; he tried hard to understand what we were doing and how we did it. But the Russian engineers at these mines, almost without exception, were sullen and obstructive. They objected to every improvement we suggested. I wasn't used to this sort of thing; the Russian engineers in gold-mines where I had worked had never acted like this.

'However, I succeeded in getting my methods tried out in these mines, because the Communist manager who had come with me supported every recommendation I made. And when the methods worked the Russian engineers finally fell into line, and seemed to get the idea

'At the end of five months I decided I could safely leave this property Mines and plant had been thoroughly reorganized; there seemed to be no good reason why production could not be maintained at the highly satisfactory rate we had established.

'I drew up detailed instructions for future operations I explained these things to the Russian engineers and to the Communist manager, who was beginning to get some notion of mining. The latter assured me that my ideas would be followed to the letter.'⁶¹

'(I)n the spring of 1932 Soon after my return to Moscow I was informed that the copper-mines at Kalata were in very bad condition; production had fallen even lower than it was before I had reorganized the mines in the previous year. This report dumbfounded me; I couldn't understand how matters could have become so bad in this short time, when they had seemed to be going so well before I left.

'Serebrovsky asked me to go back to Kalata to see what could be done. When I reached there I found a depressing scene. The Americans had all finished their two-year contracts, which had not been renewed, so they had gone home. A few months before I arrived the Communist manager . . . had been removed by a commission which had been sent in from Sverdlovsk, Communist headquarters in the Urals. The commission had reported that he was ignorant and inefficient, although there was nothing in his record to show it, and had appointed the chairman of the investigating commission to succeed him — a curious sort of procedure.

'During my previous stay at the mines we had speeded up capacity of the blast furnaces to seventy-eight metric tons per square metre per day; they had now been permitted to drop back to their old output of forty to forty-five tons. Worst of all, thousands of tons of high-grade ore had been irretrievably lost by the introduction into two mines of methods which I had specifically warned against during my previous visit

‘But I now learned that almost immediately after the Russian engineers were sent home the same Russian engineers whom I had warned about the danger had applied this method in the remaining mines (despite his written opposition, as the method was not universally applicable), with the result that the mines caved in and much ore was lost beyond recovery

‘I set to work to try to recover some of the lost ground

‘Then one day I discovered that the new manager was secretly countermanding almost every order I gave

‘I reported exactly what I had discovered at Kalata to Serebrovsky

‘In a short time the mine manager and some of the engineers were put on trial for sabotage. The manager got ten years . . . and the engineers lesser terms

‘I was satisfied at the time that there was something bigger in all this than the little group of men at Kalata; but I naturally couldn’t warn Serebrovsky against prominent members of his own Communist Party But I was so sure that something was wrong high up in the political administration of the Ural Mountains

‘It seemed clear to me at the time that the selection of this commission had their conduct at Kalata traced straight back to the Communist high command in Sverdlovsk, whose members must be charged either with criminal negligence or actual participation in the events which had occurred in these mines.

‘However, the chief secretary of the Communist Party in the Urals, a man named Kabakoff, had occupied this post since 1922 . . . he was considered so powerful that he was privately described as the “Bolshevik Viceroy of the Urals.”

‘(T)here was nothing to justify the reputation he appeared to have. Under his long rule the Ural area, which is one of the richest mining regions in Russia, and which was given almost unlimited capital for exploitation, never produced anything like what it should have done.

‘This commission at Kalata, whose members later admitted they had come there with wrecking intentions, had been sent directly from Kabakoff’s headquarters I told some of my Russian acquaintances at the time that it seemed to me there was a lot more going on in the Urals than had yet been revealed, and that it came from somewhere high up.

‘All these incidents became clearer, so far as I was concerned, after the conspiracy trial in January 1937, when Piatakoff, together with several of his associates, confessed in open court that they had engaged in organized sabotage of mines, railways, and other industrial enterprises since the beginning of 1931. A few weeks after this trial . . . the chief secretary of the Party in the Urals, Kabakoff, who had been a close associate of Piatakoff’s, was arrested on charges of complicity in this same conspiracy.’⁶²

The opinion given here by Littlepage about Kabakov is worth remembering, since Khrushchev, in his infamous 1956 Secret Report, cited him as an example of worthy leader, ‘who had been a party member since 1914’ and victim of ‘repressions . . . which were based on nothing tangible’!⁶³

Sabotage in Kazakhstan

Since Littlepage visited so many mining regions, he was able to notice that this form of bitter class struggle, industrial sabotage, had developed all over the Soviet Union.

Here is how he described what he saw in Kazakhstan between 1932 and 1937, the year of the purge.

‘(In October 1932,) An SOS had been sent out from the famous Ridder lead-zinc mines in Eastern Kazakstan, near the Chinese border

‘(I was instructed) to take over the mines as chief engineer, and to apply whatever methods I considered best. At the same time the Communist managers apparently received instructions to give me a free hand and all possible assistance.

‘The Government had spent large sums of money on modern American machinery and equipment for these mines, as for almost all others in Russia at that time But . . . the engineers had been so ignorant of this equipment and the workmen so careless and stupid in handling any kind of machinery that much of these expensive importations were ruined beyond repair.’⁶⁴

‘Two of the younger Russian engineers there impressed me as particularly capable, and I took a great deal of pains to explain to them how things had gone wrong before, and how we had managed to get them going along the right track again. It seemed to me that these young fellows, with the training I had been able to give them, could provide the leadership necessary to keep the mines operating as they should.’⁶⁵

‘The Ridder mines . . . had gone on fairly well for two or three years after I had reorganized them in 1932. The two young engineers who had impressed me so favorably had carried out the instructions I had left them with noteworthy success

‘Then an investigating commission had appeared from Alma Ata . . . similar to the one sent to the mines at Kalata. From that time on, although the same engineers had remained in the mines, an entirely different system was introduced throughout, which any competent engineer could have foretold would cause the loss of a large part of the ore body in a few months. They had even mined pillars which we had left to protect the main working shafts, so that the ground close by had settled

‘(T)he engineers of whom I had spoken were no longer at work in the mines when I arrived there in 1937, and I understood they had been arrested for alleged complicity in a nation-wide conspiracy to sabotage Soviet industries which had been disclosed in a trial of leading conspirators in January.

‘When I had submitted my report I was shown the written confessions of the engineers I had befriended in 1932. They admitted that they had been drawn into a conspiracy against the Stalin *régime* by opposition Communists who convinced them that they were strong enough to overthrow Stalin and his associates and take over control of the Soviet Government. The conspirators proved to them, they said, that they had many supporters among Communists in high places. These

engineers, although they themselves were not Communists, decided they would have to back one side or the other, and they picked the losing side.

‘According to their confessions, the ‘investigating commission’ had consisted of conspirators, who traveled around from mine to mine lining up supporters. After they had been persuaded to join the conspiracy the engineers at Ridder had taken my written instructions as the basis for wrecking the mines. They had deliberately introduced methods which I had warned against, and in this way had brought the mines close to destruction.’⁶⁶

‘I never followed the subtleties of political ideas and manœuvres (But) I am firmly convinced that Stalin and his associates were a long time getting round to the discovery that disgruntled Communist revolutionaries were the most dangerous enemies they had

‘My experience confirms the official explanation which, when it is stripped of a lot of high-flown and outlandish verbiage, comes down to the simple assertion that ‘outs’ among the Communists conspired to overthrow the ‘ins’, and resorted to underground conspiracy and industrial sabotage because the Soviet system has stifled all legitimate means for waging a political struggle.

‘This Communist feud developed into such a big affair that many non-Communists were dragged into it, and had to pick one side or the other Disgruntled little persons of all kinds were in a mood to support any kind of underground opposition movement, simply because they were discontented with things as they stood.’⁶⁷

Pyatakov in Berlin

During the January 1937 Trial, Pyatakov, the old Trotskyist, was convicted as the most highly placed person responsible of industrial sabotage. In fact, Littlepage actually had the opportunity to see Pyatakov implicated in clandestine activity. Here is what he wrote:

‘In the spring of 1931 . . . , Serebrovsky . . . told me a large purchasing commission was headed for Berlin, under the direction of Yuri Piatakoff, who . . . was then the Vice-Commissar of Heavy Industry

‘I . . . arrived in Berlin at about the same time as the commission

‘Among other things, the commission had put out bids for several dozen mine-hoists, ranging from one hundred to one thousand horse-power. Ordinarily these hoists consist of drums, shafting, beams, gears, etc., placed on a foundation of I- or H-beams.

‘The commission had asked for quotations on the basis of pfennigs per kilogramme. Several concerns put in bids, but there was a considerable difference — about five or six pfennigs per kilogramme — between most of the bids and those made by two concerns which bid lowest. The difference made me examine the specifications closely, and I discovered that the firms which had made the lowest bids had substituted cast-iron bases for the light steel required in the original specifications, so that if their bids had been accepted the Russians would have actually

paid more, because the cast-iron base would be so much heavier than the lighter steel one, but on the basis of pfennigs per kilogramme they would appear to pay less.

‘This seemed to be nothing other than a trick, and I was naturally pleased to make such a discovery. I reported my findings to the Russian members of the commission with considerable self-satisfaction. To my astonishment the Russians were not at all pleased. They even brought considerable pressure upon me to approve the deal, telling me I had misunderstood what was wanted

‘I . . . wasn’t able to understand their attitude

‘It might very well be graft, I thought.’⁶⁸

During his trial, Pyatakoff made the following declarations to the tribunal:

‘In 1931 I was in Berlin of official business In the middle of the summer of 1931 Ivan Nikitich Smirnov told me in Berlin that the Trotskyite fight against the Soviet government and the Party leadership was being renewed with new vigour, that he — Smirnov — had had an interview in Berlin with Trotsky’s son, Sedov, who on Trotsky’s instruction gave him a new line

‘Smirnov . . . conveyed to me that Sedov wanted very much to see me

‘I agreed to this meeting

‘Sedov said . . . that there was being formed, or already been formed . . . a Trotskyite centre The possibility was being sounded of restoring the united organization with the Zinovievites.

‘Sedov also said that he knew for a fact the Rights also, in the persons of Tomsky, Bukharin and Rykov, had not laid down their arms, that they had only quietened down temporarily, and that the necessary connections should be established with them too

‘Sedov said that only one thing was required of me, namely that I should place as many orders as possible with two German firms, Borsig and Demag, and that he, Sedov, would arrange to receive the necessary sums from them, bearing in mind that I would not be particularly exacting as to prices. If this were deciphered it was clear that the additions to prices that would be made on the Soviet orders would pass wholly or in part into Trotsky’s hands for his counter-revolutionary purposes.’⁶⁹

Littlepage made the following comment:

‘This passage in Piatakoff’s confession is a plausible explanation, in my opinion, of what was going on in Berlin in 1931, when my suspicions were roused because the Russians working with Piatakoff tried to induce me to approve the purchase of mine-hoists which were not only too expensive, but would have been useless in the mines for which they were intended. I had found it hard to believe that these men were ordinary grafters But they had been seasoned political conspirators before the Revolution, and had taken risks of the same degree for the sake of their so-called cause.’⁷⁰

Sabotage in Magnitogorsk

Another American engineer, John Scott, who worked at Magnitogorsk, recorded similar events in his book *Behind the Urals*. When describing the 1937 Purge, he wrote that there was serious, sometimes criminal negligence on the part of the people responsible. The machines at Magnitogorsk were deliberately sabotaged by ex-kulaks who had become workers. A bourgeois engineer, Scott analyzed the purge as follows:

‘Many people in Magnitogorsk, arrested and indicted for political crimes, were just thieves, embezzlers, and bandits’⁷¹

‘The purge struck Magnitogorsk in 1937 with great force. Thousands were arrested

‘The October Revolution earned the enmity of the old aristocracy, the officers of the old Czarist army and of the various White armies, State employees from pre-war days, business men of all kinds, small landlords, and kulaks. All of these people had ample reason to hate the Soviet power, for it had deprived them of something which they had before. Besides being internally dangerous, these men and women were potentially good material for clever foreign agents to work with

‘Geographical conditions were such that no matter what kind of government was in power in the Soviet Union, poor, thickly populated countries like Japan and Italy and aggressive powers like Germany would leave no stone unturned in their attempts to infiltrate it with their agents, in order to establish their organizations and assert their influence These agents bred purges

‘A large number of spies, saboteurs, and fifth-columnists were exiled or shot during the purge; but many more innocent men and women were made to suffer.’⁷²

The trial of the Bukharinist social-democratic group

The February 1937 decision to purge

Early in 1937, a crucial meeting of the Bolshevik Party Central Committee took place. It decided that a purge was necessary and how it should be carried out. Stalin subsequently published an important document. At the time of the plenum, the police had gathered sufficient evidence to prove that Bukharin was aware of the conspiratorial activities of the anti-Party groups unmasked during the trials of Zinoviev and Pyatakov. Bukharin was confronted with these accusations during the plenum. Unlike the other groups, Bukharin’s group was at the very heart of the Party and his political influence was great.

Some claim that Stalin’s report sounded the signal that set off ‘terror’ and ‘arbitrary criminality’. Let us look at the real contents of this document.

His first thesis claimed that lack of revolutionary vigilance and political naïveté had spread throughout the Party. Kirov’s murder was the first serious warning, from which not all the necessary conclusions had been drawn. The trial of Zinoviev and the Trotskyists revealed that these elements were ready to do anything to

destroy the régime. However, economic successes had created within the Party a feeling of self-satisfaction and victory. Cadres had forgotten capitalist encirclement and the increasing bitterness of the class struggle at the international level. Many had become submerged by little management questions and no longer preoccupied themselves with the major lines of national and international struggle.

Stalin said:

‘Comrades, from the reports and the debates on these reports heard at this Plenum it is evident that we are dealing with the following three main facts.

‘First, the wrecking, diversionists and espionage work of the agents of foreign countries, among who, a rather active role was played by the Trotskyites, affected more or less all, or nearly all, our organisations — economic, administrative and Party.

‘Second, the agents of foreign countries, among them the Trotskyites, not only penetrated into our lower organisations, but also into a number of responsible positions.

‘Third, some of our leading comrades, at the centre and in the districts, not only failed to discern the real face of these wreckers, diversionists, spies and assassins, but proved to be so careless, complacent and naive that not infrequently they themselves helped to promote agents of foreign powers to responsible positions.’⁷³

From these remarks, Stalin drew two conclusions.

First, political credulity and naïveté had to be eliminated and revolutionary vigilance had to be reinforced. The remnants of the defeated exploiting classes would resort to sharper forms of class struggle and would clutch at the most desperate forms of struggle as the last resort of the doomed.⁷⁴

In 1956, in his Secret Report, Khrushchev referred to this passage. He claimed that Stalin justified ‘mass terror’ by putting forth the formulation that ‘as we march forward toward socialism class war must . . . sharpen’.⁷⁵

This is a patent falsehood. The most ‘intense’ class struggle was the generalized civil war that drew great masses against each other, as in 1918–1920. Stalin talked about the remnants of the old classes that, in a desperate situation, would resort to the sharpest forms of struggle: attacks, assassinations, sabotage.

Stalin’s second conclusion was that to reinforce vigilance, the political education of Party cadres had to be improved. He proposed a political education system of four to eight months for all cadres, from cell leaders all the way to the highest leaders.

Stalin’s first report, presented on March 3, focused on the ideological struggle so that members of the Central Committee could take note of the gravity of the situation and understand the scope of subversive work that had taken place within the Party. His speech on March 5 focused on other forms of deviation, particularly leftism and bureaucracy.

Stalin began by explicitly warning against the tendency to arbitrarily extend the purge and repression.

‘Does that mean that we must strike at and uproot, not only real Trotskyites, but also those who at some time or other wavered in the direction of Trotskyism

and then, long ago, abandoned Trotskyism; not only those who, at some time or other, had occasion to walk down a street through which some Trotskyite had passed? At all events, such voices were heard at this Plenum You cannot measure everyone with the same yardstick. Such a wholesale approach can only hinder the fight against the real Trotskyite wreckers and spies.⁷⁶

In preparation for the war, the Party certainly had to be purged of infiltrated enemies; nevertheless, Stalin warned against an arbitrary extension of the purge, which would harm the struggle against the real enemies.

The Party was not just menaced by the subversive work of infiltrated enemies, but also by serious deviations by cadres, in particular the tendency to form closed cliques of friends and to cut oneself off from militants and from the masses through bureaucratic methods.

First, Stalin attacked the 'family atmosphere', in which 'there can be no place for criticism of defects in the work, or for self-criticism by leaders of the work'.⁷⁷ 'Most often, workers are not chosen for objective reasons, but for causal, subjective, philistine, petty-bourgeois reasons. Most often, so-called acquaintances, friends, fellow-townsmen, personally devoted people, masters in the art of praising their chiefs are chosen.'⁷⁸

Finally, Stalin criticized bureaucracy, which, on certain questions, was 'positively unprecedented'.⁷⁹ During investigations, many ordinary workers were excluded from the Party for 'passivity'. Most of these expulsions were not justified and should have been annulled a long time ago. Yet, many leaders held a bureaucratic attitude towards these unjustly expelled Communists.⁸⁰ '(S)ome of our Party leaders suffer from a lack of concern for people, for members of the Party, for workers because they have no individual approach in appraising Party members and Party workers they usually act in a haphazard way only those who are in fact profoundly anti-Party can have such an approach to members of the Party.'⁸¹

Bureaucracy also prevented Party leaders from learning from the masses. Nevertheless, to correctly lead the Party and the country, Communist leaders had to base themselves on the experiences of the masses.

Finally, bureaucracy made the control of leaders by Party masses impossible. Leaders had to report on their work at conferences and listen to criticisms from their base. During elections, several candidates had to be presented and, after a discussion of each, the vote should take place with a secret ballot.⁸²

The Riutin affair

During 1928–1930, Bukharin was bitterly criticized for his social-democratic ideas, particularly for his opposition to the collectivization, his policy of 'social peace' with the kulaks and his attempt to slow down the industrialization efforts.

Pushing even further than Bukharin, Mikhail Riutin formed an openly counter-revolutionary group in 1931–1932. Riutin, a former substitute member of the Central Committee, was Party Secretary for a Moscow district until 1932. He was

surrounded by several well-known young Bukharinists, including Slepkov, Maretsky and Petrovsky.⁸³

In 1931, Riutin wrote up a 200-page document, a real program for the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. Here are a few passages:

‘Already in 1924–1925, Stalin was planning to organize his ‘Eighteenth Brumaire’. Just as Louis Bonaparte swore in front of the house his faithfulness to the constitution, while at the same time preparing his proclamation as emperor Stalin was preparing his ‘bloodless’ Eighteenth Brumaire by amputating one group after another Those who do not know how to think in a Marxist manner think that the elimination of Stalin would at the same time mean the reversal of Soviet power The dictatorship of the proletariat will inevitably perish because of Stalin and his clique. By eliminating Stalin, we will have many chances to save it.

‘What should be done?’

‘The Party.

‘1. Liquidate the dictatorship by Stalin and his clique.

‘2. Replace the entire leadership of the Party apparatus.

‘3. Immediately convoke an extraordinary congress of the Party.

‘The Soviets.

‘1. New elections excluding nomination.

‘2. Replacing the judicial machine and introduction of a rigorous legality.

‘3. Replacement and purge of the OGPU apparatus.

‘Agriculture.

‘1. Dissolution of all kolkhozes created by force.

‘2. Liquidation of all unprofitable sovkhozes.

‘3. Immediate halt to the pillage of the peasants.

‘4. Rules allowing the exploitation of land by private owners and the return of land to these owners for an extended period.’⁸⁴

Riutin’s ‘communist’ program in no way differed from that of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie: liquidate the Party leadership, dismantle the state security apparatus and re-establish private farms and the kulaks. All counter-revolutionaries, from Khrushchev to Gorbachev and Yeltsin, would adhere to this program. But in 1931, Riutin, like Trotsky, was forced to hide this program in ‘leftist’ rhetoric: he wanted the restoration of capitalism, you see, to save the dictatorship of the proletariat and to stop the counter-revolution, i.e. the ‘Eighteenth Brumaire’ or the ‘Thermidor’.

During his 1938 trial, Bukharin stated that the young Bukharinists, with the accord and initiative of Slepkov, organized a conference at the end of the summer of 1932 in which Riutin’s platform was approved.

‘I fully agreed with this platform and I bear full responsibility for it.’⁸⁵

Bukharin’s revisionism

Starting from 1931, Bukharin played a leading rôle in the Party work among intellectuals. He had great influence in the Soviet scientific community and in the

Academy of Sciences.⁸⁶ As the chief editor of the government newspaper *Izvestiia*, Bukharin was able to promote his political and ideological line.⁸⁷ At the Inaugural Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, Bukharin praised at length the ‘defiantly apolitical’ Boris Pasternak.⁸⁸

Bukharin remained the idol of the rich peasants and also became the standard bearer for the technocrats. Stephen F. Cohen, author of the biography *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, claimed that Bukharin supported Stalin’s leadership to better struggle against it:

‘It was evident to Bukharin that the party and the country were entering a new period of uncertainty but also of possible changes in Soviet domestic and foreign policy. To participate in and influence these events, he, too, had to adhere to the facade of unanimity and uncritical acceptance of Stalin’s past leadership behind which the muted struggle over the country’s future course was to be waged.’⁸⁹

In 1934–1936, Bukharin often wrote about the fascist danger and about the inevitable war with Nazism. Speaking of measures that had to be taken to prepare the country for a future war, Bukharin defined a program that brought his old right-opportunist and social-democratic ideas up-to-date. He said that the ‘enormous discontent among the population’, primarily among the peasantry, had to be eliminated. Here was the new version of his old call for reconciliation with the kulaks — the only really ‘discontent’ class in the countryside, during those years. To attack the collectivization experience, Bukharin developed propaganda around the theme of ‘socialist humanism’, where the ‘criterion is the *freedom of maximal development of the maximum number of people*’.⁹⁰ In the name of ‘humanism’, Bukharin preached class conciliation and ‘freedom of maximal development’ for old and new bourgeois elements. To fight fascism, ‘democratic reforms’ had to be introduced to offer a ‘prosperous life’ to the masses. At this time, the country was being menaced by the Nazis and, given the necessity of great sacrifices to prepare resistance, the promise of a ‘prosperous life’ was sheer demagoguery. Nevertheless, in this relatively underdeveloped country, the technocrats and the bureaucrats wanted ‘democracy’ for their nascent bourgeois tendency and a ‘prosperous life’ at the expense of the working masses. Bukharin was their spokesperson.

The basis of the Bukharinist program was halting the class struggle, ending political vigilance against anti-socialist forces, demagogically promising an immediate improvement in the standard of living, and democracy for opportunist and social-democratic tendencies.

Cohen, a militant anti-Communist, is not mistaken when he calls this program a precursor of Khrushchev’s.⁹¹

Bukharin and the enemies of Bolshevism

Bukharin was sent to Paris to meet the Menshevik Nikolayevsky, who had some manuscripts of Marx and Engels. The Soviet Union wanted to buy them. Nikolayevsky reported on his discussions with Bukharin.

‘Bukharin seemed to be longing for calm, far from the fatigue imposed on him by

his life in Moscow. He was tired'.⁹² 'Bukharin let me know indirectly that he had acquired a great pessimism in Central Asia and had lost the will to live. However, he did not want to commit suicide'.⁹³

The Menshevik Nikolayevsky continued: 'I knew the Party order preventing Communists from talking to non-members about relationships within the Party, so I did not broach the subject. However, we did have several conversations about the internal situation in the Party. Bukharin wanted to talk'.⁹⁴ Bukharin the 'old Bolshevik' had violated the most elementary rules of a Communist party, faced with a political enemy.

'Fanny Yezerkaya . . . tried to persuade him to stay abroad. She told him that it was necessary to form an opposition newspaper abroad, a newspaper that would be truly informed about what was happening in Russia and that could have great influence. She claimed that Bukharin was the only one with the right qualifications. But she gave me Bukharin's answer, "I don't think that I could live without Russia. We are all used to what is going on and to the tension that reigns."'⁹⁵ Bukharin allowed himself to be approached by enemies who were plotting to overthrow the Bolshevik régime. His evasive answer shows that he did not take a principled stand against the provocative proposition to direct an anti-Bolshevik newspaper abroad.

Nikolayevsky continued: 'When we were in Copenhagen, Bukharin reminded me that Trotsky was close by, in Oslo. With the wink of an eye, he suggested: "Suppose we took this trunk . . . and spent a day with Trotsky", and continued: "Obviously we fought to the bitter end but that does not prevent me from having the greatest respect for him."'⁹⁶ In Paris, Bukharin also paid a visit to the Menshevik leader Fedor Dan, to whom he confided that, in his eyes, Stalin was 'not a man, a devil'.⁹⁷

In 1936, Trotsky had become an irreconcilable counter-revolutionary, calling for terrorism, and a partisan of an anti-Bolshevik insurrection. Dan was one of the main leaders of the social-democratic counter-revolution. Bukharin had become closer politically to these individuals.

Nikolayevsky:

'He asked me one day to procure him Trotsky's bulletin so that he could read the last issues. I also gave him socialist publications, including *Sotsialisticheskyy Vestnik* An article in the last issue contained an analysis of Gorky's plan aiming to regroup the intelligentsia in a separate party so that it could take part in the elections. Bukharin responded: 'A second party is necessary. If there is only one electoral list, without opposition, that's equivalent to Nazism'.⁹⁸

'Bukharin pulled his pen from his pocket and showed it to me: 'Look carefully. It is with this pen that the New Soviet Constitution was written, from the first to the last word.' Bukharin was very proud of this Constitution On the whole, it was a good framework for the pacific transfer from the dictatorship of one party to a real popular democracy.'⁹⁹

'Interested' by the ideas of the social-democrats and Trotsky, Bukharin even took up their main thesis of the necessity of an opposition anti-Bolshevik party, which would necessarily become the rallying point of all reactionary forces.

Nikolayevsky:

‘Bukharin’s humanism was due in great part to the cruelty of the forced collectivization and the internal battle that it set off within the Party ‘They are no longer human beings,’ Bukharin said. ‘They have truly become the cogs in a terrible machine. A complete dehumanization of people takes place in the Soviet apparatus’.¹⁰⁰

‘Bogdanov had predicted, at the beginning of the Bolshevik Revolution, the birth of the dictatorship of a new class of economic leaders. Original thinker and, during the 1905 revolution, second in importance among the Bolsheviks, Bogdanov played a leading rôle in Bukharin’s education Bukharin was not in agreement with Bogdanov’s conclusions, but he did understand that the great danger of ‘early socialism’ — what the Bolsheviks were creating — was in the creation of the dictatorship of a new class. Bukharin and I discussed this question at length.’¹⁰¹

During 1918–1920, given the bitterness of the class struggle, all the bourgeois elements of the workers’ movement passed over to the side of the Tsarist and imperialist reaction in the name of ‘humanism’. Upholding the Anglo-French intervention, hence the most terrorist colonialist régimes, all these men, from Tsereteli to Bogdanov, had denounced the ‘dictatorship’ and the ‘new class of Bolshevik aristocrats’ in the Soviet Union.

Bukharin followed the same line, despite the conditions of class struggle in the thirties.

Bukharin and the military conspiracy

In 1935–1936, Bukharin developed closer links with the groups of military conspirators who were plotting the overthrow of the Party leadership.

On July 28, 1936, a clandestine meeting of the anti-Communist organization that included Colonel Tokaev was held. The agenda included a discussion of the different proposals on the new Soviet Constitution. Tokaev noted:

‘Stalin aimed at one party dictatorship and complete centralisation. Bukharin envisaged several parties and even nationalist parties, and stood for the maximum of decentralisation. He was also in favour of vesting authority in the various constituent republics and thought that the more important of these should even control their own foreign relations. By 1936, Bukharin was approaching the social democratic standpoint of the left-wing socialists of the West.’¹⁰²

‘Bukharin had studied the alternative draft (of the Constitution) prepared by Demokratov (a member of Tokaev’s clandestine organization) and . . . among the documents were now included a number of important observations based on our work.’¹⁰³

The military conspirators of Tokaev’s group claimed that they were close to the political positions defended by Bukharin.

‘Bukharin wanted to go slowly with the peasants, and delay the ending of the NEP . . . he also held that the revolution need not take place everywhere by armed uprising and force Bukharin thought that every country should develop on its own lines

‘(Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsy) succeeded in publishing (the) main points (of their program): (1) Not to end the NEP but to continue it for at least ten years . . . ; (4) While pursuing industrialisation, to remember that the Revolution was made for the ordinary man, and that, therefore far more energy must be given to light industry — socialism is made by happy, well-fed men, not starving beggars; (5) To halt the compulsory collectivisation of agriculture and the destruction of *kulaks*.’¹⁰⁴

This program was designed to protect the bourgeoisie in agriculture, commerce and light industry, as well as to slow down industrialization. If it had been implemented, the Soviet Union would no doubt have been defeated in the anti-fascist war.

Bukharin and the question of the coup d'état

During his trial, Bukharin admitted in front of the tribunal that in 1918, after the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, that there was a plan to arrest Lenin, Stalin and Sverdlov, and to form a new government composed of ‘left-communists’ and Social Revolutionaries. But he firmly denied that there was also a plan to execute them.¹⁰⁵

So Bukharin was ready to arrest Lenin at the time of the Brest-Litovsk crisis in 1918.

Eighteen years later, in 1936, Bukharin was a completely demoralized man. With the world war just over the horizon, tension was extreme. Coup d'état attempts against the Party leadership were more and more probable. Bukharin, with his prestige of ‘Old Bolshevik’; Bukharin, the only ‘rival’ of the same stature as Stalin; Bukharin, who detested the ‘extreme hardness’ of Stalin’s régime; who was afraid that the ‘Stalinists’ would form a ‘new aristocracy’; who thought that only ‘democracy’ could save the Soviet Union; how would he not have accepted to cover with his authority a possible ‘democratic’ anti-Stalinist coup d'état? How could the man who was ready to arrest Lenin in 1918 not be ready, at a much more tense and dramatic time, to cover up the arrests of Stalin, Zhdanov, Molotov and Kaganovich?

The problem was exactly that. A demoralized and politically finished man, Bukharin clearly had no more energy to lead an important struggle against Stalin. But others, right-wing revolutionaries, were ready to act. And Bukharin could be useful for legitimacy. Colonel Tokaev’s book helps understand this division of labor.

In 1939, Tokaev and five of his companions, all superior officers, met in the apartment of a professor of the Budyenny Military Academy. They discussed a plan to overthrow Stalin in case of war. ‘Schmidt (a member of the Voroshilov Leningrad Military Academy) regretted a lost opportunity: had we moved at the time of the trial of Bukharin the peasants would have risen in his name. Now we had no one of his stature to inspire the people’. One of the conspirators suggested giving the position of Prime Minister to Beria, given his popularity because he had liberated many people arrested by Yezhov.¹⁰⁶

This passage clearly shows that the military conspirators needed, at least at the

beginning, a 'Bolshevik flag' to succeed with their anti-Communist coup d'état. Having good relations with Bukharin, these right-wing military were convinced that he would have accepted the *fait accompli* if Stalin had been eliminated.

In fact, in 1938, during Bukharin's trial, Tokaev and his group already had this strategy in mind. When Radek confessed after his arrest, Comrade X succeeded in reading the report. Tokaev wrote:

'(Radek) provided the culminating 'evidence' on which Bukharin was arrested, tried and shot

'We had known of Radek's treachery at least a fortnight before (Bukharin's arrest on October 16, 1936), and we tried to save Bukharin. A precise and unambiguous offer was made to him: 'After what Radek has now said against you *in writing*, Yezhov and Vishinsky will soon have you arrested in preparation for yet another political trial. Therefore we suggest that you should "vanish" without delay. Here is how we propose to effect this

'No political conditions were attached to the offer; it was made . . . because it would be a mortal blow if the NKVD transformed Bukharin on trial into another Kameniev, Zinoviev or Radek. The very conception of opposition would have been discredited throughout the U.S.S.R.

'Bukharin expressed his warm gratitude for the offer but refused it.'¹⁰⁷

'If (Bukharin) could not stand up to this and prove the charges false, it would be a tragedy: through Bukharin all the other moderate opposition movements would be tarnished.'¹⁰⁸

Before Bukharin's arrest, the military conspirators thought of using Bukharin as their flag. At the same time, they understood the danger of a public trial against Bukharin. Kameniev, Zinoviev and Radek had admitted their conspiratorial activity, they had 'betrayed' the opposition's cause. If Bukharin admitted in front of a tribunal that he was implicated in attempts to overthrow the régime, the anti-Communist opposition would suffer a fatal blow. Such was the implication of Bukharin's trial, as it was understood at the time by Bolshevism's worst enemies, infiltrated in the Party and the Army.

At the time of the Nazi invasion, Tokaev analyzed the atmosphere in the country and within the army: 'we soon realised that the men at the top had lost their heads. They knew only too well that their reactionary régime was totally devoid of real popular support. It was based on terror and mental automatism and depended on peace; war had changed all that'. Then Tokaev described the reactions of several officers. Beskaravayny proposed to divide the Soviet Union: an independent Ukraine and an independent Caucasus would fight better! Klimov proposed to get rid of the Politburo, then the people would save the country. Kokoryov thought that the Jews were the source of all the problems.¹⁰⁹

'(O)ur problem as revolutionary democrats was very much in our minds. Was not this perhaps the very moment to attempt to overthrow Stalin? Many factors had to be considered'.¹¹⁰ In those days Comrade X was convinced that it was touch and go for Stalin. The pity of it was that we could not see Hitler as a liberator. Therefore, said Comrade X, 'we must be prepared for Stalin's régime to collapse,

but we should do nothing whatever to weaken it'.¹¹¹

It is clear that the great disarray and the extreme confusion provoked by the first defeats against the Nazi invader created a very precarious political situation. Bourgeois nationalists, anti-Communists and anti-Jewish racists all thought that their time had come. What would have happened if the purge had not been firmly carried out, if an opportunist opposition had held important positions at the head of the Party, if a man such as Bukharin had remained available for a 'change of régime'? In those moments of extreme tension, the military conspirators and opportunists would have been in a strong position to risk everything and put into action the coup d'état for which they had so long planned.

Bukharin's confession

During his trial, Bukharin made several confessions and, during confrontations with other accused, gave details about certain aspects of the conspiracy. Joseph Davies, U.S. ambassador to Moscow and well-known lawyer, attended every session of the trial. He was convinced, as were other competent foreign observers, that Bukharin had spoken freely and that his confessions were sincere. On March 17, 1938, Davies send a confidential message to the Secretary of State in Washington.

'Notwithstanding a prejudice arising from the confession evidence and a prejudice against a judicial system which affords practically no protection for the accused, after daily observation of the witnesses, their manner of testifying, the unconscious corroboration which developed, and other facts in the course of the trial, together with others of which a judicial notice could be taken, it is my opinion so far as the political defendants are concerned sufficient crimes under Soviet law, among those charged in the indictment, were established by the proof and beyond a reasonable doubt to justify the verdict of guilty by treason and the adjudication of the punishment provided by Soviet criminal statutes. The opinion of those diplomats who attended the trial most regularly was general that the case had established the fact that there was a formidable political opposition and an exceedingly serious plot.'¹¹²

During the trial's dozens of hours, Bukharin was perfectly lucid and alert, discussing, contesting, sometimes humorous, vehemently denying certain accusations. For those who attended the trial, as for those of us who can read the trial proceedings, it is clear that the 'show trial' theory, widely diffused by anti-Communists, is unrealistic. Tokaev stated that the régime 'may have hesitated to torture him, lest he shout the truth the world in court'.¹¹³ Tokaev described Bukharin's acid replies to the trial attorney and its courageous denials, concluding as follows:

'Bukharin displayed supreme courage.'¹¹⁴

'Vishinsky was defeated. At last he knew that it had been a cardinal error to bring Bukharin into open court.'¹¹⁵

The trial proceedings, eight hundred pages long, are very instructive reading. They leave an indelible mark on the mind, a mark that cannot be erased by the standard tirades against those 'horrible trials'. Bukharin appears as an oppor-

tunist who was beaten politically and criticized ideologically on repeated occasions. Rather than transforming his petit-bourgeois world view, he became a bitter man who dared not openly oppose the Party's line and its impressive achievements. Remaining close to the head of the Party, he hoped to overthrow the leadership and impose his viewpoint through intrigues and backroom maneuvers. He colluded with all sorts of clandestine opponents, some of who were dedicated anti-Communists. Incapable of leading an open political struggle, Bukharin placed his hopes in a coup d'état resulting from a military plot or that might result from a mass revolt.

Reading the proceedings allows one to clarify the relations between the political degeneration of Bukharin and his friends and actual criminal activity: assassinations, insurrections, spying, collusion with foreign powers. As early as 1928–2929, Bukharin had taken revisionist positions expressing the interests of the kulaks and other exploiting classes. Bukharin received support from political factions representing those classes, both within and without the Party. As the class struggle became more intense, Bukharin allied himself to those forces. The coming World War increased all tensions and opponents to the Party leadership began to prepare violent acts and a coup d'état. Bukharin admitted his ties to these people, although he vehemently denied having actually organized assassinations and espionage.

When Vishinsky asked of him: 'you have said nothing about connections with the foreign intelligence service and fascist circles', Bukharin replied: 'I have nothing to testify on this subject.'¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, Bukharin had to recognize that within the bloc that he led, some men had established ties to fascist Germany. Below is an exchange from the trial on this subject. Bukharin explains that some leaders in the conspiracy thought the confusion resulting from military defeats in the case of war with Germany would create ideal conditions for a coup d'état.

'Bukharin: (I)n 1935 . . . Karakhan left without a preliminary conversation with the members of the leading centre, with the exception of Tomsy . . .

'As I remember, Tomsy told me that Karakhan had arrived at an agreement with Germany on more advantageous terms than Trotsky . . .

'Vyshinsky: When did you have a conversation about opening the front to the Germans?

'Bukharin: When I asked Tomsy how he conceived the mechanics of the coup he said this was the business of the military organization, which was to open the front.

'Vyshinsky: So Tomsy was preparing to open the front?

'Bukharin: He did not say that . . .

'Vyshinsky: Tomsy said, "Open the front"?

'Bukharin: I will put it exactly.

'Vyshinsky: What did he say?

'Bukharin: Tomsy said that this was a matter for the military organization, which was to open the front.

'Vyshinsky: Why was it to open the front?

'Bukharin: He did not say.

‘Vyshinsky: Why was it to open the front?

‘Bukharin: From my point of view, it ought not to open the front

‘Vyshinsky: Were they to open the front from the point of view of Tomsky, or not?

‘Bukharin: From the point of view of Tomsky? At any rate, he did not object to this point of view.

‘Vyshinsky: He agreed?

‘Bukharin: Since he did not object, it means that most likely he three-quarters agreed.’¹¹⁷

In his declarations, Bukharin recognized that his revisionist line pushed him to seek illegal ties with other opponents, that he was hoping that revolts within the country would bring him to power, and that he changed his tactics to terrorism and a coup d’état.

In his biography of Bukharin, Cohen tries to correct the ‘widespread misconception — that Bukharin willingly confessed to hideous, preposterous crimes in order . . . to repent sincerely his opposition to Stalinism, and thereby to perform a “last service” to the party’.¹¹⁸

Cohen claims that ‘Bukharin’s plan . . . was to turn his trial into a counter-trial . . . of the Stalinist regime’. ‘(H)is tactic would be make sweeping confessions that he was “politically responsible” for everything . . . while at the same time flatly denying . . . any actual crime.’ Cohen claims that when Bukharin was using terms such as ‘counter-revolutionary organization’ or ‘anti-Soviet bloc’, he really meant the ‘Old Bolshevik Party’: ‘He would accept the symbolic role of representative Bolshevik: “I bear responsibility for the bloc,” that is for Bolshevism.’¹¹⁹

Not bad. Cohen, as spokesperson for U.S. interests, can do such pirouettes, since few readers will actually go and check the trial proceedings.

But it is highly instructive to study the key passages of Bukharin’s testimony at the trial about his political evolution. Bukharin was sufficiently lucid to understand the steps in his own political degeneration and to understand how he got caught up in a counter-revolutionary plot. Cohen and the bourgeoisie can do their utmost to whitewash Bukharin the ‘Bolshevik’. To Communists, Bukharin’s confessions provide important lessons about the mechanisms of slow degeneration and anti-socialist subversion. These confessions allow one to understand the later appearance of figures such as Khrushchev and Mikoyan, Brezhnev and Gorbachev.

Here is the text. Bukharin is speaking.

‘The Right counter-revolutionaries seemed at first to be a “deviation” Here we went through a very interesting process, an over-estimation of individual enterprise, a crawling over to its idealization, the idealization of the property-owner. Such was the evolution. Our program was — the prosperous peasant farm of the individual, but in fact the kulak became an end into itself collective farms were music of the future. What was necessary was to develop rich property-owners. This was the tremendous change that took place in our standpoint and psychology I myself in 1928 invented the formula about the military-feudal exploitation of the peasantry, that is, I put the blame for the costs of the class struggle not on

the class which was hostile to the proletariat, but on the leaders of the proletariat itself.¹²⁰

‘If my program stand were to be formulated practically, it would be, in the economic sphere, state capitalism, the prosperous muzhik individual, the curtailment of the collective farms, foreign concessions, surrender of the monopoly of foreign trade, and, as a result — the restoration of capitalism in the country.’¹²¹

‘Inside the country our actual program . . . was a lapse into bourgeois-democratic freedom, coalition, because from the bloc with the Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries, and the like, it follows that there would be freedom of parties, freedom of coalition, and follows quite logically from the combination of forces for struggle, because if allies are chosen for overthrowing the government, on the day after the possible victory they would be partners in power.’¹²²

‘My rapprochement with Tomsy and Rykov dates approximately to 1928–1929 — then contacts and sounding out the then members of the Central Committee, illegal conferences which were illegal in respect of the Central Committee.’¹²³

‘Here began the quest for blocs. Firstly, my meeting with Kamenev at his apartment. Secondly, a meeting with Pyatakov in the hospital, at which Kamenev was present. Thirdly, a meeting with Kamenev at Schmidt’s country house.’¹²⁴

‘The next stage in the development of the counter-revolutionary organization of the Rights began in 1930–1931. At that time there was a great sharpening of the class struggle, of kulak sabotage, kulak resistance to the policy of the Party, etc. . . .

‘The (Bukharin–Rykov–Tomsy) trio became an illegal centre and therefore, whereas before this trio had been at the head of the opposition circles, now it became the centre of an illegal counter-revolutionary organization

‘Close to this illegal center was Yekudnize, who had contact with this centre through Tomsy

‘(A)pproximately towards the end of 1931, the members of the so-called school were transferred to work outside of Moscow — to Voronezh, Samara, Leningrad, Novosibirsk — and this transfer was utilized for counter-revolutionary purposes even then.’¹²⁵

‘About the autumn of 1932 the next stage in the development of the Right organization began, namely the transition to tactics of a forcible overthrow of Soviet power.’¹²⁶

‘I make note of the time when the so-called Ryutin platform was formulated the Ryutin platform (was) the platform of the Right counter-revolutionary organization.’¹²⁷

‘The Ryutin platform was approved on behalf of the Right center. The essential points of the Ryutin platform were: a “palace coup”, terrorism, steering a course for a direct alliance with the Trotskyites. Around this time the idea of a “palace coup” was maturing in the Right circles, and not only in the upper circles, but also, as far as I can remember, among a section of those working outside of Moscow. At first this idea came from Tomsy, who was in contact with Yenukidze who had charge of the Kremlin guard at the time

‘Consequently . . . , the recruiting of people for a “palace coup”. This was when

the political bloc with Kamenev and Zinoviev originated. In this period we had meetings also with Syrtsov and Lominadze.¹²⁸

‘(I)n the summer of 1932, Pyatakov told me of his meeting with Sedov concerning Trotsky’s policy of terrorism. At that time Pyatakov and I considered that these were not our ideas, but we decided that we could find a common language very soon and that our differences in the struggle against Soviet power would be overcome.’¹²⁹

‘The formation of the group of conspirators in the Red Army relates to that period. I heard of it from Tomsy, who was directly informed of it by Yenukidze, with whom he had personal connections

‘I was informed by Tomsy and Yenukidze, who told me that in the upper ranks of the Red Army the Rights, Zinovievites and Trotskyites had then united their forces; names were mentioned to me — I don’t vouch that I remember them all exactly — but those I have remembered are Tukhachevsky, Kork, Primakov and Putna.

‘Thus the connections with the centre of the Rights followed the line of: the military group, Yenukidze, Tomsy and the rest.’¹³⁰

‘In 1933–34 the kulaks were already smashed, an insurrectionary movement ceased to be a real possibility, and therefore in the centre of the Right organization a period again set in when the orientation toward a counter-revolutionary conspiratorial coup became the central idea

‘The forces of the conspiracy were: the forces of Yenukidze plus Yagoda, their organizations in the Kremlin and in the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs; Yenukidze also succeeded around that time in enlisting, as far as I can remember, the former commandant of the Kremlin, Peterson, who, a propos, was in his time the commandant of Trotsky’s train.

‘Then there was the military organization of the conspirators: Tukhachevsky, Kork and others.’¹³¹

‘During the period preceding the Seventeenth Party Congress, Tomsy broached the idea that the coup d’état with the help of the armed counter-revolutionary forces should be timed exactly for the opening of the Seventeenth Party Congress. According to Tomsy’s idea, an integral part of this coup was to be a monstrous crime — the arrest of the Seventeenth Party Congress.

‘This idea of Tomsy’s was subjected to a discussion, though a very cursory one; but objections to this idea were raised on all hands

‘Pyatakov objected to this idea not for considerations of principle, but for considerations of tactics, because that would have aroused extreme indignation among the masses But the fact alone that this idea was conceived and that it was subjected to a discussion speaks sufficiently clearly of the whole monstrosity and criminality of an organization of this sort.’¹³²

‘In the summer of 1934 Radek told me that directions had been received from Trotsky, that Trotsky was conducting negotiations with the Germans, that Trotsky had already promised the Germans a number of territorial concessions, including the Ukraine

‘I must say that then, at that time, I remonstrated with Radek. Radek confirms

this in his testimony, just as he confirmed at a confrontation with me that I objected to this, that I considered it essential that he, Radek, should write and tell Trotsky that he was going too far in these negotiations, that he might compromise not only himself, but all his allies, us Right conspirators in particular, and that this meant certain disaster for all of us. It seemed to me that with the growth of mass patriotism, which is beyond all doubt, this point of view of Trotsky's was politically and tactically inexpedient.¹³³

'I advanced the argument that since this was to be a military coup, then by virtue of the logic of the things the military group of the conspirators would have extraordinary influence, and, as always happens in these cases, it would be just that section of the joint upper group of the counter-revolutionary circles that would command great material forces, and consequently political forces, and that hence a peculiar Bonapartist danger might arise. And Bonapartists — I was thinking particularly of Tukhachevsky — would start out by making short shrift of their allies and so-called inspirers in Napoleon style. In my conversations I always called Tukhachevsky a "potential little Napoleon," and you know how Napoleon dealt with the so-called ideologists.

'Vyshinsky: And you considered yourself an ideologist?

'Bukharin: Both an ideologist of a counter-revolutionary coup and a practical man. You, of course, would prefer to hear that I consider myself a spy, but I never considered myself a spy, nor do I now.

'Vyshinsky: It would be more correct if you did.

'Bukharin: That is your opinion, but my opinion is different.¹³⁴

When it was time for his last statement, Bukharin already knew that he was a dead man. Cohen can read in this speech a 'fine defence of real Bolshevism' and a 'denunciation of Stalinism'. On the other hand, a Communist hears a man who struggled for many years against socialism, who took irrevocable revisionist positions, and who, facing his grave, realized that in the context of bitter national and international class struggles, his revisionism had led him to treason.

'This naked logic of the struggle was accompanied by a degeneration of ideas, a degeneration of psychology

'And on this basis, it seems to me probable that every one of us sitting here in the dock suffered from a peculiar duality of mind, an incomplete faith in his counter-revolutionary cause Hence a certain semi-paralysis of the will, a retardation of reflexes The contradiction that arose between the acceleration of our degeneration and these retarded reflexes expressed the position of a counter-revolutionary, or a developing counter-revolutionary, under the conditions of developing socialist construction. A dual psychology arose

'Even I was sometimes carried away by the eulogies I wrote of socialist construction, although on the morrow I repudiated this by practical actions of a criminal character. There arose what in Hegel's philosophy is called a most unhappy mind. This unhappy mind differed from the ordinary unhappy mind only in the fact that it was also a criminal mind.

'The might of the proletarian state found its expression not only in the fact that it

smashed the counter-revolutionary bands, but also in the fact that it disintegrated its enemies from within, that it disorganized the will of its enemies. Nowhere else is this the case, nor can it be in any capitalist country

‘Repentance is often attributed to diverse and absolutely absurd things like Tibetan powders and the like. I must say of myself that in prison, where I was confined for over a year, I worked, studied, and retained my clarity of mind. This will serve to refute by facts all fables and absurd counter-revolutionary tales.

‘Hypnotism is suggested. But I conducted my own defence in Court from the legal standpoint too, orientated myself on the spot, argued with the State Prosecutor; and anybody, even a man who has little experience in this branch of medicine, must admit that hypnotism of this kind is altogether impossible

‘I shall now speak of myself, of the reasons for my repentance. Of course, it must be admitted that incriminating evidence plays a very important part. For three months I refused to say anything. Then I began to testify. Why? Because while in prison I made a revaluation of my entire past. For when you ask yourself: “If you must die, what are you dying for?” — an absolutely black vacuity suddenly rises before you with startling vividness. There was nothing to die for, if one wanted to die unrepented. And, on the contrary, everything positive that glistens in the Soviet Union acquires new dimensions in a man’s mind. This in the end disarmed me completely and led me to bend my knees before the Party and the country

‘The point, of course, is not this repentance, or my personal repentance in particular. The Court can pass its verdict without it. The confession of the accused is not essential. The confession of the accused is a medieval principle of jurisprudence. But here we also have the internal demolition of the forces of the counter-revolution. And one must be a Trotsky not to lay down one’s arms.

‘I feel it my duty to say here that in the parallelogram of forces which went to make up the counter-revolutionary tactics, Trotsky was the principal motive force. And the most acute methods — terrorism, espionage, the dismemberment of the U.S.S.R. and wrecking — proceeded primarily from this source.

‘I may infer a priori that Trotsky and my other allies in crime, as well as the Second International, all the more since I discussed this with Nicolayevsky, will endeavour to defend us, especially and particularly myself. I reject this defence, because I am kneeling before the country, before the Party, before the whole people.’¹³⁵

From Bukharin to Gorbachev

The anti-Communist author Stephen F. Cohen wrote in 1973 a very favorable biography of Bukharin, who was presented as ‘the last Bolshevik’. It is touching to see how a confirmed anti-Communist ‘mourned the end of Bukharin and Russian Bolshevism’!¹³⁶ Another follower of Bukharin, Roy Medvedev, did the same in an epigraph:

‘Stalinism cannot be regarded as the Marxism-Leninism or the Communism of three decades. It is the perversions that Stalin introduced into the theory and practice of the Communist movement

‘The process of purifying the Communist movement, of washing out all the layers of Stalinist filth, is not yet finished. It must be carried through to the end.’¹³⁷

Hence the two anti-Communists, Cohen and Medvedev, presented Stalin’s following the Leninist line as a ‘perversion’ of Leninism and then, as irreconcilable adversaries of Communism, proposed the ‘purification of the Communist movement’! Of course, this is a tactic that has been well developed over the decades: once a revolution has triumphed and consolidates itself, its worst enemies present themselves as the best defenders of the ‘authentic revolution’ that ‘was betrayed right from the beginning’ by its leaders. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Cohen and Medvedev’s theses were taken up by almost all the Khrushchevites. Even Fidél Castro, himself influenced by Khrushchev’s theories, has not always escaped this temptation. Yet, the same tactic was used by U.S. specialists against the Cuban revolution. Right from 1961, the CIA started an offensive for the ‘defence of the Cuban revolution’ against the ‘usurper Fidél Castro’ who had ‘betrayed’. In Nicaragua, Eden Pastora joined the CIA to defend ‘the original Sandinist program’.

Yugoslavia was, right from 1948, the first socialist country to veer towards Bukharinism and Trotskyism. Tito received massive aid from the United States. Then Titoist ideas infiltrated themselves in most of Eastern Europe.

During the seventies, Cohen’s book *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, as well as the one published by British social-democrat Ken Coates, president of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation,¹³⁸ served as the international basis for the rehabilitation of Bukharin, who united the revisionists from the Italian and French Communist Parties, the Social-Democrats — from Pélikan to Gilles Martinet — and, of course, the different Trotskyist sects. These same currents followed Gorbachev right to the very end. All these anti-Communists united in the seventies to rehabilitate Bukharin, the ‘great Bolshevik’ that Lenin called ‘the favorite of the whole party’. All claimed that Bukharin represented an ‘alternative’ Bolshevism and some even claimed him as a precursor of Eurocommunism.¹³⁹

Already, in 1973, the direction of this campaign was set by the openly anti-Communist Cohen:

‘Bukharinist-style ideas and policies have revived. In Yugoslavia, Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, Communist reformers have become advocates of market socialism, balanced economic planning and growth, evolutionary development, civil peace, a mixed agricultural sector, and tolerance of social and cultural pluralism within the framework of the one-party state.’¹⁴⁰ ‘This is a perfect definition of the velvet counter-revolution that finally triumphed during the years 1988–1989 in Central and Eastern Europe.

‘If . . . reformers succeed in creating a more liberal communism, a “socialism with a human face,” Bukharin’s outlook and the NEP-style order he defended may turn out to have been, after all, the true prefiguration of the Communist future — the alternative to Stalinism after Stalin.’¹⁴¹

Gorbachev, basing himself on these ‘vanguard experiences’ of the Eastern European countries during the sixties and the seventies, himself adopted Bukharin’s program. It goes without saying that Cohen was welcomed with open arms by

Gorbachev's Soviet Union as the great precursor of 'new thought' and 'socialist renewal'.

Note also that the 'Bukharin school' has much influence in Deng Xiaoping's China.

*The Tukhachevsky trial and
the anti-Communist conspiracy within the army*

On May 26, 1937, Marshal Tukhachevsky and Commanders Yakir, Uborevich, Eideman, Kork, Putna, Feldman and Primakov were arrested and tried in front of a military tribunal. Their execution was announced on July 12.

They had been under suspicion since the beginning of May. On May 8, the political commissar system, used during the Civil War, was reintroduced in the army. Its reintroduction reflected the Party's fear of Bonapartist tendencies within the army.¹⁴²

A May 13, 1927 Commissar of Defence directive ended the control that the political commissars had over the highest officers. The military commander was given the responsibility for 'general political leadership for the purpose of complete co-ordination of military and political affairs in the unit'. The 'political assistant' was to be responsible for 'all party-political work' and was to report to the commander on the political condition of the unit.¹⁴³ The Tolmachev Military Political Academy in Leningrad and the commissars of the military district of Byelorussia protested against 'the depreciation and diminution of the rôle of the party-political organs'.¹⁴⁴ Blomberg, a superior German officer, made a report after his visit to the USSR in 1928. He noted: 'Purely military points of view step more and more into the foreground; everything else is subordinated to them'.¹⁴⁵

Since many soldiers came from the countryside, kulak influence was substantial. Unshlikht, a superior officer, claimed in 1928 and 1929 that the danger of Right deviation was greater in the Army than in the Party's civil organizations.¹⁴⁶

In 1930, ten per cent of the officer corps, i.e. 4500 military, were former Tsarist officers. During the purge of institutions in the fall of 1929, Unshlikht had not allowed a massive movement against the former Tsarist officers in the Army.¹⁴⁷

These factors all show that bourgeois influence was still strong during the twenties and the thirties in the army, making it one of the least reliable parts of the socialist system.

Plot?

V. Likhachev was an officer in the Red Army in the Soviet Far East in 1937–1938. His book, *Dal'nevostochnyi zagovor* (Far-Eastern conspiracy), showed that there did in fact exist a large conspiracy within the army.¹⁴⁸

Journalist Alexander Werth wrote in his book *Moscow 41* a chapter entitled, 'Trial of Tukhachevsky'. He wrote:

‘I am also pretty sure that the purge in the Red Army had a great deal to do with Stalin’s belief in an imminent war with Germany. What did Tukhachevsky stand for? People of the French *Deuxieme Bureau* told me long ago that Tukhachevsky was pro-German. And the Czechs told me the extraordinary story of Tukhachevsky’s visit to Prague, when towards the end of the banquet — he had got rather drunk — he blurted out that an agreement with Hitler was the only hope for both Czechoslovakia and Russia. And he then proceeded to abuse Stalin. The Czechs did not fail to report this to the Kremlin, and that was the end of Tukhachevsky — and of so many of his followers.’¹⁴⁹

The U.S. Ambassador Moscow, Joseph Davies, wrote his impressions on on June 28 and July 4, 1937:

‘(T)he best judgment seems to believe that in all probability there was a definite conspiracy in the making looking to a *coup d’état* by the army — not necessarily anti-Stalin, but antipolitical and antiparty, and that Stalin struck with characteristic speed, boldness and strength.’¹⁵⁰

‘Had a fine talk with Litvinov. I told him quite frankly the reactions in U.S. and western Europe to the purges; and to the executions of the Red Army generals; that it definitely was bad

‘Litvinov was very frank. He stated that they had to “make sure” through these purges that there was no treason left which could co-operate with Berlin or Tokyo; that someday the world would understand that what they had done was to protect the government from “menacing treason.” In fact, he said they were doing the whole world a service in protecting themselves against the menace of Hitler and Nazi world domination, and thereby preserving the Soviet Union strong as a bulwark against the Nazi threat. That the world would appreciate what a very great man Stalin was.’¹⁵¹

In 1937, Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov was working for the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party. A bourgeois nationalist, he had close ties to opposition leaders and with the Central Committee members from the Caucasus. In his book *The Reign of Stalin*, he regrets that Tukhachevsky did not seize power in 1937. He claims that early in 1937, after his trip to England, Tukhachevsky spoke to his superior officers as follows:

‘The great thing about His Britannic Majesty’s Army is that there could not be a Scotland Yard agent at its head (allusion to the rôle played by state security in the USSR). As for cobblers (allusion to Stalin’s father), they belong in the supply depots, and they don’t need a Party card. The British don’t talk readily about patriotism, because it seems to them natural to be simply British. There is no political “line” in Britain, right, left or centre; there is just British policy, which every peer and worker, every conservative and member of the Labour Party, every officer and soldier, is equally zealous in serving The British soldier is completely ignorant of Party history and production figures, but on the other hand he knows the geography of the world as well as he knows his own barracks The King is loaded with honours, but he has no personal power Two qualities are called for in an officer — courage and professional competence.’¹⁵²

Robert Coulondre was the French Ambassador to Moscow in 1936–1938. In his memoirs, he recalled the Terror of the French Revolution that crushed the aristocrats in 1792 and prepared the French people for war against the reactionary European states. At the time, the enemies of the French Revolution, particularly England and Russia, had interpreted the revolutionary terror as a precursor of the disintegration of the régime. In fact, the opposite was true. The same thing, Coulondre wrote, was taking place with the Soviet Revolution.

‘Soon after Tukhachevsky’s arrest, the minister of Lithuania, who knew a number of Bolshevik leaders, told me that the marshal, upset by the brakes imposed by the Communist Party on the development of Russian military power, in particular of a sound organization of the army, had in fact become the head of a movement that wanted to strangle the Party and institute a military dictatorship

‘My correspondence can testify that I gave the “Soviet terror” its correct interpretation. It should not be concluded, I constantly wrote, that the régime is falling apart or that the Russian forces are tiring. It is in fact the opposite, the crisis of a country that is growing too quickly.’¹⁵³

Churchill wrote in his memoirs that Beneš ‘had received an offer from Hitler to respect in all circumstances the integrity of Czechoslovakia in return for a guarantee that she would remain neutral in the event of a Franco-German war.’

‘In the autumn of 1936, a message from a high military source in Germany was conveyed to President Benes to the effect that if he wanted to take advantage of the Fuehrer’s offer, he had better be quick, because events would shortly take place in Russia rendering any help he could give to Germany insignificant.

‘While Benes was pondering over this disturbing hint, he became aware that communications were passing through the Soviet Embassy in Prague between important personages in Russia and the German Government. This was a part of the so-called military and Old-Guard Communist conspiracy to overthrow Stalin and introduce a new régime based on a pro-German policy. President Benes lost no time in communicating all he could find out to Stalin. Thereafter there followed the merciless, but perhaps not needless, military and political purge in Soviet Russia

‘The Russian Army was purged of its pro-German elements at a heavy cost to its military efficiency. The bias of the Soviet Government was turned in a marked manner against Germany The situation was, of course, thoroughly understood by Hitler; but I am not aware that the British and French Governments were equally enlightened. To Mr. Chamberlain and the British and French General Staffs the purge of 1937 presented itself mainly as a tearing to pieces internally of the Russian Army, and a picture of the Soviet Union as riven asunder by ferocious hatreds and vengeance.’¹⁵⁴

The Trotskyist Deutscher rarely missed an opportunity to denigrate and slander Stalin. However, despite the fact that he claimed that there was only an ‘imaginary conspiracy’ as basis for the Moscow trials, he did have this to say about Tukhachevsky’s execution:

‘(A)ll the non-Stalinist versions concur in the following: the generals did indeed

plan a *coup d'état* The main part of the *coup* was to be a palace revolt in the Kremlin, culminating in the assassination of Stalin. A decisive military operation outside the Kremlin, an assault on the headquarters of the G.P.U., was also prepared. Tukhachevsky was the moving spirit of the conspiracy He was, indeed, the only man among all the military and civilian leaders of that time who showed in many respects a resemblance to the original Bonaparte and could have played the Russian First Consul. The chief political commissar of the army, Gamarnik, who later committed suicide, was initiated into the plot. General Yakir, the commander of Leningrad, was to secure the co-operation of his garrison. Generals Uberovich, commander of the western military district, Kork, commander of the Military Academy in Moscow, Primakow, Budienny's deputy in the command of the cavalry, and a few other generals were also in the plot.¹⁵⁵

Deutscher, an important anti-Communist, even when he accepted the veracity of the Tukhachevsky plot, made sure that he underlined the 'good intentions' of those who wanted 'to save the army and the country from the insane terror of the purges' and he assured his readers that Tukhachevsky was in no way acting 'in Germany's interest'.¹⁵⁶

The Nazi Léon Degrelle, in a 1977 book, referred to Tukhachevsky in the following terms:

'Who would have thought during the crimes of the Terror during the French Revolution that soon after a Bonaparte would come out and raise France up from the abyss with an iron fist? A few years later, and Bonaparte almost created the United Europe.

'A Russian Bonaparte could also rise up. The young Marshal Tukhachevsky executed by Stalin on Benes' advice, was of the right stature in 1937.'¹⁵⁷

On May 8, 1943, Göbbels noted in his journal some comments made by Hitler. They show that the Nazis perfectly understood the importance of taking advantage of opposition and defeatist currents within the Red Army.

'The Führer explained one more time the Tukhachevsky case and stated that we erred completely at the time when we thought that Stalin had ruined the Red Army. The opposite is true: Stalin got rid of all the opposition circles within the army and thereby succeeded in making sure that there would no longer be any defeatist currents within that army

'With respect to us, Stalin also has the advantage of not having any social opposition, since Bolshevism has eliminated it through the purges of the last twenty-five years Bolshevism has eliminated this danger in time and can henceforth focus all of its strength on its enemy.'¹⁵⁸

We also present Molotov's opinion. Apart from Kaganovich, Molotov was the only member of the Politburo in 1953 who never renounced his revolutionary past. During the 1980s, he recalled the situation in 1937, when the Purge started:

'An atmosphere of extreme tension reigned during this period; it was necessary to act without mercy. I think that it was justified. If Tukhachevsky, Yakir, Rykov and Zinoviev had started up their opposition in wartime, there would have been an extremely difficult struggle; the number of victims would have been colossal.

Colossal. The two sides would have been condemned to disaster. They had links that went right up to Hitler. That far. Trotsky had similar links, without doubt. Hitler was an adventurist, as was Trotsky, they had traits in common. And the rightists, Bukharin and Rykov, had links with them. And, of course, many of the military leaders.¹⁵⁹

The militarist and Bonapartist tendency

In a study financed by the U.S. army and conducted by the Rand Corporation, Roman Kolkowicz analyzed, from the reactionary point of view found in military security services, the relations between the Party and the Army in the Soviet Union. It is interesting to note how he supported all the tendencies towards professionalism, apolitism, militarism and privileges in the Red Army, right from the twenties. Of course, Kolkowicz attacked Stalin for having repressed the bourgeois and military tendencies.

After describing how Stalin defined the status of the army in the socialist society in the twenties, Kolkowicz wrote:

‘The Red Army emerged from this process as an adjunct of the ruling Party elite; its officers were denied the full authority necessary to the practice of the military profession; they were kept in a perennial state of uncertainty about their careers; and the military community, which tends toward exclusiveness, was forcibly kept open through an elaborate system of control and indoctrination

‘Stalin . . . embarked on a massive program intended to provide the Soviet army with modern weapons, equipment, and logistics. But he remained wary of the military’s tendency toward elitism and exclusiveness, a propensity that grew with its professional renaissance. So overwhelming did his distrust become that, at a time of acute danger of war in Europe, Stalin struck at the military in the massive purges of 1937

‘Hemmed in on all sides by secret police, political organs, and Party and Komsomol organizations, the military’s freedom of action was severely circumscribed.’¹⁶⁰

Note what the U.S. army most ‘hates’ in the Red Army: political education (‘indoctrination’) and political control (by political organs, Party, Komsomol and security forces). On the other hand, the U.S. army views favorably the tendencies towards autonomy and privileges for superior officers (‘elitism’) and militarism (‘exclusivity’).

The purges are analyzed by Kolkowicz as a step in the Party struggle, directed by Stalin, against the ‘professionalists’ and Bonapartists among the superior officers. These bourgeois currents were only able to impose themselves at Stalin’s death.

‘(W)ith Stalin’s death and the division of the Party leadership that followed, the control mechanisms were weakened, and the military’s own interests and values emerged into the open. In the person of Marshal Zhukov, broad sectors of the military had their spokesman. Zhukov was able to rid the establishment of the political organs’ pervasive controls; he introduced strict discipline and the separation of ranks; he demanded the rehabilitation of purged military leaders and the

punishment of their tormentors.¹⁶¹

Zhukov gave Khrushchev armed support in the two coups d'état of 1953 (the Beria affair) and 1957 (the Molotov–Malenkov–Kaganovich affair).

Vlasov

But how could generals of the Red Army have envisaged collaborating with Hitler? If they were not good Communists, surely these military men were at least nationalists?

This question will first be answered with another question. Why should this hypothesis be any different for the Soviet Union than France? Was not Marshal Pétain, the Victor at Verdun, a symbol of French chauvinist patriotism? Were not General Weygand and Admiral Darlan strong defenders of French colonialism? Despite all this, these three became key players in the collaboration with the Nazis. Would not the overthrow of capitalism in the Soviet Union and the bitter class struggle against the bourgeoisie be, for all the forces nostalgic for free enterprise, be additional motives for collaborating with German 'dynamic capitalism'?

And did not the World War itself show that the tendency represented by Pétain in France also existed among certain Soviet officers?

General Vlasov played an important rôle during the defence of Moscow at the end of 1941. Arrested in 1942 by the Germans, he changed sides. But it was only on September 16, 1944, after an interview with Himmler, that he received the official authorization to create his own Russian Liberation Army, whose first division was created as early as 1943. Other imprisoned officers offered their services to the Nazis; a few names follow.

Major-General Trukhin, head of the operational section of the Baltic Region Chief of Staffs, professor at the General Chiefs of Staff Academy. Major-General Malyshkin, head of the Chiefs of Staff of the 19th Army. Major-General Zakutny, professor at the General Chiefs of Staff Academy. Major-Generals Blagoveshchensky, brigade commander; Shapovalov, artillery corps commander; and Meandrov. Brigade commander Zhilenkov, member of the Military Council of the 32nd Army. Colonels Maltsev, Zverev, Nerianin and Buniachenko, commander of the 389th Armed Division.

What was the political profile of these men? The former British secret service officer and historian Cookridge writes:

'Vlassov's entourage was a strange motley. The most intelligent of his officers was Colonel Miletı Zykov (a Jew). He had been a supporter of the "rightist deviationists" of Bukharin and in 1936 had been banished by Stalin to Siberia, where he spent four years. Another survivor of Stalin's purges was General Vasili Feodorovich Malyshkin, former chief of staff of the Far East Army; he had been imprisoned during the Tukhachevsky affair. A third officer, Major-General Georgi Nicolaievich Zhilenkov, had been a political army commissar. They and many of the officers whom Gehlen recruited had been "rehabilitated" at the beginning of the war in 1941.¹⁶²

So here we learn that several superior officers, convicted and sent to Siberia in 1937, then rehabilitated during the war, joined Hitler's side! Clearly the measures taken during the Great Purge were perfectly justified.

To justify joining the Nazis, Vlasov wrote an open letter: 'Why I embarked on the road of struggle against Bolshevism'.

What is inside that letter is very instructive.

First, his criticism of the Soviet régime is identical to the ones made by Trotsky and the Western right-wing.

'I have seen that the Russian worker has a hard life, that the peasant was driven by force into kolkhozes, that millions of Russian people disappeared after being arrested without inquest or trial The system of commissars eroded the Red Army. Irresponsibility, shadowing and spying made the commander a toy in the hands of Party functionaries in civil suits or military uniforms . . . Many thousands of the best commanders, including marshals, were arrested and shot or sent to labour camps, never to return.'

Note that Vlasov called for a professional army, with full military autonomy, without any Party control, just like the previously cited U.S. Army.

Then Vlasov explained how his defeatism encouraged him to join the Nazis. We will see in the next chapter that Trotsky and Trotskyists systematically used defeatist propaganda.

'I saw that the war was being lost for two reasons: the reluctance of the Russian people to defend Bolshevik government and the systems of violence it had created and irresponsible command of the army'

Finally, using Nazi 'anti-capitalist' language, Vlasov explained that the New Russia had to integrate itself into the European capitalist and imperialist system.

'(We must) build a New Russia without Bolsheviks or capitalists'

'The interests of the Russian people have always been similar to the interests of the German people and all other European nations Bolshevism has separated the Russian people from Europe by an impenetrable wall.'¹⁶³

Solzhenitsyn

We would like to open a brief parenthesis for Solzhenitsyn. This man became the official voice for the five per cent of Tsarists, bourgeois, speculators, kulaks, pimps, maffiosi and Vlasovites, all justifiably repressed by the socialist state.

Solzhenitsyn the literary hack lived through a cruel dilemma during the Nazi occupation. Chauvinist, he hated the German invaders. But he hated socialism even more passionately. So he had a soft spot for General Vlasov, the most famous of the Nazi collaborators. Although Solzhenitsyn did not approve of Vlasov's flirt with Hitler, he was laudatory about his hatred of Bolshevism.

General Vlasov collaborated with the Nazis after having been captured? Solzhenitsyn found a way to explain and justify the treason. He wrote:

'Vlasov's Second Shock Army . . . was 46 miles (70 kilometres) deep inside the German lines! And from then on, the reckless Stalinist Supreme Command could

find neither men nor ammunition to reinforce even those troops The army was *without food* and, at the same time, Vlasov *was refused permission to retreat*

‘Now this, of course, was treason to the Motherland! This, of course, was vicious, self-obsessed betrayal! But it was Stalin’s It can include ignorance and carelessness in the preparations for war, confusion and cowardice at its very start, the meaningless sacrifice of armies and corps solely for the sake of saving one’s own marshal’s uniform. Indeed, what more bitter treason is there on the part of a Supreme Commander in Chief?’¹⁶⁴

So Solzhenitsyn defended the traitor Vlasov against Stalin. Let us look at what really happened in early 1942. Several armies had received the order to break the German blockade of Leningrad. But the offensive quickly got bogged down and the front commander, Khozin, received the order from Stalin’s headquarters to withdraw Vlasov’s army. Marshal Vasilevsky writes:

‘Vlasov, who did not possess many gifts as a commander and, in fact, vacillating and cowardly by nature, was thoroughly inactive. The grave situation for the army demoralised him ever further and he made no attempt to withdraw his troops quickly and covertly

‘I can with some authority confirm the extremely serious concern which Stalin displayed daily for the 2nd Shock Army and for rendering every possible assistance to them. This is evidenced by a whole series of GHQ directives that I personally wrote primarily to Stalin’s dictation’.

Vlasov joined the enemy while a considerable part of his army succeeded in breaching through the German trap and in escaping.¹⁶⁵

Russians were hired in the Nazi army to combat the Soviet people? But, exclaimed Solzhenitsyn, it was Stalin’s criminal régime that pushed them to do it:

‘(M)en could be induced to enter the Wehrmacht’s Vlasov detachments only in the last extremity, only at the limit of desperation, only out of inexhaustible hatred of the Soviet regime.’¹⁶⁶

Besides, said Solzhenitsyn, the Vlasovian collaborators were more anti-Communist than pro-Nazi:

‘(O)nly in the fall of 1944 did they begin to form Vlasov divisions that were exclusively Russian their first and last independent action, dealt a blow — to the Germans themselves Vlasov ordered his divisions to the aid of the Czech rebels.’¹⁶⁷

This is the fable that has been repeated by Nazi and other fascist criminals of all countries: when the German fascists were on the verge of defeat, they all discovered their ‘national and independent’ vocation and remembered their ‘opposition’ to Germany, looking for protection under the wings of U.S. imperialism!

Solzhenitsyn did not object to the Germans being fascists, but to the fact that they were stupid and blind fascists. If they had been more intelligent, the German Nazis would have recognized the value of their Russian brothers-in-arms and they would have allowed them a certain level of autonomy:

‘The Germans, in their shallow stupidity and self-importance, allowed them only to die for the German Reich, but denied them the right to plan an independent

destiny for Russia.¹⁶⁸

The war was still raging, Nazism was not clearly defeated, and Solzhenitsyn was already crying for the 'inhuman' lot reserved for the arrested Vlasovian criminals! He described a scene after the cleaning-up of a Nazi pocket on Soviet territory:

'A prisoner on foot in German britches was crying out to me in pure Russian. He was naked from the waist up, and his face, chest, shoulders, and back were all bloody, while a sergeant osobist . . . drove him forward with a whip . . . I *was afraid* to defend the Vlasov man against the osobist . . . This picture will remain etched in my mind forever. This, after all, is almost a symbol of the Archipelago. It ought to be on the jacket of this book.'¹⁶⁹

We should thank Solzhenitsyn for his disconcerting candor: the man who best incarnated the 'millions of victims of Stalinism' was a Nazi collaborator.

A clandestine anti-Communist organization in the Red Army

In general, the purges within the Red Army are presented as acts of foolish, arbitrary, blind repression; the accusations were all set-ups, diabolically prepared to ensure Stalin's personal dictatorship.

What is the truth?

A concrete and very interesting example can give us some essential aspects.

A colonel in the Soviet Army, G. A. Tokaev, defected to the British in 1948. He wrote a book called *Comrade X*, a real gold mine for those who want to try to understand the complexity of the struggle within the Bolshevik Party. Aeronautical engineer, Tokaev was from 1937 to 1948 the Political Secretary of the largest Party branch of the Zhukovsky Air Force Academy. He was therefore a leading cadre.¹⁷⁰

When he entered the Party in 1933 at the age of 22, Tokaev was already a member of a clandestine anti-Communist organization. At the head of his organization was a leading officer of the Red Army, an influential member of the Bolshevik Party Central Committee! Tokaev's group held secret conferences, adopted resolutions and sent emissaries around the country.

Throughout the book, published in 1956, he developed the political ideas of his clandestine group. Reading the main points adopted by this clandestine anti-Communist organization is very instructive.

Tokaev first presented himself as a '*revolutionary democrat* and liberal'.¹⁷¹

We were, he claimed, 'the enemy of any man who thought to divide the world into 'us' and 'them', into communists and anti-communists'.¹⁷²

Tokaev's group 'proclaimed the ideal of universal brotherhood' and 'regarded Christianity as one of the great systems of universal human values'.¹⁷³

Tokaev's group was partisan to the bourgeois régime set up by the February Revolution. The 'February Revolution represented at least a flicker of democracy . . . (that) pointed to a latent belief in democracy among the common people'.¹⁷⁴

The exile Menshevik newspaper, *Sozialistichesky Vestnik* was circulated within Tokaev's group, as was the book *The Dawn of the Red Terror* by the Menshevik G. Aaronson.¹⁷⁵

Tokaev recognized the link between his anti-Communist organization and the social-democrat International. '*The revolutionary democratic movement is close to the democratic socialists. I have worked in close co-operation with many convinced socialists, such as Kurt Schumacher Such names as Attlee, Bevin, Spaak and Blum mean something to humanity*'.¹⁷⁶

Tokaev also fought for the 'human rights' of all anti-Communists. 'In *our* view . . . there was no more urgent and important matter for the U.S.S.R. than the struggle for the human rights of the individual'.¹⁷⁷

Multi-partyism and the division of the U.S.S.R. into independent republics were two essential points of the conspirators' program.

Tokaev's group, the majority of whose members seem to have been nationalists from the Caucasus region, expressed his support for Yenukidze's plan, which aimed at destroying Stalinism 'root and branch' and replacing Stalin's 'reactionary U.S.S.R.' by a 'free union of free peoples'. The country was to be divided into ten natural regions: The North Caucasian United States, The Ukraine Democratic Republic, The Moscow Democratic Republic, The Siberian Democratic Republic, etc.¹⁷⁸

While preparing in 1939 a plan to overthrow Stalin's government, Tokaev's group was ready to 'seek outside support, particularly from the parties of the Second International . . . a new Constituent Assembly would be elected and its first measure would be to terminate one Party rule'.¹⁷⁹

Tokaev's clandestine group was clearly engaged in a struggle to the end with the Party leadership. In the summer of 1935, 'We of the opposition, whether army or civilian, fully realised that we had entered a life-or-death struggle'.¹⁸⁰

Finally, Tokaev considered 'Britain the freest and most democratic country in the world'.¹⁸¹ After World War II, 'My friends and I had become great admirers of the United States'.¹⁸²

Astoundingly, this is, almost point by point, Gorbachev's program. Starting in 1985, the ideas that were being defended in 1931–1941 by clandestine anti-Communist organizations resurfaced at the head of the Party. Gorbachev denounced the division of the world between socialism and capitalism and converted himself to 'universal values'. The rapprochement with social-democracy was initiated by Gorbachev in 1986. Multi-partyism became reality in the USSR in 1989. Yeltsin just reminded French Prime Minister Chirac that the February Revolution brought 'democratic hope' to Russia. The transformation of the 'reactionary U.S.S.R.' into a 'Union of Free Republics' has been achieved.

But in 1935 when Tokaev was fighting for the program applied 50 years later by Gorbachev, he was fully conscious that he was engaged in a struggle to the end with the Bolshevik leadership.

'(I)n the summer of 1935 . . . We of the opposition, whether army or civilian, fully realised that we had entered a life-or-death struggle'.¹⁸³

Who belonged to Tokaev's clandestine group?

They were mostly Red Army officers, often young officers coming out of military

academies. His leader, Comrade X — the real name is never given — was a member of the Central Committee during the thirties and forties.

Riz, lieutenant-captain in the navy, was the head of the clandestine movement in the Black Sea flotilla. Expelled from the Party four times, he was reintegrated four times.¹⁸⁴

Generals Osepyan, Deputy Head of the Political Administration of the Armed Forces (!), and Alksnis were among the main leaders of the clandestine organization. They were all close to General Kashirin. All three were arrested and executed during the Tukhachevsky affair.¹⁸⁵

A few more names. Lieutenant-Colonel Gaï, killed in 1936 in an armed confrontation with the police.¹⁸⁶ Colonel Kosmodemyansky, who ‘had made heroic but untimely attempts to shake off the Stalin oligarchy’.¹⁸⁷ Colonel-General Todorsky, Chief of the Zhukovsky Academy, and Smolensky, Divisional Commissar, Deputy Chief of the Academy, responsible for political affairs.¹⁸⁸

In Ukraine, the group supported Nikolai Generalov, whom Tokaev met in 1931 during a clandestine meeting in Moscow, and Lentzer. The two were arrested in Dnepropetrovsk in 1936.¹⁸⁹

Katya Okman, the daughter of an Old Bolshevik, entered into conflict with the Party at the beginning of the Revolution, and Klava Yeryomenko, Ukrainian widow of a naval aviation officer at Sebastopol, assured links throughout the country.

During the purge of the Bukharin group (‘right deviationist’) and that of Marshal Tukhachevsky, most of Tokaev’s group was arrested and shot: ‘circles close to Comrade X had been almost completely wiped out. Most of them had been arrested in connection with the ‘Right-wing deviationists’’.¹⁹⁰ Our situation, wrote Tokaev, had become tragic. One of the cadres, Belinsky, remarked that we had made a mistake in believing that Stalin was an incapable who would never be able to achieve industrialization and cultural development. Riz replied that he was wrong, that it was a struggle between generations and that the after-Stalin had to be prepared.¹⁹¹

Despite having an anti-Communist platform, Tokaev’s clandestine organization maintained close links with ‘reformist-communist’ factions within the Party.

In June 1935, Tokaev was sent to the south. He made a few comments about Yenukidze and Sheboldayev, two ‘Stalinist’ Bolsheviks, commonly considered as typical victims of Stalin’s arbitrariness.

‘One of my tasks was to try to ward off an attack against a number of Sea of Azov, Black Sea and North Caucasian opposition leaders, the chief of whom was B. P. Sheboldayev, First Secretary of the Regional Committee of the Party and a member of the Central Committee itself. Not that our movement was completely at one with the Sheboldayev–Yenukidze group, but we knew what they were doing and Comrade X considered it our revolutionary duty to help them at a critical moment We disagreed on details, but these were nevertheless brave and honorable men, who had many a time saved members of our group, and who had a considerable chance of success.’¹⁹²

‘(In 1935), my personal contacts made it possible for me to get at certain top-

secret files belonging to the Party Central Office and relating to 'Abu' Yenukidze and his group. The papers would help us to find out just how much the Stalinists knew about all those working against them

'(Yanukdize) was a committed communist of the right-wing

'The open conflict between Stalin and Yenukidze really dated from the law of December 1st, 1934, which followed immediately on the assassination of Kirov.'¹⁹³

'Yenukidze (tolerated) under him a handful . . . of men who were technically efficient and useful to the community but who were anti-communists.'¹⁹⁴

Yenukidze was placed under house arrest in mid-1935. Lieutenant-Colonel Gaï, a leader of Tokaev's organization, organized his escape. At Rostov-on-Don, they held a conference with Sheboldayev, First Secretary of the Regional Committee for Sea of Azov-Black Sea, with Pivovarov, the President of the Soviet of the Region and with Larin, the Prime Minister. Then Yenukidze and Gaï continued to the south, but they were ambushed by the NKVD near Baku. Gaï shot two men, but was himself killed.¹⁹⁵

Tokaev's opposition group also had links with Bukharin's group (see page 124).

Tokaev claimed that his group maintained close contact with another faction at the head of the Party, that of the Chief of Security, Yagoda. '(W)e knew the power of . . . NKVD bosses Yagoda or Beria . . . in their roles not of servants, but of enemies of the régime'.¹⁹⁶

Tokaev wrote that Yagoda protected many of their men who were in danger. When Yagoda was arrested, all the links that Tokaev's group had with the leadership of state security were broken. For their clandestine movement, this was a tremendous loss.

'The NKVD now headed by Yezhov, took another step forward. The Little Politbureau had penetrated the Yenukidze-Sheboldayev and the Yagoda-Zelinsky conspiracies, and broken through the opposition's links within the central institutions of the political police'. Yagoda 'was removed from the NKVD, and we lost a strong link in our opposition intelligence service'.¹⁹⁷

What were the intentions, the projects and the activities of Tokaev's group?

Well before 1934, wrote Tokaev, 'our group had planned to assassinate Kirov and Kalinin, the President of the Soviet Union. Finally, it was another group that assassinated Kirov, a group with which we were in contact.'¹⁹⁸

'In 1934 there was a plot to start a revolution by arresting the whole of the Stalinist-packed 17th Congress of the Party'.¹⁹⁹

A comrade from the group, Klava Yeryomenko, proposed in mid-1936 to kill Stalin. She knew officers of Stalin's bodyguard. Comrade X had refused, and 'pointed out that there had already been no less than fifteen attempts to assassinate Stalin, none had got near to success, each had cost many brave lives'.²⁰⁰

'In August, 1936 . . . My own conclusion was that the time for delay was past. We must make immediate preparations for an armed uprising. I was sure then, as I am today, that if Comrade X had chosen to send out a call to arms, he would have been joined at once by many of the big men of the U.S.S.R. In 1936, Alksnis,

Yegorov, Osepyan and Kashirin would have joined him'.²⁰¹

Note that all these generals were executed after the Tukhachevsky conspiracy. Tokaev thought that they had in 1936 sufficiently many men in the army to succeed in a coup d'état, which, Bukharin still being alive, would have had support from the peasantry.

One of 'our pilots', recalled Tokaev, submitted to Comrade X and to Alksnis and Osepyan his plan to bomb the Lenin Mausoleum and the Politburo.²⁰²

On November 20, 1936, in Moscow, Comrade X, during a clandestine meeting of five members, proposed to Demokratov to assassinate Yezhov during the Eighth Extraordinary Congress of the Soviets.²⁰³

'In April (1939) we held a congress of underground oppositionist leaders to review the position at home and abroad. Apart from revolutionary democrats there were present two socialists and two Right-wing military oppositionists, one of whom called himself a popular democrat-decentralist. We passed a resolution for the first time defining Stalinism as counter-revolutionary *fascism*, a betrayal of the working class The resolution was immediately communicated to prominent personalities of both Party and Government and similar conferences were organised in other centres we went to assess the chances of an armed uprising against Stalin'.²⁰⁴ Note that the theme 'Bolshevism = fascism' was shared in the thirties by Soviet military conspirators, Trotskyists, social-democrats and the Western Catholic right-wing.

Soon after, Tokaev was discussing with Smolninsky, a clandestine name for a leading officer of the Leningrad district, the possibility of a attempt against Zhdanov.²⁰⁵

Still in 1939, on the eve of the war, there was another meeting, where the conspirators discussed the question of assassinating Stalin in the case of war. They decided it was inopportune because they no longer had enough men to run the country and because the masses would not have followed them.²⁰⁶

When war broke out, the Party leadership proposed to Tokaev, who spoke German, to lead the partisan war behind the Nazi lines. The partisans, of course, were subject to terrible risks. At the time, Comrade X decided that Tokaev could not accept: 'We were, as far as we could, to remain in the main centres, to be ready to take over power if the Stalin régime broke down'.²⁰⁷ 'Comrade X was convinced that it was touch and go for Stalin. The pity of it was that we could not see Hitler as the liberator. Therefore, said Comrade X, we must be prepared for Stalin's régime to collapse, but we should do nothing whatever to weaken it'. This point was discussed during a clandestine meeting on July 5, 1941.²⁰⁸

After the war, in 1947, Tokaev was in charge of discussions with the German professor Tank, who specialized in aeronautics, in order to persuade him to come work in the Soviet Union. 'Tank . . . was indeed prepared to work on a jet fighter for the U.S.S.R. . . . I discussed the matter with a number of key men. We agreed that while it was wrong to assume that Soviet aircraft designers could not design a jet bomber, it was not in the interests of the country that they should The U.S.S.R. as we saw it was not really threatened by external enemies; therefore

our own efforts must be directed towards *weakening*, not strengthening, the Soviet monopolistic imperialism in the hope of thus making a democratic revolution possible'.²⁰⁹ Tokaev recognized here that economic sabotage was a political form of struggle for power.

These examples give an idea of the conspiratorial nature of a clandestine military group, hidden within the Bolshevik Party, whose survivors would see their 'ideals' recognized with the arrival in power of Khrushchev, and implemented under Gorbachev.

The 1937–1938 Purge

The actual purge was decided upon after the revelation of the Tukhachevsky military conspiracy. The discovery of such a plot at the head of the Red Army, a plot that had links with opportunist factions within the Party, provoked a complete panic.

The Bolshevik Party's strategy assumed that war with fascism was inevitable. Given that some of the most important figures in the Red Army and some of the leading figures in the Party were secretly collaborating on plans for a coup d'état showed how important the interior danger and its links with the external menace were. Stalin was extremely lucid and perfectly conscious that the confrontation between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union would cost millions of Soviet lives. The decision to physically eliminate the Fifth Column was not the sign of a 'dictator's paranoia', as Nazi propaganda claimed. Rather, it showed the determination of Stalin and the Bolshevik Party to confront fascism in a struggle to the end. By exterminating the Fifth Column, Stalin thought about saving several million Soviet lives, which would be the extra cost to pay should external aggression be able to profit from sabotage, provocation or internal treason.

In the previous chapter, we saw that the campaign waged against bureaucracy in the Party, especially at the intermediate levels, was amplified in 1937. During this campaign, Yaroslavsky harshly attacked the bureaucratic apparatus. He claimed that in Sverdlovsk, half of the members of the Presidiums of governmental institutions were co-opted. The Moscow Soviet only met once a year. Some leaders did not even know by sight their subordinates. Yaroslavsky stated:

'This party *apparat*, which should be helping the party, not infrequently puts itself between the party masses and the party leaders, and still further increases the alienation of the leaders from the masses.'²¹⁰

Getty wrote:

'(T)he center was trying to unleash criticism of the middle-level *apparat* by the rank-and-file activists. Without official sanction and pressure from above, it would have been impossible for the rank and file, on their own, to organize and sustain such a movement against their immediate superiors.'²¹¹

The bureaucratic and arbitrary attitude of the men in the provincial apparatuses was reinforced by the fact that the latter had a virtual monopoly on administrative

experience. The Bolshevik leadership encouraged the base to struggle against these bureaucratic and bourgeois tendencies. Getty wrote:

‘Populist control from below was not naive; rather, it was a vain but sincere attempt to use the rank and file to break open the closed regional machines.’²¹²

In the beginning of 1937, a satrap like Rumiantsev, who ran the Western Region, a territory as large as a Western European country, could not be dethroned by criticism from the base. He was expelled from above, for having been linked to a military plot, as a collaborator of Uborevich.

‘The two radical currents of the 1930s had converged in July 1937, and the resulting turbulence destroyed the bureaucracy. Zhdanov’s party-revival campaign and Ezhov’s hunt for enemies fused to create a chaotic “populist terror” that now swept the party

‘Antibureaucratic populism and police terror destroyed the offices as well as the officeholders. Radicalism had turned the political machine inside out and destroyed the party bureaucracy.’²¹³

The struggle against Nazi infiltration and against the military conspiracy therefore fused with the struggle against bureaucracy and feudal fiefs. There was a revolutionary purge from below and from above.

The purge started with a cadre decision, signed on July 2, 1937 by Stalin and Molotov.

Yezhov then signed the execution orders condemning to death 75,950 individuals whose irreconcilable hostility to the Soviet régime was known: common criminals, kulaks, counter-revolutionaries, spies and anti-Soviet elements. The cases had to be examined by a troika including the Party Secretary, the President of the local Soviet and the Chief of the NKVD. But starting in September 1937, the leaders of the purge at the regional level and the leadership’s special envoys were already introducing demands to increase the quota of anti-Soviet elements to be executed.

The purge was often characterized by inefficiency and anarchy. On the verge of being arrested by the NKVD in Minsk, Colonel Kutsner took the train to Moscow, where he became Professor at the Frunze Academy! Getty cited testimony by Grigorenko and Ginzburg, two of Stalin’s adversaries: ‘a person who felt that his arrest was imminent could go to another town and, as a rule, avoid being arrested’.²¹⁴

Regional Party Secretaries tried to show their vigilance by denouncing and expelling a large number of lower cadres and ordinary members.²¹⁵ Opponents hiding within the party led conspiracies to expell the greatest possible number of loyal Communist cadres. About this question, one opponent testified:

‘We endeavored to expel as many people from the party as possible. We expelled people when there were no grounds for expulsion (sic). We had one aim in view — to increase the number of embittered people and thus increase the number of our allies.’²¹⁶

To lead a giant, complex country, still trying to catch up on its backwardness, was an extremely difficult task. In many strategic domains, Stalin concentrated

on elaborating general guidelines. He then gave the task to be effected to one of his adjuncts. To put into application the guidelines on the purge, he replaced the liberal Yagoda, who had toyed with some of the opponents' plots, by Yezhov, an Old Bolshevik of worker origin.

But only three months after the beginning of the purge led by Yezhov, there were already signs that Stalin was not satisfied by the way the operation was being carried out. In October, Stalin intervened to affirm that the economic leaders were trustworthy. In December 1937, the twentieth anniversary of the NKVD was celebrated. A cult of the NKVD, the 'vanguard of party and revolution', had been developing for some time in the press. Stalin did not even wait for the next central meeting. At the end of December, three Deputy Commissars of the NKVD were fired.²¹⁷

In January 1938, the Central Committee published a resolution on how the purge was taking place. It reaffirmed the necessity of vigilance and repression against enemies and spies. But it most criticized the 'false vigilance' of some Party Secretaries who were attacking the base to protect their own position. It starts as follows:

'The VKP(b) Central Committee plenum considers it necessary to direct the attention of party organizations and their leaders to the fact that while carrying out their major effort to purge their ranks of trotskyite-rightist agents of fascism they are committing serious errors and perversions which interfere with the business of purging the party of double dealers, spies, and wreckers. Despite the frequent directives and warnings of the VKP(b) Central Committee, in many cases the party organizations adopt a completely incorrect approach and expel Communists from the party in a criminally frivolous way.'²¹⁸

The resolution shows two major organizational and political problems that made the purge deviate from its aims: the presence of Communists who were only concerned about their careers, and the presence, among the cadres, of infiltrated enemies.

'(A)mong Communists there exist, still unrevealed and unmasked, *certain careerist Communists who are striving to become prominent and to be promoted by recommending expulsions from the party, through the repression of party members, who are striving to insure themselves against possible charges of inadequate vigilance through the indiscriminate repression of party members . . .*

'This sort of careerist communist, anxious to curry favour, indiscriminately spreads panic about enemies of the people and at party meetings is always ready to raise a hue and cry about expelling members from the party on various formalistic grounds or entirely without such grounds . . .

'Furthermore, numerous instances are known of disguised enemies of the people, wreckers and double dealers, organizing, for provocational ends, the submission of slanderous depositions against party members and, under the semblance of 'heightening vigilance,' seeking to expel from the VKP(b) ranks honest and devoted Communists, in this way diverting the blow from themselves and retaining their own positions in the party's ranks . . .

‘(They) try through measures of repression to beat up our bolshevik cadres and to sow excess suspicion in our ranks.’²¹⁹

We would like now to draw attention to Khrushchev’s criminal swindle. In his Secret Report, he devoted an entire chapter in the denunciation of the ‘Great Purge’.

‘Using Stalin’s formulation, namely, that the closer we are to socialism the more enemies we will have . . . the *provocateurs* who had infiltrated the state-security organs together with consciousnessless careerists began to protect with the party name the mass terror against . . . cadres’.²²⁰

The reader will note that those are precisely the two kinds of hostile elements that Stalin warned against in January 1938! In fact, ‘Stalin’s formulation’ was invented by Khrushchev. Yes, some Communists were unjustly hit, and crimes were committed during the purge. But, with great foresight, Stalin had already denounced these problems when the operation had only been running for six months. Eighteen years later, Khrushchev would use as pretext the criminal activities of these provocateurs and careerists, denounced at the time by Stalin, to denigrate the purge itself and to insult Stalin!

We return to the January 1938 resolution. Here are some of its conclusions:

‘It is time to understand that bolshevik vigilance consists essentially in the ability to unmask an enemy regardless of how clever and artful he may be, regardless of how he decks himself out, and not in discriminate or ‘on the off-chance’ expulsions, by the tens and hundreds, of everyone who comes within reach.

‘(Directions are) to end mass indiscriminate expulsions from the party and to institute a genuinely individualized and differentiated approach to questions of expulsion from the party or of restoring expelled persons to the rights of party membership . . .

‘(Directions are) to remove from their party posts and to hold accountable to the party those party leaders who do not carry out the directives of the VKP(b) Central Committee, who expel VKP(b) members and candidate members from the party without carefully verifying all the materials, and who take an arbitrary attitude in their dealings with party members.’²²¹

Tokaev thought it probable that anti-Communist opponents had provoked excesses during the purge to discredit and weaken the Party. He wrote:

‘The fear of being suspected of lack of vigilance drove local fanatics to denounce not only Bukharinists, but also Malenkovists, Yezhovists, even Stalinists. It is of course not impossible that they were also egged on to do so by concealed oppositionists . . .! Beria . . . at a closed joint session of the Central Committee and the Central Control Committee of the Party, held in the autumn of 1938 . . . declared that if Yezhov were not a deliberate Nazi agent, he was certainly an involuntary one. He had turned the central offices of the NKVD into a breeding ground for fascist agents.’²²²

‘Gardinashvili, one of my close contacts, (had a) conversation (with Beria) just before Beria was appointed Head of the police. Gardinashvili asked Beria if Stalin was blind to the dismay caused by so many executions — was he unaware that the

reign of terror had gone so far that it was defeating itself; men in high positions were wondering whether Nazi agents had not penetrated the NKVD, using their position to discredit our country.

‘Beria’s realistic reply was that Stalin was well aware of this but was faced with a technical difficulty: the speedy restoration of ‘normality’ in a centrally controlled State of the size of the U.S.S.R. was an immense task

‘In addition, there was the real danger of war, and the Government therefore had to be very cautious about relaxations.’²²³

The rectification

On November 11, 1938, Stalin and Molotov signed a clear decision, putting an end to the excesses that took place during the purges.

‘The general operations — to crush and destroy enemy elements — conducted by the NKVD in 1937–1938, during which investigation and hearing procedures were simplified, showed numerous and grave defects in the work of the NKVD and prosecutor. Furthermore, enemies of the people and foreign secret service spies penetrated the NKVD, both at the local and central level. They tried by all means to disrupt investigations. Agents consciously deformed Soviet laws, conducted massive and unjustified arrests and, at the same time, protected their acolytes, particularly those who had infiltrated the NKVD.

‘The completely unacceptable defects observed in the work of the NKVD and prosecutors were only possible because enemies of the people had infiltrated themselves in the NKVD and prosecutor offices, used every possible method to separate the work of the NKVD and prosecutors from the Party organs, to avoid Party control and leadership and to facilitate for themselves and for their acolytes the continuation of their anti-Soviet activities.

‘The Council of People’s Commissars and the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) resolves:

‘1. To prohibit the NKVD and prosecutors from conducting any massive arrest or deportation operation

‘The CPC and the CC of the CPSU(b) warn all NKVD and prosecutor office employees that the slightest deviation from Soviet laws and from Party and Government directives by any employee, whoever that person might be, will result in severe legal proceedings.

‘V. Molotov, J. Stalin.’²²⁴

There is still much controversy about the number of people that were affected by the Great Purge. This subject has been a favorite topic for propaganda. According to Rittersporn, in 1937–1938, during the ‘Great Purge’, there were 278,818 expulsions from the Party. This number was much smaller than during the preceding years. In 1933, there were 854,330 expulsions; in 1934, there were 342,294, and in 1935 the number was 281,872. In 1936, there were 95,145.²²⁵ However, we should underscore that this purge was completely different from the previous pe-

riods. The 'Great Purge' focused mainly on cadres. During the preceding years, elements that had nothing to do with Communism, common criminals, drunkards and undisciplined elements constituted the majority of the expelled.

According to Getty, from November 1936 to March 1939, there were fewer than 180,000 expulsions from the Party.²²⁶ This number takes into account reintegrated individuals.

Even before the 1938 Plenum, there were 53,700 appeals against expulsions. In August 1938, there were 101,233 appeals. At that time, out of a total of 154,933 appeals, the Party committees had already examined 85,273, of which 54 per cent were readmitted.²²⁷ No other information could better give the lie to the statement that the purge was blind terror and without appeal, organized by an irrational dictator.

Conquest claims that there were 7 to 9 million arrests in 1937–1938. At that time, the number of industrial workers was less than 8 million. This number, Conquest 'bases this on the memoirs of ex-prisoners who assert that between 4 and 5.5 per cent of the Soviet population were incarcerated or deported during those years'.²²⁸ These figures are sheer fantasy, invented by enemies of socialism who were firmly committed to harming the régime by all means. Their 'estimates' are based on no serious sources.

'Lacking evidence, all estimates are equally worthless, and it is hard to disagree with Brzezinski's observation that it is impossible to make any estimates without erring in the hundreds of thousands or even millions.'²²⁹

We would now like to address the Gulag and the more general problem of the number of imprisoned and dead in the corrective work camps, the word Gulag meaning Principal Administration of the camps.

Armed with the science of statistics and extrapolation, Robert Conquest makes brilliant calculations: 5 million interned in the Gulag at the beginning of 1934; more than 7 million arrested during the 1937–1938 purges, that makes 12 million; from this number one million executed and two million dead of different causes during those two years. That makes exactly 9 million politically detained in 1939 'not counting the common law'.²³⁰

Now, given the size of the repression, Conquest starts to count cadavers. Between 1939 and 1953, there was an average annual mortality 'of around 10 per cent'. But, during all these years, the number of detained remained stable, around 8 million. That means that during those years, 12 million persons were assassinated in the Gulag by Stalinism.

The Medvedez brothers, those 'Communists' of the Bukharin–Gorbachev school, essentially confirmed those revealing figures.

There were '12 to 13 million people thought to have been in concentration camps during Stalin's time'. Under Khrushchev, who reawoke hopes for 'democratization', things went much better, of course: in the Gulag, there were only some 2 million common law criminals left.²³¹

Up to now, no problem. Everything was going just fine for our anti-Communists. Their word was taken for granted.

Then the USSR split up and Gorbachev's disciples were able to grab the Soviet archives. In 1990, the Soviet historians Zemskov and Dugin published the unedited statistics for the Gulag. They contain the arrivals and departures, right down to the last person.

Unexpected consequence: These accounting books made it possible to remove Conquest's scientific mask.

In 1934, Conquest counted 5 million political detainees. In fact there were between 127,000 and 170,000. The exact number of all detained in the work camps, political and common law combined, was 510,307. The political prisoners formed only 25 to 35 per cent of the detainees. To the approximately 150,000 detainees, Conquest added 4,850,000. Small detail!

Annually, Conquest estimated an average of 8 million detainees in the camps. And Medvedev 12 to 13 million. In fact, the number of political detainees oscillated between a minimum of 127,000 in 1934 and a maximum of 500,000 during the two war years, 1941 and 1942. The real figures were therefore multiplied by a factor of between 16 and 26. When the average number of detainees was somewhere between 236,000 and 315,000 political detainees, Conquest 'invented' 7,700,000 extra! Marginal statistical error, of course. Our school books, our newspapers, do not give the real figure of around 272,000, but the horror of 8,000,000!

Conquest, the fraud, claims that in 1937–1938, during the Great Purge, the camps swelled by 7 million 'politicals' and there were in addition 1 million executions and 2 million other deaths. In fact, from 1936 to 1939, the number of detained in the camps increased by 477,789 persons (passing from 839,406 to 1,317,195). A falsification factor of 14. In two years, there were 115,922 deaths, not 2,000,000. For the 116,000 dead of various causes, Conquest adds 1,884,000 'victims of Stalinism'.

Gorbachev's ideologue, Medvedev, refers to 12 to 13 million in the camps; under the liberal Khrushchev, there remained 2 million, all common law. In fact, during Stalin's time, in 1951, the year of the greatest number of detained in the Gulag, there were 1,948,158 common law prisoners, as many as during Khrushchev's time. The real number of political prisoners was then 579,878. Most of these 'politicals' had been Nazi collaborators: 334,538 had been convicted for treason.

According to Conquest, between 1939 and 1953, there was, in the work camps, a 10 per cent death rate per year, some 12 million 'victims of Stalinism'. An average of 855,000 dead per year. In fact, the real figure in peace time was 49,000. Conquest invented a figure of 806,000 deaths per year. During the four years of the war, when Nazi barbarity was imposing unbearable conditions on all Soviets, the average number of deaths was 194,000. Hence, in four years, the Nazis caused an excess of 580,000 deaths, for which, of course, Stalin is responsible.

Werth, who denounces Conquest's falsifications, still does his best to maintain as much as possible the myth of Stalinist 'crimes'.

'In fourteen years (1934–1947), 1 million deaths were registered in the work camps alone.' So Werth also blames socialism for the 580,000 extra deaths caused by the Nazis!

Let us return to the purge itself.

One of the best-known slanders claims that the purge was intended to eliminate the ‘Old Bolshevik Guard’. Even a vicious enemy of Bolshevism like Brzezinski can take up the same line.²³² In 1934, there were 182,600 ‘Old Bolsheviks’ in the Party, i.e. members who joined in 1920 at the latest. In 1939, there were 125,000. The great majority, 69 per cent, were still in the Party. There was during those five years a drop of 57,000 individuals, i.e. 31 per cent. Some died of natural causes, others were expelled, others were executed. It is clear that if ‘Old Bolsheviks’ fell during the Purge, it was not because they were ‘Old Bolsheviks’, but because of their political behavior.²³³

We conclude with the words of Professor J. Arch Getty who, at the end of his remarkable book, *Origins of the Great Purges*, writes:

‘The evidence suggests that the Ezhovshchina — which is what most people really mean by the “Great Purges” — should be redefined. It was not the result of a petrified bureaucracy’s stamping out dissent and annihilating old radical revolutionaries. In fact, it may have been just the opposite. It is not inconsistent with the evidence to argue that the Ezhovshchina was rather a radical, even hysterical, *reaction* to bureaucracy. The entrenched officeholders were destroyed from above and below in a chaotic wave of voluntarism and revolutionary puritanism.’²³⁴

The Western bourgeoisie and the Purge

By and large, the 1937–1938 purge succeeded in its purpose. There was also a lot of damage and many errors were committed, but these could probably not have been avoided, given the internal situation of the Party. Most of the men and women in the Nazi Fifth Column fell during the purge. And when the fascists attacked the USSR, there were few collaborators within the State and Party apparatus.

When we listen to Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, liberals and other bourgeois speaking of Stalin’s ‘absurd terror’, of the ‘bloody despot’, we would like to ask them where they and people like them were in 1940, when the Nazis occupied France and Belgium. The great majority who, here at home, denounced Stalin’s purge, actively or passively supported the Nazi régime as soon as it was set up. When the Nazis occupied Belgium, Hendrik de Man, the President of the Socialist Party, made an official declaration to praise Hitler and to announce that the arrival of the Hitlerite troops meant the ‘liberation of the working class’! In ‘The Manifesto to the Members of the POB (Belgian Workers’ Party)’, published in July 1940, de Man wrote:

‘The war has led to the debacle of the parliamentary regime and of the capitalist plutocracy in the so-called democracies. For the working classes and for socialism, this collapse of a decrepit world, far from being a disaster, is a deliverance . . . the way is open for the two causes which sum up the aspirations of the people: European peace and social justice.’²³⁵

In history courses, they beat our eardrums with all the scandalous lies about

Stalin, but they do not tell us that the President of the Belgian Socialist Party, great critic of the Stalin purge, hailed the Nazis in Brussels! It is a well established fact that not only Hendrik De Man, but also Achille Van Acker, future Prime Minister of 'democratic' Belgium, collaborated with the Nazis as soon as they arrived. When we hear these people say that the purge organized by Stalin was 'criminal' and 'absurd', we understand them. Those who were preparing to collaborate with the Nazis were of the same family as most of the 'victims of the purge'. In France too, the vast majority of the parliamentary Socialists voted full powers to Pétain and helped set up the collaborating Vichy régime.

Furthermore, when the Nazis occupied Belgium, resistance was almost non-existent. The first weeks and months, there was no significant resistance. The Belgian bourgeoisie, almost to a man, collaborated. And the masses were subject to and passively accepted the occupation. French author Henri Amouroux was able to write a book entitled *Quarante millions de pétainistes* (Forty million Petainists).²³⁶

Let us make a comparison with the Soviet Union. As soon as the Nazis set foot on Soviet territory, they had to confront military and civilians prepared to fight to the death. The purge was accompanied by a constant campaign of political and ideological preparation of workers for the war of aggression. In his book about the Urals, U.S. engineer Scott described well how this political campaigning took place in the factories of Magnitogorsk. He described how the Party explained the world situation to the workers, in the newspapers, in seminars, using films and theatre. He talked about the profound effect this education had on the workers.

It is precisely because of the purge and the education campaign that accompanied it that the Soviet people found the strength to resist. If that steadfast will to oppose the Nazis by all means had not existed, it is obvious that the fascists would have taken Stalingrad, Leningrad and Moscow. If the Nazi Fifth Column had succeeded in maintaining itself, it would have found support among the defeatists and the capitulationists in the Party. If the Stalin leadership had been overthrown, the Soviet Union would have capitulated, as did France. A victory of the Nazis in the Soviet Union would have immediately helped the pro-Nazi tendency in the British bourgeoisie, still powerful after Chamberlain's departure, take the upper hand from Churchill's group. The Nazis would probably have gone on to dominate the whole world.

Trotsky's rôle on the eve of the Second World War

During the thirties, Trotsky literally became the world's expert on anti-Communism. Even today, right-wing ideologues peruse Trotsky's works in search of weapons against the Soviet Union under Stalin.

In 1982, when Reagan was again preaching the anti-Communist crusade, Henri Bernard, Professor Emeritus at the Royal Military School of Belgium, published a book to spread the following urgent message:

'The Communists of 1982 are the Nazis of 1939. We are weaker in front of Moscow than we were in August 1939 in front of Hitler.'¹

All of the standard clichés of Le Pen, the fascist French Front National leader, are there:

'Terrorism is not the act of a few crazies. The basis of everything is the Soviet Union and the clandestine network of international terrorism.'²

'Christian leftism is a Western wound.

'The synchronicity of 'pacifist' demonstrations shows how they were inspired by Moscow.'³

'The British commandos who went to die in the Falklands showed that there still exist moral values in the West.'⁴

But the tactics used by such an avowed anti-Communist as Bernard are very interesting. Here is how a man who, despite despising a 'leftist Christian', will ally himself with Trotsky.

'The private Lenin was, like Trotsky, a human being His personal life was full of nuance

'Trotsky should normally have succeeded Lenin . . . he was the main architect of the October Revolution, the victor of the Civil War, the creator of the Red Army

'Lenin had much respect for Trotsky. He thought of him as successor. He thought Stalin was too brutal

'Within the Soviet Union, Trotsky rose up against the imposing bureaucracy that was paralysing the Communist machine

‘Artist, educated, non-conformist and often prophet, he could not get along with the main dogmatists in the Party

‘Stalin was nationalist, a sentiment that did not exist either in Lenin or Trotsky With Trotsky, the foreign Communist Parties could consider themselves as a force whose sole purpose was to impose a social order. With Stalin, they worked for the Kremlin and to further its imperialist politics.’⁵

We present here a few of the main theses that Trotsky put forward during the years 1937–1940, and that illustrate the nature of his absolute anti-Communist struggle. They allow one to understand why people in the Western security services, such as Henri Bernard, use Trotsky to fight Communists. They also shed some light on the class struggle between Bolsheviks and opportunists and on some aspects of the Purge of 1937–1938.

The enemy is the new aristocracy, the new Bolshevik bourgeoisie

For Trotsky, the main enemy was at the head of the Soviet State: it was the ‘new Bolshevik aristocracy’, the most anti-Socialist and anti-democratic layer of the society, a social layer that lived like ‘the well-to-do bourgeois of the United States’! Here is how he phrased it.

‘The privileged bureaucracy . . . now represents *the most antisocialist and the most antidemocratic sector of Soviet society.*’⁶

‘We accuse the ruling clique of having transformed itself into a new aristocracy, oppressing and robbing the masses The higher layer of the bureaucracy lives approximately the same kind of life as the well-to-do bourgeois of the United States and other capitalist countries.’⁷

This language makes Trotsky indistinguishable from the Menshevik leaders when they were leading the counter-revolutionary armed struggle, alongside the White and interventionist armies. Also indistinguishable from the language of the classical Right of the imperialist countries.

Compare Trotsky with the main anti-Communist ideologue in the International Confederation of Christian Unions (CISC), P. J. S. Serrarens, writing in 1948:

‘There are thanks to Stalin, once again ‘classes’ and rich people Just like in a capitalist society, the élite is rewarded with money and power. There is what ‘Force Ouvrière’ (France) calls a ‘Soviet aristocracy’. This weekly compares it to the aristocracy created by Napoleon.’⁸

After World War II, the French union Force Ouvrière to which Serrarens was referring was directly created and financed by the CIA. The ‘Lambertist’ Trotskyist group worked, and still works, inside it. At that time, the CISC, be it in Italy or Belgium, worked directly for the CIA for the defence of the capitalist system in Europe. To mobilize the workers against Communism, it used a revolting ‘anti-capitalist’ demagoguery that it borrowed from the social-democrats and the Trotskyists: in the Soviet Union, there was a ‘new class of rich people’, a ‘Soviet aristocracy’.

Confronting this ‘new aristocracy, oppressing and robbing the masses’,⁹ there

were, in Trotsky's eyes, 'one hundred and sixty millions who are profoundly discontented'.¹⁰ These 'people' were protecting the collectivization of the means of production and the planned economy against the 'ignorant and despotic Stalinist thieves'. In other words, apart from the 'Stalinists', the rest of the society was clean and led just struggles! Listen to Trotsky:

'Twelve to fifteen millions of the privileged — there are the "people" who organize the parades, demonstrations, and ovations But apart from this "*pays légal*" as was once said in France, there exist one hundred and sixty millions who are profoundly discontented

'Antagonism between the bureaucracy and the people is measured by the increasing severity of the totalitarian rule

'The bureaucracy can be crushed only by a new political revolution.'¹¹

'(T)he economy is planned on the basis of nationalization and collectivization of the means of production. This state economy has its own laws that are less and less tolerant of the despotism, ignorance and banditry of the Stalinist bureaucracy.'¹²

Since the re-establishment of capitalism was impossible in Trotsky's eyes, any opposition, be it social-democratic, revisionist, bourgeois or counter-revolutionary, became legitimate. It was the voice of 'one hundred and sixty millions who were profoundly discontented' and aimed to 'protect' the collectivization of the means of production against the 'new aristocracy'. Trotsky became the spokesperson for all the retrograde forces, anti-socialist and fascist.

Bolshevism and fascism

Trotsky was one of the first to put forward the line that Bolshevism and fascism were twins. This thesis was quite popular, during the thirties, in the reactionary Catholic parties. The Communist Party was their sworn enemy, the fascist party their most important bourgeois opponent. Once again, here is Trotsky:

'Fascism is winning victory after victory and its best ally, the one that is clearing its path throughout the world, is Stalinism.'¹³

'In fact, nothing distinguishes Stalin's political methods from Hitler's. But the difference in results on the international scale is remarkable.'¹⁴

'An important part, which becomes more and more important, of the Soviet apparatus is formed of fascists who have yet to recognize themselves as such. To equate the Soviet régime with fascism is a gross historic error But the symmetry of the political superstructures and the similarity of totalitarian methods and of psychological profiles are striking

'(T)he agony of Stalinism is the most horrible and most odious spectacle on Earth.'¹⁵

Trotsky here presented one of the first versions of the essential theme of CIA and fascist propaganda during the fifties, that of 'red fascism'. By using the word 'fascism', Trotsky tried to redirect the hatred that the masses felt towards the terrorist dictatorship of big capital, against socialism. After 1944–1945, all the German, Hungarian, Croatian and Ukrainian fascist leaders that fled to the West

put on their ‘democratic’ mask; they praised U.S. ‘democracy’, the new hegemonic force and the main source of support for retrograde and fascist forces in the world. These ‘old’ fascists, faithful to their criminal past, all developed the same theme: ‘Bolshevism is fascism, but even worse’.

Note further that at the time that European fascism had already started its war (wars in Ethiopia and Spain, annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia), Trotsky was affirming that the ‘most horrible and most odious spectacle’ on Earth was the ‘agony of socialism’!

Defeatism and capitulation in front of Nazi Germany

Trotsky became the main propagandist for defeatism and capitulationism in the Soviet Union. His demagogic ‘world revolution’ served to better stifle the Soviet revolution. Trotsky spread the idea that in case of fascist aggression against the Soviet Union, Stalin and the Bolsheviks would ‘betray’ and that under their leadership, the defeat of the Soviet Union was inevitable. Here are his ideas on this subject:

‘The military ... status of Soviet Russia, is contradictory. On one side we have a population of 170,000,000 awakened by the greatest revolution in history ... with a more or less developed war industry. On the other side we have a political regime paralyzing all of the forces of the new society ... One thing I am sure: the political regime will not survive the war. The social regime, which is the nationalized property of production, is incomparably more powerful than the political regime, which has a despotic character The representatives of the political regime, or the bureaucracy, are afraid of the prospect of a war, because they know better than we that they will not survive the war as a regime.’¹⁶

Once again, there were, on one side, ‘the 170 million’, the ‘good’ citizens who were awoken by the Revolution. One might wonder by whom, if it was not by the Bolshevik Party and Stalin: the great peasant masses were certainly not ‘awoken’ during the years 1921–1928. These ‘170 million’ had a ‘developed war industry’. As if it was not Stalin’s collectivization and industrialization policies, implemented thanks to his strong will, that allowed the creation of an arms industry in record time! Thanks to his correct line, to his will, to his capacity to organize, the Bolshevik régime awoke the popular forces that had been kept in ignorance, superstition and primitive individual work. According to the *provocateur* Trotsky’s rantings, the Bolshevik régime paralyzed that society’s forces! And Trotsky made all sorts of absurd predictions: it was certain that the Bolshevik régime would not survive the war! Hence, two propaganda themes dear to the Nazis can be found in Trotsky’s writings: anti-Bolshevism and defeatism.

‘Berlin knows to what extent the Kremlin clique has demoralized the country’s army and population through its struggle for self-preservation ...

‘Stalin continues to sap the moral force and the general level of resistance of the country. Careerists with no honor, nor conscience, upon whom Stalin is forced to rely, will betray the country in difficult times.’¹⁷

In his hatred of Communism, Trotsky incited the Nazis to wage war against the Soviet Union. He, the 'eminent expert' on the affairs of the Soviet Union, told the Nazis that they had every chance of winning the war against Stalin: the army and the population were demoralized (false!), Stalin was destroying the resistance (false!) and the Stalinists would capitulate at the beginning of the war (false!).

In the Soviet Union, this Trotskyist propaganda had two effects. It encouraged defeatism and capitulationism, through the idea that fascism was assured victory given that the USSR had such a rotten and incompetent leadership. It also encouraged 'insurrections' and assassination attempts to eliminate Bolshevik leaders 'who would betray in difficult times'. A leadership that was categorically destined to fall during the war might well fall at the beginning of the war. Anti-Soviet and opportunistic groups could therefore make their attempts.

In both cases, Trotsky's provocations directly helped the Nazis.

Trotsky and the Tukhachevsky plot

In the chapter dedicated to the Tukhachevsky military plot, we showed that a large anti-Communist opposition truly did exist among the cadres of the Red Army. Trotsky's attitude towards this reality is enlightening.

Here are Trotsky's written positions about the Tukhachevsky affair:

'I must here state what were my relations with Tukhachevsky I never considered the Communist convictions of this officer of the Old Guard to be serious

'The generals struggled to defend the security of the Soviet Union against the interests of Stalin's personal security.'¹⁸

'The army needs capable, honest men, just as the economists and scientists, independent men with open minds. Every man and woman with an independent mind comes into conflict with the bureaucracy, and the bureaucracy must decapitate the one section at the expense of the other in order to preserve themselves A man who is a good general, like Tukhachevsky, needs independent aides, other generals around him, and he appreciates every man according to his intrinsic value. The bureaucracy needs docile people, byzantine people, slaves, and these two types come into conflict in every state.'¹⁹

'Tukhachevsky, and along with him the cream of the military cadres, perished in the struggle against the police dictatorship hovering over Red Army officers. In its social characteristics, the military bureaucracy is naturally no better than the civil bureaucracy When the bureaucracy is viewed as a whole, it retains two functions: power and administration. These two functions have now reached an acute contradiction. To ensure good administration, the totalitarian power must be eliminated

'What does the new duality of power mean: the first step in the decomposition of the Red Army and the beginning of a new civil war in the country?

'The current generation of commissars means the control of the Bonapartist clique over the military and civilian administration and, through it, over the people

‘The actual commanders grew up in the Red Army, can not be dissociated from it and have an unquestioned authority acquired over many years. On the other hand, the commissars were recruited among the sons of bureaucrats, who have no revolutionary experience, no military knowledge and no ideological capital. This is the archetype of the new school careerists. They are only called upon to command because they are ‘vigilant’, i.e. they are the army’s police. The commanders show them the hatred that they deserve. The régime of dual command is transforming itself into a struggle between the political police and the army, where the central power sides with the police

‘The development of the country, and in particular the growth of its new needs, is incompatible with the totalitarian scum; this is why we see tendencies to resist the bureaucracy in all walks of life In the areas of technology, economics, education, culture, defence, people with experience, with a knowledge of science and with authority automatically reject the agents of Stalinist dictatorship, who are for the most part uncultivated and cynical uncouth like Mekhlis and Yezhov.’²⁰

First of all, Trotsky had to recognize that Tukhachevsky and those like him were never Communists: previously, Trotsky himself had designated Tukhachevsky as candidate for a Napoleon-like military coup d’état. Furthermore, for the needs of his unrelenting struggle against Stalin, Trotsky denied the existence of a bourgeois counter-revolutionary opposition at the head of the army. In fact, he supported any opposition against Stalin and the Bolshevik Party, including Tukhachevsky, Alksnis, etc. Trotsky led a united front policy with all the anti-Communists in the army. This clearly shows that Trotsky could only come to power in alliance with the counter-revolutionary forces. Trotsky claimed that those who were fighting Stalin and the leadership of the Party within the army were actually struggling for the security of the country, while the officers who were loyal to the Party were defending Stalin’s dictatorship and his personal interests.

It is remarkable that Trotsky’s analysis about the struggle within the Red Army is identical to that made by Roman Kolkowicz in his study for the U.S. Army (see page 154). First, Trotsky opposed the Party measures to assert political control over the Red Army. In particular, Trotsky attacked the reintroduction of political commissars, who would play an essential political rôle in the war of anti-fascist resistance and would help young soldiers maintain a clear political line despite the incredible complexity of problems created by the war. Trotsky encouraged the elitist and exclusivist sentiments within the military against the Party, with the explicit aim of splitting the Red Army and provoking civil war. Next, Trotsky declared himself in favor of the independence, hence the ‘professionalism’, of officers, saying that they were capable, honest and with an open mind, to the extent that they opposed the Party! Similarly, it is clear that anti-Communist elements like Tokaev defended their dissident bourgeois ideas in the name of independence and of an open mind!

Trotsky claimed that there was a conflict between the ‘Stalinist’ power and the State administration, and that he supported the latter. In fact, the opposition that he described was the opposition between the Bolshevik Party and the State

bureaucracy. Like all anti-Communists throughout the world, Trotsky slandered the Communist Party by calling it 'bureaucratic'. In fact, the real danger of bureaucratization of the régime came from the parts of the administration that were in no sense Communist, that sought to get rid of the 'stifling' political and ideological control of the Party, to impose themselves on the rest of society and to acquire privileges and benefits of all kinds. The political control of the Party over the military and civil administration was especially aimed at fighting these tendencies towards bureaucratic disintegration. When Trotsky wrote that to ensure a good administration of the country, the Party had to be eliminated, he was the spokesperson for the most bureaucratic tendencies of the state apparatus.

More generally, Trotsky defended the 'professionalism' of the military, technical, scientific and cultural cadres, i.e. of all the technocrats who tried to rid themselves of Party control, who wanted to 'eliminate the Party from all aspects of life', according to Trotsky's precepts.

In the class struggle that took place within the State and Party in the thirties and forties, the front line was between the forces that defended Stalin's Leninist line and those who encouraged technocratism, bureaucracy and militarism. It was the latter forces that would gain hegemony over the Party leadership during Khrushchev's coup d'état.

Provocations in the service of the Nazis

To prepare for the Nazi war of aggression, Stalin and the Bolsheviks had to be overthrown. By defending this thesis, Trotsky became an instrument in the hands of the Hitlerites. Recently, during a meeting at the Free University of Brussels (ULB), a ranting Trotskyist yelled: 'Those are lies! Trotsky always stated that he unconditionally defended the Soviet Union against imperialism.'

Yes, Trotsky always defended the Soviet Union, assuming that destroying the Bolshevik Party was the best preparation for defence! The essential point is that Trotsky was calling for an anti-Bolshevik insurrection, from which the Nazis, and not the handful of Trotskyists, would profit. Trotsky could well preach insurrection in the name of a 'better defence' of the Soviet Union, but he clearly held an anti-Communist line and mobilized all the anti-socialist forces. There is no doubt that the Nazis were the first to appreciate this 'better defence of the Soviet Union'.

Here are Trotsky's exact words about 'a better defence of the Soviet Union'.

'I cannot be "for the USSR" in general. I am for the working masses who created the USSR and against the bureaucracy which has usurped the gains of the revolution It remains the duty of a serious revolutionary to state quite frankly and openly: Stalin is preparing the defeat of the USSR.'²¹

'I consider the main source of danger to the USSR in the present international situation to be Stalin and the oligarchy headed by him. An open struggle against them . . . is inseparably connected for me with the defense of the USSR.'²²

'The old Bolshevik Party was transformed into a caste apparatus

'Against the imperialist enemy, we will defend the USSR with all our might.

However, the gains of the October Revolution will serve the people only if it shows itself capable of acting against the Stalinist bureaucracy as it did previously against the Tsarist bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie.²³

‘Only an uprising of the Soviet proletariat against the base tyranny of the new parasites can save what is still left over in the foundations of the society from the conquests of October In this sense and in this sense only, we defend the October Revolution from imperialism, fascist and democratic, from the Stalin bureaucracy, and from its “hired friends”.’²⁴

From these citations, it is clear that the words ‘we support the USSR against imperialism’ were pronounced by an anti-Communist who had to say them if he wanted to have the slightest chance of being listened to by the masses who were ready to defend the socialist régime to the bitter end. But only politically blind people could be confused by the meaning of this ‘defence’. In fact, this is how traitors and enemies prepare defence: ‘Stalin will betray, he is preparing defeat; so Stalin and the Bolshevik leadership have to be eliminated to defend the USSR.’ Such propaganda perfectly suited the Nazis.

Trotsky ‘defended’ the Soviet Union, but not the Soviet Union of Stalin and the Bolshevik Party. He pretended to defend the Soviet Union ‘with all our might’, i.e. with his few thousand followers in the USSR! Meanwhile, these few thousand marginals should have prepared an insurrection against Stalin and the Bolshevik Party! Good defence, to be sure.

Even a hardened anti-Communist such as Tokaev thought that Trotsky’s writings played into the hands of the German aggressors. Tokaev was anti-Communist, but a partisan of British imperialism. At the beginning of the war, he made the following reflexions:

‘The peoples of the U.S.S.R., guided by their elemental feelings in the face of mortal danger, had made themselves one with the Stalin régime The opposed forces had joined hands; and this was a spontaneous act: the average Soviet outlook was: ‘Side even with the Devil, to defeat Hitler.’ . . . opposition to Stalin was not only harmful to the international anti-Axis front but was also equivalent to antagonism to the Peoples of the U.S.S.R.’²⁵

With the approach of World War II, Trotsky’s main obsession, if not the only one, became the overthrow of the Bolshevik Party in the Soviet Union. His thesis was that of the world far-right: ‘whoever defends, directly or indirectly, Stalin and the Bolshevik Party, is the worst enemy of socialism’. Here are Trotsky’s declarations:

‘The reactionary bureaucracy must be and will be overthrown. The political revolution in the USSR is inevitable.’²⁶

‘Only the overthrow of the Bonapartist Kremlin clique can make possible the regeneration of the military strength of the USSR The struggle against war, imperialism, and fascism demands a ruthless struggle against Stalinism, spotted with crimes. Whoever defends Stalinism directly or indirectly, whoever keeps silent about its betrayals or exaggerates its military strength is the worst enemy of the revolution, or socialism, of the oppressed peoples.’²⁷

When these lines were being written in 1938, a fierce class struggle was developing on the world scene, between fascism and Bolshevism. Only the most right-wing ideologues of French, British or U.S. imperialism or of fascism could defend Trotsky's thesis:

'Whoever defends Stalinism directly or indirectly . . . is the worst enemy'.

Trotsky encouraged terrorism and armed insurrection

From 1934 on, Trotsky called over and over for the overthrow of the Bolsheviks, through terrorism and armed insurrection.

In April 1938, Trotsky claimed that it was inevitable that there would be, in the USSR, attempts against Stalin and the other Bolshevik leaders. Of course, he continued to claim that individual terror was not a correct Leninist tactic. But, you see, 'the laws of history tell us that assassinations attempts and acts of terror against gangsters such as Stalin are inevitable'. Here is how Trotsky put forward in 1938 the program of individual terror.

'Stalin is destroying the army and is crushing the country Inplacable hatred is accumulating around him, and a terrible vengeance hangs over his head.

'An assassination attempt? It is possible that this régime, which has, under the pretext of fighting terrorism, destroyed the best brains in the country, will ultimately suffer individual terror. One can add that it would be contrary to the laws of history that the gangsters in power not be subject to acts of vengeance by desperate terrorists. But the Fourth International . . . has nothing to do with despair and individual vengeance is too limited for us In as much as Stalin's personal future concerns us, we can only hope that his personal lot is to live long enough to see his system collapse. He will not have to wait long.'²⁸

Hence, for Trotskyists, it would be 'against the laws of history' that one would not attempt to kill Stalin, Molotov, Zhdanov, Kaganovich, etc. It was an 'intelligent' and 'clever' way for the clandestine Trotskyist organization to put forward its terrorist message. It did not say 'organize assassination attempts'; it said: 'the terrorist vengeance against Stalin is part of the laws of history'. Recall that in the anti-Communist circles that Tokaev and Alexander Zinoviev frequented, there was much talk of preparation for assassination attempts against the Bolshevik leaders. One can easily see what forces were being 'inspired' by Trotsky's writings.

Trotsky alternated his calls for individual terrorism with propaganda for armed insurrections against the Bolshevik leadership. In general, he used the veiled and hypocritical formula of 'political revolution'. During a debate with the Trotskyist Mandel, in 1989, we said that Trotsky called for armed struggle against the Soviet régime. Mandel got angry and cried out that this was a 'Stalinist lie', since 'political revolution' meant popular revolution, but pacific. This anecdote is an example of the duplicity systematically taken by professional anti-Communists, whose primary task is to infiltrate leftist circles. Here, Mandel wanted to reach out to the environmentalist audience. Here is the program of anti-Bolshevik armed struggle, put forward by Trotsky:

‘(T)he people . . . have lived through three revolutions against the Tsarist monarchy, the nobility and the bourgeoisie. In a certain sense, the Soviet bureaucracy now incarnates the traits of all the overthrown classes, but without their social roots nor their traditions. It can only defend its monstrous privileges through organized terror

‘The defence of the country can only be organized by destroying the autocratic clique of saboteurs and defeatists.’²⁹

As a true counter-revolutionary, Trotsky claimed that socialism united the oppressive traits of Tsarism, the nobility and the bourgeoisie. But, he said, socialism did not have as large a social basis as those other exploiting régimes! The anti-socialist masses could therefore overthrow it more easily. Once again, here was a call for all the reactionary forces to attack the abhorrent, toppling régime and to undertake the ‘Fourth Revolution’.

In September 1938, Austria had already been annexed. This was the month of Munich, where French and British imperialism gave the green light to Hitler to occupy Czechoslovakia. In his new *Transitional Program*, Trotsky set out the tasks of his organization in the Soviet Union, despite the fact that he himself admitted ‘as an organization . . . unquestionably “Trotskyism” is extremely weak in the USSR.’³⁰ He continued:

‘(T)he Thermidorian oligarchy . . . hangs on by terroristic methods the chief political task in the USSR still remains the *overthrow of this same Thermidorian bureaucracy* Only the victorious revolutionary uprising of the oppressed masses can revive the Soviet regime and guarantee its further development toward socialism. There is but one party capable of leading the Soviet masses to insurrection — the party of the Fourth International.’³¹

This document, which all Trotskyist sects consider to be their basic program, contains an extraordinary sentence. When would this ‘insurrection’ and ‘uprising’ have taken place? Trotsky’s answer is stunning in its honesty: Trotsky planned his ‘insurrection’ for when the Hitlerites attacked the Soviet Union:

‘(T)he impetus to the Soviet workers’ revolutionary upsurge will probably be given by events outside the country.’³²

The next citation is a good example of duplicity. In 1933, Trotsky claimed that one of the ‘principal crimes’ of the German Stalinists was to have refused the united front with social democracy against fascism. But, until Hitler took power in 1933, social democracy did its utmost to defend the capitalist régime and repeatedly refused unity proposals made by the German Communist Party. In May 1940, eight months after the European part of World War II had started, the great specialist of the ‘united front’, Trotsky, proposed that the Red Army start an insurrection against the Bolshevik régime! He wrote in his Open Letter to the Soviet Workers:

‘The purpose of the Fourth International . . . is to regenerate the USSR by purging it of its parasitic bureaucracy. This can be only be done in one manner: by the workers, the peasants, the soldiers of the Red Army and the sailors of the Red Fleet who will rise up against the new caste of oppressors and parasites. To prepare this

uprising of the masses, a new party is needed . . . the Fourth International.³³

At the time that Hitler was preparing war against the Soviet Union, the *provocateur* Trotsky was calling on the Red Army to effect a coup d'état. Such an event would have been a monstrous disaster, opening up the entire country to the fascist tanks!

Stalin and the anti-fascist war

With the 1929 economic collapse, the world capitalist system was in shambles. The time was ripe for another world war. It would soon break out. But where? And to what extent? Who would fight whom? These questions stood without answers for some time. Even after the ‘official’ beginning, in 1940, the answers to these questions were still not clear.

These unanswered questions allow one to better understand Stalin’s foreign policy during the thirties.

The Germano-Soviet Pact

Hitler came to power on January 30, 1933. Only the Soviet Union understood the dangers to world peace. In January 1934, Stalin told the Party Congress that ‘the “new” (German) policy . . . recalls the policy of the former German Kaiser, who at one time occupied the Ukraine and marched against Leningrad, after converting the Baltic countries into a place d’armes for this march’. He also stated:

‘(I)f the interests of the U.S.S.R. demand rapprochement with one country or another which is not interested in disturbing peace, we adopt this course without hesitation.’¹

Until Hitler’s coming to power, Great Britain had led the crusade against the Soviet Union. In 1918, Churchill was the main instigator of the military intervention that mobilized fourteen countries. In 1927, Great Britain broke diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and imposed an embargo on its exports.

In 1931, Japan invaded Northern China and its troops reached the Soviet border in Siberia. The Soviet Union thought at the time that war with Japan was imminent.

In 1935, fascist Italy occupied Ethiopia. To oppose the danger of fascist expansion, the Soviet Union proposed, as early as 1935, a collective system of security for Europe. Given this perspective, it signed mutual assistance treaties with France and Czechoslovakia. Trotsky made vicious attacks against Stalin who had, with

these treaties, 'betrayed' the French proletariat and the world revolution. At the same time, official voices of the French bourgeoisie were declaring that their country was not obliged to come to the aid of the Soviet Union, should it be attacked.

In 1936, Italy and Germany sent their élite troops to Spain to fight the legal republican government. France and Great Britain adopted a 'non-intervention' policy, leaving free reign to the fascists. They were trying to placate Hitler and to push him East.

In November of the same year, Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact, which Italy joined soon after. The Soviet Union was encircled.

On March 11, 1938, Radio Berlin announced a 'Communist uprising in Austria' and the Wehrmacht (German army) pounced on that country, annexing it in two days. The Soviet Union took up Austria's defence and called on Great Britain and France to prepare collective defence. 'Tomorrow will perhaps be too late', underscored the Soviet leadership.

In mid-May, Hitler concentrated his troops on the border with Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union, with treaty obligations towards the threatened country, placed 40 divisions on its Western border and called up 330,000 reservists. But in September, Great Britain and France met in Munich with the fascist powers, Germany and Italy. Neither Czechoslovakia nor the Soviet Union were invited. The great 'democracies' decided to offer Hitler the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia. Along with this treacherous act, Great Britain signed on September 30 a declaration with Germany in which the two powers stated that they regarded the agreement 'as symbolic of the desire of our peoples never to go to war with one another again.'²

France did the same in December. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union offered its aid to Czechoslovakia in case of German aggression, but this offer was declined. On March 15, 1939, the Wehrmacht seized Prague. By cutting up Czechoslovakia, Hitler offered a piece of the cake to the reactionary Polish government, which greedily gobbled up the bait.

A week later, the German army occupied the Lithuanian territory of Klaipeda, an important Baltic port. Stalin could see that the monster was advancing East and that Poland would be the next victim.

In May 1939, the Japanese army attacked Mongolia, which also had a military assistance treaty with the Soviet Union. The following month, Soviet troops, led by an unknown officer, Zhukov, took up battle with the Japanese army. It was a sizeable military confrontation: Japan lost more than 200 planes and more than 50,000 of its soldiers were killed or wounded. On August 30, 1939, the last Japanese troops left Mongolia.

The next day, another Soviet border was set aflame: Germany invaded Poland.

Everyone knew that this aggression would take place: to ensure an optimal position and begin his war either against Great Britain and France or against the Soviet Union, Hitler had to 'resolve Poland's fate'. Let us look at the events of the previous months.

In March 1939, the Soviet Union began negotiations to form an anti-fascist alliance. Great Britain and France allowed time to pass, maneuvered. By this

attitude, the two great 'democracies' made Hitler understand that he could march against Stalin without being worried about the West. From June to August 1939, secret British-German talks took place: in exchange for guaranteeing the integrity of the British Empire, the British would allow Hitler to act freely in the East. On July 29, Charles Roden Buxton of the Labour Party fulfilled a secret mission for Prime Minister Chamberlain to the German Embassy. The following plan was elaborated:

'Great Britain would express her willingness to conclude an agreement with Germany for a delimitation of spheres of interest

'1) Germany promises not to interfere in British Empire affairs.

'2) Great Britain promises fully to respect the German spheres of interest in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. A consequence of this would be that Great Britain would renounce the guarantees she gave to certain States in the German sphere of interest. Great Britain further promises to influence France to break up her alliance with the Soviet union and to give up her ties in Southeastern Europe.

'3) Great Britain promises to give up the present negotiations for a pact with the Soviet Union.'³

The Soviet intelligence services ensured that Stalin was aware of these maneuvers.

In August 1939, negotiations between Britain, France and the Soviet Union entered their final phase. But the two Western powers sent second rank delegations to Moscow, with no mandate to finalize an accord. Voroshilov insisted on binding, precise engagements so that should there be renewed German aggression, the allies would go to war together. He wanted to know how many British and French divisions would oppose Hitler should Germany invade the Soviet Union.

He received no response. He also wanted to draw up an accord with Poland so that the Soviet troops could engage the Nazis on Polish soil in case of German aggression. Poland refused, thereby making any possible accord effective. Stalin understood perfectly that France and Britain were preparing a new Munich, that they were ready to sacrifice Poland, encouraging Hitler to march on the Soviet Union. Harold Ickes, U.S. Secretary of the Interior, wrote at the time in his journal:

'(England) kept hoping against hope that she could embroil Russia and Germany with each other and thus escape scot-free herself.'⁴

'France would also have to renounce to Central and Eastern Europe in favor of Germany in the hope of seeing her wage war against the Soviet Union. Hence France could stay in security behind the Maginot Line.'⁵

The Soviet Union was facing the mortal danger of a single anti-Soviet front consisting of all the imperialist powers. With the tacit support of Britain and France, Germany could, after having occupied Poland, continue on its way and begin its blitzkrieg against the USSR, while Japan would attack Siberia.

At the time, Hitler had already reached the conclusion that France and Britain had neither the capacity nor the will to resist. He decided to grab Western Europe before attacking the USSR.

On August 20, Hitler proposed a non-aggression pact to the Soviet Union. Stalin reacted promptly, and the pact was signed on August 23.

On September 1, Hitler attacked Poland. Britain and France were caught in their own trap. These two countries assisted in all of Hitler's adventures, hoping to use him against the Soviet Union. Right from 1933, they never stopped speaking in praise of Hitler's battle against Communism. Now they were forced to declare war against Germany, although they had no intention of doing so in an effective manner. Their rage exploded in a virulent anti-Communist campaign: 'Bolshevism is fascism's natural ally'. Half a century later, this stupid propaganda is still be found in school books as an unquestioned truth. However, history has shown that the Germano-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was a key for victory in the anti-fascist war. This may seem paradoxical, but the pact was a turning point that allowed the preparation of the necessary conditions for the German defeat.

In fact, the Soviet Union concluded this pact with the clear understanding that sooner or later war with Nazi Germany was inevitable. Once Germany had decided to sign an accord with the USSR, Stalin forced out of Hitler a maximum of concessions, ensuring the best possible conditions for the war to come. The September 23, 1939 issue of *Pravda* wrote:

'The only thing that was possible was to preserve from German invasion Western Ukraine, Western Byelorussia (two provinces seized from the Soviet Union in 1920) and the Baltic countries. The Soviet government forced Germany to make the engagement to not cross the line formed by the Thasse, Narew, Bug and Vistula rivers.'⁶

In the West, those who sympathized with Hitler's anti-Communist politics immediately cried out: 'The two totalitarianisms, Fascism and Bolshevism, shared up Poland.' But the advance of the Soviet troops corresponded to the interests of the masses in these territories, since they could get rid of the fascists, the landed gentry and the capitalists. This advance also helped the entire world anti-Hitler movement. The most realistic bourgeois saw clearly that by advancing its troops, the Soviet Union gave itself a better starting position for the coming war. For example, Churchill declared on October 1, 1939:

'(T)hat the Russian armies should stand on this line was clearly necessary for the safety of Russia against the Nazi menace. At any rate, the line is there, and an Eastern Front has been created which Nazi Germany does not dare assail.'⁷

Unable to see through their dream of seeing the Nazi army charge through Poland to attack the Soviet Union, France and Britain were forced to declare war on Germany. But on the Western Front, not a single bomb would bother Nazi tranquility. However, a real internal political war was launched against the French Communists: On September 26, the French Communist Party was banned and thousands of its members were thrown into prison. Henri de Kerillis wrote:

'An incredible tempest swept through bourgeois minds. The crusade storm raged. Only one cry could be heard: War on Russia. It was at this moment that the anti-Communist delirium reached its apogee.'⁸

At the same time, Stalin spoke with great insight to Zhukov:

‘The French Government headed by Daladier and the Chamberlain Government in Britain have no intention of getting seriously involved in the war with Hitler. They still hope to incite Hitler to a war against the Soviet Union. By refusing in 1939 to form with us an anti-Hitler bloc, they did not want to hamper Hitler in his aggression against the Soviet Union. Nothing will come of it. They will have to pay through the nose for their short-sighted policy.’⁹

Knowing that war with Germany was inevitable, the Soviet government was extremely worried about Leningrad’s security, as it was only 32 kilometres from the Finnish border. On October 14, 1939, Stalin and Molotov sent a memorandum to the Finnish government about the problem of the defence of Leningrad. The Soviet Union wished to be able to ‘block the access to the Gulf of Finland’. It asked of Finland that it be ceded by lease the Port of Hanko and four islands. To ensure the defence of Finland, it asked for part of the isthmus of Karelia belonging to Finland. In exchange, the Soviet Union would offer to Finland part of Soviet Karelia, twice the size.¹⁰ Encouraged by Germany, Finland refused. On November 30, 1939, the the Soviet Union declared war on Finland. A few days later, Hitler gave instructions for the coming war with the Soviet Union. Here is one passage:

‘On the flanks of our operation we can count on active intervention from *Romania* and *Finland* in the war against the Soviet Union.’¹¹

Britain and France, worried about not getting caught up in this ‘strange war’, charged headlong into a real war against the Bolshevik menace! In three months, Britain, France, the U.S. and fascist Italy sent 700 planes, 1,500 canons and 6,000 machine guns to Finland, ‘victim of aggression’.¹²

The French General Weygand went to Syria and Turkey to prepare an attack against the Soviet Union from the South. The French Chief of Staffs prepared to bomb the Baku oilfields. At the same time, General Serrigny cried out:

‘In fact, Baku, with its annual oil production of 23 million tons, dominates the situation. If we succeed in conquering the Caucasus, or if these refineries were simply set alight by our air force, the monster would collapse exhausted.’¹³

Even though no shot had been fired against the Hitlerites, despite the fact that they were in a state of war, the French government regrouped an expeditionary force of 50,000 men to fight the Reds! Chamberlain declared that Britain would send 100,000 soldiers.¹⁴

But these troops were unable to reach Finland before the Red Army defeated the Finnish army: a peace accord was signed on March 14, 1939. Later on, during the war, a Gaullist publication appearing in Rio de Janeiro claimed:

‘At the end of the 1939–1940 winter, Chamberlain’s and Daladier’s political and military plot failed. Its purpose was to provoke a backlash against the Soviet Union and to end the conflict between the Anglo-French alliance and Germany through a compromise and an anti-Commintern alliance. This plot consisted in sending an Anglo-French expedition to help the Finns, the intervention thereby provoking a state of war with the Soviet Union.’¹⁵

The Germano-Soviet Pact and the defeat of Finland prepared the conditions for

the Red Army's victory over the Nazis.

These two events had four important implications.

They prevented the formation of a united front of the imperialist powers against the socialist Soviet Union. A German attack in 1939 would certainly have provoked a Japanese intervention in Siberia. What in fact happened was that the Soviet Union succeeded in signing with Japan a Non-Aggression Pact that held until the defeat of fascism.

France and Britain, which had both refused throughout the thirties a collective security system, were forced into an effective military alliance with the Soviet Union once Germany broke the Germano-Soviet Pact.

The Soviet Union was able to advance its defences by 150 to 300 kilometres. This factor had great influence on the defence of Leningrad and Moscow at the end of 1941.

The Soviet Union won 21 months of peace, allowing it to decisively reinforce its defence industry and its armed forces.

Did Stalin poorly prepare the anti-fascist war?

When Khrushchev seized power, he completely inverted the Party's line. To do this, he denigrated Stalin and his Marxist-Leninist politics. In a series of incredible slanders, he even denied Stalin's lead in preparing for and undertaking the anti-fascist war.

So Khrushchev claimed that in the years 1936–1941, Stalin poorly prepared the country for war. Here are his statements.

'Stalin put forward the thesis that the tragedy . . . was the result of the result of the "unexpected" attack of the Germans against the Soviet Union. But, comrades, this is completely untrue. As soon as Hitler came to power in Germany he assigned to himself the task of liquidating Communism

'Many facts from the prewar period clearly showed that Hitler was going all out to begin a war against the Soviet state

'Had our industry been mobilized properly and in time to supply the Army with the necessary matériel, our wartime losses would have been decidedly smaller

'(O)ur Army was badly armed

'Soviet science and technology produced excellent models of tanks and artillery peeces before the war. But mass production of all this was not organized'.¹⁶

That the participants in the Twentieth Congress could listen to these slanders without indignant protests coming from every part says a lot about the political degeneration that had already taken place. In the room, there were dozens of marshals and generals who knew to what extent those statements were ridiculous. At the time, they did not say anything. Their narrow professionalism, their exclusive militarism, their refusal of political struggle within the Army, their refusal of the ideological and political leadership of the Party over the Army: these factors all brought them closer to Khrushchev's revisionism. Zhukov, Vasilevsky,

Rokossovsky, all great military leaders, never accepted the necessity of the Army Purge in 1937–1938. Nor did they understand the political implications of Bukharin's trial. Hence they supported Khrushchev when he replaced Marxism-Leninism with theses taken from the Mensheviks, the Trotskyists and the Bukharinists. There is the explanation for the marshals' silence over Khrushchev's lies about the Second World War. They refuted these lies later on in their memoirs, when there were no longer any political implications and when these questions had only become academic.

In his 1970 *Memoirs*, Zhukov correctly underscored, against Khrushchev's allegations, that the real defence policy began with Stalin's decision to industrialize in 1928.

'We could have put off a steep rise in the heavy industry for some five or seven years and given the people more consumer goods, and sooner. Our people had earned this right a thousand times. This path to development was highly attractive.'¹⁷

Stalin prepared the defence of the Soviet Union by having more than 9,000 factories built between 1928 and 1941 and by making the strategic decision to set up to the East a powerful industrial base.¹⁸ With respect to the industrialization policy, Zhukov gave tribute to the 'wisdom and acumen of the Party line, finally indicated by history'.¹⁹

In 1921, in almost all areas of military production, they had to start from nothing. During the years of the First and Second Five Year Plans, the Party had planned that the war industries would grow faster than other branches of industry.²⁰

Here are the significant numbers for the first two plans.

The annual production of tanks for 1930 was 740 units. It rose to 2,271 units in 1938.²¹ For the same period, annual plane construction rose from 860 to 5,500 units.²²

During the Third Five-Year Plan, between 1938 and 1940, industrial production increased 13 per cent annually, but defence industry production rose by 39 per cent.²³ The breathing space offered by the Germano-Soviet Pact was used by Stalin to push military production to the hilt. Zhukov testified:

'Experienced Party workers and prominent experts were assigned to large defence enterprises as CC Party organizers, to help the plants have everything needed and ensure attainment of targets. I must say that Stalin himself worked much with defence enterprises — he was personally acquainted with dozens of directors, Party leaders, and chief engineers; he often met with them, demanding fulfilment of plans with a persistence typical of him.'²⁴

The military deliveries that took place between January 1, 1939 and June 22, 1941 are impressive.

Artillery received 92,578 units, including 29,637 canons and 52,407 mortars. New mortars, 82mm and 120mm, were introduced just before the war.²⁵ The Air Force received 17,745 fighter aircraft, including 3,719 new models. In the area of aviation:

'The measures taken between 1939 and 1941 created the conditions necessary to

quickly obtain during the war quantitative and qualitative superiority'.²⁶

The Red Army received more than 7,000 tanks. In 1940, production of the medium-size T-34 tank and heavy KV tank, superior to the German tanks, began. There were already 1,851 produced when war broke out.²⁷

Referring to these achievements, as if to express his disdain for Khrushchev's accusations, Zhukov made a telling self-criticism:

'Recalling what we military leaders demanded of industry in the very last months of peace, I can see that we did not always take full stock of the country's real economic possibilities.'²⁸

The actual military preparation was also pushed to the hilt by Stalin. The military confrontations in May–August 1939 with Japan and in December 1939–March 1940 with Finland were directly linked with the anti-fascist resistance. These combat experiences were carefully analyzed to strengthen the Red Army's weaknesses.

In March 1940, a Central Committee meeting examined the operations against Finland. Zhukov related:

'Discussions were sharp. The system of combat training and educating troops was strongly criticized.'²⁹ In May, Zhukov paid a visit to Stalin:

' "Now that you have this combat experience," Stalin said, "take upon yourself the command of the Kiev Military District and use this experience for training the troops." '³⁰

For Stalin, Kiev was of significant military importance. He expected that the main attack in the German attack would focus on Kiev.

'Stalin was convinced that in the war against the Soviet Union the Nazis would first try to seize the Ukraine and the Donets Coal Basin in order to deprive the country of its most important economic regions and lay hands on the Ukrainian grain, Donets coal and, later, Caucasian oil. During the discussion of the operational plan in the spring of 1941, Stalin said: "Nazi Germany will not be able to wage a major lengthy war without those vital resources." '³¹

In summer and fall 1940, Zhukov made his troops undergo intense combat preparation. He noted that he had with him capable young officers and generals. He made them learn the lessons resulting from German operations against France.³²

From December 23, 1940 to January 13, 1941, all leading officers were brought together for a large conference. At the center of debates: the future war with Germany. The experience that the fascists had accumulated with large tank corps was carefully examined. The day after the conference, a great operational and strategic exercise took place on a map. Stalin attended. Zhukov wrote:

'The strategic situation was based on probable developments in the western frontier zone in the event of a German attack on the Soviet Union.'³³

Zhukov led the German aggression, Pavlov the Soviet resistance. Zhukov noted:

'The game abounded in dramatic situations for the eastern side. They proved to be in many ways similar to what really happened after June 22, 1941, when fascist Germany attacked the Soviet Union'. Pavlov had lost the war against the Nazis. Stalin rebuked him in no uncertain terms:

‘The officer commanding a district must be an expert in the art of war and he must be able to find correct solutions in any conditions, which is what you failed to do in this game.’³⁴

Building of fortified sectors along the new Western border began in 1940. By the beginning of the war, 2,500 cement installations had been built. There were 140,000 men working on them every day.

‘Stalin was also pushing us with that work’, wrote Zhukov.³⁵

The Eighteenth Congress of the Party, February 15–20, 1941, dealt entirely with preparing industry and transportation for the war. Delegates coming from all over the Soviet Union elected a number of extra military members to the Central Committee.³⁶

Early in March 1941, Timoshenko and Zhukov asked Stalin to call up the infantry reservists. Stalin refused, not wanting to give the Germans a pretext for provoking war. Finally, late in March, he accepted to call up 800,000 reservists, who were sent to the borders.³⁷ In April, the Chiefs of Staff informed Stalin that the troops from the Baltic, Byelorussia, Kiev and Odessa Military Regions would not be sufficient to push back the attack. Stalin decided to advance 28 border divisions, grouped into four armies, and insisted on the importance of not provoking the Nazis.³⁸

On May 5, 1941, in the Kremlin Great Palace, Stalin spoke to officers coming out of the military academies. His main theme: ‘the Germans are wrong in thinking that it’s an ideal, invincible army.’³⁹

All these facts allow one to refute the standard slanders against Stalin:

‘He prepared the army for the offensive, but not for the defensive’; ‘He believed in the Germano-Soviet Pact and in Hitler, his accomplice’; ‘He did not believe that there would be a war with the Nazis’. The purpose of these slanders is to denigrate the historic achievements of the Communists and, consequently, to increase the prestige of their opponents, the Nazis.

Zhukov, who played a crucial rôle in Khrushchev’s seizure of power between 1953 and 1957, still insisted, in his *Memoirs*, on giving the lie to Khrushchev’s Secret Report. He concluded as follows about the country’s preparation for war:

‘It seems to me that the country’s defence was managed correctly in its basic and principal features and orientations. For many years everything possible or almost everything was done in the economic and social aspects. As to the period between 1939 and the middle of 1941, the people and Party exerted particular effort to strengthen defence.

‘Our highly developed industry, the kolkhoz system, universal literacy, the unity of nations, the strength of the socialist state, the people’s great patriotism, the Party leadership which was ready to unite the front and rear in one whole — this was the splendid foundation of our immense country’s defensive capacity, the underlying cause of the great victory we won in the fight against fascism. The fact that in spite of enormous difficulties and losses during the four years of the war, Soviet industry turned out a colossal amount of armaments — almost 490 thousand guns and mortars, over 102 thousand tanks and self-propelled guns, over 137 thousand military aircraft — shows that the foundations of the economy from

the military, the defence standpoint, were laid correctly and firmly.⁴⁰

‘In basic matters — matters which in the end decide a country’s fate in war and determine whether it is to be victory or defeat — the Party and the people prepared their Motherland for defence.’⁴¹

The day of the German attack

To attack the tremendous prestige of Stalin, undoubtedly the greatest military leader of the anti-fascist war, his enemies like to refer to the ‘incredible mistake’ that he made by not predicting the exact date of the aggression.

Khrushchev, in his Secret Report, stated:

‘Documents . . . show that by April 3, 1941 Churchill . . . personally warned Stalin that the Germans had begun regrouping their armed units with the intent of attacking the Soviet Union

‘However, Stalin took no heed of these warnings.’⁴²

Khrushchev continued by stating that Soviet military attachés in Berlin had reported rumors according to which the attack against the Soviet Union would take place on May 14 or June 15.

‘Despite these particularly grave warnings, the necessary steps were not taken to prepare the country properly for defense

‘When the fascist armies had actually invaded Soviet territory and military operations began, Moscow issued the order that the German fire was not to be returned

‘(A) certain German citizen crossed our border and stated that the German armies had received orders to start the offensive against the Soviet Union on the night of June 22 at 3 o’clock. Stalin was informed about this immediately, but even this warning was ignored.’⁴³

This version is found throughout bourgeois and revisionist literature. Elleinstein, for example, wrote that under ‘the dictatorial and personal system that Stalin had set up . . . no-one dared to say that he had erred.’⁴⁴

What can be said about the first day of the war?

Stalin knew perfectly well that the war would be of extreme cruelty, that the fascists would exterminate without mercy the Soviet Communists, and would, using unprecedented terror, reduce the Soviet peoples to slavery.

Hitlerian Germany was reinforced by Europe’s economic potential. Each month, each week of peace meant a significant reinforcement of the Soviet Union’s defence. Marshal Vasilevsky wrote:

‘The political and state leaders in the country saw war coming and exerted maximum efforts to delay the Soviet Union’s entry into it. This was a sensible and realistic policy. Its implementation required above all a skillful conduct of diplomatic relations with the capitalist countries, especially with the aggressors.’ The army had received strict orders to avoid ‘any action that the Nazi leaders

could use to exacerbate the situation or to make a military provocation.’⁴⁵

The situation on the borders had been very tense since May 1941. It was important to keep one’s cool and to not get entangled in German provocations. Vasilevsky wrote about this subject:

‘The state of alert in a border area is in itself an extreme development

‘(T)he premature alert of the troops may be just as dangerous as the delay in giving it. Quite often there is still a long distance from hostile policies of a neighbour-country to a real war.’⁴⁶

Hitler had not succeeded in invading Britain, not in shaking it. But the British Empire was still the world’s leading power. Stalin knew that Hitler would do anything to avoid a war on two fronts. There were good reasons to believe that Hitler would do everything it could to beat Britain before engaging the Soviet Union.

For several months, Stalin had been receiving information from Soviet intelligence services announcing that the German aggression would begin in one or two weeks. Much of this information was rumor spread by Britain or the U.S., who wanted to turn the fascist wolves against the socialist country. Each defence measure of the Soviet borders was manipulated by the Right in the U.S. to announce an imminent attack by the Soviet Union against Germany.⁴⁷

Zhukov wrote:

‘The spring of 1941 was marked by a new wave of false rumours in the Western countries about large-scale Soviet war preparations against Germany.’⁴⁸

The Anglo-American Right was pushing the fascists to fight the Soviet Union.

Furthermore, Stalin had no guarantees as to the British or U.S. reaction to a Nazi aggression against the Soviet Union. In May 1941, Rudolf Hess, number two in the Nazi Party, had landed in Scotland. Sefton Demler, who ran a British radio station specialized in propaganda broadcasts destined for Germany, noted in his book:

‘Hess . . . stated that the object of his flight to Scotland had been to make peace with Britain “on any terms”, providing that Britain would then join Germany in attacking Russia.

‘ “A victory for England as the ally of the Russians,” said Hess, “will be a victory for the Bolsheviks. And a Bolshevik victory will sooner or later mean Russian occupation of Germany and the rest of Europe.” ’⁴⁹

In Britain, the current to make a deal with the USSR had deep roots. A recent event shows this once again. In early 1993, a controversy took place in Britain with John Charmley’s bibliography of Churchill, *The End of Glory*. Alan Clarc, former Minister of Defense under Thatcher, intervened to state that it would have been better if Churchill had made peace with Germany in Spring 1941. Nazi Germany and Bolshevik Russia would have mutually destroyed each other and Britain would have maintained its Empire!⁵⁰

Let us return to early 1941. Stalin was receiving at the time varied information, from all over the world, announcing an imminent German attack against Britain. When Stalin saw simultaneous reports coming from Britain, announcing an immi-

nent Nazi attack against the Soviet Union, he had to ask himself: to what extent are these British lies, whose aim is to prevent a Hitlerian attack against Britain?

After the war, it was learned that German Marshall Keitel, applying instructions from Hitler given on February 3, 1941, had followed a 'Directive for Misinforming the Enemy'. Zhukov wrote:

'Maps of England were printed in vast quantities, English interpreters were attached to units, preparations were made for "sealing off" some areas along the coast of the English Channel, the Strait of Dover and Norway. Information was spread about an imaginary "airborne corps", make-believe "rocket batteries" were installed along the shore . . . the flood of propaganda was turned against England and the usual diatribes against the Soviet union stopped'.⁵¹

All this explains Stalin's extreme caution. He was hardly the blind dictator that Elleinstein depicts, but well a very lucid Communist leader who weighed all possibilities. Zhukov testified:

'(Stalin) did say to me one day:

' "A man is sending me very important information about the intentions of the Hitler Government but we have some doubts."

'Perhaps he was speaking of Richard Sorge (famous Soviet spy)'.⁵²

According to Zhukov, the Soviet intelligence services bear their responsibility in the erroneous prediction of the attack date. On March 20, 1941, their leader, General Golikov, submitted to Stalin a report containing information of vital importance: the attack would take place between May 15 and June 15. But in his conclusions, Golikov noted that this was probably 'misinformation coming from the English or perhaps even the German intelligence service.' Golikov estimated that the attack would probably take place 'after (German) victory over England'.⁵³

On June 13, Marshal Timoshenko phoned Stalin to place the troops on alert. 'We will think it over,' Stalin replied. The next day, Timoshenko and Zhukov came back. Stalin told them.

'You propose carrying out mobilization, alerting the troops and moving them to the Western borders? That means war! Do you two understand that or not?'

Zhukov replied that, according to their intelligence services, the mobilization of the German divisions was complete. Stalin replied:

'You can't believe everything in intelligence reports.'

At that very moment, Stalin received a phone call from Khrushchev. Zhukov relates:

'From his replies we gathered that they talked about agriculture.

' "That's good," Stalin said after listening for a while.

'N. S. Khrushchev must have painted the prospects for a good harvest in rosy colours.'⁵⁴

From Zhukov, this remark is incredible! We know that Khrushchev attacked Stalin's 'lack of vigilance' and 'irresponsibility'. But at the time that Zhukov, Timoshenko and Stalin were evaluating the chances of an imminent aggression,

the vigilant Khrushchev was discussing grain and vegetables.

The evening of June 21, a German deserter reported that the attack would take place the next night. Timoshenko, Zhukov and Vatutin were called to Stalin's place:

'But perhaps the German generals sent this deserter to provoke a conflict?', Stalin asked.

Timoshenko: 'We think the deserter is telling the truth'.

Stalin: 'What are we to do?'

Timoshenko: 'A directive must immediately be given to alert all the troops of border Districts'.

After a brief discussion, the military men drew up a text, which was slightly modified by Stalin. Here is the essence:

'I order:

'a) During the night of 21.6.41 the firing posts in the fortified areas on the state border are to be secretly occupied;

'b) Before dawn on 22.6.41 all aircraft including army aviation are to be dispersed among the field aerodromes, and carefully camouflaged;

'c) All units are to be alerted. Forces are to be kept dispersed and camouflaged';⁵⁵

Signed Timoshenko and Zhukov. The transmission to the various regions was finished soon after midnight. It was already June 22, 1941.

Khrushchev wrote about the first months of the war:

'(A)fter the first severe disaster and defeat at the front, Stalin thought that this was the end

'Stalin for a long time actually did not direct the military operations and ceased to do anything whatever. He returned to active leadership only when some members of the Political Bureau visited him'.⁵⁶

'(T)here was an attempt to call a Central Committee plenum in October 1941, when Central Committee members from the whole country were called to Moscow Stalin did not even want to meet and talk to the Central Committee members. This fact shows how demoralized Stalin was in the first months of the war'.⁵⁷

Elleinstein adds to this:

'Drinking strong vodka, he remained drunk for almost eleven days'.⁵⁸

Let us return to Stalin, dead drunk for the last eleven days and demoralized for another four months.

When Zhukov announced to Stalin on June 22, 1941, at 3:40 in the morning, that German planes had bombed border cities, Stalin told him to convoke the Politburo. Its members met at 4:30. Vatutin told them that the German land forces had begun their offensive. Soon after came the German declaration of war.⁵⁹

Stalin understood better than anyone the savagery that the country would have to endure. He kept a long silence. Zhukov recalled this dramatic moment.

'Stalin himself was strong-willed and no coward. It was only once I saw him somewhat depressed. That was at the dawn of June 22, 1941, when his belief that

the war could be avoided, was shattered.⁶⁰

Zhukov proposed that the enemy units should be attacked immediately. Stalin told him to write up the directive, which was sent at 7:15. But ‘considering the balance of forces and the situation obtaining it proved plainly unrealistic — and was therefore never carried out.’⁶¹

Khrushchev’s affirmation that Stalin had ‘issued the order that the German fire was not to be returned’ is clearly false.⁶²

If Stalin was affected when he heard that the war broke out, ‘After June 22, 1941, and throughout the war Stalin firmly governed the country, led the armed struggle and international affairs together with the Central Committee and the Soviet Government.’⁶³

Already, on June 22, Stalin took decisions of vital importance. Zhukov testified that at 13:00 on that day, Stalin telephoned him to say:

‘Our front commanders lack combat experience and they have evidently become somewhat confused. The Politbureau has decided to send you to the South-Western Front as representative of the General Headquarters of the High Command. We are also sending Marshal Shaposhnikov and Marshal Kulik to the Western Front.’⁶⁴

The High Command was the college of military and political leaders around the supreme leader, Stalin.

At the end of the day, Zhukov was already in Kiev. He learned upon arrival that Stalin had given a directive to begin counter-offensive operations. Zhukov thought the directive premature, given that the Chiefs of Staff did not have sufficient information about what was happening on the front. Nevertheless, on June 24, Zhukov sent the 8th and 15th mechanized corps on the offensive. They ‘successfully dealt one of their first counterblows at the enemy.’⁶⁵

With good reason, Zhukov draws attention to the ‘grandiose border battle of the initial period in the war’, which is little studied in his opinion. And with good reason. To further his political intrigues, Khrushchev painted this period as a series of criminal errors by Stalin, who completely disorganized the defence. But, facing the Nazi blitzkrieg, disorganization, defeats and important losses were to a great extent inevitable. The important fact is that, placed in very difficult circumstances, the army and its leading cadres undertook phenomenal, determined resistance. Their heroic fighting began to create, right from the very first days, the conditions for the defeat of blitzkrieg warfare. All this was possible, to a great extent, because of Stalin’s energetic resistance.

Right from June 26, Stalin took the strategic decision to build a reserve front, some 300 kilometres behind the front, to stop the enemy should it succeed in breaking through the defences.

That very day, the Western Front was broken and the Nazis charged toward Minsk, the capital of Byelorussia. That evening, Stalin convoked Timoshenko, Zhukov and Vatutin and told them:

‘Think together and decide what can be done about the current situation’. Zhukov reported:

‘All these proposals were approved by Stalin