

# The Prague Purge Trial

By Joseph Newman *Topic 12*

LONDON.—The gruesome story of the Prague trial must have haunted Andrej Y. Vishinsky in the halls of the United Nations in New York. He was one of those who started the story in Moscow 16 years ago.

As prosecutor in the treason trial of 1936, Vishinsky framed the legal formula and court ritual for convicting and hanging Communist leaders who have fallen into disfavor. His methods and language have been followed religiously in satellite states, so Vishinsky can claim to be father (with Premier Josef Stalin) of the Communist purge trial.

In 1936, Zinovieff, Kameneff and 14 other Communist leaders were accused of treason and of plotting to assassinate Stalin. Vishinsky, whipping himself into a fury and using the vilest language he could command, demanded death for all of them.

"Dreadful and monstrous are the aims and crimes which the accused directed against our socialistic fatherland," screamed Vishinsky. "Dreadful and monstrous is the guilt of these criminals who raised their hand against the leaders of our party.

"Hang the mad dogs," demanded Vishinsky.

A few days ago a similar performance was enacted in Prague. This time one of Vishinsky's understudies, Josef Urvalek, played the role of prosecutor.

He, too, demanded the death sentence for all the 14 Communist leaders accused of treason. "They are rats, snakes and cannibals," he said. "and the verdict of the judges must fall like an iron fist on this nest of snakes without mercy."

ALL but one of the accused — Smirnoff—cursed themselves with confessions and pleaded guilty in the Moscow trial. Communist police methods have improved since that time and all 14 slandered themselves with confessions of guilt in Prague.

In 1937 the treason trials continued in Moscow, bringing death to Marshal Tukhachevsky and seven top generals of the Red Army on charges of espionage for Germany and seeking to restore capitalism. At the same time Rykoff and Bukharin were condemned for "Trotskyism" and Stalin issued a statement which has a bearing on the Prague trial.

He said Trotskyism had become an "organization of wreckers, spies and murderers employed by foreign capitalist states" who were gaining the confidence of Communist leaders. These "wreckers," he continued, would not reveal themselves until the eve of a war or during a

war and the Communist party could not wait until then to take action against them.

Stalin at that time was anticipating war with Germany and Japan, to which he referred specifically as foreign powers for which the alleged Trotskyites were working.

Post-war purge trials in four of six satellite states—Albania, Hungary, Bulgaria and now Czechoslovakia—have been staged against the background of the cold war and they suggest that Stalin is extremely uncertain about the loyalty of Communist leaders under his control in the event the cold war becomes hot.

Since the Communists distrust each other as much if not more than they do non-Communists, they seem condemned to an interminable series of purges and executions.

In Czechoslovakia, as in all other satellite countries, Trotskyism, together with Titoism and Zionism, have become voodoo terms for convicting Communist leaders who have fallen from favor. Regardless of whether they bitterly opposed or secretly favored any of these movements, they have to hang because Stalin feels he cannot rely upon them in the event of war with the Western powers.