

THE PRAGUE TRIALS

Subjugating the Satellites

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The Western world is quite unable to realise and indeed it is quite incomprehensible to our mind that political trials such as that now ended in Prague are no trials at all. They are nothing but weapons of political warfare, a political device, without relation to the administration of justice. The reasons why men have to stand such trials have no real relation to the charges brought against them. Former trials of this type have taught us that whenever the Communist party faces a crisis of any kind it offers scapegoats to the people, and whenever the political line is to be changed the exponents of the former line are destroyed.

One thing is clear: it is Moscow and not Prague that is responsible for this trial. It may be assumed that it has several causes. First, economic and political difficulties. The food situation seems to be catastrophic in Czechoslovakia, and so is the industrial economy, hampered by the deliveries to the Soviet Union. Scapegoats have to be found to divert the attention of the people from the actual reasons for the crisis. Thus, the defendants on trial, responsible for the economy of the country, have had to confess that they "damaged the national economy." The economic crisis and the approaching congress of the Czechoslovak Communist party explain fully the timing of the trial but only partly its true basis.

The Great Purge

To understand better we should recall the history of the great purge in Russia in the late thirties when, as early as 1934, the leaders of the opposition, and after 1936 the rest of them, were "liquidated." Stalin, a man of average intelligence, a second-rate political philosopher, but a master of political strategy and organisation, has in the course of his life discovered the great secret: the power of the "apparatus" as the essential tool in governing. To achieve it he had to crush in advance the already existing structure. The great purge in Moscow crushed both Left and Right and helped to create this blindly obedient apparatus and machine. The trial in Prague speaks of Trotskyites, Titoists, Zionists, and bourgeois nationalists, and involves the Radicals, Slansky and Geminder (and Anna Pauker), as well as Clementis, and Tillon, Marty, and Gomulka.

Another aspect of the great purge was the change of attitude towards the national minorities. The theory of the leading nation, enunciated by Stalin and newly stressed at the recent congress of the Communist party of the Soviet Union, was and is a policy of actual subjugation, national oppression, and economic exploitation of other nations by the leading nation. The October Revolution formally gave complete national independence to the minorities in the Soviet Union, "including the right of voluntary and complete secession from the Soviet Union." Until 1937 the national minorities had a certain degree of cultural freedom, but the price they paid for this was to submit to a complete centralisation in political and, above all, economic matters. In order to prevent the appearance of resentment to this process "national conspiracies" were discovered by the N.K.V.D. Not much is known about the fate which overtook the members of the Ukrainian Communist party, many of whom were "liquidated" for supposed deviations towards nationalism. The party leadership in Georgia, Armenia, and elsewhere and the most important party and state officials were arrested and wiped out. All obstacles to complete centralisation were removed.

Is the Soviet Union not doing the same thing outside its boundaries to-day in full view of the whole world? The Prague trial seems to

herald the same policy of quickened centralisation and integration towards the satellite States. Anyway, the accusations in Prague are based on the charge that the defendants tried "to tear Czechoslovakia from alliance and friendship with the Soviet Union." In his report to the nineteenth party congress on the work of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist party in the sphere of foreign policy, Mr Malenkov stated as one of the tasks "to strengthen and develop inviolable friendly relations" with the satellites. It will be interesting to see what will be the decisions of the congress of the Czechoslovak Communist party, to be held in three weeks' time, on the office of President of the Republic, and whether, in accordance with the development in Poland, this office will be abolished, and further integration and sovietisation will thus be made apparent.

The Jews

For some months I have been collecting material for a study of the status of Jews in Czechoslovakia. So far I have found hardly any classical racial or economic forms of official anti-Semitism. I found, of course, many proofs of the political anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist attitude. This trial, however, changes the picture and reveals a new approach by the authorities towards the Jews. Although Prague is trying to clear itself of the suspicion of a Nazi pattern of anti-Semitism, this trial aimed at provoking anti-Semitic feelings in the population and thus diverting public wrath and dissatisfaction to the Jews. The "confessions" of Frejka, Löbl, and Margolus, who were allotted the rôles of the men responsible for the economic situation, were shaped accordingly.

The trial is aimed at discrediting the State of Israel, attacking the policy of the United States towards it, smearing Jewry and flattering the Arab States. As it is Moscow that stage-manages this trial it is pretty safe to assume that the Kremlin wishes to manifest even more active interest in the Arab States and wishes to stress Soviet sympathy with the "peace-loving people and the enslaved Arab nations."

Fear of war was the "justification" for trials in Russia shortly before the Second World War. Is there any parallel with the trial in Prague? The fear of war (whether genuine or not) and the fear of the growing strength of the Western Powers which Moscow tries to hamper by all possible means—"peace" movements and so on—is and has always been part and parcel of the Soviet domestic policy and of its ruling technique. The sheer absurdity of the "confessions" in the staged trials, in which no one could possibly believe, seems to indicate that it was a question of expediency to arrange such a trial now, and the trials of senior Army officers which will follow in Prague.

In the cold war long-term priorities are necessary, such as the creation of an Atlantic force, planning of long-term rearmament in such a way that inflation is avoided, economic development in under-developed countries, securing a common policy for allies in Southern Asia and the Far East. But there must also be alliance to combat Moscow propaganda throughout the world. The Prague trial provides a possibility, which should be fully exploited, of transferring the psychological war into Stalin's camp. This trial is a shock for the Communists and fellow-travellers in the Western world. More than that, Moscow committed a blunder by staging such a trial in Czechoslovakia, which is West and not East in its social structure, cultural tradition and civilisation, and the outlook of its people. Every man must now ask himself: "If such a horror is possible in Central Europe, is it not possible in my homeland?"