

## Russia under the new Stalin: blood and trials

by Konstantin George

At the beginning of this year, *EIR* had alerted our readers that a new phase of the mass Soviet purges under Mikhail Gorbachov—the new Stalin—was beginning, and that this phase would witness a continual series of bloody show trials and death sentences, under the banner of “anti-corruption.” We were right on the mark. Blood is indeed flowing in the Soviet Empire.

The Chernobyl disaster adds a further dimension to our forecast, in that it will serve to increase the fury of the purge drive in the Soviet Union.

Till now, the purge was more or less strictly focused on removing those functionaries responsible for failing to meet assigned output quotas. When the quota however is fetishized, an endemic problem of another sort appears, and reaches horrendous proportions. It becomes especially aggravated when those who fail to meet assigned, artificially set quotas, are indiscriminately punished, without sorting out the reasons—and the actual blame. The purge produces the phenomenon en masse of functionaries who will “deliver” the assigned quota, by hook or by crook. “By crook” here means, to cite but one endemic example, that projects are completed “on time” with heavy use of substandard—and hence structurally unsafe—materials, which are not returned to suppliers—for fear of thereby experiencing a schedule delay, and thus losing, at a minimum, one’s post.

It is this near universal application of “cutting corners,” and “robbing Peter to pay Paul” which is generically responsible for Chernobyl, and responsible for many other unsafe factories and projects in the U.S.S.R. Even if the result is not a headline-grabbing disaster like Chernobyl, the economy suffers heavily through extremely high rates of equipment breakdowns, and consequent production loss, to say nothing

of the extra investment of men and supplies required for repairs.

Shortly before the Chernobyl disaster, solid indications began to surface in the Soviet media, that those responsible for recklessly ignoring material and equipment standards in order to formally meet quota deadlines, would soon be joining the ranks of purge victims, being deemed as guilty as any laggards. It is quite revealing that two such articles were explicitly devoted to the “mess” at the Chernobyl site, where the same sloppy and incompetent construction standards applied to the first four reactors already built, were being re-applied to meet artificially shortened construction schedules for the fifth and sixth reactors.

The first article appeared in the March 18 edition of the Ukrainian *Pravda*.

The real biting blast then surfaced on March 27 in the journal of the Ukrainian Writers’ Association, *Literaturna Ukraina*. The article, covering half of the front page, was drafted by one Luba Kovalevska, a resident of the town of Pripyat, the largest town near the reactor site.

The front-page article by Kovalevska began with laudatory quotes from Gorbachov’s 27th Party Congress speech in February, where the Soviet general secretary ordered plant managers and functionaries to incorporate the latest in high technology in order “to increase efficiency.” The author also cites parallel quotes from speeches by Soviet Politburo member and Ukrainian party boss Vladimir Shcherbitsky. Then comes the stinging broadside against the Chernobyl nuclear power plant project as a blatant example of an across-the-board failure to meet these guidelines, and a paradigm of a project whose structural and safety standards had gone “out of control” through the formalistic adherence to quotas and

deadlines which bore no relation to reality. The following excerpted passages from the *Liternaturna Ukraina* article speak for themselves:

"Construction work should proceed as an uninterrupted process on the basis of the strictest adherence to construction technology. But this is exactly what is not happening. The problems of the first reactor were inherited by the second, the problems of the second by the third, and so on." Kovalevska then attacks the decision which artificially reduced the construction period for the fifth and sixth reactors "from three to two years," to have the entire project finished by 1988:

"Already in 1985, construction plan targets were not being fulfilled and the construction workers suffered low morale"; the decision to move up the deadline, "strained planning and made it harder to obtain supplies when needed. The accelerated schedule threw the whole project into disarray. Rather than learning from problems with the construction of the first reactor, managers permitted the problems to become worse. This caused indignation among the workers and created a sense of hopelessness in the managers at the plant.

"The inability and impossibility of the engineers to organize the work brigades has weakened the ability to demand efforts from the brigades. As workers tried to meet unrealistic goals, it led to a disorganization of the construction and a total failure of the overall plan.

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"In some cases, materials were substandard. . . . for example, 326 tons of spent nuclear fuel from a plant in the Volga region were deficient . . . [and] especially steel and reinforced concrete were always in short supply." Then, Kovalevska says that "the sickness of the construction system" cited at Chernobyl, is "unfortunately typical." Her prophetic conclusion:

"The impossibility and unwillingness of engineering workers to organize teamwork resulted in lowered standards. The failures will be repaid over the decades to come."

The purges are a crucial feature of Gorbachov's attempt to enforce the society's conversion into a war economy running at full steam. Under the heading of stamping out "corruption" and bureaucratic impediments to increased produc-

tion output, thousands of party, government, and management functionaries have been removed in the purge's first—relatively bloodless—phase.

Starting a few months ago, this bloodless phase came to an abrupt end.

Gorbachov has rediscovered an old favorite of Stalin's—the firing squad. For the first time since 1946, when the initial wave of executions of Nazi war criminals and wartime collaborators ended, a woman has been executed by a firing squad in the Soviet Union. The woman, 59 years old, was executed as an example to all women functionaries and managers that they would not be exempt from the death penalty if convicted of serious "corruption" offenses.

Other recent cases of executions by firing squad include two Soviet diplomats from the Russian Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. The two, one a Russian, the other a Tadjik, who was formerly the justice minister of Tadjikistan, were executed after being found guilty of having conducted massive black market gold dealings with Afghan rebels.

### **The breakup of the 'Cotton Mafia'**

The biggest single number of arrests in the "anti-corruption" drive anywhere in the Soviet Union, has occurred in the Central Asian Republic of Uzbekistan. The campaign began with the roundup in Uzbekistan, of well over 200 party and government functionaries belonging to the so-called Cotton Mafia, as it's called in the Soviet media. Uzbekistan is one of the leading cotton-producing areas in the world. The regional and local party and government leaderships, in a practice that began during the Brezhnev period, systematically—year in, year out—falsified cotton and cotton product production figures, reaping a whirlwind of extra State cash hand-outs. The cash was used to finance all kinds of smuggling and criminal activities, including a bribery system that had nearly all leading figures in Uzbekistan "on the take."

As we shall see below, hardly any of Uzbekistan's Brezhnev-era leadership has survived the Gorbachov sweep. The former long-time leader of the Uzbekistan party and candidate member of the Soviet politburo, Rashidov, only escaped arrest through his untimely death in 1983.

Already, several leading party functionary members of the "Cotton Mafia" have been executed, and more are expected to follow. An example of the scope of "Mafia" activities is indicated by the following information divulged by Soviet media.

- The party First Secretary of the Bukhara region, who had been a full member of the Soviet Central Committee, was arrested for having accumulated a total of 3.5 million rubles in bribes. In the home of one local party secretary from the Bukhara region arrested, were found 18 million rubles and 200 kilograms (5,280 troy oz.) of gold.

- The entire apparatus of Uzbekistan's interior ministry has been purged for co-participation and cover-up of the wide-ranging Mafia activities. Thirty-seven members of the interior ministry are under house arrest, and four department heads are in jail awaiting trial. The interior minister himself,

and his deputy, have managed to avoid certain death sentences by preemptively committing suicide.

The scope of the Gorbachov purges in Uzbekistan has exceeded anything witnessed in Central Asia, even under Stalin. When the Uzbekistan Party Congress ended in early February, only 34 of the 177 full Central Committee members in Uzbekistan survived the sweep. The Republic of Uzbekistan was also removed from even the nominal trappings of "home rule" on local matters. The newly elected Uzbekistan Politburo contains only 6 Uzbeks among its 13 members, with the majority now consisting of 6 Russians and 1 Russified Kazakh.

A similar total elimination of the old Brezhnev-era leadership "Mafias" has occurred in every other Central Asian Muslim Republic.

The show-trials spotlight will soon move to Moscow. Last Christmas, Gorbachov convened a special meeting of the Moscow City Party to expel Viktor Grishin, Moscow party boss since June 1967, from both his key Moscow post, and from the Soviet Politburo. Since Grishin's expulsion, over 130 Moscow functionaries and managers have been arrested and will soon appear in a big "anti-corruption" show trial. Other spectacular show trials are scheduled to start soon in Leningrad, in the Volga industrial and war production center of Kuibyshev, and in Kishinev, the capital of the Moldavian Republic (the former Romanian province of Bessarabia).

### The bloodier secret executions

The "anti-corruption" public trials and publicly reported executions are only the tip of the iceberg of what actually goes in the Soviet Union. Mass executions, which are never even hinted at publicly, also have been occurring. One especially brutal example of this has just been reported by the authoritative Swiss defense publication, *International Defense Review*, published in Geneva. In October 1985, Muslim Tadjik troops stationed in Afghanistan with the Red Army contingent there, mutinied. Russian troops were called in to put down the mutiny, and in the ensuing fighting, over 70 soldiers were killed on both sides. All the hundreds of surviving Tadjik mutineers were then summarily executed.

The same issue of *International Defense Review* also reports that at the beginning of January, a large explosion caused extensive damage at a Soviet missile plant in the town of Biysk, in Western Siberia. The plant produces the 8,300-kilometer range SS-N-20 missile, the missile fired by the 25,000-ton Typhoon Class missile submarines, the most modern in the Soviet navy and the largest submarines in the world. As in all cases of military- and defense-related "accidents" in Russia, a secret investigating commission was constituted. Mistakes and negligence among responsible figures in such cases almost automatically lead to the imposition of death sentences for de facto sabotage of critical war production.

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## Asia

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# Political cards reshuffled in Thailand

by Sophie Tanapura

The dissolution of the parliament by the government of Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda on the night of May 1 really came as no surprise to those who have been closely watching Thai politics for the past months. Some politicians with a certain foresight had already been preparing their constituency since January for early elections this year.

After a year and a half of repeated failures of the Prem government to correct the accelerated course of economic decline that Thailand has taken since the International Monetary Fund-instigated devaluation of the baht in November 1984, a majority in the lower House of Representatives was reached to defeat a government decree which, if passed, would have increased registration fees for vehicles powered by diesel fuel and liquified natural gas. Thus challenged, Prime Minister Prem had no other choice but to dissolve the parliament and to call for new elections within three months as a last attempt to reshuffle political cards in his favor.

Politicians in Bangkok have noted that the dissolution of the parliament came a little earlier than expected, and will create a favorable situation for the Democrat Party, whose political machine is among the oldest and the most experienced. Unlike other political forces, the Democrat Party still remains relatively intact. It is generally expected that Democrat candidates are likely to supplant many of the incumbents of the Thai Citizens Party (Prachakorn Thai Party of Communications Minister Samak Sundaravej) in metropolitan Bangkok. Deputy Prime Minister and Democrat Party Secretary-General Bichai Rattakul has asked General Prem to run in the elections under the banner of the party. If Prime Minister Prem decides to make a political come-back with increased legitimacy, it is mooted that he might choose to run in Songkhla, his home town in the south of Thailand. To date, Prem has not made his intentions clear.

On all other political fronts, a major realignment of forces