

More on Corrections of Stalin Era

TWO GREAT liberalizing factors are at work in the Soviet Union. One of them is the thoroughgoing process of correcting the violations of socialist principles and law that occurred as a result of Stalin's assumption of one-man leadership. The other is the normal process of internal relaxation made possible by the relaxation of international tensions in the past year.

On April 25, by decree of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet, a number of wartime decrees designed to keep workers, engineers, technicians and others from changing jobs, were rescinded. These laws have, in fact, become largely inoperative in recent years, when the practice of prosecuting persons for quitting their jobs or for frequent unexplained absenteeism has been replaced by a system of public censure. The decree provides for the release of those convicted and serving sentences under the previous laws, and cessation of prosecution in all pending cases.

Factory and office workers may now quit their jobs on two weeks notice. While this means forfeiting of certain credits accumulated by continuing service and eligibility for temporary disability benefits only after six months in the new place of work, hardship cases will be considered. Exceptions are also made in cases of discharge on grounds of health, transfers of husband or wife in order to be with their families, and expectant mothers.

Following recommendations at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party, the work week has al-

ready been reduced by two hours, and a six-hour day instituted on Saturdays and the days preceding national holidays. Paid maternity leave has been extended from 77 to 112 days. As part of the effort to lessen disparity between lowest and highest paid categories, top bracket salaries of administrative and professional workers have been considerably reduced.

The draft of a new pension bill has now been worked out for submission to the Supreme Soviet. The recommendations provide increased pensions for old age and disability and for members of families who have lost their bread winner. The proposed new schedules are on a graduated scale, amounting to 100 per cent of the wages of the lowest paid workers, dropping to fifty per cent in the case of the highest categories.

In connection with the drastic overhauling of special powers which Soviet security organs have had in the past, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on April 19 abolished decrees which had made possible the speedy trial and immediate execution of persons accused of sabotage, terrorism and counter-revolutionary acts. These decrees had been issued at the time Kirov was assassinated. According to investigations carried on since Stalin's death, these and other decrees created a situation in which impermissible methods had been used in extracting confessions from accused persons, and in the use of fabricated evidence.

New York Times correspondent Jack Raymond reported on May 5 that

Anatoli Volin, President of the Supreme Court of the USSR, had recently spoken very frankly of these matters to a visiting group of French Socialists. He read to them the text of a Supreme Soviet decree promulgated in 1953 after the death of Stalin, abolishing OSSOB, a special section of the Ministry of Internal Security which had extrajudicial powers of arrest and execution. Mr. Volin was reported to have told his visitors that Soviet lawyers were "profoundly opposed" to such organs and that "they never will be reestablished." He said new laws had been drafted modifying investigation and trial practices. He told the group that attorneys of accused persons will soon have the right to participate in investigation proceedings from the time the charges are preferred rather than as formerly only during actual court trial; that "conviction by association" will soon be outlawed; that "economic sabotage" (which he pointed out had not been used as the basis of a trial for twenty years) will be taken from the statute books; that punishment of persons failing to denounce suspects of serious crimes will be moderated; and that political opposition, when not involving crimes or definite acts against the state, will no longer be subject to prosecution.

According to a dispatch in the *New York Times* of May 14, the French group was told of further reforms in process, by a leading member of the Ministry of Internal Affairs who accompanied them on a visit to a corrective labor camp at Tula. He informed them that the Soviet Government had decided to abolish within a year or a year and a half all internment camps, and that deportation to areas remote from place of conviction was no longer

practiced except in case of extremely serious political crimes. In the future, even such cases will be tried in accordance with normal legal procedure and those convicted will serve their sentences within a reasonable distance of their homes. With only two types of imprisonment envisaged for the future, prisons and corrective labor colonies, the practice of imprisoned persons working outside of the penal institution will be discontinued.

The latest issue of the authoritative journal *Soviet State and Law*, according to press reports, attacked the idea of "trial by confessions" which it said had been used in the past to frame innocent persons. It said that this theory, advocated by the late Andrei Vyshinsky, was a "glaring violation of the principle of Soviet legality," and "denies the need for a court to establish the absolute truth in each case." The journal said a revamping of the legal code had been under way since the death of Stalin, "with the aim of insuring legality and protecting the rights and interests of citizens."

On the Jewish question, a number of Soviet publications in the last few weeks have strongly attacked violations of the socialist principle of national and racial equality, quoting Lenin's condemnation of "Great Russian chauvinism" and any manifestations of anti-Semitism.

On May 14, it was announced that permission had been granted for a delegation of five American rabbis to visit the USSR and meet "with representatives of the Jewish community." The group will be headed by Rabbi David B. Hollander, president of the Rabbinical Council of America, an organization of 700 Orthodox rabbis.

Regarding questions of local democracy, a recent article in *Izvestia* by Vassili Kozlov, Chairman of the

Byelorussian Soviet Republic, called for more frequent meetings of parliamentary committees and of the Soviets themselves, as well as more searching and intensive debate at these sessions. The Soviet press has published a number of grass roots criticisms of failure of local Soviets to meet at required intervals. *New York Times* correspondent Jack Raymond reported on the revival of local initiative as described to him by the Mayor of Odessa on a recent visit to that city. Mayor Lavishchenko told him: "Take my own case. When people are not pleased with me, they do not hesitate to say so, and frankly, there have been times lately when they did so. That never happened to a Mayor before."

While a great deal has been made of an article in *Pravda* attacking "rotten elements" who took advantage of the present situation to launch attacks against the Party, a later article in *Party Life*, said that references against such elements were not meant to stifle the activity of Party members, and that members should have no fear of engaging in criticism, and "the widest freedom of discussion."

B. J. Cutler, in the *New York Herald Tribune* of May 11, quoted an article in *Pravda* by Igor V. Kurchatov, foremost Soviet authority on nuclear energy. The latter wrote that the Soviet Union was prepared to share with the world detailed information on its work in adapting thermonuclear power for peaceful uses. Academician Kurchatov, who accompanied Bulganin and Khrushchev on their trip to England, had amazed his audience in a lecture at Harwell Research Center by describing in detail results of Soviet research toward controlled thermonuclear reaction. In the *Pravda* article he indicated

that while not all problems had been solved, much progress had been made, and promised early publication of further details in Soviet scientific journals. He wrote that solution of the problem of creating power by nuclear fusion would "relieve mankind of the constant vital concern for energy resources necessary for existence on earth." Cutler commented: "The freedom with which Soviet scientists are being allowed to make public their nuclear research efforts has impressed Western observers." A group of American scientists has been attending a physics conference in Moscow.

In the People's Democracies

In the People's Democracies the process of correction, releasing people wrongly imprisoned, removing some of the officials associated with incorrect methods of leadership, continues, while past mistakes are being fully aired in the press and freely discussed at public meetings.

In Hungary a process of decentralization of planning is reported to be taking place. As a result of requests by the Austrian Government and the Austrian Communist Party, the barriers along the frontiers are in process of being dismantled by order of the Hungarian Government. More than 100 anti-Communist prisoners have been released and Archbishop Groesz, sentenced for treason, restored to his post.

In Czechoslovakia, Dr. Alexei Cepicka has lost his posts as Minister of National Defense, a First Deputy Premier, and member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party. He had been criticized for faults in methods of administration and as a leading proponent of the cult of one-man leadership. Manifestations of anti-Semitism in the wake of the

Slansky trial have been aired in the Prague press and are in process of correction. Mordecai Oren, an Israeli citizen who testified at the Slansky trial and was subsequently imprisoned as a confessed "Zionist spy," has been released and has returned to Israel.

There he repudiated his confession, which he said, according to a dispatch in the *New York Times*, May 16, "had been forced by means foreign to Socialist practices." The dispatch added: "He declared that he was not a victim of a Socialist regime but of those who brought down the moral stature of socialism."

In Poland a number of Cabinet Ministers and Justice Ministry officials have been dismissed from their posts, and two former police officials are to undergo trial for violations of legality and illegal questioning methods.

Jacob Berman, former Deputy Premier, resigned after criticism by the Politburo of his activities "in the fields over which he had supervision."

The Polish Government, while stressing that the uprising of the Home Army against the Nazis in 1944 was premature, has acknowledged that there has been persecution and discrimination against the ordinary members of the Army. Premier Cyrankiewicz told Parliament that an investigation committee had established injustices against them and their families and that pensions and all rights and honors were to be restored.

The press has reported that in a general review of all cases of imprisonment upwards of 30,000 had been released and the sentences reduced of 40,000 others.

In the process of a drastic overhauling of the Polish legal system

which has already begun, the project of a new penal code has been issued for a several month period of public discussion before its final revision and adoption. The draft code contains a much more explicit description of various crimes than the former one, eliminating vague categories of political crimes which led to grave injustices in the past. It is reported that the new code will be followed by a revision of rules of evidence. Improvements in law education have already been instituted.

A dispatch in the *New York Times* on April 29 said that in the process of revitalizing the Polish parliamentary system it had been decided to introduce a regular period of questioning under which government ministers have to reply to questioning from members of the national legislative body, and to have longer and more frequent sessions instead of the former perfunctory type. Sydney Gruson wrote on May 7:

The freedom granted the press has astounded visitors and Poles alike. The papers have engaged in the most wide-ranging criticism and are digging into every nook of official life for bungling and corruption. . . .

To some younger Communists these evidences of what is called 'democratization' are overshadowed by less publicized events. According to them, there are no longer any tabooed subjects at Party meetings. They say also that rigid centralized direction of affairs down to the lower levels has ceased.

On May 20, Mr. Gruson wrote of the "boundless creative freedom" now permitted in Poland, and took exception to those who doubt the reality of these changes.