

TODAY ABROAD

by Joseph Clark

Did Lenin Author Stalin's Repression?

THE NEED to comment on Tito's visit to Moscow and on the Molotov resignation interrupted my column on I. F. Stone's reports from Moscow.

In differing with the drastic conclusions drawn by Stone I also noted that he has some very cogent criticism of the Soviet Union. Certainly in his article on Soviet justice he showed that the present Soviet leaders have not carried out their 1953 pledge to recodify Soviet law, although they have made some very necessary revisions. Stone quotes the definition of "counter-revolution" under the old code which is apparently still in effect. It has a most ominous dragnet quality.

For that matter, what can be more devastating than Khrushchev's report to the closed session of the 20th congress? That report shows how deep-going an overhauling is still needed in the Soviet Union to re-establish socialist legality and justice. Moreover, I agree with Stone that Pravda articles on the post-20th congress discussion tended to shut off rather than stimulate free discussion.

STONE undertook a legitimate search—to see whether the abuses and crimes committed under Stalin's rule are related to Lenin's teachings and activities. But alas, Stone scarcely bothered to acquaint himself with Lenin's life and writings.

It seems to me that there is a connection between the ruthless suppression of the landlord and capitalist counter-revolution un-

der Lenin and the later repression of socialist democracy under Stalin. But basically that later-day repression was a gross distortion of Leninism and not its logical continuation.

Edward Hallett Carr's invaluable history: "The Bolshevik Revolution," though written by a non-Marxist, shows how much the violent, dictatorial actions of the opponents of the Soviet regime were responsible for their repression.

For example, Carr notes (Vol. I, p. 153) that: "The first legislative act of the second All-Russian Congress of Soviets on the day after the revolution had been to abolish the death penalty at the front, where it had been restored by Kerensky in September 1917, under military pressure after its total abolition at the time of the February revolution. The revolutionary tradition of opposition to the death sentence weakened and collapsed only after the outbreak of the civil war and open insurrection against the Soviet regime."

The Bolsheviks, under Lenin's leadership, did not view the "dictatorship of the proletariat" primarily as a means of repression, and definitely not as repression of the majority. Carr writes (p. 151):

"The emotional overtones of the word 'dictatorship' as associated with the rule of the few or of one man were absent from the minds of Marxists who used the phrase . . . Moreover, since the dictatorship of the proletariat was the rule of the vast majority, it

would require, once the bourgeoisie was struck down, less compulsion to maintain it than any previous order of society. Far from being a rule of violence, it would pave the way for the disappearance of the use of violence as a social sanction, i. e. for dying away of the state."

IN THE November uprising itself there was practically no bloodshed and Carr says it "seemed to show that it indeed had behind it the vast majority of the population." He adds (p. 152): "The boast of the Bolsheviks that the revolution itself cost remarkably few lives, and that most of these were lost in attempts by their opponent to wrest the victory from them when it had already been won, was justified."

The revolution was exceedingly generous, when the Bolsheviks for example, released the white guard General Krasnov who organized Kerensky's futile counter-offensive from Gatchina. Free on parole Krasnov used it to organize civil war in the south of Russia.

Carr quotes Lenin who wrote: "We are reproached with using terror. But such terror as was used by the French revolutionaries who guillotined unarmed people we do not use and, I hope, shall not use. . . . When we have made arrests we have said: 'We will let you go if you will sign a paper promising not to commit acts of sabotage.' And such signatures are given."

KHRUSHCHEV in his report to the closed meeting notes how the death penalty was imposed.

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when the white guard generals waged their civil war. But after the defeat of Denikin in 1920 Lenin said it should be abolished.

Lenin foresaw the flourishing of direct democracy under Soviet rule. He definitely envisioned the decline of any kind of repression with the rise of socialism. But the early experience of the revolution showed Lenin how difficult it was to secure this direct democracy.

Lenin was terribly concerned about the growth of bureaucracy under the Soviet regime. He sponsored the Workers and Peasants Inspection as a means of curbing bureaucracy. On this he wrote to Stalin in January, 1920, (Selected Works Vol. IX, p. 457): "Object: to enlist all the toilers, men, and particularly women, in the work of the Workers' and Peasants Inspection."

In his article on "The Party Crisis," in which he criticized Trotzky and Bukharin for seeking to infringe on the democracy of the trade unions Lenin agreed that the Soviet Union was a workers' state, but "it is a workers state with bureaucratic distortions." (Selected Works Vol. 9 p. 33).

Lenin would have been the last to claim that this problem of democracy had been solved in his time. But the later repressions under Stalin were a drastic break with Lenin and Leninism. We'll return to the question as it affects Marxism in America in our next column.