

THE DECISIVE ROLE OF THE SOVIET PURGE

by WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

When the Communists of the U.S.S.R. and other countries stated that the purge of the Trotskyite, Zinovievite, Bukharinite spies and wreckers in the Soviet Union during the years 1936-37 constituted a major defeat for Hitler and the other imperialists who were contemplating a military attack to overthrow the Soviet government, many liberals scoffed at this analysis. They were shocked by the drastic elimination of these traitorous elements from Soviet activity and declared that the Soviet government, abandoning its Socialist principles, was butchering a legitimate opposition and turning into a brutal tyranny.

Now, however, in the Soviet-German non-aggression pact and the tremendous events that are flowing from it, the decisive and constructive importance of the role played by the Soviet purge stands out so clearly that only those willfully blind politically can ignore it. Ever since the foundation of the Soviet government in October, 1917, the British and French Tories have plotted, boldly and unblushingly, for its overthrow, sometimes one group and sometimes the other taking the lead in the growing international anti-Soviet front. And when Hitler, the champion of German imperialism, seized power in 1933, he immediately began to fit his course in with this anti-Soviet orientation. Upon all occasions he shouted his determination to conquer the Ukraine and he even talked of overrunning the Soviet Union as far east as the Urals; it was Hitler also who launched the great agitational campaign "to save the world from Bolshewism" and initiated the anti-Comintern pact between Germany, Japan and Italy, a pact which was directed towards the destruction of the Soviet government.

The British and French reactionaries applauded all this and proceeded systematically to strengthen Hitler's hands through the appeasement policy that the world now knows only too well. Thus, there gradually more and more took shape a great imperialist front of Germany, England, France, Japan and Italy, the central purpose of which was eventually to destroy the Soviet Union. The spearhead of this anti-Soviet movement was fascist Germany.

Hitler based his strategy upon the ideas of von Clausewitz, the military strategist who held the theory that the only way Russia could be decisively defeated militarily was by the attacker being assisted at the same time by an organized revolt inside that country. With this conception in mind, therefore, Hitler and his Japanese allies bought up the Trotskyites, Bukharinites and other associated traitors. These elements were to strike their blow at the Soviet leaders and government simultaneously with the German and Japanese military attack from without. In return for surrendering the Ukraine to Hitler and the maritime provinces to Japan, these traitors were to be placed at the head of a puppet Russian government sustained by foreign fascist bayonets. As this anti-Soviet conspiracy gradually ripened, England and France en-



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couraged Hitler from the background.

But the purge of 1936-37 completely upset this carefully thought-out strategy of British-German-Japanese-French imperialism by wrecking the counter-revolutionary organization of Trotskyites, Zinovievites, Bukharinites, etc., upon whom Hitler was depending to stage a revolt simultaneously with his attack from without. Therefore, with his putch forces inside the Soviet Union destroyed, and in line with von Clausewitz's theory that Russia could only be defeated with the help of internal revolt, Hitler had to give up for the time being at least his long-projected and deeply-cherished military assault against the Soviet Union. The purge thus blocked Hitler's march to the east and forced him to direct his attention elsewhere for conquests.

The general consequence was that the ranks of the imperialist powers were split, their strategy thrown into confusion and the mutual antagonisms among them enormously sharpened. Their plan to attack the Soviet Union through Hitler was hopelessly disrupted. The British and French Tories, however, did not accept the full consequences of this situation as quickly as Hitler did. They kept on trying, through concessions, promises and threats, to force Hitler to resume his drive to the east against the Soviet Union. They surrendered Czecho-slovakia and Austria to Hitler and they systematically aided him in building up his land, air and naval forces, all with the aim of directing his aggression against the Soviet Union.

But Hitler refused to take the path they wanted him to take, because, guided by von Clausewitz's theory, he was convinced beforehand that a German attack could not succeed in the face of a united Soviet people. Instead, Hitler, in his campaigns of aggression, kept pressing more and more against Great Britain and France and consequently getting into ever greater conflict with them.

The final result of this clash of imperialist aims we now see in the war between England and France on the one side, and Germany on the other. The imperialist wolves, balked of their anticipated prey, the Soviet Union, have turned about and are devouring each other.

Hitler, stopped in the east by a Soviet Union made immeasurably stronger by its thorough-going purge of traitors, was compelled to sign the non-aggression pact. And the aftermath of that pact shows by the acid test of life itself that the whole Soviet course of the purge and the pact was correct. The pact has smashed the fascist axis and thereby dealt world fascism a heavy defeat; it has stopped Hitler's drive to the east; seriously weakened German, French and British imperialism in the Balkans and the Baltic and Japanese imperialism in the Far East; it has also enormously strengthened the strategic position of the Soviet Union and raised its prestige among the oppressed peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. In short, the Soviet-German pact, which flowed from the defeat of Hitler in the Soviet purge of 1936-37, represents a great victory for the forces of Socialism and peace.

Many intellectuals and liberals did not understand the purge any more than they now understand the Soviet-German pact. But this is not unusual on their part. It is one of the striking facts of the Russian Revolution that practically all the important steps taken forward, those that were really decisive in the life of the revolution, have been widely misunderstood by liberals and have only come to be grasped in their full significance after a considerable lapse of time. Thus, these people condemned the overthrow of the Kerensky regime in October, 1917, although the passage of time has clearly shown that without this the revolution must have failed completely in Russia. They also repudiated the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in 1918 as a betrayal of democracy, but now even conservatives admit that this treaty was a great strategical achievement by Lenin and that without it the revolution could not have survived. Many liberals also excoriated the New Economic Policy of 1921 as an abandonment of Socialism and a surrender to capitalism, but again they were completely wrong. Today the NEP, like the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, is understood almost everywhere to have been an indispensable measure for the upbuilding of Socialism.

Now, like so many times in the past, the liberal ranks again are all hot and bothered over the Soviet-German pact. Once more everything is lost. And these liberals, confused by the breakdown of the world capitalist system, are wandering in a swamp of pessimism and chaos. Eventually, many of them will doubtless come to understand the true significance of the pact and the purge, even as they have got an inkling of the real meaning of the overthrow of the Kerensky regime, the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, the establishment of the NEP and many other measures which, in their day, deeply alarmed and confused them. The course of the proletarian revolution is unique and full of many surprises, and by the time the liberals catch up with the true significance of the Soviet-German pact, undoubtedly they will be then confronted by still more startling and world-shaking developments that will give them new cases of jitters and confusionism.