



Red Justice

How Soviet Russia's Secret Police Suppress the Foes of Bolshevism

Sergey Kobyakov

ADMIRAL SCHASTNY was charged with the "high treason" of failing to obey Trotzky's order to destroy the Baltic fleet. Two weeks before the trial the Soviets had abolished capital punishment, but later a decree was issued leaving to judges the choice of penalties. At the Admiral's trial, when his counsel mentioned capital punishment, he was stopped by the presiding judge. It seemed natural, therefore, that there was no cause to fear for the Admiral's life. The judges deliberated, and then the presiding judge read the sentence: "Admiral Schastny is guilty of high treason." Then he shouted at the top of his voice: "To be shot in 24 hours." Among the judges who condemned Schastny was the workman Galkin. Galkin had once been sentenced to death under the Tsar, and he was saved only by the energy of his counsel, who was now defending Admiral Schastny. We afterward learned that Galkin more than any one else insisted on the death sentence. Thus did he repay the man who had saved his life.

The Bolsheviki had to show the world that no foreign Power could meddle with their regime. In order to make an impression, they staged a monster trial, involving an American citizen, French and British subjects, three Czechs, and a number of Russians, beginning with two prominent generals and ending with an 18-year old girl artist. The American was accused of gathering military information and transmitting it to the British Mission while he was a "commercial agent" of the United States. The others were accused of helping him, or of being acquainted with members of the British Mission. Investigation



failed to establish any proofs of their guilt. The trial was in M— Hall. It was cold, uncomfortable, and dirty. Rubbish was scattered around, people were spitting on the floor—in a word, it had the appearance of any room in which the Bolsheviki work. The judges were dressed like diplomats—fur coats, lacquered shoes, gloves. What a contrast to the accused and the counsel for the defense!

Among the accused was an old general who had been retired from service 10 years before. In one of their raids the Bolsheviki found in his house a letter from a cavalry officer, containing the phrase: "We are of the same school." Although it was explained that this meant that he and the cavalry officer were graduates of the same school, he was imprisoned for five months, charged with high treason. At the trial the prosecutor demanded the death sentence for all of the accused. He said: "It is unimportant whether or not these people are guilty. The important thing is that they will never again cross the boundary line that divides them from us. Therefore they must be destroyed." We were not afraid that American, British and French subjects would be shot; for we knew that the Bolsheviki were cruel only to those who had no powerful defenders. And we were right. A former Russian Colonel was sentenced to death by shooting. A Major-General, another Colonel, and a number of others were sentenced to five years' compulsory labor.

Later, the members of the French Mission were charged with "high treason." But Clemenceau demanded the safe return of the entire mission to France. The Bolsheviki were frightened and allowed the mission to return. But as it was again necessary to show the world that not only England, but also France, was interfering with the establishment of the communist paradise in Russia, seven Russians were dragged into the case and charged with aiding the French Mission. Their guilt consist-



ed in the fact that they had been acquainted with members of the French Mission. The degenerate, Galkin, presided. When the testimony was completed, he declared: "In view of the fact that the case is perfectly clear, the Tribunal refuses to listen to the summing up by either the prosecution or the defense, and will retire to make its decision." Since the judges refused to allow the counsel for the defense to speak, it was felt that the verdict would be in favor of the accused. About ten minutes later Galkin returned and shouted: "All the accused are found guilty of high treason and are to be shot in 24 hours." They were shot that night.

Another case of "high treason" was created against several Russians, on equally unsubstantiated charges. Two of them were sentenced to death by shooting, another to compulsory labor and imprisonment. After the reading of the verdict, it appeared that the Tribunal had forgotten about a sailor, Ivanov, who had been involved in the proceedings. Galkin was again presiding judge in this case, and he admitted that he had forgotten to consider the case of Ivanov, so the judges retired for consultation. The relatives of Ivanov felt hopeful. Since the Tribunal had forgotten to consider his case, he could hardly be regarded as one of the central figures, and therefore could not get the supreme penalty. But in less than a minute—just long enough to write a few words—Galkin returned and read: "Ivanov is found guilty of high treason and is to be shot." The three Russians were shot on the following day.

Thus were things staged in the Supreme Tribunal. The first presiding judge proved to be a professional crook. The second was a shallow-brained, violent man, who turned the Tribunal into a dram shop. It was he who introduced the order that peo-



ple should wear their caps in the court-room, and the judges as well as the public all chewed sunflower seed. He was replaced by Peters, the hangman. Then blood began to flow like a river. People were condemned to death every day. People were shot for all kinds of offenses. A woman was sentenced to death for selling a food-card. Vikstein was shot because, in the opinion of the prosecutor, he had intended to bribe him.

Certain suspicious papers were found in the home of two Polish brothers, who did not participate in any political activities in Moscow. Serious charges were made against them. They were arrested and awaiting trial. I was their counsel. On September 5 a conference took place in my home regarding these brothers with representatives of Polish societies. Late that evening I received a note from the wife of one of the brothers informing me that the brothers had been removed from prison that morning, and she did not know their whereabouts. Next morning I went to see Krilenko, who occupied the magnificent residence of Prince Gagarin. The house was furnished in very good taste—that had been done by its former occupant I asked Krilenko where the two brothers were. He answered calmly: "They were shot yesterday." From the papers we learned that more than 80 "counter-revolutionists" had been shot in Petrovsky Park in the presence of many people. After the shooting all the bodies were robbed.

The Reader's Digest

*"An article a day" from leading magazines
—each article of enduring value and interest,
in condensed, permanent booklet form.*

Vol. 2

APRIL 19 23

Whole No. 14

p. 82