

Fifty years after Stalin and Yezhov—the Gorbachov sweep

by Konstantin George

At the end of February, the Soviet Communist Party will be holding its 27th Party Congress, the first under the “new Stalin,” Mikhail Gorbachov, and a landmark Party Congress by any yardstick. The 27th Party Congress will ratify the already adopted 1986-90 Five Year Plan, drafted by Gorbachov, the military high command and the military-industrial Party mafia brought to the fore in the past year. The Five Year Plan, stressing a massive acceleration in the rate of implementation of “scientific-technological progress” into the Soviet economy, provides the war economy foundation for Russia’s final phase military buildup to achieve overwhelming strategic superiority.

It will also “ratify” the results of one year of mass purges—the biggest wave of purges since the 1930s under Stalin—conducted since Gorbachov’s attainment of power in March. To date, in a zealous drive to remove bureaucratic “dead wood” accumulated during the 20 years under Leonid Brezhnev, which would impede the accelerated war-economy push, nearly all Politburo members from the Brezhnev era have been removed, along with dozens of Central Committee members, nearly 30 cabinet ministers, scores of regional party leaders, and thousands of local party functionaries and plant managers.

In the next weeks, besides the “daily routine” of TASS announcing new purge victims—in the third week of January alone at least four cabinet ministers or officials of cabinet minister rank were removed (the ministers for Petrochemical and Oil Industry, and Cattle Raising and Animal Feed, along with the heads of the State Committees for Vocational Education, and for Labor)—the 14 scheduled Party Congresses of the non-Russian Republics, which will all take place before the 27th Congress, as well as the 27th Party Congress itself, will all be the occasions for further big house-cleanings.

The first of these non-Russian Republic Party Congresses—the Turkmenistan Party Congress—began on Jan. 19. The meeting, as reported in *Pravda* of Jan. 20, was characterized by strong denunciations of the Turkmenistan Party’s first secretary, Mohammed Nazar Gapurov, who was dumped last month. Gapurov, 63, who had been the Party leader of Turkmenistan since 1969, was removed in the midst of a Gorbachov sweep during November and December of the

Party leaders in three Central Asian Republics with a Muslim majority; Turkmenistan, Tadjikstan, and Kirghizia. Of the four Central Asian Republics with Muslim majorities, only the first secretary of Uzbekistan has so far escaped being purged, though the Uzbekistan Party leadership itself has been the subject of heavy recent criticism in *Pravda*.

The Jan. 20 *Pravda* blasted Gapurov for having exhibited “a wide gulf between words and deeds” in his performance, especially concerning the failure to fulfill the goals of the last Five Year Plan (1981-85). Gapurov’s rule had been characterized by “nepotism and favoritism,” “irresponsibility,” and “abuse of power,” a system where “one hand washed the other.”

After noting that Turkmenistan had achieved a record cotton harvest in 1985, *Pravda* quickly added that the Five Year Plan quota had not been fulfilled, and furthermore blamed Gapurov along with Turkmenistan Deputy Prime Minister Michenko, as responsible for “serious shortages” in agriculture. In even angrier tones, *Pravda* reported that Turkmenistan industrial production had not met the goals set in the Five Year Plan, “despite the fact” that Turkmenistan is one of the few Soviet Republics with a “labor surplus.”

The polemic in the *Pravda* article, labeling poor economic performance as doubly criminal under conditions of a “labor surplus,” is a polemic and a purge warning not only meant for Turkmenistan. This point will be made very clear in the coming days as the Party Congresses in the other Muslim “labor surplus” Republics, Tadjikstan, Kirghizia, and Uzbekistan.

The purges have just begun

As the first reports on the Turkmenistan Party Congress illustrate as a paradigm, the clean-out Gorbachov has accomplished to date is only a warm-up. What took place in 1985 will pale in comparison to the purges planned—indeed already underway—in 1986, which happens to mark the 50th anniversary of the inauguration of Stalin’s Great Purge, known in Russian as the “Yezhovshchina” (named after Stalin’s Secret Police Chief, Yezhov). This is emphasized by two striking articles recently, one in the weekly KGB-“house organ” *Liternaturnaya Gazeta*, and the other in the Party journal *Kommunist*.

In *Liternaturnaya Gazeta* for the week of Jan. 13, one Vladimir Katayev, writing in a style evoking memories of articles commissioned by Josef Stalin in the 1930s, calls for: "A moral purge of society. This is a vital question. . . . We have to be strong [militarily] to preserve peace." Katayev then "recalls" how inspired and privileged he was to hear Gorbachov "addressing workers" in Leningrad last May: "Comrade Gorbachov stressed the necessity of purging work in society (raising efficiency and ending laziness). I was most impressed by this."

The author, Katayev, then "confesses" in the style of classical Stalin period prose, that he himself had been in error in believing that there were no problems in the Soviet oil and gas industry, but then was "enlightened" upon hearing the great leader "Comrade Gorbachov," again "addressing workers" in the center of the Soviet oil and gas production, the Tyumen region of Western Siberia; "I remember Comrade Gorbachov speaking in Tyumen . . . and I realized I had been wrong." "Comrade Gorbachov" emphasized that regarding oil supplies, "now it's getting more difficult."

Then follows the "heads will roll" message: "Listening to Comrade Gorbachov, I asked myself: Why didn't the people at the Ministries tell us?" Katayev-Gorbachov supply the answer; "They disinformed us. They lied. They distorted the truth. These are the people who are now being hounded from their posts."

Since this article appeared, the purge axe moved into both regions named. On Jan. 15, TASS announced that the Party boss for the Leningrad Region, one of the key regions in the U.S.S.R., had been named—rather exiled—new Soviet ambassador to Cuba. On Jan. 13, *Pravda* blasted the party leadership of the Tyumen region as being responsible for four straight years—1982-85—of below-target oil production. *Pravda* said, "Last year's plan was not fulfilled," and despite heavy new investments poured into the region, fingered the Oil Ministry. "So far, there is little in return from them." The same day, Jan. 13, TASS announced that the Minister for Petrochemical and Oil Machine Building, Konstantin Brechov, 78, was "retired." The week before, the government newspaper, *Izvestia*, ran a large article citing complaints by three workers from Tyumen, detailing plan failures and mismanagement.

Purges and—trials

The only parallel to Stalin's purges still lacking, is the phenomenon of big trials of the deposed and disgraced. That will not be long in coming. The wheels have now been set in motion.

In the January issue of the party journal *Kommunist* a menacing article appeared signed by the Supreme State Prosecutor, Rekunkov, denouncing those party functionaries who consider themselves "above the law," and adding that "still, a lot has to be done to eliminate widespread corruption among party functionaries." Rekunkov then informs that those slated

for removal are primarily the thousands of functionaries who had built comfortable nests for themselves during the Brezhnev era: "Especially during the 1970s and early 1980s," Party functionaries had permitted corruption to continually expand. Rekunkov, mindful of his own cover-up role, having been chief prosecutor also during this period, quickly added; "Many of those who had abused their power also tried to prevent the judicial authorities from doing their job."

In his new role as a Grand Inquisitor, or, "son of Andrei Vyshinsky," the prosecutor at Stalin's Purge Trials, Rekunkov on Jan. 13 made an appearance at the Kharkhov Region party meeting in the Ukraine. The meeting ordered the removal of several regional party functionaries, charged with "abuse of power," economic mismanagement, and "violations of Party discipline." Rekunkov's presence was a sure sign that trials are to follow the dismissals.

Stiff penalties are not only in store for Party functionaries and economic managers. The Russian Federation newspaper, *Sovietskaya Rossiya* of Jan. 20, carries a signal article of a different sort. *Sovietskaya Rossiya* announced that the time has come to put an end to "parasitism" in the Soviet Union, citing a "growing number" of primarily young people, many "with a good education," who refuse to work, and "live off others." These young people subsist through "odd jobs," sponging off their parents (given that the sponging is going on in the Soviet Union, the "parents" in question are party and government functionaries, economic managers, and professional job categories). The number of "tramps" and "beggars" has grown.

Sovietskaya Rossiya calls for stronger penalties and "criminal prosecution" for these "parasites." The same publication recently carried an article, denouncing an intolerable "labor shortage" in the Soviet Far East. The article stressed that the goals of the 1986-90 Five Year Plan for the Soviet Far East had to be met, and to do so would require a net addition of 1 million to the labor force in the Soviet Far East during that time frame. Part of that ambitious goal will now be met "Stalin-style," from the "parasites" of today.

The 27th Party Congress will be a celebration of the new ruler, Gorbachov. The new leader in a matter of months has removed all but one of the Moscow-based Politburo members belonging to the pre-Andropov era. The sole survivor, former Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, will probably, for reasons of Soviet status and prestige, not be unceremoniously dumped. Gromyko, 76, will stay on to die with honors. Severe illness or death may not be far away. Gorbachov has assigned Gromyko, who is notorious for never going anywhere on foot, to conduct walking tours—in mid-January's freezing weather—of Moscow department stores, shops and hospitals, to collect information on shoddy goods, wrongdoings, etc. Gromyko, in his new assignment has become the daily hero of Soviet television, fighting to help the "common man" against the bureaucracy. How long Gromyko can survive his new hero role is certainly an open question.