

Russia Has a Congress

by Felix Morley



Supreme Soviet. Stalin's congressmen have only the power to listen and obey.

Many Americans do not realize that Soviet Russia has an elected congress. As its powers are set forth in the present Russian constitution, this congress has the appearance of being both representative and democratic.

Moreover, the organization of the Russian elected congress, which is called "The Supreme Soviet," is somewhat similar to that of our national legislature. It has two chambers, like our House and Senate.

There is the "Soviet of the Union," elected on the basis of one deputy for every 300,000 people. And there is the "Soviet of Nationalities," in which the deputies represent the various federated Soviet republics, in the same manner that our Senators represent the federated states.

* * *

The Supreme Soviet is now in session in Moscow, with a legislative program fundamentally similar to that of our own 81st Congress.

Thus the first order of business, after the customary ovation to Stalin, has been the adoption of the Russian budget for the current year. As presented by Finance Minister Zverev that calls for the largest peacetime budget in Russian history. The appropriation for military expenditure is even greater than our own, if accurate comparisons can be made.

The point is that before Stalin and his cabinet can make expenditures, or put any major administrative policy into effect, they must first secure congressional approval. Under the Soviet constitution, Stalin is clearly denied the absolute dictatorial power that we attribute to him.

Article 65 of the English edition of the Russian constitution, as furnished to me by the Russian Embassy in Washington, says:

Supreme Soviet

“The Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. [of which Stalin is chairman] is responsible and accountable to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R.”

Although Russia has a representative government on paper, and although Communist spokesmen call Russia a “democracy,” we know perfectly well there is a catch somewhere.

It is of the greatest importance that we should know just what the catch is. Whether or not we win the “cold war” may well depend on whether or not we understand how the Communists can establish an absolute tyranny while maintaining democratic forms.

* * *

The explanation is not complicated. Only members of the Communist Party can be nominated for the Russian legislature. Nearly everybody can now vote in Russia. But they can only vote for Communists. So there is no opposition party and, therefore, no opposition in “The Supreme Soviet” to Stalin.

The moral is clear. The mere possession of a congress is not adequate to preserve freedom. If people do not want to be enslaved they must be able and willing to oppose those who govern them. There must be not only a congress, but also an active and resolute opposition party in the congress. Soviet Russia has an elected congress. It does not have an opposition party. And that’s the catch.

* * *

If we want to combat communism successfully we must first understand the simple trick which underlies its tyranny. Communism supports the *form* of freedom. It supports legislative bodies, courts, and organizations like trade unions and co-operatives.

But wherever communism obtains power it actually stamps out all opposition. It permits none of that criticism which is essential in any society which is really free. Thus communism shows us what a great Englishman—Herbert Spencer—meant when he said, many years ago: “Increase of freedom in *form*” can easily lead to “decrease of freedom in *fact*.”