

DECEMBER • 1941

THE **American**

How Russia blasted HITLER'S SPY MACHINE

by **JOSEPH E. DAVIES**

Former United States Ambassador to Soviet Russia



**Told here for the first time:
How the Red Army held out
against the Nazi blitzkrieg.
The real secret behind the
bloody Russian purges. How
Stalin got the jump on Hitler.
New clues to the mysterious
assassination of Leon Trotsky
in Mexico.**



A FEW days after Hitler's attack on Soviet Russia, I was asked the question, "What about Fifth Columnists in Russia?" Off the anvil, I replied, "There aren't any—they shot them."

There is, when you think about it, a unique feature in this latest Nazi stab-in-the-back. Not a word has appeared about any inside work for the Nazis behind the Russian lines. There has been no so-called "internal aggression" in Russia, co-operating with the German High Command. There were no Sudeten Henleins, no Czechoslovakian Hachas, Berans, or Chvalkovskys, no Slovakian Tisos, no Belgian Degrelles, no Norwegian Quislings, in the Soviet picture.

OldMagazineArticles.com

**JOSEPH E. DAVIES**

With this thought in mind I recently went through my diary and, with the permission of the State Department, re-read some of my reports as American Ambassador to Moscow in 1937 and 1938. Suddenly I saw the picture as I undoubtedly should have seen it at the time in Russia. Much of the world construed the famous treason trials and purges from 1935 to 1938 to be outrageous examples of barbarism, ingratitude, and hysteria. But it now appears that they indicated the amazing far-sightedness of Stalin and his close associates.

In the light of present facts, and after an examination of the record, there can be no doubt that those defendants were, directly or indirectly, in the employ of the German and Japanese High Commands. Practically every device of the German Fifth Column, as we now know it in Europe, South America, and even in the United States, was disclosed in the testimony of the Soviet Quislings. But the Russians were acutely aware of the menace as early as 1935. As fast as the Germans and Japanese built, the Russians destroyed. That, in brief, is the real story behind the Russian purges—and one of the chief explanations for the magnificent Russian resistance to the Nazi juggernaut.

I attended the treason trials probably more assiduously than any other member of the Diplomatic Corps. But all of us there in Moscow at the time, including the diplomats and the able newspaper correspondents, seem to have “missed the boat.” I certainly did. There were two counts in the indictments in these trials. The first had to do with the internal revolutionary activities of the defendants, and the second charged that they had conspired and co-operated with Germany and Japan to betray Russia and acquire power themselves through a successful military attack upon the Soviet Union. In my reports, I find that I referred to the second charge quite casually and as of comparatively little importance.

One reason was that the phrases descriptive of the Nazi technique, such as “Fifth Column” and “internal aggres-

SPY MACHINE

sion," were unfamiliar to our thoughts then. These terms came to have a meaning for us only after we saw these activities in the conquest of one after another of the victims of Hitler's diplomacy and military prowess.

It was only after the taking of Prague that we began to recognize the fact that there had existed in Germany, as a part of the Foreign Office under the administration of a man named Ernst Bohle, a huge organization for "Fifth Column" instruction. It was, in fact, a school for the purpose of instructing Germans and German agents in the methods and technique of propaganda for the breakdown of morale, and undoubtedly in the even more sinister methods of destruction of industrial and military facilities in the various countries marked for German aggression. All were designed to weaken the victim before attack and to supply centers of traitors' help back of the lines. This school was the campus for Fifth Columnists, but not many of us knew of it and relatively few paid any attention to it at the time.

It was only recently that Secretary of State Hull, with characteristic bluntness, served notice upon the Hitler government that the Fuehrer's statement that Nazi Germany demanded first allegiance from those of German blood wherever they might be, regardless of whether or not they had become naturalized citizens of other states, could not be applied to German citizens of the United States. Mr. Hull stated forcibly that any such insidious assumption would meet with vigorous action by the United States. It was only recently that the Dies Committee uncovered the activities of these German organizations in this country.

Another reason why we in Moscow failed at the time to grasp the full significance of the treason trials was that we all seemed to be thinking in terms of the struggle for power that was going on within Russia between the "ins" and the "outs"—between Stalin, on the one hand, and, on the other, the late Leon Trotsky, who (*Continued on page 110*) had been exiled early in 1928 and was mysteriously murdered in Mexico last year.

One of the primary issues between Trotsky and Stalin was the question of which policy the Soviet Union should pursue. Stalin, the practical realist, was convinced that his primary job was to develop a socialist democracy and make Communism work within Soviet Russia. Trotsky, on the other hand, was an extreme advocate of world revolution and held that Communism could not be successful if surrounded by capitalist states. We knew that Trotsky had a great many followers in Russia, and we regarded the treason trials as Stalin's methods of destroying his internal enemies. Talk of co-operation with the German and Japanese High Commands seemed like so much bizarre window-dressing, a façade to cover the liquidating of counterrevolutionaries.

BUT, like everybody who discounts the devilish ingenuity of the Germans in waging war within the borders of their enemies, we were mistaken. The testimony at the trials revealed that Trotsky had been planning to take advantage of a general European war to foment revolution within Russia and oust Stalin. But when the war didn't come in 1936 and 1937 he grew tired of waiting, and

OldMagazineArticles.com

played into the hands of the Nazis by contacting the German General Staff. Working through Red Army leaders inside Russia, Trotsky agreed to co-operate with the Germans and pave the way through espionage and sabotage for an effective invasion.

Indicative of the degree to which the Soviet Government was alarmed by these subversive activities is the fact that Stalin, at that time, completely reversed a policy laid down in 1926. Prior to the banishment of Trotsky in 1928, many of Stalin's associates urged that Trotsky be tried for treason. To this Stalin replied, in effect:

"No, we must not do that. When the leaders of the French Revolution began to kill each other, it was the beginning of the end. The Soviet Revolution must not 'chew up its own children.' We will not do it."

From 1927 to 1935 that policy was sustained. But it was changed suddenly when the Russian leaders learned of the activities of the Fifth Column, and there followed the trials, purges, and executions, which were pressed with the greatest vigor and relentlessness. When they were over, the Fifth Column had been smashed once and for all, and the road was clear to build up the magnificent morale and the military machine that is checkmating the Germans today.

The fireworks started in December, 1934, with the murder of Stalin's personal friend, a man by the name of Sergei Kirov, who was the Soviet party leader for the Leningrad district. The result was the trial of the murderer and a group of prominent Soviet leaders, formerly associated with Trotsky, who were charged with aiding and abetting in the crime and in a conspiracy to overthrow the Stalin government. They were adjudged guilty and 16 were shot.

Subsequently, in January, 1937, apparently as the result of investigations arising out of this trial, 17 men, including five or six prominent leaders, as well as a number of engineers and professional killers, were tried on similar charges of conspiracy and treason. This was the so-called Radek trial, named for one of the best-known prisoners, Karl Radek, a brilliant Communist and editor of a great Moscow newspaper. Thirteen of the defendants were shot, and three were given terms of ten years.

Another year passed, and in March, 1938, came the Bukharin trial, in which the chief defendant was N. I. Bukharin, another prominent intellectual and editor. Eighteen of these defendants were shot (among them Bukharin), one was given a term of 25 years, and two others were given terms of 15 years.

It was these last two trials that I attended. The Radek trial, which lasted six days, was drenched with drama. The sessions were held in a long, high-ceilinged room which had formerly been part of a fashionable Moscow club of the old regime. I sat with the Diplomatic Corps, just in front of the newspapermen, not more than 12 feet from the prisoners' dock. The testimony and confessions of these defendants were startling. They all pleaded guilty, literally beating their breasts as they heaped guilt upon themselves. But, as a trained lawyer, not without experience in testing the credibility of witnesses in criminal trials, I watched the defendants' faces, studied their conduct on the stand, and I arrived at the conclusion that the state had unquestionably proved its case.

As a matter of fact, on the record, it would be difficult for me to conceive how any court could have done other than judge the defendants guilty as charged. To have assumed that the proceedings were staged as political fiction would be to presuppose the creative genius of Shakespeare.

THE indictment at the Bukharin trial was similar to that of the preceding trial. It

SPY MACHINE

charged conspiracy to overthrow the Stalin government by the defendants, but charged with much greater detail the alleged treason of the defendants in conspiracy with Germany and Japan. The conspirators confessed that, under the leadership of Trotsky, they had:

1. Agreed to aid Germany and Japan in a military attack on Russia.

2. Co-operated in plans to assassinate Stalin and Molotov.

3. Planned a military uprising against the Kremlin, to be led by General Tukhachevsky, then second in command of the Red Army.

4. Directed sabotaging of industries, blowing up of chemical plants, destruction of coal mines, wrecking of transportation facilities; and other subversive activities.

5. Taken orders from the German General Staff.

6. Passed on military information to the German and Japanese intelligence services.

7. Co-operated with the German representatives in espionage and sabotage.

The plan, in short, contemplated complete co-operation with Germany. The conspirators, as a reward, were to be allowed to take over a smaller but technically independent Soviet state, which would turn over White Russia and the Ukraine to Germany, and the Maritime Provinces and the Sakhalin oil fields to Japan. Further, after the German conquest, German firms were to receive concessions and favors in connection with the development of iron ore, manganese, oil, coal, timber, and other great resources of the Soviet Union. If these original Fifth Columnists had succeeded in their plans, Germany would be poised today for the final attack upon Great Britain—with the natural wealth of the Russian territory behind her.

To appreciate fully the character and significance of this testimony it should be borne in mind that the confessions came, not from obscure, impoverished citizens ready to betray their country for a few marks, but from such prominent personalities as two Cabinet members, the Commissar for the Treasury, the Commissar for Foreign Trade, a former premier of the government, two former ambassadors who had served in London, Paris, and Tokyo, a former Under-Secretary of State, and the Acting Secretary of State of the government, as well as two of the Soviet Union's foremost editors.

It was as if Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau, Secretary of Commerce Jones, Under-Secretary of State Welles, Ambassador Phillips, Ambassador Winant, and Secretary to the President Early confessed to conspiring with Germany to co-operate in an invasion of the United States.

HERE are a few excerpts from the testimony in open court which are revealing:

Krestinsky, Under-Secretary of State:

"I established espionage connections with the Germans on the direct instructions of Trotsky. . . . We came to an agreement that we would help the Reichswehr create a number of espionage bases on the territory of the USSR by permitting the unhindered entry of spies sent by the Reichswehr, and that we would supply the Reichswehr with espionage materials—that is, to put it plainly, that we would be German spies. In return, the Reichswehr undertook to pay us 250,000 marks a year. . . ."

Rosenglotz, Commissar of Foreign Trade:

"I handed various secret information to the Commander-in-Chief of the Reichswehr, Seeckt, and to the Chief of the German General Staff, Hasse. . . . I received instructions from Trotsky through Krestinsky to carry on wrecking activities in the sphere of foreign trade with the object of rendering direct assistance to Germany and Japan...."

Bessonov, Councilor of the Soviet Em-

SPY MACHINE

bassy at Berlin:

"Krestinsky told me that the agreement reached by the Trotskyites with the German National Socialist Party on the possibility of hastening war, which would facilitate the coming to power of the Trotskyites, must be expedited at all costs."

Grinko, Commissar of Finance:

"One of the organizers of the Ukrainian national Fascist organization, I operated particularly in the Ukraine, at the main gates through which German Fascism is preparing its blow against the USSR."

Minor defendants confessed they had direct connection with the German and Japanese Intelligence Services and co-operated with them in systematic espionage and sabotage. For instance, one official stated that he had organized two explosions at fertilizer plants which entailed enormous property losses as well as the loss of human life. Another assumed responsibility for disasters at a chemical plant. A third described the manner in which cadres, or centers, were organized for the purpose of co-operating with the German invaders when they arrived. Still another told how he had planned and wrecked troop trains, on the express directions from foreign intelligence services. Among the routine orders which this last conspirator had received were instructions not only "to organize incendiarism in military stores, canteens, and army shipments," but also to use "bacteriological means in time of war, with the object of contaminating troop trains and army camps with virulent bacilli."

From the testimony, it was disclosed that contact between the German High Command and General Tukhachevsky had been established through Trotsky. The names of some of the highest general officers of the Red Army Command were brought into the case with testimony that they had been corrupted or otherwise induced to enter the conspiracy.

THE Russian leaders proceeded to clean house, and acted with the greatest of energy and precision. Voroshilov said later, "It is easier for a burglar to break into the house if he has an accomplice to let him in. We have taken care of the accomplices."

It was suddenly announced in April, 1937, that General Tukhachevsky, who had been designated by the government to attend the coronation in London as the representative of the USSR, would not go to London. He was reported to have been sent down to command the army of the Volga District, but it was understood at the time that he had been removed from the train and arrested before he arrived at his command. Within a few weeks thereafter, on June 11th, along with 11 other officers of the High Command, he was shot after a court-martial.

Many commentators have concluded that the purges seriously weakened the Red Army. I believe that the exact opposite is the truth. The house cleaning of traitors eliminated some of the higher commanders, but it brought about the promotion of younger and frequently more imaginative men who, while lacking the experience of their predecessors, made up for it in initiative and loyalty.

The purges also gave the average soldier a greater sense of security, and the conviction that his fate was now in the hands of more trustworthy officers than "the Trotskyite traitors who met the fate they deserved." In connection with morale, you must remember that most soldiers are less than thirty years old. Thus, in Russia, the average soldier would not have been more than six years old when the Communists seized the government in 1917. During all his youth he is taught blind, unquestioning loyalty to the Soviet regime. The result is that he doesn't dream of analyzing the acts of his government. When the government brands a man

OldMagazineArticles.com

7
SPY MACHINE

a traitor, the man is a traitor, and nobody bothers his head about the details.

THE extensive military and industrial preparations that were launched immediately after the smoke of the purges cleared away, go far to explain the Russians' resistance today and their ability to withstand German science and German *panzer* divisions.

But this "all-out" program could easily have been nullified if Stalin and his associates had not cleaned out all treasonable elements within the country three years before the invasion was launched. Today, when the Russian generals order a bridge blown up or a section of earth scorched, the bridges are blown and the earth is scorched. There are no saboteurs, secret agents, or Fifth Columnists to co-operate with the invaders, because the Russians were sufficiently farsighted to eliminate them before it was too late.

That is a fact which other liberty-loving nations might well ponder. **THE END**

THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE

OldMagazineArticles.com