

Soviet Reform



Practically the only thing that the swaggering Russian press had to boast about last week was not visible to the public eye. In Moscow, behind tall board fences, workmen were busy on the foundations of a colossal new government building to be called "The Palace of the Soviets."

An architectural cross-breed of skyscraper and wedding cake, the structure will be built in 11 tiers, topped by a 328-foot statue of Lenin, first dictator of the Soviet Union. At completion it will be 129 feet higher than New York City's 1,248-foot Empire State Building. As if this were not enough, *Izvestia*, the official government newspaper, mixed up names a bit and proudly remarked that the new palace would also outscrape "the Woolworth State Building, the Singer State Building and the Chrysler State Building."

Elsewhere, Soviet bureaucrats were grimly taking to heart the advice of Dictator Josef Stalin that they stop flattering themselves and get down to business (PATHFINDER, April 10). Particularly in southern Russia, party leaders belatedly began a withering fire of criticism against the peasantry. Hampered by a late spring season, the country's farmers thus far have planted only 12,000,000 acres of grain in a program which by this time should have covered 328,000,000 acres.

Soviet newspapers were sprinkled with items that showed wide dismissals and demotions in the ranks of government workers. Frequent grounds for shake-ups were that officials had been inefficient or had benefitted from favoritism.

Highest official to be affected was a sleek, 45-year-old Jew named Henry Georgeivitch Yagoda. Once head of the dread OGPU (Soviet Secret Police), he was known to be a wire-puller who had gotten his job although Stalin cordially disliked him.

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Two demotions by Stalin since 1934 had finally brought Yagoda down to a powerless position as Commissar of Posts and Telegraphs. Last week, probably because he had privately deprecated Stalin's policies, the former OGPU head was unexpectedly dismissed. In Moscow it was thought that he was being held to be tried on charges of "criminal activity"—failure as OGPU chief to obtain all the evidence that could have been gotten for the trial of Trotzky plotters Zinovieff and Kameneff last August.

Most important in the sudden hustle and bustle which swept through the Union was acceleration in the field of industrial production. With the end of its second Five Year Plan due next December, with many industries lagging behind in output, the government issued notice that total plant production would have to show a 20 per cent increase beginning next week. At no increase in pay, Soviet laborers were to work harder than ever before to produce the things most needed for the Soviet's "Good Life"—machinery, textiles, bicycles, phonographs, army guns and ordinary buttons.

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