

The End of the Road

In his final article on the recent terrorism trials, the author explains the psychological breakdown of the prisoners and the reason for the death penalty

By Joshua Kunitz

THE testimony of Zinoviev will shake every revolutionist temporarily "disappointed" in the movement. "The party saw whither we were going, and warned us. In one of his speeches Stalin pointed out that there might appear, among the Opposition, tendencies to impose their will on the party by force. Even before the Fourteenth Congress of the party, Dzerzhinsky called us Kronstadters, traitors, at one of the conferences. Stalin, Voroshilov, Orjonikidze, Dzerzhinsky, Mikoyan tried in every way possible to convince us, to save us. Dozens of times they said to us: 'You may cause tremendous harm to the party and the Soviet state; you yourselves will perish because of this.' We did not heed their warnings. . . ."

It is not that Zinoviev and Kamenev and the rest were doomed to perish, but that they perished so ignominiously. History moved too fast for them. In a few short years the Soviet peoples, under the leadership they sabotaged, accomplished such wonders in industrialization that by 1933 all the old Zinovievite and Trotskyite counter-schemes of "super-industrialization" were dwarfed; and such wonders in collectivization that the Zinovievites' and Trotskyites' fears of the peasant kulaks appeared ludicrous.

"In the latter half of 1932 we realized that our banking on a growth of difficulties in the country had been vain. . . . We began to understand that the party and its Central Committee would overcome these difficulties," says Zinoviev. Kamenev goes into greater detail: "I came to the view that the policy of the party, the policy of its leadership, had won in the only sense in which a political victory is possible in the land of socialism, that this policy had been accepted by the toiling masses. Our attempt to bank on the possibility of a split in the party leadership also failed. . . . We could not hope for any serious internal difficulties to overthrow the leadership which had carried the country through the most difficult stages, through industrialization and collectivization. There remained two roads: either honestly and completely to put an end to the struggle against the party or to continue it, without any hope, however, for mass support, without a political platform, without a banner—that is, by means of individual terror. . . ."

ONE ceases to wonder why they admit everything. Of course they now admit everything. They twisted and wriggled and lied while they could. At the January 1935

trial, Zinoviev and Kamenev acknowledged, when confronted with irrefutable evidence, moral and political responsibility for Kirov's murder. But even then they had not told the whole truth, as the 1936 trial discloses.

One ceases also to wonder that there is no defiance. One can defiantly face death, knowing that outside the courtroom millions are in sympathy and that when he is gone, endless generations will recall his struggles with reverence.

But when he stands exposed before his own former comrades as a mere intriguer for power, as a traitor to party and country, a traitor even to his former self, when he stands stripped as the plotter of murders and as the actual murderer—secret murderer and public mourner—of one of the leaders, standing there stripped and alone—without masses, without a cause, without a banner—and with the stigma of fascist collusion fixed upon him—then one cannot be defiant, one has lost the will.

But why do they admit things so glibly, how can they be so utterly without embarrassment or shame?

Disintegration of character! A personality that has experienced justified public disgrace

has been undermined. These people have been exposed so repeatedly and so mercilessly that by this time their psychological props have been knocked from under. Hence this gruesome collapse. He who has been exposed in treachery ends by referring to himself as a traitor, unblushingly. One can well understand why the defendants refused counsel. Everything brought to the surface, self-convicted, all they can crave for is mercy; all they can expect is death.

Hope of mercy, and the sense of impending doom throb in their last sobs and confessions. A few brief hours, and the sentence will be read. They stand—they know it with every atom of their being—on the brink of death. . . . Little Dreitzer looks like a corpse. "The political weight," he says, "and the biographies of all of us were different in the past. Having become murderers, however, we are equal here. I, at any rate, belong among those who have no right either to expect or to ask for mercy—" Holzman, too, is lifeless. No desires. No hope. It is an effort for him to open his mouth. His voice sounds cadaverous. "Here in the dock—along with me—is a company of murderers—not only murderers, but fascist murderers. I do not ask for any mercy."

OTHERS hold on desperately to the last chance to be heard, but it is hard for them to begin. They grasp at the rail, clutch at the microphone. They gulp agonizingly from the glasses of water constantly refilled by the Red Army guards. The last word—and so much to be said. So many accounts to be squared. Where to begin? Where to end?

Ter-Vaganyan is typical. His first words are faint little cries. But the sound of his words, the very process of uttering them have a restorative effect. Each word uttered forms a link in a chain that holds him, though he sways in the abyss. He is back in life again, a politician again, an orator again. And however dreadful this moment, it is better than to look back, back into the abyss from which he has just returned. He grasps at every suggestion that flits through his mind. He makes an excursion into history; he attacks the others; he becomes a prosecutor, a revolutionary agitator; he exults in the achievements of the country; he declaims his newly found admiration and even love for the leaders of the party, particularly Stalin. He flatters. He twists and turns. He craves mercy. Though he does not admit it, he hopes for clemency. He brings up extenuating circumstances: he



Fisherman

A. Walkowitz

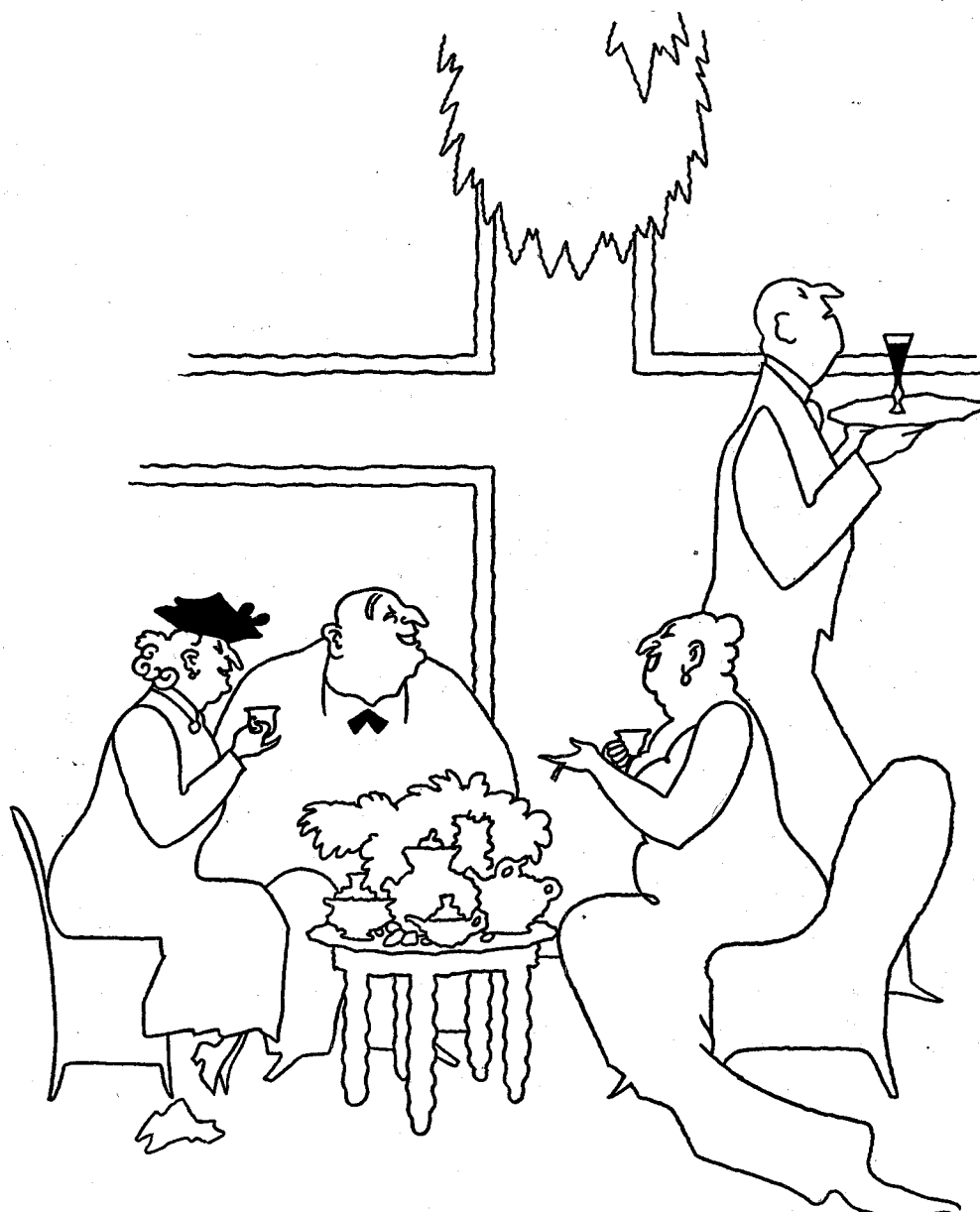
had told the whole truth the moment he was arrested; he had been misled by Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Trotsky; he had been a good revolutionist at one time; his services to the proletariat up to 1927 nobody can challenge, etc., etc. It is painful to listen to him. Even the judges stare into their papers in embarrassment. His words sound false. Everybody feels it. He himself feels it. *But he cannot stop. If he stops, he stops forever.* He turns away from the judges and addresses the audience directly. He lectures, he exhorts, he flagellates. . . .

Suddenly he stops. He clutches at the glass. No, he cannot go on. It is all so false, false. . . . This is not what he wanted to say, not at all what he wanted to say. . . . He sees the abyss again. He gulps down one glass of water after another. His shoulders shake. He keeps on passing his hand over his cheeks and mouth. Again little cries of anguish. His last confession is a sob.

Ah, the sweetness of confession . . . the release, the gratification, the sense of inner absolution that comes in its wake. *Mea culpa . . . mea culpa . . .*

IN THESE last tragic moments, one might be inclined to overlook the past, to believe, not only their confessions, but their affirmations as well. One might be inclined to believe Dreitzer when he, after acknowledging that he has the right neither to expect nor ask for mercy, whispers in a voice so faint one can scarcely hear it: ". . . and it is not necessary. I would only like to be believed that I have realized to what depths of monstrous crime I have fallen. I would only like to be believed that I wish happiness to my country, that I wish that my country, already prosperous, be as successful in attaining communism as it has been in attaining socialism, under the leadership of those whom we planned to kill." One might be inclined to believe Pickel when he says: "Death itself is not awful. It is awful to die a traitor. It is not the kind of death I would like to die. I would like to die better. I would like to die a patriot having earned the pardon of my country." One might be inclined to believe Ter-Vaganyan when he entreats the court to tell his former comrades, Mikoyan, Orjonikidze, etc., that he, Ter-Vaganyan, on the eve of his death, cleansed and purified, a good Bolshevik again, felt he had a right to stretch across the gulf of these years and shake hands at last with his former revolutionary self.

These people are thinkers, historians, scholars; above all, they were once Bolsheviks. One feels that they realize all the more sensitively, here, in the presence of death, that history is with communism, and that to them it is a form of survival, at this last moment, once again to identify their lost selves with this vast, living, communist movement. This perhaps explains Kamenev's last words: "If I couldn't be useful to the revolution with my life, I hope I can be useful with my death." This probably prompts Zinoviev's words: "I ask you to believe me, citizen judges, that



*"And besides, if we didn't have a big army and navy
how could we celebrate Armistice Day?"*

GARDNER
REA

Gardner Rea

whatever the punishment I am to receive, the greatest punishment of all was for me the moment when I heard here the testimony of Nathan Lurye and the testimony of Olberg. I felt and understood that my name will be bound with the names of those who stood alongside of me. On my right, Olberg; on my left, Nathan Lurye. I ask you to believe . . ."

"What about Kirov?" throws back the prosecutor, and the momentary illusion of sincerity vanishes.

No, Vyshinsky is right; the stern Russian comrades around me, the millions of indignant Soviet citizens outside this courtroom are right when they refuse to place any credence in these contrite words. Let the Citrines and the de Brouckeres be indulgent and magnanimous. They have always been thus with the enemies of the revolution. But it is the workers, the peasants, the comrades who sit by my side, these judges and this prosecutor, who articulate the will of the people of the Soviet Union; it is they, and not the Citrines and the de Brouckeres, who suffered through years

of imperialist invasion, civil war, famine, factional strife, who have lost brothers, sisters, parents, friends, who have with superhuman sacrifices created their Dnieprostroys and their Metros, their state and collective farms, who have built a classless socialist society under the leadership of a strong united Communist Party.

It is they whose privilege it is to pity and forgive. But they cannot forgive. Their love for their socialist fatherland and the people who have led them to victory has been welded in blood and fire and common sacrifice. Stalin, Voroshilov, Orjonikidze, Kaganovich are not merely political leaders to them—they are flesh of their flesh, blood of their blood, the pride of their past, the guarantee of their future. Anybody who raises his hand against these leaders raises his hand against them. The wretches whom Citrine has so valiantly rushed to defend not merely *planned* murder; they *killed*! They killed Kirov, one of their best beloved leaders. Trust the murderers? Not even when they sob recantations in the face of death.

Is God a Capitalist?

Proving that a forked beard and a long coat, when worn with a certain button, can liven up a crosstown bus with a new slant on theology

By Louis Lerman

THE old man was wearing a Browder-Ford button. How often do you see an old man, with a split beard, carrying God under his long coat, wearing a Browder button? It's not a usual sight.

He got into the crosstown bus at Seventh Avenue, lugging a package wrapped in a Jewish newspaper. It was exactly what you expect to see: the forked beard, the long shabby coat, the derby—all except the Browder-Ford button. That didn't belong.

A fat dame ostentatiously pulled her skirt toward her, looked ostentatiously out of the window. Someone smiled gently, forgivingly, thin shaven lips only a little contemptuous. A man with grease on his cheeks looked up for a moment, moved to make room for the old man.

The old man sat down heavily as the bus jerked forward, almost spilling the package into my lap. People around us peeked their heads out of newspapers, then quickly forgot. An old man gets on or off. That's nothing. Even if he's wearing a Browder button.

He was sitting right next to me, his knees supporting the package wrapped in the Jewish newspaper. I tried to read the paper wrapped around the package. My Jewish is pretty bad even when a paper is held right side up, but when it's upside down . . . I couldn't make it out at all.

The button kept pulling at my eyes. Should I ask him? But what should I say to him after I had said, "Old man, hello, I'd like to talk to you." Should I say, "Old man, how come you're wearing a Browder button?" That would sound like a lot of crust.

HIS HEAD was nodding on my shoulder, jerking awake with the spasms of the bus. The package was resting half on my knees, half on his. I took my courage in my hands. Stealthily I pushed it. It began to slip down. I bent forward suddenly to grab the package before it fell to the floor. He woke up. "Dankes," he said. "You're welcome," I answered. "That button you're wearing," I said to him, "it's a Communist button."

"Yes," he said, "Communist." And then in Jewish, "I speak English very badly."

I smiled in return, "Well, I speak Jewish very badly."

People around us looked up. Went back to sleep.

I said, "I noticed the button when you got on the bus. I wondered . . ."

He grinned. It's funny to see an old man grinning through all that beard. He said, a little belligerently, "And why shouldn't I



wear a Communist button? Am I a step-child?"

I grew confused. It was difficult to explain. An old man, a beard that should be waving over a synagogue table. Even the word "Communist" took on an unaccustomed sound out of the beard.

"Well," I said, "well . . . I wondered. Most of our people are young." I mumbled something about religion.

He grinned again. What a grin. "It's not me. It's my son. If the members of my synagogue knew what it was. But they don't ask me and I don't tell them. Let well enough alone. Trouble comes without a welcome."

"Why your son, why not you? It's no sin to be a Communist."

"Sin? Who's talking about sins. Sins from above. I stopped believing in them a long time ago. They are made here, on Fourteenth Street, and a good many of them in the synagogue. My son thinks I'm an atheist. He thinks I'll end in the other place. I'm almost tempted to cut off my beard—for his sake. But how would I look naked? Besides, it's my only protection. When he threatens to throw me out of the synagogue, I tell him I'm going to cut off my beard. And he quiets down, quiets down quickly."

"I don't understand," I said. "How can your son force you to be a Communist? You mean he's a Communist and he insists that you should wear the button?"

"No," he said, "it's the other way around. He's a good boy, but a donkey. He thinks I'm too old to think, old enough to be respectable."

I began to titter. The whole thing struck me, to say the least, as a funny story.

"Don't make a mistake," he hastened to add seriously, "not that I'm a Communist, but at least I want to know what they are saying. I talk to my son, I say, 'What's the matter with the Communists? What do they say?' And he gets excited, 'A bunch of God-

forsaken loafers, tramps trying to stir up trouble.' And I keep on asking him, 'What do they say? What do they want?' And he gives me a speech. 'An old man like yourself should be ashamed to ask such a question, to even show an interest in such filth (you will excuse me, that's his own language) except to spit on them.' The same thing the members of my synagogue say. So I stopped asking, I started to find out for myself.

"The first time my son saw the *Freiheit* in the house, he almost had a fit. For three hours he lectured me. But every time he threw a quotation from the Bible at me, I threw back two. Even Baalam's ass talked sense, I told him, at least he should try to. So he stopped talking about it. A new trick. He used to steal all my newspapers. I didn't know what to do. Of course I could always buy another copy, but in the first place, there's the expense, and in the second place, the principle. So I said, after the third time it happened, 'Listen, Labe Schmucl, every day I buy a paper and every day it's gone. Now I don't know who steals them and I don't care. But if it happens again, I swear by my grandmother, I'll cut my beard off. I'm getting tired of it anyway. Forty-five years is a long time, and besides, it gets in my soup.'"

I **BEGAN** to laugh out loud. I couldn't stop. People around looked at me as if I was crazy.

"Well," continued my old man, "and what was the upshot? I get my papers. I read them and nobody touches them.

"But now my son has a new trick. He says he'll have me thrown out of the synagogue. Now whether he will or not is another story. But whom do you have in the synagogue? All my old friends. I've known them for years, but they're donkeys. All you have to do is say 'Communist.' And I already have a reputation. . . .

"So I told my son I'm getting tired of this business. You are going to throw me out, hah. All right, go ahead. But so long as I have the tail, I'm going to wag it so everybody will see. You see this button, I told him, it says 'Vote Communist.' That's what I'm going to wear from now on. He went blue in the face. And I said, furthermore, one word more, and I'll put on a necktie, a red one.

"'Atheist!' he shrieked, 'revolutionist, fellow-worker, after sixty-eight years—a fellow worker. . . .'

"What's the matter," I said, "is God a capitalist?"

"And that's where it stands."