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Svyazhsk

BY LARISSA REISSNER

Editor's Note: Symbol of the international character of the October revolution is Larissa Reissner, daughter of a Polish mother and a German—East Elbian—landowner; she was born May 1, 1895, in Vilna (Poland), educated in Germany and France; before her 22nd birthday she was an outstanding figure in the Russian revolution.

Trotsky, in "My Life", writes of her in his chapter on Svyazhsk:

"Larissa Reissner, who called Ivan Nikitich (Smirnov) 'the conscience of Svyazhsk', was her self prominent in the Fifth Army, as well as in the revolution as a whole. This fine young woman flashed across the revolutionary sky like a burning meteor, blinding many. With her appearance of an Olympian goddess, she combined a subtle and ironical mind and the courage of a warrior. After the capture of Kazan by the Whites, she went into the enemy camp to reconnoitre, disguised as a peasant woman. But her appearance was too extraordinary, and she was arrested. While she was being cross-examined by a Japanese intelligence officer, she took advantage of an interval to slip through the carefully guarded door and disappear. After that, she engaged in intelligence work. Later, she sailed on war-boats and took part in battles. Her sketches about the civil war are literature. With equal gusto, she would write about the Ural industries and the rising of the workers in the Ruhr. She was anxious to know and to see all, and to

take part in everything. In a few brief years, she became a writer of the first rank. But after coming unscathed through fire and water, this Pallas of the revolution suddenly burned up with typhus in the peaceful surroundings of Moscow, before she was even thirty."

Elsewhere Trotsky ranks her with Isaac Babel as the greatest writers of the civil war period—a remarkable tribute to a girl to whom Russian was a foreign language, acquired in maturity.

"The Front", a collection of her civil war sketches, from which "Svyazhsk" is taken, was enormously popular with the Soviet masses. The various districts of the Communist Party—Moscow, Leningrad, the Urals, etc.—vied with each other in bringing it out in scores of editions. A larger collection of her work, "Oktober: Ausgewählte Schriften", was brought out in Germany by the official Comintern publishing house as late as 1930, with an introduction by Radek written in 1926, the year she died. It was not until Stalin's 50th birthday (December 21, 1929) and the publication on that date of Voroshilov's "Stalin and the Red Army" that the falsification of the history of the civil war began with full force. Now, of course, Larissa Reissner's sketches are forbidden literature in the Soviet Union, for their unforgettable portraits of the civil war leaders murdered by Stalin are a complete refutation of the Stalinist falsifications.

With this sketch of "Svyazhsk", we begin the publication of her work for the first time in England. The translation is by John G. Wright and Amy Jensen.

Whenever two comrades who worked together in the year 1918, fought beneath Kazan against the Czechoslovaks and then in the Urals or at Samara and Tsaritsin, chance to meet again many years later one of them is bound to ask after the first few questions:

"Remember Svyazhsk?" And they will clasp each other's hand again.

What is Svyazhsk? Today it is a legend, one of the revolutionary legends which still remain unchronicled but which are being retold over and over again from one end to another of this Russian vastness. Not one of the demobilised Red Army men from among the old-timers, the founders of the Workers' and Peasants' Army, upon returning home and reminiscing about the three years of Civil War will skip over the fabulous epic of Svyazhsk, the cross-roads whence the tide of the revolutionary offensive started rolling on all four sides. On the east—towards the Urals. On the south—towards the Caspian shores, the Caucasus and the borders of Persia. On the north toward Archangel and Poland. Not all together, of course; not simultaneously. But it was only after Svyazhsk and Kazan that the Red Army became crystallised into those fighting and political forms which, after undergoing change and being perfected, have become classic for the R.S.F.S.R.

On August 6 (1918) numerous hastily organised regiments fled from Kazan; and the best among them, the class-conscious section, clung to Svyazhsk, halted there and decided to make a stand and fight. By the time the mob of deserters fleeing from Kazan had almost reach Nizhny Novgorod, the dam erected at Svyazhsk had already halted the Czechoslovaks; and their general who tried to take the railroad bridge across the Volga by storm was killed during the night attack. Thus in the very first clash between the Whites who had just taken Kazan and consequently were stronger in morale and equipment, and the core of the Red Army seeking to defend the bridge-head across the Volga, the head of the Czechoslovak offensive was lopped off. They lost their most popular and gifted leader in General Blagotich. Neither the Whites, flushed by their recent victory, nor the Reds rallying

round Svyazhsk had any inkling of the historical importance that their initial skirmishes would have.

It is extremely difficult to convey the military importance of Svyazhsk without having the necessary materials at hand, without a map, and without the testimony of those comrades who were in the ranks of the Fifth Army at that time. Much has already been forgotten by me; faces and names lit by as in a fog. But there is something that no one will ever forget and that is: the feeling of supreme responsibility for holding Svyazhsk. This was the bond between all its defenders from a member of the Revolutionary Military Council to the last Red rank and file in desperate search for his somewhere extant, retreating regiment, who suddenly turned back and faced Kazan in order to fight to the last, with worn-out rifle in hand and fanatic determination in his heart. The situation was understood by everyone as follows: Another step backward would open the Volga to the enemy down to Nizhny (Novgorod) and thus the road to Moscow.

Further retreat meant the beginning of the end; the death sentence on the Republic of the Soviets.

How correct this is from a strategic point of view, I know not. Perhaps the Army if rolled back even further might have gathered into a similar fist on one of the innumerable black dots which speckle the map and thenceforth carried its banners to victory. But indubitably it was correct from the standpoint of morale. And insofar as a retreat from the Volga meant a complete collapse at that time, to that extent the possibility of holding out, with one's back against the bridge, imbued us with a real hope.

The ethics of the revolution formulated the complex situation succinctly as follows: To retreat is to have the Czechs in Nizhny and in Moscow. No surrender of Svyazhsk and the bridge means the reconquest of Kazan by the Red Army.

THE ARRIVAL OF TROTSKY'S TRAIN.

It was, I believe, either on the third or fourth day after the fall of Kazan that Trotsky arrived at Svyazhsk. His train came to a determined stop at the little station; his locomotive panted a little, was uncoupled, and departed to drink water, but did not return. The cars remained standing in a row as immobile as the dirty straw-thatched peasant huts and the barracks occupied by the Fifth Army's staff. This immobility silently underscored that there was no place to go from here, and that it was impermissible to leave. Little by little the fanatical faith that this little station would become the starting point for a counter-offensive against Kazan began to take on the shape of reality.

Every new day that this God-forsaken, poor railway siding held out against the far stronger enemy, added to its strength and raised its mood of confidence. From somewhere in the rear, from far-off villages in the hinterland, came at first soldiers one by one, then tiny detachments, and finally military formations in a far better state of preservation.

I see it now before me, this Svyazhsk where not a single soldier fought "under compulsion." Everything that was alive there and fighting in self-defence—all of it was bound together by the strongest ties of voluntary discipline, voluntary participation in a struggle

(Continued on page 4.)

ALLIED POLICY—RIFT WIDENS

By DAVID JAMES

The drastic reverses suffered by the Axis have had strong repercussions in the camp of the "United" Nations. The conflict between the war policies of Russia and the Western Powers has been raised to a higher degree, and with the approach of the period of a European settlement, the conflict over post-war aims has become increasingly sharp and open.

Workers' International League has consistently pointed out the irreconcilable class difference between the Soviet Union and her "Allies", which is the basis of the contradiction in war and peace aims. Fresh confirmation of this analysis is provided every day.

Friction between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers, officially eliminated by the Anglo-Soviet Pact, has in fact continued—sometimes openly, more often behind the scenes. Moore-Brabazon's expressed wish to see Germany and the Soviet Union exhaust one another remains unaltered as a clear statement of Anglo-U.S. aims. That Stalin recognises this is shown in the campaign for opening a Second Front in the West which has increased in volume from 1941 to the present day.

On the other side, the alarm of the Western Powers at the prospect of a Soviet advance into Europe was voiced loudly this spring when the Red Army began to smash the German army back. Wallace's speech foreshadowing the Third World War unless agreement with Russia was obtained, was the most famous example of this panic. Neither side trusts the other, and with good reason.

CONTRADICTORY WAR POLICIES

The differences over war policy have come to a head. No Soviet representative was present at Casablanca. At that time, however, Stalin hoped that a decision would be taken in favour of a Second Front, so he did not complain. The materialisation of the Casablanca decisions in the form of the Sicilian invasion, but no real Second Front, disillusioned him. The Quebec Conference on the contrary, has caused a storm. Tass abruptly denied that the Soviet Government had been invited to send representatives, and the Soviet demand for a Second Front "drawing away 50 to 60 German divisions from the Eastern Front" was renewed vigorously. But the main emphasis of the discussions at Quebec was laid on the war in the Pacific, the aerial war and of postponement of the Second Front until next spring. This, in spite of the accepted fact that the Soviet Union cannot suffer another winter without irreparable loss of millions of Russians in the occupied territories, the disastrous effects on the health of the Russian people, and a breakdown of Russia's already overstrained transport system.

Of course! Is this not what Moore-Brabazon advocated? Is this not what the "Socialist Appeal" has been saying: that the allied imperialists will

time the invasion of Europe to suit their own imperialist interests."

CONTRADICTORY PEACE AIMS

The struggle over peace aims is becoming sharper too. Stalin remembers the "cordon sanitaire" policy pursued by the allies after the last war—that of creating reactionary military dictatorships, subsidised by "democratic" capital as a buffer against the Soviet State. He is attempting to get in first, by creating spheres of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe.

As after the last war, Poland is a key factor in the reactionary set-up. The squabble with the Polish Government in London over the murdered Polish officers cloaked a far more important issue. Stalin wished to discredit this Government, which is thoroughly anti-Soviet and well fitted to assume the role of spearhead of Anglo-U.S. aggression against the Soviet Union at some future date. By means of the Union of Polish Patriots, Stalin is attempting to build up a movement in Poland which will serve his aims. The latest blow in the "war of nerves" over Poland was struck by Wanda Wasselewka, Chairman of this Union, who was reported in the "Daily Worker" 19/8/43 as saying:

"... Polish patriots active in the resistance struggle against the enemy have been murdered in Poland by order of emigre Polish circles..."

These actions, states Wasselewka, have been taken in response to incitements broadcast over the secret radio station "Swit" which is claimed to be operated by the underground Polish movement organised in connection with Polish emigre circles in Britain.

Wasselewka contrasts the appeals for patience and restraint in respect to the German occupation emitted by this station and in many official statements of the Polish Government in London, with the reckless and repeated calls for violence against leaders of the Polish guerrilla movement emitted by the same station.

A precisely similar situation exists in Yugoslavia, where Stalin has built a strong influence by means of the Peoples' Liberation Army, and continually exposes the reactionary activities of Mihailovich and the Yugoslav Government in London. The Allied military headquarters in Cairo supports Mihailovich's policy by issuing radio appeals to the guerrillas instructing them to "wait" for an allied invasion.

Here the class alignment becomes obvious. The British and American imperialists fear-like the plague—any extension of guerrilla activity in Europe for they know that in spite of their Stalinist controlled leadership, wherever the guerrilla armies are victorious, they expropriate the majority of landlords and capitalists. Though he hates and fears the workers' revolution, Stalin finds that his objective position as head of a Workers' State forces him in conflict with his "allies" to give support to the revolutionary elements since

these are the only genuine allies of the Soviet Union against the Axis and Anglo-American imperialism and its stooges. Remembering all the time, of course, the bureaucratic methods of Stalin, the refusal to direct the guerrillas along the road of socialist revolution, the beheading of the genuinely revolutionary elements and the inevitable switch of Stalin's policy and horse deal with the "allies" and Mihailovich if it so suits his ends.

Stalin is attempting to gain Czechoslovakia as a sphere of influence by signing a pact with Benes. London showed its realisation of the meaning of this move by at first refusing Benes permission to go to Moscow! Only the publication of this fact, the strong discontent in Czech circles, and the danger of a too-open disclosure of British hostility towards the Soviet Union, forced a reversal of this decision.

In the formation of the Free German Committee, Stalin is hunting bigger game. There is no consultation of Britain and America before setting it up. In this move, Stalin hopes to create a bastion against Anglo-U.S. imperialism in the form of a Germany ruled by a Popular Front Government, working in close collaboration with Moscow. The alarm of the British ruling class was voiced in an article in the "Observer", 25/7/43:

But even at this moment Stalin, cool, farsighted, and realising that even after the most conclusive defeat Germany will continue to be an important factor in European politics, sows the seeds of future Russian-German peace and co-operation on realistic terms.

We have neither so far devised an approach to Russia which would make it superfluous for her thus to extend her influence in Western Europe... nor have we built up a similar body of support in Europe for ourselves. The dangers of these omissions are obvious. Stalin's Policy is Futile.

Though we support the Soviet Union against her imperialist enemies; and although Stalin's recent manoeuvres represent a tendency to establish a certain independence on the part of the Soviet Union from her imperialist allies, it would be entirely wrong to believe that these manoeuvres will genuinely defend the Soviet Union and assist the European revolution. Time and again we have emphasised that only the Socialist Revolution can aid the Soviet Union. This is confirmed though indirectly, by the Yugoslavian experience. Stalin's policy, on the other hand, is bureaucratic through and through. Alliances with the cap-

italists; setting up stooge committees of a popular front character; influencing the liberation movements away from the workers' revolution into channels of Popular Frontism.

It is necessary to state unambiguously: if this Stalinist policy is victorious in the coming European revolution it will lead to disastrous defeats precisely as it did before the war—and the repercussions on the Soviet Union will be as grave. Only by complete and unconditional independence of the European revolutionary movement from the capitalist class can the Soviet Union be defended.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY

In this crisis the Communist Party reveals itself as usual to be a hollow reed. Tied by the Anglo-Soviet Pact to support of British imperialism, it limits itself to pleading with the Government for a Second Front. Need we recall the two years of "pressure" which have resulted in exactly nothing? The Stalinists are even to the right of the liberals, whom they rebuke for complaining about Stalin's absence from Quebec:

"But it is unnecessary for the Press to concern itself so much with Stalin's absence."

It is true that the closeness of Anglo-American Soviet relations is the key not only to victory, but to the winning of the peace. And it is true that at the present time these relations still leave very much to be desired.

But the character of the present Conference is quite clear. As President Roosevelt has said, it is an Anglo-American Conference.

"Daily Worker", 14/8/43.

THE LIBERALS AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATS

The liberals, led by the "News Chronicle", and the Social Democrats, blurt pathetically that it is no good; Stalin should have been at Quebec. They call for a "real understanding" between the Western Powers and the Soviet Union. But what has prevented this up to now—in spite of the mutual back-slapping and champagne orgies? The simple fact that between a workers' state, though degenerated and in the grip of a reactionary bureaucracy, and the imperialist states there is an irreconcilable class contradiction.

The Soviet Union is bleeding itself to exhaustion with a terrible toll in lives and material while the "Allies" have emerged with their resources strengthened and with a negligible loss of life. Now the chief concern of British and American imperialism, with the defeat of Germany practically certain, is how to destroy the European revolution and at the same time further weaken the Soviet Union for the inevitable clash they perceive in the future. The capitalist strategy has only partly succeeded because, though Russia has been terribly weakened, Germany has not destroyed the Soviet Union.

Whether a Second Front in Europe will be launched or not will depend on the analysis of the situation by the Allies. As always their cold-blooded calculations will be dictated by the interests of the Anglo-American capitalists and nothing else.

But even a completely successful Second Front launched at the present time would not mean the destruction of fascism, or could save the Soviet Union, from destruction. Only the workers of Europe, together with the workers of Britain by overthrowing capitalism and taking power into their own hands can defend the Soviet Union and help destroy fascism. To the class actions of the capitalists must be opposed the class solidarity of the workers.

Trotskyists Active In Indian Struggle

U.S. "MILITANT" organ of American Trotskyists.

The Bolshevick-Leninist Party, Indian section of the Fourth International, fights on despite the bestial repressions and totalitarian censorship of British imperialism, writes the July issue of the magazine, Fourth International, which is in possession of ten leaflets and a pamphlet published by the Indian Trotskyists during the past year.

Though the leaflets one can follow the response of the party to the revolutionary developments in India. The latest of them is a leaflet issued for the Indian Independence Day celebration on January 26, 1943. Another is a rounded political statement issued on August 9, 1942, when the All-India Congress Committee ratified the resolution of its Working Committee to launch a mass civil-disobedience struggle.

This leaflet solidarizes with the struggle for independence, warns the masses to be on guard against the weak and vacillating Gandhi leadership and the policy of compromise, pledges support to "any mass action that the Congress may take against British imperialism," and confidently predicts:

"The movement started under the leadership of the Congress is bound to develop into channels other than those laid down for it."

The Independence Day leaflet sums up the results of six months of struggle and records that the bestial repressions of the British rulers, "far from leading to demoralization, increases the volume of desperate discontent. The masses are reaching out for new methods of struggle.

The Soviet Union and Stalinism are dealt with by almost all the leaflets. One of them, headed "Defend the Soviet Union," explains why the only way to defend the workers' state is by revolutionary struggle against all the capitalists.

I stake my life! BY LEON TROTSKY DEWEY REPORT on the Moscow Trials 6¢

War Writers' Board Hits "Mission to Moscow"

New York—

The Davies whitewash film, "Mission To Moscow," is booming on its inspirers, sponsors and producers. The GPU lies and frame-ups are too much to ram down the throats of the American public, despite the Hollywood sauce and the "unofficial" blessing of the State Department.

Among the latest to denounce the film is the Writers War Board, representing more than 2,000 feature writers for newspapers and periodicals. This board, which issues reports on war movies, last week awarded "three duds" to the Warner Brothers screen justification of the Moscow frame-ups. The board further found that Hollywood has tried to "falsify facts" for the sake of appeasing Stalin and goes on to add:

"Every movement for appeasement is based on the idea that an untruth or a distortion is excusable if it serves a greater good. We cannot subscribe to such a doctrine, however desirable the immediate effect." (N. Y. Times, June 26.)

The report bears the names of Rex Stout, chairman; Franklin P. Adams, Pearl S. Buck, Carl Carner, Robert T. Colwell, Russell Crouse, Clifton Fadiman, Paul Gallico, Jack Goodman, Oscar Hammerstein, Rita Halle Kleeman, Robert J. Landry, Margaret Leech, John P. Marquand, Katharine Seymour, William L. Shirer, and Frederica Barach, executive secretary.

There is one glaring omission in the report of the Writers War Board. They pretend that Warner Brothers ("Hollywood") was alone responsible for the falsification of facts. There is not a single reference to the State Department and its "unofficial" endorsement of the film.

SPLIT IN CHINESE C.P.

An AP dispatch from Chungking on July 7 quoted a government spokesman as saying that the dissolution of the Comintern had caused a split in the Chinese Communist Party. One group which favored the C. I. dissolution is moving closer to the Chiang Kai-shek government, while the other group still holds to the need for internationalism, according to the report.