

TODAY ABROAD

by Joseph Clark

Socialist Lands Revamp Legal, Legislative Methods

EVIDENCE piles up that the Soviet Union and other socialist countries are only at the beginning of a long process of overhauling their judicial and legislative procedures.

In Poland earlier, and now in the Soviet Union, people are discussing the revitalization of their elected law-making bodies. For example, Vasili Kozlov, chairman of the Byelorussian Soviet republic, wrote an article in the newspaper Izevetia calling for more frequent meetings of parliamentary committees and of the Soviets themselves. He also did say that more searching and intensive debate is needed at these sessions.

Soviet newspapers have also carried grass roots criticism of the failure of local Soviets to meet at required intervals.

It is interesting that a sharp criticism of Soviet legislative practices had appeared some weeks ago in *Unita*, the Italian Communist paper, by Umberto Terracini, one of the leaders of the Communist Party of Italy. Terracini had referred to the infrequent meetings of the Supreme Soviet, their short duration and the formal nature of the debate.

EVER SINCE the death of Stalin there has been a revamping of legal procedures and revision of the legal code in the Soviet Union. An amnesty was one of the first acts of the Soviet government after the death of Stalin. Trial by "confession" has been roundly condemned. Many persons arrested on flimsy or manufactured evidence have been released from penal institutions.

Only last week the Polish government announced that 23,500 persons have been released from penal institutions and that altogether about 30,000 will be freed. Most of these apparently were convicted for crimes and their sentences commuted; but many also were victims of injustice perpetrated by the security and judicial organs. The

removal of Jakub Berman, as deputy premier of Poland has been linked to the correction of grave violations of civil liberties which had been permitted in the past.

A REVIEW of past cases and the release of certain persons from prison has also taken place in East Germany by action of the government of the German Democratic Republic. In this connection it is important to note that the West German Social Democrats have sought formal meetings with the East German leaders to discuss the question of prisoners. According to Adolf Arndt, chief legal expert to a press agency dispatch, for the West German Socialists, has said that the release of political prisoners in East Germany will strengthen the fight of the West German Social Democrats against the reactionary Adenauer regime. Certainly a fight by the Social Democrats against the attempts of the Adenauer government to ban the Communist Party would strengthen unity trends.

The question of prisoners in socialist countries has been raised anew in some quarters recently as part of the old anti-communist crusade. But it is not all too far fetched to predict that the overhauling now going on in the socialist lands will become a means for bringing socialists and communists closer together.

British Socialist publications already reflect the growing trend toward reconciliation between socialists and communists. It has been spurred by the liberalizing process now going on in the Soviet Union and the other socialist lands. G. D. H. Cole, for example, a most respected name in British Labor Party ranks, has made a most powerful plea for international socialist-communist unity, in an article published by *New Statesman and Nation*.

IN OUR own country it is

obvious that the extreme right wing press, which abhors militant trade unions and not only socialism, is trying to use the revelations about injustices uncovered by the socialist countries, as a means of attacking socialism itself. Thus, in reporting the rectifications taking place in Poland, for example, the *N. Y. Times* makes it clear that only a return of the old regime—a feudal, pogrom-ridden regime it was—will satisfy the *N. Y. Times*.

It would be most unfortunate if labor, socialist and liberal circles in our country were also inveigled into such an effort. Thus when the New Leader organizes petitions in behalf of political prisoners in the socialist lands it has ulterior motives, to put it mildly. These are strongly cold-war and anti-Soviet motives.

But to question the motives of the New Leader doesn't mean there aren't injustices in the socialist lands that remain to be rectified. Such rectification is a process and is in fact going on.

In discussing the issue of purges, and trials and thought control it is a sobering thought indeed that the only place in the world where thought control and purge trials are going on **RIGHT NOW** is in our country. The corrections of past mistakes by the socialist countries only serves to emphasize the indecency of the Smith Act trials in America, as well as the imprisonment of Sobell at Alcatraz, and the deportation procedures and McCarran Act persecutions.

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