

SEROV CHANGES JOBS BUT OPPRESSION REMAINS

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Sir Winston Churchill once described the Soviet Union as "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." The aptness of this observation has recently been demonstrated anew by the perplexing development concerning Serov.

Following his assumption of the post of Chairman of the Committee for State Security (KGB) in April 1954, General Ivan Alexandrovich Serov has been perhaps the most dreaded figure in the Soviet Union. He also appeared to be one of the most powerful of the Kremlin hierarchy. As head of the KGB, he directed a vast network of two million agents, spies and informers whose function was to protect the Soviet Union against internal subversion and espionage agents. His organization presumably maintains dossiers on leading Soviet personalities, containing incriminating and compromising information on many of the regime's highest and most influential figures.

Today Serov is no longer head of the KGB. The world, and probably the Soviet public also, was surprized when a brief official announcement on 9 December stated that he had been relieved of his post "in connection with his transfer to other work." Although no reasons were given for his removal, it was not for lack of professional qualifications. Serov entered the Army as a young man, serving at first with the artillery, and subsequently transferring to the secret police. From 1939 until 1941 he worked closely with Khrushchev, who was then political chief of the Ukraine, as chief of the secret police there. For the next 13 years he served under Soviet secret police chief Beria in important posts in the national secret police organization. Three months after Beria's execution when the KGB was separated from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Serov was appointed its head responsible for espionage, counter-espionage and the security police.

Serov was responsible for the large-scale deportations of the Baltic populations in June 1941. Under his Secret Order No. 001223, approximately 200,000 persons were seized and sent to forced labor camps or exile in Siberia. He also masterminded the deportation of the ethnic minority Chechen and Ingush peoples from the Caucasus in 1943. As punishment

for collaboration with the Germans, an estimated 500,000 individuals were forcibly resettled in North Kazakhstan in Central Asia. Packed into unheated trains in the middle of winter with inadequate supplies of food and clothing, many thousands died on the journey. More recently, Serov is credited with the treacherous "arrest" of General Pal Maleter, leader of the Hungarian forces in the uprising of 1956, and with the subsequent deportation of Hungarian freedom fighters after the revolt had been suppressed.

Although no announcement has been made as to what "other work" Serov is to be transferred, he is regarded as too valuable and experienced a member of the hierarchy to be eliminated. Since he left the KGB, he has appeared at several official Kremlin functions, an indication that he is still an important member of the power group around Khrushchev.

Anastas Mikoyan said on 11 January in Los Angeles that Serov had a position in the Soviet Army. In view of his previous experience, it appears that he may be the new head of Soviet military intelligence. After World War II Soviet military intelligence was increasingly dominated by the general security organization, probably because Stalin was unwilling to allow an independent intelligence network to develop. Recently, however, there are indications that the regime has recognized the need for a specialized, and therefore more autonomous, military intelligence. To minimize the political danger of a separate military intelligence organization, it appears that Khrushchev may have appointed his trusted lieutenant, Serov, to head it.

In addition, according to an authoritative diplomatic source, Serov heads a new Soviet espionage agency that specializes in secret weapons, including bacteriological and chemical warfare materials. The new organization is a part of Soviet military intelligence but with special privileges under Serov's direction. His responsibilities include the protection of Russian secret devices and counter-espionage against the West.

Serov's hand also can be discerned in the announcement that throughout the Soviet Union, so-called "volunteer workers' militia" are being formed, with members recruited from the most reliable workers. The stated purpose of these workers' militia detachments is to act as auxiliary police to assist

the regular police in keeping down hooliganism and drunkenness. But since the Soviet Union is one of the most thoroughly policed states in the world, it seems improbable that the regular police cannot be relied upon to keep public order. A clue to the real purpose of the new militia may be found in the fact that its members are to preserve order on streets, public transportation, in stores and clubs, and to apprehend "anti-social" elements.

In the USSR, "anti-social" is a broad term, frequently used to denote elements opposed to the regime. Competent observers have suggested therefore that the creation of the new militia is actually a step to provide a new secret police organization with members drawn from the most reliable Party members among the workers. Stalin's system for maintaining an absolute dictatorship, whereby one out of every four Soviet citizens was a police informer, is coming back under another name. Serov is believed to be charged with the responsibility for organizing and directing this new secret police apparatus which, to avoid arousing suspicion among the other members of the Kremlin hierarchy who remember Stalin's rule of terror all too well, will be known as a "workers' militia."

The shift in KGB leadership does not presage any relaxation of Soviet police activities. Serov's replacement, Alexander Shelepin, was hand-picked by Khrushchev and has had a nine-month indoctrination period since he was transferred in April from his previous post as leader of the Communist Youth Organization (Komsomol). While lacking Serov's grisly reputation, Shelepin has been under Party discipline for 18 years, 15 of which were spent as a senior party official. As head of the Komsomol, Shelepin was concerned with "thought control" of its 20,000,000 members. In a speech given in April 1958, he told the Central Committee and the Soviet Government that Komsomol organizations "must guarantee the improvement of ideological and educational work among student youth and resolutely attack the penetration of bourgeois views and tastes"--a point of view that will be equally useful for a policeman.

Recently, the Soviets have attempted to impose a facade of "socialist legality" upon the operations of the most pervasive totalitarian rule ever known on earth by the adoption of a new criminal code in December. Although the new code does eliminate some of the most flagrant abuses of the Stalin

era such as secret police trials, reliance on confession without other evidence, and criminal responsibility at the age of 12, it does not by any means guarantee the Soviet citizen the protection of Western legal concepts. The right of habeas corpus is not recognized; the presumption of innocence of the defendant is not accepted; and the death penalty can be exacted for high treason, espionage, subversive and terrorist activities, premeditated murder and banditry. In the USSR, high treason includes flight abroad and refusal to return from abroad and conspiring to seize power. Since in the past many Soviet citizens, including the highest Communist leaders, have been put to death on charges of spying for the imperialists or conspiring with the West to overthrow the government, it does not appear that the new code will restrict Shelepin's police activities.

Furthermore, the more rigid enforcement of the decrees of 1956 dealing with the internal passports required for Soviet citizens which is now being carried out, and the recent unveiling of a statue of Dzerzhinsky, founder of the secret police under Lenin, suggest that Khrushchev's statement to Senator Humphrey concerning the reduction of the role of the secret police in the USSR, is for foreign consumption only. All these developments can only mean that with Serov's present employment as head of a new military secret police organization, the sinister shadow of the secret police will continue to haunt every Soviet citizen.

LAOS ACTS TO CURE COMMUNIST PERIL

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On 14 January 1959 the small Indo-Chinese state of Laos took a significant step towards curbing the ever-present threat of Communism when its National Assembly voted overwhelmingly to place full powers for one year in the hands of Premier Phoui Sananikone. A champion of democracy rather than of one-man dictatorial rule, the energetic 54-year-old Premier needed extraordinary powers to enable his government to combat the subversive activities of Laotian Communists, and bring order, stability and economic progress to the country.

Laos is a small landlocked country shaped like a mushroom with the head bent westward toward Burma and Thailand. China lies to the north, Vietnam to the east, and Cambodia to the south. One of the three states which formerly made up French Indo-China, it became a French protectorate in 1893. In response to awakening desires for freedom and independence, the King promulgated on 11 May 1947 a constitution which provided for a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary government. Although France granted it the status of an independent state within the French Union in July 1949, international recognition of Laotian sovereignty and independence came only on 20 July 1954 with the signing of the Geneva cease-fire agreements.

The newly-recognized state started life with a variety of serious problems which might well have daunted a more experienced nation. Laos is the poorest and least developed of the three Indo-Chinese countries. It has practically no industry and little commercial activity. Its principal export, tin, accounted for \$518,000 of a total of \$1,079,000 in exports in 1957. The exploitation, however, of its natural resources is hampered by the lack of transportation and communications, which during the rainy season are practically non-existent. The population, estimated at between two and three million, is made up about equally of Laotians and very primitive tribes, principally Chinese immigrants. In addition, the lack of trained and experienced Laotians available to participate in the government, staff its offices, and carry out its policies, is a serious handicap.

This combination of circumstances--a small, economically underdeveloped country, politically inexperienced, lacking educational facilities, containing many minority groups, and bordered by Red China and North Vietnam--appears to be a

natural target for Communist organizers. And this indeed has been the case. Even before Laos was recognized as an independent country, Communist Viet Minh forces had invaded the kingdom, occupied several provinces, and organized Laotian Communists and pro-Communists into a rival government under the name of Pathet Lao (Free Laos--PL).

Under the Geneva agreement, the royal government at Vientiane was recognized as the legal government of the country, and the PL agreed to abandon its claim to authority and to regroup its forces in the two provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua, pending conclusion of a political agreement.

Such an agreement was finally reached on 19 November 1957 by the Royal Laotian Government and representatives of the PL. This provided for the recognition of PL as a legal political party under the name Neo Lao Hak Zat (Laotian Patriotic Front--NLHZ) and the admission of two PL leaders into the Laotian cabinet. One of the two ministers was Prince Souphannouvong, head of the PL and of the NLHZ and a half-brother of the then Premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma.

The agreement provided for reestablishment of the central government's authority in Phong Saly and Sam Neua and for the disbandment of the PL armed forces. It was also agreed that 1,500 PL soldiers would be integrated into the Laotian National Army (ANL), while the rest would assume the status of ANL reserves.

The ANL reoccupied the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua on 19 January 1958, and the integration of PL troops began at the same time. But PL compliance with the terms of the November agreement was only superficial. The unintegrated PL troops hid their weapons instead of surrendering them to the ANL, and cadre formations were retained on a clandestine basis so that guerrilla warfare against the government could be resumed whenever the NLHZ leaders or their masters in North Vietnam might order.

On the political level, the NLHZ retained its tight grip on the two reoccupied provinces despite the appointment of new governors by Vientiane. In addition, NLHZ organizers now were sent to the other provinces, where they established party cells which, by threats, actual violence or enticements, undertook to usurp the functions of the regular authorities and to create antagonisms among the people towards the government.

Within the cabinet the two NLHZ ministers worked to disrupt cabinet unity and to prevent the execution of needed reforms and developmental projects. In Laos as elsewhere, the Communists find it easiest to recruit supporters among poor illiterate peoples--and these comprise the great bulk of Laos' population. Hence, anything which the NLHZ ministers could do to hamper improvement of conditions benefited the Party.

So successful were the NLHZ efforts that in the May 1958 supplementary elections the Party won 9 of the 21 Assembly seats at stake. The resulting situation created new difficulties for the government. In the 59-member National Assembly the ruling Lao Hom Lao (Rally of the Laotian People--LNL) had a clear majority with 37 seats. However, the LNL had been formed by a merger of the Nationalist and Independent Parties, whose members frequently found themselves agreeing only on the necessity of combating Communism. As a result of this situation, the 9 NLHZ deputies, supported by 7 Santiphab (Neutralist) Party deputies and 3 belonging to the Democrat Party--a small, regional opportunistic group--were often able to upset or stall government actions.

Finding itself unable to solve the country's problems, the Phouma cabinet resigned on 22 July 1958, and on 18 August a new cabinet headed by Phoui was invested by the Assembly by a vote of 29 to 21. The most significant feature of the new cabinet was the absence of any NLHZ ministers.

The Phoui government worked strenuously to give Laos stability and economic progress, and recently even pushed through the politically unpopular but economically necessary devaluation of the kip, Laos' national currency. However, continued NLHZ agitation against the government and the clandestine activities of PL guerrilla forces have been disruptive influences.

Faced with this situation Premier Phoui finally found himself with no alternative but to call a special session of the Assembly and ask for full powers. Only the 9 NLHZ and the 7 Santiphab deputies cast dissenting votes in the crucial 14 January action.

Realizing that a strong determined government would mean an end to its subversion, the NLHZ called on Communist North Vietnam for support. North Vietnamese troops immediately demonstrated on Laos' eastern borders and even made forays

into Laotian territory (which led to a formal protest by Laos to the United Nations on 19 January). These Communist pressures backfired, however. They were so obviously designed to support local Communists that all non-Communist Laotians closed ranks behind Premier Phoui.

The vigorous anti-Communist policies of the Phoui government reflect great courage. Laos has an 800-kilometer border with Red China and North Vietnam, and her small army, which lacks armored power or air strength, could not hope successfully to resist any Communist aggression.

A poor country, Laos clearly could make good use of Communist economic assistance. But the government, firm in its adherence to the Free world, has resolutely spurned all such offers, realizing that political domination would follow.

Laos has also defied Red China by giving asylum to thousands of refugees from China's Yunnan Province who have fled the slave existence of the new Red Chinese commune system. Since May 1958 more than 14,000--3,000 in December alone--have arrived in Laos' Muong Sing Valley. Despite their own economic poverty, the Laotian Government and people have welcomed and extended every possible assistance to these refugees, who are largely members of Chinese minority groups ethnically related to the peoples of Laos.

Today, Laos is facing the future with more confidence. Premier Phoui has warned the MLHZ that he does not intend to use his special powers to suppress it, but that he will not permit it to continue to engage in illegal activities and subversion. With increased political stability and an opportunity for economic development, Laos appears to have a good chance to evolve into a modern, independent and democratic state. The internal Communist threat appears to have been checked. Whether her Communist neighbors will allow her to progress in peace remains to be seen.

EXPORT PLENTY DOES NOT HELP POOR IVAN

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During the past few years the Communists have been gradually increasing their participation in trade fairs throughout the world. We have had quite a few here in Latin America, such as the Petroleum Exhibition in Buenos Aires last year, the International Industrial Fair at Santiago de Chile, the Bogota Trade Fair and also that in Mexico City in January 1957. There also have been quite a number in Europe.

There have been so many of them and, given the fact that participation is costly, one may ask why a sudden insistence on this medium. One answer is quite plain and that is the Communist Bloc, like everyone else, wants to do business. However, that is only part of the explanation. The other is that the Communists see in trade fairs an excellent means of spreading their propaganda and also of taking markets away from the Western world.

The propaganda aspect of the trade fair is to persuade the world that the Communist Bloc is teeming with merchandise, both heavy equipment and consumer goods. The greatest efforts have been made to heighten the impact of the display at the fair by lavish advertising and paid articles in the press extolling the quality of the goods and, naturally, the excellence of the political system which made it possible to produce them.

So we see that by participating in these trade fairs the Communists are pursuing a dual aim. One is business and the other is politics. It cannot be denied that a number of striking displays have been assembled with the result that thousands of people, both here and in Europe, have been given the impression that the Bloc has everything the heart desires.

However, nothing could be farther from the truth. Forty years of planned economy under Communism in Russia have shown the world a system in which the emphasis has invariably been placed on the production of heavy equipment while that of consumer items, for which the people have been hungering, has been ignored. When Georgiy Malenkov, who was premier following the death of Stalin, wanted to remedy this situation and give the people more consumer items to satisfy their needs, the result was his exile and the advent of Khrushchev.

It is, therefore, quite plain that the glittering array of consumer goods one sees at the pavilions of the Communist Bloc at these fairs is intended "for export only," while the citizens of the Bloc must take whatever the State chooses to offer them.

An excellent illustration of the typical Communist trade fair is offered by the one that was held in Communist territory in Leipzig in March 1957. There, the Soviet Bloc pavilion, covering about 10 hectares, was filled with an array of gleaming machines and the observer was struck by the lack of consumer goods. That reputable Swiss newspaper, the Zuercher Zeitung, commented on it in this manner: "The discrepancy between Western fairs and the Leipzig Fair is striking. At the former, the economy, the individual merchant, conditions and economic relations are decisive. At the latter, the State, the functionary, the plan and rigid norms are the rule. At Western fairs, businessmen deal with businessmen. At Leipzig, it is the State functionaries who govern all."

The dearth of consumer goods and the disregard for the desires of the people are the result of a well-defined policy which, over the years, has had a profound effect which runs counter to all the preachings of Communist dogma. Because, at the present stage of its development, the government will not release enough productive power for the production of consumer goods, it deliberately prices what there is so high that few can afford them. This is nothing less than a disguised form of rationing, despite Mr. Mikoyan's recent statements that there is no rationing in Russia. The percentage of profit of consumer goods is several hundred percent, and profits from this source give the government not less than 60 percent of its total revenue.

Let us examine the cost in the Soviet Union of a few articles of common consumption (the reader can make his own comparison with Argentine prices for the same articles). A good blanket, for instance, costs \$35, while a pair of rayon stockings sell for about \$2.50. A pair of men's dress shoes are priced at \$48, while a pair for his wife are about \$50. Tea towels are 80 cents each and a child's dress costs \$21. A one-burner electric plate costs about \$20 and the quality is shoddy.

Insignificant items that are within the reach of virtually anybody in the West are astronomically high in the Bloc. A medium-sized chocolate bar costs well over \$3 and a pack of cigarettes, 87 cents. A fountain pen, of mediocre quality, sells for \$14 and an electric light bulb for 57 cents. A pair of fleece-lined boots have been priced at \$212.

As a result of these high prices, goods that we in the West consider commonplace necessities have become true luxury items in Russia, and can only be afforded by the well-paid Party functionaries, bureaucrats and plant managers who now form the "upper class" in Communist society.

The Communists evidently feel that in trade fairs they have an effective propaganda weapon which can be used to convince those who view their displays to accept them at face value. However, closer examination, as we have shown, proves that the trade fair is nothing but a facade and that the plethora of merchandise displayed there has been created solely for the foreign market. Behind the Iron Curtain consumer goods have been deliberately placed out of reach of the ordinary citizen who is thus deprived of the opportunity to become owner of at least part of the fruit of his labors.