NATIONAL SHARE-CROPPERS’ WEEK IS BEING observed this week, and the event serves to remind us that for all its efforts in behalf of the farmer the Administration has made no progress in alleviating the terrible conditions which afflict these marginal thousands in the great valley of the Mississippi. The Workers’ Defense League, which is sponsoring Share-Croppers’ Week, states that a recent survey shows that evictions last year affected 500,000 families and that 85 per cent of those evicted have been unable to find other employment or crops for this year. Meanwhile persecution of the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union continues, and the cost of defending its members in court actions is increasing. The remarkable government film, “The River,” now currently on view at various theaters, shows the genesis and development of the conditions that have produced the share-cropper problem. Such “propaganda” may eventually force the nation to solve it. But in the meantime the share-croppers, with a cash income of $200 a year and often much less, continue to pile up a national liability in malnutrition and poverty, while the union must somehow meet the bills incurred in its courageous fight for ordinary civil liberties in the planter states.

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PREASSUMABLY SEEKING TO HEAD OFF, OR buy off, opposition from the Catholic church, the President’s Advisory Committee on Education has committed a perilous blunder. It has marred a notable report by recommending allocation of federal funds to parochial and other non-public schools. Nevertheless the report is an impressive summons for Congressional action to save public education. Some months ago the National Education Association estimated that nearly 3,000,000 children of school age are deprived of any educational facilities. It was shown that in twelve states teachers’ salaries average less than $750 a year. The tenor of these findings is dismally confirmed by the committee’s report, which calls for a six-year program of federal aid. Urging an appropriation of $85,000,000 spread over that period, the group acknowledges that this sum is “undoubtedly small when compared with real need.” That the appropriation is inadequate should not be forgotten, but it is at least a hopeful springboard. As for the traditional cry that such appropriations mean “federal domination” and the end of democracy in our schools, the answer lies in vigilance over the execution of the program. Democracy will not be saved by the slow death of free education—or by the resurrection of any identity between church and state.

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STANLEY M. ISAACS, BOROUGH PRESIDENT OF Manhattan, is a loyal Republican; Simon W. Gerson was a reporter on the Communist Daily Worker. In naming Gerson to his staff, Isaacs paid generous tribute to an individual’s ability. His action has been denounced as reckless defiance of law—which it is not—and as sinister capitulation to Moscow—which should tax even the most reactionary imagination. With the Communist Party recognized as legal, it is plain that Gerson’s technical eligibility is beyond dispute. What remains important is the pattern of attack which has been fashioned by the American Legion, the Catholic church, and all the professional foes of the New Deal—local and national. It occurs in a city where liberal and labor forces have registered momentous election victories. It is fostered by agencies which have been traditionally indiscriminate in their assaults upon minority opinion. If reaction forces the ousting of Gerson, the crusade will widen to include other progressives in office. In that light Mr. Isaacs’s refusal to yield is as vital as it is impressive. When a Republican defends a Communist appointee, at the risk of his own political fortunes, it is not merely news. To the ScripSy-Howard World Telegram it is Revolution. To us it is a dramatic assertion of faith in the essence of democratic procedure. It is a dignified rebuke to those who hate Mr. Gerson less than they despise democracy. We hope that Mr. Isaacs will sit tight until his critics grow weary of their own voices.

**Russian Tragedy, Act III**

The trial of Bukharin and his fellow-oppositionists has broken about the ears of the world like the detonation of a bomb. One can hear the cracking of liberal hopes, of the dream of anti-fascist unity; of a whole system of revolutionary philosophy. The reaction in this country has been much more severe than in the case of the other public trials or of the purge in general. We are too far away from the center of infection to have become immunized, and the horror deepens as the process of extermination goes on. The probable innocence or guilt of the defendants still absorbs the largest share of interest, but we detect in published and private discussion a shift of attention to the wider implications of the trial—its relation to the European crisis, its effect on revolutionary theory and practice. One of the unfortunate by-products of the case has been the encouragement of isolationist sentiment. It has played directly into the hands of those who are looking for arguments to prove the futility of expecting united resistance to war and fascist ambitions. This too is natural; and it reinforces our conviction that the international effect of the trial may be even more serious and far-reaching than the objective facts warrant.

There is acute danger of a split between Socialists and Communists in France, a split that would doom the united front and lead to ends one scarcely dares to contemplate. Hitler, today, is discussing the fate of Europe with Neville Henderson; can anyone doubt that a factor in his calculations is the drama under way in the Hall of Nobles in Moscow, and the probable response to it of the Western world? In Czechoslovakia, in Loyalist Spain, in China, wherever democracy is threatened, the significance of the trial will be anxiously weighed. In varying degrees every one of these nations bases its day-by-day foreign policy on its estimate of Russian stability.
The Moscow trial is a world issue as well as the culmination of an inner struggle. Under the pressure of that struggle Stalin has risked losing the confidence of those nations and groups on which the security of the world and of Russia itself must depend.

It is important to know why this trial should mark a turning point. The reasons are not all rooted in logic. The crimes charged against the men now under indictment are not different in kind from those charged in the earlier trials. The list of defendants may include more names favorably known to more people. (When one looks at Bukharin's picture and reads his words, the whole past of the revolution clamors for defense and vindication.) But essentially the story is the same. If it is difficult to believe charges which range from a conspiracy to dismember the Soviet Union to a successful plot to cause Maxim Gorki to catch a cold, we find it equally difficult to believe that the Soviet government invented these nightmare crimes in order, as Trotsky suggests, to restore "shaken world confidence in Stalin's 'justice'"! One's mind moves, as in the previous trials, from the inherent improbability of particular offenses attributed to particular men and the psychological obscurities of the confessions, to the undoubted fact that terror and plotting and espionage have become a commonplace in the Socialist fatherland. And in the end one abandons the attempt to render final judgment when the materials for judging are so obviously out of reach. The tragic spectacle in Moscow leaves only one thing certain—a system of law that allows the guilt of men accused of grave offenses to remain forever in doubt is a travesty of justice.

These same elements of uncertainty and horror were present in the two earlier trials. The reasons for the more ominous aspect of the current one are to be sought elsewhere. The purge has had a cumulative effect. The new trial tragically confirms the evidence of mortal conflict among the most responsible leaders of the revolution and of the government. And it goes far beyond the other trials in the scope of its charges. It indict the whole past of the revolution itself. It proves that disaffection has spread through all the important branches of the state apparatus. It indicates a plot in the army of sufficient dimensions to warrant plans for a military coup led by the most important generals. Accept the official position, assume the guilt of the accused, and you are forced to a conviction that the government of the Soviet Union has, from the start of the revolution, been riddled with conspiracy. Assume the innocence of the defendants, and the government itself is convicted of an even more monstrous crime. Assume them neither all innocent nor all guilty of all the specific charges—as reason tempts one to assume—and one is still forced to acknowledge a situation in which opposition has been met by repression, repression countered by conspiracy, and conspiracy fought by terror to the final demoralization of the whole government apparatus.

It is for these reasons that the "explanations" of Communists and of Trotskyites alike explain so little. They assume more knowledge than is available and ignore the elements which tend to blur the neat partisan outlines of their pictures. Even a partisan must occasionally ask himself whether the tragedy in Moscow can really be laid to individual perfidy, or whether the issue is not the result of a historic process that, with impersonal logic, is slowly strangling the very forces that set it in motion. The Soviet government was born of inevitable violence and was maintained by means of terror and military force against incredible odds. Would it have survived civil war and foreign invasion and the struggle to achieve a working economic order if it had refused to use force against its enemies? We are certain that it would not. But dictatorship—intrenched behind a powerful army, adept in the use of spying and police terror, conditioned to fear opposition—tended to solidify, not to fade. Repressive measures were easy to justify in the sacred name of the revolution itself. Repression came to be identified with justice; opposition with treason. And presently treason became the only possible expression of opposition, and conspiracy took the place of open political action. This much is evident whatever the truth of specific charges against specific men.

We are not adopting a cut-and-dried doctrine of inevitability. Many shifts of circumstance might have altered the dismal course of recent Russian history. A leader like Lenin might have encouraged the growth of proletarian democracy from the roots of party democracy. Even under Stalin a different course might have been laid had not the rise of Hitler created in the Soviet Union a psychological state of war. This in its turn produced, first, a desperate pressure to speed up industrialization, second, a vast arms program, and, third, a universal atmosphere of suspicion and overcharged patriotism. Since this development coincided with, and helped to aggravate, profound political differences already existing and denied any open channels of expression, the result was certain.

Out of the anxiety and shock of the present trial will come, we believe, a new determination on the part of political thinkers to examine the premises of revolutionary doctrine. The Russian dictatorship has challenged the whole theory of dictatorship and demanded an honest revaluation of its own history and achievement.

What remains? One hears no rumors of internal unrest in the Soviet Union, despite the political cannibalism of its ruling group. The solid material achievements of the revolution still stand. So do the need and desire of the Soviet government for peace, and its opposition to fascist aggression, East and West. But the effect of the trial is not to be measured in such tangible terms. It will be measured in the degree to which faith is reluctantly surrendered by left groups everywhere, in the confusion of contemporary revolutionary thinking. It will depend upon the estimate of Russia's real strength arrived at in the foreign offices of other states. It will depend upon the future policies of the Soviet government itself. Not the next few days in Moscow, but the coming weeks in European diplomacy and the next decade in the development of radical thought and action, will determine the real significance of the Soviet trial.