
As to “Red Terror”

by Will Herberg

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Unsigned editorial attributed to editor Will Herberg.

The tears shed by sundry individuals over the execution of threescore or so White Guards, monarchists, and varied enemies of the Soviet Union are in themselves most unimportant. What is, however, occasionally significant is the pedigree of tear shedders.

It is in this light that we ask our readers to turn to Norman Thomas’ “Timely Topics” in *The New Leader* of December 15th [1934]. Hardly having had a moment’s rest after his latest masterpiece, “Human Exploitation,” Norman Thomas turns with great energy and even greater fury to the “Soviet Terror.” This leader of “militant” socialism in the United States is heartbroken over the fact that the Soviet government acted with such promptness and vigor in disposing of some of its blood-enemies. It is very peculiar that when Kirov was murdered neither the *New York Times* nor *The New Leader* nor *The Wall Street Journal* nor Simon Strunsky nor Norman Thomas burst a single blood vessel over this dastardly crime against the USSR. However, this is only one individual. “Why get excited, if you are a revolutionist, over the death of one individual? With the Soviet government it is almost four score individuals.”

Here’s the rub to this line of reasoning by the above galaxy. To have gotten excited over the murder of Kirov would mean to get excited over a loss by the Soviet government, by the Russian people, of one of its most trusted and capable workers. To get aroused to white-heat over the in-

stant meting out of full and irrevocable justice to the White Guard assassins and to the imperialist spies would mean to get aroused over the enemies of the Socialist Soviet Republic. That’s why silence in the case of Kirov and raucous anger in the case of Soviet justice.

Nor is it an accident that Norman Thomas is instantly ready to close his eyes to the danger of imperialist war against the Soviet Union, to the multiplying and intensifying plots within and outside of the Soviet Union by the Hitler government, and, instead, seeks to find the cause of Kirov’s assassination in an inner-Party controversy. Thomas betrays woeful lack of the slightest knowledge of the situation in the Soviet Union today when he says (perhaps on the advice of some of his latest recruits to the Socialist Party) that: “There seems to be some evidence that behind the assassination was an intra-Party fight of considerable political and economic importance... All this looks uncomfortably like Hitler’s terrible bloodbath of June 30th.” This is the reasoning of a “pure” bourgeois democrat, pure in the abstract but violently anti-working class in the concrete.

The proletarian dictatorship of the Soviet Union is to Norman Thomas just another dictatorship like the fascist dictatorship of Hitler Germany. At these conclusions we are not surprised. But let the workers in the Socialist Party draw another conclusion from this. Given Norman Thomas’ loyalty to and faith in “genuine” and not “bogus” capitalist democracy, one cannot but be op-

posed in principle to a working class dictatorship as well as a capitalist-class fascist dictatorship. Such pseudo-socialists can only be for the so-called democratic rule of the bourgeoisie, which is, in substance and in reality, only another type of exploiting class dictatorship over the workers and poorer farmers.

Even the most politically purblind might be expected to see that the assassination of Kirov was not tied up with any economic difficulties in the Soviet Union or any political difficulties inside the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Soviet economic situation has been improved considerably. With all criticisms and shortcomings that can be registered in the evaluation of inner-Party life in the Soviet Union taken for granted, it must be recognized that the factional struggles in the Party are over, at least for the present and for some time. Witness the decision of the 17th Russian Party Congress for the extension and not the reduction of Party democracy. Besides, given an improvement in the economic situation, given increasing proof of the correctness of the general line of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in the USSR where

would there be a basis for such a sharpened political inner-Party fight to reach manifestations of a kind not reached in the Soviet Party even in the most bitter days of the most violent factional struggles of the past? Russian Bolshevik Party history does not show a single political assassination in its factional struggles which have been numerous and bitter. All assassinations (Volodarsky, Uritsky, the attempt on Lenin's life) were made by outright opponents of the Soviet regime.

Thomas and his colleagues are to be condemned in the most unmistakable terms by all honest socialists for their attempt to cover up the trail of the imperialist right and its hired assassins banded against the Soviet regime. Every class-conscious worker can only hail the swift and complete justice accorded the culprits in the Soviet Union. Very likely if Judge Panken were to be in charge of the trial of these sworn enemies of the Soviet Union they would be given a trial more fair in the eyes of Thomas and O Neal. We, as class-conscious workers, as Communists, are more than satisfied with the accurate and complete justice instead of the bogus democratic justice that our Social Democratic tear-shedders are demanding.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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