

CHAPTER 6

"BLOODY STATISTICS"

1920

*-On the ruins of the old - we will build the new.
-With a sword we bring not a sword, but peace
to the world.*

Revolutionary Rhetoric

Part C

Latsis didn't publish his statistics for 1920 or thereafter. And I no longer maintained my archive, for I was myself under arrest in a Bolshevik prison with the sword of Bolshevik justice hanging over me.

Capital punishment was abolished once again in February 1920. And Zinoviev, speaking in Galle, Germany, boldly said that executions stopped in Russia after the defeat of Denikin. Martov, speaking at the congress of German independents on October 15th made a correction right away: Zinoviev neglected to mention that the executions stopped for a very short time¹ then resumed on a "terrifying scale." Knowing CheKa, it's doubtful they really stopped. Just take a quick look at the process of amnesty, for example.

The following inscriptions could be found among those made by the condemned on the walls of CheKa's Special Unit in Moscow: "The night capital punishment was abolished became a night of blood." Every amnesty meant new mass executions for the prisons. The excommers tried to dispatch their victims as quickly as possible. There were times when, through the night, as the presses were printing the morning papers that would carry the announcement of amnesty, mass executions by firing squad were being carried out in the prisons. Those who often point at the frequent issuance of the amnesty acts by the soviet government need to keep that in mind.² The

1 If they did at all.

2 I believe A. V. Peshehonov should be more careful in his brochure "Why Have I Not Emigrated?" where he softened Bolshevik reality in his rhetoric. "Despite Bolshevik cruelty, - reads p. 8, - to do them justice, most of the inmates do not languish in jail for too long - at least not as long as their sentence says." You bet! I know of a sentence to 120 years in prison! I know of a life-time sentence by CheKa (a temporary institution according the Bolsheviks). There is lots of savagery in Bolshevik "justice." Does Peshehonov not know that thousands are awaiting trial for

nights before an anticipated amnesty were oh, so worrisome for everyone who spent time in prison in those days. I remember those nights in 1920 in Bootyrskaya prison before the amnesty announced on the anniversary of the October revolution. They could not keep up transporting the naked bodies of people, shot in the back of the head, to Kalitnikov cemetery. That was in Moscow and the same was in the regions.

An article about Ekaterinodar prison in CheKa Almanac reads:

Despite the amnesty for the anniversary of the October revolution, the executions were carried out as usual in Ekaterinodar CheKa and Special Department, but that did not stand in the way of the staff political writers publishing a number of articles in the local paper "The Red Flag." They cynically lied about the humanity and mercy of the soviet government, which announced the amnesties and supposedly applied them from time to time to their enemies.³ It happened later too. On the eve of the congress of Communist International in 1921 Seventy were executed in Bootyrskaya prison for the most amazing accusations: for bribes, for abusing food stamps, for pilfering. The political prisoners said that it was a sacrifice to the Comintern gods, while the career criminals rejoiced: there was going to be an amnesty, so those undesirables would be promptly executed, and the rest would be released in the name of Comintern.⁴

"The night capital punishment was abolished became a night of blood." We have enough testimony substantiating that claim. It became an unwritten rule that the time before the periodic abolition or relaxing of capital punishment became a time of escalated executions without any other external cause.

*Izvestiya*⁵ published a decree signed by Russia CheKa chair Felix Dzerzhinsky and addressed to "all regional CheKa":

The defeat of Yudenich, Kolchak and Denikin, the capture of Rostov, Novocherkassk and Krasnoyarsk, the capture of the "Supreme Governor"⁶ have created new conditions for combating counter-revolution.

The defeat of the counter-revolution's standing armies undermines the hopes and calculations of the counter-revolutionary groups in Soviet Russia to overthrow the government of the workers and peasants by way of conspiracies, riots and terrorist activity.

years without any court order, and on the petty accusations or without any - just as the "counter-revolutionaries" to-be.

3 CheKa Almanac, p. 227

4 CheKa Almanac, p. 102

5 15 January 1920

6 Admiral Kolchak. Trans.

The worker and peasant government was forced to use the most efficient methods of suppressing espionage, sabotage and rebellious acts of the Entente agents and the monarchy generals in its employ, serving on the home front of the Red Army while the Soviet Republic fought a defensive war against Entente's counter-revolutionary troops.

The defeat of counter-revolution inside and outside, the crushing of the largest counter-revolutionary conspiracies and bandits and the subsequent strengthening of the soviet government has allowed us to discontinue the application of capital punishment (i.e. execution by firing squad) to the enemies of soviet power.

The revolutionary proletariat and revolutionary government of Soviet Russia are pleased to acknowledge that the capture of Rostov and the imprisonment of Kolchak provide an opportunity to lay off the weapons of terror.

Only renewed attempts by Entente to destabilize the soviet government and the peaceful laboring of workers and peasants for the establishment of the socialist economy by armed intervention or financial aid to the monarchy generals can force us to return to the methodology of terror.

Thus responsibility for the return of the soviet government to the cruel methods of red terror lies squarely on the governments and ruling classes of the Entente members and their allies among the Russian capitalists.

Also the Extreme Commissions have an opportunity to focus on combating the basic internal enemy of the moment - economic decline, speculation, abuses of power - thus assisting economic recovery with all means available and removing all obstacles created by sabotage, lack of discipline, and malice..

As per above, Russia CheKa ordered:

1. To discontinue capital punishment (execution by firing squad) by the orders of Russia CheKa and all of its local detachments immediately.
2. To assign a task to comrade Dzerzhinski to apply to the Soviet of People's Commissars and RCAC for the complete abolishment of capital punishment not only by the orders of the Extreme Commissions, but by the verdicts of the district, regional and supreme tribunals.
3. To announce of this coming into force by wire...

We did not celebrate in Moscow, as we remembered well reading the articles proclaiming the end of terror just a year earlier. Here is a quote from an article by a certain Norov in the *Moscow Evening Izvestiya*.⁷ Denial of the power of execution to CheKa was the topic.

The Russian proletariat is victorious. It no longer needs terror - that sharp, but dangerous weapon of last resort. *It is even harmful, for it scares and disperses those segments who would otherwise follow the revolution.* That is why the proletariat abandons the weapon of terror, picking up the weapon of justice and law. (Emphasis in the original.)

...We remembered, how the Kiev Soviet festively announced back in January 1919: "capital punishment is abolished within its jurisdiction".

It was supposedly a CheKa initiative to abolish capital punishment on January 15, 1920. We knew full well that it was not CheKa - it resisted all the way, and when the decision was made anyway, Dzerzhinski insisted that, officially, it should be announced as a CheKa initiative. Meanwhile CheKa rushed to dispatch the remaining victims. More than 300 people were executed by firing squad by all accounts.

A prominent figure among the left socialist-revolutionaries - Izmailovich, imprisoned at the time, said:

The night before the publication of the decree for the abolition of capital punishment, 120 people were taken from Bootyrskaya prison and executed by the order of CheKa... The condemned somehow found out about the decree, scattered and begged for mercy referring to the decree, but both the resisting and the compliant were slaughtered like cattle... This funeral will become a



Figure 6.2: Exhumation of the mass grave of the red terror victims.

historic event too!⁸

One of the authors of the articles in CheKa Almanac, imprisoned those days in Moscow CheKa, testified:⁹

The decree had been enacted, even printed in the holiday papers (by Julian calendar), but 160 prisoners from various detention centers, prisons, and concentration camps, who were considered impossible to keep alive, were executed by firing squad in the yard of the Moscow CheKa. Some of them were already sentenced to prison terms and had served half of them, for example, Hvalinski, from the Lockhart trial, sentenced to just 5 years even in that cruel case. The executions continued 13 and 14 January. A wounded man was sent to the prison hospital from Moscow CheKa with a wound to the jaw and tongue. He explained with hand gestures that he was being executed, but did not die and was only wounded and considered himself saved, once he was not finished off and sent to a hospital surgery ward. He was beaming, his eyes were happy and he could not believe his luck. We did not know his name or file number. But by night fall he was taken away with the bandage on his face and finished off...

400 people were executed in St. Petersburg on the eve of the abolishment of capital punishment and even the night after. And 52 in Saratov, according to a private letter, and so on.

After capital punishment was abolished, the power to execute was factually left to CheKa. There was a clever caveat: "The Kiev regional CheKa - read for example "Izvestiya" 5 February - has received a clarification by the chair of Russia CheKa by wire, that the decree on abolishment of capital punishment does not apply to the territories, subordinate to the fronts. Those territories reserve the power of execution to the revolutionary tribunals. Kiev and the region belong to the territory subordinate to the fronts." And with incredible cynicism the Special Department of CheKa distributed on 15 April an instruction to the chairs of the Special Departments of the local CheKa: "In light of the abolishment of capital punishment, all those arrested for capital offenses should be sent to the territories with ongoing military operations as the decree does not apply there." And I remember how one of the arrested in February 1920 on the charges of counter-revolution was told by the investigator: "we cannot execute you here, but we can send you to the front." Incidentally, the "front" was not necessarily a territory with ongoing military operations.¹⁰

But soon Che Ka would not have to resort to those Jesuit tricks (however I doubt it had to actually resort to them, as everything was carried out in secrecy and in the unlikely case they were ever

8 *Kremlin Behind Bars*, p. 112

9 *CheKa Almanac* "A prison of Russia Extreme Commission," p. 147

10 A Czech socialist Psenicka, visiting Moscow at the time, stated in his report in Prague, that several dozens of the sentenced to death have been sent to the fronts ("The Latest News" 30 June)

necessary, it was seldom).¹¹ *Izvestiya* once announced, as if forgetting capital punishment had been abolished, that 521 were executed by firing squad between January and May--the tribunals executing 176 and 131 executed by Moscow CheKa alone.

Capital punishment was officially restored no later than May 24th due to the Russian - Polish war. It has not been abolished since. A decree by Trotsky on June 16, 1920, is very peculiar in that respect, if compared with the Bolshevik rhetoric of 1917:

1. Any wretch who advocates a retreat, any deserter who refuses to obey an order, will be executed.
2. Any soldier who abandons a position without orders will be executed.
3. Anyone who drops a rifle or sells any issued item will be executed.

...But the Russian Congress of the Soviets decreed "capital punishment, restored in the army by Kerensky, is abolished"...¹² An orgy of executions started in the near-front territory and not only there. A riot by the red garrison in Smolensk in September was quelled with extreme cruelty. Some estimated that 1200 soldiers were executed in addition to the other categories of the rioters.¹³

The central papers were silent about the executions of CheKa,¹⁴ but they printed information on the executions by the special military-revolutionary tribunals. And that official data is frightening: between May 22 and June 22--600; June - July--898; July - August --1,183; August - September--1,206. The information was published the following month. On October 17, "Izvestiya" announced 1,206 executions for September and included the charges. They were typical from the point of view of justifying "red terror": for espionage - 3, for treason - 185, for refusing an order - 14, for rioting - 65, for counter-revolution - 59, for desertion - 467, for looting - 160, for possession of weapons and failure to turn in - 23, for fights and intoxication - 20, for abuse of power - 181.

It is often difficult for a mere mortal to understand Bolshevik justice. For example, on November

¹¹ "The Star of Kharkov", 7 June 1910

¹² Of course, the executions on the fronts during the civil war were constantly carried out before Trotsky's order. "The ordinary red army men were executed like dogs," said Ms. Larissa Raisner, repeating in her essay on the events in Sviyazhsk in August 1918 the views of the red army men themselves. ("Proletarian Revolution" No. 18 - 19, 185). 27 communist officials, who escaped Sviyazhsk city during the offensive of the "whites" were executed as an example to the rest of the population.

¹³ "The Latest News", 20 October.

¹⁴ Though there were such publications from time to time. For example No. 206 of "Izvestiya" published a list of the executed by Moscow Che Ka after 10 trials of white espionage, abuse of food stamps etc. Sixteen people were executed, including Dr. Mudrov, princess Shirinsky-Shihmatova, the Dovgiyi husband and wife, etc.

12, "Izvestiya" reported that between February and September 1920 the revolutionary tribunals of the Armed Guard (the home front troops, essentially an army of CheKa) executed 283 people. We have a copy of one such verdict, published in Moscow "Izvestiya" on November 18. The Supreme Military-Revolutionary tribunal of the Armed Guard sentenced to execution by firing squad an engineer named Trunov, the manager of administration of the Moscow Regional Military Engineering Service, S. S. Mihno, and the manager of Artillery Supplies of Heavy Special Purpose Artillery, N. S. Mihno, for abuse of power. "The sentence is final and cannot be appealed in any way."

One can get lost in these bloody statistics, as the blood doesn't drip, but gushes up from the ground in mighty rivers whenever life in Soviet Russia is disturbed one way or another. In Summer 1920, 20 doctors were executed in Moscow on charges of aiding draft dodgers. At the same time 500 people were arrested for allegedly bribing the doctors, and the soviet newspapers, publishing the names of the executed doctors, announced that the same fate awaited the patients too. An eyewitness imprisoned in Bootyrskaya prison at that time said that a majority "could not believe until the very last moment that they were going to be executed by firing squad." Officially, 120 were executed, but, in fact, it was many more than that.

There was unrest among the troops stationed in Moscow in Autumn 1920. The rumors of mass executions in CheKa reached the Moscow residents; foreign social-revolutionary press¹⁵ published information of 200 - 300 executions. "The Latest News"¹⁶ wrote about 900 executions in October; 118 in December. A reporter with "Will of Russia" stated 5,000 people were executed in 1920 (the Autumn of 1920 was when the "conspiracies" associated with the Gen. Yudenich offensive were investigated).

An article titled "In Moscow" by Y. K-iy, printed in "The Latest News"¹⁷ quoted a source who arrived from Russia with news of an absolutely monstrous act: the execution of women infected with syphilis, arrested in anti-prostitution street raids. I heard about something similar, but I couldn't verify the persistent rumors circulating in Moscow about the executions of the victims of glanders.¹⁸ There were many things never before imagined in this world--things so monstrous as to be thought impossible--that actually occurred under this regime.

15 "Will of Russia", 21 November.

16 18 February 1921.

17 24 June 1920

18 British press wrote about executions of the children succumbed to glanders. "The Latest News", 1922, No. 656.