

THE NEW SOVIET ELECTIONS

By

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Twice in recent months countrywide elections have been held in the USSR under the conditions of secret ballot, universal, direct and equal suffrage guaranteed by the federal constitution of 1936 and the republic constitutions of 1937. The significance of these elections seems to lie not in elements of contest but rather in the campaign of political education for the citizenry. There were other features of note in the elections and while it would be foolhardy to dogmatize about the permanence of any of them, it is instructive to examine what seem to be the basic characteristics of the new type of election.

In June of this year the eleven union republics and the twenty-two autonomous republics of the Soviet Union for the first time under their new constitutions held elections to their respective unicameral parliaments. The Supreme Soviet of each republic is elected for four years and is its sole legislative organ. These elections were treated in the Soviet Union as no less important than the election to the bicameral Supreme Soviet of the USSR in December 1937, the first to be held under the new federal constitution. In fact the popular slogan during the republic elections was "to conduct them better and in a more organized fashion than the previous election."

The political structure of the Soviet Union is an expression of its nationality policy; the division into republics and regions is largely on the basis of nationality. The names of a few of the units are indicative of the claim to give the various peoples the opportunity for political as well as economic and cultural development: The Uzbek SSR, the Armenian SSR, the Moldavian ASSR, the Volga-German ASSR, the Jewish Autonomous Region. The structure of the Soviet State is such, it is

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maintained, as to provide the nationalities with opportunity to progress from one form of self-government to another in accordance with concrete conditions. The progression of Kirgizia, for instance, from an autonomous region, to an autonomous republic, to a union republic, is cited to show the increasing economic and cultural maturity of the nationalities and the correspondingly dynamic nature of the political structure.

New Class Composition

Some ten years ago it would not have been possible to conduct elections by secret ballot amongst the various nationalities. The Bolsheviks had not yet conquered the illiteracy and the low level of political development of the multi-national population inherited from the Tsars. Nor was universal and equal suffrage considered possible at that time. Sharp class lines reflected an economy only partially socialist. Urban representation in the soviets had been made, accordingly, between two and three times greater than the rural. But two Five-Year Plans have seen an expanded school system, the collectivization of the countryside, and industrialization reaching into the steppe and the desert. Giving the peasantry now an equal vote with the workers did not mean a weakening of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, the Communists declared, for the peasantry was a new, a collective farm peasantry, whose interests were no longer in antagonistic relation to those of the working class, the former proletariat. "The working class and its Government have won such prestige and confidence on the part of the masses of the peasantry and other sections of the working population that there is no longer any need of restricting the rights of any portion of the citizenry," declared Molotov in a speech on the draft of the federal constitution (July 1936). The actual elections bore out this confidence, for while many kolkhoz members were sent to the Supreme Soviets there was no attempt on the part of rural areas to use their increased representation to secure spokesmen for "farm" interests. The collectivization of farming and the network of schools and machine-tractor stations had been a far step in lessening the political distance between town and country.

The intelligentsia, a new intelligentsia with over 80 per cent of its members recruited from the workers and peasants and trained in Soviet schools, "must serve the people, for there are no longer any exploiting classes" for it to serve. Disfranchisement of particular groups as a weapon against their open hostility was no longer necessary; it was now possible to introduce the "universal suffrage *without any restrictions*" which Lenin in 1919 saw as a desirable possibility for the future. Every citizen of 18 or over, regardless of race, religion, sex, education, domicile, social origin, property status and past activities is entitled to a single vote, according to the Constitution of the USSR. Women and Red Army men are specifically granted the right to elect and be elected. The insane and persons convicted by court of law to sentences including deprivation of electoral rights are the only ones denied the vote.¹

To avail himself of his right to vote the elector in the USSR is not required to register. The local soviets are made responsible for compiling alphabetical lists of those eligible to vote which must be posted for public inspection thirty days before election. The list can include nothing besides names, ages, and addresses. When some districts in the Crimean ASSR in drawing up the lists of voters added a column for literacy and another for nationality, the Central Executive Committee of the republic took steps against such violations of the electoral law. The compilation of the lists of voters was not an easy task. In Moscow, for instance, there were several thousand individuals all with the same surname, Ivanov, many of whom had identical given names and patronymics. Only their ages and addresses distinguished them. Even this was uncertain identification for the same difficulties that hampered the work of the census of 1937 were operative here: many streets in a given city had the same name, houses often lacked numbers and boundaries were sometimes uncertain. For these reasons the elector was urged to check up on the accuracy of the list, not only for his own name but, as a matter of social duty in the preparatory election work, for all errors he might notice, whether of the improper exclusion of his neighbor's name or

1. Administrative withdrawal of election rights was thus at an end. A. Vishinsky, State's Attorney, also cautioned that insanity must be legally-scientifically declared and not depend merely on the opinion of acquaintances. "The Election Law of the RSFSR," *Pravda*, May 5, 1938.

the improper inclusion of one deprived of electoral rights. The work of drawing up the lists for the republic elections was considerably lightened by reference to the lists compiled for the federal election.

The magnitude of the task of inducting a recently literate population, familiar only with voting by show of hands, into the mysteries of ballots, booths, and boxes had also lessened considerably by the time of the republic elections. The population was experienced by virtue of the federal election. It had learned that to write in "Stalin" on a ballot in a district where he was not a candidate was an undesired expression of enthusiasm, for it resulted in a "spoiled ballot" and, by decreasing figures on how many had voted for the candidates, weakened the picture which the Soviet Union wished to present to the world of its "moral and political unity." Not only the electorate but many of the thousands of agitators and members of election commissions were experienced. They could not avoid learning of their mistakes in the federal election; the daily press had reported instances of organizational error, of overstepping of authority, of bureaucratic attitudes, of denial of rights.

A Campaign of Education

In February and March, 1938, the Central Executive Committee of each republic met to adopt its "Rules on Elections to the Supreme Soviet." Speakers stressed the conformity of their electoral law with the federal electoral law and with the federal and republic constitutions. The "Rules" adopted in each republic differed only as to the number of inhabitants to be included in an electoral district. The speeches at these meetings were a forecast of the scope of subject matter to be discussed in the ensuing meetings and in the study circles that made of the vast election campaign *an intensive two-months course for the Soviet citizen in the domestic and foreign affairs of the Soviet Union*. International relations, industrial developments, agricultural achievements, cultural expansions, the development of the formerly suppressed peoples—all these, interlarded with criticism of lagging departments and leaders and with warnings against traitors, made up a substantial dish

in an educational repast to which the population's new literacy and sharpened political appetite prepared it to do justice.

"The election campaign has done one thing for all of us," observed a collective farmer, "it made us pause and take notice of all the great changes in our country for the last twenty years, and particularly the great transformation in our own lives. Ordinarily one is kept too busy with everyday work to look back and observe his own progress. The election campaign made us do it." This comment on the federal election was echoed in the republic campaigns.

Like the federal election, the republic elections were the occasion for the appearance in the press of articles, loaded with statistics, on the growth of well-being in this republic or that. An article on the Ukraine or Tadzhikistan "on the eve of the elections" would turn out to be a recital of the injustices it had suffered before the revolution in contrast with a detailed account of present industrial, agricultural, and cultural developments. It was a public stock-taking which displayed the Bolshevik view of the credit and debit side of the ledger and which served as material for lectures and discussions in the hundreds of thousands of circles (*kruzhki*) which had been set up among hunters and fishermen, in factories and on farms, for the study of the constitutions, the election laws, and other election materials. Floods of election literature, copies of the constitutions, brochures written in simple question-answer form, reprints of famous speeches, were poured out over the land in many languages and priced encouragingly for the use of the study circles. "More than seventy-two million copies of books and pamphlets have been published this year in the RSFSR in connection with the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR," states a Soviet newspaper. There were 50,000 copies of a "Diagram of the State Structure of the RSFSR." Advertisements of reading materials in newspapers declared: "Every elector should know the constitution and the electoral law of his republic."

Housewives were encouraged to start wall newspapers in their apartment houses, to join the vast "army" of Party and non-Party propagandists. They heard once more Lenin's words on woman's forsaking her narrow drudgery to participate in

social enterprise and in the work of the state apparatus. They were stimulated by the large number of women candidates for the Supreme Soviets. In many republics women make up a fourth of the parliament, in some the proportion is even larger. While in the federal Supreme Soviet women constitute only 16 per cent of the membership, a large proportion when compared with governments outside the Soviet Union, in the Tadzhik Republic 30 per cent of the Supreme Soviet is made up of women. The figure is large in other eastern republics as well, marking a signal victory for Bolshevik efforts to emancipate the eastern woman from her serf-like status. Of course, there are many Russians and Ukrainians living in the eastern republics and some of the women elected are of these nationalities.

As in the previous election, parks were the center of much agitational activity. Lectures, meetings, consultation stands drew thousands. Nor was it "all work and no play." Concerts, films, museums, the radio, contests, and even airplanes were used to dramatize, to stimulate, to educate. A photography contest and a bicycle run in the federal campaign found their counterparts in the recent elections. The press played no small part in creating a heightened atmosphere. When the "Stalinist Constitution" was adopted, newspapers reported the voluntary surrender of many thieves who had been inspired by its clauses to expiate their sins and join in the new life. The federal election saw press reports that "individual farmers" had reacted to their study of the election law by joining the collective farms. Many of those who were active in the recent campaign are reported to have become candidates for membership in the Communist Party. In fact, campaign workers are regarded as a useful reservoir of Party material.

Not unexpected in a land that sees no divorce of economics and politics but rather the closest of connections between them, was the series of Stakhanov periods with which workers greeted the various stages of the election campaign.

The Campaign Workers

Because the educational-propaganda aspects are among the most significant characteristics of the Soviet elections, it is

worth inquiring who the campaign workers were, by what methods they accomplished their purpose, and what their activities will be in the future.

With the federal election, a new character appeared on the Soviet scene, the *doverennoe litso*, literally a trusted person—or, more understandably, a person to whom some responsibility has been entrusted, in this case the organization of mass political work. *Pravda*, in an editorial devoted to “this new remarkable figure of our days,” cites him as a product of the Soviet electoral system. This *delegated campaigner* is elected by the citizens in the same district pre-election conferences at which they consider candidates for deputy to the Supreme Soviet. To this individual they delegate authority to campaign for their candidates. While every citizen has the right of agitating for the candidates, the *delegated campaigner* does this in the name of the large body which chose him. He is an “official” electioneer. Moreover, he is an organizer of campaign workers. In one Moscow district during the federal election there were two or three *delegated campaigners* to forty campaign workers in each precinct. The *delegated campaigner* takes a leading position in the election campaign, making suggestions to the others, planning gatherings, and initiating lectures which are usually not limited to an account of the social-political views and activities of the candidates but are tied up with the successes achieved by the country as a whole. Many of the *delegated campaigners* who had worked during the December election continued their educational work in the succeeding months and were authorized to conduct agitation in the republic campaigns. Thousands of new ones were drawn into the work as the increased number of election districts and precincts demanded more of them. In one Moscow district alone, 179 *delegated campaigners* were put to work. The proportion of Party members to non-Party people entrusted with this work was usually about three to one.

The *delegated campaigners* were aided by the tens of thousands of campaign workers and propagandists who had volunteered and been drafted for work in the precincts. They were factory workers, students, farmers, housewives, both Party and non-Party, the majority of whom had been given

special training courses. Not all of them worked in their own community, as a factory or an institution would send propagandists to a collective farm whose patron (*shef*) it was. Campaign workers in the rural areas had to go out to the field camps to reach most of the adult population, since it was the season of year for cultivating winter crops and only children, old people, and mothers-to-be remained in the villages. The lectures, phonograph recordings, and field newspapers which were used were aimed not only at increasing the political literacy of the countryside but at stimulating productive efficiency as well.

Much work was carried on in the campaign center (*agit-punkt*) which was set up in most of the precincts and which was visited by electors interested in reading the election literature to be found there, listening to lectures, or taking part in the entertainment occasionally supplied. Campaign work was also carried to the elector's door. In the larger cities a worker might devote himself to a single apartment house. The statements of one such election campaign worker in a house of over 200 residents are revealing: "A campaign worker must be able to talk not only on constitutional rights, but also on a whole series of current and special topics. For example, I have given talks on International Women's Day, on the anniversary of the Paris Commune, on fascist intervention in Spain, Germany's seizure of Austria and other world developments. . . . Our efforts are directed toward drawing ever greater masses into active participation in community affairs, not only at election time but permanently. We strive to broaden cultural as well as political horizons, to discover and rouse the latent abilities of leadership and organization in all the people with whom we come into contact." His concrete results in the house, he recounted, included not only lasting friendships and invitations to tea, but a Red Cross study circle for women which he organized and a wall newspaper which a housewife started with articles on arranging a summer playground for the children of the house. Moreover, another housewife was encouraged to arrange a circulating library in the apartment house, drawing upon the factory library for books. And perhaps the most important achieve-

ment of all was showing "how the voters themselves can work to make public servants live up to their responsibilities," in this case by hastening the house management in its repair of the water supply.

It was thus not only the thousands of *delegated campaigners*, members of election commissions and other campaign workers who were to experience active participation in the governmental process during the campaign. It was regarded as a decided step towards the goal avowed by the Communists of "drawing new strata of the working masses into governing the State."

The value of the campaign workers, "activists" of the election, has been recognized. In *Pravda* it was urged that this type of "active group" become permanent, that the study circles organized by the "active group" be continued and others be formed. "Interesting lectures and discussions on international questions and questions of internal conditions, the current policies, on anti-religious themes, circles, excursions, issuing of wall newspapers, evenings of amateur entertainment, collective visits to the cinema and theatres—the whole arsenal of methods of Bolshevik propaganda must also be used in every degree in the future," declared a *Pravda* editorial. That the work of such "active groups" is not to be limited to periods preceding elections is evident from the notice given in the Soviet press during the summer to indications of continued activity on the part of the *delegated campaigners*, propagandists, and election commissioners. *Pravda* printed the letter of a Stakhanovite who had done electioneering work during the campaign. "The elections have ended but the activity of the campaign workers goes on," he declares. "Our life is diverse and rich with events. We are called to help the population understand the meaning of these events." One such event was the State Loan of the third Five-Year Plan which was launched immediately after the elections. The importance of preparations for the harvesting of the crop constituted another post-election subject to which the "active group" devoted itself.

Election Commissions

The official election campaigns began in April when the Central Executive Committee of each republic announced the

date for the election of its Supreme Soviet and made public the names of those to serve on its Central Election Commission, which, together with the district and precinct election commissions, supervised the election within each republic. The fifteen members of each Central Election Commission were "representatives of public organizations and societies of toilers." They were apparently appointed in each republic, not elected, and were listed as "from" a particular body, such as a trade union of railroad transport workers, a particular collective farm, a trade union of medical-sanitary workers, a university, a factory, a detachment of border guards, a unit of the Communist Party, and so on. Each Central Executive Committee also announced the formation of election districts from each of which a deputy to the Supreme Soviet was to be elected.² These districts ranged in number from over 700 in the RSFSR to 200-300 in smaller republics and less than 150 in autonomous republics.

The first of many meetings of electors now began. In factories and institutions, on farms and ships, meetings were held to propose candidates for the District Election Commissions. Communist Party members and non-Party people in diverse callings—architects and collective farmers, engineers and fishermen—were put forward, often on the basis of their organizational achievements during the federal election. These District Election Commissions elected at these meetings were approved by the Central Executive Committee of each republic.³ Many were drawn into the work of the election commissions, as an individual could serve on only one election commission whether it was central, district, or precinct⁴ and the number of election commissions was increased as compared with the federal election. In the RSFSR there were 90,000 precincts in the recent election, each with its commission.

2. In future elections of the Supreme Soviets of the republics, both the endorsement of the Central Election Commissions and the formation of election districts will be a function of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet which was not yet in existence.

3. The approval will in the future be a function of the presidiums of the supreme soviets and of the soviets of territories and provinces.

4. In future elections members of the Precinct Election Commissions are to be endorsed by the city and district soviets. *Pravda*, May 26, 1938, reported violations of the election law when in several precincts members of the precinct election commissions were not chosen at meetings of citizens but were named by the presidiums of the raion executive committees.

Nomination of Candidates

The procedure followed in nominating candidates to the Supreme Soviets revealed, as in the federal election, that the principle of functional representation had not been wholly abandoned. Foreign commentators, writing about the new federal constitution, had seen in Article 141 the introduction of geographic representation. "Candidates are nominated for election according to electoral districts," reads Article 141, and continues: "The right to nominate candidates is ensured to public organizations and societies of toilers: Communist Party organizations, trade unions, cooperatives, youth organizations and cultural societies." But the procedure, actually followed in both the federal and republic elections, produced a hybrid, a functional-geographical principle that differed both from the old functional principle and from the innovation of purely geographical representation that some had anticipated. The electoral laws of the republics gave the right of nomination not only to those enumerated in the Constitution but to "general meetings of workers and office employees in enterprises, Red Army men in military units, general meetings of peasants in collective farms, and state farm workers and office employees on state farms." It was actually these occupational units, which under the previous electoral system had elected members of the lower soviets, and apparently not the "public organizations and societies of toilers" designated in the Constitution, that now advanced the candidacy of members of the republic's Supreme Soviet, to be elected by geographical districts. While it was more usual for a farm or a factory to meet as a unit, in some districts several factories or an industrial *combinat* and a collective farm would hold a joint nomination meeting. This often occurred when the candidacy was a foregone conclusion, as in the Stalin Election District in Moscow from which district Stalin had been a candidate in the federal elections. A meeting of 15,000 people in one place would hardly provide the proper atmosphere of deliberation were there any difficulty in deciding on the candidates.

Since electors voted in their district of residence, when a huge plant like the Stalin Auto Plant in Moscow, employing individuals who lived in almost all the districts of that city,

proposed some one as candidate, it meant that many participated in this proposal who would vote in some district other than that of the Stalin Auto Plant. Not only nominating but campaigning had a functional basis to some extent. The election campaign took place at a season of year when many city dwellers move to their country homes (*dachy*) for the summer. This made campaign work at their place of occupation a surer way of reaching them than at their place of residence. In the Stalin Auto Plant, for instance, although the workers were to vote in various districts and for various candidates, propagandists met them in separate groups and discussed their candidates with them.

The meeting of citizens in their places of occupation, having proposed candidates, then voted, as in the federal election, for representatives to be sent to a pre-election district conference (*predvybornoe okruzhnoe soveshchanie*), a meeting which shared the nominating function in each district with the various meetings at which names were first advanced. Voting on nominations in both the occupational units and the district pre-election conferences was by show of hands. Secrecy of voting is guaranteed by the constitution at "elections of deputies," not at nominations. Speeches were made for the people proposed and then the district conference accepted some or all of them. In one Moscow district the meeting approved all nine nominations. The resolution of the district conference declared its "support of the decision of the general meetings of such and such factories, farms, and institutions, to nominate such and such a candidate, or such and such candidates." The district conference, often a meeting of considerable size (1500 in a Tbilisi election district), then requested the consent of the nominees, for the District Election Commission can only register those who have agreed to run. It is at this point that the multiple nominations dwindled down to one acceptance and, hence, to one candidate for each district.

It is interesting to note that there is not only no mention of the district conference either in the constitution or the electoral law, though it is apparently not in contradiction to any provision, but even the later documents referring to the nominations ignore it. Thus, the official registration of the candi-

date by the District Election Commission indicates that the candidate was nominated by general meetings of workers at such and such factories, farms and institutions, with no mention of the action of the pre-election district conference.

Contest and Unity

While an individual could run for the Supreme Soviet in several republics, he could be a candidate in only one district in each republic, just as in the federal election he could be a candidate in only one election district in the USSR. This meant that a popular figure like Stalin who had been nominated in all the thousands of election districts had to choose one in each republic. In the federal election when Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich, and others received scores of nominations, they appealed for advice to the Central Committee of the Communist Party and in an open letter to the election commissions they told of the Central Committee's decision as to the district in which each was to run. This set a precedent for non-Party people as well. In the republic elections there was no such publicized appeal. Stalin and Molotov were candidates in all the union and autonomous republics. Others accepted fewer nominations: Ezhov 20, Voroshilov 19, Kaganovich 17, Andreev 11, Kalinin 10, Zhdanov 9. A candidate did not have to be a resident of the district or even of the republic in which he was running for parliamentary office. Nor were there any restrictions on the right of members of the federal Supreme Soviet to hold office in the republic Supreme Soviets. In fact, many of the republic candidates were already federal deputies.

As in the federal election only one candidate ran in each district for the Supreme Soviet. Although several were nominated in many districts, only one accepted the nomination in each. Nominations were often made in anticipation of probable refusal. Many factories and farms nominated Stalin and his "companions-in-arms," (*soratniki*) along with less famous individuals. Thus a collective farm put up Molotov, Voroshilov, Kalinin, Ezhov, and a village schoolmistress. The refusal of the first four left only one candidate in the field for that district. But where several individuals of coordinate status were nominated and only one accepted the nomination, some

machinery must have been in operation which is not revealed by the public records. It is possible that in some districts it was patent to the nominees that one of them had the support of several large plants and the others preferred to decline rather than face certain defeat. In other districts one can only surmise that some influence, probably the Communist Party, made the several nominees aware of the desirability of avoiding public contest.

The one-candidate feature was a surprise to many foreign observers, informed and uninformed. The uninformed had anticipated the kind of contest that characterizes western elections. The informed observer had not anticipated a contest of issues—whether the country was to go ahead on the basis of socialism towards communism, the one big issue, was not debatable—, but he had expected a contest of men. Stalin's conversation with Roy Howard in March 1936 had provided, some thought, a basis for this expectation. He had said in his interview with the American newspaperman: "It seems to you that there will not be an electoral struggle. But there will be, and I foresee a very lively electoral struggle. We have not a few institutions which work badly. It sometimes happens that one or another local organ of power does not know how to satisfy one or another of the many-sided and ever-growing needs of toilers of city and country. Did you construct a good school, or not? Did you better living conditions? Are you not a bureaucrat? Did you help make our work more effective, our life more cultured? Such will be the criteria with which millions of electors will approach candidates, discarding the unfit, crossing them out of the lists, putting forward the best and nominating them as candidates." (Translation R.S.)

The contest of men which this statement indicated was apparently to be in securing the nomination and not necessarily in securing election. Some foreign authorities, however, saw the contest as one to be decided on election day.

Stalin's statement has not been "repudiated." In its editorial of February 17, 1938, at the time the Central Executive Committee was adopting electoral laws, *Pravda* quotes this passage from the conversation.

There was undoubtedly some competition in securing the nomination for this or that local favorite. The searching questions that Stalin listed may well have been in the minds of those in the factory or farm who proposed some one as their candidate.⁵ But the contest was never one of the factory or farm insisting to the bitter end that its nominee had built a *better* school than some other nominee or had done *more* to better living conditions than the other. To some extent this may have been due to the fact that the differences amongst the nominees appeared to be relatively slight. The biographies of the candidates that were published in the press as part of the campaign agitation invariably listed their Stakhanov work in factory or farm, their constant study, their active participation in the socio-political life of their institutions, their devotion to the Party, to building socialism. Of varied age and occupation, 18 to 65 and shepherd to Academician, the candidates were all reputed to be people of ability in their fields, men and women who had demonstrated their initiative and energy. They were not chosen on the basis of their knowledge of the technique of legislation; the tasks of a deputy to the Supreme Soviet although as yet not completely defined, are wider than merely passing laws. All were apparently considered above a certain level of loyalty and capability.⁶ All, it was felt, would be equally representative of the toilers' interests. This, Communists urge, is possible where there are no class antagonisms.

While foreign commentators have professed to see in the one-candidate slate a complete negation of the principle of free and democratic elections, Soviet authorities have seen in it an expression of the unity which Socialism, with the absence of antagonistic classes, makes possible. Universal, equal elections in other countries, they declare, are not only never universal

5. What sort of caucus or meeting, if any, may have been held previous to the placing of certain names before the general nomination meeting in factory or farm is a question which the foreign observer can hardly answer with authority. To a certain extent the same situation applies, of course, to the study of nominations in any country. Some nominees could have been the spontaneous choice of a whole occupational unit but as far as most of the possible nominees were concerned their relative merits must have been the subject of discussion in gatherings that preceded the official nomination meetings. That the Communist Party played a large part in this preliminary but decisive work is not an unsafe guess.

6. During the months of the election campaign there were being held the elections of leading personnel of all Communist Party units up to and including the republic organizations. In the prerequisites laid down for a candidate for Party office may be found some clue to the considerations operative in determining the desirability of a nominee for deputy to the Supreme Soviets. "First, [and the order is perhaps significant] does the given worker deserve political trust, and second, is he capable of handling the work assigned to him." (*Pravda*, March 30, 1938.)

or equal but, under conditions of class conflicts, the pressure of the propertied classes on the unpropertied, they are never entirely "free" or "democratic." They point to parliaments and congresses, made up of lawyers, landowners, the propertied people, presumably representing the interests of the vast majority when the vast majority consists of the property-less. They point to the deputies elected to the supreme soviets—factory workers, locomotive engineers, collective farmers (Party officials and directors of plants and enterprises, too, but rarely constituting a majority)—and query whether under social ownership of the means of production the election of any one of these is not a clearer expression of democracy than the election of a landowner after a bitter contest with a factory owner. In fact a dominant note in the speeches during the election campaign was the Soviet evaluation of their elections as the "freest and most democratic elections in the world."

During the federal election, the Central Committee of the Communist Party addressed an "Appeal" to all voters stressing unity rather than contest in the elections. "The candidates will be common for both the Communists and the non-Party people." All were to run as candidates of "an election bloc of Party and non-Party people"; they were to be the joint candidates of the Communist Party, the trade unions, the Young Communist League, and other social organizations. This "Appeal" was echoed by similar "Appeals" by the Young Communist League, the trade unions, etc.⁷ It was unlikely that these "public organizations and societies of toilers" would ever run rival candidates, as there is too great a disparity in the numbers of their membership. The Communist Party, with its two million members and its half-million Sympathizers, is a small numerical force compared with the trade unions with their twenty-two million members, almost a fourth of the voters of the USSR. It was unlikely from another point of view. In all these organizations and societies, the leaders are usually members of the Communist Party and the influence of the Party had penetrated to a point that obviates conflict, especially in the sense of competition, between these bodies and the Party.

7. During the republic elections, too, the device of "Appeal" was used by the Communist Party of the Georgian Republic, by a Conference of Workers in Higher Schools, and, more unusual, by one republic to another.

The right of nomination given these organizations and societies in Art. 141 of the federal constitution, and which apparently has not been used by them in the elections so far, must therefore be interpreted not as contemplating contest but as intending to draw from them their "best people," to fill the soviets with individuals who are outstanding in the organizations to which they belong.

This decision to forego contests of candidates and to make the elections "the clearest demonstration of the moral-political unity of the multi-national soviet people . . . a demonstration of love for the socialist homeland, for the Party, for Comrade Stalin"⁸ was undoubtedly influenced by the world situation. The trials and executions had given an impression abroad of a dis-united people; the spread of fascism in Europe had given birth to its antagonist, the United Front, the realization of the need of fighting the greater evil. Molotov, in a speech commenting on the Party's "Appeal," declared, "What can be better from the point of view of the interests of the whole people, what can be better in our conditions, than an harmonious electoral union of Communist and non-Party people for the sake of further victories of Socialism in our country?"

It is not impossible, however, that, with changed conditions, future elections may see a more public contest of men. The electoral laws are prepared for this contingency. They provide for re-balloting if none of the candidates in a district receives an absolute majority of the votes cast. This provision would be invoked with only one candidate if, unlikely indeed, he were so unpopular that more than half the voters spoiled or scratched their ballots. It would operate if two candidates exactly tied, also not very likely. The running of three or more candidates would be more apt to bring the provision into use. Nor is the provision regarded as a dead letter. It was referred to as recently as May 5th in an article in *Pravda* by A. Vyshinsky, State's Attorney. In this regard it will be interesting to watch the province, city and rural elections which will be forthcoming shortly and which are already referred to in the Soviet press.

8. "The Soviet authority," I. Trainin, in *Pravda*, December 5, 1937.

The Communist Party in the Elections

While those who ran were candidates of a "bloc of Party and non-Party people," more than half the candidates in each republic and sometimes as many as 75 per cent were members of the Communist Party. In the federal Supreme Soviet 75 per cent of the deputies are Party members. The majority of election commissioners, *delegated campaigners* and other campaign workers were also Party members. There were differences in the proportion in the various republics. In Georgia, for instance, about 25 per cent of the district election commissioners were non-Party, in Armenia 43 per cent. Party leaders were judged by the quality of their work in the elections. "Successful conduct of these elections [to the Supreme Soviets of the republics] will be the first, striking political examination of the newly-elected leaders of the Party organizations," declared *Pravda*. In the campaign work itself, while the Party played a leading role,⁹ it sought the participation of non-Party people and organizations. In fact there were few organizations or individuals that did not feel it was "their" election. The vast number of clubs, libraries, factory newspapers of the trade unions, declared Moskatov, Secretary of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, should be put at the service of the election campaign. A. Vyshinsky cited the protection of the election rights of citizens as one of the most important tasks of the State's Attorney. There were meetings of local soviets devoted to discussions of the electoral campaign. The Communist Party press made much of the fact that many campaign workers were non-Party, and complained when the soviets and trade unions in the territories left the work to the territorial committee of the Party.

The Tally

The mobility of the population in June did not result in a lowered participation in the elections. In consonance with their

9. This was in line with the new constitution of the USSR which apparently for the first time in Soviet constitutional history defined the nature and role of the Party. "... and the most active and politically conscious citizens in the ranks of the working class and other strata of the toilers unite in the Communist Party of the USSR, which is the vanguard of the toilers in their struggle to strengthen and develop the socialist system and which represents the leading core of all organizations of the toilers, both public and State." Article 126.

right to vote "regardless of domicile" the electors who moved between the date of publication of the lists and the date of election were supplied with a document which enabled them to vote in the new election district to which they had gone for either a temporary or a permanent stay even if the new district lay in a wholly different republic. Voting precincts were also set up on trains and boats and in hospitals. It was probably with regret that communicable diseases were still so contumacious, that the electoral laws excluded scarlet fever and diphtheria wards from taking part in the voting. The aged were transported to the polls in automobiles. This concern with ensuring the participation of all electors manifested itself in emphasis on correct compiling of lists of voters. The State's Attorney termed this task "one of the most important, if not the most important, deciding condition for successful preparations for the elections."

It is difficult to determine to what extent an element of "compulsion" entered into the mass turn-out on election day. There is some significance in the fact that foreign correspondents, whose reactions to the elections were not always gratifying to the Soviet authorities, nevertheless did not report any sinister scenes at the polls, any muted threats of force, any signs of intimidation, such as came from Germany during Hitlerite elections. Of those eligible to vote in the USSR, 96.8 per cent took part in the December election and over 99 per cent in most of the republics in the June elections. All of the republics bettered the December record. It is unlikely with registration lists to indicate absences, that the electors could feel they would not be missed at the polls. On the other hand it is more probable that the participation of the millions of voters was a reflection of the educational and agitational work of the preceding months and the pleasant circumstances of election day than an indication of "obedience." The educational work had impressed upon them the aspects of privilege and duty involved in utilization of the franchise. They had heard and read of the literacy and residence qualifications, the poll tax, and the court decision on primaries which deprived a considerable proportion of America's southern population of the vote, the sex qualification which disenfranchised the women

of France, the denial of suffrage to army people in many countries. Also, they felt close to their candidates: either they knew him personally as a fellow-worker or they had heard him speak during the campaign and had read his biography which so closely paralleled their own and that of their Soviet government. They had been impressed with the international significance of a record vote. And, too, voting was made pleasant for them. The balloting place was adorned with pictures and flowers; there was a nursery room in which to leave children while voting. The precinct election commissioners who presided over the desks were those they had nominated for the work and known to many of them personally. There was an air of gaiety; local choirs and dancers performed outside the polling place. It was "free day" and the weather was fair. The press referred to the occasion as *prazdnik* (holiday),¹⁰ and the voters responded in a *prazdnik* mood, wearing their best, lingering at the polling place to watch the performers or to take part in a folk dance, and marching in the mass demonstrations that filled the huge squares and stadiums of the Soviet cities.

Of the millions who took part in the elections, 99 per cent in most of the republics gave their vote to the "bloc" candidates for the Supreme Soviets.¹¹ While there was little suspense as to who would win, as there was only one candidate running in a district, interest in the Soviet Union was centered on how well they would win, for a great deal of effort had been expended in securing a vote that would "demonstrate to the world once again the moral and political unity of the Soviet people." The number of spoiled and scratched ballots was considerable in absolute numbers but not in percentage. In the RSFSR in the June election 73,226 ballots were invalid¹² and on 320,496 the name of the candidate had been crossed out; both together

10. "The forthcoming elections are not simply elections, comrades. They are really an all-people's holiday. . . .", declared Stalin.

11. In some of the autonomous republics the figure was slightly lower, 97.8 per cent, 98.8 per cent, etc., but in general the record excelled even the high returns of the federal election when 98.6 per cent of the voters favored the "bloc" candidates to the Soviet of the Union and 97.8 per cent the "bloc" candidates to the other chamber.

12. The electoral law declares invalid "Ballots which:

- a. are not of the prescribed form and color
- b. are not submitted in envelopes or are submitted in envelopes not of the prescribed form
- c. contain more candidates than the number of deputies to be elected."

constituted only 0.7 per cent of the votes cast in that republic. Whether these ballots are attributable to groups whose enfranchisement had been often protested when the draft constitution was being discussed by the population,¹³ is only a matter of speculation in an election with secret ballots.

Power of Recall

The Soviet voters have elected their deputies to the supreme soviets for four years but they may recall some of them before the expiration of that period. Article 142 of the Constitution of the USSR declares it the duty of a deputy to report on his work and the work of the soviet "and he is liable to be recalled at any time in the manner established by law upon decision of a majority of the electors." In a speech at an election meeting Stalin reminded the voters of this provision and of the responsibility it placed upon them. "The functions of the voters do not end with the elections . . . it is the duty and right of the electors constantly to exercise control over their deputies." Not all deputies are of the "Lenin type" he warned, declaring, "My advice is to remember this law [of recall] and make use of it if need be."

Whether this recall provision will become an operative part of political life and whether the electoral system in general will retain the features discussed above are questions which will be settled only by future developments in the USSR.

13. Many had felt that former merchants and Tsarist officials as well as clergymen would use the elections for non-socialist ends. During the federal and the republic election campaigns efforts were made to counteract such influence by radio lectures on the anti-Soviet activities of these groups, by discussions of science, and by excursions to anti-religious museums.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Marshal Vasili Konstantinovich Bluecher

Any account of the Soviet regime in the Far East must include mention of the part played therein by Vasili Konstantinovich Bluecher, Marshal of the Soviet Union and Commander of the Special Red Banner Far Eastern Army. Various intriguing versions of his life are extant but Soviet biographies of the man are fairly unanimous. He was born of poor parents in 1889 in the village of Barshchinka, province of Yaroslav. According to some accounts he owes his non-Russian name to the fact that a Yaroslav landowner of Prussian origin inadvertently gave one of his serfs a name which later evolved into the surname of Bluecher's grandfather. The boy had little formal education, having completed only the village school when, like so many other sons of poor peasants, he was sent to St. Petersburg, there to be apprenticed. He soon ran away from his blacksmith master and obtained work, in 1909, as a fitter in a railway car factory. There he led a strike of the workers (1910) for which he was arrested and sent to prison for more than two years.

During the World War, Bluecher served as a private and later as a corporal in the Tsar's army on the Austrian front. Here it is said he showed something of the ingenuity in military affairs which today places him in the ranks of great military leaders. Badly wounded in 1915 he was sent back home to work in industry. In 1916, he joined the Communist Party and the October Revolution found him in Samara where he was elected to the Revolutionary Committee and took a leading part in the establishment of Soviet power.

From the period of foreign intervention and civil war up to the present time, Bluecher has won increasing recognition for military strategy by his repeated victories, often achieved under the most difficult circumstances. In 1918 when the counter-revolutionary forces seized Cheliabinsk and tore up the Siberian Railroad, he was appointed to lead the Red Guards against Dutov, head of the Orenburg Cossack troops. With a combined