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THE MILITIA REARMED?

Ever since 1957, Soviet propaganda has been making considerable efforts to raise the distinctly low status accorded to the militia by the population as a whole. Usually this has tended to take the form of brief reports describing heroic exploits by the militia, together with effusive praise and gratitude expressed by carefully chosen "men in the street" for the protection awarded them by "our militia".

The past year or so has brought an accumulation of evidence suggesting that more practical measures will soon have to be taken, apparently because the propaganda phase has not been sufficiently successful. During 1961, there were two unprecedented separate attacks on militia stations in central Russia,<sup>1</sup> both of which led to sentences of death being passed on the ringleaders. It now appears that the internal security situation has not materially improved since then, because a number of press articles and broadcasts are calling for the reequipment and rearming of the militia.

Last month a conference of militia officers of the RSFSR was held, which was attended by the Minister of the Interior of the RSFSR, V. Tikunov. Izvestia's report on the conference (13 June 1962) shows that there are "demagogues who are ready in vain to condemn the militia", and a Deputy Chief of the Main Militia Administration of the RSFSR is quoted as stating that a number of writers, journalists, and dramatists have an incorrect attitude to the militia which evokes "a feeling of special bitterness". They "tendentially distort" the life of the militia whereas those who write warmly about it "can be counted on the fingers of one's hands."

Later the conference turned to the reequipment problem, when another Deputy Chief of the Main Administration said:

"Our equipment really is poor. For example our trucks are ordinary ones which are not adapted for operating off the roads. But we need a special truck. And the M-72 motorcycle with sidecar is also outmoded. In addition we need a special portable radio and a great deal more."

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<sup>1</sup>Background Information 17 August 1961 and 7 September 1961.

The Chief of the Moscow Criminal Investigation Department supported this theme by adding:

"Even the Moscow Militia is poorly equipped. Radios, for example, are installed only in patrol vehicles. Others have no two-way communications. Of course industry could equip our militia better."

#### Empire-Building by the Police?

The long-standing dispute in the USSR between the prosecutor's office and the militia as to who should bear responsibility for the preliminary investigation of crimes was also aired at the conference. Militia officials claimed that they could easily take over the job of investigation, but only on condition that they could be freed of various extraneous duties which they now perform (supervision of urban sanitation, checking on petrol consumed, supervision of the accuracy of meters and measurements, etc.) The conference made it clear that the militia is making real headway in its efforts to farm out some of the more routine police functions. Sovetskaya Rossiya (16 June 1962) pointed out that apart from the "people's volunteers", (who now number a million in the Ukraine alone), there are also the following categories of part-time, civilian police auxiliaries:

"Public precinct authorized agents, vehicle inspectors, street traffic regulators, inspectors of children's rooms and (internal) passport departments."

The paper also admitted openly, perhaps for the first time, that not all the "people's volunteers" wear the red arm-bands of their units. Some of them are in fact police in plain clothes who operate on a voluntary basis for "special assignments" as these operations are euphemistically described by Sovetskaya Rossiya.

Thus militia auxiliaries and the secret branch of the "people's volunteers" already cover a wide range of low-grade security and police duties. The cost of this network of amateurs must be much lower than that of the paid professionals of Beria's time, and its magnitude gives it a degree of crude effectiveness. Nevertheless, despite the declared eagerness of militia officers to expand their prerogatives to include investigation there is still no firm indication that the authorities will in fact allow them to do so. At present such a move would run so clearly counter to the main lines of the current phase of the destalinization campaign that Khrushchev would be unlikely to countenance it.

#### Public Hostility to the Militia

Apart from the attacks on militia stations mentioned above, which may have been the work of "bandits", as the Soviet authorities claim, or may simply have been carried out by desperately angry citizens, there is ample evidence of the hostile attitude of the public towards the militia.



In Leningrad recently (Izvestia, 21 July 1962) a group of youths who had been drinking assembled in Turgenev Square late at night and caused a disturbance. When they were warned by two militia sergeants, they shouted back "Gen-darmes!", the pejorative term only used in Soviet parlance for the police of capitalist states.

A more serious type of public hostility was illustrated by a recent incident in Kolomna, a small town south-east of Moscow. A group of hooligans had beaten up several people, one of whom later died of his injuries. But none of the victims reported the matter to the militia (Izvestia, 10 June 1962). When, after a motor-cycle patrol had accidentally stumbled on one of the injured, the militia arrived on the spot in numbers, they were deliberately misdirected away from the hooligans by several passers-by "as a joke". This form of passive resistance, or petty sabotage, is more often associated with anti-Nazi action in the occupied territories of Europe during World War II than with the attitudes of citizens in peace-time towards "their own" police force.

#### To Arm or Not to Arm

One important tendency in the press and radio coverage of the militia's difficulties is the propaganda for re-issuing the militia with weapons. In Stalin's day every militiaman on duty was armed with a pistol, but under Khrushchev this practice was severely limited, and now the authorities appear to regret the fact. Izvestia, (21 July 1962) writes:

"We would like to believe that there will be no more bitter incidents in which an unarmed (or sometimes even an armed) militiaman loses his life in a fight with a bandit or hooligan merely because in practice he was able to use primarily exhortation and his bare hands. It must be hoped that this position will be changed. There will of course be hypocrites who groan and moan when they learn about this. The hypocrites for some reason would prefer the militiaman to be defenceless in the face of the bandits. But when it concerns the hypocrite himself he is the first to wail: 'Where were the militia!'"

A few days earlier (17th June 1962) Vladivostok Radio was emphasizing the same point as Izvestia:

"Many hooligans arm themselves with knives, metal lashes, bludgeons and sometimes use them against militiamen...What can be done about such brutalities? Obviously militiamen should not be unarmed when dealing with such elements. The question of arming militiamen with means for their defense, with means by which they can cool the ardour of young hooligans, can no longer be put off. Means for self-defense for our

militiamilitia will make it stronger and its actions more effective. Soviet militiamen are striving for a just cause and they should be given more rights."

When Izvestia is echoing a campaign begun as far away as Vladivostok, there is reason to think that before long the necessary new instructions to permit the militia to carry arms again, as a general rule rather than an exception, may soon be issued. If this proves to be the case, it will be yet another defeat for the policy practised in the early Khrushchev years of severely curtailing police powers. Re-arming the militia would not be necessary if the Khrushchev era had given birth to the "new Soviet man". The propaganda for it is one more proof of the recalcitrance of reality.

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