

From *Saturday Evening Post*  
January 1, 1938

# **Red Wreckers in Russia**

**By John D. Littlepage**  
**with Demaree Bess**

Since I returned from Russia last August, I have followed with close attention the frequent newspaper reports of additional executions or arrests for "wrecking," or industrial sabotage.

I watch with especial interest for names, which, to me, often represent acquaintances of long standing. For ten years I have worked alongside some of the many recently shot, imprisoned or exiled in Russia as wreckers.

Some of my friends have asked me whether or not I believe these men and women are guilty as charged. I have not hesitated a moment in replying that I believe most of them are guilty. I find that many Americans are confused by the unusual accusations, which hardly seem credible to them, and are further bewildered by differences of opinion among so-called experts; some of whom claim that the whole affair is a gigantic frame-up, while others delve deep into Russian history and literature to explain why the accused are guilty.

But I approach this matter as a plain American mining engineer with a decade's experience in Soviet mines. I make no claim to knowledge of the ins and outs of Communist politics; neither am I interested in trying to settle the everlasting feud between Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin and their respective followers, nor in seeking to determine what goes on inside the heads of Russian Communist conspirators, or why they confess with so much apparent relish when brought into open court.

Solely on the basis of my own experiences, I can testify that industrial sabotage is a commonplace in Soviet Russia. It often bears strong evidence of being directed and organized in high places. I have come across indisputable proof of deliberate sabotage on numerous occasions. Some of this seemed to be petty and unorganized, but some could hardly have been possible without the participation of important Communist managers.

I have had some close contacts, over a period of years, with several of the Communist leaders who were executed or imprisoned

in 1936 and 1937, after confessing that they had organized a gigantic conspiracy to wreck Soviet industry. I am convinced, from my own experience, that these Communists made genuine confessions—at least so far as their statements applied to industrial sabotage. When I read the testimony of Yuri Pyatakov, Vice Commissar of Heavy Industry, and some of his fellow defendants at the conspiracy trial in January, 1937, I finally understood some matters which had been puzzling me since I first came in contact with organized Soviet wrecking in 1932.

Before I went to Russia in 1928, I had never once come across a case of proved industrial sabotage, although I had a great deal of experience in gold mining. I never saw anything of the sort during fourteen years in the gold fields of Alaska. But I hadn't worked many weeks in Russia before I encountered unquestionable instances of deliberate and malicious wrecking.

One day in 1928 I went into the power station at the Kochkar gold mines, in the Southern Urals, where I first worked in Russia as chief engineer. I just happened to drop my hand on one of the main bearings of a large Diesel engine as I walked by and felt something gritty in the oil. I had the engine stopped immediately, and we removed from the oil reservoir about a quart of clean quartz sand, which could have been placed there only by design. On several other occasions, in the new milling plants at Kochkar, we found sand inside of such equipment as speed reducers, which are entirely enclosed, and can be reached only by removing the hand-hole covers.



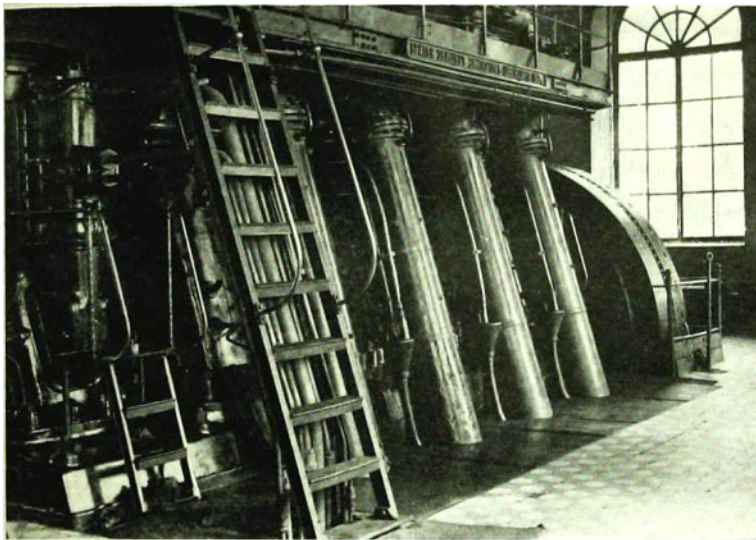
*SOVFOTO: Hydraulic Placer Mining by the Soviet Extends as Far East as the Sungari River, Best Known Because of Russo-Japanese Border Clashes*

Such petty industrial sabotage, combined with passive resistance, was, and still is, so common in all branches of Soviet industry that Russian engineers can do little about it, and were surprised at my own concern when I first encountered it. Both Soviet workers and officials often are so green, industrially speaking, that it takes a very wise man, indeed, to determine between so-called wrecking and plain ignorance.

The police department of the Commissariat of the Interior has its representatives in every Soviet factory, farm, mine and institution, who keep busy looking out for potential or actual wreckers, and organize a whole army of amateur spies to assist them. In fact, so many people in Soviet institutions are busy watching producers to see that they behave properly that I suspect there are more watchers than there are producers.

Why, I have been asked, is sabotage of this description so common in Soviet Russia and so rare in most other countries? Do Russians have a peculiar bent for industrial wrecking?

People who ask questions like that apparently haven't realized that the Communists in Russia have been and still are fighting a



*"I Just Happened to Drop My Hand on One of the Main Bearings of a Large Diesel Engine as I Walked by and Felt Something Gritty In the Oil." Hear Is a Photograph of the Kochkar Power Station, In Which the Author Found Evidence of Sabotage*

whole series of open or disguised civil wars. In the beginning, they fought and dispossessed the old aristocracy, the bankers and landowners and merchants of the Czarist regime. More recently they have been fighting the little independent farmers and the little retail merchants and the nomads in Central Asia; taking away from people of these groups all that they possessed and turning them into wage earners on state-controlled, so-called collective farms or in state-owned mines and factories.

Of course, it's all for their own good, say the Communists. But many of these people can't see things that way, and remain bitter enemies of the Communists and their ideas, even after they have been put back to work in state industries. From these groups have come a considerable number of disgruntled workers who dislike Communists so much that they would gladly damage any of their enterprises if they could.

But these are mostly little people under the present system, no matter how big they may have been under the old system. Their past marks them off as potential "enemies of the people," and the police and numerous volunteer labor spies keep them under close watch at all times. They rarely get a chance to indulge in anything more than



*A Miner of Kochkar,  
in the Rich Southern Urals*

petty sabotage. To be really effective, industrial sabotage must come from the top, and for a good many years the people at the top in Russia have been Communists.

It is my opinion that the ruling Communist group in Russia has been a long time getting around to the discovery that other Communists are the most dangerous enemies they have. My own experiences

made me suspicious of a number of Communist industrial leaders years before the present roundup of Communist conspirators started in the middle of 1936. It, naturally, wasn't my business to warn Joseph Stalin and his associates against fellow party members, but some Russians can bear witness that I mentioned my suspicions to them as early as 1932, after I had worked for some months in the Ural copper mines.

During the past two years, the Russian Communists have shot more people for industrial sabotage than any other government has ever done, so far as I can discover. A large proportion of those shot were Communists. Some Americans seem to find it hard to believe that Communists would try to wreck industries in a country where other Communists are in control. But anyone who knows Communists can understand that they can fight each other more fiercely than they fight so-called "capitalists," once any group of them dares to depart from the so-called "party line."

Now, sabotage is a familiar Communist weapon in every country; industrial sabotage in the United States can usually be traced to Communists or people who think like Communists. It is hardly surprising that some Communists should use this same weapon in Russia, once they have decided that the existing regime does not satisfy their own peculiar notions.

As I see it, the



*The Author, on the Steps of His Home  
at Kochkar, In 1931*

reason organized sabotage has proved far more effective in Russia than anywhere else is that Communists occupy most of the highest places in Russian industry, and an important industrial executive can do more damage, if he is a deliberate wrecker, than thousands of disgruntled little fellows. I don't make this statement as an abstract generalization; I have seen with my own eyes what a Communist wrecker in high places can do.

My first contact with organized, as distinct from petty and personal, sabotage came in 1931, after I had worked three years in Russia and thoroughly understood the language and industrial conditions. Late in 1930, the gold-mining industry in which I had been working was combined with copper, lead and zinc mining in one gigantic state corporation for nonferrous metals. The man who had brought me to Russia, A. P. Serehrovsky, had done a fine job of reviving gold mining. Now he was assigned the task of trying to bring some order out of the chaos in other metal mines.

At that time between 150 and 175 first-class American engineers were at work in the nonferrous-metal mines in Russia. With a very few exceptions, their talents were wasted. They were involved in such an endless mass of red tape that they could do nothing. Their recommendations served only to fill office pigeonholes. The lack of progress was particularly notorious in the Ural Mountains, probably the richest mineral region of Russia. So I was sent out in the spring of 1931, with a Russian engineer and an American metallurgist, to see what could be done to improve matters.

I shall never forget the situation we found at Khalata, in the Southern Urals, one of the most important copper properties in Russia, consisting of six mines, a flotation concentrator and a smelter, with blast and reverberatory furnaces. Seven American mining engineers of the first rank, drawing very large salaries, had been sent to this place some time before. Any one of them, if he had been given the opportunity, could have taken this property and got it in good running order in a few weeks.

But at the time I arrived they were bogged down in red tape. Their recommendations were ignored; they were assigned no particular work. They were unable to convey their ideas to Russian engineers through ignorance of the language and lack of competent interpreters. They had become so disgusted with the situation that they were occupied almost entirely with operating an "American boardinghouse," which they had set up for themselves. These high-

priced engineers, who could have done wonders for Soviet mines, were spending their days working alternately as buyers, bookkeepers and house managers for their boardinghouse. Within this limited sphere, their talents were proving effective enough—they had a good boardinghouse, all right.

But, of course, they weren't satisfied, and our arrival brightened them up considerably when they discovered we really had sufficient authority to cut through the red tape. I had been named chief engineer at this plant, and the Russian manager sent in with me was instructed to give me free rein. This manager was a Communist without any special knowledge of mining, but unlike some of his fellows, he had sense enough not to interfere with men who did have special training. It was a comparatively simple matter to set things right; the Americans were allowed to work and their instructions were carried out. Within five months, production had risen 90 per cent.

The Communist manager was an earnest fellow; he tried hard to understand what we were doing and how we did it. But some of the Russian engineers were sullen and obstructive; they objected to every improvement we suggested. We got ahead only because the manager supported me in every recommendation I made. When I was proved right, the Russian engineers finally fell in line and seemed to get the idea. At the end of five months, I left on another assignment with a sense of work well done. Mines and plant had been thoroughly reorganized; there seemed to be no good reason why production could not be maintained at the same rate. The Communist manager assured me that my ideas would be followed. I left behind elaborate and detailed instructions for future operations.

### *Soviet Prodigals*

A few months later I was asked to hurry back to these mines. It seemed that production was even worse than it had been when I visited Khalata in the first place. When I got there, I found a depressing mess. The Americans had all finished their two-year contracts and been sent home. The Communist manager I had trained had been removed by an investigating commission sent in to examine the mines soon after I had left. The commission had substituted for him its own chairman, who was still acting as manager when I returned.

During my previous stay, we had speeded up capacity of the blast furnaces to seventy-eight metric tons per square meter per day; they

had now permitted the furnaces to drop back to their old output of forty to forty-five tons. Worst of all, thousands of tons of high-grade ore had been irretrievably lost by the introduction into two mines of methods which I had specifically, and in writing, warned against. We American engineers had worked out for some of the mines a more productive system of working the stopes, and had managed to introduce it in spite of the persistent opposition of Russian engineers. But I had explained at great length to both the manager and the engineers that this method could not safely be applied in the remaining mines, and left written instructions to prevent such action. I now learned that almost immediately after the American engineers had left, the same Russian engineers I had warned had applied this method in the remaining mines, with the result that the mines caved in. Much ore was gone forever.

Weil, I set to work, in a decidedly discouraged mood, to try to recover some of the lost ground. The atmosphere around the place was markedly unwholesome. The new manager was sullen and barely courteous to me. I couldn't get things done. One day I discovered the manager was secretly countermanding every order I issued. That was the end for me. I climbed on a train for Moscow, determined to resign and leave Russia for good.

Together with my resignation, I presented to the authorities in Moscow a report of conditions as I had found them. Some of the people at Khalata, after being questioned by the police for a period, were put on trial for sabotage, and confessed their guilt. But that didn't solve the problem of production at Khalata; it has never yet come back to anything like what it was while American engineers were at work there. I am convinced, in the light of subsequent events, that the manager and engineers were just pawns in a bigger game, and that the higher-ups were not caught until years had passed. I had this feeling so strongly at the time that I agreed to stay on in Russia only on condition that I would not be asked to work in the Urals.

During this period, while I was detached temporarily from the Gold Trust and assigned to work in copper mines, I had an opportunity to observe at first hand the actions of Yuri Pyatakov, the vice commissar executed in 1937, after he had confessed to leadership of a wrecking ring. I went to Berlin in the spring of 1931 with a large purchasing commission headed by Pyatakov; my job was to offer technical advice on purchases of mining machinery. Some things happened on that occasion which I never understood until I

read Pyatakov's testimony at his trial in 1937.

Pyatakov testified that the group of conspirators, of which he was a leader, built up a reserve fund for their anti-government activities abroad by getting rebates on purchases from German firms. The Soviet prosecutor didn't see fit to call me as a witness; if he had done so, I might have contributed something useful. I suppose the prosecutor didn't know I had any connection with the affair.

Among other things, the commission in Berlin was buying several dozen mine hoists, ranging from 100 to 1000 horse power. Ordinarily, these hoists consist of drums, shafting, bearings, gears, and so on, placed on a foundation of I or H beams. The commission asked for quotations on the basis of pfennigs per kilogram. After some discussion, the German concerns later mentioned in Pyatakov's confession reduced their prices between five and six pfennigs per kilogram. When I studied these proposals, I discovered that the firms had substituted cast-iron bases weighing several tons for the light steel provided in specifications, which would reduce the cost of production per kilogram, but increase the weight and, therefore, the cost to purchaser.

### *Blocking a Racket*

Naturally, I was pleased to make this discovery, and reported to the members of the commission with a sense of triumph. But these men were distinctly lukewarm; they even brought considerable pressure on me to persuade me to approve the deal. I couldn't figure out their attitude. I finally told the commission members flatly that they would have to make such purchases on their own responsibility, and that I would see that my own contrary advice got on the record. Only then did they drop the proposal.

At the time I attributed their attitude to obstinate stupidity, or perhaps some personal graft. But this incident was fully explained by Pyatakov's subsequent confessions. The matter was so arranged that Pyatakov could have gone back to Moscow and showed that he had been very successful in reducing prices, but at the same time would have paid out money for a lot of worthless cast iron and enabled the Germans to give him very substantial rebates. According to his own statement, he got away with the same trick on some other items, although I blocked this one.

There was a sequel to this Berlin affair which may or may not have had some connection with my conduct there. I went back for the

second time to the copper mines at Khalata after returning from Berlin. As I have related, I found conditions there deplorable and highly suspicious. One day I was standing with another American on a dump of ore near one of the mines, silhouetted against the sky. Suddenly bullets began to whiz past me, and I wasted no time in taking shelter. That was a turbulent period, and it was not uncommon for Soviet officials to be shot, so that I didn't suspect these bullets may have been intended for me. But when I read the testimony in the 1937 trial, I began to wonder.

Pyatakov's associates were directly in charge of copper mining over a period of years. Judging from my own experience, I can't believe that it was entirely a matter of chance that disastrous "mistakes" occurred so much oftener in copper and other nonferrous-metal mines than in gold mines, where the leadership was never in question. I personally have no doubts whatever that the Khalata copper mines were deliberately wrecked after we American engineers had got them going.

During my second visit to Khalata., in 1932, I discovered that production had gone along pretty well under the Communist manager who had worked with us American engineers and had begun to understand what it was all about at the time I left. There was no good reason why an investigating commission should have been sent in by the highest Communist authorities in the Urals, or why the commission should have displaced the honest manager and substituted its own chairman for him.

### *The Viceroy of the Urals*

The Communist chairman of the whole Urals region, a man named Kabakov, was officially responsible for this procedure. Kabakov held this job for about fifteen years, and had so much power that he was dubbed the "Bolshevik viceroy of the Urals." For some reason which I never understood he retained the complete confidence of the Kremlin and was always forgiven every mistake. Judged dispassionately, his record was bad. Under his long rule, the Ural region, which has almost unlimited mineral riches and was given vast capital sums for exploitation, never did produce anywhere near what it should have done. I positively refused to work in the territory controlled by this man in 1932; five years later, in 1937, he was arrested on charges of industrial sabotage covering a period of nine years. When I heard of his arrest, I was not surprised.

Toward the end of 1932 I was given an assignment which has completely convinced me that organized wrecking existed on a large scale in Russia. I was sent to rehabilitate Russia's greatest lead-zinc mines, a former British concession in Southern Kazakstan. I had been warned that conditions were pretty bad, but wasn't prepared for anything quite so bad as I found. These mines are among the best lead-zinc mines in the world, and, in addition, the ore carries an unusually large amount of gold.

The methods which had been used in these mines were enough to break the heart of a mining engineer. They had resulted in several cave-ins so large that production had almost been stopped. The mines lie alongside a river, and the cave-ins had caused a sudden large increase in the flow of water, which had overtaxed the installed pumping equipment, and the mines were in such condition that they were in danger of being lost beyond recovery at any moment through flooding. The government had spent large sums for modern American machinery and equipment for these mines, but much of it already was useless. For example, a fine large flotation concentrator had been erected, but was in terrible shape because the equipment had not been taken care of and the workmen were untrained in the use of American machinery, which the Russian engineers themselves didn't understand.

I went into these mines as chief engineer with the same authority which I had been given when I first went to Khalata. I saw at once that immediate action was necessary to save the mines, and decided upon a plan of work. One of the chief difficulties here, as I later discovered, had been quarrels between two parties at the mines about the proper methods to use. But the local people showed immediate confidence in my judgment, and gave me excellent co-operation. As a result, we managed to get the mines and mill into fairly good shape in a few months.

Two of the younger Russian engineers at these mines impressed me as particularly capable, and I took a great deal of pains to explain to them how things had gone wrong and how they had been righted. These engineers were not Communists, but they had been trained under the Communist regime and seemed to be working honestly.

It was clear to me that Communist managers at the mines, ignorant of engineering problems, had compelled these young fellows to act against their better judgment, in order to obtain some immediate increase of production at the expense of the future, and

even at the risk of losing great bodies of valuable ore. I said to them: "Don't let these Communist managers push you into anything like this again. You know what is right, and you must stick to it." They promised me faithfully that they would do as I advised. I made out an elaborate set of recommendations and instructions for additional improvements for mines and smelters. These instructions amounted to a blueprint detailing the proper methods for developing mines and plant for years to come.

Well, one of my last jobs in Russia, in 1937, was a hurry call to return to those same mines. When I looked over that plant, I was ready to leave Russia for good. Once more the mines were close to destruction. Thousands of tons of rich ore already had been lost beyond recovery, and in a few more weeks, if nothing had been done meanwhile, the whole deposit might have been lost.

I discovered that the property had gone along fairly well for two or three years after I had reorganized it in 1932. Then a commission came in from Pyatakov's headquarters, as it had done at the mines at Khalata. My instructions had been thrown into the stove, and a system of mining introduced throughout those mines which was certain to cause the loss of a large part of the ore body in a few months. Pillars which we had left for protecting the main working shafts had been mined, so that the ground around these shafts was settling.

One of the most flagrant examples of deliberate sabotage involved a rather elaborate ventilating system which had been ordered for the lead smelter to prevent the poisoning of workers. This ventilating system, which cost a lot of money and was necessary to protect the health of workers in the smelter, had actually been installed in the filter section of the mill, where there were no harmful gases or dust of any kind. Any engineer would agree that such action could hardly be the result of mere stupidity, however gross.

I went through this plant thoroughly, and drew up my report, explaining how the written instructions I had left behind me in 1932 had disappeared sometime in 1934. When I submitted this report, I was shown the written confessions of the young engineers I have mentioned above.

They admitted that they had used my written instructions of 1932 as the basis for deliberately wrecking the plant. Their confessions explained just how and when the "mistakes" had occurred which I outlined in my report. They admitted that they had been drawn into a

conspiracy against the Stalin regime by opposition Communists, who convinced them that they were strong enough to overthrow Stalin and his associates and seize power for themselves. The conspirators proved to them that they had many supporters among Communists in high places. They decided that they had to back one side or the other, and picked the losing side.

In my opinion, this incident explains a large part of what has happened in Soviet Russia. It hardly seems necessary to study Dostoevski's novels or to dig deep into Russian history to find a more complicated explanation, as observers with more subtle minds than mine have preferred to do. My experience confirms the official explanation, which, when it is stripped of a lot of high-flown and outlandish verbiage, comes down to the simple assertion that "outs" among the Communists conspired to overthrow the "ins," and resorted to underground conspiracy and industrial sabotage because they have no legitimate means of waging a political struggle under the Soviet system.

### *A Vicious Circle*

This Communist feud developed into such a big affair that many non-Communists were impelled to pick one side or the other. All those who could avoid it made no choice; they didn't want to get caught, whichever way the battle went. Disgruntled little persons of all kinds were in a mood to support any kind of underground opposition movement, simply because they were discontented with things as they stood. I saw what this conspiracy did to some of the mines, and I can well believe that it was equally destructive to other branches of Soviet industry, as the official reports say it was.

Well, now that the conspiracy has been discovered and thousands of actual or suspected men and women have been put out of the way, will Soviet industry show marked improvement in the near future? To that question, I would answer: Improvement is likely to be slow. The fierce hunt for conspirators has continued now for more than a year, and has upset morale in every kind of organization, industrial or otherwise. The political police, throwing out their nets, have hauled in some honest men and women along with the conspirators, and have discouraged any kind of initiative, at least for the time being. This is unfortunate, as the younger managers and engineers were just beginning to have some confidence in themselves, and I had found, before the last purge started, that I could give orders with

reasonable confidence that they would be carried out properly.

Looking at the Soviet industrial system from the viewpoint of an engineer, as I have always done, it seems to me that the Communists have got themselves and the Russian people into a kind of vicious circle. The Communists assume absolute political control over the whole economy of the country, and put their own Communist politicians in every key position. They won't tolerate any other political party except their own, and won't consider anything less than complete political control of industry.

All at once, the group in power suddenly discovers it can't trust fellow Communists. A tremendous conspiracy develops among the Communists themselves. The ruling group has no means of knowing whether or not some of the conspirators are left in office; no Communist knows whether or not he can trust the rest.

But it is often very hard to tell the difference between deliberate sabotage and stupid mistakes in Russia, where so many workmen and engineers haven't yet got the feel for modern industrial methods. Having discovered that so many actual wreckers are at work, the authorities have a tendency to suspect any person who makes a mistake. Knowing this, engineers and managers are afraid to take any sort of risk; they stick to dull routine methods, for fear of making a mistake, and any engineer will agree that progress isn't made under such conditions.

Then, too, it seems to me that the Soviet so-called planned



*This Shows the Vast Reaches of Russian Territory the Author Covered During the Ten Years He Hunted Gold for Stalin.*

*Moscow, the Urals, Kazakstan, Lake Baikal, the Amur,  
Yakutia*

economy makes it almost impossible for an engineer or manager to avoid trouble for himself sooner or later. At the end of each year, under this system, engineers and managers must turn in complete programs for the ensuing year. These programs include output, financial needs, orders for all technical and food supplies, and so on. To work at all, this system requires the highest degree of delicate adjustment, which won't be possible for a long time in Russia, if it is possible anywhere under political domination.

If some supplies are not delivered on time, which usually happens, all plans are thrown out of balance. In mining, where I had my experience, conditions of the ore body often change, making the plan unworkable. But each mine's plans have been built into the framework of the general plan, and all concerned struggle frantically and unnaturally to adjust altered conditions in the mines to a rigid plan made out before present conditions existed. Sometimes, on the other hand, a mine's engineers and managers make out a certain plan, provide the necessary equipment, and then, in the course of development, discover that a much larger output is possible. The state needs additional output badly, but it is safer and easier to keep to the plan already fixed.

Managers and engineers in Soviet industries have to endure a constant barrage of brutal criticism and officious interference both from the top and the bottom layers of industrial society. The Communists—the politicians—stand at the top and consider it their duty to keep the specialists on the mark. The ordinary workmen, at the bottom, have been assured that they are the real rulers of the country, and have the right to speak their minds to the engineers and executives who are theoretically their employees.

### *Time Out for Speechmaking*

As a foreigner, I wasn't often disturbed by this. I was assigned to do specific jobs, and wasn't supposed to have much share in the country's political life. But my Russian associates had to spend hours every day on matters which had nothing to do with production; they often had to waste so much time at meetings and parades and talkfests of various kinds that they couldn't possibly do their work well. Like all politicians, the Communists attach an inordinate value to speech making. The engineers are blamed if they neglect the outside stuff, and are blamed if their work doesn't go well.

In addition, the system of so-called planned economy requires an

enormous amount of paper work. Before I went to Russia, I worked for a time at the Alaska-Juneau gold mines, where the daily output of ore ranks among the largest in the world. The office force in these mines consisted of five people, of whom one was the manager. At my first mines in Russia, where the output was a fraction of that in the Alaska mines, the office force numbered 150 men and women, and even that number was always behind in its paper work. At the Alaska mines, I could get any figures I needed in a minute, but in Russia it might take weeks or even months.

Foreigner or not, I was never able to break away from this paper work. My last five years in Russia, which ended in August, 1937, were spent largely in inspection or reorganization work. I had the title of Deputy Chief Engineer in Charge of Production for the Gold Trust, and kept constantly on the go, visiting one set of mines after another.

This was a strenuous job, as I had to analyze plants quickly and decide what was needed to set them on the right track. I should have spent a large part of my working day in the mines or mills, but I often had to sit at my desk for long hours, wading through the countless orders and instructions and regulations which poured out from headquarters and sub-headquarters, and kept us all up to our necks in paper. It's not surprising that there is always a paper shortage in Russia, or that there is alleged to be no unemployment. The surplus population can always find a job adding to the mountain of paper.

I was always trying to get away from this paper work, which slows up rather than helps production, and on one occasion I thought I had a chance to escape it. I was acting one morning as interpreter between Serebrovsky, head of the Gold Trust, and an American engineer who could speak no Russian. The American wanted to go over some plans and written proposals he had worked out. Serebrovsky listened for a little while, and then broke in: "Tell this engineer I don't want paper from him: I get enough of that from the Russian engineers. I want you fellows to give me some metal."

Well, after that I tried to cut down, or even ignore, some of my own paper work. I thought I would have an excuse, if there were objections, in what Serebrovsky had said. But I soon discovered that no living man can get away from the mass of paper under the system in Russia. And I don't see any prospect that anyone ever will.

### *A System Built on Paper*

During my ten years in Russia, I came back on several occasions

for a brief holiday in the United States, and every time I came back I was struck anew by the comparative absence of red tape in American industry. It was not only a question of red tape. If the same kind of bookkeeping and cost accounting which we have in this country were put into proper operation in Soviet Russia, it would become much easier for Moscow to control the “mistakes” and sabotage which have been causing so much trouble lately.

After my holidays over here, I always went back to Russia with fresh spirit, and on several occasions proposed to install, in one or two mines, at least, a system which, would make available promptly accurate reports of operations and costs, which are essential, as any engineer knows, to efficient control of the mines. They are just as essential under the Russian system as they are here.

Well, I tried to stress the importance of such work, but I never got very far. It was usually nothing more than writing a few letters back and forth, which, after all, is just a further waste of paper. The system in Russia seems to depend on paper, which is its meat and drink. The producers are tied up in red tape and left swimming in an ocean of paper. I've been told it's the same in all government offices; in Soviet Russia, practically every office has become a government office.

Editor's Note—This is the second of several articles by Mr. Littlepage and Mr. Bess. The next will appear in an early issue.