8-1-1969

Stalin and the purges

Diann Scales
Atlanta University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations
Part of the History Commons

Recommended Citation
STALIN AND THE PURGES

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY
DIANN SCALES

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
AUGUST 1969

R = '11 T = 57
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. PROLOGUE</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenin's Death</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Right and Left Opposition</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Liquidation of The Kulaks</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Purge of the Intelligentsia</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. KIROV'S MURDER INAUGURATES THE GREAT PURGES</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Murder of Kirov.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Trial of The Sixteen</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Trial of The Seventeen</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Army Purge.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Trial of The Twenty-one</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trotsky's Assassination</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. COMPARATIVE REASONS FOR THE GREAT PURGES</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challengers Had to be Eliminated</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scapegoats Were Necessary</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terror was an Inherent Element of The System Itself</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE RESULT OF THE GREAT PURGES</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Effect.</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Effect.</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Effect</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Joseph Stalin was one of the world's most powerful dictators. For more than thirty years he was in command of Russia's destiny. No emperor in Russia had ever enjoyed the power he possessed. There was a time when the people in Russia were almost afraid to speak his name.

Throughout his life almost everyone under estimated him, until it was too late. Those who dealt with Stalin under the impression that his Communism was meaningless or a smokescreen for some kind of personal interest often suffered disaster. Many of his comrades, for instance Gregory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev and Nikolai Bukharin were accused of crimes such as murder, attempt at committing murder, high treason and plotting with the fascist powers. Practically all the leading Communists who had opposed Stalin at any time during the 1920's or even earlier were shot or died in labor camps.

Stalin began his purges in the Party and the state, after Lenin became ill in 1922. During this time the word "purge" meant the dismissal from office or party. His purges in the Ukraine, and above all in Georgia stirred up alarm because there had been many imprisonments and some shootings of revolutionaries including Mensheviks. Stalin had for the first time used the word "purge" in order to extend his roughhouse tactics to fellow Communist party members. Thousands of people were expelled from the Party during the major purges which took place in 1927, 1929, and 1933. In 1934, a new era of purging began after the murder of Sergei Kirov, a member of the Political Bureau and a close personal friend of Stalin. These purges lasted through 1938.
Finally, in 1940, Leon Trotsky was assassinated while reading a manuscript that was brought to him by his assassin. This culminated the era known as the Great Purges.

Was Stalin's entire rule destined to be a bloody terror in consequence of Lenin's decision to seize and hold power by force in a country that did not support him? It is highly possible that the Russian Civil War and the Cheka, that is, secret police were the result of Lenin's decision to seize power, but it seems difficult to insist that, say, the Great Purges were the inevitable outcome of what Lenin had done before. Many writers have examined what Stalin did, but they have failed to agree concerning why and how he reached his decisions.

This paper does not propose to present a definitive answer to the intricate question of why Stalin began the purges. Rather an attempt will be made to compare the various causes of the purges that have been given by various historians. How it could have happened that a man of Stalin's attainment could have been responsible for the murder of so many people, may never be wholly explained. The author believes that as long as there are men alive who witnessed what Stalin did, although there is no positive proof written in published documents, his career will remain a touchy subject for historians to venture on.

The author believes that Isaac Deutscher, Merle Fainsod, Alexander Uralov, Alexander Weissberg, Alexander Orlov, and F. Beck and W. Godin give excellent accounts of the Great Purges. The author has found their books helpful in the research, especially the eye witness accounts. The author has tried to examine their accounts objectively in order to distinguish the actual facts from the various personal
bias. For instance, Alexander Weissberg, a member of the Communist Party; F. Beck, a historian; and W. Godin, a scientist were arrested during the Great Purges, so their accounts may differ from others because of personal bias. Alexander Orlov, former Soviet Diplomat and Counter-Intelligence chief presents the hidden facts of Stalin's crimes, but the author has found it necessary to compare other eye witness accounts in order to determine critically the validity of his often dubious facts.

The author's aim is to present as factual a picture as possible of the Great Purges and leave the reader to draw his own conclusions. The topical approach of research will be used in this study. The data for the development of this study will be limited primarily to secondary sources, since the author cannot translate Russian primary sources. It is the author's intention to gather, analyze, and compare the complex facts concerning the Great Purges.

The purpose of this study is to present a historical analysis of Stalin's power as a dictator and to show how the Great Purges affected Russia economically, politically, and militarily. The author plans to emphasize how Stalin expanded his personal secretariat as a kind of inner apparatus to control the Party apparatus and other hierarchies. This inner apparatus became one of the most powerful hierarchies in Russia.
CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE

THE BEGINNING PURGES

On April 3, 1922, Joseph Stalin became Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. This post was to become the most important post in Russia. Stalin had accumulated many powers, the basis of his imminent triumph. One of the most important powers that the Secretary General and his secretariat obtained was the domination of the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee of the Party. This body governed the membership, the distribution of posts and promotion within the Party. Stalin did not, however, possess supreme power. Late in May, 1922, Lenin suffered an incapacitating stroke. While Lenin was ill no one had supreme power. It was believed that he would soon recover, but no one knew how soon or how much. Stalin's power, however, could function for the time being without check from any higher authority in the Politburo which was the abbreviation for the Political Bureau. This was the leading committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union which had the responsibility of analyzing events, and determining policy.

Lenin began to improve in the autumn of 1922, but he could not resume his former enormous work load. Information was fed to him by the chosen few concerning Stalin's control within the Party. At this point Lenin's confidence in Stalin which had remained constant for seventeen years, was broken. Lenin suffered his second stroke in
December, 1922. He dictated a memorandum known as his Testament, in which he expressed misgivings about the concentration of power in Stalin's hands. According to T. H. Rigby who quotes Lenin's Testament:

(December 24, 1922)
Comrade Stalin, having become General Secretary, has concentrated limitless power in his hands, and I am not certain that he will always be careful enough in the use of this power.

(Addendum January 4, 1923)
Stalin is too rough, and this shortcoming while completely tolerated in relations among us Communists becomes intolerable in the post of General Secretary. Therefore I propose to the comrades to think over the means of transferring Stalin from this post and appointing to it some other person who is superior to Stalin only in respect, namely, in being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite, and more attentive to comrades, less capricious, and so on. This circumstance may seem an insignificant trifle. But I think that, from the point of view of preventing a split and from the point of view of what I have written above about the relations between Stalin and Trotsky, it is not a trifle, or it is the kind of trifle that is capable of acquiring decisive significance.¹

From the end of January to early March, 1923, Lenin dictated various articles attacking Stalin's work in Rabkrin, as the Commissariat was called. The Rabkrin was set up to control every branch of the administration, from top to bottom, with a view to eliminating the two major faults, inefficiency and corruption, which the Soviet civil service had inherited from its Tsarist predecessor. Stalin's measures of defense were not very effective. On one occasion he forgot himself so far as to tell Lenin's wife, Nadezhsa Krupskaia, what she could do to her mother. On March 5, therefore, Lenin formally broke off personal relations with Stalin. He made arrangements to have the Georgian

case brought up against Stalin at the Twelfth Party Congress, which was scheduled to meet in April. Lenin dictated a letter to Trotsky on March 5, 1923, he stated:

I earnestly ask you to undertake the defence of the Georgian matter in the Party Central Committee. It is now being 'persecuted' by Stalin and Dzerzhinsky, so that I cannot rely on their impartiality. Indeed, quite the contrary. Should you agree to undertake its defence, I would rest easy. If for some reason you do not agree, please return all the papers. I shall consider that a sign of your disagreement.¹

After Lenin's first stroke Stalin arranged an informal alliance with Gregory Zinoviev, whose bureaucratic base at this time lay in the Petrograd Party organization and in the Comintern which is the abbreviation for the Communist International; and Lev Kamenev, whose power rested in the Moscow Party organization. These two men were also members of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Since their alliance with Stalin at this time was eventually to cost Zinoviev and Kamenev their lives, their motives have been the subject of much interest. They apparently thought that Stalin was inherently slow and clumsy, and that the powerful posts he held posed no real danger to themselves because he seemed to have been on the ropes already, whether or not Lenin recovered. Their real fear seems to have been that Lenin would die and that Trotsky would become the leader of the Party. They apparently thought that Trotsky would take their positions. But Trotsky had become less powerful by April, 1922.

According to Robert Payne who states:

...On April 11, / 1922 /, Lenin offered an even greater gift to Trotsky by proposing that he be appointed deputy chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. Rykov and Tsyurupa had already been appointed deputy chairman, and Trotsky seems to have felt that the appointment was beneath his dignity. He was not a man to share honors with others. He knew his own value. Was he not the man who had built the Red Army and held the world at bay? It never seems to have occurred to him that Lenin had proposed the honor in order to ensure the succession. Trotsky haughtily declined to fill the office, and at that moment he signed his own death warrant. If he had accepted the honor, he might have been able to claim the succession. Without it, he was weaponless.  

Zinoviev and Kamenev believed that separately, neither could measure up to Trotsky. But jointly they represented a powerful combination of talent and influence. They virtually controlled the whole Party and through it, the government. Kamenev had acted as Lenin's deputy and presided over the Moscow Soviet. Zinoviev was the chairman of the Soviet of Petrograd. Stalin controlled most of the provinces. This triumvirate was to last about three years, during which Stalin won supreme power.

With the aid of Zinoviev and Kamenev Stalin was able to defend himself at the Twelfth Party Congress and on several other occasions during the middle months of 1923.

Patient, crafty, and iron-willed Stalin had laid his plans carefully during the two years of Lenin's illness. As General Secretary of the Communist Party, he used his position to secure an increase in the membership of the Central Executive Committee. At the end of 1923, Trotsky was still War Commissar and the likely heir to Lenin in the eyes of the world.

---

On January 21, 1924, Lenin died of a fourth stroke. This was an opportune moment for the political fortunes of Stalin. Some of his more uncharitable enemies have suggested that he poisoned Lenin. We may assume Stalin felt relieved that there was no longer a chance for Lenin to recover and strip him of his high party offices. We can also assume that Stalin felt some manner of grief at the end of a twenty-year association with Lenin. Many of the "Old Bolsheviks" found Trotsky's excuse, for not attending Lenin's funeral, hard to believe. Isaac Deutscher contends that:

...Trotsky had gone to the Caucasus to have his illness treated; and, if his own testimony is to be believed, he failed to return for the funeral in Moscow because Stalin had misinformed him about the date....1

At the beginning of 1925, Stalin's long campaign against Trotsky proved decisively victorious. Stalin decided that the time was ripe to have the triumvirate and its majority in the Politburo order Trotsky to "resign" as People's Commissar for War. Trotsky was in control of the Red Army. He had lost his ability to rally the Party against Stalin sometime in the middle of 1923; so long as he remained in command of the Red Army, there was always the possibility that he might reverse Stalin's triumph within the Party by a military Putsch which was the word used for an uprising. But he left office without the slightest attempt at rallying in his defense the army he had created and led for seven years. Having resigned from the Commissariat of War, Trotsky devoted his energy and talent to such minor jobs in the economic administration as Stalin assigned to him. He still remained a

---

member of the Politburo, but for more than a year he kept aloof from all public controversy.

Stalin took the initiative in breaking up the triumvirate in that he refused to consult his partners or to discuss with them his moves before the sessions of the Politburo. He was the indisputable master of the Party, even though Kamenev was still entrenched in the organization of Moscow, while Zinoviev still led the Bolsheviks of Leningrad. Stalin convinced the Party members that not a single one of Lenin's disciples was worthy of Lenin's mantle and that only as a team could they aspire to leadership. In 1925, that body consisted of Stalin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Trotsky, Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky. Having put an end to the triumvirate, Stalin was now more dependent on the backing of three members, Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky.

The new alignment coincided with the crystallization of a Right Wing in the Party and the Politburo. The process began in the first half and was completed in the second half of 1925. Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky were the chief spokesmen of the new trend, while Zinoviev and Kamenev came to head the Left Wing. Stalin belonged neither to the one nor to the other wing. Tactical reasons compelled him to join hands with the spokesmen of the Right, on whose vote in the Politburo he was dependent. Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky accepted his doctrines of socialism in one country, while Zinoviev and Kamenev denounced it. The group that favored the NEP policy was led by Bukharin and the Right Opposition. The NEP policy declared that the peasant could dispose of his remaining output in anyway that pleased him, after he paid his tax in kind. The kulaks, or richer peasants, produced a large
share of their output for market, but they were prepared to withhold their grain in order to drive a hard bargain when price relationships were unfavorable.\footnote{Merle Fainsod, \textit{How Russia is Ruled} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 268.} The Bukharin group counseled avoidance of repressive measures in dealing with the peasantry. This group believed that certain price concessions should be offered to the peasantry in order to encourage production for market. The Right Opposition realized that, in order to obtain large grain deliveries, more and cheaper consumer goods would have to be made available to the rural population.

The opposing group or Left Opposition was led by Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Trotsky. This group believed that a program of rapid industrialization was necessary and that nothing short of a wholesale reconstruction of Soviet agriculture could guarantee the grain reserve to carry it forward. The Left Opposition advocated "emergency measures" against the \textit{kulaks} in order to expropriate the surpluses which they were hoarding. They believed that the government should reduce taxation for the middle and poor peasants, but increase it for the \textit{kulaks}. The Left Opposition affirmed that the government should set out to create large farms, producers of marketable grain; but, these should be large collective farms. The collective farming was to be carried out in order to prevent a food crisis.

Stalin realized that the majority of the Party was for a continuation of the moderate policy as embodied in the New Economic Policy. He knew that the masses were content to have things remain and they wanted no more swinging to the left. Trotsky argued that Lenin had
meant the New Economic Policy as a temporary measure to tide over a critical period and that the time had come to go back to militant Communism.

Stalin did not take issue with either side at this time. His basic concern seems to have been the reorganization of the Party apparatus. Stalin began reorganizing the Central Committee of the Communist Party in the Ukraine and other Soviet republics. On the pretext of eliminating undesirable and counterrevolutionary elements, he ousted all who did not appear to agree to his suggestions. With the Party apparatus thus reorganized Stalin could now fill governmental posts with his own men.

After his overwhelming triumph at the Fourteenth Congress, Stalin began to purge the Leningrad Party organization of Zinoviev's followers. Stalin could now proceed to destroy the opposition. He branded Zinoviev and Kamenev as "super-industrializers." For nearly three years, until in 1928, industrialization was not discussed while the program of the Right Opposition was being carried out.

On November 7, 1927, during the annual celebration of the October Revolution, Trotsky and Zinoviev led their followers in a peaceful procession through the streets of Moscow and Leningrad. Although the banners and slogans that were carried by the demonstrators were directed against the ruling group only by implication, the procession brought the struggle to a head. Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the Party. In December, 1927, the Fifteenth Congress met and

---

1 Ibid., p. 151.
demanded from the leaders of the opposition that they renounce their views in order to continue their membership in the Party. On December 18, 1927, the Congress voted the expulsion of seventy-five leading members of the Trotskyite opposition as well as twenty-three members of the Saponov group. On December 19, 1927, Kamenev, Zinoviev, and twenty-one of their followers offered their unconditional surrender. The Congress refused to accept their unconditional surrender and left the decision of their readmission to the discretion of the General Secretariat. Zinoviev, Kamenev and some of their supporters managed during the following years to gain readmission into the Party. Stalin's triumph over the Left Opposition was now complete.

To oppose the leadership was to weaken the Party and aid the enemies of the Soviet power. Opposition of any sort became equivalent to treason. Those who opposed Stalin's policies kept silent or engaged in secret discussions. From Stalin's point of view any opposition came to represent a potential challenge to his power which had to be eliminated.

In January, 1928, Stalin made an inspection tour of Siberia in order to discuss grain deliveries with the local farmers. The farmers had been speculating in grain prices, and Stalin was determined to put an end to it. It had been reported that the farmers were not delivering the grain the government demanded at the price the government was willing to pay. Stalin spent several weeks touring Siberia. He made

---

1 Isaac Deutscher, Stalin: A Political Biography, p. 311.

2 Merle Fainsod, op. cit., p. 154.
several speeches during his tour and on one occasion, he stated:

I propose (1) the immediate delivery of all surpluses from the kulaks at government prices, (2) kulaks refusing to obey the law be prosecuted under Article 107 of Crim-inal Code of the R.S.F.S.R. and their grain surplus confiscated, grain be distributed among the poor and less well-to-do peasants at low government prices or in the form of long-term loans.¹

On Stalin's return to Moscow the NEP was liquidated and the era of the first Five-Year Plans began. It launched the Soviet Union on a course of industrialization, and collectivization, during which many farmers were arrested. The First Five-Year Plan was accompanied by a phase of political coercive measures. In 1929, Stalin announced his intention to liquidate the kulaks as a class. For the farmers whether rich or poor, there was now no law no court of appeal and no means of escape. The secret police were instructed to deal with the peasantry as they saw fit. The kulaks and the middle peasants took arms. They hid their grain, burned their crops, and slaughtered their cattle. Many kulaks were killed or deported to work camps. The G.P.U. which was the abbreviation for the secret police, employed millions of slave laborers, who built railroads and cut down forests. Hundreds of thousands of slave laborers perished in the Artic winters. The power of the secret police increased to the point that it dominated the entire economic life of the country.²

The liquidation of the kulaks brought ruin to innumerable peasant families. By collectivizing the farms and nationalizing peasant labor,

¹ Payne, op. cit., p. 371.
² Ibid., p. 372.
Stalin made the peasantry completely dependent upon the state. The result was that several million peasants perished.

When the Right Opposition realized their mistake and saw how they had been betrayed by Stalin, they made secret overtures to the Left Opposition in a frantic attempt to turn the tables on Stalin. But it was too late. Trotsky was in exile, and Stalin's position in the Party was impregnable.

Some of the negotiations between the groups of the Right and the Left were revealed in a series of documents published in Moscow by the secret presses of the Trotskyites in the latter part of 1928 and early months of 1929.

On February 2, 1929, Bukharin made some important statements to Kamenev concerning Stalin's desire to stay in power. According to information found in Current History, Bukharin stated:

The differences between us / the Right Opposition / and Stalin are vastly more serious than all our former differences with you of the Left Wing. Rykov, Tomsky and I are unanimously of this opinion, it would be better to have Zinoviev and Kamenev in the Politburo instead of Stalin... For several weeks now I have not been on speaking terms with Stalin. This man is an unprincipled plotter whose chief aim is to stay in power. He changes his theories whenever he finds it necessary to put an opponent out of his way... No one must know about our meeting. Do not speak to me over the telephone—the wires are tapped. I am constantly followed by an agent of the Ogpu (Soviet secret police) and an agent is watching you. I want to communicate with you, but not through secretaries or intermediaries. No one except Rykov and Tomsky know what I have said to you.¹

At the end of the meeting Bukharin agreed that a full report of their discussion should be sent to Zinoviev, who was in exile in Voronezh.

¹ "Stalin's Rise to Power," Current History, XXXIV (April, 1931), 76.
Kamenev accordingly wrote out an account of the discussion in the form of a series of statements, dialogues and observations and sent it by special messenger to Zinoviev. A few hours or days later the notes were in the hands of Stalin.

The incompetence and stupidity of the conspirators played into the hands of Stalin. The original revolutionary flame had withered until it was no more than a quivering breath of smoke among ashes.

Max Eastman quotes some statements that were made by L. P. Serbriakov, a member of the Politburo, in a conversation in 1929:

I am not afraid of anything...Besides it doesn't make any difference what I do. Stalin will get me in the end, anyway. If he lives long enough he will get every single one of us who has ever injured him in speech or action. That is his principal aim of life. He is completely dominated by vindictive passion. He will lie back and wait ten, twenty, thirty years, secretly plotting to achieve an equisitely appropriate revenge upon an enemy, and then when everything is ready he will spring. Believe me, I am not telling fairy stories. I have lived with him roomed with him, camped with him on the battlefield. He is the most vindictive man on earth.¹

In the meantime, early in 1929, Stalin began to accuse Bukharin, Tomsky, and Rykov of right-wing opposition. Bukharin, he pointed out, had engaged in negotiations with Kamenev to establish a bloc with the former Left Opposition. On April 23, 1929, Bukharin was removed from the leadership of the Communist International. On June 2, Tomsky lost his control of the trade unions to Nilolai M. Shvernik, a devoted Stalinist. Toward the end of December, Molotov replaced Rykov as Prime Minister, as well as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissar.

Stalin let them continue as members of the Party Central Committee, but were thoroughly discredited. There followed a purge of their supporters. Stalin's triumph over the Right Opposition was now complete.

In 1930, the purge of the old intelligentsia began. The persecution of the old intelligentsia was inspired by doubt of their loyalty to the Soviet regime. The party leadership needed a scapegoat to divert attention from deteriorating living conditions, so the old intelligentsia was utilized. Every breakdown in production was treated as an act of sabotage for which the old regime engineers were held responsible. Many engineers were accused of conspiring to overthrow Soviet power with the aid of foreign capitalist enemies of the USSR. Merle Fainsod writes an account of the number arrested. He maintains that:

The OGPU was given the responsibility of preparing a series of show trials which would lend plausibility to these flimsy accusations. The production lag in the Donets Coal Basin in 1927-28 led to the widely advertised Shakhty prosecution of Russian technicians and old-regime engineers who were alleged to have conspired with the Germans to commit acts of sabotage and espionage. In the autumn of 1930, forty-eight specialists in the food industry were arrested and shot for alleged membership in a counterrevolutionary organization charged with sabotaging the worker's food supply. In December 1930 came the famous Prompartiya (Industrial Party) trial in which Ramzin and seven other prominent Soviet engineers were accused and convicted of organizing a secret political party, committing acts of sabotage, and conspiring with France to overthrow the Soviet regime. Six of the defendants received death sentences which were subsequently reprieved; the two others were given ten-year terms of imprisonment. In March 1931 another trial was dramatically staged. Fourteen professors and officials were convicted of counterrevolutionary activity and sabotage in conspiracy with the Mensheviks abroad....

---

In June, 1931, Stalin decided to put an end to the engineer purge because he had accomplished his purpose of frightening the intellectuals into submission. He had a substantial number of engineers released from prison or recalled from exile. The old technical intelligentsia began taking its place in industry and assuming its responsibility.

On November 7, 1932, the fifteenth anniversary of the Revolution was celebrated with a military parade and a procession of workmen and athletes. As usual, Stalin took the salute from Lenin's Mausoleum. Stalin's second wife, Nadezhda, was seen among the crowd watching the military parade. Stalin had spies watching over her behavior since 1929, when she enrolled in the Industrial Academy. Her conversations were frequently reported to him. She attended various meetings at which opinions against collectivization were sometimes expressed too freely. The police spies would report her attendance, and sometimes unhappy arguments would occur when she returned to the Kremlin. ¹

The anniversaries of the Revolution were usually celebrated like Christmas. The all-night parties often continued through the next day and the following night. On the night of November 8, 1932, Stalin and Nadezhda attended a party given at the house of Voroshilov. He was accompanied by a small group of intimate friends who had not been eliminated by the purges of the previous twelve months. At such parties Stalin would drink dangerously. Something said by Nadezhda seems to have made Stalin angry. In front of her friends he began cursing

¹ Payne, op. cit., p. 409.
her. Nadezhda could stand it no longer, rushed out of the room, drove to the Kremlin and went straight to the house where she and her children lived. She died the next morning.¹

The official report announced only that her death was "sudden and premature." No further official report was made concerning her death. A semi-official report was circulated concerning the fact that she died of acute appendicities. It was generally accepted that the official report was true. Some people believed that she shot herself through the head, since she was not in good health before the celebration of the Revolution.

Stalin's liberal attitude toward the old intelligentsia in 1931 did not last long. In January 1933, another show trial began, but this time it was directed against six British Metro-vickers engineers, ten Russian technicians, and a woman secretary associated with them. They were charged with sabotage of power stations, and conspiracy in the People's Commissariat of Agriculture and State Farming. They were accused also of using their authority to wreck tractors and to disorganize sowing, harvesting, and threshing in order "to create a famine in the country." Thirty-five of the accused were shot; twenty-two received ten-year sentences; and eighteen were ordered confined for eight years.² The mass executions of the intelligentsia were lifted slightly after the favorable harvest of 1933.

¹ Ibid., pp. 410-11.
² Fainsod, op. cit., pp. 431-32.
CHAPTER II

KIROV'S MURDER INAUGURATES THE GREAT PURGES

On December 1, 1934, a young oppositional Communist, Nikolayev, assassinated Sergei Kirov, the governor of Leningrad. Kirov was an influential personality in the Politburo and one of Stalin's most important henchmen. The circumstances surrounding the assassination of Kirov has never been satisfactorily explained. The first official version claimed that a body of White Guard conspirators helped Nikolayev to assassinate Kirov. The White Guard was composed of men who had opposed the Communist Red Army during the Civil War. The second version, described the assassin as a follower of Zinoviev and Kamenev and did not mention the White Guard.¹

Stalin rushed to Leningrad when he heard of Kirov's assassination, and personally interrogated the terrorist for several hours. His principle aim was to extract a statement of guilt from him which Stalin felt was necessary to destroy all enemies of the Soviet regime. The shot fired by Nikolayev signaled the inauguration of an unparalleled campaign which became known as the Great Purges. Nikolayev and his associates were executed. They were tried in secret, under a decree issued ad hoc, which denied the terrorists the right of defense and appeal.²


In explaining the effect of Kirov's murder, Malcolm Muggeridge contends that seven hundred persons at least in different parts of the USSR were taken out and shot in sheer panic. He maintains that the first impulse was to shoot to shoot anyone handy.\(^1\)

Stalin was not satisfied with the trials that had been held in order to convict the assassins of Kirov. The OGPU arrested hundreds of suspects. The arrests took place in Leningrad, Moscow, Kiev, and Minsk. Within fourteen days, 103 of the men who had been arrested were tried by military tribunals and shot. The man hunt went on throughout 1935 under the slogan "Exterminate all Trotskyites!"\(^2\)

Stalin did not stop with the execution of Nikolayev and his associates for the murder of Kirov. He charged Zinoviev and Kamenev with the responsibility for Kirov's assassination. In discussing the trials of the accused, Alexander Orlov, former Soviet Diplomat and Counter-Intelligence Chief, states:

At the secret trial which took place on January 15, 1935, the state prosecutor was unable to produce any proof that Zinoviev and Kamenev had anything to do with the murder. Nevertheless, under the pressure of threats and relentless bargaining, which was conducted by Yagoda in the name of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev agreed to take upon themselves 'the political and moral responsibility' for the murder of Kirov, denying at the same time any actual complicity in the murder. On this shaky foundation was based the verdict of the court. Without implying by a single word that Zinoviev and Kamenev had taken a part in the assassination of Kirov, the secret military court nevertheless placed upon them 'the political and moral responsibility' for the murder and sentenced Zinoviev to ten


and Kamenev to five years in prison.¹

Stalin's anger against the "Old Bolsheviks" seems to have arisen after a group of Komsomols which was the abbreviation for the Young Communist League was discovered plotting his assassination. It was believed that the officers of the Kremlin guard were involved. The young terrorists were supposed to have been stimulated by speeches or writings of members of the Society of Former Exiles which consisted of revolutionaries from the Tsarist times.² In the spring of 1935, nearly forty men of Stalin's own bodyguard were tried in secret and were executed, the rest were sentenced to various terms of penal servitude.

In estimating the number of expulsions in June 1935, Zbigniew Brzezinski maintains that 22 districts of the Chernigov region resulted in only 15 expulsions from the Party, the second led to 362 expulsions; three districts of the Sverdlousk region reported 30 expulsions the first time and 225 the second, 36 districts of the East Siberian Party organization expelled 218 members on the first try and 784 on the second and the western Region, ordered on June 27, 1935, by the Central Committee to conduct a rescreening, reported that out of some 4000 members checked, 1768 or 22 per cent lost their Party cards, as contrasted with a mere 150 on the first screening.³


In the summer of 1935, Stalin decided to place Zinoviev and Kamenev on trial again, and on July 27, 1935, one of these sentences was revised upward, Kamenev being sentenced to ten years imprisonment.

In 1935, Stalin became irritated by Maxim Gorky's opposition. Maxim Gorky was a Russian writer and a close personal friend of Stalin. Gorky molded public opinion in Russia and he corresponded with writers all over the world. He was the first to whom the injured complained. Stalin did not like the fact that he continually pleaded for the poor, the disinherited, and the imprisoned. Gorky used his influence to moderate Stalin's bottomless obsession for vengeance. On one occasion when Kamenev's life seemed to have been in danger, Gorky arranged a confrontation between them in the Kremlin. Stalin wanted Gorky to write a book celebrating Stalin's deeds, but Gorky refused. Stalin suggested that Gorky should write an article on "Lenin and Stalin," and again Gorky refused. It was Gorky's way of protesting against the growing persecution of the "Old Bolsheviks." Gradually their friendship came to an end. On June 18, 1936, Gorky died at the height of the Great Purges.

Stalin started a new wave of "purifications" on January 14, 1936, when the Central Committee decreed that all party members must exchange their old party cards for new identification. This was a process which again eliminated many "passive people." Of those members who remained in the Party, Stalin demanded increased vigilance in exposing hidden enemies. A new wave of denunciations, arrests, and expulsions followed, laying the groundwork for the first major spectacle which took place on August 19, 1936. Sixteen "Old Bolsheviks," including
Zinoviev and Kamenev, who had been imprisoned in 1935 were scheduled for a public trial. The defendants were accused of organizing, under Trotsky's guidance, a "terrorist centre" whose aim was to carry out terrorists acts against Stalin and company. According to the Report of Court Proceedings: The Case of The Trotskyite-Zinovite Terrorist Centre, August, 1936:

The investigation has established that the Zinovievites pursued their criminal terroristic practices in a direct bloc with the Trotskyites and with L. Trotsky, who is abroad. These newly revealed circumstances established without a doubt that:

1) At the end of 1932, the Trotskyite and Zinovievite groups united and formed a united centre consisting of Zinoviev, Kamenev, Evdokimov, Bakayev (from the Zinovievites) and I.N. Smirnov, TerVaganyan and Mrachkovsky (from the Trotskyites) all charged in the present case.

2) The principal condition for the union of these counterrevolutionary groups was their common recognition of individual terrorism against the leaders of the C.P.S.U. and Soviet Government.

3) Precisely from that time onwards (end of 1932) the Trotskyites and Zinovievites acting on direct instructions from L. Trotsky, received by the united centre through special agents, concentrated their hostile activities against the C.P.S.U. and the Soviet Government mainly on the organization of terrorism against the most prominent leaders of the Party and the Government.

4) With this end in view the united centre organized special terrorist groups, which prepared a number of practical measures for the assassination of comrades Stalin, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Kirov, Orjonikidze, Zhdanov, Kossior, Postyshev and others.

5) One of these terrorist groups consisting of Nikolayev, Rumyansev, Mandelstamm, Levin, Kotolyomov and others, who were convicted by the military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the U.S.S.R. on Dec. 28-29, 1934, carried out the foul murder of Comrade S. M. Kirov on Dec. 1, 1934, on the direct instructions from Zinoviev and L. Trotsky, and
under the direct guidance of the united centre.¹

In the courtroom, Chief Judge V. V. Ulrich presided and Prosecutor Andrei Vishinsky cited the charges. One by one the prisoners confessed as the Prosecutor proceeded to ask questions concerning the crimes committed. In analysing the trial, Newsweek quotes the confession made by Zinoviev:

Did you organize the plot to kill Stalin? Zinoviev stated: Yes....I am guilty...of every charge in the indictment....I have no illusions as to what reactions the court will have to my words...yes, I have lied ever since I began the struggle against the Bolshevik party....I went all the way from opposition through counterrevolutionism and actually to fascism... Trotskyism plus terrorism means fascism.²

He confessed that he had intrigued with the Red Exile since 1928.

The defendants implicated numerous Soviet leaders who were still free among them. A wave of new arrest followed their testimony. On August 23, 1936, Tomsky, former Trade Union Council chief, committed suicide.³

After three days of testimony all sixteen were sentenced to death and were executed.

On October 16, 1936, Bukharin was arrested while at work in the office of Izvestiya, of which he was editor-in-chief, and driven to the Lubyanka. Then he vanished from sight for fifteen months. It was believed that Bukharin was in prison during this time.


² "Mad Fascist Dogs Meekly Admit Plot to Kill Stalin With Aid of Reich Secret Police," Newsweek, VIII (August 29, 1936), 11.

³ Fainsod, op. cit., p. 435.
In January 1937, Stalin arranged the second spectacle which was composed of seventeen men led by Radek, Soviet propagandist; G. L. Pyatakov, a member of the Politburo; G. I. Sokolnikov, Ambassador to Great Britain; and L. P. Serebriakov, a former member of the Politburo. It was conducted by the new head of the NKVD, or the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, Nikolai I. Yezhov, who replaced prison-bound Henry G. Yagoda. The defendants were all men who had devoted many decades of their lives to the Party and had reached high positions. This time the accused were charged with plotting the forcible overthrow of the Soviet government with the aid of Germany and Japan, with planning the restoration of capitalism in the USSR, and with carrying on espionage, wrecking, diversive, and terrorist activities on behalf of foreign states. Again the trial was arranged to demonstrate that Trotsky was the individual who inspired, organized, and directed all these activities. All seventeen defendants confessed their guilt. Alexander Orlov views the result in this way:

On January 30, 1937, the military court condemned thirteen out of the seventeen to death before a firing squad. All the thirteen men, and among them Pyatakov, Serebriakov and other intimate friends of Lenin were murdered in the cellar of the NKVD.¹

Radek and Sokolnikov were given ten-year prison sentences. Two minor figures were also sentenced to long prison terms, but their ultimate fate has never been made public.

By 1937, Stalin had reached the stage when murder had become as habitual as shaving or eating. Three times a week the death lists

¹ Orlov, op. cit., p. 187.
compiled by Yezhov at Stalin's orders would be brought to him, he would read through the list casually, add his initials and then forget about them. These lists did not comprise the names of a small number of high officials, but included hundreds and sometimes thousands of obscure people working inside and outside the government.

Many of those purged during 1937, accepted their disgrace with what the Bolsheviks call "self-criticism." In the Kursk province 1,832 Communists were expelled during 1937. Archangel province expelled 1,254 Communists. Nearly half of the Communists living in Kiev which was the capital of the Ukraine were purged by one secretary in less than nine months. In Azerbaidjan 279 members were expelled on November 5, 1937. In Novosibirsk two days later a similar meeting expelled 72, and in Stalingrad on November 26, 1937, a single meeting expelled 69.¹

By implicating new "conspirators," the second spectacle paved the way for further arrests and trials. This time the victims came from the Red Army. Here the Purge struck not at men isolated and ostracized both politically and socially, but against a group of men skilled in their profession and supposedly in command of the military branch of the Soviet State. On June 11, 1937, several were arrested, tried and executed. On June 12, 1937, Pravda, Izvestiya, and the Moscow radio broadcast carried the announcement of the execution of eight prominent generals of the Red Army. The press and the Moscow radio broadcast said that the generals were tried in secret by a

special bench of judges appointed by the Supreme Court. These reports were found to be untrue. There was no trial held. The Party press merely declared that the eight generals were accused of espionage on behalf of Germany and Japan, anti-party conspiracy, cooperation with Trotsky, and plotting the territorial dismemberment of the USSR. The execution of Tukhachevsky and his associates was the prelude to a mass purge of the Soviet armed forces in the course of which the top commanding personnel was particularly attacked. The commander-in-chief of nearly every military command in the Soviet Union was arrested. Alexander Uralov, former member of the propaganda group of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party who was arrested in 1937, gives an account of the number purged in the Army:

The Cheka / secret police / carried through a radical operation in the Army. The outcome was that by the end of 1938, the following senior officers remained: 3 marshals out of 5; 2 army commanders out of 15; 28 corps commanders out of 85; 85 divisional commanders out of 195; 186 brigadiers out of 406. Thus 57 per cent of all officers belonging to the higher command had been imprisoned and—with rare exceptions, such as General Rokossousky, who was liberated during the Second World War and later promoted marshal—physically destroyed.¹

Many of the officers escaped arrest. F. Beck and W. Godin give an account of the number of officers who escaped arrest:

From an account to which we had access and which seemed thoroughly reliable, we learned that two of five marshals of the Soviet Union escaped arrests, two of fifteen army commanders, twenty-eight of fifty-eight corps commanders, and a hundred and ninety-five of four hundred and six regimental commanders. The arrest were not limited to the higher ranks. According to the estimates of arrested officers from sixty to seventy per cent of officers of field rank must have been

arrested.\(^1\)

In comparing the two accounts of the number of officers purged and those that escaped, it is obvious that these accounts differ.

Alexander Orlov, former Soviet Diplomat and Counter-Intelligence chief, gives an account of the members of the Soviet Government who were imprisoned in 1937 and 1938:

During the second half of 1937 and in 1938 the following members of the Soviet Government were thrown into prison. They had never taken part in any opposition against Stalin:

The People's Commissars:
- for Heavy Industry, Mezhlauk
- for Finance, Grinko
- for Agricultural, Chernov and Yakovlev
- for Interior Trade, Veitser
- for Communications, Khalepsky
- for Military Industry, Rukhimovich
- for Justice, Krylenko
- for State Farms, Kalmanovich
- for Education, Bubnov
- for Sea and River Transport, Yanson

The Secretary of the Central Executive Committee, Abel Yenukidze
- The Chairman of the State Bank of the USSR, Maryasin
- The Deputy to the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, Antipov
- The Secretary of the Central Executive Committee, Akulov

The members of the Politbureau, Kossior and Rudzutak

They were to a man faithful adherents of Stalin. And I am convinced that up to the last minute these men did not know why they had been arrested and why Stalin needed their lives.

A similar massacre had been organized in the Ukraine and in all other Soviet Republics. Petrovsky, the President of the Ukrainian Republic disappeared. Lubchenko, the head of the Ukrainian Government, committed suicide without waiting for his turn. His deputies and all other members of the government were arrested and shot.

The same carnage was organized in the White Russian

---

Republic. The chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of White Russia was arrested and shot without a trial. Some time later the other members of the government were arrested. Cherviakov, the President of the White Russian Republic, committed suicide.¹

The last major spectacle took place in March, 1938. The defendants were twenty-one former members of the Right Opposition, and some were members of the Politburo. The group was headed by Nikolai Bukharin, former Editor of Izvestia; and A. I. Rykov, former People's Commissar for Communication. Also among the defendants was former head of the NKVD, Henry Yagoda. The defendants were charged with the usual combination of treason, espionage, diversion, terrorism and wrecking. The bloc headed by Bukharin and Rykov was alleged to have spied for foreign powers from the earliest days of the Revolution, to have entered into secret agreements with the Nazis and the Japanese to dismember the Soviet Union, and to have organized innumerable acts of sabotage and diversion in order to wreck the economic and political power of the Soviet Union. Bukharin was accused in addition, of conspiracy to kill Lenin and Stalin as early as 1918. This accusation he denied to the end. Yagoda testified to the fact that he not only murdered his predecessor in office, Menzhinsky, but also tried to murder his successor, Yezhov. He asserted that he was responsible for the murder of Maxim Gorky, Gorky's son, and Kuibyshev. He admitted that he planned a palace coup in the Kremlin and the assassination of the Politburo.² Bukharin and his associates "confessed," and all but three

¹ Orlov, op. cit., p. 242.
² Fainsod, op. cit., p. 437.
were sentenced to death and executed. The three who were spared received long prison terms.

In estimating the final number that had been purged in November 1938, Alexander Uralov states:

The 'general operation' for the purging of the Party was concluded in November, 1938. The final balance-sheet of arrests was as follows: 6 out of the 13 members of the Politburo; 125 out of the 140 members of the Central Committee; 9 out of 11 secretaries of Central Committees in the federated republics; 6 out of 6 inter-regional secretaries; 26 out of 30 regional secretaries; 16 out of 16 regional secretaries in the autonomous republics; 81 out of 87 secretaries of urban committees in towns of more than 100,000 inhabitants; 14 out of 18 members of the Council of People's Commissars (now the Council of Ministers) of the U.S.S.R.1

In December 1938, the final phase of the Great Purges occurred. It involved the purging of the purgers. Alexander Weissberg, a member of the Communist Party, who was arrested during the Great Purges, discusses the situation in this way:

On December 8, 1938, the organizer of Stalin's Great Purges, Nikolai Ivanovitch Yezhov, People's Commissar for Home Affairs and Head of the G.P.U., was removed from his post. A few months later he disappeared from the Central Committee and then he was arrested. We were never able to discover whether he was shot or not. At the same time a unique trial took place in Moldavian Republic, in the southwest corner of the vast Soviet Union. The leader of the local G.P.U. and four of his examiners were charged before a military court with having arrested innocent people and forced them to make false confessions under torture. The accused pleaded guilty. But they did not defend themselves by saying that they had acted under the instructions of a counterrevolutionary organization. They were found guilty sentenced to death and shot.... The indictment and execution of these minor, G. P. U. officials was Stalin's signal for change. The Great Purges

1 Uralov, op. cit., p. 73.
After having analyzed the Moscow trials, Alexander Barmine, an armament expert attached to the Arms Export Commissar of the Supreme Defense Council, stated in 1938:

Only Stalin remains. He is all powerful. So has been fulfilled what Lenin feared when he wrote his will that it would be dangerous to leave Stalin in the post of secretary general of the party. He foresaw the probability of diversion in the party because of the diversion of views between Stalin and Trutsky. Perhaps also, he saw dimly what Stalin might become, but even he could never have imagined what has happened. His choice for succession in leadership of the party was Gregory Piatakov as the wisest statesman and Bukharin as the greatest theoretician. Stalin did not forget those words.

The continual existence of Trotsky was valuable to Stalin, for he could always blame the Great Purges on non-existent Trotsky conspiracies. Since Trotsky was living in Mexico, it was easy for him to make speeches and write material against Stalin. By 1940, Trotsky's usefulness to Stalin was over. Stalin had liquidated everyone who was opposed to his policies except Trotsky.

On February 27, 1940, Trotsky wrote his Testament in which he denied the accusations which had been made against him. He reaffirmed that:

I have no need to refute here once again the stupid and vile slander of Stalin and his agents: there is not a single spot on my revolutionary honor. I have never entered, either directly or indirectly, into any behind-the-scenes agreements or even negotiations with the enemies of the working class.


Thousands of Stalin's opponents have fallen victims of similar false accusations. The new revolutionary generations will rehabilitate their political honor and deal with the Kremlin executioners according to their deserts.¹

Trotsky pointed out that he had been a revolutionist for forty-three years under the banner of Marxism. He asserted that he would die a proletarian revolutionist, a dialectical materialist, a Marxist, and an atheist.  

On August 10, 1940, Leon Trotsky wrote a shocking expose in Liberty Magazine: "Did Stalin Poison Lenin?" Unfortunately, Trotsky was unaware of the danger involved when he introduced his accusation with the following statement:

Every fact I mention, every reference and quotation, can be substantiated either by official Soviet publications or by documents preserved in my archives.²

The official Soviet Documents were never revealed to the public because on August 20, 1940, a visitor entered Trotsky's home in Mexico and smashed his head with a pickaxe. It is generally believed that the assassin was an agent of Stalin, though there is no positive proof. Thus, the verdict of the Moscow tribunal, which sentenced Trotsky to death, was carried out. Stalin now achieved his last dark triumph over the man himself, whose name had stood for the great hopes and the great illusions of the October Revolution. The assassination of Trotsky culminated the Great Purges.


CHAPTER III

COMPARATIVE REASONS FOR THE PURGES

Many schools of thought about Soviet history acknowledge the years from 1934 to 1938, as an important turning point in the development of the Communist system, though they may differ widely in their estimates of the reasons, achievements, and implications of the changes which came about during this period. Millions of people became victims of the purges. Some who were accused of sabotage, murder and diverse activities were executed.

What caused Stalin to begin the purges? Some have argued that Stalin needed scapegoats to cover up his economic failures. Others have asserted that he sought to eliminate all possible challenges to his power. There are those who have affirmed that the purges were an inherent element of the system itself, designed to terrorize every individual in order to deprive him of independent action. There are many who believe that Stalin's own madness was the chief cause of these abhorrent massacres.

It is vital that we compare these reasons for the purges that have been given by various historians in order to get a better understanding of what actually occurred. In comparing the reasons for the purges we will be able to note the essential differences and similarities.

Zbigniew Brzezinski contends that the Great Purges were not only a unique manifestation arising out of the very nature of the
totalitarian system but also a distinctive technique of totalitarian government.\(^1\) He believes that all totalitarianisms have arisen out of social and political tensions. The elimination of the kulaks as a class illustrates this point because this extermination was motivated by political and economic considerations which formed an integral part of the first Five-Year Plan. He asserts that the purge is applied against individuals and groups bred within totalitarianism itself not against elements which totalitarianism a priori marks out for destruction.

Brzezinski maintains that the purge is both a consequence of the struggle for power and a part of it. He mentions the fact that in the initial stages of a struggle, the purge is used as a weapon to dislodge various competitors or their associates from positions of influence. In other words, the purge is used to strengthen or weaken rivals. The purge tends to be more cautious and delicate--limiting itself to such tools as transfers, demotions or dismissals.\(^2\) He contends that the struggle will continue until a given group or individual has accomplished the desired leadership.

According to Brzezinski, this is when the bloody procedures begin. This is when the victor set into motion the machinery of total elimination of every sign of opposition. Brzezinski contends that Stalin's struggle for power with Trotsky, for example, resulted in a purging of the Trotskyites only after the effective conclusion of the

---

\(^1\) Brzezinski, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

struggle.

Brzezinski asserts that certain factors that precede, influences or motivates the purges are clearly changeable. These factors depend on or are closely connected with the local situation, such as political, social or economic developments, which influence the specific motivation of the leadership in launching a purge.

W. G. Krivitsky, former chief of the Soviet Intelligence in Western Europe, makes the following observation as a possible motivating influence that led to the purges:

For the next five years / from 1931 / Stalin managed to maintain his power. But during those years discontent and rebellion in the country were spreading like wildfire. Bewildered and enraged by his campaign for 'complete collectivization,' the peasants were fighting OGPU troops with arms in their hands. In this struggle whole provinces were laid waste, millions of peasants were deported, hundreds of thousands were conscripted to forced labor. Only the noise of party propaganda drowned the shots of the firing squads. The misery and hunger of the masses were so great that their resentment against Stalin infected the rank and file of the Party. By the end of 1933, Stalin was compelled to institute a 'cleansing of the Party.' During the next two years, approximately a million Bolshevik oppositionists were expelled. But that did not solve the problem, for these oppositionists were still at large, and they had the sympathy of the masses of the population.¹

Krivitsky asserts that Stalin was profoundly impressed by Hitler's blood purge which occurred on the night of June 30, 1934. Krivitsky emphasizes the fact that the murder of Kirov on December 1, 1934, was a turning point in Stalin's career because Kirov had for a long time stood in the way of Stalin's introducing the death penalty for Bolsheviks. This murder was followed by the era of public and secret

trials of the Bolshevist Old Guard, and the era of confessions. The assassination of Kirov gave Stalin his wished-for opportunity to introduce the death penalty for Bolsheviks. Krivitsky contends that Stalin then began exterminating all who provided a standard around which the discontented and rebellious masses might rally.

Robert Daniels believes that the determining reason for Stalin's decision to begin the purges was his realization, that the mood of the majority of the old party workers was really one of bitterness and hostility toward him. Daniels contends that the trials and investigations which followed the assassination of Kirov had demonstrated unmistakably that the Party had not reconciled itself to Stalin's personal dictatorship. Daniels asserts that Stalin realized that the Bolsheviks' attitude of hostility toward him was growing and that the majority of those who pretended to be loyal to him, would betray him at the first change of the political atmosphere.

Alexander Orlov, former Soviet Diplomat, Counter-Intelligence Chief, Deputy Chief of the Economic Administration of the OGPU and a member of the Communist Party insists that Stalin needed scapegoats to hide his economic failures. Orlov declares that Stalin himself had no illusions about the real feeling which the masses of the people had for him. Orlov asserts that Stalin knew that the exploited and hungry workers hated him. Orlov explains the situation in this way:

1 Ibid., p. 187.

By a system of terror and merciless persecution Stalin succeeded in instilling in the people fear of his mighty state machine, but he was unable to extinguish the general feeling of discontent. That discontent of the people was the Achilles heel of Stalin’s regime. Knowing that, Stalin saw that the only way to preserve his power was by the consolidation of the privileged bureaucracy, by strengthening the punitive organs of his dictatorship and by expanding the network of the concentration camps.¹

Orlov points out that every political despot tries to divert the discontent of the people from himself to others. He indicates that the czarist government did it by means of inciting the ignorant masses against national minorities, which were pictured as the real culprits responsible for the wretched living conditions of the Russian people. Stalin for years had been attributing to the bourgeoisie the responsibility for the failures in the field of industrial construction and the privations suffered by the Soviet people.

Orlov emphasizes the fact that Stalin staged two show trials in 1928 and 1930, in order to prove that some of Russia’s prominent engineers and professors were wrecking Soviet industry on instructions from the Russian industrialists and bankers who fled abroad.²

Orlov maintains that in 1937, Stalin decided to explain to the working masses of the Soviet Union that all their hardships and suffering were due not to his government, but to the leaders of the opposition, who by their wrecking activities sowed poverty and hunger in the country. Orlov points out that Stalin thought that if the former leaders of the opposition themselves testified to this in court and

¹ Orlov, op. cit., p. 293.
² Ibid., p. 294.
recounted in detail how they had spoiled huge stores of food, exterminated cattle and industry and trade, the more backward strata of the population would believe it.\(^1\)

Merle Fainsod believes that the real significance of Stalin's theory of terror did not become fully manifest until the period of the Great Purges in the 1930's. Fainsod contends that the liquidation of the "Old Bolsheviks" made it altogether clear that the prominent role of terror in Stalinist ideology was to serve as a bulwark of defense for his own monopoly of Party leadership. Fainsod asserts that Stalin was faced with the problem of reconciling his innovation with the traditional notion that terror was reserved for the class enemy.\(^2\) Fainsod maintains that the problem was neatly solved by identifying any form of opposition to Stalin with counterrevolution and foreign espionage. The oppositionists became known as "enemies of the people."

Barrington Moore analyzes the services of organized terror in order to see how it effected the regime. He believes that it helps to generate in some people a sort of generalized fear and a sensation of guilt which becomes necessary to eliminate opposition. He contends that terror is a necessary ingredient in the dictator's ability to shake up the apparatus and reach down to interfere with its operation at any level. Moore asserts that terror constitutes a device through which the Soviet system can handle the problem of initiating shifts in policy and personnel and making the new policy stick. He maintains


that the Great Purges helped to clear the road for talent, keeping open channels of upward mobility, a necessary feature in any dynamic industrial society.¹

Leonard Schapiro asserts that from Stalin's point of view the trials served an important purpose of focussing attention on an enemy outside, namely Trotsky, in order to divert attention from discontent at home. The outside enemies provided an explanation for the economic hardships and industrial shortcomings.

Schapiro contends that it was not ambition alone which had led Stalin in the 1920's to accumulate his great power over the Party. Schapiro believes that the survival in power of the Party was at stake during these years and few Communists ever doubted that for the Party to retain its monopoly of power was the first and foremost aim of all policy. Schapiro makes the observation that this survival required centralized discipline inside the Party, and Stalin was probably the only man who could insure it.²

Schapiro maintains that by 1934, Stalin's revolution had been successfully accomplished, at any rate to the extent that "the point of no return had been reached." Schapiro believes that Stalin may have foreseen that in conditions of peace within the Party there would be no room for him. Schapiro insists that it is seldom that the man who has ruled by terror can himself survive when once that terror


comes to an end. In other words, too many passions and hatreds have been aroused and these people desire vengeance.

Alexander Weissberg, a member of the Communist Party who was arrested during the Great Purge of 1937, believes that Stalin concealed his real motives for the Great Purges even from those closest to him. Weissberg asserts that before we approach the real truth we must first dispose of the obviously false explanations. He makes known the fact that the necessity for obtaining labor power for the great works that were being carried out in the Artic cannot explain the arrest of the leading groups in the Soviet Administration, but that was how the Great Purges began. He asserts that the leading scientists and engineers throughout the country were not arrested, the leaders of the Red Army were not removed, and the governing bodies of all the federal republics of the Union were not decimated merely in order to obtain laborers for Siberia.\(^1\) He feels that this motive played only a secondary role.

Weissberg makes the observation that the attempt to explain the Great Purges as a defensive measure on the part of the revolution against its enemies in a critical period is no more successful. He feels that the point at which they began spoiled this explanation. He contends that the arrests did not begin in 1932 and 1933, at a time when the forced collectivization and the great famine were shaking the country to its foundations and when a political upheaval seemed too many to offer the only way out, but in 1936, at a time when Stalin's

\(^1\) Weissberg, *op. cit.*, p. 516.
victory in the countryside was already long established. Weissberg insist that no one even thought of the possibility of Stalin's overthrow because his domination was securely founded. According to Weissberg:

The Great Purge was aimed against lovers of freedom, and this was clearly demonstrated by the make-up of the groups which were arrested in its first period. The traditional enemies of the Russian Revolution, the monarchists and White Guardists, were not involved. These supporters of a different form of despotism were spared. I did not meet a single monarchist in prison during the Great Purge. And even among the national minorities it was not the reactionary, orthodox groups which were liquidated, but the progressive and democratic groups for instance the Armenian Dashnaki.¹

Weissberg maintains that the Great Purges was directed against the few real friends of liberty and against the many who-Stalin feared might become friends of liberty.

Suzanne Labin contends that when one man dominates everything then everything is his responsibility. She believes that a dictator who concentrates all power into his own hands must at the same time face a concentration of all the reproaches levelled against his rule. She asserts that by distributing the burden of governance amongst a great number of responsible people, a democratic regime tends to reduce the gravity of the errors inevitably committed in the process of government and diminishes their hostile character.

Suzanne Labin maintains that terror was used to dispose of Stalin's personal enemies, of his accomplices who knew to much and of witnesses

¹Ibid., p. 517.
who might have made awkward revelations. She contends that the cry of sabotage offered Stalin the ideal excuse for all the shortcomings of rule.

Zbigniew Brzezinski asserts that the underlying factor in the purge of the nationalities was the desire on the part of the Soviet leadership, to weld the various nationalities more tightly together under central control. He maintains that the achievement of this policy was dependent on the elimination of the older local Bolshevik leaders who were inclined to assert the federated nature of the Soviet Union.

Brzezinski emphasizes the fact that the need for continued purging of Party members, as well as of individuals who were not Party members, grew out of the growing stability of the regime itself. Brzezinski contends that almost all aspects of Soviet life efforts were directed toward the accomplishment of two basic objectives: The stabilization of the system and increased efficiency in the controls exercised over it by the government. He insists that many individuals became personally accountable for his inability to adjust to the totalitarian pattern, and responsibility for maladjustment could be charged to the person directly concerned.

It is difficult to determine a basic reason for the purges because Stalin concealed his real motives for beginning the purges even from his closest comrades.


After having examined the causes that have been given by others for the purges, the author believes that the essential causes stemmed from Stalin's desire to gain power in the Communist Party and to find scapegoats to cover up his economic failures. The Great Purges supplied an element of security for the discontented masses. The Great Purges eliminated potential opposition to Stalin and furthered the elements of social mobility and promotion. The Great Purges provided the Soviet system a method of initiating shifts in policy and personnel. Finally, the Great Purges sought to eliminate all lovers of freedom.
CHAPTER IV

THE RESULT OF THE PURGES

What were the economic, political, and military results of the Great Purges? With regard to the political crisis which caused the changes of 1934, and thereafter we are still largely in the dark. Yet we know that the assassination of Kirov in 1934, paved the way for a series of mass purges in which hundreds of thousands, at least, were either shot, sent to labor camps or exiled to remote places. We know, secondly, that in these purges almost all the original revolutionaries of 1917 disappeared, especially those of the Right Opposition who were identified with Bukharin and those of the Left Opposition who were identified with Trotsky. We know finally, that the Great Purges eliminated many of the high commanding officers of the Red Army.

In the economic field, the result of the first five years of forced collectivization were mixed. During this period Party and government bureaucracies were aligned against the peasants in the battle over which way agriculture would go. In the late 1920's and early 1930's the nation's leadership wanted an end to private peasant holdings and individual farming. The government imposed heavy taxes in order to overcome peasant resistance and withdrew the peasant's right to rent land and hire labor. In 1928, the government carried out a policy to wipe out the kulak class. The kulaks were the richer peasants or often simply any peasant who opposed the regime. Many peasants retaliated by hiding their food, breaking their implements, burning their
crops and slaughtering millions of cattle, sheep, goats, and horses.¹

After 1930, peasants were allowed to retain their houses, garden
plots, family livestock and small tools outside of the collectives.
Some of the kulaks were promised preferences in receiving new land,
machinery, seed grain and tax credits. In the 1930's, collectiviza-
tion increased so that 52.7 per cent of the peasant households formed
were collectives by 1931. By 1938, this figure increased to 93.5 per
cent.²

Richard Gripp maintains that several million peasants died of
famine and malnutrition during 1932-33, as an indirect result of
forced collectivization. Many peasants were exiled or imprisoned. He
contends that almost all list their land except for the small garden
plots. Private agriculture was wiped out. In many instances mechan-
ization lagged behind the needs of the collectives. He contends that
crop failures in 1931 and 1932, would not be prevented or alleviated
simply by reorganizing the structure of agriculture.³

The regime realized several achievements arising from collectiv-
ization. Agricultural life within the nation was placed under govern-
ment-Party control and peasants were subjected to the political and
propaganda influence of the Party. The Soviet leadership was in a
much better position to control the nation's agricultural resources in

¹Richard C. Gripp, Patterns of Soviet Politics (Homewood, Illinois:

²Jesse D. Clarkson, A History of Russia (New York: Random House,

³Gripp, op. cit., p. 80.
fulfillment of its plans along the lines toward which it was directing industry. Collectivization of Soviet agriculture became a model for other Communist nations to follow as a necessary mark of a Communist system.¹

Harold Bremen contends that the First and Second Five-Year Plans had succeeded in industrializing Russia to a large extent, but production in itself was no solution to the economic problems that were being confronted. The problems of the quality of the products and the disproportions of production had become very serious. The old intelligentsia were held responsible for these problems.² They were charged with economic sabotage and conspiracy with foreign powers to overthrow the Soviet regime. A series of trials occurred which resulted in wholesale removals and arrests of leading engineers and technicians.

Meanwhile the consequences of the purges began to affect the country's economic life. Those in charge of practically every factory and every railway station, every school or learned institution in the country had been removed. F. Beck and W. Godin maintain that the quality of work deteriorated to a large extent. Continual meetings of workers were held and the fear of arrest paralyzed initiative and work discipline. The purges economically weakened the country and threatened to lead to catastrophe.³

¹Ibid., p. 81.


³Beck and Godin, op. cit., p. 39.
Stalin's rule of terror kept the members of the Party, along with other professional and social groups, in a state of insecurity and political impotence. Gripp maintains that the Great Purges altered the composition and the procedures of the Communist party. He contends that the "Old Bolsheviks" were practically wiped out by the Great Purges.¹

Leonard Schapiro cites three main effects of the Great Purges. He asserts that the Great Purges were first of all preventive, since they eliminated all who might have opposed Stalin. They were secondly constructive, since they restocked the entire elite of the country with men who realized that their continued survival depended on conformity to Stalin's demands. Third, the Great Purges broke up, both inside the ranks of the Party and outside them, all possibility of cohesion.²

Alexander Uralov gives the following account of the Communist party members who were shot during the Great Purges:

At the time of Lenin's death the Politburo was composed of the following members: L. Trotsky (exiled and assassinated), G. Zinoviev (shot), N. Bukharin (shot), M. Tomsky (committed suicide to escape being shot), F. Djerjinsky (died suddenly), Bubnov (shot) - and Stalin. Following the liquidation of the greater part of the 'Lenin Old Guard,' the Politburo was composed entirely of 'companions of Stalin.' The following, in their turn, were members: A. Andreyev (still living), M. Kalinin (died of illness), St. Kossior (shot), S. Kirov (assassinated), V. Kulibchev (died 'suddenly'), Mejlauk (shot), A. Mikoyan (still living), G. Petrovsky (deported), F. Postyshev (shot), J. Rudsutak (shot), S. Syrtsov (shot), Uglanov (shot), S.

¹ Gripp, op. cit., p. 79.

² Schapiro, op. cit., p. 430.
Ordjonikidze (died 'suddenly'), Shubar (shot), Eikhe (shot).\(^1\)

The Great Purges destroyed the whole species of the anti-Stalinist Bolsheviks. The majority of the Comintern, that is, the Communist International functionary staff were cruelly decimated. Gunther Nollau maintains that Stalin had every one of the leading Bolsheviks who had delivered the representative speeches at the World Congresses during the Comintern's first ten years branded as murderers, Gestapo agents and terrorists. Lenin was the only exception.\(^2\)

Stalin accompanied the wholesale elimination of his real and imaginary opponents with the elevation of his own stature. The survivors and the beneficiaries through promotions to vacant positions were terrorized out of any thought of active disloyalty.

Alexander Orlov, a witness to some of the events, views the situation in this way:

Toward the end of 1937 the People's Commissariat and other federal state organizations were left without leaders. All the industrial enterprises were in a state of semi-paralysis. To keep the state machine going, new managers were urgently needed for all the state establishments which had been wrecked by the country-wide destruction. But Stalin thought it unsafe to select new managers from among the remnants of the old experienced cadres who were on file in the Central Committee of the Party, because these men had been to some degree connected through their past work with the executed leaders. As a result Stalin had to hire managers for important state institutions and even members of the government in a way more haphazard than, in normal times, even ordinary clerks would be hired.\(^3\)

---

\(^1\)Uralov, op. cit., p. 75.


\(^3\)Orlov, op. cit., p. 243.
In the military field, thousands of Stalin's most effective and experienced officers were destroyed. Their loss was felt most strongly in the top military command during the disastrous opening months of World War II. The removal of Marshal Tukachevsky was a heavy blow to the military opposition, and it had a demoralizing effect throughout the army.

Alexander Uralov maintains that the number of officers purged in units whose commander was arrested as an "enemy of the people" ran as high as 50 per cent. He contends that the Great Purges were particularly drastic among staff officers because a great many units, from army corps down to regiments, were left for a considerable time without commanders, and had to wait until officers could be transferred from other units.¹

The consequences of the Great Purges are self evident. The Red Army was totally disorganized. John Erickson contends that the new high command was stamped either by mediocrity or lack of experience. He maintains that the effect upon the balance of the Red Army was disastrous.²

F. Beck and W. Godin assert that the Soviet Union had been so weakened by the Great Purges that she was in no position to throw her weight into the balance to prevent aggression.³ Needless to say, this

¹ Uralov, op. cit., p. 65.


³ Beck and Godin, op. cit., p. 39.
whole process of elimination of the military leadership created doubts as to Soviet military capabilities.

Isaac Deutscher contends that the Great Purges detracted from Russia's value as an ally. He maintains that if so many politicians, administrators, and military men had in fact formed a fifth column it was asked, then what was the morale of a nation in which this could happen? He feels that if the charges were faked, then the regime must have been rotten from top to bottom.¹

Beck and Godin describe the effect of the Great Purges in this way:

...whether or not foreign policy was based on these factors, the conditions to which the country was reduced by the purge, the approaching wave of economic distress, the weakness of the Red Army, which was robbed of practically all its officers down to the rank of major, and finally the enormously increased discontent of the masses caused by the purge itself left the Government with little choice in 1938 and still less choice in 1939, but to permit the Fascist attacks on Austria, Czechoslovakia, and finally Poland, and to make the diversion of German aggression from Russia the main aim of its foreign policy. That was the real reason for Stalin's non-aggression pact with Hitler, which we regard as one of the basic roots of the second world war.²

The Great Purges had a damaging effect upon the Red Army and the Administration as a whole.


CONCLUSION

At the death of Lenin the general feeling was that Trotsky would become the Communist leader. Stalin, however, as Secretary General had made use of his position to build up a strong political machine for himself. Trotsky believed that Lenin had meant for the New Economic Policy to be a temporary measure and that the time had come to go back to militant Communism. Stalin realized that the majority of the Party was for a continuation of the NEP, so he pretended that he was for it.

For three years the struggle for power between Stalin and Trotsky went on. In 1927, Stalin's influence in the Party was strong enough to get the Central Committee to expel Trotsky from the Party. Two years later Trotsky was banished from Russia. And in 1940, Trotsky was assassinated in Mexico.

Stalin was just as cruel to all his other enemies in the Party. By 1928, he was in complete control, the unquestioned dictator of Russia. From that time on at the first sign of opposition to Stalin's wishes the secret police moved in. Arrest, perhaps a trial then death, banishment or imprisonment were the steps in Stalin's purge of his enemies.

In 1929, Stalin launched the policy of eliminating the kulaks as a class. The kulak farms were raided, their grain was expropriated and if they resisted or protested, they were arrested and received exemplary punishment. The net result was that several million peasants perished during the collectivization period.

The signal for the expulsions of 1929, was given at the Sixteenth
Party Conference which met in Moscow in April, 1929. It was primarily directed against the Right Wing followers of Bukharin, Tomsky and Rykov; who were opposed to the new program of collectivization and industrialization to which the Party was committed. In June, 1929, Bukharin, Tomsky, and Rykov were removed from their administrative positions in the Party. They remained members of the Party, but were thoroughly discredited.

Since the collectivization period caused discontent among the masses, the party leadership needed a scapegoat to divert their attention. Many of the old intelligentsia engineers and technicians were purged at this time. Every breakdown in production was treated as an act of sabotage for which they were held responsible. Some were executed and others were imprisoned.

In December, 1934, Sergei Kirov was assassinated by Nikolayev, a young oppositional Communist who had been employed by Kirov. Nikolayev and his associates were executed. This murder started a new era of purging which eliminated many of the "Old Bolsheviks" who had participated in the October Revolution with Lenin. Hundreds of Party members were expelled between 1934 and 1936.

In 1936, Sixteen "Old Bolsheviks," including Zinoviev and Kamenev were executed. They were accused of organizing a "terrorist centre" whose aim was to carry out terrorist acts against Stalin and company. Mikhail Tomsky, former Trade Union Council chief shot himself to death at his home near Moscow after learning of their testimony.

In January 1937, seventeen administrative officials, including Piakakov and Serebriakov were charged with plotting the formidable
overthrow of the Soviet Union with the aid of Germany and Japan, and with carrying on espionage on behalf of foreign states. Thirteen were sentenced to death and were executed. Others were given prison sentences.

On June 11, 1937, eight generals of the Red Army including Marshall Tukhachevsky were arrested, tried and executed. The commander-in-chief of nearly every military command in the Soviet Union was arrested. They were accused of espionage on behalf of Germany and Japan, anti-Party conspiracy and plotting territorial dismemberment of the USSR.

The last major spectacle took place in March 1938. Twenty-one members of the Right Opposition and Politburo were arrested. Bukharin, Rykov, and Yagoda were among the defendants. They were charged with espionage, diversion, terrorism and wrecking. Eighteen of the defendants were executed, including Bukharin and Yagoda. Three minor figures received long prison terms.

Finally, in December, 1938, the Great Purges came to an end with the purging of the purgers. N. I. Yezhov, the People's Commissar for Home Affairs and head of the G.P.U. was removed from his post. The leader of the G.P.U. and four of his examiners were charged with having arrested innocent people and forced them to make false confessions under torture. They were found guilty and sentenced to death and shot.

Historians disagree concerning the causes of the purges because they interpret the available primary sources differently. Alexander Weissberg maintains that it is difficult to determine Stalin's motives because even his closest friends did not know why he began the purges.
Zbigniew Brzezinski contends that the purges were an inherent element of the system itself, designed to terrorize every individual in order to deprive him of independent action. Barrington Moore asserts that Stalin sought to eliminate all possible challenges to his power. W. G. Krivitsky maintains that Stalin needed scapegoats to cover up his economic failures.

The Great Purges had a damaging effect in Russia economically, politically, and militarily. The first five years of collectivization resulted in the death of several million peasants because of famine and malnutrition during the early 1930's. The purges economically weakened the country because many of the leading engineers and technicians were removed from their positions. The Great Purges resulted in wholesale removals and arrests of leading officials in the union republics, secretaries of the Party, heads of industry trusts and enterprises, and Comintern functionaries. Thousands of Stalin's most effective and experienced officers were destroyed. The Red Army was totally disorganized. Russia's value as an ally was questioned after the Great Purges because almost all of the political administrators in the government and commanding officers in the Red Army were purged.

Historians will continue to examine the Great Purges in order to determine Stalin's role, his motives and the results which are still largely obscure today.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Periodicals


