vitch is a Jew, Voroshilov is too limited in interests, Molotov not big enough a personality.

If Stalin should die, the *party*, not one man, would take over. Personal rivalries, like those that followed the death of Lenin, are perfectly possible, but it is extremely unlikely that they could disrupt the régime. Discipline is strict, and the party is unanimous within itself on major issues. There is no obvious candidate for power in Russia, like Goering in Germany, simply because no man in the U.S.S.R. can be unduly prominent if he is conspicuously ambitious. The party is the great leveler. The Soviet State could hardly be more affected by the death of Stalin than it was by the death of Lenin. The régime will carry on.

Chapter XXXVII

The Russian Trials

IN AUGUST, 1936, a series of treason trials began in the U.S.S.R., that perplexed and indeed stupefied the western world. Old Bolsheviks like Zinoveiv and Kamenev were tried and shot; so were important vice-commissars like Pyatakov and generals like Tukhachevsky, who was considered the No. 2 military man in the Soviet Union. Incredibly sensational details were alleged: that Trotsky was negotiating with Hitler, that such well-known leaders as Radek and Sokolnikov plotted the overthrow of the Stalinist government, that generals who had devoted their lives to the Red Army sold out to Germany and Japan. The plotters found guilty were given short shrift. It seemed that friends of the Soviet Union were confronted with two alternatives equally unpleasant, that (a) the opposition to Stalin was much more serious than anyone had believed, reaching in fact the very heart of the army and the state, or (b) Stalin was a ruthless murderer getting rid of Trotskyist or other opponents by means of the most monstrous frame-up of modern times.

Let us dismiss at outset some of the fairy tales. Stalin, some whisperers had it, was mortally ill, and was extirpating the last remnants of opposition while he was still alive; according to other "reports" he had suddenly gone "insane." Such patent nonsense was easily rebutted. It was said that the prisoners were tortured, hypnotized, drugged (in order to make them give false confessions) and—a choice detail—impersonated by actors of the Moscow Art theatre! But the trials occurred immediately the preliminary investigations were concluded, and they took place before hundreds of witnesses, many of them experienced correspondents, in open court. The prisoners testified that they were well-treated during the investigation. Radek, indeed, says that it was he who tortured the prosecutor, by refusing to confess month after month. Pressure there certainly was, in the manner of police investigation all over the world, but no evidence of torture.

The trials, the Trotskyists assert, were a colossal frame-up. The prisoners were induced to confess, they say, on a promise of immunity and a pardon after the trial—if they talked freely—and then double-crossed and shot. This is hardly conceivable from a close reading of the testi-

mony. It certainly could not have occurred in the second trial, when the defendants must have known that the first batch, despite their confessions, were sentenced to death and duly executed.

Stalin, one should remember, is no fool. He could not have wanted those trials. He had nothing to gain from them beyond the object forced on him—elimination of treason. As interpreted abroad the trials were a disaster to his prestige and a serious encumbrance to his foreign policy. They weakened Russia just when Russia needed to be strong.

Any defendant in either of the first two trials, if he were being unjustly accused or the victim of a frame-up, could have shouted out his story in open court. There were dozens of journalists to hear. The defendants knew they were doomed. If innocent, they could have made a fight of it.

An important point to keep in mind is the peculiarity of Russian legal procedure. It differs drastically from ours, and resembles to some extent the French system, where the real "trial" is the preliminary investigation; the final court session does not so much determine guilt as decide what penalty shall be attached to the guilty. In Russia, a prisoner is not brought to what we call a "trial" until he has confessed. Within the circumscriptions of Russian procedure the trials were perfectly fair. The defendants had the right of legal defense; they had the privilege of cross-examining witnesses; they talked with the greatest vivacity and freedom. The attitude of the court was severe but not coercive. The closing speech of the prosecutor, A. Y. Vyshinsky, was violent enough, but during the testimony he treated the defendants with reasonable consideration. For instance:

Vyshinsky: Accused Pyatakov, perhaps you are tired.
Pyatakov: No, I can go on.
The President: I propose to adjourn at 3 o'clock.
Vyshinsky: I do not object, but perhaps it is tiring for the accused?
Pyatakov: How much longer?
The President: Fifty minutes.
Vyshinsky then resumes the questioning.

The confessions, in both the first and second trials, bewildered observers because it seemed literally inconceivable (a) that men like Sokolnikov, Smirnov, Radek, Serebryakov, and so on could possibly be traitors, and (b) that they should have so meekly gone to conviction without a struggle. Point (a) we shall come to later on. As to point (b), the defendants *did* struggle. It lasted during all the preliminary examination. The British jurist and M.P. Denis Pritt has pointed out how Zinoviev and Kamenev gave way only grudgingly, little by little over more than a year, finally giving up and confessing only when presented with incontrovertible evidence. Radek held out two and a half months. Muralov, an old Trotskyist, held out eight months. Radek says of him, "I was convinced he would rather perish in prison than say a single word."

The impression held widely abroad that the defendants all told the same story, that they were abject and groveling, that they behaved like sheep in the executioner's pen, isn't quite correct. They argued stubbornly with the prosecutor; in the main they told only what they were forced to tell; they disagreed often with one another. Boguslavsky describes his "horror and disgust" at Radek. Muralov contradicts another defendant. There is nothing faintly abject in Radek's last plea, or Muralov's.

No fair-minded person can read the verbatim report of the second trial and still believe the confessions could have been fabricated. No artifice, no ingenuity, could erect any such 579 closely knit pages on a series of false confessions. As Malcolm Cowley says, the trial could be accepted as a fake "only on the assumption that Marlowe and Webster had a hand in staging it." The details fit together like a brightly colored and complicated mosaic; they make an architecture as solid as a bridge. A thorough reading of the testimony leads irresistibly to one conclusion, remarkable as it may seem: that the defendants confessed for one reason only, that they were guilty.[1]

The first trial, with the old Bolsheviks Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Smirnov as the chief defendants, opened on August 19, 1936. It was heard by the military collegium of the supreme court, with V. V. Ulrich as the presiding judge and Vyshinsky as prosecutor. The defendants were accused of forming a terrorist "Center" in Leningrad, instigated by Trotsky and devoted to counter-revolution and conspiracy against the U.S.S.R., of planning the assassination of Stalin and other leaders, and actively conniving the murder of Kirov. All sixteen defendants were found guilty and executed.

The highpoint of this trial was the examination of Zinoviev:

Vyshinsky: When was the united center organized?
Zinoviev: In the summer of 1932.
Vyshinsky: What were its activities?

[1] By confession too they may have hoped to get lighter sentences.

Zinoviev: Its main activities consisted of making preparations for terrorist acts.
Vyshinsky: Against whom?
Zinoviev: Against the leaders.
Vyshinsky: That is, against Comrades Stalin, Voroshilov, and Kaganovitch? Was it your center that organized the assassination of Comrade Kirov? Was the assassination of Sergei Mironovitch Kirov organized by your center, or by some other organization?
Zinoviev: Yes, by our center.
Vyshinsky: In that center there were you, Kamenev, Smirnov, Mrachkovsky and Ter-Vaganyan?
Zinoviev: Yes.
Vyshinsky: So you all organized the assassination of Kirov?
Zinoviev: Yes.
Vyshinsky: So you all assassinated Comrade Kirov?
Zinoviev: Yes.
Vyshinsky: Sit down.

This trial, not the second one, provoked the most furious of the Trotskyist "frame-up" charges. It seemed odd, for one thing, that the "center" was organized in 1932, whereas Kirov was murdered in December, 1934, and the trial took place only in 1936. Zinoviev and Kamenev were arrested after the murder and sentenced to exile, then brought back, arrested again, and tried again. And the testimony—of which no verbatim record exists in English—indicated some remarkable contradictions. For instance Smirnov was apparently in jail in 1933, during which time he was supposed to have been plotting with the "center"; there seems to be considerable confusion about the false Honduras passport of another defendant; another, Holtzman, testified that he met Sedov, Trotsky's son, in the Hotel Bristol in Copenhagen in 1932, when in fact no hotel by this name existed in Copenhagen. Sedov asserts that he was never in Copenhagen in his life.

The second trial, much more convincing, and of which a full record exists in various languages, occurred January 23-30, 1937, before the same court and the same prosecutor. The defendants, seventeen in all, included Y. L. Pyatakov, the assistant commissar of heavy industry, Gregory Sokolnikov, the assistant commissar of foreign affairs, Y. A. Livshitz, the assistant commissar of railways, such well-known old-line Bolshevists (and Trotskyists) as Muralov and Serebryakov, and of course Radek. Thirteen of the seventeen were sentenced to death and shot; Sokolnikov and Radek got ten years—Radek literally talked himself out of the death penalty in an inordinately fascinating last plea; two

dupes, Arnold (a sort of cross between the four Marx brothers and the characters in Gorki's "Lower Depths") and Stroilov, got lesser sentences.

The indictment was a good deal broader than that of the first trial. The defendants were accused of sabotage and wrecking, of selling information of military importance to Japan and Germany, of plots to murder Molotov and other members of the government, and of conspiracy with Germany and Japan whereby, if the plotters usurped power in the Soviet Union, the Ukraine was to be surrendered to Germany and the Maritime Province to Japan, presumably as a price for noninterference while Stalin was being overthrown. Nothing more sensational or—at first sight—incredible could be imagined.

As unfolded inexorably in the testimony, the story begins when Pyatakov, a known Trotskyist who had spent long periods in opposition and exile, secretly saw Sedov, Trotsky's son, in Berlin in 1931. Sedov sounded Pyatakov out; Pyatakov returned to Russia, and cautiously, with infinite slowness and secrecy, communicated with Radek, Sokolnikov, and the others. Gradually a "parallel" or "reserve" center—first of conspiracy, then of terrorism—was formed, to back up the Zinoviev group and carry on if the Zinovievites were exposed and crushed.

Vyshinsky tried hard to find out how the alleged conspirators disclosed themselves to one another:

Vyshinsky: What gave Rataichak reasons for disclosing himself to you?
Pyatakov: Two persons had spoken to me . . .
Vyshinsky: Did he disclose himself to you, or did you disclose yourself to him?
Pyatakov: Disclosure may be mutual.
Vyshinsky: Did you disclose yourself first?
Pyatakov: Who first, he or I—the hen or the egg—I don't know.

He tried hard to pin Radek down, to make Radek, too, disclose more fully the interrelations of the group.

Vyshinsky: These actions of yours were deliberate?
Radek: Apart from sleeping, I have never in my life committed any undeliberate actions.
Vyshinsky: And this, unfortunately, was not a dream?
Radek: Unfortunately it was not a dream.

Some of the conspirators seem desperately unhappy at their own rôle in the plot, as it tightens and develops. For instance Sokolnikov:

"Just imagine. I am conducting official negotiations at the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. The conversation draws to a close. The interpreters have left the room. The official representative of a certain foreign state, Mr. ——, suddenly turned to me and asked: am I informed about the proposals Trotsky has made to his government. . . . How does Trotsky visualize that? How can I, as Assistant People's Commissar, conduct such negotiations? This is an absolutely impossible situation."

Trotsky, according to the testimony, was the heart and soul of the conspiracy. He sent letters to Radek, concealed in books or shoes; one of the intermediaries was the journalist Vladimir Romm, formerly *Izvestia* correspondent in Washington, who says he met Trotsky in Paris. Pyatakov, unless he was lying, took a secret airplane trip from Berlin to Oslo, and there saw Trotsky, in December 1935. Trotsky, questioned by the John Dewey commission in Mexico, denied flatly either that he met Romm or saw Pyatakov. Trotsky was not in Paris at all when Romm was there, he insists.

Pyatakov revealed—according to his testimony—how, among other things, the Trotskyist movement outside Russia was financed. For instance; in his official capacity as assistant commissar of heavy industry, Pyatakov (incidentally Lenin in his will called Pyatakov one of the ablest men in Soviet Russia), gave orders for machinery to German firms and promised to pay more than the normal price; the difference went to the Trotskyists, through Sedov and other agents. But Pyatakov says the plot was not engineered "purely for the sake of Trotsky's beautiful eyes."

Trotsky's close connection with German Fascists is constantly alleged. It seems beyond belief, but half a dozen times in the testimony Hitler's first aid, Rudolf Hess, is named as the German negotiator. The court was extremely careful to keep mention of compromising diplomatic details from the public sessions. Time and again the defendants were rebuked for mentioning foreigners' names.

Radek: I informed him (Sokolnikov) of the directives and asked about the specific fact regarding ——." (Name cut from the record.)
The President: Accused Radek, are you trying to provoke us?
Radek: I am not trying to provoke you; this will not occur again.
Vyshinsky: Such behavior on the part of the accused Radek places me in a very difficult position during the course of the investigation.
The President: Quite so.
Vyshinsky: You are a man sufficiently well versed in politics to understand that it is forbidden to speak about certain things in Court; this must be accepted as a demand of the law.

Radek: I deeply apologize; this will not occur again.
The President: I consider that if Radek repeats anything of this kind, this question will have to be dealt with *in camera.*
Radek: I repeat that this will not occur again.

The plot developed although inefficiently. Sabotage did occur. Trains were wrecked, soldiers killed. Details came out in testimony that make the flesh creep; officials of the railroads deliberately slowing up car loadings, disrupting freight schedules, stalling trains (the chief train-wrecker, Knyazev, confessed to getting 15,000 rubles from a Japanese agent); engineers ruining chemical factories by burning out their furnaces and sabotaging work in the mines; one defendant, Shestov, described how he ordered the murder of an honest official who suspected sabotage in the coal industry.

But by the middle of 1935 the conspirators began to lose their enthusiasm. Trotsky himself, according to Radek, saw that they could not bring Stalin down by these means. In the most emotional and moving passages in the trial Radek describes his gradual awareness that he and his colleagues have made a terrible mistake. He debates what to do. It is very difficult for the conspirators to meet; in the whole course of the affair Radek, Piatakov, and Sokolnikov actually see one another and confer only two or three times. Radek comes finally to a conclusion:

Vyshinsky: What did you decide?
Radek: The first step to take would be to go to the Central Committee of the Party, to make a statement, to name all the persons. This I did not do. It was not I that went to the G.P.U., but the G.P.U. that came for me.
Vyshinsky: An eloquent reply.
Radek: A sad reply.

It would be obtuse to deny or gloss over weaknesses in the testimony. For instance the prosecutor went back to Kirov over and over again, but he could never make Radek or Sokolnikov at least admit they had any connection with the assassination or knowledge of it. Again, it may well be asked why the conspirators, with years to work in, were so inadequate and bungling; aside from sabotage which was after all minor, they accomplished little. The one attempted assassination, that of Molotov, with which they were charged, sounds "fishy" in the extreme. But the man in charge of it was Arnold, an exceedingly fishy character.

Again, there was very little actual evidence. Prime evidence would

have been the letters Trotsky sent to Radek. But Radek says he burned them (as he might prudently do).

Granting that the confessions were genuine, of which there can be little sincere doubt, one may attempt to construct a "theory" as follows:

1. Every important defendant in the first and second trials was a Zinovievite or a Trotskyist. Radek, Pyatakov, Sokolnikov, Serebryakov, had been Trotskyists for years. Radek joined the Trotsky faction in 1923, went into exile, and only recanted in 1929; he was readmitted to grace in 1930. Their opposition to Stalin was ingrained and inexpungable; they were Trotskyists to the bone; when they saw things going badly according to their lights, it was perfectly reasonable for them to turn back to their old leader.

2. Moreover, these old revolutionaries, quite apart from the fact that they were Trotskyists and therefore dissidents, were conspirators by nature, *conspirators* born and bred. From their very earliest days they had breathed the air of plot and counterplot. The day of their eminence passed; Stalin wanted engineers and administrators; they were naturally disgruntled. In a polite state like Russia, one should remember, discontent can be expressed only by conspiracy. And Radek and company were congenitally incapable of giving conspiracy up.

3. The Trotskyists—outside Russia at least—made no effort to conceal their violent hatred of the Stalinist régime. They were far beyond such "bourgeois" considerations as orthodox patriotism. As Cowley says, Russia wasn't "their" country any more. They were world revolutionaries, and they no longer regarded the U.S.S.R. as a revolutionary or communist state. They had the same aim as Germany and Japan, to overthrow the Stalinist régime. Stalin was as much an enemy to them as Hitler. And they were willing to coöperate even with Hitler, an obvious ally, for their supreme goal—Stalin's destruction.

4. Radek and the others testified over and over again—the central issue of the trial—that they felt war to be inevitable in 1933 or 1934 and that the Russians would be defeated. They thought that things were going very badly, and that when the crash came the Soviet Union would not survive it. Therefore, as good world revolutionaries, they deemed it their duty to get to work and perfect an underground organization that would survive the war, so that revolutionary communism would not altogether perish. Also, if war came, they might themselves have had a chance at getting power in Russia, and therefore an attempt to buy the Germans off, buy the Japanese off, was natural.

5. So much for Radek and his friends inside. As regards Trotsky outside, an anti-Trotskyist could probably add two more considerations: (a) Trotsky was actively eager for a German war against the U.S.S.R., and he hoped that the U.S.S.R. would lose—therefore he sought to weaken it by sabotage; (b) his ambition and his lust for office were such that he was quite willing to give up the Ukraine and the Maritime Provinces as a price for power. One should not forget that Trotsky fought the Czar during the Great War much as he fights Stalin now, that Lenin crossed Germany with German aid in a German sealed train, and that Trotsky signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk giving an immense amount of Russian territory to Germany.

6. Finally—and very importantly—it is quite possible that the trials were exploited inside Russia to impress the Russian masses. The government may have exaggerated the crimes of the victims in order to simplify the issue. The overthrow of capitalism in the U.S.S.R., the partition of the country, may possibly have been added to the indictment to give the crimes of the conspirators a final and overwhelming smear of black. Stalin was eager to clean out the Trotskyists once for all, they were conveniently in his hands, and he neglected no factor to make the job as thorough and complete as possible. After all, the aim of Trotsky was to destroy *him*.

The third trial, that of the generals, was of a different category; proceedings were secret and the testimony has not been published. Announcement simply came on June 11, 1937, that eight high officers of the Red Army, including young Marshal Tukhachevsky, had been arrested, tried for traitorous behavior, and promptly shot. Among the eight were General Putna, formerly the Russian military attaché in Berlin and London (he was named as a conspirator in the second trial), General Yakir, the commander of the Leningrad military district, General Uborovitch, former commander in White Russia, General Eidemann, the head of Osoaviakhim, and General Feldman, the chief of the personnel division of the general staff. The generals were accused of treasonable relations with Germany and Japan, and the betrayal of the Red Army in the event of war.

This shocked world opinion warmly. It seemed incredible that men like Tukhachevsky, who had devoted the totality of their lives to the defense of the Soviet Union, could be guilty of wantonly planning its defeat. Tukhachevsky, only 44, had a brilliant revolutionary and military career; he was one of the great heroes of the Soviet Union. Dissi-

dent careerists like Zinoviev and Kamenev, no longer prominent, were one thing; eight young generals including Tukhachevsky and Yakir were quite another. Many friends of Russia, even if unwillingly, accepted the first two trials; they found it difficult to swallow the third.

But investigation, so far as investigation was possible, began to disclose a number of enlightening details. Tukhachevsky, brilliant and ambitious, wanted power for himself; he and Voroshilov were on bad terms, it is said; a general impression in military circles is that Tukhachevsky planned a "palace" *coup d'état* to get rid of Stalin and set up a dictatorship himself. Stalin got him first.

All eight of the generals had had close relations at one time with the German Reichswehr. The Red Army and the German army worked intimately together before 1932, it should be remembered; every year Russian officers went to Germany for training and study; even after Hitler, the two general staffs had a cordial respect for each other. Generals Kork and Feldman, with obviously German names, were Baltic Germans; General Uborovitch attended the German maneuvers after the Nazi party congress last year; both Kork and Putna had been military attachés in Berlin. Putna's activities were exposed in the second trial.

Few people think that Tukhachevsky could have sold out to Germany, or promised the defeat of his own army in the event of war; but it is quite possible that he envisaged some arrangement with the Reichswehr independently of Stalin. He wanted the Red Army and the German army to work together; politics prevented this. He was known to be an opponent of the Franco-Soviet pact, and the French distrusted him. One suggestion is that the Reichswehr planned to overthrow Hitler just as Tukhachevsky wanted to overthrow Stalin, the two armies to refrain from interference with each other.

The trials are a remarkable and by no means a pleasant episode. Accompanying them came a witch-hunt, a widespread purge; hundreds of officials, minor and major, were accused of sabotage, tracked down all over the country, and exiled or shot. Prominent and important men, like Marshal Gamarnik, committed suicide. A reign of something near terror came back to Russia. The trials showed very sharply that things were not as tranquil inside the Soviet Union as one had come to believe.

But on the other hand the great bulk and mass of the 170,000,000 people of the U.S.S.R. seemed unimpressed by the trials; the rank and file of the people paid little attention to them. The New York *Times* correspondent, Harold Denny, brings interesting testimony on this point.

After all, most of the defendants were Trotskyists, occupying posts on sufferance and without great influence. The solid party organization was untouched. For instance, not a single one of those tried—except Radek—is so much as mentioned in the preceding chapter, which I wrote in 1935 and which attempted to sketch the men who really count, who are intimately close to Stalin. Again, it is a pity to lose eight generals, but they were eight out of about 400. Stalin showed his impregnability by, among other things, daring to strike against the military. No other dictator has done this. The trials were a misfortune, but it would be wrong to assume that they wounded Russia critically. Stalin must have been shaken, but he survived the shock.

PARTY PURGES UNDER STALIN

The Party itself became massive, and in 1929, the beginning of the first Five-Year Plan, membership reached 1 million, not counting candidate members, usually representing between one-third and two-thirds of the regular membership. By 1933, there were 2,203,951 members and 1,351,387 candidate members. The Party was underrepresented in the countryside, reflecting the generally negative attitude of peasants to Communism. Women were also underrepresented, likely a result of persistent social attitudes that resisted putting them on an equal footing with men. Still, by 1932, there were nearly half a million female members, or 15.9 percent of the total.[2]

Purges were generally conducted within and by the Party itself, with directives issued from Moscow. Some local leaders wanted to avoid overheating the atmosphere, however, as is shown in a letter of the Smolensk City Party Committee, which said in the midst of the 1935 events that it did not want the Party to "transform the work of verifying party documents into a campaign of unmasking." The aim should be to raise "party awareness" and foster "integrity" in the ranks by "sweeping them of all alien and corrupt elements." Such a process was in practice difficult to control.[3]

The secret police was more involved in the 1935 purge, with its boss, Yezhov, in charge of the "verification of party documents." He reported in December that 177,000 members (just under 10 percent of the total) had been expelled. Some 15,218 were arrested.[4] Stalin said Yezhov might have gone too far, but in fact he wanted deeper cuts.

Stalin was informed in early 1936 that Trotsky, living in exile since 1929, working through sympathizers, was still trying to influence events in the Soviet Union. Several top leaders were arrested for being part of this "conspiracy," which allegedly included the already incarcerated Kamenev and Zinoviev. On July 29, 1936, the Central Committee informed local and regional committees that a "Trotskyist-Zinovievist" plot had been uncovered, the aim of which was to assassinate eight national leaders, including Stalin, Kliment Voroshilov, and Kaganovich. The Party was called upon to exercise "proper Bolshevik vigilance" and stop those who operated "under cover of their Communist rank."[5]

Letters of denunciation flowed in from the regions as they discussed this Central Committee note. Moscow's response was to "focus the attention of all members of the Party on the struggle against the last vestiges of the villainous enemies of our Party and of the working class, to focus their attention on raising Bolshevik revolutionary vigilance with every means possible."[6]

SHOW TRIALS

That note set the stage for the first major show trial in Moscow on August 19–24, 1936. Zinoviev, Kamenev, and fourteen other major Party leaders were charged with organizing a "terrorist" center on Trotsky's instructions. Behind the scenes, Stalin worked out the details of what was to happen. He had plenty of willing accomplices. Kaganovich, on vacation as the trial approached, wrote to Stalin on July 6 that, having read the interrogations, he was sure that the "main instigator of this gang is that venal scum Trotsky. It is time to declare him an outlaw, and to execute the rest of the lowlifes we have in jail."[7]

One feature of the trial was that all the accused openly confessed to crimes most observers regarded as preposterous. They also implicated others, such as Bukharin, Aleksei Rykov, and Mikhail Tomsky (that is, leading rightists), as well as Karl Radek (a well-known leftist) and several generals. All were not tried at once. Tomsky committed suicide the day after his name was mentioned by Procurator-General Vyshinsky.[8]

Suicide became one way to cope with accusations, but at the Central Committee meetings in December 1936 Stalin said that those who chose that option were admitting their guilt. They were trying to "cover their tracks," to "distract the Party, undermine its vigilance, and deceive it one last time before they died." Far from being victims, Stalin told the committee, they took their lives out of fear "that everything would be discovered." He said suicide was a simple method to "spit on the Party for the last time, and deceive the Party."[9]

Many rank-and-file members adopted this coldhearted interpretation. A director of a machine-building factory in the Urals, for example, said of the death of a local official in early 1937: "These days we cannot believe suicide notes—even these may well turn out to be false. In com-

mitting suicide an individual is trying to threaten the Party, to tell it that by mistreating those who commit political crimes, the Party cripples people and forces them to put revolvers to their own heads." He concluded that in this case as well "a suicide has to be regarded as an anti-Party gesture."[10]

Stalin's correspondence with Kaganovich reveals his part in the show trials. He helped phrase the charges, decided on the slate of defendants, crafted the evidence, and prescribed the sentences. He even dictated Vyshinsky's emotional speech as the grand finale of the trial and polished its style.[11]

Stalin wanted a public trial to convince the world and Soviet citizens that these former "oppositionists" aimed at counterrevolution and acted as the agents of foreign governments. The press frenzy reached its climax on the last day of the trial with the headline "Crush the Loathsome Creatures! The Mad Dogs Must Be Shot!" Each of the unfortunates made his plea for mercy. Kamenev went so far as to say, "No matter what my sentence will be, I in advance consider it just." He told his sons not to look back, but to "go forward. . . . Follow Stalin."[12]

Lev Kopelev, later a dissident, was credulous. He stopped talking to people he knew were innocent when their exclusion "had been decided by a higher necessity." Despite second thoughts "the rule remained: unswerving loyalty to the idol," namely to Stalin and Communism, "the graven image" he had helped to create.[13] What was called "Bolshevik party-mindedness"—a mystical concept—meant repression of doubts, "iron discipline and faithful observance" of the Party's dictates and rituals.[14]

Even as this first major show trial was proceeding, Stalin and his henchmen were preparing the next. Georgy Pyatakov, deputy commissar of heavy industry, was arrested on September 12. Stalin's longtime ally and fellow Georgian Sergo Ordzhonikidze, commissar of heavy industry, vainly tried to slow down the repression, but Pyatakov, once a supporter of Trotsky, soon "confessed" his role in the conspiracy supposedly being hatched against Stalin.

Yezhov revealed the "facts" at the December meeting of the Central Committee, and key leaders such as Pyatakov, Radek, Grigory Sokolnikov, and Leonid Serebriakov were arrested. They were allegedly a "backup" to take over once the main conspirators were caught. Yezhov

said there were ties between this group and hundreds of Party leaders. Pyatakov was called a "vicious fascist" and a "degenerate Communist." Yezhov insisted "these swine must be strangled."

There was a commotion at the meeting when someone asked about the popular Bukharin. Stalin said Bukharin aimed to restore capitalism, bring back private enterprise in agriculture, and worse. Although Bukharin and other accused on the Central Committee were allowed to respond, they were not convincing, partly because they were in fact critical of Stalin. At the very least they thought the Soviet Union under his aegis was socializing faster than was sustainable. Stalin's concluding speech was calm and cool but left little doubt that he believed Bukharin and his allies to be as guilty as Yezhov had intimated.[15]

What was at the heart of the matter? Stalin wanted a radical transformation of society. He was opposed by Bukharin and "the right" who believed he was going too far and by those on what Stalinists called "the left" (onetime sympathizers with Trotsky) who felt Stalin was not going far enough and had made too many concessions to "capitalism." The debate would start up anew whenever any policies seemed not to be working. The "left" or the "right" opposition picked away at Stalin, and with the purges he struck back.

At the end of 1936 and into the next year many began to feel some kind of national calamity was at hand, be that war or famine or both, their worries fueled by a failed harvest in 1936. That led to breadlines and anxieties verging on panic.[16]

The NKVD intercepted letters, from which they extracted strident views of the situation. These included:

"I wish that a war would start. I would be the first to go against the Soviet government."

"Tsar Nicholas was stupid, but bread was cheap and white, and you didn't have to stand in line for it. You could have as much as you wanted."

"The Soviet government and Stalin act like we are serfs. Just like before, when the peasants worked for landlords, now the kolkhoznik [worker on a collective farm] works until he drops—nobody knows for whom, but he does not get bread."

"What a life! If Trotsky were the leader, he would rule better than Stalin."

"Hitler will not only take the Soviet Union, but the whole world will

be under his power—then we will begin to live. But now only the leaders have a life."[17]

These disorganized voices of discontent hinted at support for Stalin's enemies, so eliminating potential leaders was one way to solidify his dictatorship beyond all possible threats.

"ACCOMPLICES" OF FASCISM?

The second great show trial was conducted in Moscow between January 23 and 30, 1937. In the dock this time, besides Pyatakov, Radek, Sokolnikov, and Serebriakov, were more than a dozen others. The prosecutor Vyshinsky met with Stalin to work out how to proceed, even jotting down how to mimic Stalin's tone. Vyshinsky was told not to let the accused "babble," but to "shut them up."

The defendants again confessed their guilt and did not even ask for mercy. One said: "I do not need leniency. The proletarian court should not and cannot spare my life. . . . I want one thing: to calmly mount the execution block and wash away the stain of a traitor of the Motherland with my blood."[18]

To give the show trial another prop, defense counsel was added. One plea is worth noting as an illustration of what a show trial was about. Ilya Braude's remarks went as follows:

> Comrade Judges, I am not going to conceal from you the exceptionally difficult and immeasurably hard position a counsel for the defense finds himself in this case. After all, a counsel for the defense, Comrade Judges, is first and foremost a son of his Motherland, he is also a citizen of the great Soviet Union, and the feelings of great indignation, wrath, horror which all our country, both young and old, are now seized with, these feelings are inevitably shared by the counsels for the defense as well. . . .
>
> I am defending I. A. Knyazev, the head of the railway, who in order to please the Japanese Intelligence Service derailed trains carrying workers and Red Army men. I shall not conceal that as I was reading over the materials of the case, as I was leafing through the documents, as I was listening to Knyazev's testimony, I imagined the crash of the carriages as they were being derailed and the groans of the dying and injured Red Army men. . . . Driven into a corner, Knyazev agreed to join the counter-revolutionary Trotskyite organization. Thus began the first page of Knyazev's despicable actions which had been dictated to him by the Trotskyite terrorist organization.[19]

The outcome was a foregone conclusion. A crowd of 200,000 demonstrated their bloodlust in Red Square on January 29, despite the −27°C temperatures. They carried banners reading: "The Court's Verdict Is the People's Verdict."

Nikita Khrushchev, one of Stalin's most vicious enforcers, addressed the crowds and passionately denounced the "Judas-Trotsky." The guilty "raised their hand against all the best that humanity has, because Stalin is hope. . . . Stalin is our banner. Stalin is our will, Stalin is our victory."[20]

Sergo Ordzhonikidze, a longtime Stalin friend, became entangled himself. He opted for suicide on January 31, an ominous sign of worse to come for others.

Bukharin's fate was discussed in his presence at the Central Committee plenum beginning on February 23. The shadow cast over the meeting was the suicide of Ordzhonikidze and the execution of Pyatakov. Molotov demanded Bukharin confess. If he would not, his refusal would be taken as "proof" he was a "fascist hireling."[21] Voroshilov called his ex-friend a "scoundrel." Stalin told Bukharin to "ask the Central Committee for its forgiveness."[22] A commission struck to investigate Bukharin's case and that of Rykov came back on February 27 with the conclusion to "arrest, try, shoot" both.[23] However, the ever-calculating Stalin suggested that instead their cases be turned over to a special commission of thirty-six worthies for investigation.

The third major show trial—usually called the trial of twenty-one—included Bukharin and other important leaders, like Yagoda, of the so-called "right-Trotskyist bloc." It began on March 2, 1938, with Vyshinsky descending to new levels to besmirch the accused. Some of the Soviet Union's great writers and publicists chimed in as well. A Moscow writer's open letter stated bluntly: "We demand the spies' execution! We shall not allow the enemies of the Soviet Union to live!" It was signed by writers as illustrious as Boris Pasternak, Mikhail Sholokhov, and Alexei Tolstoy. Vasily Grossman, who had been saved by Bukharin's direct

intervention earlier, now shouted: "No mercy to the Trotskyite degenerates, the murderous accomplices of fascism!"[24] Vyshinsky's summation against Bukharin was that he was a "damnable cross of a fox and a swine."[25]

Bukharin's professions of innocence were useless. Sentence was passed on March 13, and two days later he, Rykov, and seventeen others, including the former NKVD chief Yagoda, were executed. This was the last of the great show trials, but the terror was operating at other levels as well.

Lev Kopelev admitted in his autobiography he did not really think

> Bukharin and Trotsky were Gestapo agents or that they had wanted to kill Lenin, and I was sure that Stalin never believed it either. But I regarded the purge trials of 1937 and 1938 as an expression of some far-sighted policy; I believed that, on balance, Stalin was right in deciding on these terrible measures in order to discredit all forms of political opposition, once and for all. We were a besieged fortress; we had to be united, knowing neither vacillation nor doubt. But to most people—the "broad masses"—the theoretical differences between left and right within the Party were difficult to understand: both sides quoted Lenin and swore loyalty to the October Revolution. Therefore, the opposition leaders had to be depicted as deviationists and villains, so that the people would come to hate them.[26]

Victor Kravchenko, who was more skeptical than Kopelev, agreed in substance about Bukharin. In his autobiography he recalled that no one he met in Moscow

> attached the slightest value to their confessions. These men had consented to serve as puppets in a political morality play not in the least related to truth. Stalin was destroying his personal opponents and had succeeded in forcing them to participate in their own humiliation and extinction. We wondered about the techniques he had used. But even Party people were not expected to believe the trial testimony literally. To do so would have been tantamount, among Communists, to an admission of congenital idiocy. At most we accepted the fantasies in a symbolic, allegorical sense.[27]

Given the atmosphere in which conspiracies by foreign powers were being discovered with such regularity, it was "logical" that foreign spies would have to be found inside the armed forces. From the latter part of 1936 the NKVD gathered evidence against some of the most senior officers. Using torture, they gained confessions that implicated (among many others) Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, hero of the civil war and deputy commissar of defense. On May 22, 1937, he was arrested and, with Stalin's express permission, tortured brutally. Stalin's instruction was to find out what the marshal knew: "It is impossible that he acted on his own."

The extorted testimonies were duly presented to Stalin in order to confirm suspicions. He then circulated his opinion to the Politburo for what was by then merely a pro forma "vote" to remove Tukhachevsky and others from the Communist Party. The damning accusation was that he was part of a "Trotskyite-Right [*sic*]" conspiracy on behalf of Hitler's Germany. On June 11, the one-day military tribunal met and, in keeping with Stalin's instructions, sentenced Tukhachevsky and seven army generals to death. The sentence was carried out early the following morning. Stalin attended to all the details, even seeking to orchestrate popular responses. He sent telegrams to Communist Party officials across the USSR telling them to organize meetings and pass resolutions "about the need to apply the supreme measure of punishment"—which is to say, to call for the execution of the traitors.[28]

In the next nine days 980 senior officers and political commissars were arrested in connection with this "military conspiracy." The wave of repression then struck down an even longer list of officers. A former Soviet general noted how "they were the flower of the officer corps, with civil war experience, and most of them were relatively young. The blow to the Soviet armed forces was immense."[29]

In 1937–38 the officer corps was purged of at least 33,400, of whom a minimum of 7,280 were arrested. Many who perished were among the top command of the army and navy, including three of five marshals, fifteen of sixteen commanders, and sixty of sixty-seven corps commanders. As happened to Tukhachevsky's family, their wives and children were often arrested and killed. The entire affair was pushed by Stalin, but not because he really believed there were plans for a coup. His motivation had more to do with his continuing mistrust of the army.[30] The purges not only caused direct harm to the armed forces but led to doubts,

demoralization, and paralysis of will. The USSR would pay the price for this senseless purge with the German invasion in 1941.

The Politburo approved holding forty or so additional show trials across the country in the second half of 1937, and in 1938 another thirty were staged. Local and regional Party leaders and other members of the elite were tried in these cases.

An example of what ensued can be seen in Georgia, where the Party boss, Lavrenti Beria, went after "counterrevolutionaries." Empowered by Moscow in June 1937, he told the head of the regional NKVD, Sergei Goglidze, that those under arrest should be beaten if they would not confess. Goglidze described what happened next: "After this the Georgian NKVD began mass beatings of those under arrest. They were beaten at will. Testimonies against large groups of people appeared in the records and the numbers of those arrested as a result of having been mentioned in the testimonies grew, which led to falsification of cases and a distortion of reality."[31]

The results were tragic. Out of the 644 delegates to the Tenth Party Congress in Georgia held in May 1937, 425 were arrested and shot. Their wives and children were often arrested and tortured as well. The purge of the ranks went into the thousands. According to one witness, the troika in Tbilisi during 1937 "often did not concern themselves with compiling lists and conducting investigations" to send to Moscow for signing. Instead, the troika there "judged guilty and innocent alike according to the law of the Holy Inquisition, and their decision had the power of God."[32]

Raion, or district-level, show trials differed from those in Moscow and did not always rely on public confessions. The most absurd charges were brought, and outlandish plots were alleged. The need for witnesses to back up the charges provided opportunities for the powerless to assert themselves; there was no want of complaints and denunciations from peasants and other citizens. The provincials were more than mere "bystanders gathered to watch a public hanging," as they often were the ones who gave the incriminating evidence.[33]

To some extent the local trials removed one cohort of officialdom, but the basic structure of the system remained. The same point holds for the larger show trials in Moscow. Nevertheless, the trials and purges made possible the entrance of new people into the elite, those more likely than ever to be loyal Stalin supporters.

STALIN'S THEORY OF THE SHOWDOWN

Bukharin was once a favorite in the Party, and getting rid of him represented the last obstacle to Stalin's unchecked dictatorship. The evidence against him was assembled by Yezhov, but before the ax fell, the Central Committee held its plenum in February–March 1937.

Stalin addressed some awkward facts, in particular the question: if Socialism in one country was the great success he kept claiming, why were there so many enemies? One explanation was that the nearer the Soviet Union came to achieving Socialism, the more desperate would be the struggle of the "remnants" of enemy classes. This was a theory he had broached in 1928, and he brought it up again at the plenum of the Central Committee in February–March 1937. As he put it:

> The further we move forward, the more success we will have, the greater fury can we expect from what remains of the defeated exploiting classes, the more intense will be the struggle they put up, the harder they will try to harm the Soviet state, and the more desperate they will become as they grasp at the last resort of the doomed. It must be kept in mind that the vestiges of the defeated classes in the USSR are not alone. They are directly supported by enemies beyond the borders of the USSR . . . and must be aware of this. And so, they will keep up their desperate sorties. This is what history teaches us. This is what Leninism teaches us. We have to remember this and stay on the alert.[34]

This theory derived from the claim that as the class struggle became more volatile, it inevitably led to civil war, because no dominant class ever gave in without a desperate fight. Stalin built on that Marxist-Leninist point by suggesting that the "dying classes" would fight to their last breath. The theory also served to explain why Communists felt compelled to eliminate all the "formers" or the relatives and friends of the "formers." The all-out battle on this "front" against the innocent and defenseless was imagined as the "final showdown" against a vicious and dangerous enemy.

The idea of a showdown or last stand is common in Western culture. Before the "bad guys" or "evildoers" pass away, they muster renewed

strength for a last-ditch effort and are at their most dangerous. The final showdown linked the struggles against the whole range of enemies, from kulaks to "socially harmful elements," "anti-Soviet elements," and enemies in the ranks of the Party itself.

The official discourse of the regime was that it was the most popular in the world. The Communist way to explain industrial accidents or deviant social behavior was to attribute the causes to persons who were "alien infiltrators." Those with the "wrong" social or political background had ingrained anti-Soviet attitudes that they had "masked" or hidden. Ultimately, the only way to end their opposition was to kill them or put them in concentration camps, from which they were unlikely to return.[35]

Stalin was the main mover and organizer of the terror, made the key decisions, and often saw their implementation through. He relished hearing the details of the tortures and the last minute pleas uttered by the condemned. Although other leaders like Molotov, Voroshilov, and Kaganovich certainly played their part in the Great Terror, recent research shows that overwhelmingly it was Stalin who was its author.[36] The repression and outright murder of hundreds of thousands of completely innocent people revealed the dictatorship in all its horror. Nevertheless, true believers at the time, and ever since, found ways to rationalize it and to support it in the name of the higher cause.

MAKING WAY FOR NEW PEOPLE

One of the ways people found to participate in this system was by sending letters to the authorities. Letters of denunciation were sent to all the top leaders, including Stalin, who took a keen interest in them. Not just ordinary citizens but leaders down the line wrote to bring a superior or boss to his attention. If Stalin did not like the person who was denounced, he sent the incriminating letter to the NKVD with a note to investigate. If he was more positively disposed, he simply kept the letter for his files. This was the dictator's greatest power.

Party members completely in tune with Stalin became serial denouncers and wrote him so regularly as to win a place in his heart. Polia Nikolaenko, resident of Kiev, is said to have denounced thousands, many of

whom paid with their lives. Kiev Party bosses treated her with disdain, but Stalin, under the iron rule that if there was smoke there was fire, came to her aid when she complained of being ignored. Ukrainian leaders were told to "pay attention to Comrade Nikolaenko" and protect her.[37]

Nikita Khrushchev was in some ways typical of how Party leaders became enthusiasts for terror. As Party boss of Moscow, he thundered in August 1937 to a Party conference that "scoundrels must be destroyed." Khrushchev was ruthless; by the time he finished, only 3 leaders were left of 38 in Moscow's city and Party organizations, and 10 Party secretaries in the wider Moscow district remained out of 146. He happily exceeded the quota, set by the Politburo on June 27, of 35,000 "enemies" to be repressed; within two weeks he told Stalin he had already picked up 41,305 "criminal and kulak elements." Out of these, he personally assigned 8,500 "to the first category," as the expression went, that is, they were to be executed.

Khrushchev's reasoning was as follows: "In destroying one, two, or ten of them, we are doing the work of millions. That's why our hand must not tremble, why we must march across the corpses of the enemy toward the good of the people."[38]

Some of the fears that fueled the purges may have been motivated by a panic to eliminate a fifth column of possible traitors in a time when the threats of war were growing. The sheer scale of the repressions indicates, however, that the process got completely out of control and lost any rational foundation it might have had.[39]

The press played up the show trials in the provinces. The coverage seems to have deflected blame away from Stalin and onto the shoulders of lower-range leaders. Even some of the victims blamed the "little Stalins" for what was going wrong.

Unlike the great show trials, local ones easily found plausible charges and gave citizens an opportunity to redress wrongs suffered at the hands of abusive or incompetent administrators. This populist side of the terror targeted the elites and likely won the regime support. Not just political bosses but managers and foremen were called to account. Workforces in factories and on collective farms were brought into the trials to bear witness, and everything possible was done to publicize the events.

Members of the Party or its affiliations who were denounced engaged in "self-criticism" meetings that turned into purges of the soul. Children

were cajoled in meetings of the Komsomol to defame arrested parents. Any Communists who might have previously supported Trotsky or Bukharin were endangered and were lucky if they were merely expelled from the Party.[40]

The Commission for Judicial Affairs of the Politburo determined in advance what the sentences would be of the more prominent people. The names of members or leaders of the Party, or well-known figures in industry, the army, or arts and culture, who were brought to court were submitted on lists to Stalin. He personally signed 362 of these lists, as the ultimate judge, juror, and executioner. It should be noted that other members of the Politburo were involved in this practice as well. Thus, Voroshilov signed 195 lists, Kaganovich 191, Andrei Zhdanov 177, and Anastas Mikoyan 62. There were forty-four thousand names on the lists submitted to these men, and thirty-nine thousand were condemned to death.[41]

The Party's Central Committee was hit hard. By the time of the Party congress in March 1939, the 139 members elected in 1934 were reduced to 32 full and candidate members. Ninety-four had been executed; one had been assassinated; four died by their own hand and five of natural causes; and three were still in prison. Members of the Central Committee elected before 1934 (but not reelected that year) went from ninety-five to forty-four during the purge. All in all, close to 70 percent of the entire Central Committee was wiped out.[42]

As for the Party itself, by one accounting, 60 percent of the members in 1933 were gone by the beginning of 1939. Some 1.8 million were expelled, and 1 million new ones were recruited. In the process, the Party was transformed into a more Stalinist institution than ever before.[43] If this was indeed the intent behind letting the purges go so far, Stalin could hardly have been unhappy.

At the local level, this process took on a momentum of its own. Stalin may well have been surprised by the scale of the terror, but he had a hardness and resiliency that defies the imagination, and it certainly fits his profile that he would seize any and all opportunities to outwit his foes and rid himself of troublemakers. The so-called Old Bolsheviks, with their ideas of Party "democracy" or at least of open discussion of the issues, had long been a thorn in Stalin's side. The purges functioned to remove many of them once and for all and to bring in more enthusiastic new people who had the energy needed to carry the revolution forward and in just the way Stalin wanted.[44]

The terror in the 1930s was without precedent. Various estimates of the numbers arrested during that decade range up to 3.5 million and beyond. In 1937 alone, 936,750 people were arrested, of whom 790,665 were "convicted." Astoundingly, 353,074 of these people were shot, and 429,311 were sent to the Gulag or prison. In 1938, the number of arrests fell to 638,509, but the executions, at 328,618, did not decrease significantly. That year another 205,509 people were consigned to the Gulag or prison.[45] These official figures underestimate the full extent of the fatalities in many ways and, for example, do not include the hundreds of thousands who died in the Gulag or in exile.

No single agency counted all the arrests or registered the deaths and executions, so we are still trying to reconstruct what happened. A conservative and careful estimate (that is admittedly incomplete, but based on all the available documents) now puts the number of those killed in the 1930s at around two million.[46]