

The USSR Under Stalin

Stalin's Purges



Sergei Kirov: assassinated 1934

A. Background

- The most famous aspect of Stalin's USSR was the Terror.
- This grew from his paranoia and his desire to be an absolute autocrat, and was enforced via the NKVD and public 'show trials'.
- It developed into a centrally-enforced 'cult of Stalin-worship', and a terrifying system of slave labour camps - 'the gulag'.



GULAG MAP - USSR

BY MEMORIAL SOCIETY IN MOSCOW



B. Reasons For the Terror

- Whole Country

- Stalin believed that Russia had to be united with him as leader if it was to be strong

- Urgency

- Stalin believed Russia had only 10 years to catch up with the western world before Germany invaded.

- Paranoia – remember what Stalin did to gain power?

- Stalin became increasingly paranoid (seeing plots everywhere) and power-mad (he demanded continuous praise and applause).
 - In 1935, his wife killed herself.



Stalin's Family



Sergei Kirov, 1934

- Stalin had to secure leadership and remove all sources of opposition to Stalin's power
- The excuse was the 1934 murder of Sergei Kirov, the chief of the Lennigrad Communist Party
 - evidence indicates that this could have been set up. (Howarth p. 134)

<http://www.indepthinfo.com/kirov/murder.shtml>

C. Chronology of the Purges

- The - 3 phases (in general)

1st: The Kulaks during
Collectivization

2nd: 1934 - purge of party

- 3 million disappear

3rd: - 1937 purge of army

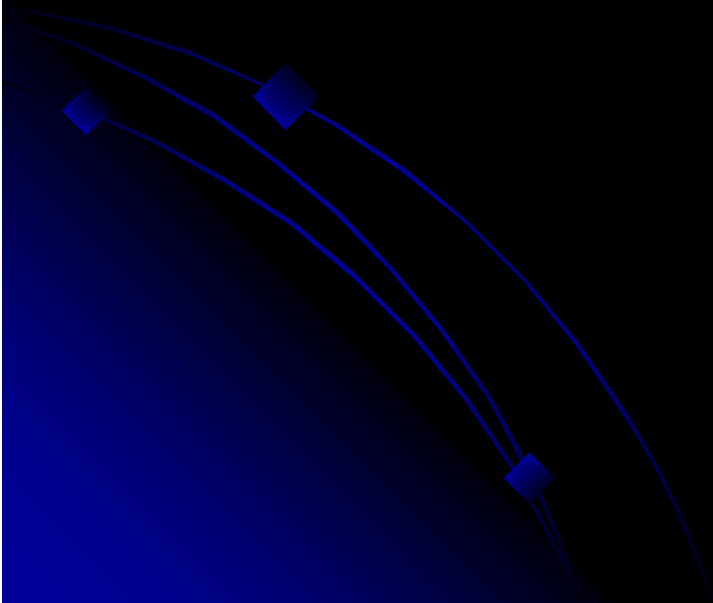
- - 1/3 of army officers



"The Year 1933" Victor Gymbol

D. The First Phase 1930–33

- This included the Kulaks who resisted collectivization



E. Phase Two: The Great Purge, 1934–39

● Secret Police

- The CHEKA became the OGPU (1922), then the NKVD (1934). (Eventually it became the KGB)
- OGPU was a greatly enlarged organization, job to root out and destroy opposition, but also to terrorize ordinary people into silence (later to become the KGB and now the FSB)
- sometimes secret police officers spied on each other!
- the head of the NKVD, Yagoda, and his senior staff were shot (on orders of new NKVD director **Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov**)



Genrikh Yagoda

- 1st Political Opponents were dealt with:

- Stalin used the Kirov murder as a chance to arrest thousands of his opponents.
- They were put on “Show Trials”, where they pleaded guilty to impossible charges of treason
 - (e.g. Zinoviev and Kamenev 1936/ Bukharin, Tomsy & Rykov 1938).
- Most of the trials were not “show”, thousands were conducted in secret

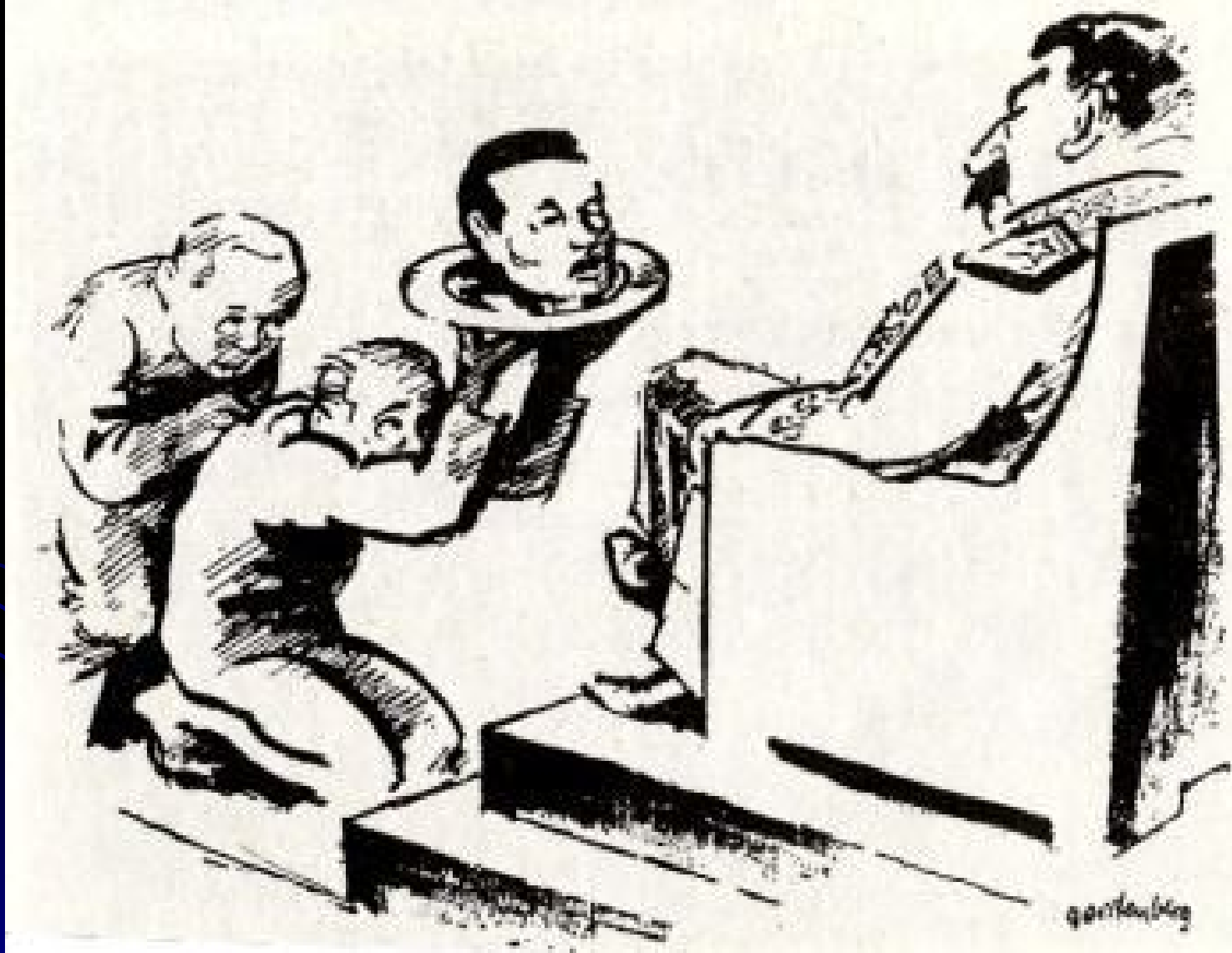
It was the duty of every good communist to be "watchful" for "saboteurs", often there was benefit to the accusers. This included kids turning in parents.



A Show Trial in Moscow

- At these "show" trials, former high Bolsheviks were tried for the conspiracy to kill Kirov
- many confessed to a conspiracy with Trotsky even though it was obvious that the evidence was made up (Howarth p. 135)
- many confessed to trumped up charges - why?
 - to save lives of families
 - Torture
 - believed their deaths were in the interests of the country
 - some were relieved to have the process over
 - many trials were rehearsed and when a Judge recognized fabricated evidence, many accused still wanted to confess

4. Slánského pád: Velkému Stalinovi je přinášena oběť. Kresba Bodo Gerstenberga



- many were arrested and without a trial, were sent to labour camps (Gulags) if they were not shot
- prisoners called "zeks"
 - estimated about 17-25 million political prisoners were used to help industrialize the USSR



- by 1940, only one of the original 15 governing Bolsheviks was left alive: Stalin himself. Stalin had their history erased along with their lives (Howarth p. 134)



- **Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov**
- People's Commissar for State Security
- January 27, 1937 – November 25, 1938



- Like his predecessor, **Yezhov was eventually arrested and executed himself**

- - the revolution devours its children



In the original version of this photo (top), Yezhov is clearly visible on the right of the photograph. The later version (bottom) was altered by censors, removing all trace of his presence.

F. Phase Three: The Purge of the Army, Air Force and Navy

- This was done to remove any remaining source of opposition to Stalin
 - (remember Kronstadt?)
- The most famous victim was Commander-in-Chief Marshal Tukhachevsky – a hero of the civil war

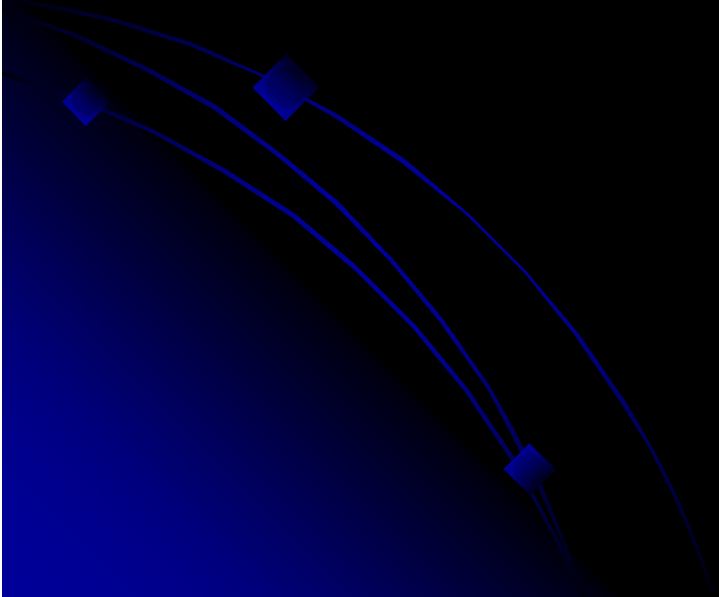


- In all 3 out of 5 full marshals purged
 - 3 out of 4 full generals
 - 12 lieutenant-generals
 - 60 out of 67 corps commanders
 - 136 out of 199 divisional commanders
-
- Total: about 1/3 of all officers disappeared



The first five Marshals of the Soviet Union in November, 1935. (l-r): Mikhail Tukhachevsky, Semyon Budyonny, Kliment Voroshilov, Vasily Blyukher, Aleksandr Yegorov. Only Voroshilov and Budyonny survived the Great Purge.

- the Red Army was weakened enough that Nazis forces (during Operation Barbarossa) easily swept aside the Red Army as they advanced during the early months of the operation in WWII



G. Stalin's Other Purges

- The Church:
 - Religious leaders imprisoned; churches closed down.
- Ethnic groups:
 - Stalin enforced 'Russification' of all the Soviet Union.
- Ordinary people:
 - 20 million Russians were sent to the camps, where perhaps half of them died.
 - People lived in fear. Apparatchiks (party members loyal to Stalin) got all the new flats, jobs, holidays etc.

H. The Cult of Stalin Emerges

- Censorship of anything that might reflect badly on Stalin
 - Propaganda everywhere - pictures, statues, continuous praise and applause
- Places named after him
- Mothers taught their children that Stalin was 'the wisest man of the age'
- History books and photographs were changed to make him the hero of the Revolution, and obliterate the names of purged people (e.g. Trotsky).



- FYI: The most famous description of Stalin's Terror is book “The Gulag Archipelago”, by exiled Russian Author, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.
- Solzhenitsyn spoke of a Communist Party meeting he attended in 1938:

At the end of the conference, a tribute to Comrade Stalin was called for.

Of course, everyone leapt to his feet.

However, who would dare to be the first to stop – after all, NKVD men were in the hall waiting to see who quit first. And in that obscure hall, unknown to the Leader, the applause went on – 6, 7, 8 minutes! They couldn't stop now till they collapsed of heart attacks!

Aware of the falsity of the situation, after 11 minutes, the director of the paper factory sat down in his seat.

And, oh, a miracle took place! Everyone else stopped dead and sat down.

That, however, was how they found who the independent people were.

And that was how they set about eliminating them.

They easily passed 10 years in a labour camp on him.

In The end, everyone either loved Stalin or ceased to exist (Howarth p. 135)

