

Stalin:

Trials and Purges:

Key words: Gulag, The Kirov Affair, The Great Purge, The Great Terros, The Cult of Personality, Propaganda, Dictatorship, CHEKA, NKVD, KGB

Stalin's insecurity:

- By 1929 Stalin had **defeated his main opponents** within the Communist Party
- But there were **still some critics** who opposed the policy of forced collectivization and other political steps

The Kirov Affair, 1934:

- **Sergei Kirov**: head of the Party in Leningrad, was murdered in 1934.
- Kirov was very popular. By some Party officials, he was seen as a likely replacement for Stalin
- Kirov was murdered in 1934 under suspicious circumstances: Stalin's involvement in the murder is not absolutely clear, there is no clear evidence.
- Stalin used this murder as an **opportunity to launch purge of the Communist Party**

The Great Purge and the "Show Trials":

- **The Moscow Trials**: were a series of "*show trials*" conducted in the Soviet Union and orchestrated by Joseph Stalin during the Great Purge of the 1930s.
- **The Moscow Trials** were *show trials*, which meant that **the verdicts were predetermined, and then publicly justified through the use of coerced confessions, obtained through torture and threats against the defendants' families.**
- The purpose of the trials was to: **eliminate any potential political challengers to Stalin's authority.**
- Most defendants were charged under **Article 58** of the RSFSR Penal Code with: **conspiring with the western powers to assassinate Stalin and other Soviet leaders, dismember the Soviet Union, and restore capitalism. People were forced to "confess" their involvement in attempts to assassinate Party leaders and to overthrow the Revolution. They were even accused of being agents of Nazi Germany.**

Article 58 of the legal code, listing prohibited anti-Soviet activities as counterrevolutionary crime was applied **in the broadest manner**. The flimsiest pretexts were often enough to brand someone an "**enemy of the people**", starting the cycle of public persecution and abuse, often proceeding to interrogation, torture and deportation, if not death.

Article 58-1: Definition of **counter-revolutionary activity**:

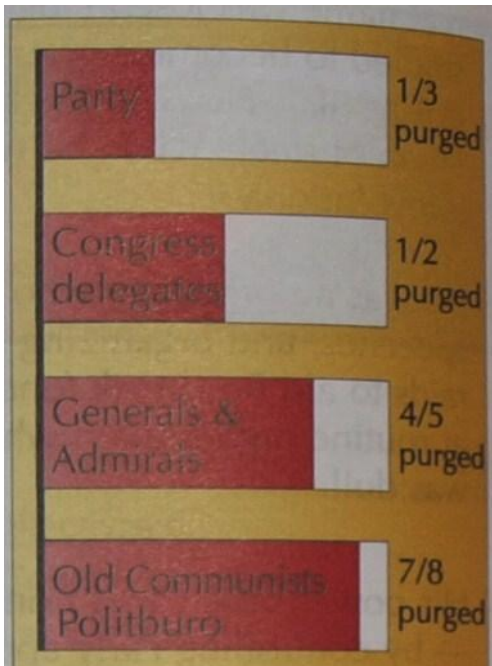
"A counter-revolutionary action is any action aimed at overthrowing, undermining or weakening of the power of workers' and peasants' Soviets... and governments of the USSR and Soviet and autonomous republics, or at the undermining or weakening of the external security of the USSR and main economical, political and national achievements of the proletarian revolution"

The Moscow trials:

| | |
|--|---|
| Trial of the Sixteen in 1936 | Zinoviev, Kamenev and 14 others killed |
| Trial of the Seventeen in 1937: | 17 lesser figures |
| The "Trial of the Twenty-One" in 1938 | Against so-called "Bloc of Rightists and Trotskyites": Nikolai Bukharin - Marxist theoretician, former head of Communist International and member of Politburo |

– killed.

- **Nikolai Yezhov** – the head of the ... Secret Police from 1937 – under Yezhov, the trials became the most disgusting demonstration of POWER. Yezhov was nothing but a **cruel murderer** – in Slovak “... ježovština”



- Although a few refused to admit their guilt, most did. About **100 Party members were executed**, and many were imprisoned.

The Great Terror:

- The purge now turned into terror:
- **ARMY:** In 1937, Stalin turned his attention to the armed forces. Red Army commanders were arrested and executed. They were accused of spying for Nazi Germany and Japan. **In all, about 20 % of all army officers were executed.**
- **ORDINARY PEOPLE:** The terror then spread beyond the Party and military leaders to ordinary people. **By 1939 about 3 million people were killed and 9 million were political prisoners.**
- As the terror started to affect industrial production, Stalin called off the Great Terror in 1939.

The results of the purges were:

1. Many of the most gifted and able citizens had disappeared – killed or sent to camps.
2. The army and navy was seriously weakened by the loss of most senior officers
3. Industrial and technical progress was hampered by the loss of top scientists and engineers.

Communist attitudes to the Church:

- Religion was called the “opium of the people” by Marx

Karl Marx: “Religion is an opium of the people”

- The Russian **Orthodox** Church was a powerful supporter of the Tsar, so the communists began to take Church property and land – these were valuable assets for the Party. Christians were prosecuted as a political threat to Communism and priests were murdered or exiled.
- In 1929 the Church was banned from any activity except leading worship.
- By 1939 a few hundred Churches remained active.

Stalin’s Russia was a dictatorship:

1. Stalin ran everything
2. People loyal to Stalin received privileges like holidays, flats, ...
3. New Constitution in 1936: every 4 years there were elections and only official Party candidates were allowed to stand. Power was kept in the Politburo.
4. Most people lived in fear but were unable to speak out.

Gulags:

Two meanings of the term:

1. *GULag* or *Gulág* is an abbreviation for the “*Chief Administration of Corrective Labour Camps*”, the bureaucratic name of the *Soviet concentration camp main governing board*.



Later, there were also the victims of Stalin's purges.

2. the labor camps themselves

The Gulags:

- were officially created in 1930 and dissolved in 1960, but practically operated until the collapse of the communist regime.
- is recognized as a major instrument of **political repression** in the Soviet Union.
- Most Gulag inmates were not **political prisoners**, although the political prisoner population was always significant. People could be imprisoned in a Gulag camp for crimes such as petty theft, unexcused absences from work, and anti-government jokes. Lots of inmates were peasants who had resisted ... collectivization.

More than **14 million people** passed through the *Gulag* from 1929 to 1953, with a further 6 to 7 million being deported and exiled to remote areas of the USSR.

Living and working conditions in the camps varied significantly across time and place, depending, among other things, on the impact of broader events (World War II, countrywide famines and shortages, ...). However, to one degree or another, the large majority of prisoners at most times faced **meagre food rations, inadequate clothing, overcrowding, poorly insulated housing, poor hygiene, and inadequate health care. Most prisoners were compelled to perform harsh physical labor.**

Andrei Vyshinsky, procurator of the Soviet Union, wrote a memorandum to NKVD chief Nikolai Yezhov in 1938 which stated: *“Among the prisoners there are some so ragged and lice ridden that they pose a sanitary danger to the rest. These prisoners have deteriorated to the point of losing any resemblance to human beings. Lacking food . . . they collect orts [refuse] and, according to some prisoners, eat rats and dogs.”*

Location: In the early days of Gulag, the locations for the camps were chosen primarily for their isolated locations. But with the new emphasis on Gulag as the **means of concentrating cheap labour**, new camps were then constructed throughout the Soviet sphere of influence. The inmates built for example parts of Moscow Metro and the Moscow State University new campus.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn:

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich - is a novel written by Solzhenitsyn, first published in November 1962. The story is set in a **Soviet labor camp in the 1950s**, and describes a single day of an ordinary prisoner, Ivan Denisovich Shukhov. Its publication was an extraordinary event in Soviet literary history - **never before had an account of Stalinist repression been openly distributed.**

The themes of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* center on **authoritative oppression and camp survival**. Specifically discussed is the cruelty and spite towards the fellow man, namely from prison officials.

The Cult of Personality:

- **in general:** the cult of personality arises when an individual uses mass media to create an idealized and heroic public image.
- **Stalin's cult of personality:** Propaganda and censorship helped to build up Stalin's dictatorship and cult of personality. **If there were mistakes, these were either blamed on “enemies”, or not reported at all.**

Who is not with us is against us

- The Press, radio, the Art and cinema were all heavily censored.
- Numerous towns, villages and cities were renamed after Stalin and the Stalin Prize and Stalin ... Peace Prize were named in his honor. He accepted titles such as "Father of Nations," "... Brilliant Genius of Humanity," "Great Architect of Communism," "Gardener of Human Happiness," and others, and helped rewrite Soviet history to provide himself a more significant role in the revolution.

Stalin's Achievements(?!):

- medical care improved
 - health services were free
 - education expanded
 - living standards for most workers were improved
 - benefits such as cheap public transport and recreational facilities such as swimming pools and cinemas
-

Off topic:

CHEKA, NKVD, KGB:

- **The Cheka**: was the **first** of Soviet **state security** organizations. It was created by Vladimir Lenin in 1917.

Under the category of *counter-revolutionaries* fell as classified by the Cheka:

1. any civil or military servicemen suspected of working for Imperial Russia,
2. families of officers-volunteers (including children),
3. any clergy,
4. workers and peasants who are under suspicion of not supporting the Soviet government,
5. and any other person whose private property was evaluated over 10 000 rubles.

- **NKVD**: was the public and **secret police** organization of the Soviet Union that directly executed the rule of power of the Soviets, including political repression, during the era of Joseph Stalin.

The NKVD contained the regular, public police force of the USSR, but is better known for the activities of the Gulag. It conducted mass extrajudicial executions, ran the Gulag system of forced labor camps, suppressed underground resistance, conducted mass deportations of entire nationalities and Kulaks to unpopulated regions of the country, guarded state borders, conducted espionage and political assassinations abroad, was responsible for influencing foreign governments, and enforced Stalinist policy within communist movements in other countries.

- **The KGB**: it was the national **security agency** of the Soviet Union **from 1954 until 1991**.