

After the end of World War II, and perhaps with Picasso's painting in mind, people began to view Guernica's destruction not just as another atrocity but as a prelude to the greater horrors to come. "Guernica" is often cited both as a precedent-setting example of "terror bombing" and as a precursor of the raids on Coventry, Rotterdam, Hamburg, and Dresden.

Yet momentous and tragic as the Guernica bombing was, in some ways it is surprising that it should have taken on such vast symbolic weight. Despite claims to the contrary, it was by no means the first large-scale bombing of a civilian population. In the Ethiopian war the Italians made a regular practice of bombing undefended towns and even Red Cross centers. The earlier bombing of Durango in the Spanish war probably killed about as many civilians as the Guernica attack. Though the Guernica raid certainly took on terrorist dimensions, "demoralization of the civil population" was not its initial or primary purpose, as it was in many World War II attacks.

What makes the Guernica case special is primarily the historical and political significance of the target. But the foreign airmen who laid waste to the city had little or no notion of this significance. Nor, obviously, could they have known that their act would shock world opinion and become the subject of the twentieth century's most celebrated painting. Picasso's *Guernica* helped make this moment emblematic of the horrors of modern warfare, but perhaps it ought also stand for war's bitter ironies.

## VII

# "THE REVOLUTION EATS ITS CHILDREN"

## *Stalin's Great Purge*

THE WHITE QUEEN: He's in prison now being punished; and the trial doesn't even begin til next Wednesday; and of course, the crime comes last of all.

ALICE: But suppose he never commits the crime?

THE WHITE QUEEN: That would be all the better, wouldn't it?

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

In 1936 Mme Marcelle Vinal, astrologer for the French newspaper *L'Intransigeant*, predicted that the following year would be a bad one for Europe's dictators. "Their power will be weakened," she announced, "because Saturn is no longer in the sign of the fishes and opposed to Neptune."

One of Europe's most brutal dictators, Joseph Stalin, was apparently unaware that the stars had turned against him. In 1937 his "Great Purge" of alleged political "oppositionists" reached its peak with the second of three spectacular show trials. These trials, in which prominent Communist party figures confessed to crimes they could not have committed, have been called "the most ambitious and concentrated attempt to destroy and distort the historical truth that history has known." But the infamous trials constituted only one dimension of Stalin's Great Purge. The cream of the Red Army was liquidated without public trial, and tens of thousands of minor party officials, state bureaucrats, economic experts, and ordinary citizens disappeared into forced-labor camps.

Certain aspects of Stalin's Great Purge suggest similarities to Hitler's Night of the Long Knives, but in the modern era the massive scope of Stalin's internecine bloodletting can be compared only to that of Mao's "Cultural Revolution" of the 1960s and perhaps that of Pol Pot's "killing fields" in Cambodia in the 1970s. Although the Great Purge did rid Stalin of various opponents or critics, it followed earlier repressions that had already eliminated most resistance to the dictator's policies. The crusade's focus on "Old Bolsheviks," moreover, made the terror seem cannibalistic—a reenactment of that grisly period in the French

Revolution when the revolutionaries turned against themselves and "ate their children."

## THE KIROV ASSASSINATION

In the late afternoon of December 1, 1934, a young Communist named Leonid Nikolayev appeared at the entrance to the Smolny Institute, a former school for daughters of the aristocracy that now served as the headquarters of the Communist party in Leningrad. Nikolayev, emaciated and trembling, showed his pass to a guard and entered the building, whose windows shone brightly in the early December darkness. The young man walked down strangely empty corridors until he found the office of the Leningrad party boss, Sergei Kirov. Nikolayev hid in a corner near Kirov's door and pulled a Nagan revolver from his briefcase. When Kirov came out of his office and turned down the hall, Nikolayev shot him cleanly through the back. He then collapsed in a faint a few yards from his victim.

News of Kirov's murder was immediately relayed to Joseph Stalin in the Kremlin. Stalin ("Man of Steel"), who had been ruling Russia with an iron hand for the past half dozen years, was now fifty-five. He had a pockmarked face, uneven teeth, and a stiff left arm. Like many other dictators, he was quite short, and wore thick-soled shoes to give him an extra inch. One of his rivals (and later victims), Nikolai Bukharin, suggested that Stalin was made miserable and mean-spirited by his short stature, by his inability to "convince everyone, including himself, that he [was] a taller man than anybody else." Stalin's personality was also shaped by his harsh upbringing as the son of a drunken cobbler in wild Georgia, a mountainous region that had been controlled by the Mongols and Turks before becoming a part of the expanding Russian Empire in the early nineteenth century. As a young boy, the future dictator identified with the Georgian rebels who had resisted their land's "Russification." Later he became a zealous Russifier in his own right, but he always spoke with a Georgian accent and retained something of the provincial rebel in his character. His personality was further molded by his education at a repressive theological seminary famous for its production of rebels and by his long years in czarist prisons and Siberian exile. Well before he embarked on his Great Purge, he had established a reputation for cruelty and vengefulness: his enemies compared him to Tamerlane and Genghis Khan.

Immediately upon receiving word of the Kirov assassination, a shocked and angry Stalin rushed by train to Leningrad. At the station he was met by Philip Medved, head of the Leningrad NKVD (secret police). As Medved opened his arms in greeting, Stalin punched him in the face. From the station he went directly to the NKVD headquarters and began questioning Nikolayev. "Why did you kill such a nice man?" he is said to have asked Nikolayev. According to one account the young man fell on his knees and pointed at a group of NKVD men standing behind Stalin and shouted, "They forced me to do it." Another account

has Nikolayev insisting that he had "fired at the Party" when he shot Kirov. To Stalin's query about where he got his revolver, he replied, "Why do you ask me? Ask Zaporozhets [second in command of the Leningrad NKVD] that!" To which Stalin, reportedly "green with anger," cried, "Take him away!"

All existing accounts of this scene in the Leningrad NKVD building are secondhand. No one present at the meeting left a reliable memoir. We do know, however, that Kirov's assassination led to a wave of arrests and executions. At first the government blamed the deed on Russian "White Guard terrorists" who had allegedly sneaked into the Soviet Union from Finland and the Baltic States. In early December, Soviet newspapers announced that 104 White Guardists had been executed for their role in this counterrevolutionary plot. Then the investigation shifted to the Ukraine, where twenty-eight men were charged with "organizing acts of terror against officials of the Soviet government." They too were immediately executed.

Two weeks later, however, the Soviet press offered an entirely different explanation for Kirov's murder. Two prominent Old Bolsheviks, Grigori Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, were said to have "encouraged" Nikolayev's act by fomenting dissension within the party.

Why this sudden attack on two former luminaries of the Bolshevik party? The explanation must be sought as much in earlier party history as in more recent developments. Zinoviev and Kamenev had been Lenin's closest associates during his years in exile before the Bolshevik Revolution. Although they had angered Lenin by opposing his insurrection in October 1917, after the revolution they returned to favor and assumed key positions in the new Soviet regime. Zinoviev, indeed, had fancied himself Lenin's successor. Stalin, who had similar ambitions, could not help resenting Zinoviev's and Kamenev's influence with Lenin, especially since he knew that Lenin saw *him*, the raw provincial from Georgia, as too uncouth and heavy-handed to inherit his mantle of leadership.

In the years immediately following Lenin's death, Stalin had to share power with Zinoviev and Kamenev, but he quickly sought to undermine their influence by maligning them as coffee-house revolutionaries who had spent most of their careers talking about revolution in Western cafés. He also made derogatory reference to their Jewish origins, tapping a vein of anti-Semitism that was almost as rich among Russia's revolutionaries as among the old defenders of czarist autocracy. In matters of policy Zinoviev and Kamenev had incurred Stalin's hatred by opposing his position of "Socialism in One Country," which held that the Soviet Union could and must become an advanced industrial country before Communist revolutions had triumphed abroad. By careful backstairs maneuvering, Stalin managed slowly to isolate his opponents and set them up for their political fall, which came at the Fifteenth Party Congress, in 1927. After this moment they never again exercised genuine influence, but Stalin, in his paranoid insecurity, saw them as potential troublemakers. It seemed that he had long been waiting for an opportunity to ensure that these former oppositionists never became oppositionists again.

The Kirov assassination offered this opportunity, and Stalin seized it. Exposure of the Zinoviev-Kamenev "plot" led to a new wave of arrests and executions, though initially the focus was on lesser "allies" of the two discredited leaders. In Leningrad, corpses began to pile up in the NKVD cellars. The press launched a campaign for increased vigilance toward the "hidden enemy." A Central Committee directive entitled "Lessons of the Events Connected with the Evil Murder of Comrade Kirov" called on party members to hunt down all former oppositionists who remained in the party. Within the next month thousands of party members and ordinary citizens were arrested and deported to Siberia. Since Leningrad was said to be the main site of the oppositionist plot, the purge focused on that city. A Soviet journalist told the American Communist Louis Fischer that right after the Kirov assassination, well-to-do Muscovites traveled to Leningrad to buy up the furniture, carpets, and paintings of the people sent into exile. "The purge almost solved that city's housing problem," he added.

On December 28 and 29 Nikolayev and thirteen other men accused of being directly involved in the Kirov assassination were tried in a secret military court. The published account of their trial said that they had "confessed" to plotting against Kirov in order to open the way for Zinoviev's and Kamenev's return to power. Oddly enough, however, the press also mentioned a diary carried by Nikolayev that suggested he had acted alone. Immediately following the trial, Nikolayev and the others were shot.

Zinoviev and Kamenev, on the other hand, were not tried for the murder until mid-January 1935. Before their trial they were ordered by the NKVD publicly to assume full responsibility for the Kirov murder, but they agreed to accept only "moral responsibility." In the trial Zinoviev reportedly admitted, "The former activity of the former opposition could not, by the force of objective circumstances, but stimulate the degeneration of those criminals." As punishment for their subversive behavior, Zinoviev was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment and Kamenev to five. A week later Medved and Zaporozhets, the Leningrad NKVD men, were charged with dereliction of duty for their failure to protect Kirov. Their sentences were three and two years' Siberian exile, respectively.

Most Russians apparently accepted the various official explanations for the Kirov murder. One NKVD official who later defected to the West, however, claimed to have smelled a rat from the outset. Alexander Orlov, an operative in the NKVD's Foreign Department, had been out of the Soviet Union at the time of the murder. Upon his return to Moscow in the fall of 1935, he began asking friends in the secret police about the assassination. Though told it was "healthier not to know too much," he pressed on with his investigation. He learned, he said, that Kirov had alienated Stalin in the summer of 1934 by challenging his authority. Without Moscow's permission, he had apparently requisitioned scarce food supplies for the workers of Leningrad. A gifted orator, he had become extremely popular in Leningrad, which he had turned into his personal fiefdom. As a party

"moderate" he had opposed internal purges and the introduction of the death penalty for oppositionists.

As for the assassin, Orlov learned that Nikolayev had been apprehended by the NKVD in an earlier attempt to kill Kirov. Rather than detain him, the police had returned his revolver and allowed him to go free. A few days later he was found by Kirov's guards snooping around the Smolny. Turned over to the secret police, he was advised by an undercover agent posing as his friend to try yet again. This time the police were careful to clear away most of the Smolny guards. Even Kirov's personal bodyguard was removed from the scene. This explained the ease with which Nikolayev could enter the Smolny and gun down his target.

On the basis of this information, Orlov surmised that the Leningrad NKVD had "allowed" Kirov to be murdered on orders from Stalin himself. The dictator had gotten rid of a bothersome rival, then used the murder as a pretext to launch a campaign against Zinoviev and Kamenev. The entire operation was a giant "frame-up."

Another NKVD agent turned defector, Walter Krivitsky, advanced a similar theory in 1939. Noting that Zinoviev and Kamenev had remained figureheads of an inchoate "opposition" to Stalin's one-man rule, Krivitsky opined that the dictator was searching for a way to destroy the Bolshevik Old Guard once and for all. Hitler's Blood Purge of June 30, 1934, suggested a solution: "Stalin was profoundly impressed by the manner in which Hitler exterminated his opposition, and studied minutely every secret report from our agents in Germany relating to the events of that night." Hitler therefore "showed the way," and Stalin proved an adept pupil.

Orlov's and Krivitsky's revelations smacked of insider information, and they convinced many students of Stalinism that the dictator had orchestrated the Kirov assassination. Nevertheless, there are reasons to doubt that this was so. Kirov was not, it turns out, the "moderate" anti-Stalinist that Orlov made him out to be. He had supported the dictator in his consolidation of power, which he never really challenged. Of course, Stalin may have still wanted him out of the way, but assassination was a dangerous and clumsy way to achieve this: it might encourage the murder of other high officials. Had he nevertheless chosen this method, Stalin would probably have been more efficient in its execution and would not have let loose ends, like Nikolayev's dead-end diary, confuse the issue. His initial response to the murder—an immediate trip to Leningrad and a wild striking out at all sorts of alleged culprits—suggests confusion, panic, and unfocused retaliation. Only gradually did more coherent and focused uses for this event become clear to him.

In the end, at any rate, Stalin's possible complicity in the Kirov assassination is less important than his exploitation of the affair. Krivitsky was certainly correct when he noted that "the murder of Kirov was a turning point in Stalin's career. It ushered in the era of public and secret trials of the Bolshevik Old Guard, the era of the confessions."

### THE TRIAL OF THE TROTSKYITE-ZINOVIEVITE UNITED CENTER

Not long after the Kirov assassination, orders went out from Moscow to every party organization to step up efforts at exposing "deviations" from the party line. In her memoirs of the purge period, Eugenia Ginzburg, one of its victims, speaks of an "orgy of breast-beating and self-criticism." Lecture halls were turned into "public confessionals" where people "repented" for misunderstanding the theory of permanent revolution, or for underrating the importance of the Second Five-Year Plan, or for showing signs of "rotten liberalism." A new "verification of party documents" led to the exclusion of thousands of people accused of poor discipline, lack of revolutionary zeal, association with counterrevolutionary elements, or drunkenness and hooliganism.

The worst offense, however, was maintaining contact with what was now called the Trotskyite-Zinovievite United Center. The addition of the discredited and exiled Lev Trotsky to the anti-Soviet conspiracy was a significant development. Much more than Zinoviev or Kamenev, Trotsky had played a key role in the Bolshevik Revolution and in the subsequent civil war. As commissar for war, he had created the Red Army, which ultimately defeated the White forces and saved the revolution. In Stalin's eyes this was Trotsky's first sin, for Stalin had not been one of the central figures in the October Revolution, and in the civil war he had displayed more brutality than military ability. Trotsky compounded this sin by openly accusing Stalin both of "calculated caution" in the revolution and of reckless insubordination in the civil war. He also harped on Stalin's lack of sophistication in socialist theory, dismissing one of his essays as "a hopelessly provincial analysis." Trotsky found it hard to imagine that Stalin, a "third-rate provincial mind," an uncouth rustic who did not even know German, might try to lead the party of Marx and Engels once the great Lenin had passed from the scene.

When it became evident that Stalin would try to do just this, Trotsky did his best to stop him. He conspired, intrigued, and let it be known far and wide that Lenin had thought Stalin an impossible brute. He heaped ridicule on Stalin's theory of "Socialism in One Country": Did this not signal an abandonment of that worldwide socialist upheaval without which Soviet communism could not long survive? Was not Stalin the "gravedigger of the revolution"? But whatever the force of his arguments, Trotsky lacked Stalin's talent for political infighting and organization; instead of isolating Stalin, he increasingly isolated himself. In the decisive showdown at the Fifteenth Party Congress, in 1927, Trotsky tried to gun down Stalin with his famous oratory but found that his salvos all missed the mark. Now he was "the Prophet Unarmed," and soon he would be driven from the party and then (in 1929) from the country. Yet even in exile in Turkey, Norway, France, and Mexico, he seemed to Stalin a dangerous adversary whose nefarious influence had to be countered with all possible means.

Though initially somewhat inchoate, Stalin's campaign against deviations from the party line soon focused firmly on Trotsky and his alleged coconspirators, Zinoviev and Kamenev. A decree of March 7, 1935, ordered the removal of all works by these men from Soviet libraries. Other decrees gave the regime new legal tools to deal with suspected deviationists and plotters. A revision of the criminal code declared the death penalty for attempts by Soviet citizens to flee abroad. If the flight involved a military man, members of the man's family would be subject to arrest whether or not they knew of the impending flight. Another revision extended the death penalty to children over twelve—an ominous sign of Stalin's intentions.

Accompanying these legal measures was a sharp intensification in the official veneration of Stalin—that "cult of personality" that Khrushchev was later to identify as the starting point for Stalin's crimes. He was heralded by the Soviet press as the "wisest of leaders," "beloved father," "great helmsman," "reformer of the world," and "forger of peace." Soviet newspapers and magazines invariably carried Stalin's picture, along with gushing letters, speeches, and greetings from "ordinary citizens." His oversized portrait stared down from innumerable billboards and building facades. Like the ubiquitous television screens in George Orwell's *1984*, these portraits also reminded the people that their chief was always watching.

The chief's vigilance was responsible for the exposure early in 1935 of an apparent "conspiracy" against the regime within the very walls of the Kremlin. A number of the Kremlin guards, it seems, were discovered to have been former White Guardists and Trotskyites. The official in charge of Kremlin personnel, Abel Yenukidze, was an old friend of Stalin's who sometimes protected dissidents from the full force of "Soviet justice." Exposure of the "Kremlin plot" led to Yenukidze's arrest and expulsion from the party. With this rough treatment of Yenukidze, Stalin established an important precedent: he showed that he was ready to sacrifice personal friends who had in some way become obnoxious.

Yenukidze's fall and the repressive legal measures that preceded it might have seemed alarming to some Soviet citizens, but most Russians, especially those outside the party, had reason to regard the year and a half or so following Kirov's murder as an "idyllic interlude." The economic situation improved considerably after the disruptive initial phases of forced industrialization and agricultural collectivization in the late twenties and early thirties. The 1935 harvest was relatively bountiful. Food rationing ended, and the collective farms were permitted to sell grain on the open market. On the political front a new "Stalin constitution," which the Soviet press hailed as "the most democratic in the world," promised free, equal, and secret elections, as well as the protection of individual rights and the guarantee of employment for all citizens. "Life has become better, comrades, life has become gayer," said the chief; and apparently many Russians agreed.

Events were brewing on the international horizon, however, that helped bring this "idyll" to an end. Hitler's Germany was now emerging as a genuine threat. Stalin had been inclined initially to discount Hitler's importance, but the führer's

Blood Purge suggested that he was not a man to be trifled with. Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1936, which by fortifying Germany's western border opened the possibility of a push to the east, suggested that Russia might once again have to reckon with aggression from its old enemy. As if this were not frightening enough, the Japanese were threatening Russian interests and territory in the Pacific. The Western democracies seemed unable or unwilling to counter the designs of the Fascist powers. They had not stopped Hitler from remilitarizing the Rhineland, Mussolini from raping Ethiopia, or Japan from moving into Manchuria.

For Stalin these developments had significant diplomatic as well as domestic implications. In foreign policy they led him to adopt the Popular Front strategy and to intervene in Spain. At home they kindled his fears of a "fifth column" that might cripple Soviet defenses at the moment of foreign attack. He believed he would have to liquidate in advance any individuals who might turn against him in time of war. In this respect he was prepared to be even more brazen than Hitler. So far the führer had liquidated only a few dozen troublemakers within the Nazi movement; Stalin knew that he would have to be more thorough.

In the spring of 1936 G. A. Molchanov, chief of the NKVD's Secret Political Department, called together about forty of his colleagues and informed them that a vast plot against the Kremlin leadership had been uncovered. At the center of it stood Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev, along with a few lesser accomplices. Full details of the conspiracy, however, were as yet unclear. The NKVD's job was to flesh out the bare bones of this plot and, more important, to secure the "confessions" of the ringleaders. Molchanov told his men that Stalin himself would supervise the investigation, though direct control would be in the hands of Genrikh Yagoda, chief of the NKVD. Yagoda's assistant would be one L. M. Zakovsky, who had once bragged that if he had Karl Marx to interrogate, he could make him admit to being an agent of Bismarck.

Such claims notwithstanding, it seemed that Stalin did not fully trust his policemen, for he instructed Nikolai Yezhov, secretary of the party Central Committee, to keep an eye on the investigation. A tiny man with a cruel streak that rivaled Stalin's own, Yezhov was called "the bloodthirsty dwarf." Stalin said that his prominence showed that "out of filth you can make a prince."

On Stalin's orders, Molchanov, Yagoda, and company began their investigation by bringing some three hundred former oppositionists to Moscow and subjecting them to inquisitorial grilling. According to Orlov, who had contacts among the interrogators, Stalin's plan was to identify by these methods roughly fifty or sixty oppositionists who would testify that they had engaged in conspiratorial activities under the direct control of Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev. Armed with these "confessions," the NKVD would then try to force Zinoviev and Kamenev themselves to admit their guilt. If they resisted, which was only to be expected, they and their families would be threatened with execution. If, on the other hand, they agreed to accept the charges against them at a public trial,

they would be allowed to live. Stalin was not an aficionado of American gangster films, but he knew how to make an offer one could not refuse.

In the event, only sixteen men (including Zinoviev and Kamenev, who had been in prison since January 1935) actually appeared in court at the first Moscow show trial, in August 1936. Among these sixteen, five were "fictitious defendants"—that is, NKVD plants whose assigned duty was to pressure the real defendants to confess, then to confirm and embellish those confessions at the public trial.

The first of these five stooges was one Valentin Olberg, a former agent of the Foreign Department of the NKVD who had previously worked in Berlin as a secret informer against exiled Trotskyites. When told in 1936 that his services were again needed to unmask Trotsky's evil designs, he readily agreed to cooperate. In preparation for his upcoming "trial," he signed a deposition that he had recently received an order from Trotsky's son to recruit an anti-Stalinist hit squad among the students of the Gorky Polytechnic Institute. He also confessed to being a secret agent of the Gestapo, adding that this German connection "followed the [Trotskyite] line of organizing terrorism in the USSR against the leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union." As a reward for his testimony, the NKVD promised Olberg a new posting in the Far East—not, one would think, a terribly attractive proposition. But he was also undoubtedly given to understand that if he resisted or bungled his assignment, he would quickly be transformed from a "fictitious" defendant into a real one.

The NKVD's next pigeon initially proved much less willing to coo for his keepers. Isak Reingold, a trade official and personal friend of Kamenev's, resisted police efforts to get him to admit that his once-powerful friend had drawn him into a terror organization that planned to kill Stalin. In frustration Molchanov turned Reingold over to an especially brutal interrogator, who grilled him for long periods without allowing him food, water, or rest. Still he resisted, saying he would sign a confession only if ordered to do so by the party leadership. He remained uncooperative even when confronted with a signed order for the arrest of his family and his own execution. Finally Yezhov intervened, informing Reingold in the name of the Central Committee that he could prove his loyalty to the party only by signing the deposition required of him. Suddenly he dropped all resistance and confessed that Kamenev and Zinoviev had ordered the murder of Kirov and planned to kill other party leaders, including Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, and Kaganovich.\*

As their third tool the NKVD chose one Richard Pickel, a writer and theater

\*Reingold's deposition was forwarded to Stalin, who promptly struck Molotov's name from the list of assassination targets. Everyone who learned of this assumed it meant the worst for Molotov—that Stalin's next move would be to add him to the list of conspirators. Instead, Stalin allowed Molotov to twist in the wind for a while, then restored him to grace. Molotov continued to act as Stalin's right-hand man, signing the death warrants for thousands of "enemies of the people," negotiating the infamous nonaggression pact with the Nazi foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, in August 1939, and outliving his master by some thirty-three years (he died in 1986).

manager who had once been chief of Zinoviev's secretariat. The police asked Pickel to confess that he, along with Reingold and another accomplice, had received written instructions from Zinoviev to kill Stalin. Pickel was not eager to denounce his former boss, but eventually agreed to do so on the promise that *he*, at least, would not suffer as a result of his testimony. He signed a statement that the "Trotskyite-Zinovievite bloc" had planned in 1934 to "strike a crushing blow at the CPSU by committing a number of terroristic acts with the aim of beheading the leadership and seizing power."

With the signed depositions of Olberg, Reingold, and Pickel, the NKVD was ready to force the ringleaders of the "Trotskyite-Zinovievite Center" to admit their guilt. Before doing so, however, they were told by Stalin to firm up their case against the absent Trotsky, whom the chief wished to depict as the mastermind of the entire conspiracy. In reviewing Olberg's testimony, Stalin noted that he had confessed to receiving assassination orders from Trotsky's son, not from Trotsky himself. Yagoda offered to rewrite Olberg's deposition to implicate Trotsky directly, but Stalin was oddly fastidious about these documents: there should be no tampering with the "evidence." Instead, he agreed to an NKVD proposal to recruit two additional fictitious defendants—the former NKVD agents Fritz David and K. B. Berman-Yurin, who swore to have separately visited Trotsky in Copenhagen in 1932 and received from him orders to kill Stalin.

Having gotten all their decoys in a row, the NKVD now set out to do the same with their real targets. They started with the Trotskyite side, which because of Trotsky's absence had to be represented by his former associates within the grasp of the police. One of these was Ivan Smirnov, a distinguished Old Bolshevik and revolutionary hero who had fought in the revolution of 1905, suffered for years in czarist prisons, and led a Red Army unit to victory in the civil war. After Lenin's death Smirnov had joined with Trotsky's followers in demanding that Lenin's Testament, which urged the removal of Stalin from his post as general secretary, be fulfilled. Exiled with Trotsky in the late twenties, he had recanted and returned to Moscow, only to be arrested and imprisoned in January 1933. Since that date he had never been out of prison, which caused some police officials to question his suitability as a defendant in the upcoming trial. "I am afraid," said one NKVD man to Stalin, "that we won't have a strong case concerning Smirnov; he's been in prison for several years." But Stalin was impatient with such niceties: "Don't be afraid," he reportedly said, and ordered the police to extract a confession from Smirnov in whatever manner they could. If this required "mounting"—that is, torture—so be it.

In the event, Smirnov's interrogators resorted chiefly to psychological torture. They confronted him with the testimony of his former wife, Safonova, who in the hope of saving both herself and Smirnov swore that the latter had received terrorist orders from Trotsky. Then the police brought Smirnov and his wife face to face so that Safonova could reinforce a promise from Stalin to spare them both if Smirnov confessed. The Old Bolshevik finally relented but agreed only to confirm part of the charges against him.

Distinguished and prominent as Smirnov was, he was a small fish compared with those former chief lieutenants of the great Lenin—Zinoviev and Kamenev—who languished in prison for the Kirov murder. Much of the previous "investigation" had been designed to set the scene for the interrogation of these two men. Now it was their turn fully to learn how much the Red Dictator had assimilated the wisdom of the White Queen.

The NKVD agent in charge of interrogating Kamenev confronted him with the depositions of Olberg and company attesting to his and Zinoviev's murder of Kirov and attempts to murder Stalin. "That is a lie, and you know it is a lie!" exclaimed Kamenev. He pointed out that since he and Zinoviev had been imprisoned or constantly shadowed by the police for the past five years, they could hardly have been preparing terrorist acts. He added that he would never again take part in a "judicial farce" or enter into any "deals" with Stalin. When the NKVD reported this to Stalin, the chief replied that no prisoner could withstand the "astronomical pressure of the state." But it was not with the weight of the state that Stalin proposed to squeeze cooperation out of Kamenev. "Tell him," Stalin said to Kamenev's interrogator, "that if he refuses to go to trial, we'll find a suitable substitute for him—his own son, who will testify at the trial that on instructions from his dad he was preparing terrorist acts against the leaders of the Party. . . . This will bring him to his senses at once. . . ."

Stalin was right: Kamenev quickly relented. His deposition stated that he and his fellow conspirators had come to hate Stalin because of his great successes in leading the Soviet Union out of its "difficulties" in the mid-twenties. They knew that the only way they could come to power "was to organize terroristic acts against the leaders of the CPSU, and primarily against *Stalin*."

Zinoviev's interrogation was handled personally by Yezhov. Claiming that the Soviet Union was in danger of being attacked by Germany and Japan, and that all internal subversion must cease immediately, Yezhov demanded in the name of the Politburo that Zinoviev confirm at a public trial that he had been planning to kill Stalin in collusion with Trotsky. Yezhov added that if Zinoviev agreed to do this, Stalin would spare his life; if not, he would be tried by a secret military court and "annihilated." Zinoviev refused.

Now the NKVD literally turned up the heat. Although it was very hot that July, Zinoviev's jailers turned on the radiators in his cell. Suffering acutely from asthma and liver disease, Zinoviev began tossing about on the floor of his cell. Prison doctors gave him injections that increased his pain. Finally Zinoviev had had enough: he joined Kamenev in agreeing to make confessions and go to public trial if—and only if—Stalin personally confirmed the Politburo's promise to spare their lives.

A meeting was accordingly arranged between the prisoners and the chief. An NKVD man who witnessed the meeting reported that Zinoviev and Kamenev tearfully recalled their services to the party and pointed out the brazen implausibility of the charges. "Just think of it," cried Zinoviev, "you want to portray members of Lenin's Politburo and his personal friends as unscrupulous bandits



Stalin and members of the Politburo on the occasion of Stalin's fiftieth birthday (December 1929). *Left to right: Sergo Ordzhonikidze, Klementi Voroshilov, Valerian Kuibyshev, Stalin, Mikhail Kalinin, Lazar Kaganovich, Sergei Kirov. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz*

Grigori Zinoviev, Karl Radek, and Béla Kun at a meeting of the Comintern in 1924. All were to fall victim to Stalin's Great Purge. *Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz*



Nikolai Bukharin, Russian communism's greatest theorist and one of Stalin's most prominent victims. *UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos*



Russian victims of the 1941 German invasion, whose initial success was partly a result of Stalin's purge of the Red Army leadership. *Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR*



and our Bolshevik Party, the party of the proletarian revolution, as a snake pit of intrigue, treachery, and murder. If [Lenin] were alive, if he saw all this!" Unimpressed, Stalin reminded them of their factional struggles against the Central Committee and informed them curtly that only full cooperation could spare them "and the lives of those [they] led into the swamp." When Zinoviev and Kamenev asked for guarantees that they would not be shot, Stalin exploded, "A guarantee? Maybe you want an official treaty, certified by the League of Nations?" But he ended the meeting by declaring, "We Bolsheviks, disciples and followers of Lenin, do not want to shed the blood of old Bolsheviks, no matter how grave their past sins against the Party."

The trial of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite United Center opened on August 19, 1936, and ran until August 24. It took place in the October Hall of the Trade Union House in Moscow, formerly a club for the nobility. The courtroom, replete with baby blue walls, white columns, dancing-girl frieze, and crystal chandeliers, had previously been the club's ballroom. Now it was fitted with rough wooden benches on which sat about 150 Soviet citizens and some 30 foreign journalists, handpicked for their pro-Stalinist views. The Soviet spectators were mostly minor NKVD officials and clerks. Some of them were apparently assigned the duty of raising a commotion in case any of the defendants unexpectedly began saying things that might embarrass the trial's organizers.

Presiding over the court was V. V. Ulrikh, whom one foreign witness described as follows: "His shaven head rose to a point; his neck bulged out over the collar of his tunic in rolls of fat; his little pig's eyes darted here and there, from the prisoners to the crowd and back again." To the right of Ulrikh and two lesser judges\* stood Andrei Vyshinsky, the public prosecutor. Vyshinsky cut a dapper figure, dressed in a well-tailored suit, his trim gray mustache and hair setting off a rubicund complexion. If Ulrikh looked like a pit bull, Vyshinsky resembled a "prosperous stockbroker accustomed to lunch at Simpson's and golf at Sunningdale." Across the room from Vyshinsky sat the prisoners, guarded by NKVD soldiers with rifles and fixed bayonets. The defendants looked pale and worn, although they had been allowed to catch up on their sleep and eat hearty meals in the period immediately preceding the trial.

Ulrikh opened the proceedings by asking the accused if they wanted to be defended by lawyers. In fact, the defendants had already been privately told that they could not have lawyers, and the court had rejected requests by several noted foreign jurists to defend the men. Thus they were obliged to "defend" themselves and to do so in a way that fully confirmed their guilt. Just before the trial opened, Yezhov had warned them that any act of "treachery" would result in certain execution for the entire group.

The secretary of the court then read the indictment. It stated that "newly

\*One of these judges, I. I. Nikitchenko, was later to appear on the bench of the Supreme Allied Tribunal at Nuremberg. His presence there lent some credence to the German charge that in these trials the kettle was calling the pot black.

revealed circumstances" had established that these members of the so-called Moscow Center had not simply known "that their adherents in Leningrad were inclined towards terrorism, but were the direct organizers of the assassination of Comrade S. M. Kirov." Recent investigation had also shown that the accused "were the initiators and organizers of attempts which were being prepared on the lives of other leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the Soviet Government as well." Throughout their conspiracy they had "been acting on direct orders from L. Trotsky." Their motives were rooted in their hatred for "the Socialist victories of our country," their eagerness to wallow in the "swamp of white-guardism," and their identification with the "last remnants of the exploiting classes." Soviet vigilance had fortunately uncovered this conspiracy before it could run its course. Confronted with conclusive evidence of their criminal deeds and intentions, the defendants had "freely confessed" to all charges.

In light of the regime's elaborate preparations for this trial, it is not surprising that the actual proceedings yielded little in the way of "courtroom drama." For the most part the defendants did what they had agreed to do: they confirmed their confessions and elaborated on details of their nefarious plots when asked to do so by the public prosecutor.

Comrade Reingold proved especially zealous in incriminating himself and his colleagues. He said that the Moscow Center, of which he, Zinoviev, and Kamenev were members, planned to arrange Stalin's murder, place Kamenev at the head of the state, make Zinoviev chief of the Russian Communist party and the Communist International, and put T. Bakaiev (another defendant) in charge of the secret police. Then Bakaiev would put to death all the actual assassins and any secret police functionaries having "dangerous knowledge" of the plot. It sounded, noted one journalist, like something from the era of Ivan the Terrible.

Reingold also took pains to add some new "accomplices"—Alexei Rykov, Nikolai Bukharin, and Mikhail Tomsky, all prominent party figures and members of the so-called Right deviation. This was an important (and no doubt rehearsed) addition, for two of these men were to become the central defendants in the third show trial, in 1938.

Asked by Vyshinsky how he and his fellow plotters "reconciled terroristic activities with Marxism," Reingold answered that they knew terror was "incompatible with Marxism," but had to resort to it because Stalin's immense popularity precluded his being removed from power by legal means. "There are no other methods available of fighting the leaders of the Party and the Government at the present time," declared Reingold. "Stalin combines in himself all the strengths and firmness of the present Party leadership." Reingold added that Zinoviev and Kamenev had hoped to conceal their continuing conspiratorial activities after their initial exposure by "crawling on their belly to the Party" and securing Stalin's forgiveness.

Following Reingold to the dock, Zinoviev and Kamenev were asked if they admitted the "grave crimes" in which their colleague's testimony had implicated



them. Zinoviev, his face puffy and sickly gray, quietly said yes. He later added, "My defective Bolshevism became transformed into anti-Bolshevism and through Trotsky arrived at fascism. . . . We filled the place of the Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, and White Guards who could not come out openly in our country."

Kamenev also confirmed Reingold's testimony. Ponderously, "like a professor lecturing his class," he told the court how his group had decided on assassination to win power because the Soviet Union's economic prosperity and Stalin's popularity with the masses "made an [open] opposition movement impossible." Later, during his special examination, Kamenev elaborated on his "monstrous crime," careful to stress his connections with Trotsky. Asked if his claims to be a party loyalist were not "deception," he replied, "No, worse than deception." "Perfidy?" prodded Vyshinsky. "Worse," said Kamenev. Vyshinsky: "Worse than deception, worse than perfidy—find the word: Treason?" Kamenev: "You have found it."

For its part, the prosecution offered no evidence for the guilt of the accused beyond the various depositions the defendants were required to confirm. Vyshinsky did not produce letters from Trotsky or copies of written plans for the assassination of party leaders. This seems odd, for incriminating documents would have been easy to fabricate, as indeed they had been fabricated in famous political trials of the past, including the Dreyfus trial. This strange fastidiousness, already noted in connection with the pretrial investigation, may have reflected, as one scholar suggests, a Marxist desire to "keep control over the facts, to be able to distinguish what might be called real reality from the 'objective' [that is, politically necessary] one." More likely, the authorities simply did not think they needed more "evidence" than they already had.

Their confidence was by no means misplaced, but there were minor hitches in the proceedings. Smirnov initially denied another defendant's testimony that he, Smirnov, had conveyed Trotsky's instructions about terrorism to the Moscow Center. Indignant, Vyshinsky called Smirnov's attention to his sworn deposition, in which he had confessed to just this offense. Confronted with this discrepancy, Smirnov at first remained silent, then recanted his recantation. Yet he apparently did so in a "sarcastic" manner that revealed his contempt for the charges against him.

Another complication arose when one of the secondary defendants, a certain S. Holtzman, testified that he had met Trotsky at the Hotel Bristol in Copenhagen in 1932 to arrange terrorist attacks in the Soviet Union. Soviet and foreign newspapers duly reported Holtzman's testimony, which allowed Trotsky (then in Norway) to claim that he had not been in Copenhagen in 1932, and the Danish government to point out that Copenhagen's Hotel Bristol had been demolished in 1917! Apparently the hapless Holtzman had been given the name "Hotel Bristol" by the NKVD, which in turn had gotten it from a hotel list supplied by the Soviet Foreign Office. The list covered hotels in Oslo, Norway, not Copenhagen. Stalin was not amused. "What the devil did you need a hotel for?" he is said

to have asked Yagoda. "You ought to have said that they met at the railway station. The railway station is always there!"

Minor setbacks such as this hardly disrupted the progress of Soviet justice. Following Vyshinsky's examinations the defendants were allowed to make "last pleas." Here they engaged in new orgies of self-abasement, prostrating themselves before the party and its all-powerful chief. "We didn't listen to *him* at the proper time—and he taught us a lesson!" cried one defendant. Kamenev said nothing in his defense; instead, he addressed his children, instructing them not to "look back" but to "go forward with the Soviet people [and] follow Stalin!" Zinoviev took pains to explain how a famous Old Bolshevik like himself could have become a "traitor." The answer was that his good Bolshevik record was a "myth"—he had always valued personal power over the success of socialism, and he had started "fighting against the Party" as soon as he saw that it was succeeding under Stalin. In the process he had begun "telling untruths," but at least now, in reciting his errors, he was telling "the whole truth." That was more than he could say for his accomplice Smirnov, who seemed to have "adopted a different decision." So in the end Zinoviev combined self-abasement with denunciation of a colleague—a tour de force of toadyism in the name of self-preservation.

But though self-preservation lay at the core of this unseemly display, such a simple and understandable instinct was probably not the whole story behind these extraordinary confessions, or those that followed. As Robert Conquest has pointed out, "surrender and self-abasement" were integral aspects of the "Party mind" in Stalin's Russia. These show trial confessions were not exceptional acts "but rather the culmination of a whole series of submissions to the Party made in terms [these men] knew to be 'objectively' false." Having already submitted to the party's rigorous discipline, they could see "no political possibilities outside the Party," and their willingness to "crawl in the dust" sprang from a desire not just to go on living but also to remain in or return to the Communist fold.

In this vein Eugenia Ginzburg, a loyal Communist, recalled her unwillingness to take flight after having been "exposed" for neglecting to denounce an unreliable colleague. "But I must prove my innocence to the Party," she said. "How can I, a Communist, hide from the Party?"

A determination to provide a final service to the party, then, may have helped pave the way to the Stalinist Canossa for some of these men. But even if the errant Communist did not see false confession as a service, he was disinclined to protest his innocence for he knew that he was guilty of many offenses, if not to Stalin then to old friends and colleagues whom he had betrayed in his time. Perhaps he had denounced a confederate to the secret police, or helped Stalin purge the kulaks (rich peasants), or sent some cement plant manager to the Gulag for failing to reach his production quota under a five-year plan.

This deeper guilt is a central theme in Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, that haunting fictional account of Stalin's Great Purge. Koestler's condemned Communists parrot the accusations of their judges, for they see in them a kind of righteousness that has little to do with literal truth. "They were too deeply entan-

gled in their own past, caught in a web they had spun themselves, according to the laws of their own twisted logic; they were all guilty, although not of those deeds of which they accused themselves." What Koestler describes here, and what at least some of the show trial defendants seem actually to have felt, is a sense of sin—sin in a secularized, post-Christian form.

Like Koestler's Comrade Rubashov, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and their "accomplices" did not save themselves by their prodigious feats of self-abasement. Nor did the five fictitious defendants receive medals or sinecures for helping to incriminate the real targets. Vyshinsky demanded that all the accused be convicted and shot like "mad dogs," and the court duly sentenced all sixteen to death. According to Soviet law, persons sentenced to death were to be allowed seventy-two hours in which to file a plea for a pardon or a stay of execution. But on August 25, twenty-four hours after the verdict had been pronounced, the Moscow papers carried an official announcement that all sixteen had been executed. According to NKVD gossip, Kamenev was "stunned" when taken from his cell to be shot. He cried and made a scene. Smirnov, on the other hand, was calm and composed. "We deserve this for our unworthy attitude at the trial," he reportedly said.

The reaction to the trial and executions in the Soviet Union was predictable enough. Before the trial had even ended, letters to the editor in *Pravda* were urging the death penalty for these "rotten agents of the Gestapo." After the executions more letters applauded this quick reckoning with treason. Most of these letters were no doubt planted by the authorities, but this does not mean that they did not reflect genuine popular sentiments. After all, most people everywhere are fascinated with crimes in high places and often believe their top politicians capable of the nastiest skulduggery. In the totalitarian systems, moreover, there was a strong popular tendency to trust in the leader, but not necessarily in his henchmen. "If he only knew . . ." was a commonly heard phrase, both in Germany and Russia. Many Russians were relieved that their chief, at least, seemed to know.

While the Zinoviev trial was still in progress, Leon Trotsky, alleged mastermind of the entire conspiracy, derided the proceedings as "humbug." "For political vengeance," the exiled Bolshevik added, "the trial puts the Dreyfus scandal and the Reichstag Fire in the shadow." He noted that he had copies of every letter he had sent in the past seven years, and would soon prove the fraudulence of the charges against him. "I will make the accusers the accused," he warned.

Trotsky's fulminations notwithstanding, Moscow's first show trial found acceptance among many foreign observers. *Pravda* recorded with much fanfare a statement by "the English jurist Pritt" to the effect that the trial and sentences were perfectly in order. The Moscow correspondent for the London *Observer* agreed that the government's case against the Zinovievites was genuine. Sir Bernard Pares, a British expert on Russia hardly known for his pro-Bolshevik views,

reported after visiting Moscow that Zinoviev and the others were undoubtedly guilty as charged. "Zinoviev was now finally brought to book and died, still fawning, like the coward he had always been. . . ." Harold Denny, a correspondent for the *New York Times*, entertained and then quickly dismissed the notion that the confessions might have been bogus. "These defendants do not testify like men coerced and the stories they tell extemporaneously on their feet dovetail as fabricated stories hardly could. If there is more here than meets the eye, not even the most skeptical observer can guess what it is." As for the defendants' willingness to confess even though it probably meant their "doom," Denny could only point to the "traditional Slavic-Oriental indifference to death."

Foreign Communists and fellow travelers who had come to believe in the legitimacy and necessity of Stalin's system tended to applaud the Zinoviev trial. The French intellectual Left spoke with almost one voice (André Gide was a notable dissenter) in favor of Stalin's action. In England, Sidney and Beatrice Webb reaffirmed their oft-stated admiration for Soviet justice: "the Soviets must be right, Beatrice Webb said; they must know . . ." Reaction among pro-Stalinists in America was typified by the views of a friend of Alfred Kazin (called Francis in the author's memoir of the thirties). Reading about the trial in the *New York Times*, Francis could "not doubt the reiterative, hallucinatory charges that such people were outside, mad dogs, criminal oppositionists, heretics, unbelievers, seditionists, driven to conspiracy against the State and murder of the leaders because they had gone against the Party." In Norway the local Communists joined the Nazis in demanding Trotsky's expulsion from the country. The Norwegian Communist party newspaper said, "Trotsky ought to share the dock with Zinoviev and Kamenev. Even death and annihilation are too good for him."

But a great many foreign observers, including some on the left, were shocked and dumbfounded by the Zinoviev trial. The *Manchester Guardian* and the British Labour press refused to be taken in; so did George Orwell, Ellen Wilkinson, and Edmund Wilson. The American philosopher John Dewey established a committee of inquiry to look into the Moscow Center case after the Danish government reported the nonexistence of the Hotel Bristol. Dewey's committee determined that Holtzman could not have met Trotsky in Copenhagen; from this, in good philosophical fashion, Dewey concluded that there was something fishy about the entire proceeding.

But if Dewey thought that his exposure of this "hole" in the government's case would have any effect on the progress of Soviet justice, he was sadly mistaken. It only made Stalin wonder whether Yagoda was the right man after all to run his Great Purge.

#### THE CASE OF THE ANTI-SOVIET TROTSKYITE CENTER

Stalin played such a key role in planning and orchestrating the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial that he must have known that the central charges against the

defendants were false. Yet on a deeper level he undoubtedly believed in these men's guilt. Had they not once resisted his policies? Did they not remain potential rivals for power? And since Stalin identified his own policies and power with the progress of the Soviet state—indeed, with the progress of history—he regarded all personal opponents, even those who claimed to have seen the error of their ways, as enemies unto death.

But the trial and execution of the members of the Zinovievite-Trotskyite United Center did not relieve Stalin of his anxieties concerning subversion within the party. In hopes of saving themselves, Zinoviev and company had denounced other former oppositionists, some of whom remained in positions of influence. Kamenev had insisted that Rykov and Bukharin (still editor of *Izvestia*) thought “just as [he] did.” To Stalin this could mean only that the fifth-column danger remained potent and menacing.

In the late summer and fall of 1936, Stalin was therefore prepared to extend his purge to the former Right deviationists mentioned in the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial. To this end he sought once again to unsheath his “sword of the revolution”—the NKVD. At the end of August, Molchanov summoned his inquisitors and stunned them with the announcement “This year you will have to forget about vacations. The investigation has not yet ended; it has just begun.”

But Stalin, already suspicious regarding the requisite sharpness of his revolutionary sword, soon learned that it was even duller than he had feared. One of the Right deviationists, Tomsy, was allowed to kill himself, thereby evading interrogation. Yagoda, backed by some members of the Politburo and the Central Committee, was dragging his feet in the new investigation. It seemed that he had friends in the Rykov-Bukharin camp. Was he trying to put off their trial, hoping that Stalin would change his mind? Or was he trying to save his own skin? After all, he was an Old Bolshevik himself and could not have welcomed an open season on the species. Moreover, he had apparently believed Stalin's promises that Zinoviev and Kamenev would be spared if they cooperated with the chief. Now he knew what such promises meant.

On September 10, while Stalin was away from Moscow on vacation, *Pravda* suddenly announced that the investigation into the charges against Rykov and Bukharin was being suspended for lack of evidence. Reference was made to “pressure from some members of the Politburo.”

Confronted with an apparent palace rebellion, Stalin seemed to give in. He acquiesced in the suspension of the “Right opposition” investigation. But he was determined that his purge should not lose momentum. On September 25 he sent the following telegram to the Politburo:

We deem it absolutely necessary and urgent that Comrade Yezhov be nominated to the post of People's Commissar for Internal Affairs. Yagoda has definitely proved himself to be incapable of unmasking the Trotskyite-Zinovievite bloc. The [police] is four years behind in this matter. This is

noted by all Party workers and by the majority of the representatives of the NKVD

Yagoda was named minister of post and telegraphs, an ominous transfer since this was the position from which Rykov had just been removed. More ominous for all Old Bolsheviks was the appointment of Yezhov to replace Yagoda as head of the secret police. Unlike Yagoda, Yezhov was a “new man” with no ties to the group who had made the October Revolution. As Stalin's creation, he would do the chief's bidding without question. Thus his appointment signaled the beginning of the so-called Yezhovshchina (“cleanup” regime of Yezhov, 1937–39). In its thoroughgoing brutality, this period might be seen as a twentieth-century reincarnation of Ivan the Terrible's Oprichnina (ca. 1564–72), when Ivan's personal henchmen, dressed in black tunics adorned with dog-and-broom insignia, “sniffed out treason” and “swept it away” in a massacre of the czar's enemies, real and imaginary.\*

The Yezhovshchina commenced with preparations for a second public trial—not, as Stalin had originally planned, involving the Right opposition—but focusing on a new group of former Left oppositionists said to be tied to the Zinovievite-Trotskyite camp. This group was described as the Reserve Center—a collection of second-string subversives who were to take over leadership of the anti-Stalinist conspiracy in the event that the first team was exposed and taken out of the game. Though they held positions of influence in the party, they were less august than Zinoviev or Kamenev. But two of the accused, Karl Radek and Grigori Pyatakov, had figured rather prominently in party history.

Karl Radek, born Karl Sobelsohn in 1885 in Galicia (Austrian Poland), was one of international communism's best-known journalists. He began his career in 1908, editing two German Social Democratic papers. During World War I he fell in with Lenin in Switzerland, and after the October Revolution he began writing for *Izvestia*. He quickly gained a reputation for wit and brilliant invective but was so given to clownishness and self-parody that most of his colleagues found it hard to take him seriously. Physical characteristics added to his buffoon image. According to one colleague, Radek was instantly recognizable as “the little man with the huge head, his beard encircling his clean-shaven face like a monkey's, his protruding ears, his spectacles, his pipe held between tobacco-stained teeth.”

In 1918 Radek went back to Germany, where he helped organize the new German Communist party. Arrested by the republican authorities, he turned his jail cell into a contact point for Germans who wanted to do business with the new

\*Stalin admired Ivan the Terrible and identified in many ways with his brutal regime. In a conversation with the actor who played Ivan in Sergei Eisenstein's film about the czar, Stalin noted that Ivan “was a great and wise ruler, who guarded the country from the penetration of foreign influence and strove to unify Russia.” But Ivan had shown weakness in failing to liquidate all the feudal families who stood in the way of Russia's progress. Religion, Stalin opined, had made Ivan less “terrible” than he ought to have been. “God got in his way.”

Soviet state. Soon he was helping the Reichswehr (new German army) establish ties to the Bolsheviks, a service that facilitated his quick release and return to the Soviet Union. Following Lenin's death Radek allied himself to Trotsky and championed the latter's vision of "permanent revolution." With Trotsky's fall Radek was exiled to Siberia, from which he initially wrote caustic letters denouncing Stalin's policies. But Siberia did not suit the cosmopolitan Radek, and he was soon condemning Trotsky and praising Stalin with all the rhetorical brilliance at his command. For good measure he also exposed a middle-level secret-police officer as an anti-Stalinist subversive. By the early thirties he had burned all his bridges to the opposition and was back writing for *Izvestia*.

Radek could not have seemed a serious threat to Stalin, and it is hard to understand why the chief ordered his arrest. Perhaps Stalin was short on prominent names for the second trial and needed a well-known figure. Perhaps, too, Stalin despised Radek precisely because he seemed so spineless: the Russian dictator both demanded and distrusted sycophancy. Radek's cosmopolitan background and Jewish origins were no doubt also held against him. Stalin resented showy men of the world who were always dropping references to restaurants in Berlin, London, and Paris. And though he was not yet the dyed-in-the-wool anti-Semite he later became, Stalin harbored an instinctive distrust of Jews.

Grigori Pyatakov, the second show trial's other star attraction, was as serious and disciplined as Radek was clownish. An outstanding leader of the Red Army during the civil war, he had been president of the Soviet government in the Ukraine, then head of the coal industry in the Don basin. In his Testament, Lenin characterized him, along with Bukharin, as one of "the most able forces (among the youngest) [in the party]." In the twenties Pyatakov helped set up the first two five-year plans for the industrialization of the country, and in 1931 Stalin appointed him deputy commissar for heavy industry. Pyatakov did not head this agency, because he had once sided with the Trotskyites against Stalin. But he had abandoned all opposition by 1928 and worked efficiently for the regime ever since.

Why, then, did Stalin include him in the circle of conspirators? The answer undoubtedly lies in Pyatakov's prominent role in Russia's industrial development. He could be made a scapegoat for all the disasters, privations, and failures that attended Stalin's campaign to make the Soviet Union into a first-rate industrial power. He could also be portrayed as a holdover from those scientific and industrial "specialists" whom Stalin had been attacking ever since the revolution and who had been the objects of an earlier show trial—the so-called Shakhty trial of 1928.\* Though he understood the need for industrial expertise, Stalin was deter-

\*In the Shakhty trial fifty Soviet engineers, as well as five German nationals working for German firms in the Soviet Union, were charged with sabotaging the economy at the instigation of foreign interests. They were also accused of perpetuating "bourgeois" attitudes and values. On the eve of the trial Stalin said, "We have internal enemies. We have external enemies. We cannot forget this for one moment." All but four of the defendants were convicted. Sentences, however, were more mild than in the later trials: five were executed and the rest imprisoned for terms varying from one year to life.

mined to keep his technical specialists in their place, determined that they should not develop "technocratic" notions about running the state themselves. "The engineer, the organizer of production, does not work as he would like to but as he is ordered, in such a way as to serve the interests of his employers," wrote the chief. Since Stalin's rivals Rykov and Bukharin had opposed his purge of the industrial specialists, a new trial involving a prominent manager like Pyatakov would refocus attention on the treachery of the two and lay the groundwork for a more concerted action against them later on.

As in the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial, prospective defendants in the Trotskyite Center case were made to confess their guilt before the trial opened. Pyatakov refused to do this for several weeks. Eventually the police brought in Pyatakov's former boss, the people's commissar for heavy industry, Sergo Ordzhonikidze. Ordzhonikidze was a close friend of Stalin's, and he apparently promised Pyatakov in the name of the chief that his life would be spared if he confessed. Whether Pyatakov believed this is impossible to say; knowing the fate of Zinoviev and company, he could not have been optimistic. In any event, the police also turned his wife against him by threatening to kill their son if she did not incriminate her husband. Faced with these pressures, Pyatakov finally signed a deposition saying that he had met Trotsky in Oslo in 1935 and received from him instructions to sabotage Soviet industry. According to the deposition, Trotsky told Pyatakov that he was working in concert with the Germans, who had promised to go to war against a weakened Soviet Union and to put the Trotskyites in power.

Karl Radek, though hardly known for his inner fortitude, also resisted police pressures to make him sign the deposition they had prepared for him. In their effort to break him, they brought him together with another prospective defendant, Grigori Sokolnikov, former Soviet ambassador to Great Britain, who had already "confessed." Though Sokolnikov did his best to bring Radek around, the latter insisted that he would not yield until he had had a personal interview with Stalin, in whose benevolence he continued to believe. A meeting was accordingly arranged. Radek emerged from it ready not only to sign a deposition but also to rewrite his confession in a way that heightened his guilt.

The Trotskyite Center trial, which opened on January 23, 1937, looked in some ways to be a reenactment of the Zinoviev-Kamenev affair. It, too, was held in the ornate October Hall, and presiding again was the uncouth Ulrikh, with the dapper but equally ferocious Vyshinsky as chief prosecutor. This time, however, the audience was considerably larger, and it included more foreign journalists and diplomats (among them the new American ambassador, Joseph Davies). Three of the seventeen defendants had lawyers; the rest had "waived" this right. Instead of publishing a mere summary of the proceedings, as it had in the Zinoviev trial, the Stalin government now produced a lengthy "verbatim report." These changes undoubtedly reflected Stalin's growing confidence in the trials' credibility in the eyes of the world.

The formal indictment charged the seventeen defendants with "treason against the country, espionage, committing acts of diversion, wrecking activities and the preparation of terrorist acts." This conspiratorial "parallel center," acting "under the direct instructions of L. D. Trotsky," and with the collusion of "foreign states," had as its main goal "the forcible overthrow of the Soviet Government with the object of changing the social and state system existing in the USSR." The indictment contained long excerpts from the written confessions of the defendants, all of whom pleaded guilty.

First to testify was Pyatakov. One of the foreign correspondents covering the trial described him as looking "like a professor, with his scholar's stoop, high forehead, black-rimmed glasses and short reddish beard and waved-back hair, both flecked with gray." In a "clear, colorless voice," Pyatakov gave a "detailed recital of conspirative action, little less terrible and more convincing than the indictment." The high point in his testimony came when he described a secret visit he made to Trotsky in Oslo in December 1935. Pyatakov said that he flew to Oslo from Berlin on instructions from a "Trotsky agent" named Heinrich or Gustav. During his two-hour meeting with Trotsky, the Old Bolshevik complained of the dilatory fashion in which the conspirators in Russia had thus far proceeded. "When we came to the subject of wrecking activity," said Pyatakov, "[Trotsky] delivered himself of a veritable philippic, made cutting remarks such as: 'You can't break away from Stalin's navel cord; you take Stalin's construction for socialist construction.'" Trotsky went on to urge more concerted subversion in preparation for a "fascist attack" scheduled for 1937. He said he had worked out all the details with Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess. In exchange for "wrecking" the Soviet economy and "diverting" Stalin's attention from the attack, the Germans would install Trotsky and his friends in power. They in turn would compensate Germany with territory in the Ukraine and rights to "exploit in the Soviet Union the raw material resources it needs." Near the end of Pyatakov's testimony, Vyshinsky asked him how he would categorize his activities: were they "crimes against the state?" Pyatakov said they were. "Was [Pyatakov] helping the aggressor, helping fascism?" asked Vyshinsky. "Undoubtedly," answered the defendant. Vyshinsky had no further questions.

While Pyatakov's testimony focused on collusion with the Germans, Radek brought in the Japanese. Pyatakov had already mentioned letters Radek had allegedly received from Trotsky spelling out concessions to Germany and Japan that the conspirators would make to secure those states' support in bringing them to power. Radek now testified that the new Trotskyite regime would revive "private capital" concentrated around "German and Japanese concessionaires." As he talked, Radek warmed to his role, which after all he had written himself. He admitted to conspiring with the other defendants in the wrecking of trains, mines, and chemical plants. He and his confederates had discussed with Japanese and German agents the "wartime use of bacteriological means for the purpose of infecting troop trains, food supply depots and sanitary stations with bacilli to cause highly contagious diseases." The Germans were to gain control over the

Ukraine, and the Japanese would get Russia's maritime provinces, Sakhalin oil, access to Siberian goldfields, and *carte blanche* in China.

Radek also confessed to having helped assassinate Kirov, adding that he had realized at the time that this act could be only a first step, that the entire Soviet leadership would have to be liquidated. He understood, too, that the Kirov killing would commit the conspirators to a full-scale "guerrilla war" against the NKVD, since the police would realize that "such things as the assassination of Kirov are not like pimples which burst out for a short time and then disappear." In another colorful metaphor, he professed belated indignation over his willingness to overthrow Stalin and thrust Russia into the clutches of capitalist and foreign exploiters "for nothing at all, just for the sake of Trotsky's beautiful eyes."

Perhaps because Radek's flamboyant *mea culpa* had upstaged his inquisitors, Vyshinsky took it upon himself to needle the defendant. Noting that Radek had failed to confess for three months after his arrest, he wondered if this did not make him an unreliable witness. To this Radek pointed out that the court had learned of Trotsky's instructions only from him, Radek. Here he obliquely exposed the central weakness of the entire trial: the charges were all based exclusively on personal testimony of the defendants (no written evidence was produced), and if the testifiers were unreliable, the government's case was worthless.

Radek's testimony sometimes amused the audience, for he could not, even in these grim circumstances, resist occasional flashes of his old wit. But more systematic comic relief was provided by another defendant, one Valentin Arnold, a self-professed Russian army deserter, sometime South American sailor, veteran of Verdun, Hollywood stuntman, Los Angeles Mason, and (most recently) Trotskyite agent serving as chauffeur for party leaders. Arnold testified that he had been ordered by the Trotskyite Center to kill both Molotov and Ordzhonikidze by involving them in auto accidents. In both cases, however, he had lost his nerve and "muffed" his assignment. For Molotov, Arnold's testimony must have been especially welcome, for it seemed to reestablish his credentials as a worthy enemy of Trotsky and thus a friend of Stalin.

Three other defendants, all former railway officials, testified that they had supplied secret information concerning the Russian railway system to Japanese agents. I. A. Kniazeff, former chief of the southern railways, told of causing the deaths of sixty-three persons in a widespread train-wrecking program involving some thirty-five hundred accidents between 1935 and 1936. Another wrecking plot, this one in the coal mines, was divulged by one A. A. Shestov, a member of the board of the Eastern and Siberian Coal Trust. Shestov spoke of sabotage operations in the Kuzbas coal district sponsored by Pyatakov, Trotsky, and various German mining engineers. The conspirators had, he said, set fires and caused explosions in the coal pits that claimed many lives and significantly retarded coal production.

After five days of testimony, Vyshinsky put the trial in perspective. The proceedings, he declared, illuminated "like a searchlight" the "most remote re-

cesses, the secret by-ways, the disgusting hidden corners of the Trotskyite underground." They "revealed and proved the stupid obstinacy, the reptile cold-bloodedness, the cool calculation of professional criminals with which the Trotskyite bandits [had] been waging their struggle against the USSR." This was the "abyss of degradation," the "last boundary of moral and political decay," the "diabolical infinitude of crime!" Comrade Stalin had fortunately seen through the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Counterrevolutionary Center as early as 1931 and had kept his vigilant eye on these traitors ever since. Now their nefarious plans and deeds were exposed for all to see. The young workers and peasants, the toilers of all countries, would realize with whom they were "really dealing."

After four hours of such fustian, Vyshinsky lodged a passionate appeal for "death by shooting" for all the defendants. "I am not alone in this demand," he cried.

I feel that by my side here stand the victims of the crimes and of these criminals: on crutches, maimed, half-alive, and perhaps legless, like Comrade Nagovitsina, the switch-girl at Chusovskaya Station, who appealed to me, through *Pravda*, today, and who, at twenty years of age, lost both her legs in averting a train disaster organized by these people! . . . The victims may be in their graves, but I feel they are standing here beside me, pointing at the dock, at you, accused, with their mutilated arms, which have mouldered in the graves to which you sent them!

In their "last pleas" the defendants made no serious effort to defend themselves. On the contrary, they competed with one another in self-laceration and praised the court, police, and Stalin for exposing their conspiracy before it could do yet more damage. Typical was Pyatakov's final statement: "In a few hours you will pass your sentence. And here I stand before you in filth, crushed by my own crimes, bereft of everything through my own fault, a man who has lost his family, who has lost his very self."

Vyshinsky was correct in his claim not to be alone in demanding the death penalty for the accused. As after the Zinoviev trial, mass meetings around the country called for the defendants' blood. Some of the meetings were led by young Nikita Khrushchev, then a Stalin protégé. "We will uncover and annihilate [the oppositionists] and reduce to dust every one of them and scatter them to the far winds," declared Khrushchev.

On January 30 the court announced that it found all the defendants guilty. All but four—Radek, Sokolnikov, Arnold, and Stroilov—were given the death sentence. These four received prison terms varying from eight to ten years. Stalin undoubtedly dictated the penalties, and one must wonder why he showed "leniency" toward some of the accused. NKVD rumor had it that he spared Radek's life on a special appeal from the prominent German writer Leon Feuchtwanger, who made this his price for agreeing to write a book justifying the trials. As for Arnold, he may have been spared just because Stalin was entertained by his

fanciful testimony. In any event, clemency of this sort was not worth much. Radek died in an Arctic labor camp in 1939, as did Sokolnikov. Arnold simply disappeared—presumably not back to Los Angeles.

During the proceedings, Leon Trotsky, now in Mexico, publicly attacked the trial as a "cruel fiasco" and a "gigantic frame-up being carried out in the same manner as a chess puzzle." Stalin, in struggling to maintain his personal dictatorship, had "taken recourse to the methods of Cesare Borgia." Trotsky denied ever having written to Radek, with whom he said he had broken off all relations in 1928. "No one among the leaders of the Communist Party ever took Radek seriously," he added. "Why should I have considered Radek as a person worthy of my special confidence?" He dared the Soviet court to produce the Radek letters it claimed to have found, and he demanded "in the name of elementary political hygiene" the formation of an international body of investigation to look into the charges against him. He promised to demonstrate before such a commission that Stalin was "the organizer of the greatest political crimes in world history."

The Soviet regime could write off Trotsky's attack as the defensive posturing of an obvious traitor. Less easily dismissed was the revelation produced by a Norwegian newspaper that Pyatakov could not have flown to Oslo to meet Trotsky in December 1933, because no civil aircraft had landed at Oslo's airport in that month. Again it seemed that Stalin and his henchmen had unnecessarily discredited their case by insisting upon too much detail. In an important psychological sense, though, they were right to have done so. As Adam Ulam has pointed out, "People are often willing to believe the most thinly established slander when it comes to human motivations, but when it comes to actual plots, credulity and interest grow in proportion to the richness of detail."

Whether it was the satisfying complexity of the alleged plots or a willingness to see Stalin more as an embattled statesman than as a Borgian schemer, this second Moscow show trial found its influential supporters around the world, just as the first one had. The *New York Times* correspondent in Moscow, Walter Duranty, offers a case in point. He noted that some people abroad had said that the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial seemed somehow phony. "But this trial," he declared, "does stand up and the evidence rings true." He described Vyshinsky as "serious-minded and an earnest seeker after truth." When one of the defendants insisted that he had not been "treated roughly" by the police, and had confessed only because he realized he "had been wrong and Stalin right," Duranty editorialized, "His words rang true as gold." It bothered him, however, that the defendants made little effort to defend themselves as Americans supposedly would have done. "Why do they act like that, these Russians? Why don't they fight back and defend themselves as we should in a similar case? The only answer I have is that they are Russians, who are a different breed from us. Or have you not read Dostoevsky?"

Duranty was not the only Western correspondent to accept this trial as judicially correct. The Moscow correspondent for the left-leaning London *Daily Herald* argued that the defendants confessed because the state's collection of

evidence “forced them to do so. No other explanation fits the facts.” A British Labour party MP insisted that all foreign correspondents, with the exception of the Germans and the Japanese, “expressed themselves as very much impressed by the weight of evidence presented by the prosecution and the sincerity of the confessions of the accused.” This was an exaggeration, for the London *Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* correspondents had their doubts. Yet it is safe to say that the Western press did little to subject this trial—or, for that matter, any of the Moscow show trials—to the critical scrutiny that the audacious charges and bizarre confessions might legitimately have called forth.

Duranty claimed that the foreign diplomats attending the trial—the Germans and the Japanese again excepted—unanimously agreed that Vyshinsky had “put it over.” The new American ambassador, Joseph Davies, certainly thought so. In a long report to the secretary of state, Davies insisted that the prosecutor “conducted the case calmly and generally with admirable moderation.” The accused, Davies further reported, “all appeared well nourished and normal physically.” In his general assessment of the trial, Davies admitted that he had been “predisposed against the credibility of the testimony of these defendants.” But his experience of previous trials (as a jurist in the United States) and the application of “tests of credibility” led him to the conclusion “that the state had established its case, at least to the extent of proving the existence of a widespread conspiracy and plot among the political leaders against the Soviet government, and which under their statutes established the crimes set forth in the indictment.” Despite his lingering “reservations” based on the possibility that the Russian “psychology” might be different from the American, he stated, “To have assumed that this proceeding was invented and staged as a project of dramatic political fiction would be to presuppose the creative genius of a Shakespeare and the genius of Belasco in stage production.”

Like the Zinoviev trial, this one also found its defenders among the fellow-traveling intelligentsia in the West. Upton Sinclair was certain that good Bolsheviks would not confess to crimes they had not committed. Theodore Dreiser declared that Trotsky was guilty of all charges brought against him. After the Dewey commission found the second Moscow show trial—like the first—to have been a “frame-up,” thirty-eight American intellectuals published a letter in *Soviet Russia Today* denouncing the commission and urging Americans not to cooperate with it. The letter asked, “Should not a country recognized as engaged in improving conditions for all its people, whether or not one agrees with all the means whereby this is brought about, be permitted to decide for itself what measures of protection are necessary against treasonable plots to assassinate and overthrow its leadership and involve it in war with foreign powers?”

The brilliant German novelist Heinrich Mann defended Vyshinsky’s tactics and the confessions as a mutual “Dostoevskian” struggle “for the possession of the subterranean truth.” His countryman and fellow novelist Leon Feuchtwanger, who as we noted may have interceded with Stalin on behalf of Radek, was nonetheless convinced of Radek’s guilt. He said that his initial doubts about

this “melted away as naturally as salt dissolves in water” once he heard Radek’s testimony. “If that was lying or prearranged, then I don’t know what truth is.” In his book *Moscow 1937* he declared, “There was no justification of any sort for imagining that there was anything manufactured or artificial about the trial proceedings.”

Left-leaning intellectuals who dared cast doubt upon the trials—most notably, Orwell, Stephen Spender, and Kingsley Martin—tended to be hounded by their colleagues as traitors or dupes of the Gestapo. It seemed that the Fascist challenge, particularly the war in Spain, ruled out for the majority of leftist intellectuals any criticism of the Soviet Union. As Louis Aragon wrote, with much passion but little logic, “To claim innocence for these men [in the Pyatakov-Radek trial] is to adopt the Hitlerian thesis on all points. . . . [Those who do this] relieve Hitler and the Gestapo of the Spanish rebellion, they deny fascist intervention in Spain.”

## THE MILITARY PURGE

Six months before the Pyatakov-Radek trial, the NKVD arrested a Red Army divisional commander in Kiev named Dmitri Shmidt. Son of a Jewish shoemaker and swashbuckling veteran of the civil war, Shmidt had associated briefly with the Trotskyite opposition in the mid-twenties. In 1927, following the expulsion of the Trotskyites from the party, Shmidt had personally insulted Stalin, telling the chief that one day he would lop his ears off. His arrest in 1936 could therefore be understood as another example of Stalin’s vengefulness and, more precisely, of his adherence to that old Sicilian maxim “Revenge tastes best when it is eaten cold.” Little did anyone suspect that Shmidt’s arrest was the first step in a Stalinist purge of the Red Army that would decimate its leadership, leaving it ill prepared to meet the German onslaught in 1941.

On June 11, 1937, Soviet newspapers published a short communiqué announcing that Russia’s most esteemed military figure, Deputy War Commissar Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, had been arrested along with seven other prominent generals. All would be brought before a military tribunal on charges of spying for a “foreign state” and preparing the defeat of the Soviet Union. The next morning another communiqué announced that the trial had already taken place and that all the accused had been convicted and executed.

These announcements came as a great shock to the Soviet people. Unlike the politicians belonging to the Trotskyite Center, the generals had not been subjected to an extended vilification campaign prior to their execution. They were military “heroes” one day, “traitors” the next. One top officer recalled asking himself how it could be that men who had “done so much to improve our army” could suddenly become “enemies of the people.” No wonder some diplomats began to speak (sotto voce) of Stalin as “the sick man of the Kremlin.”

But Stalin was neither mad nor quite so precipitate in his military purge as it

may have seemed. In retrospect it can be seen that the NKVD had gradually and carefully undermined the military leadership before Stalin made his move against Tukhachevsky and his colleagues in June 1937.

After his arrest, Commander Shmidt was grilled for information concerning an alleged army plot to kill War Commissar Klementi Voroshilov, a close Stalin associate. Eventually Shmidt made the confession demanded of him and, in the process, implicated other military leaders. He was shot in May 1937.

In the course of the Zinoviev trial a more senior military leader, E. A. Dreitzer, implicated Corps Commander Vitovt Putna in the Trotskyite conspiracy. Since both Dreitzer and Putna were close to Tukhachevsky, it is not surprising that the marshal's name came up during Radek's testimony. Radek testified that Tukhachevsky had no relations with the Trotskyites, but, as one veteran intelligence officer noted at the time, having a positive character reference from Radek was a mixed blessing.

In a party plenum meeting in March 1937, some military men, including Yona Yakir, commander of the Kiev Military District, apparently spoke out against Stalin's purge of the Old Bolsheviks. The chief, for his part, grumbled ominously about what harm "a few spies in the Red Army could do." The next month Corps Commander Gekker, head of the Red Army foreign liaison and a close Yakir associate, was arrested. On April 28 *Pravda* urged the Red Army to become more ideologically vigilant and to fight the "internal" as well as the external foe.

An astute observer of Stalin's tactics might have seen in these moves the proverbial "handwriting on the wall" for the Red Army leadership. No one outside the NKVD, however, could have known of a yet more insidious maneuver against the military establishment: the compiling of a dossier "proving" pro-Nazi subversion in the army.

This story reads like bad spy fiction. As best as it can be reconstructed, the tale began in late 1936 when a Soviet triple agent (he worked for the NKVD, the Gestapo, and a czarist émigré group) planted hints with Reinhard Heydrich's SD (the SS security service) suggesting a conspiracy between the Soviet high command and the German general staff to undermine both the Hitler and the Stalin regimes. Heydrich, whose SS was already competing with the German army, was only too eager to use this information to discredit the Wehrmacht leadership. But he also saw that it could be used against Tukhachevsky and his colleagues in the Soviet Union, with the probable result that Russia's military defenses would be weakened. Accordingly, Heydrich and Himmler forwarded the file to Hitler, after "improving" it with a few more compromising details. The führer in turn decided to send the material on to Stalin, whom he trusted to make good use of it. He did this through Eduard Beneš, president of Czechoslovakia. Upon receiving the material, Stalin apparently asked how much he had to pay for it. To "preserve appearances" the Germans asked for three million gold rubles, which Stalin promptly paid.

It seems unlikely, however, that Stalin accepted the German dossier as en-

tirely legitimate. When it came time to "expose" the "counterrevolutionary Fascist organization" in the military, he made no direct use of the Nazi material. At a meeting of the Military Revolutionary Council (June 1-4), where he called for the generals' arrest and execution, he based his charges exclusively on confessions supplied by military men like Shmidt and Putna. He may, however, have used the dossier to persuade other Soviet generals to act as judges against their colleagues and to sentence them to death. It is not certain whether the military Revolutionary Council held a trial to pronounce the sentences or simply rubber-stamped them after the men were already executed. It is certain only that eight high officers collaborated with Stalin in this unseemly business and that six of them were later liquidated themselves.

If the details of the Tukhachevsky "trial" are somewhat murky, harder to fathom still are the motives that might have led Stalin to liquidate his best generals, the very men who had been helping him to build up the power and effectiveness of the Red Army. One must speculate here, as with most of Stalin's motives, for unlike Hitler he produced no *Mein Kampf* or *Table Talks* spelling out his designs and inner thoughts.

Even if Stalin did not accept at face value all the innuendo contained in Heydrich's voluminous dossier, he (like Adolf Hitler) harbored a long-standing distrust of military men and was always prepared to believe the worst of them. This distrust had several sources. Military men, like engineers and technical specialists, had a way of becoming so proud of their expertise that they often saw themselves as more important to the health of the state than the leading politicians. They held themselves "above politics," developed self-perpetuating cliques, and created their own agendas based on their specialized view of the world. In the Russian case, Stalin's regime had actually encouraged these tendencies by abolishing the Leninist system of political commissars in the army and allowing commanders full control of their units. Stalin also made senior officers exempt from arrest by civilian authorities without special authorization from the people's commissar of defense. Having allowed his generals to become somewhat independent, and to forget the demands of political vigilance, Stalin seems suddenly to have realized that the Red Army might become a "state within the state" rather than a pliable political tool. Just as he had to remind his industrial specialists that politics always came before economics or technology, so he had to remind his generals of their subordinate status.

But it seems that Stalin feared more than his generals' potential independence. He knew that Tukhachevsky and his colleagues had spent a great deal of time in Germany during the twenties, attending German military schools and socializing with German officers and diplomats. This close German-Soviet military relationship had more or less ended after Hitler came to power, though Tukhachevsky had paid a brief visit to some of his old Reichswehr friends as recently as January 1936. On that occasion he had gone out of his way to praise the accomplishments and effectiveness of Hitler's new Wehrmacht. "*Ils sont déjà invincibles!*" he told a French journalist. Stalin must have wondered, upon learn-



ing of such effusions, how Tukhachevsky and his colleagues would behave if Hitler made good on his threat to secure lebensraum in the east.

Paradoxically, Stalin seems to have worried both that his army might not effectively stand up to the Germans and that it might not allow him to evade such a confrontation. Despite deteriorating relations with Nazi Germany, Stalin hoped to keep his options open for an eventual rapprochement with the Reich. Russia carried on extensive trade with Germany in the early thirties, and Stalin secretly sent emissaries to Hitler to negotiate a resumption of military and technical cooperation. In December 1936 an NKVD agent told his colleague Walter Krivitsky in Paris, "We have set our course toward an early understanding with Hitler. It will only be a matter of three or four months. There's nothing for us in this rotting corpse of France, with her Front Populaire." Stalin's top generals, on the other hand, had gradually adjusted to the notion that war with Germany was inevitable. Despite his German contacts, Tukhachevsky in particular opposed any opening to the Reich; instead, he favored firming up Russia's alliance with France. He and his colleagues therefore threatened to tie Stalin's hands when it came to dealing with Hitler. Stalin's decision to eliminate this obstacle to his freedom of action can thus be seen as an important step toward the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939.

In addition to these strategic considerations, Stalin may also have been motivated by personal animosities toward the Tukhachevsky circle. Though Stalin often praised Tukhachevsky and allowed him to become a marshal, he certainly remembered that in the civil war Tukhachevsky had performed much more brilliantly than he had. Indeed, Stalin believed that Tukhachevsky had spread the word in the Red Army officer corps that he, Stalin, was responsible for the Reds' failure to conquer Poland in 1920. The more megalomaniacal Stalin became, the more determined he was to erase any memories of his less-than-glorious martial and revolutionary past.

Finally, it is worth noting that three of the nine officers executed in August 1937 were Jewish. On the one hand this made the charges against them seem all the more preposterous: why would Jews want to collaborate with the Nazis? But to Stalin, whose growing anti-Semitism was already evident in his campaigns against Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Radek, the Jewish generals' ethnic origins would have helped confirm their guilt.

The behavior of the victims in this case seems as baffling and troublesome as that of the purge's chief architect. Tukhachevsky and his colleagues, all tough veterans of bloody military campaigns, submitted passively to arrest even though they must have known what was in store for them. When their fears were confirmed, they made no effort to escape their fate. It is reported that Yakir exclaimed before the firing squad, "Long live the Party! Long live Stalin!" As we noted above, several of the condemned officers' colleagues gave the purge a measure of legitimacy by serving on the military court that formally passed the death sentences (though the accused may already have been dead). Why did the army,

the one agency that might have effectively resisted Stalin, fail to do so at the very moment when its integrity was being liquidated along with its leadership?

Perhaps the best answer is that—like the party leaders who meekly acquiesced in their own destruction—the military hierarchy had already sacrificed its integrity on the altar of Stalinist loyalty. The Soviet officer corps had zealously followed orders to shoot unarmed peasants during the collectivization of agriculture; they had helped massacre the kulaks; they had followed the zigzags of Soviet foreign policy without a murmur of dissent. Moreover, during the years when they were helping Stalin consolidate his dictatorship, they were given special privileges—servants, dachas, cars, access to the Bolshoi corps de ballet—that they must have seen as rewards for their complicity in these brutal policies. Another reward, interestingly enough, was a lack of party interference in military business, a development that may have lulled the generals into a false sense of security. In any event, Soviet Russia's military leadership proved even less prepared to defend itself against political terror than was Germany's. A number of Wehrmacht officers, after all, did plot against Hitler, and some of them eventually tried to kill him. The Red Army, alas, produced no Becks or Stauffenbergs, no legacy of military resistance to totalitarian terror.

When Hitler crushed the military conspiracy that culminated in the assassination attempt of July 20, 1944, he extended his fury to the conspirators' families. Stalin anticipated this brutal policy in 1937 by arresting, imprisoning, and (in some cases) liquidating relatives of the purged officers. Yakir's wife was murdered, along with a brother, the wife of another brother, and her son. Two of Tukhachevsky's brothers perished, while his aged mother, teenage daughter, and three sisters were sent to labor camps.

Stalin's military purge by no means ended with the liquidation of the Tukhachevsky circle. Indeed, the campaign immediately extended to all senior and junior officers who had once served with the executed generals—a huge number, given these men's extensive experience. Among the first victims were Old Bolshevik soldiers who had fought with distinction in the civil war. These men were replaced by officers slightly their juniors, but soon they, too, started to disappear. By 1939 many Soviet regiments were under the command of lieutenants.

Another target was the military education system, particularly the top military academies. A student at the Frunze Military Academy recalled how in 1936 instructors began to disappear. One day the class commissar announced that Lecturer Vatsetis had been arrested as an "enemy of the people." The students found this incredible, for Vatsetis had "fought all through the Civil War for Soviet power." Then the wave of arrests engulfed the student body. A young man who had fought with the international brigades in the Spanish civil war and received the decoration "Hero of the Soviet Union" suddenly vanished.

This Spanish veteran was not alone: Soviet soldiers who had fought in Spain were particularly vulnerable to the purge because Stalin distrusted their contacts with foreigners, especially with Spanish Trotskyites. He sent the NKVD to Spain

to keep close watch on the Red military contingent, an assignment the police seem to have taken up with relish. General J. K. Berzin, commander of the Red Army force in Spain, ran afoul of the vigilant police and was sent home to be shot. A Soviet officer named Stern, who under the nom de guerre Kleber took charge of the international bridages, was executed in Spain itself. Brigade Commander Vladimir Goriev, who had commanded the successful Republican defense of Madrid, was called home, awarded the Order of Lenin, and promptly shot.

Soviet officers who had helped train "partisans" for possible deployment after an invasion also began to disappear. Stalin had concluded that the training of partisans showed a "lack of faith in the Soviet state," for it acknowledged the possibility that an enemy might successfully penetrate Russian territory. When one officer nevertheless asked his superior how these loyal men could suddenly be condemned as "enemies of the people," he was told to keep his mouth shut: "Comrade Stalin has taken charge of this operation himself, and he will not let innocent people be wronged."

But Comrade Stalin was hardly inclined to allow a few men's possible "innocence" stand in the way of a thorough military housecleaning. Particularly thorough was his "cleansing" of the Kiev Military District, Yakir's old command, where some six to seven hundred officers were arrested on charges of treachery, sabotage, and treason. Here the purge even swept up long-retired veterans, most notably General Bougetsky, a civil war hero who had lost an arm fighting the Whites. Accusing him of plotting with the Nazis to kill Defense Commissar Voroshilov, the NKVD pinned a swastika on Bougetsky's chest and emptied a spittoon over his head.

While officers stationed in western Russia were accused of conspiring with the Germans, those in the Far Eastern Command were charged with treasonous dealings with the Japanese. In June 1937 the NKVD began arresting members of Marshal Vassily Blyukher's Far Eastern Red Banner Front. An interested observer of this process was the Japanese Command in Manchuria. Sensing that the purge was significantly weakening the Red Army, the Japanese Command began to "test" the Russians with several probing attacks along the Amur River. This prompted Stalin to relax his Far Eastern purge for the time being, though he resumed it with redoubled vengeance in 1938.

Stalin's purge not only embraced all regions of the country but also decimated all branches of the military. The Soviet navy had committed the grave error of adjusting its strategy to the limits of Russia's technical and industrial capacity. The naval command had developed a relatively small force, based primarily on submarines, committed essentially to a coastal defense. For Stalin this doctrine amounted to a refutation of his own achievement as Great Builder and to sabotage of his ambitious plan to launch a powerful oceangoing fleet. Clearly he could not become a latter-day Peter the Great with a naval strategy based on short-range submarines. He also distrusted his naval leaders for their "cosmopolitan" connections, though it was hard to see how a navy, especially one instructed to extend its international range, could avoid contacts with foreigners. In any event,

Admiral R. A. Muklevich, a leader of the drive to modernize the Soviet navy, and V. M. Orlov, naval commander in chief, were accused of conspiring with the Tukhachevsky circle to prevent the creation of a large surface fleet. Their arrest (and eventual execution) opened the way for a purge of all their staffs and of all naval installations and educational institutions. Compared with a holocaust like this, the Battle of Tsushima in the Russo-Japanese War had been a minor setback.

While attacking the naval leadership for its defensive timidity, Stalin faulted the Soviet air force for the opposite failing: for overreliance on the strategic bomber and insufficient emphasis on the defensive fighter. The two officers who had developed Russia's respected strategic bomber capacity, Generals Alksnis and Khripin, were removed from command and probably executed. The country's most accomplished aviation designer, A. N. Tupolev, was imprisoned on trumped-up charges of having sold Soviet aviation secrets abroad. Even the heads of the Moscow Aeroclub, which tested new models of light and sport aircraft, were charged with sabotage when the club lost some planes in a competition and two female parachutists died in a jumping exhibition. The fact of the matter, protested a club member, was that the planes simply went astray and the women jumpers, "trying to outdo one another, opened their parachutes too late."

If many officers were killed because they held the wrong views, or knew people who held the wrong views, others died because they stood in the way of an ambitious colleague's advancement or simply stumbled into the cross fire of denunciation and personal vendetta. Marshal Blyukher, proletarian general, lord of the Far East, and brilliant strategist, apparently fell victim to an intrigue launched by Voroshilov and the army commissar L. Z. Mekhlis. When he was shot in late 1938, there was no talk of treason or sabotage—no talk at all. Twenty years later Khrushchev "rehabilitated" him, without, however, mentioning that Blyukher had been one of the "judges" who condemned Tukhachevsky.

While Stalin closely supervised the Red Army purge, he received much zealous assistance from the NKVD, which—like its German counterparts, the SD and the Gestapo—relished every opportunity to undermine the military. The NKVD was particularly anxious to damage the rival military-intelligence agency of the Red Army, many of whose foreign agents it accused of spying for the countries where they were stationed. Most of these men were called home and shot. The NKVD also attacked the political commissars, who had been reintroduced in the military system in 1937. Charged with being too "independent-minded," all twenty-eight army political commissars were liquidated.

As the military leadership reeled under these attacks, the NKVD added to its already considerable powers. Like the German SS, it developed its own military units, managed vast forced-labor camps and factories, and maintained "scientific institutes" in prisons like the one described in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle*. After 1937 the NKVD supplanted even the party as the dominant institution in the Soviet state.

Yet even the powerful NKVD was not immune to the Great Purge. When he succeeded Yagoda, Yezhov immediately began culling the police leadership of Yagoda loyalists. Some three thousand NKVD officers were executed in 1937–38. Yagoda and Molchanov were thrown into prison. Meanwhile Yezhov, aware that he had made some enemies, instituted new security measures at the NKVD headquarters in the Lubyanka. To reach his office on the third floor, one had to take an elevator to the fifth floor, ride back down to the first floor, then finally proceed to the third. This circuitous passage was rendered all the more difficult because the elevator often broke down.

Before the military purge had run its course—the last officer was executed two weeks before the German invasion in 1941—roughly one-third of the Red Army officer corps had been executed, imprisoned, or dismissed from service. Among those liquidated were three of the five Soviet marshals, all eleven deputy people's commissars of defense, and thirteen of fifteen generals of the army. All commanders of military districts, all corps commanders, most brigade and division commanders, half the regimental commanders, and all but one fleet commander were purged or shot. A Soviet historian later observed that no army officer corps in wartime ever suffered the devastation that the Soviet military experienced in peacetime. Indeed, the Red Army lost many more senior officers in the Great Purge than in the Great Patriotic War against Germany.

Stalin was apparently aware that the scope of his military purge would undermine martial efficiency, but he believed this problem could soon be solved through the appointment of new men—"simple" men he could trust. Even if rebuilding took some time, the internal security of his regime, which he seemed genuinely to believe threatened, claimed his primary attention. The chief was also aware that some innocents were being purged along with the "guilty." But for this, as for many other of his barbarities, he had a ready proverb: "If you cut off the head, you do not worry about the hair."

### WHIRLWIND

Many Russians no doubt believed that the storm of Stalin's purges would subside now that it had carried away the military "traitors," along with their oppositionist accomplices. Who was left to purge? "Stalin cannot shoot everybody," it was said. As it turned out, however, Stalin was just reaching his stride. In the spring and summer of 1937, the "whirlwind"—as one victim called the Great Purge—began sweeping over the reigning Communist party leadership, the trade union organization, the Comintern apparatus, the "national minorities," the managerial, intellectual, and scientific elite, and the community of foreign Communists who had sought refuge from fascism in the Soviet Union.

But it did not stop with party apparatchiks or social-intellectual elites. Tens of thousands of ordinary people—peasants, factory workers, schoolteachers, petty bureaucrats—also languished in prisons and camps or, like Boris Pasternak's Lara

in *Doctor Zhivago*, "vanished without a trace and probably died somewhere, forgotten as a nameless number on a list that afterwards got mislaid." In some areas the police simply rounded up a certain percentage of the entire population. "Day and night," recalled one victim, "GPU [secret police] vans raced through the streets of town and village, taking their victims from their homes, factories, universities, laboratories, workshops, barracks and government offices." In distant Azerbaijan a British diplomat saw "striking proof of the long arm of the Kremlin"—a succession of trucks deporting Turko-Tartar peasants to camps in Central Asia. No part of the Soviet Union, it seemed, was safe from this foul wind.

Leningrad, that "window on the West" built by Peter the Great, was certainly not safe. Russia's second city was now under the control of the local party boss Andrei Zhdanov, an especially brutal thug whom Stalin had brought in to replace Kirov. Zhdanov proceeded to gut the entire Leningrad party apparatus, from minor functionaries up through all seven municipal members of the Central Committee. They were either liquidated or sent to Siberia, where they joined the hundreds of Leningraders deported in the wake of the Kirov assassination. The thorough Leningrad operation was particularly unnerving, since the subarctic nights provided no shadowy cover for those small-hour knocks on the door. Light at midnight, it seemed, was even worse than darkness at noon.

Zhdanov's purge was then emulated by Stalinist henchmen in other Russian provincial party committees and in all the Soviet republics. Lazar Kaganovich (the "Black Tornado") descended on Ivanovo, Smolensk, and the Kuban; Georgi Malenkov, one of Stalin's successors, took care of Belorussia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan; Lavrenti Beria, later head of the secret police, swept through Georgia. Like Ivan the Terrible's *oprichniki*, they "sniffed out treason" and "swept it away." According to one Soviet historian, they liquidated 90 percent of the provincial and republican Central Committee memberships in 1937–38. Eugenia Ginzburg met the entire former government of the Tartar Republic in prison.

The Ukraine, whose leaders were especially vocal in opposing the purges, and where Stalin (rightly) suspected considerable anti-Soviet sentiment, was subjected to an even greater fury. The purge there was conducted by the unholy trinity of Molotov, Khrushchev, and Yezhov, who arrived in Kiev in August 1937 with a large band of NKVD troops. They quickly cashiered the local Politburo and installed Khrushchev as first secretary. Over the course of the following year, Khrushchev saw to the arrest of all seventeen members of the Ukrainian government and most members of the Central Committee. Of the 102 members and candidate members of this latter group, only 2 were to survive the purge. They were replaced by young ideologues who could be trusted to enforce Stalinist and Great Russian authority. Among them was Leonid Brezhnev, who, as the saying goes, never looked back.

Watching Stalin and the rest of the Politburo review troops on May Day, 1937, the British diplomat Fitzroy Maclean, was struck by how anxious Stalin's colleagues looked. They "grinned nervously and moved uneasily from one foot to the other, forgetting the parade and the high office they held and everything else

in their mingled joy and terror at being spoken to by him." Their nervousness was understandable. One of their number was already missing and his dacha reassigned. Their subordinates were being arrested in droves. Commissars and vice-commissars of trade, industry, education, justice, and transport were experiencing the same fate. Soon more members of their own, select company would cease appearing at public functions, indeed would simply vanish from sight. It would be like "Ten Little Indians" in the Kremlin, though the strange disappearances in this case eventually stopped with five.

If this harsh culling of the top party ranks could perhaps be explained in terms of the victims' past transgressions, the extension of the purge to low-level party members and nonparty citizens seemed bereft of all rhyme or reason. It has been estimated that for every party member who was purged, eight or ten ordinary citizens went to prison. This was because in one sense the Great Purge was more like a snowball than a whirlwind: as soon as a person was arrested, all his acquaintances immediately became suspect. Those who were denounced to the police promptly denounced others in an effort to save themselves. "Accuse one another, denounce one another, if you wish to remain among the living," was the word of the day.

Indeed, virtually anyone in the Soviet Union in 1937 was vulnerable to the purges. Nevertheless, just as some Soviet citizens were (in Orwell's phrase) "more equal than others," some were also more likely to be purged than others. Suspect categories included former members of non-Communist parties, active Orthodox church members, Theosophists, Tolstoyans, Jehovah's Witnesses, artists or intellectuals belonging to an ethnic minority, Jews, and, above all, anyone with foreign contacts, past or present. These categories were admittedly somewhat arbitrary. Eugenia Ginzburg thought that a fellow prisoner had been arrested because she knew Ginzburg. But no, the woman said, "I'm a Tartar, so it was simpler to put me down as a bourgeois nationalist. Actually, they did classify me as a Trotskyist at first, but Rud [a policeman] sent the file back, saying they'd exceeded the quota for Trotskyists but were behind on nationalists, even though they'd pulled in all the Tartar writers they could think of." People in the prisons and camps vied with one another in thinking up ingenious reasons to justify their arrests: they apparently believed that if they could identify the reason for their predicament, they could perhaps reclaim some control over their fate. But Nadezhda Mandelstam, wife of the purged poet Osip Mandelstam, recalled one victim who understood the futility of this exercise: "What do you mean, *what for?*" this woman asked a cellmate puzzling over her arrest. "It's time you understood that people are arrested *for nothing!*" As the NKVD liked to boast, "Give us a man, and we'll make a case," or, more colorfully, "So long as you have the neck, the rope will be found somewhere."

It was relatively easy for the police to make cases against intellectuals, scientists, and writers, because they were suspect in general as thinking people, and they were apt to cross over the aesthetic-methodological lines that the regime had established in all scientific and artistic fields. Among the academic intelligentsia,

historians were especially vulnerable, for the past had become an ideological minefield in which the mines' locations were always subtly shifting. An eminent professor of ancient history wandered onto dangerous terrain when he described Joan of Arc as mentally unstable. This would have been acceptable enough before the Popular Front, but when Russia was trying to cultivate good relations with France it seemed dangerously provocative. The police also noted that this same professor had lectured on Alexander the Great and Hannibal to Red Army officers and had met foreigners at academic conferences. He was locked away as a spy and a terrorist, along with dozens of similarly incautious colleagues.

Historians were no doubt expendable enough, but the regime also sacrificed hundreds of natural scientists in the interest of "security" or ideological purity. Leading physicists whose skills were vital to the nation's technological development were arrested as "German spies" or as "intellectual deviationists." Critical fields like atomic physics and radio technology suffered enormous setbacks as their best Soviet practitioners ended up breaking rocks in the Gulag. In biology the ideological battle was particularly vicious, since Trofim Lysenko, a fanatical quack, campaigned with Stalin's blessing against those of his colleagues who doubted his claim to have disproved the basic laws of heredity. The most prominent victim of this mania was V. I. Vavilov, Russia's greatest geneticist. He was first expelled from his research institute and the Academy of Sciences, then repeatedly interrogated, and, in 1940, imprisoned. He introduced himself to his cellmates as follows: "You see before you, talking of the past, Academician Vavilov, but now, according to the opinion of the investigators, nothing but dung."

Reduced to dung, too, were many of Russia's most brilliant writers and poets. Among the seven hundred authors who attended the First Writers' Congress, in 1934, only fifty survived to attend the second, in 1954. Isaac Babel, Russia's finest short-story writer since Chekhov, made the mistake of writing truthfully about the revolution and civil war. He was arrested in 1938 and died in a camp in 1941. The country's most gifted poet, Osip Mandelstam, wrote a poem about Stalin that ended with the lines "And every killing is a treat/For the broad-chested Ossete."<sup>\*</sup> The police found this poem in a search of Mandelstam's apartment in 1934. After his arrest his wife appealed to Bukharin for his release. "He hasn't written anything rash, has he?" asked Bukharin. Of course, Mandelstam had written his death warrant, though his demise was agonizingly protracted. After a second arrest, in 1938, he was sent to a labor camp in the Far East, the kind of place described horrifyingly by Solzhenitsyn in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and *The Gulag Archipelago*. On his way to the camp he was beaten and robbed by a gang of criminals, then driven to near-madness by starvation, and finally allowed to die in a psychiatric hospital. In an artistic sense he had died earlier, since after his arrest he was not allowed to publish any work, and his name was no longer mentionable in public.

<sup>\*</sup>The Ossetes lived in the Caucasus, north of Georgia, and were thought to be particularly barbarous. There were persistent rumors that Stalin had Ossetian blood.

Many of the purged intellectuals were guilty of "cosmopolitan leanings," a heinous offense in the eyes of Stalin's xenophobic regime. Xenophobia was also strongly evident in Stalin's decimation of the Comintern, the Moscow-based umbrella organization to which most foreign Communist parties belonged. Stalin never had much use for this institution. Its inherent cosmopolitanism and its former control by Zinoviev and Bukharin made it doubly suspect. In 1927 some members of the Comintern executive committee had refused to denounce Trotsky without seeing the charges against him. Although after this mildly defiant gesture the Comintern leadership raised no more objections to Stalin's policies and, indeed, helped him discipline potential troublemakers in the various constituent parties, Stalin continued to see the Comintern—like the army—as a source of potential danger.

Among the ironic perversities of Stalin's purge of the Comintern was its focus on those foreign Communists who had suffered most from the rise of fascism in Europe. Soviet Russia was filled with leftist exiles from Mussolini's Italy, Hitler's Germany, Dollfuss's and Schuschnigg's Austria, Franco's Spain, and Horthy's Hungary. Numerous, too, were refugees from authoritarian Poland and Yugoslavia. Stalin could easily attack these people because their governments would not lift a finger to protect them.

Among the first to go in the purge of foreign Communists in the Soviet Union were the Germans—important KPD (German Communist party) politicians and obscure refugees alike. In 1937 Heinz Neumann, a former member of the KPD's Politburo, was arrested at the Hotel Lux, the dingy headquarters of Moscow's foreign Communist community. Three other former German Politburo members disappeared at about the same time, as did the editors of *Die Rote Fahne* (The red flag), Heinrich Susskind and Werner Hirsch. All were executed. After questioning Neumann, Susskind, and Hirsch, who were all Jewish, one of their interrogators reportedly concluded, "The Jewish refugees are Hitler's agents abroad." Equally grotesque was the NKVD's persecution of powerless German refugees whose only notability lay in their previous persecution by the Gestapo. Eugenia Ginzburg met one of these poor wretches in prison. Her calves and buttocks were covered with deep scars left by Gestapo torture, and her fingernails had been torn out by the NKVD. Most of the German Communists in Russia who survived the purge period were turned over by the NKVD to the Gestapo after the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939. (The Nazis returned the favor by giving the Soviet government some of the anti-Stalinist Russians they held.) Among the few German Communists in Moscow to escape this fate was Wilhelm Pieck: he helped the Russians purge his countrymen and, as a reward, was installed as head of the Communist party in East Germany after the war.

One German Communist who almost got away was the propaganda genius Willi Münzenberg, who as we recall orchestrated the Comintern's public-relations campaign for the Spanish republic during the civil war. He had enough sense not to return to Moscow when summoned there in 1937. Expelled from the party, he was interned in France as an enemy alien after the outbreak of war in

1939. Released in 1940, he tried to flee to Switzerland but was murdered, probably by NKVD agents, on the way.

Austrian leftists, particularly former *Schutzbündler*, fared no better than their German colleagues. They had fled to the Soviet Union after vainly fighting against the Right in Austria and Spain. They expected to lick their wounds in Moscow and prepare for an eventual triumphant return to their homeland. One of them noted at the time, "We were knocked down, but we are not beaten, because out of defeat we will learn how the proletariat fights and wins." Instead, they learned that their host regarded them as a nuisance. It seemed that despite their protestations of Stalinist loyalty, they might still harbor their old Social Democratic ideals. Moreover, they might raise inconvenient objections were Stalin to attempt a rapprochement with the hated Hitler. They could not understand Stalin's subtleties and must have been shocked when the NKVD started rounding them up in late 1937.

Among the first to be arrested was Gustav Deutsch, son of Julius Deutsch, the former Schutzbund leader. Young Deutsch was an enthusiastic apostle of Soviet policies, including Soviet criticism of his father's "betrayal" of the February 1934 uprising. Nonetheless, Gustav Deutsch was forced to admit to being a spy and Trotskyite agent. He was executed in 1939. Another prominent victim was Heinz Roscher, former deputy leader of the Schutzbund in Floridsdorf. Having led the first Schutzbund contingent to Moscow, he insisted that he and his comrades felt "right at home in the fatherland of the world proletariat." Like Deutsch junior, he had done his part to denounce the Austrian Social Democratic leaders as "Social Fascists." He declared that his experience in the Soviet Union had taught him that "reformism [was] the false path to socialism," which could "march to victory only under the leadership of the Communist party." Little good it did him: one week before the fourth anniversary of the February 12 uprising, three men arrived at his apartment in the middle of the night and took him away. His wife and son never saw him again.

Italian Communists in Moscow, whose countrymen back in Italy were in the process of linking their destiny to Nazi Germany, shared the fate of the exiled German and Austrian Communists in the Soviet Union. Almost two hundred Italian Communists perished in the Great Purge. Their destruction was abetted by Palmiro Togliatti, who, like Wilhelm Pieck, kept himself alive by denouncing his people to the NKVD. Among those arrested was Togliatti's brother-in-law. The police smashed his teeth and permanently injured his spine, but he survived and returned to Italy after the war. Incredibly, he refused even then to speak out about his suffering, insisting that it was not for an Italian, but only for a Russian, to complain about Soviet actions.

Among all the groups in the Comintern, the Polish Communist party suffered the heaviest casualties. Poles had played an important role in the history of Russian communism, and they constituted by far the largest foreign contingent in Moscow. Between 1937 and 1939 about fifty thousand of them were shot; among them were all the Polish Politburo members resident in the Soviet Union. Behind

this extraordinary brutality lay not only ancient national hatreds but also Stalin's understanding that most Polish Communists would oppose a new partition of their country between Russia and Germany.

Stalin did not limit his purge of foreign Communists to men and women living within easy grasp of the NKVD in the Soviet Union. His secret police established "mobile groups" charged with the hunting down of oppositionist (or potentially oppositionist) Communists in foreign countries. One of their first victims was an NKVD resident agent in Switzerland named Ignace Reiss, who had broken with Stalin and denounced the dictator as a "traitor to the cause of the working class and of Socialism." Reiss's body was found riddled with machine-gun bullets on a road near Lausanne. Another NKVD foreign agent, Walter Krivitsky, who had warned Reiss to flee and who defected from Soviet service after the Reiss murder, was found shot in a Washington, D.C., hotel room in 1941. His death was ruled a suicide, but according to the erstwhile American radical Sidney Hook, Krivitsky had told his American friends, "If I am ever found apparently a suicide, you will know that the NKVD has caught up with me." Four years before Krivitsky's death, Soviet agents murdered a former czarist officer named General Eugene Miller in Paris. Miller led a White Russian émigré group called the Russian United Military Union, which had connections to the Nazis. He may have been killed because, as Krivitsky asserted, he "knew too much" about NKVD collaboration with Heydrich; or the NKVD may have wanted him out of the way so that it could put one of its own double agents at the helm of the United Military Union.

Members of the Spanish POUM, the dissident Marxist unit fighting in Barcelona during the Spanish civil war, also stood high on Stalin's hit list. The NKVD sent agents to Barcelona to smash this group and secure the preeminence of pro-Stalinist Communist forces in the Catalan capital. They began by murdering the POUM's main leader, the prominent Catalan writer Andrés Nin. Orlov, the NKVD's chief agent in Spain, then orchestrated the interrogation and torture of other POUM leaders in the convent of Saint Ursula in Barcelona, "the Dachau of republican Spain."

Dissident Spaniards and apostate NKVD agents were small game compared with the man whom Stalin still regarded as his most dangerous rival: Leon Trotsky. In exile in Mexico since 1937, Trotsky had surrounded himself with security guards in a bunkerlike compound outside Mexico City. An NKVD agent named Leonid Eitingon was given virtually unlimited funds to crack Trotsky's defenses and liquidate him. After one abortive attempt involving a full-scale assault on Trotsky's villa, Eitingon managed to infiltrate a subordinate into Trotsky's household. On August 20, 1940, this young man struck Trotsky in the back of the head with an ice ax as the latter was reading a paper his assailant had brought him to critique.

## FINAL ACT: TRIAL OF THE ANTI-SOVIET BLOC OF RIGHTS AND TROTSKYITES

Trotsky may have been Stalin's most prominent victim, but two years before his murder Stalin had staged a third and final show trial that featured defendants only slightly less august than Trotsky. This trial's central figures—Nikolai Bukharin, Alexei Rykov, and Nikolai Krestinsky—had all been members of Lenin's Politburo. Bukharin was arguably Bolshevism's greatest theorist. Another prominent defendant was Genrikh Yagoda, the former NKVD head who Stalin believed had been insufficiently zealous in persecuting his fellow Old Bolsheviks. Less well known, but still politically important, were five people's commissars and high economic administrators, none of whom had a record of opposition to Stalin. Rounding out the list of accused were a leading agronomist, a trade union official formerly posted in Berlin, Yagoda's private secretary, and three elderly Kremlin doctors charged with the "medical murders" of the famous writer Maxim Gorky and three other Communist luminaries. The charges against these men were so extensive, their alleged conspiratorial connections so labyrinthine, that Stalin needed a special diagram with colored lines and arrows to keep it all straight.

The central themes of the "Right oppositionist" trial were familiar enough, but the prosecution allowed itself some intriguing embellishments and innovations for this final performance. In addition to spying and wrecking for Germany and Japan, the principal defendants were accused also of working for the Poles and the British. Bukharin was charged with having tried to kill Lenin as well as Stalin (This, no doubt, to put Stalin on an equal footing with Lenin.) Two Asian Communist leaders from Uzbekistan were added to the list of European-Russian "bourgeois nationalists" who supposedly plotted to turn Soviet border regions over to foreign powers. The accusations of medical murder added a bizarre twist that apparently diverted some observers' attention from the more serious aspects of the trial. The central purpose of this extravaganza, after all, was to identify the primary defendants with all opposition to Stalin—past, present, and potential. The entire Old Bolshevik leadership except Stalin was to be condemned forever as a "foul-smelling heap of human garbage."

The trial opened on March 2, 1938, in the October Hall with Vyshinsky again in the role of prosecutor. As usual, confessions had been secured in advance through a combination of "conveyor" interrogations (nonstop grillings conducted by teams of inquisitors), appeals to patriotism and party loyalty, and threats against family members. The "evidence" against the accused was voluminous: it filled fifty thick volumes stacked impressively on the judges' table. If the judges nevertheless needed additional motivation to convict the defendants, they had only to glance at a small curtained window in the back of the courtroom. Behind it sat Joseph Stalin.

The judges and prosecutor were prepared to do their duty, and so, apparently, were the defendants. And yet the trial had hardly gotten under way before one of the accused, the former vice-commissar of foreign affairs Nikolai Krestinsky, shocked everyone by retracting a confession he had made during his pretrial interrogation. Asked if he pleaded guilty to the charges against him, Krestinsky, a "pale, seedy, dim little figure, his steel-rimmed glasses perched on a beaky nose," said spiritedly, "I plead not guilty. I am not a Trotskyite. I was never a member of the bloc of Rights and Trotskyites, of whose existence I was not aware. Nor have I committed any of the crimes with which I personally am charged, in particular I plead not guilty to the charge of having had connections with the German intelligence service." Krestinsky's codefendants gasped in amazement. A shocked Vyshinsky asked him about his pretrial confession. Krestinsky admitted that he had confessed to Trotskyite transgressions during his interrogation, but now he wanted it clearly understood that he had not committed "a single crime."

Vyshinsky quickly moved on to other defendants, and after two of them bent over backward to implicate Krestinsky, he was recalled to the stand. Now he addressed the discrepancy between his confession and his present plea of not guilty. In his pretrial interrogation, he said, he had given "false testimony several times." His explanation was even more shocking: "I simply considered that if I were to say what I am saying today, my declaration would not reach the leaders of the Party and the Government." A hush spread over the court. Never, noted one foreign observer, had such a thing been said in public before.

Krestinsky's testimony was suspended until the following evening. When he returned to the stand, Vyshinsky asked him if he persisted in his refusal to confirm his pretrial testimony, as well as the incriminating statements made by other defendants. "I fully confirm the testimony I gave in the preliminary investigation," answered Krestinsky. What then, pressed Vyshinsky, was the meaning of the "piece of Trotskyite provocation" he had delivered on the preceding day? Krestinsky replied,

Yesterday, under the influence of a momentary keen feeling of false shame, evoked by the atmosphere of the dock and the painful impression created by the public reading of the indictment, which was aggravated by my poor health, I could not bring myself to tell the truth, I could not bring myself to say that I was guilty. And instead of saying, "Yes, I am guilty," I almost mechanically answered, "No, I am not guilty." . . . I request the Court to register my statement that I fully and completely admit that I am guilty of all the gravest charges brought against me personally, and that I admit my complete responsibility for the treason and treachery I have committed.

If any statement was "mechanical," it was this one and not Krestinsky's original not-guilty plea. His words, noted one witness, "were reeled off like a well-learned lesson." Apparently the NKVD had not wasted the intervening evening.

No refresher lessons were required to make Mikhail Chernov, former people's commissar of agriculture, admit to the most far-reaching economic "wrecking" campaign yet chronicled in the Moscow trials. He declared that Rykov and other Rights had instructed him to stir up the middle peasants against the government by treating them in the same, harsh fashion in which Moscow had treated the kulaks. "I was to accentuate the distortions of policy, to incense the middle peasants, to take special account of the national feelings of the Ukrainian population and to explain everywhere that these distortions were a result of the policy of Moscow. . . ." Chernov said that he had also embarked on a program—"drawn up in accordance with the demands of the German intelligence service"—to "wreck" operations in livestock breeding, seed and crop rotation, and tractor stations. Chernov and his coconspirators had sabotaged horse breeding "in order . . . not to provide horses for the Red Army." They had infected cattle and pigs with bacteria. To reduce crop yields the plotters had "muddled up seed affairs" and ordered incorrect crop rotation. At tractor stations they had sabotaged agricultural implements and brought in supervisors who were "members of our Right organization."

Isaac Zelensky, ex-chairman of the state planning board and self-confessed former agent of the czarist Okhrana (secret police), was not to be outdone as a wrecker by Chernov. He admitted that his agency had ensured shortages of sugar and sabotaged butter distribution by mislabeling grades and lacing thousands of cases of the most expensive grade with glass and nails. "And what about eggs?" prodded Vyshinsky. Had not Zelensky and his band of Rights "taken measures to ensure that Moscow would be without eggs?" Yes, admitted Zelensky, in 1936 they had allowed "fifty carloads of eggs" to spoil before shipment to the capital. The purpose of all this, added Zelensky, was to foment an uprising against the Soviet government and to bring the Rights to power. Zelensky claimed to have secured promises of support for the rightist coup from a representative of the British Labour party.

Whatever the Russian people might have thought about the machinations of the British Labour party, at least it now had an explanation for all those shortages, poor or rotten products, and high prices they had endured over the last few years. Vile "wreckers," not the inadequacies of Comrade Stalin's five-year plans, were to blame.

Through most of the Moscow trials, the Germans and Japanese had been presented as Russia's most dangerous enemies: voracious Fascist-imperialist pigs eager to poke their snouts into Stalin's "socialist garden." But now, as Zelensky's testimony indicated, another foreign danger had emerged: Great Britain. Britain's suspect status was confirmed when an Uzbek Communist leader confessed that he and a colleague had been instructed by the bloc of Rights to conspire with the British for the secession of Uzbekistan from the Soviet Union and its incorporation into the British Empire. This charge may have seemed a little far-fetched—Britain, after all, was having enough trouble holding together what remained of its far-flung empire—but the British lion had served nineteenth-century Rus-

sian leaders as a convenient bogey often enough: why not let it roar again? This would have the added advantage of explaining why Russia's Asian republics seemed somewhat restless under Great Russian rule.

The third show trial was well under way before Nikolai Bukharin, its central figure, was examined. Bukharin's testimony was deferred so that a number of defendants could thoroughly blacken his name before he appeared. He was depicted by his colleagues as an "archfiend" who "had his hand in every plot." When Bukharin finally stood before him, Vyshinsky picked up this theme with a vengeance. Bukharin's career, said the prosecutor, represented "the acme of monstrous hypocrisy, perfidy, jesuitry and inhuman villainy." This man, who had the temerity to invoke the great Lenin's name (and who, with his bald head and red beard, looked somewhat like Lenin), had actually plotted to kill Lenin in 1918. He had also taken part in the assassination of Kirov and planned to kill Stalin.

Preposterous as these charges were, Stalin had every reason to hate and distrust Bukharin. The Old Bolshevik had been closer to Lenin than Stalin had ever been. Moreover, when Stalin launched his brutal policy of collectivization and forced industrialization in the late twenties, Bukharin began espousing a "socialist humanism" that put people's needs before production goals and state power. And while Stalin tried secretly to maintain cordial relations with Nazi Germany, Bukharin publicly opposed any rapprochement with Hitler, who he insisted had "cast a dark and bloody shadow over the world."

Stalin had begun laying the groundwork for Bukharin's elimination at a Central Committee meeting in February 1937. Here the chief and his supporters demanded Bukharin's and Rykov's arrest as "hired murderers, saboteurs, and wreckers in the service of fascism." Bukharin responded by charging Stalin and Yezhov with establishing a brutal police state and with engaging in "acts of torture on a scale hitherto unheard of." A Central Committee commission appointed by Stalin quickly decided the men's fate: "arrest, try, and shoot." They were immediately thrown into the dreaded Lubyanka prison. Bukharin was apparently not tortured beyond the usual rounds of endless interrogation. But Yezhov (on Stalin's orders) threatened to kill his wife and newborn son if he did not confess and stand trial.

As soon as Bukharin began testifying on March 5, 1938, it was apparent that he would not follow his script. On the one hand, he declared, "I plead guilty to . . . the sum total of crimes committed by this counter-revolutionary organization, irrespective of whether or not I knew of, whether or not I took a direct part, in any particular act." This was a rather more fulsome confession than Vyshinsky could have wanted. On the other hand, Bukharin flatly denied some of the particular charges against him. He insisted that he had not planned to kill Lenin or Stalin, had no complicity in the assassination of Kirov or other Soviet leaders, did not work for any foreign intelligence service, and did not commit wrecking activities to promote fascism. He also implied that confessions from some of the other defendants had been extracted through torture. On several occasions he frus-

trated the prosecution by launching into learned dissertations on Marxist theory. At other times he brazenly insulted his interrogators, observing, for example, that what Vyshinsky called "logic" was mere "tautology." Most important, in his "last plea" Bukharin managed to inject into his statement a challenge to the regime's central myth: the proposition that Stalin and Stalinism were the legitimate heirs to the Bolshevik Revolution. He did this by insisting that the prosecution's accusatory terminology—"anti-Soviet bloc," "counter-revolutionary organization," and so forth—referred to the true carriers of the Bolshevik heritage. No wonder one foreign correspondent could describe Bukharin as "proud and defiant," as "the first of the fifty-four men who have faced the court in the last three public treason trials who has not abased himself in the last hours of the trial."

Still to testify among the major defendants was Genrikh Yagoda. An American correspondent noted that Yagoda had sat through the previous testimony "as if in a daze." Having spent the last ten months in prison, sharing cells with men he himself had imprisoned, he now looked much older than his forty-seven years. His hair was white and his face "lined with despair." Since he had made the preliminary arrangements for this trial, he now resembled "a playwright who suddenly finds himself mixed up in the plot of his own play." But the plot had taken an adventurous turn that was not of his making. Yagoda stood accused of plotting to seize the Kremlin in collaboration with the Tukhachevsky group, and of arranging through three Kremlin doctors the "medical murders" of Maxim Gorky, Valerian Kuibyshev (an aide to Molotov), and two other Soviet leaders who had recently died. Moreover, he had allegedly tried to murder Yezhov by spraying his rival's office with mercury. No doubt Yezhov wrote this part of the trial script himself: being a murder target would enhance his prestige and give him something in common with the chief. Yet the story was somewhat baroque even by the standards of the Moscow trials. Vyshinsky must have realized this, for he reminded the court of other bizarre murders, such as that of Pope Clement II, who died by inhaling the fumes of a poisoned candle.

When called upon to corroborate the charges raised against him, Yagoda confirmed most of them but insisted for some odd reason that he bore responsibility for only two of the "medical murders." Reminded by Vyshinsky that he had confessed to all the charges in his pretrial interrogation, Yagoda announced that he had been lying on that occasion. Asked why he had lied, he said, "Permit me not to answer that question." The audience gasped at this answer, for they knew well what Yagoda, an old torturer himself, was alluding to. The court quickly adjourned, when it reassembled, Yagoda was called back to the stand. If before he had looked cowed, now he seemed crushed. In a voice that was "utterly weary and so faint that it could scarcely be heard in the hushed court," he read a statement confirming all the charges. Again Yagoda's former pupils "had done their work well."

In his concluding speech Vyshinsky—undoubtedly still indignant over the impertinent comments made by some of the defendants—demanded that all but two of the accused



be shot like dirty dogs! Our people are demanding one thing: crush the accursed reptile! Time will pass. The graves of the hateful traitors will grow over with weeds and thistles. . . . Over the road cleared of the last scum and filth of the past, we, our people, with our beloved leader and teacher, the great Stalin, at our head will march as before onwards and onwards, towards Communism!

The court found all the defendants guilty after one day's deliberation. Three lesser figures were given prison sentences of fifteen, twenty, and twenty-five years. The rest were condemned to death and promptly shot.

Despite the predictable outcome of the "bloc of Rights" trial, Stalin had reason to regret some of its aspects. Bukharin had managed to use the trial to deliver his own political message. The inclusion of Britain among Russia's foreign predators must have seemed foolhardy in light of Hitler's annexation of Austria on March 11, 1938. Stalin, after all, might need British support against Germany if he failed to find an accommodation with the Reich. The introduction of the medical-murder motif proved misconceived because it highlighted victims other than Stalin and was so grippingly bizarre as to distract people's attention from the more important charges.

Stalin blamed Yezhov for the Bukharin trial's shortcomings. In December 1938 he removed Yezhov from his post as chief of the NKVD. A few weeks later the former policeman simply disappeared. Stalin later told a protégé, "Yezhov was a scoundrel. He killed our best people. . . . For that we had him shot." The real reason for his liquidation was his emergence as a rival to Stalin. Evidently he saw himself as a possible successor to the chief; unfortunately for him, so did the chief.

Despite the outrageousness of the charges and the prominence of the principal defendants in the "bloc of Rights" trial, some foreign witnesses were as convinced by this performance as by the others. Ambassador Davies, who attended all the sessions, wrote his daughter on March 8,

It [the trial] is terrific. I have found it of much intellectual interest, because it brings back into play all the old critical faculties involved in assessing the credibility of witnesses and sifting the wheat from the chaff—the truth from the false—which I was called upon to use for so many years in the trial of cases, myself. . . .

The extraordinary testimony of Krestinsky, Bukharin, and the rest would appear to indicate that the Kremlin's fears were well justified. For it now seems that a plot existed in the beginning of November, 1936, to project a *coup d'état*, with Tukhatchevsky at its head, for May of the following year. Apparently it was touch and go at that time whether it actually would be staged.

Two other foreign witnesses, the British diplomat Fitzroy Maclean and the American embassy official Charles E. ("Chip") Bohlen, were not so easily taken in, but even they found it hard to assess the trial's credibility. If the charges were true and the whole regime was riddled with treachery, why had the conspirators achieved so little success? And if they were innocent, why did they confess? Even extensive experience in the Soviet Union did not make it easy for these Western observers to penetrate the Alice in Wonderland world of Stalinist Russia. (Bohlen, however, was not so nonplussed by the purge trials as to miss exploiting the unusual opportunity they afforded the American diplomatic community in Moscow: as soon as Russians with choice apartments were arrested, Bohlen applied to take over their quarters. "I felt like a vulture," he confessed, "but we needed the space.")

Ambassador Davies's approval notwithstanding, the response from abroad to the last of the show trials must have given Stalin some cause for concern. The Anglo-American press gave prime coverage to attacks on the trial by Trotsky and Alexander Kerensky.\* John Dewey published depositions contradicting the charges against Krestinsky and declared this latest trial to be a "frame-up" similar to that of the Zinoviev-Kamenev affair. Eighty members of the (Trotskyite) Socialist Workers party picketed the Soviet consulate in New York. Great Britain officially protested against the charge that it had fomented secessionist activities in the Soviet Union. France's chief Socialist newspaper vehemently attacked the "whole of the accusations and confessions as untrue," thereby endangering the Socialist party's Popular Front alliance with the Communists, who loyally defended all the trials. Trotsky's and Kerensky's attacks may not have meant much to Stalin, but hostile reactions from the Western democracies could not have been welcome when his efforts to mend fences with Germany seemed not to be bearing fruit.

But perhaps they were bearing fruit. Germany ridiculed the Bukharin trial and showed its displeasure with Moscow by closing its last two consulates in the Soviet Union. Yet Germany must have noted that while various Soviet officials were being condemned for conspiring with the Reich, one of the defendants, a former counselor in the Soviet embassy in Berlin, pleaded guilty to obstructing a "normalization of relations between the Soviet Union and Germany." The implication was that Stalin was eager to do business with Hitler. Germany could also hardly fail to notice that the show trials were wiping out those Russians who were most strongly anti-Fascist. Anti-Nazi diplomats in Berlin's Moscow embassy were indeed appalled that the Soviet officials they trusted most were being eliminated. And for all their anti-Fascist rhetoric, the trials did not bring an end to secret negotiations between German and Soviet officials. Hitler made no public men-

\*Kerensky, who had led the provisional government overthrown by the Bolsheviks in October 1917, told a New York audience that the purges attested to "the continuous struggle between the people and the dictatorship" and represented "the last stage of the evolution of the Bolshevik regime." Kerensky died in 1970 in the United States, still waiting for the Communist regime in his homeland to fall.

tion of any possible "positive" effect the purges might have on Russia's relations with the Fascist powers, but his partner Mussolini was less circumspect. Writing in the *Popolo d'Italia* on the Bukharin trial, he observed, "Stalin is doing a notable service to fascism by mowing down in large armfuls his enemies who have been reduced to impotence."

Russians have long shown a fascination with the cleansing power of flames. The anarchist Mikhail Bakunin prophesied in 1848 that "tongues of flame" would burn down the citadels of power across Europe. Fire was central to the artistic visions of Scriabin and Stravinsky. Lenin's prerevolutionary magazine was called *Spark*. Stalin, too, was fascinated with fire, and he liked to compare his purges to the conflagrations that had periodically swept through Moscow, forcing its reconstruction with new timbers. But by 1939 Stalin's "cleansing fire" had begun to burn itself out. Combustible materials in the form of Old Bolshevik stalwarts, hostile party bureaucrats, veteran Red Army leaders, "bourgeois nationalists" in the provinces, and technocratic "specialists" were now so meager that only localized hot spots continued to smolder. There was already fresh growth in the burned-over places: new men in the party and military bureaucracies whose prime qualification for office was an unquestioning loyalty to Stalin.

This wholesale restructuring of civilian and military leadership undoubtedly consolidated Stalin's position, leaving him the sole arbiter of his nation's fate. His new associates, however, were inexperienced and often incompetent. They were also determined to do nothing to provoke their chief's distrust. Below the leadership level, ordinary citizens were so utterly terrified of somehow running afoul of the omnipresent police that they guarded every word and gesture, frantically seeking safety in isolation and conformity. Stalin's consolidation of power, in other words, was purchased at a terribly high price: the emasculation of an entire nation.

## VIII

### "PEACE FOR OUR TIME"

#### *Appeasement and the Munich Conference*

And here we are—safe in our skins;  
Glory to God for Munich.  
And stocks go up and wrecks  
Are salvaged and politicians' reputations  
Go up like Jack-on-the-Beanstalk; only the Czechs  
Go down and without fighting.

—Louis MacNeice, "Autumn Journal: 1938"

Early in the morning of September 29, 1938, several members of the British cabinet gathered at Heston airport outside London to wish God-speed to their prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, who was off to meet Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini in Munich. The sixty-nine-year-old Chamberlain, his tall frame stooped and his hands red and gnarled with rheumatism, delivered a brief speech to his colleagues. "When I was a boy," he said platonically, "I used to repeat 'if at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again.' That's what I'm doing." Then he reached for a nobler tone, one more commensurate with the loftiness of his mission: "When I come back, I hope I may be able to say, as Hotspur says in *Henry IV*, 'Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.'"

With his "try, try, try again," Chamberlain was referring to two flights he had recently made to Germany in pursuit of a peaceful solution to the so-called Sudeten crisis. The Sudetenland was an ethnic-German part of Czechoslovakia that the führer claimed belonged "home in the Reich" but that the Prague government insisted remain in Czechoslovakia. The Munich conference itself proved to be something of an anticlimax, for Chamberlain had already conceded most of Hitler's demands at the earlier meetings. The result of these efforts was not "Peace for Our Time," as Chamberlain promised upon his return from Munich, but war in eleven months. The nettle, it seemed, was much more tenacious than the flower.