A What do we mean by the purges?

FOCUS ROUTE

Make notes on the different sorts of purge. Make sure that you understand the differences between them.

The word 'purge' refers to 'cleaning out' or 'cleansing' an organism of impurities. The first purge of the Communist Party took place in 1918 and there were periodic purges or *chistki* (cleansings) throughout the 1920s. These usually took place at times when the leaders were seeking to exercise more control over the party or reshape it, as in the Lenin Enrolment of 1924 (see page 188). The party often took in more members (lowering entry standards) during periods of crisis such as the Civil War and collectivisation, and shed what it saw as undesirable elements when the crisis was over. But a *chistka* was, by and large, a non-violent process. Party members were required to exchange their party cards for new ones or to verify their party documents. In this process, people were refused new cards: they were expelled but not usually arrested.

After the murder of Sergei Kirov at the end of 1934 this changed. From 1936 and particularly in 1937–38, many old Bolshevik leaders were disposed of, the party was purged ruthlessly and violently, and other groups in society were swept up in the 'cleansing' process. This later period is called the Great Terror.

We can identify three phases in the purges of the 1930s:

1 The *chistka* of 1932–35 in which over twenty per cent of the party were expelled non-violently as part of a clearing-out process after collectivisation.
2 The show trials which saw prominent old Bolsheviks publicly tried and executed.
3 The Yezhovshchina, named after Yezhov, the head of the NKVD, which was a period of mass terror from 1937 to 1938 when thousands of party members, state officials, members of the armed forces, industrial directors, professionals and other sections of society were denounced, arrested and imprisoned. Many were executed; many more died in Soviet labour camps.

THE USE OF TERROR

Lenin used terror and class warfare to crush opposition. Stalin extended the use of terror and class warfare in the early 1930s to push through the Five-Year Plans. Millions of kulaks or 'class enemies' were killed or sent to labour camps. Many workers and engineers, accused of sabotage and wrecking, were sent to the growing Gulag. Government organisations, like Gosplan, were purged of ex-Mensheviks and the old bourgeois intelligentsia.

But Lenin and other Communists made a distinction between the methods to be used against opposition from outside the party and those for dealing with disagreements and opposition inside the party. There was a clear understanding that terror should not be used on party comrades. In the Great Terror, Stalin unleashed terror *inside* the party, which then engulfed an enormous number of people in the wider society.

■ **Learning trouble spot**

Why join the Communist Party?

Some Russians joined the party not for ideological reasons but for the considerable advantages and privileges that came with the party card. Party members could often get larger rations and access to scarce consumer goods. In some areas, belonging to the party gave members power over other groups. People were expelled from the party for all sorts of reasons such as drunkenness, corruption and not being an active member.

14A Timeline of the purges

1932	Signs of opposition to Stalin's leadership. Ryutin, who had denounced Stalin as the 'evil genius of the Russian Revolution', was expelled from the party but not executed.
1932–34	Purge of 'undesirable elements' – mainly the more illiterate and inactive of the new working class and peasant recruits: 22 per cent of the party were expelled.
1934	
February	Seventeenth Party Congress. Several provincial delegates urged Kirov to take over as General Secretary.
1 December	Murder of Kirov.
1935–36	Purge of the party resumed, with the focus now shifting to men who held more important posts. An 'exchange of party cards' led to half a million members being expelled.
1935	
January	Zinoviev and Kamenev arrested.
1936	
August	The first show trial, involving Zinoviev, Kamenev and fourteen others.
September	Yezhov replaced Yagoda as head of the NKVD.
1937	
January	The second show trial, involving Radek, Pyatakov and fifteen others.
May	The purge of the Red Army began.
June	Tukhachevsky and leading army officers were shot.
July	NKVD Order No. 00447 against 'anti-Soviet elements'; social cleansing set in motion.
August	National sweeps began against ethnic minorities in border areas.
1938	
March	The third show trial involving Bukharin, Rykov, Yagoda and eighteen others.
December	Beria replaced Yezhov as head of the NKVD.
1939	
March	Eighteenth Party Congress. Stalin declared an end to the 'mass purges'.

THE STALIN CONSTITUTION OF 1936

As one of the worst periods of political repression in the history of the USSR was initiated, Stalin published the most 'democratic' constitution in the world (passed 5 December 1936). The rights it enshrined included:

- **freedom from arbitrary arrest**
- **freedom of speech and the press**
- **the right to demonstrate**
- **respect for privacy of the home and personal correspondence**
- **employment for all**
- **universal suffrage for over-eighteens, free elections and secret ballots.**

It was a hollow and cynical piece of propaganda since at that very time such rights were being systematically abused. However, the Constitution made it clear that all these rights were subordinate to the interests of the working classes and it was the role of the Communist Party to decide what those interests were. Also, only Communists could be put up for elections. So one-party dominance was assured.

The Constitution was written by a team headed by Bukharin and Radek, who were both to perish shortly afterwards in the purges. It was intended largely for international consumption, to show Communist sympathisers that the Soviet state was a democratic one at heart and provided the chief hope for the future of the world. Other important sections of the Constitution proclaimed that:

- **the Soviet Union was a federal state with eleven autonomous republics**
- **ethnic groups would have local autonomy within the republics**
- **the old Congresses of Soviets were to be replaced by the Supreme Soviet, a single legislative body, filled by elected representatives from the Soviet republics**
- **the Council of the People's Commissars would continue as the chief executive authority**
- **the Soviet state embraced equality for all and joint ownership of the means of production.**

Stalin claimed that his constitution was 'proof that socialism and democracy are invincible'.

B What sort of opposition to Stalin had developed before 1934?

FOCUS ROUTE

Make notes under these headings:

- why the Communist Party was unpopular with the people
- why many Communists were distressed by Stalin's policies
- what opposition Stalin faced in the regions
- the *chistka* of 1932–35
- opposition to Stalin at higher levels of the party
- Stalin's difficulties at the Seventeenth Party Congress.

By 1933, the Communist Party was extremely unpopular. Rapid industrialisation had created tension and stress in Soviet society which was putting a strain on relations between the party and the people. The violence of forced collectivisation and the famine of 1932–33 had alienated the peasantry, making the murder of rural Communists a regular event. Many urban workers were antagonised by the low wages, strict controls and harsh punishments in the workplace. There was upheaval and unrest in the overcrowded, insanitary and often violent cities with their constantly changing populations. Hatred was particularly high among the 'former people' such as priests, industrialists, traders and 'bourgeois specialists'. Russian society was unstable and volatile.

The majority of party members had supported the drive for industrialisation, but some had been deeply disturbed by the methods employed to push it through and were worried by the disaffection in the cities. Many were horrified by the terror methods used to collectivise agriculture, and the waging of a virtual war against the peasants. This was not the road to socialist construction that they had envisaged. Some, in despair at the events of these years, had committed suicide. Among these was Stalin's own wife, Nadezda Allilueva, who shot herself in November 1932. She was deeply depressed by the excesses of collectivisation, agreeing with Bukharin that the ravages of the countryside had gone too far.

SOURCE 14.1 Popular ditties expressed opposition to the regime in the early 1930s. The following examples are included in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI)

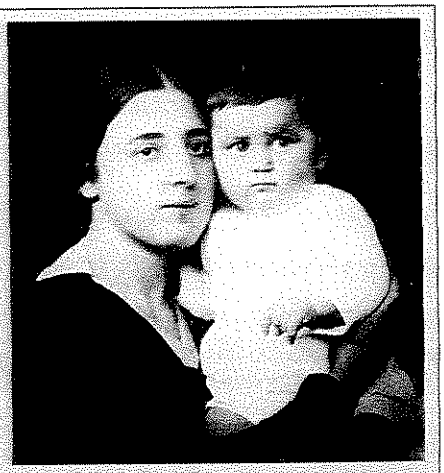
Stalin stands on a coffin
Gnawing meat from a cat's bones
Well, Soviet cows
are such disgusting creatures

How the collective farm had become prosperous
There used to be thirty-three farms
and now there are five

We fulfilled the Five Year Plan
and are eating well
We ate all the horses
And are now chasing the dogs

O commune, O commune
You Commune of Satan
You seized everything
All in the soviet cause

STALIN'S WIFE



The story of Stalin's relationship with his wife is important because some historians suggest that it may have had an impact on the terror that was about to unfold. It is alleged that Stalin treated his wife badly, and that he was cold and impersonal. There have been allegations that he had affairs with other women; in *Stalin* (1997) Edward Radzinsky says 'he was unfaithful more and more frequently simply to hurt her'. According to Khrushchev, on the night of Nadezda's suicide it is claimed that Stalin was so outrageously rude to his wife that she stormed out, knowing that he was with another woman, and that this finally prompted her to take her own life.

There are different interpretations of the significance of her suicide. Some writers say that Stalin showed little remorse and little interest in her funeral, and that he never visited her grave. They suggest that he saw her suicide as an act of betrayal. Other writers maintain that there is evidence to prove he loved his wife, despite a stormy relationship, and never got over her death. Radzinsky uses as evidence Bukharin's wife Anna, who said that Stalin asked for the lid of the coffin to stay open and sat by it for hours, and one of his bodyguards who recalled that Stalin spent hours by her graveside.

Most historians (including Bullock, Tucker and Medvedev) agree that the suicide made him draw more into himself and become more paranoid, less likely to trust those around him. In *Twenty Letters to a Friend* (1968), Svetlana Allilueva, Stalin's daughter, says inwardly things had changed catastrophically: 'something had snapped inside my father'. Robert Thurston suggests in *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia 1934–41* (1996) that Nadezda's death, occurring at the same time that other groups were opposing him, may have filled him with hatred, suspicion and a desire to project his guilt over her death onto others.

THINKING POINT

Do you think that a personal event, such as the suicide of Stalin's wife, can play an important role in deciding the future history of a country?

Breakneck industrialisation and forced collectivisation brought dissension in the party at large. Throughout the First Five-Year Plan the central party in Moscow had had difficulties in getting local party secretaries and members to implement central policies and orders. They were unwilling to push forward, argued about high grain collection targets, were unwilling to identify kulaks and were reluctant to get rid of specialists and managers who might help them achieve their industrial production targets. Some were reluctant to implement the degree of terror the centre demanded.

This caused anger and some panic among party leaders who valued discipline above all else. So, in December 1932, Moscow launched a chistka to root out passive elements, violators of party and state discipline 'who do not carry out decisions, but cast doubt upon the decisions by calling them unrealistic and unrealisable' and 'turncoats who have allied themselves with bourgeois elements'. By 1935, around 22 per cent of members had lost their party cards. This was an attempt to re-establish control of the party in the regions, but it was also used to expel members critical of the party line laid down by Stalin.

SOURCE 14.2 An extract from the Ryutin platform or memorandum

The rule of terror in the party and in the country under the clearly ruinous policy of Stalin has led to a situation where hypocrisy and two-facedness have become common phenomena ...

The most evil counter-revolutionary and provocateur could not have carried out the work of destroying the party and socialist construction better than Stalin has done. Stalin and his clique will not and cannot voluntarily give up their positions, so they must be removed by force.

And it was not just in the local party organisations that there were problems. In the early 1930s there were signs of growing opposition to Stalin's leadership at much higher levels. In 1932, a former Moscow party secretary, Ryutin, circulated to the Central Committee a 200-page document highly critical of Stalin. He called Stalin 'the evil genius of the Russian revolution'. Referring to his 'personal dictatorship', he urged Stalin's removal. This became known as the Ryutin platform.

Stalin wanted the death penalty for Ryutin. But other members of the Politburo, including Kirov and his friend Ordzhonikidze, opposed him. Ryutin was not executed. This was a blow to Stalin and a reminder that he was still subject to the majority of the Politburo.

Ryutin was not alone. The old Bolshevik A. P. Smirnov (a party member since 1896) was charged with forming an opposition group with several others looking to moderate the pace of industrialisation, make trade unions more independent and bring OGPU (the secret police) under party control. Again, Stalin wished to treat these oppositionists inside the party in the same way as those outside – to imprison or execute them – but again the majority of the Politburo would not support the execution of party members for purely political offences.

KIROV TOPS POLL

There is evidence to suggest that provincial delegates asked Kirov to take over as General Secretary and that Stalin did badly in elections to the Central Committee: Kirov was supposed to have polled all but three of the 1225 votes, whereas 300 did not vote for Stalin. The result, it seems, was hushed up by Kaganovich, a staunch Stalinist, perhaps with the help of other senior party members.

The Seventeenth Party Congress

In January 1934, the front page of *Pravda* announced 'Socialism in Our Country has Won'. The Seventeenth Party Congress, which opened on 26 February 1934, was hailed as the 'Congress of Victors'. There was a feeling that the economic groundwork had been accomplished and it was now possible to slow down, stabilise, reduce the tensions caused by the breakneck pace of change, and give the workers some rewards – more food, more clothing and better living conditions. This seemed to have been recognised in the Second Five-Year Plan, which had been redrafted in 1933 with lower targets.

However, it became clear at the beginning of the congress that Stalin wished to push ahead energetically and not slacken the pace of industrialisation. A split opened between Stalin and other leading members of the Politburo. The popular, handsome Sergei Kirov, the Leningrad party boss, pointedly said 'The fundamental difficulties are behind us' and went on to talk about stopping forcible grain seizure from peasants and increasing rations for workers. He received long standing ovations from the congress, as long as those received by Stalin.

The title of General Secretary was done away with and Stalin and Kirov were both given the title of Secretary of Equal Rank. Stalin was by no means secure as leader. He commanded the unswerving loyalty of only two of the Politburo – Kaganovich and Molotov. He could be removed or demoted. On the sidelines stood Bukharin, who had always supported a more moderate line.

It was at this key point in the history of the Communist Party that Sergei Kirov was murdered.

C The Kirov murder mystery

The murder of Sergei Kirov is one of the great mysteries of Russian history in the 1930s. And it is an important murder. Robert Conquest argues in *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (1990, page 37) that it was a turning point in history, which not only unleashed a terror that killed millions but also determined the future of Soviet Russia. But it is a strange mystery because we know who the murderer was. The mystery surrounds the motives for the murder and who, if anybody, arranged it.

ACTIVITY

You are going to play the detective. Your job is to examine the evidence and make your own judgements. Then you will be asked to reconsider your preliminary judgements in the light of other evidence. Read the account on pages 254–255, which is based on Robert Conquest's book *Stalin and the Kirov Murder* (1989), and answer the following questions.

1. In what circumstances did the assassin carry out the murder?
2. What strange coincidences surround the murder?
3. Is there any evidence to link Stalin to the murder?
4. Is there any evidence to suggest that the NKVD was involved in the murder?
5. Who had the best motive for the murder?
6. What theories can you suggest about who was responsible – was it the assassin alone or were others involved?

SOURCE 14.3 Leading Communists attended Kirov's funeral. Many of them, including Stalin, were seen to weep

The murder

Just after 4pm on 1 December 1934, Sergei Kirov entered party headquarters in Leningrad – the Smolny Institute from where seventeen years previously Lenin and Trotsky had directed the October uprising. He left his personal bodyguard, Borisov, downstairs and went up to his offices on his own. He did not notice that the usual guards were absent from the corridors. Waiting, probably in a nearby toilet, was the assassin. As Kirov passed him in the corridor, he emerged from the shadows and shot Kirov in the back of the neck. He then fainted beside the body. Kirov died soon afterwards and the assassin was arrested.

The assassin

Leonid Nikolayev, aged 30, was a nervous man whose health was poor. He had joined the Communist Party in 1920 at the age of sixteen. After a troubled time in the party, he was expelled in March 1934 for a breach of discipline but later reinstated. He had never been linked to the left opposition of Trotsky, Zinoviev and others but had developed a hatred of the party bureaucracy which had not, he felt, recognised his worth and given him his due.

Nikolayev was married to Milde Draule who was a secretary at party headquarters and may have been having an affair with Kirov. A diary found in Nikolayev's briefcase showed he had planned the murder. A further statement found there claimed that the murder was 'a personal act of desperation and dissatisfaction arising out of his straitened material circumstances and as a protest against the unjust attitude of certain members of the government towards a live person'.

SOURCE 14.4 G. Lyushkov, deputy head of the NKVD Secret Political Department, one of Nikolayev's interrogators

Nikolayev lacked balance, he had many problems ... He was convinced that he was capable of any work ... and did not get on with people easily ... all his efforts led to him losing his official positions ... This drove him to the belief that the problem was not in his personal faults but in the institutions. This discontent in turn drove him into his scheme to assassinate some important figures in the Party.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Kirov – the victim
Nikolayev – the assassin
Yagoda – head of the NKVD
Medved – head of the NKVD in Leningrad
Zaporozhets – Yagoda's deputy
Stalin – the leader

Just before the murder

- Kirov had received a great deal of support at the Seventeenth Party Congress and more people had voted for him than for Stalin. He had opposed Stalin over the Ryutin affair and over the pace of industrialisation. He now wanted a relaxation of the terror and reconciliation with the peasantry. (This would have downgraded the role of the NKVD and reduced its profile and status.) By the summer of 1934, Kirov and Stalin had fallen out over a number of issues.
- The head of the NKVD in Leningrad was Medved; his deputy was Zaporozhets. It is alleged (but not proven) that just before the murder Zaporozhets brought in some personnel from Moscow and put them in key posts without Medved's permission, presumably on the orders of some higher authority. Medved wanted them removed and got Kirov's backing. When Kirov asked Stalin to have them removed, Stalin refused. Zaporozhets had previously worked with Yagoda, overall head of the NKVD.
- Prior to the murder, Nikolayev had twice been arrested in Kirov's neighbourhood and released both times on the order of Zaporozhets. It was also alleged that an NKVD man had posed earlier as a friend of Nikolayev and practised shooting his revolver with him.

What happened after the murder?

- Stalin came to Leningrad and carried out an interrogation of Nikolayev. When asked why he had murdered Kirov, Nikolayev pointed to the NKVD men, saying that Stalin should ask 'them' that question.
- A key witness was going to be Borisov, Kirov's bodyguard. But on the way to be questioned at the Smolny Institute, in a truck with several NKVD men, there was an accident in which he was killed and nobody else was hurt. The NKVD men were killed later.
- Very shortly afterwards, the first arrests were made on Stalin's instructions. Thousands in the Leningrad party were purged. This was the beginning of the Great Purges.
- The leading Leningrad NKVD men accused of negligence for not protecting Kirov were sentenced to labour camps but were given only short sentences. They were sent to the camps in special railway carriages and received privileged treatment, including regular gifts and the status of 'assistants' which gave them power over other prisoners. They were shot in the late 1930s.
- In the third show trial in 1938, Yagoda (by now the ex-head of the NKVD) was accused of involvement in the murder by making it easy for Nikolayev to get to Kirov. He pleaded guilty.

Sergei Kirov (1886–1934)
Born into a lower middle-class family, Kirov lost his parents early. He went to a vocational school to train as a mechanic, where he met radical activists from a nearby university. He moved to Tomsk in Siberia and joined the Social Democratic Party. In the 1905 Revolution he organised railway strikes, and was arrested in 1906. Released in 1909, he went to the Caucasus, worked on a newspaper and became committed to the Bolshevik wing of the party. He played an active part in the 1917 Revolution and in the Civil War as head of the Military Revolutionary Committee in Astrakhan. Later he was involved in bringing the Caucasus under Bolshevik control. After 1921 he became Secretary of the Azerbaijan Central Committee and in 1923 a member of the Central Committee.

When Zinoviev was ousted from his power base in Leningrad, Kirov became Party Secretary in Leningrad, which put him in a powerful position. He had not been particularly keen on forced collectivisation or on attacking Bukharin and the right, but in the end he threw in his lot with Stalin and was firmly committed to the rapid industrialisation policy. He was an excellent orator, the best in the party after Trotsky, and seemed to be popular in the party.

ACTIVITY

Conquest's account of the murder (summarised on pages 254–255) is based on evidence he has collected, much of it from memoirs and personal conversations. Not all of it is established fact, including exactly where everybody was at the time of the murder. Conquest also makes some inferences from the evidence that may or may not be true.

You are now going to consider a range of evidence from historians and other sources. You will have to judge whether you think their evidence is helpful, convincing and/or reliable. At the end you have to decide whether you think the murder was:

- carried out by Nikolayev alone
- carried out by Nikolayev with the help of the NKVD but without Stalin's knowledge
- ordered by Stalin, arranged by the NKVD and carried out by Nikolayev.

Write a paragraph explaining your decision. Say what you think is 'certain', 'highly likely', 'likely', 'probable', 'uncertain' or 'open to question'.

You should bear these points in mind:

- Everyone agrees that Nikolayev did the murder and that he was a disgruntled and unstable man.
- So far no published evidence has been unearthed that directly links Stalin to the murder. Most of the evidence is second or third hand and has particular biases, for example, some of it is memoirs from people fleeing the USSR during the Cold War.

SOURCE 14.5 R. W. Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia 1934–41*, 1996, p. 20

There are many problems with the idea that he [Stalin] had Kirov killed. Evidence recently released from Russia shows that, contrary to many accounts, the police did not detain Nikolayev three times near Kirov, on each occasion mysteriously releasing him despite the fact that he was carrying a gun. He was stopped only once, and the circumstances were not suspicious. He had not received the gun from a Leningrad NKVD officer, as is typically claimed, but he had owned it since 1918 and had registered it legally in 1924 and 1930 (evidence from Pravda, 4 November 1991).

Nikolayev had a diary with him at the Smolny, but instead of showing that the party's enemies helped him in his attack, it indicated that he had acted alone. Kirov's bodyguard was not present at the fatal moment because his boss had called to say he would stay at home that day. Kirov went to his office anyway, only to meet Nikolayev by chance. The latter, who had a party card that would automatically admit him to the building, had gone there to ask for a pass to an upcoming conference.

SOURCE 14.6 J. Lewis and P. Whitehead, *Stalin: A Time for Judgement*, 1990, p. 63.
A commission to look into the murder was held under Khrushchev, the Soviet leader after Stalin. This took place at a time when Stalin's record and reputation were being attacked. The commission did not produce a public report but one of its members, Olga Shatunovskaya, recalled events as follows

The NKVD latched on to this, that he [Nikolayev] was dissatisfied, and he wrote them a letter saying: 'I am ready for anything now. I hate Kirov' and they organised it. At the inquiry before Stalin he said: 'For four months the NKVD prepared me and convinced me that it was necessary for the Party and the country.'

[On the question of the motive, she said:]

When Stalin found out [that some delegates had approached Kirov to ask him to become General Secretary in Stalin's place] he decided to remove him and Kirov realised this. When he came back from the Seventeenth Congress he told his friends and family: 'My head is now on the block.' I had all these testimonies from his friends and family and now they have been destroyed ... It has been irrefutably proved that the murder of Kirov was organised by Stalin, through Yagoda and the NKVD.

SOURCE 14.7 R. W. Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia 1934–41*, 1996, p. 22, quoting the opinion in 1991 of A. Lakoviev, a Russian scholar and politician, who studied the available archives

L. V. Nikolayev planned and perpetrated the murder alone. [Files on the case] contain no information implicating J. V. Stalin and agencies of the NKVD. [Stalin] did not know of and had no relation to the attack on Kirov.

SOURCE 14.8 R. C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941*, 1992, p. 301

A young woman journalist then living and working in Rostov, Vera Panova, recalls in a posthumously published memoir that her husband, Boris Vakhtin, managing editor on another local paper, telephoned her late on 1 December and said: ' "Vera! In Leningrad they've killed Kirov!" Who killed him? I ask, no answer comes, but I know what will happen now: after all I've written about the burning of the Reichstag. And that night I have a dream but I don't dare tell it even to Boris: they themselves have killed Kirov so as to start a new terror. Against whom? Against the "lefts", against the "rights", against anyone they want. But I can't keep this dream from Boris for long. After vacillating, I tell it to him. He gives me a strange look and is silent.'

Even among ordinary Leningrad workers, a ditty was making its whispered rounds [and this might help explain the savage repressions soon to be visited upon the Leningrad working class]:

Oh cucumber, oh pomidor
Stalin killed Kirov
In the corridor.

SOURCE 14.9 J. Arch Getty and O. V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–39*, 1999, p. 145

Yagoda (through whom Stalin presumably worked to kill Kirov) was produced in open court and in front of the world press before his execution in 1938. Knowing that he was about to be shot in any event, he could have brought Stalin's entire house down with a single remark about the Kirov killing ... such a risk would appear to be unacceptable for a complicit Stalin ...

The Stalinists seemed unprepared for the assassination and panicked by it. Indeed it took them more than eighteen months after the assassination to frame their supposed targets – members of the anti-Stalin old Bolshevik opposition – for the killing.

POSSIBLE MOTIVES

- **Stalin's motives are clear: to get rid of a rival and to use murder to get rid of opposition.**
- **Nikolayev, by all accounts, was disgruntled with the party but there is also a story that Kirov was having an affair with Nikolayev's wife, a secretary at party headquarters. This may have led him to transfer his disillusionment with the party onto Kirov.**
- **The motives of the NKVD are more difficult to identify. Conquest suggests there is no clear motive. Suggestions are:**
  - **they thought, or had been told, that Stalin wanted Kirov murdered**
  - **Kirov wanted to relax the terror, but the NKVD did not want to see this happen and did not want to see Kirov replace Stalin**
  - **they did not intend Nikolayev actually to kill Kirov; they intended to stop him before he could carry out the attack and use the attempted assassination as justification for their continuing role against enemies of the state.**

D The Great Terror

The show trials – getting rid of the old Bolsheviks

FOCUS ROUTE

For the purposes of analysis, we are going to split up the Great Terror into a number of topics, but you should be aware that the purges were affecting the party, people and armed forces over the same period.
Make notes under the following headings:

a) the show trials
b) the Yezhovshchina –
- purging the party
- purging the armed forces
- the wider terror.

ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE
This vague term now came into everyday use. It could be applied to anybody, covering any supposed offence that the authorities chose. Being identified as an enemy of the people meant arrest and imprisonment.

The Stalinist leadership used Kirov's murder as a pretext and justification for the Great Terror, which took place over the next four years. The murder was seen as evidence of a widespread conspiracy against the Soviet state and its leaders. There were enemies everywhere and they needed to be rooted out.

Within a few weeks there was an extensive purge of the Leningrad party, Kirov's power base. A 'Leningrad centre', plotting terrorist acts against the Soviet state, was uncovered. Thousands more, many outside the party, were soon accused of being Trotskyites involved in the plot to murder Kirov and other leading Communists. Kamenev and Zinoviev were arrested and put on trial in January 1935. Although no direct evidence could be produced against them, they were found guilty and given prison sentences.

It seems that few of those close to Stalin were demanding an extension of the terror at this point. But Stalin found out about communications between Trotsky and members of oppositionist groups in the party. He retaliated by sending out a Central Committee circular in June 1936 on the 'terrorist activities of the Trotskyist counter-revolutionary bloc'. This contained the crucial words 'the inalienable quality of every Bolshevik under present conditions should be the ability to recognise an ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE no matter how well he may be masked'. This was the sign that old Bolsheviks were going to be 'unmasked'.

Zinoviev and Kamenev were pulled out of prison and in August 1936 were put on trial in the full glare of the public. With them were fourteen others who had previously been members of the oppositionist groups in the party. These show trials were elaborately staged events in which the state prosecutor, Vyshinsky, proved the accused guilty of spying for foreign powers, as well as of being part of a counter-revolutionary bloc involved in Kirov's murder, with Stalin as the intended next victim. The idea of a show trial was not new. It was used in 1928 in the Shakhty trial (see page 228). It was an effective way to create an atmosphere of intimidation, a sense of danger and the feeling that there were enemies, spies and wreckers around. At the time, many accepted that such trials were genuine.

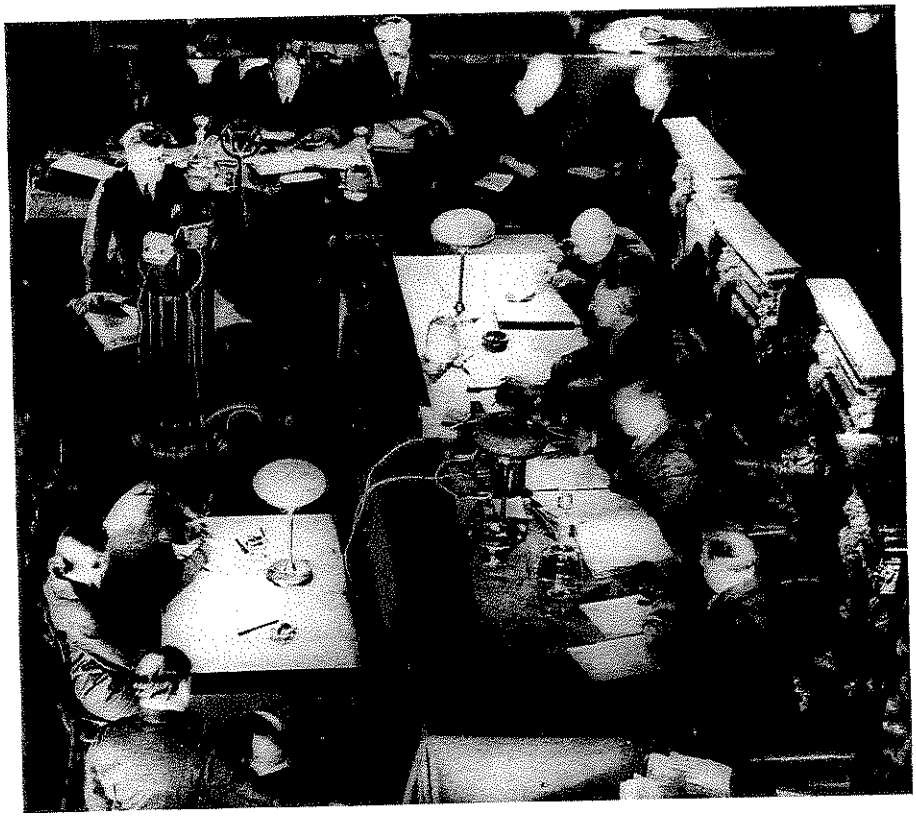
The accused confessed and were executed the next day. Zinoviev, according to police gossip, became so hysterical that his executioner panicked and shot him in a cell. These executions were significant because they were the first

SOURCE 14.10 A gallery of Stalin's victims put together by Trotsky's supporters. It shows what happened to leading Bolsheviks who had worked with Lenin

executions of people who had belonged to the Central Committee. The line had been crossed and many more executions were to follow. A second show trial took place in January 1937 in which Karl Radek, a well-known Trotskyite, and Pyatakov, a deputy in the Commissariat of Heavy Industry, were the main defendants. Needless to say they confessed and were found guilty.

The third and last great show trial was staged in March 1938. It was possibly the most dramatic because it involved Bukharin and he was able to make a more spirited defence of his actions. But in the end, he – along with twenty others, including old Bolsheviks like Rykov as well as the former head of the NKVD, Yagoda – confessed and was sentenced. Most were shot within a few hours, Bukharin and Rykov cursing Stalin as they died.

SOURCE 14.11 A show trial from the 1930s



SOURCE 14.12 J. Arch Getty and O. V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–39*, 1999, p. 301. The authors quote this letter, which provides a good example of the sort of denunciations that flowed in after Bukharin had been named as a suspect

11 August 1936
Dear Comrade Yezhov
I would like to call your attention to the following:
Comrade N. I. Bukharin has been travelling to Leningrad frequently. While there, he has been staying at the apartment of Busygin, a former Trotskyite and now a counter-revolutionary. Comrade Bukharin has maintained a close relationship with him, both in person and by correspondence ... The fact was uncovered at a party meeting of this institute and reported by Zubkov, who was expelled from the party as a White Guard and abetter of counter-revolutionary work.

I consider it my duty to report this to you in view of the fact that a simple friendship with a sworn counter-revolutionary is hardly possible. It is my suspicion that Comrade Bukharin was aware of Busygin's work and, in particular, of his counter-revolutionary activities at the Institute of the Academy of Sciences.

With Communist greetings,
I. Kuchkin,
Official of the Vasileostrovsky Party District Committee, Leningrad

LEFT-WING OPPOSITION

The Bolsheviks in the first two major show trials were those who had formed the left-wing opposition in the 1920s. Many had supported Trotsky and had opposed Stalin's 'Socialism in One Country'. However, after their defeat in 1927 most had recanted and supported Stalin when he made his left turn to pursue what were, to all intents and purposes, their policies. Trotsky, in exile in the 1930s, was writing articles condemning Stalin as the 'grave digger of the revolution', claiming that his policies had brought the Soviet Union to ruin. Stalin was incensed by this. This is why he was so angry when he found out that Trotsky had been trying to communicate with members of the old left-wing opposition.

THE RIGHTISTS

The last big show trial featured the right wing of the Communist Party, people who had supported the NEP and opposed rapid industrialisation and forced collectivisation. Bukharin had recanted his views and worked on producing the 1936 Constitution. Tomsky, the other leading member of the right, did not wait for the show trial; once it was announced he was going to be investigated he committed suicide.

ACTIVITY

Read Source 14.12 and answer the following questions.

1. In what way are Bukharin's actions considered suspicious?
2. Why is Busygin identified as a counter-revolutionary?
3. What is interesting about Zubkov, the reporter of the association?
4. What does this letter tell you about denunciations and the way the purges spread?

ACTIVITY

Read the poem extract in Source 14.14 and answer the following questions.

1 Who is the hated Judas?
2 What crimes are they accused of?
3 Who do they seem to be serving?
4 How is Stalin portrayed?
5 Do you think this poem is useful historical evidence of the era of the show trials in Russia?

SOURCE 14.13 A speech by Vyshinsky, the prosecutor at the third show trial, March 1938

Our whole country is awaiting and demanding one thing. The traitors and spies who were selling our country must 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. But over us, over our happy country our sun will shine bright and luminous as before. Over the road cleared of the last scum and filth of the past, we, with our beloved leader and teacher, the great Stalin at our head, will march as before onwards and onwards towards communism.

SOURCE 14.14 The party poet was commissioned to write a poem for *Pravda* two days after the first show trial had started, although it was not published. Here is an extract:

Like flies stuck in glue
They carried out their villainous policies
And finally found
The place their villainy deserved . . .
Fascists . . . Himmler . . . how do you like that?
The incredible suddenly became clear fact,
Recorded in the transcript of the trial:
Betrayers of the Soviet motherland,
Pseudoparty traitors, liars,
Devoted clients of hostile offices,
Underground enemies, Fascist agents,
Murderers of Kirov . . .
Here are the ones who murdered Kirov!
They are going for Stalin! But they failed . . .
WE HAVE GUARDED STALIN
WE ARE UNABLE NOT TO GUARD HIM!
WE GUARD HIM AS OUR HEAD
WE GUARD HIM AS OUR HEART!
Where is Trotsky? Without him . . .
Your foredoomed group
Is lacking, empty,
But proletarian justice will pursue
The hated Judas everywhere . . .

STALIN'S FALCONS

Today's spin doctors would have had little to teach Stalin. It was important to contrast the good and heroic with the evil traitors. In 1933, he had challenged his pilots to fly 'farther than anyone, faster than anyone, higher than anyone'. At the time of the show trials, pioneering flights were being made by Soviet aviators over the Arctic. The first was greeted with a triumphal parade in Moscow on 15 August 1936, four days before the first show trial started. The second flight took place at the same time as the trial and execution of Tukhachevsky, the army general. And before the third great show trial, an Arctic explorer was literally kept on ice (on an Arctic ice-floe for nine months) so that he could arrive home to a mass welcome just after Bukharin and the others had been executed.

SOURCE 14.15 W. G. Krivitsky, *I Was Stalin's Agent*, 1939, p. 211

They made [their confessions] in the sincere conviction that this was their sole remaining service to the Party and the Revolution. They sacrificed honour as well as life to defend the hated regime of Stalin, because it contained the last gleam of hope for the better world to which they had consecrated themselves in early youth.

Why did they confess?

The show trials were a grotesque sham, although many inside and some outside the Soviet Union believed that the defendants were guilty. Some of the charges were ludicrous: plotting to assassinate Kirov, Stalin and even Lenin and the novelist Maxim Gorky; espionage on behalf of foreign powers; conspiring with Trotskyites, Mensheviks, rightists and other opposition groups; planning to restore capitalism and overthrow socialism. The evidence was clearly faked and some of it did not stand up: for example, one of the hotels the conspirators were supposed to have met at did not even exist; one of the accused was in prison when he was supposed to have committed an offence. So why did these tough and battle-hardened Bolsheviks confess?

The most obvious answer is that they were worn down by torture and interrogation (see pages 263–264) and this undoubtedly played a part. It is also clear that they agreed to confess as part of a deal in which their families would be spared. This is true of Bukharin, who wrote a last loving testament to his wife, and probably of Zinoviev and Kamenev. In the event, few of the family members escaped. But another clue is given by W. G. Krivitsky in Source 14.15.

The Yezhovshchina

Just after the first great show trial had ended in September 1936, Nicolai Yezhov replaced Yagoda as head of the NKVD (secret police). Yagoda was criticised for not finding enemies of the state quickly enough. This was a clear sign from Stalin that he wanted to advance the terror. Yezhov was about to initiate a period of terror – called the Yezhovshchina – which reached its height in mid-1937 and lasted until late 1938.

Nicolai Yezhov (1895–1939)

Yezhov (left) and Stalin in conversation

Yezhov had joined the party in 1917. Stalin brought him into the Central Committee in 1927 and gave him an investigative role before he made him head of the NKVD. He was responsible for the deaths of thousands of people. Only about 1.5 m tall, he was known as the 'Bloodthirsty Dwarf' or the 'Iron Hedgehog'. One old Communist remarked, 'In the whole of my long life I have never seen a more repellent personality than Yezhov's.' A Soviet account in 1988 in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* talks of Yezhov's 'low moral qualities' and 'sadistic inclinations'; that 'women working in the NKVD were frightened of meeting him even in the corridors' and that he lacked 'any trace of conscience or moral principles'. (All quoted in Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, 1990, pages 14–15.)

THE STRANGE DEATH OF ORDZHONIKIDZE

SOURCE 14.16 Ordzhonikidze lies dead and high-ranking party members pay their respects. Left to right around the bed are his widow, Molotov, Yezhov, Stalin, Zhdanov, Kaganovich and Voroshilov

In February 1937, Sergei Ordzhonikidze died, after an angry confrontation with Stalin in which he pleaded for an end to the terror. He was particularly upset by the proceedings against Pyatakov who had worked closely with him at the Commissariat of Heavy Industry. Apparently, Ordzhonikidze was given the choice of suicide and a state funeral or being shot with no state funeral. He chose the former and Stalin said that it must be reported that he died of heart failure. Ordzhonikidze was buried with full honours. He was the last leading Politburo member to resist Stalin's policies. After this, the Great Terror of 1937–38 was unleashed.

SOURCE 14.17 R. Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, 1990, p. 257

It was not only this process of association that gave the Purge its increasingly mass character. In the 1930s, there were still hundreds of thousands who had been members of non-Bolshevik parties, the masses who had served in the White armies, nationalist elements in local intelligentsias, and so on. The increasingly virulent campaign for vigilance against the hidden enemy blanketed the whole country, not merely the Party, in a press and radio campaign. And while the destruction of hostile elements in the party was going forward, it must have seemed natural to use the occasion to break all remaining elements suspected of not being reconciled with the regime.

Purging the party

In the spring of 1937, Stalin made it clear that he thought traitors and spies had infiltrated the party at all levels in every locality. He encouraged lower-ranking party members to criticise and denounce those in higher positions. This resulted in a flood of accusations. Party members were 'unmasked' by colleagues for 'being part of the Bukharin Right in the 1920s' or 'authorising concessions to the peasants in 1925'. They were usually invited to confess before mass meetings and were then arrested. The flood turned into a torrent as more and more party members were dragged in. Some denounced fellow members in order to get their jobs or settle old scores, others to deflect criticism from themselves.

Denunciations were not directed only from the bottom of the party towards the top. Party secretaries and higher officials were anxious to find the counter-revolutionaries and 'fascist spies' in their local party network, if only to show how loyal they were to the regime. So they denounced people below them.

Mass terror

From spring the terror accelerated. Arrests of oppositionists increased dramatically. In July 1937, the Politburo passed a resolution condemning 'Anti-Soviet Elements'. This was elaborated by Yezhov in NKVD order 00447. He drew up an arrest list of over 250,000 of these 'elements', including scientists, artists, writers and musicians, as well as managers and administrators. The historian Chris Ward writes: 'An avalanche of monstrous charges, nightmarish allegations, incredible scenarios and random arrests overwhelmed swathes of the population while terrified, vindictive or simple-minded *apparatchiki* [party officials] flung denunciations at all and sundry ... [for example] Boris Numerov, a distinguished scientist, supposedly organised a "counter-revolutionary astronomers' group" which engaged in wrecking, espionage and terror' (*Stalin's Russia*, 1993, pages 120–21). Historians were particularly vulnerable and many were accused of leading terrorist groups. One leading Bolshevik mentioned at his trial that 'arrests had begun among the historians'.

In practice, anybody could be arrested as an oppositionist. A quota system was applied to geographical areas and to public bodies. It went further than this: in July 1937, the proportion to be shot was fixed at 28 per cent, with the rest being sentenced to up to ten years' hard labour – and this was before the oppositionists had actually been arrested!

A huge media campaign was started, encouraging ordinary people to criticise party officials, bureaucrats and managers – to seek out the 'hidden enemies'. This harnessed popular dissatisfaction with officialdom and resulted in a huge number of denunciations and arrests. People were also encouraged to denounce workers and saboteurs in the workplace, so the rest of the population did not escape either. In *Let History Judge* (1972), Roy Medvedev mentions that over 1000 were arrested in a single factory. Conquest contends, in *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (1990, page 258), that thousands of peasants, factory workers, shop girls and office clerks were swept up in the purges, although he accepts that the main target was 'officialdom, the intelligentsia'.

Once suspects had been arrested and subjected to interrogation by the NKVD, they always came up with names of accomplices. Workmates, friends, husbands and wives, sons and daughters – all could find themselves arrested because they had connections with someone who had been accused. The victims of the terror increased exponentially.

NKVD ORDER 00447

This notorious order was at the core of the Great Terror. Triggered by an instruction from Stalin, it was drawn up by Yezhov and sent out to the First Secretary of every republic and region. It set out categories to be dealt with – people with suspect political or social backgrounds – and quotas of people to be arrested in each area. These were always over fulfilled by the NKVD, in total up to 800,000 from summer 1937 to November 1938. But it was also part of a 'sweep of former kulaks and criminals', encompassing social marginals: recidivist criminals, hooligans, individuals who did not fit into the emerging Stalinist system. These, along with kulaks and workers formed, in numerical terms, the bulk of those repressed. It was social cleansing on a massive scale.

NATIONAL SWEEPS

From August 1937 a mass campaign was launched to uproot and deport national minorities from the USSR's western borders – Poles, Germans, Estonians and others – because of fears they might collude with an invader. Huge numbers were involved in this ethnic cleansing. This continued during and after the Second World War.

SOURCE 14.18 G. Gill, *Stalinism*, 1990, p. 32

People hoped to gain leniency for themselves or their families by co-operating with the NKVD, and were therefore willing to denounce others to the security organs. The circle of victims thereby widened.

SOURCE 14.19 Georgi Tsialadee, NKVD member

I asked him, Christopher Sergevich ... tell me honestly, how many people were executed in Georgia? I can tell you he said 80,000 ... we overfulfilled our plan.

SOURCE 14.20 R. Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, 1990, p. 253

Individual denouncers operated on an extraordinary scale. In one district in Kiev, 69 persons were denounced by one man, in another 100. In Odessa a single Communist denounced 230 people. In Poltava, a party member denounced his entire organisation.

ACTIVITY

Did the terror gain a momentum of its own?

1 Examine Sources 14.18–14.23. Explain what evidence each source provides to show how the terror gained its own momentum.
2 How do these sources agree/ disagree with Conquest's suggestion, in Source 14.17, of the way that the mass terror spread?

SOURCE 14.21 J. Arch Getty, *The Origins of the Great Purges*, 1985, p. 178

Members denounced leaders [and each other] for dubious class origins, long-forgotten sins, and current misdeeds. Secretaries defended themselves and proved their vigilance by expelling and denouncing batches of rank and file members. Spetseedstvo [attacks on bourgeois specialists], antibureaucratism and class hatred re-emerged in strength against the backdrop of a full-blown spy scare. Panic-stricken local party officials even resorted to filling administrative positions with politically 'safe' employees of the NKVD.

SOURCE 14.22 A. Weissberg, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 1952, p.364. The physicist Alexander Weissberg, himself a victim of the purges, wrote of repeated purges of directors of the big foundries of the Ukraine

It was only the third or fourth batch who managed to keep their seats. They had not even the normal advantages of youth in their favour, for the choosing had been a very negative one. They were the men who had denounced others on innumerable occasions. They had bowed the knee whenever they had come up against higher authority. They were morally and intellectually crippled.

SOURCE 14.23 W. G. Krivitsky, *I Was Stalin's Agent*, 1939, p. 247. Krivitsky sheds some light on why Stalin purged the army

Stalin knew that Tukhachevsky and the other ranking generals could never be broken into the state of unquestioning obedience which he now required of all those about him. They were men of personal courage, and he remembered [that in] the days when his own prestige was at the lowest, these generals had enjoyed enormous popularity ... He remembered too that at every critical stage of his rule – forcible collectivisation, hunger, rebellion – the generals had supported him reluctantly, had put difficulties in his path, had forced deals upon him. He felt no certainty now that ... they would continue to recognise his totalitarian authority.

Purging the armed forces

In 1937 it was the turn of the armed forces. Stalin was convinced that he could not count on the army to follow his policies. The leaders of the army were tough and difficult to intimidate. Marshall Tukhachevsky was the hero of the Civil War, but during this period he had come into conflict with Stalin. Stalin claimed that the army was plotting to overthrow him. Tukhachevsky and other generals had confessions beaten out of them (Tukhachevsky's written confession actually had blood stains on it) and were then executed. The NKVD then worked its way through the rest of the armed forces to devastating effect (see Chart 14B on page 266). That Stalin should risk wiping out his best commanders when the prospect of war loomed is a powerful indication of how far the terror had gone.

Arrest and interrogation

Many of the arrests came at night between 11pm and 3am. NKVD officers drove around in black vehicles called 'ravens', collecting their unwilling passengers. A knock at the door in the middle of the night inspired fear; some people kept a packed bag ready in case the knock was for them. In Moscow a sort of black humour developed during the purges. One joke told of a husband and wife being woken in the night by a loud noise. Terrified, the husband opened the door, then cheerfully called out to his wife: 'Don't worry, it's only bandits come to rob us.' A similar joke tells of a household being woken by bangs on the door. Eventually, one brave occupant opened it, calling up to the others: 'Don't worry comrades, it's just the fire brigade come to tell us the house is on fire.'

The reasons for arrest were arbitrary: criticising Stalin, telling a joke about Stalin, being a friend of someone who was arrested. Arrests were followed by the inevitable interrogation in which the victims were urged to confess their opposition to Stalin and involvement with counter-revolutionary groups. The theatre director Meyerhold, a prominent member of the avant-garde movement in the early Soviet Union, was forced to drink his own urine and then sign his confession with his left hand because his right arm had been broken.

Despite the pressure put on them, many Russians did refuse to confess and were executed quietly. Ryutin (see page 253) was brought from prison and tortured, but he refused to take part in a show trial and so he was executed. His wife and sons were also killed.

Confessions were important. They legitimised the arrests and proved that the state was right. It was a logical strategy when there was no real evidence to prove the accused guilty. The state prosecutor, Vyshinsky, thought a confession written by the accused looked more 'voluntary'. He said: 'I personally prefer a half confession in the defendant's own handwriting to a full confession in the investigator's writing' (see Sources 14.24 and 14.25).

Many Soviet citizens died in prison, either shot or dying from torture. Vans marked 'Meat' regularly arrived at Moscow cemeteries to deliver their loads – the naked bodies which filled the mass graves. People always knew when the female victims were Communist Party members because they had short hair. Those who did not die were sent to the Gulag, the network of labour camps that infested the USSR. Some of the most feared were in the north, in the Kolyma area, where the freezing weather made life intolerable. Relentless hard work and inadequate food and clothing killed many. Forced labour was also used on large building projects like the White Sea Canal, where it has been estimated that over 100,000 died because of the appalling conditions.

SOURCE 14.24 Mikhail Mindlin (arrested 1937), quoted in *The People's Century*, BBC TV, 1996

When the interrogation began, I was asked to sign some lies about myself and some good comrades from my region. They handed me a list of 47 people. They wanted me to sign a statement – I wouldn't. They kept me standing for five days, day and night. My legs were so swollen.

SOURCE 14.25 D. J. Dallin and B. I. Nicolaevsky, *Forced Labour in Soviet Russia*, 1948, p. 459

The basic mechanism and chief reliance of the extortion artists were physical torture ... several basic techniques were common ...

The 'parilka' or sweat room ... several hundred men and women, standing close packed in a small room where all ventilation has been shut off, in heat that chokes and suffocates, in stink that asphyxiates ... Many have stood thus two days ... their feet are swollen, their bodies numb ... they are not allowed to squat or sit. Every now and then, those who faint are dragged out into the corridor, revived and thrown back in the sweat room.

The so-called conveyor belt ... examiners sit at desks in a long series of rooms, strung out along corridors, up and down stairs, back to the starting point: a sort of circle of OGPU agents. The victims run at a trot from one desk to the next, cursed, threatened, insulted, bullied, questioned by each agent in turn, round and round hour after hour. They weep and plead and deny and keep on running ... If they fall they are kicked and beaten on their shins, stagger to their feet and resume the hellish relay. The agents, relieved at frequent intervals, are always fresh and keen while the victims grow weaker, more terrorised and degraded.

From the parilka to the conveyor, from the conveyor to the parilka, then periods in ugly cells when uncertainty and fear for one's loved ones outside demoralise the prisoner.

ЧТО ЗНАЧИТ ДЛЯ ЧЕЛОВЕКА, КОТОРЫЙ РАБОТАЛ НА МОРОЗЕ ВЕСЬ ДЕНЬ, МИСКА ПОХЛЁБКИ И ПАЙКА ХЛЕБА 300 ГРАММ? ПЫТАЯСЬ ОБМАНУТЬ И УСПОКОИТЬ ГОЛОДНЫЙ ЖЕЛУДОК, ЗЭКИ ВАРИЛИ ПАЙКУ В СОЛЁНОЙ ВОДЕ, И КАК РЕЗУЛЬТАТ – ОПУХАНИЕ, БИРКА НА НОГЕ И КЛАДБИЩЕ ИТЛ... ПО СЛОВАМ УЗНИКОВ, В ГУЛАГЕ БЫЛО ХУЖЕ, ЧЕМ В ЛАГЕРЯХ А. ГИТЛЕРА.

УКЛАДКА ТРУПОВ „ВРАГОВ НАРОДА" В „АММОНАЛЬНИК"...

„АММОНАЛЬНИКИ" – ЭТО ЯМЫ, ОБРАЗОВАННЫЕ В ВЕЧНОЙ МЕРЗЛОТЕ ПУТЁМ ПРИМЕНЕНИЯ ВЗРЫВЧАТКИ: ДИНАМИТА, ТОЛУОЛА И АММОНАЛА, ВМЕСТИМОСТЬЮ ОТ ДЕСЯТКА ДО СОТЕН ТРУПОВ.

SOURCE 14.26 Baldeyev cartoon of corpses in a mass grave in a labour camp

SOURCE 14.27 Baldeyev cartoon of labour camp prisoners

SOURCE 14.28 D. Volkogonov, *Stalin*, 1988, p. 339. This is the testimony of Stepan Ivanovich Semenov, a Muscovite, who spent fifteen years in the camps. Two of his brothers were shot and his wife died in prison. He is now an old man without children or grandchildren

The worst thing is when you have no one waiting for you, when no one needs you. I and my brothers might have had children and grandchildren, families. The accursed Tamerlaine [Stalin] smashed and trampled everything. He took the future away from citizens who were not born because he killed their mothers and fathers. I'm living out my life alone and I still can't understand how it was that we didn't see that 'our' leader was a monster, how the people could let it happen.

The end of the terror

Stalin called a halt to the terror towards the end of 1938. By this time, Yezhov had been replaced by Beria. Arrests slowed down, although Central Committee members and army officers were purged well into 1939. The purges were destabilising Russian society. Administrative systems were falling apart with key personnel missing and this was having a negative impact on industrial production. Stalin blamed Yezhov and the NKVD for the excesses of the terror, which was probably true. In 1940, a hitman, on Stalin's orders, murdered Trotsky. Now indeed virtually all of the old Bolsheviks had been wiped out. However, the purges continued in a much-reduced form into the Second World War. For the victims, the terror never really ended, as Source 14.28 shows.

Osip Mandelstam

With a few notable exceptions, writers and artists suffered greatly during the terror. It was easy to step out of line and fall foul of the NKVD. In 1933 the poet Osip Mandelstam composed a sixteen-line poetic epigram about Stalin. It ran as follows:

We live, deaf to the land beneath us,
Ten steps away no one hears our speeches,

But where there's so much as half a conversation
The Kremlin's mountaineer will get his mention,

His fingers are as fat as grubs
And the words, final as lead weights, fall from his lips,

His cockroach whiskers leer
And his boot tops gleam.

Around him a rabble of thin necked leaders – fawning
half men for him to play with.

They whinny, purr or whine
As he prates and points a finger,

One by one forging his laws, to be flung
Like horseshoes at the head, the eye or groin.

And every killing is a treat
for the broad-chested Ossete.

The oral composition travelled from Muscovite mouth to mouth until it reached the police in a verse whose second stanza ran:

All we hear is the Kremlin mountaineer,
the murderer and peasant slayer.

Mandelstam read his poem to half a dozen friends, one of whom informed on him. Yagoda was so struck by the poem that he could recite it by heart and he did – to Stalin. Mandelstam was arrested and interrogated. Luckily, he was defended by Bukharin and exiled for three years rather than being shot or sent to a labour camp. When he returned, he tried to write a poem praising Stalin but it was never published. He was arrested in 1938 and his wife never saw him again. She later found out that he died in December 1938 of typhus: 'Silently, in pain, lying in the filth of a prison camp, Russia's greatest poet of the twentieth century died' (E. Radzinsky, *Stalin*, 1997, page 406).

14B Who were the victims?

Leading party members
Khrushchev states that 98 out of 139 (70 per cent) members of the Central Committee elected at the Seventeenth Party Congress were arrested and shot. Of the 1966 delegates to the Congress, 1108 were arrested. This was the congress which favoured Kirov over Stalin.

Senior military officers
These included:
- Tukhachevsky, Chief of the General Staff, and seven other generals – all heroes of the Civil War
- all eleven war commissars and three out of five marshals of the USSR
- all admirals commanding fleets and their replacements
- all but one of the senior commanders of the air force.

In all, 35,000 officers were either imprisoned or shot – although over 11,000 were reinstated by the middle of 1940.

Managers, engineers and scientists
A high proportion of managers at all levels were purged. The railways were particularly hard hit. Leading physicists and biologists were arrested.

People related to those who had been purged
Colleagues, subordinates, relatives, wives, children, friends and associates.

Party and state leaders
In every national republic within the USSR, party and state leaders were charged with treason or bourgeois nationalism. In Georgia, two state prime ministers, four out of five of the regional party secretaries and thousands of lesser officials lost their posts.

NKVD
Yagoda, head of the NKVD, was arrested in 1937. According to figures given by D. Volkogonov in *Stalin* (1988, p. xxiv) more than 23,000 NKVD men perished at the end of the 1930s.

Mass terror 1937–38
- By far the largest group of all: kulaks, workers and various social marginals (recidivist criminals, the homeless, the unemployed, all those who deviated from Stalinist social norms)
- Anyone with contacts abroad, such as Comintern agents, diplomats, foreign trade officials, sportsmen
- Former Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries
- Priests, members of religious groups and people holding unorthodox views of any sort
- People in the media, artists and historians.

National minorities
National minorities in Central and Eastern Europe were singled out but also Koreans, Chinese and Afghans.

How many were killed in the terror?

It is notoriously difficult to calculate the number of people killed in the terror when the evidence is full of gaps and inconsistencies. For instance, the results of a census taken in the Soviet Union in January 1937 were suppressed and the census organisers were shot as 'a serpent's nest of traitors in the apparatus of Soviet Statistics' who had exerted themselves to diminish the numbers of the population of the USSR. Also, the NKVD burned much of their archive as the Germans approached Moscow in 1941. Another problem is that historians calculate the number of victims over different periods of time and include peasants and workers repressed during collectivisation and the industrialisation drive of the early 1930s.

14C Estimates of the number of victims of the Stalinist regime

Wheatcroft and Davies (1994) estimate that 10 million people died between 1927 and 1938. They believe that around 8.5 million of these died between 1927 and 1936, mostly from famine.

Dmitri Volkogonov claims that around 7 million people were executed between 1929 and 1953, with another 16.5 million imprisoned.

Estimates of victims of the Great Terror 1937–38 by **Robert Conquest** (1990):

	Arrests	7–8 million
	Executions	1–1.5 million
	Population of camps	7–8 million
	Died in camps	2 million
1932–1933:	Famine	7 million
1929–1953:	Deaths (total)	20 million