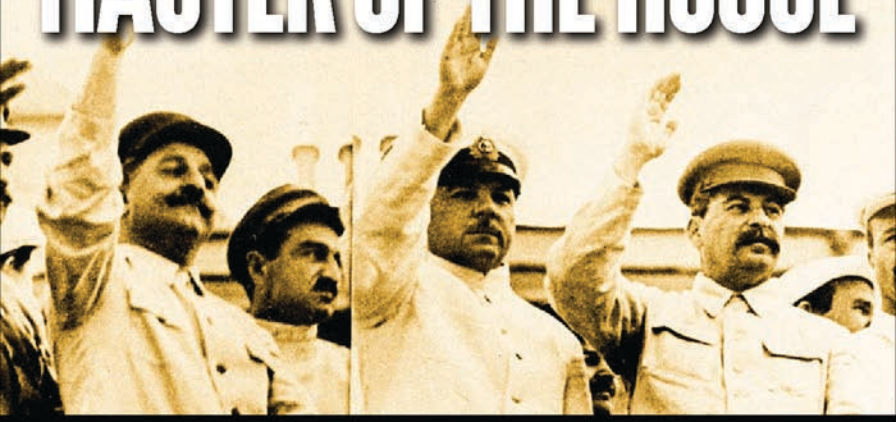
MASTER OF THE HOUSE



STALIN AND HIS INNER CIRCLE

OLEG V. KHLEVNIUK

THE YALE-HOOVER SERIES ON STALIN, STALINISM, AND THE COLD WAR

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Stanford, California

Yale University Press

New Haven and London

Set in Sabon type by The Composing Room of Michigan, Inc., Grand Rapids, Michigan.
Printed in the United States of America by Thomson-Shore, Inc., Dexter, Michigan.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Khlevniuk, Oleg V.
Master of the house : Stalin and his inner circle / Oleg V. Khlevniuk ; translated by Nora Seligman Favorov.
p. cm.— (Yale-Hoover Series on Stalin, Stalinism, and the Cold War)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-300-11066-1 (alk. paper)
1. Soviet Union—Politics and government—1917–1936. I. Title.
DK266.K456 2008
947.084′2—dc22
2008017715

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).
It contains 30 percent postconsumer waste (PCW) and is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Acknowledgments vii
Introduction xiii
List of Abbreviations xxvii

1. The Stalinization of the Politburo, 1928–1930 1
2. Power in Crisis, 1931–1933 39
3. A Facade of Liberalization, 1934 85
4. Terror and Conciliation, 1935–1936 127
5. Stalin and the Great Terror, 1937–1938 166
6. On the Eve of War: The New Structure of Stalin's Government 203
Conclusion: Master of the House 246

Appendix 1: Politburo Membership 263
Appendix 2: Visits to Stalin's Office by Politburo Members and Central Committee Secretaries 266
Notes 273
Index 303

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Acknowledgments

This book has taken shape over fifteen years of research in the archives of the Soviet government and the administrative structures of the Soviet Communist Party. Every time a new body of previously top secret archival material was opened to researchers, work on this manuscript entered a new stage. This publication represents the culmination of this work, and I am extremely pleased that it will be part of a new series, the Yale-Hoover Series on Stalin, Stalinism, and the Cold War, being launched by two leading institutions in the study of Soviet archives—Stanford University's Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, whose director is John Raisian, and Yale University Press, whose director is John Donatich. I am also grateful to the series editors, Jonathan Brent and Paul Gregory, for their advice and assistance in bringing this book to fruition. I wish as well to express my thanks to the Hoover Institution for its support of the latest phase of my work, including its sponsorship with the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI) of the publication of Politburo stenograms by the Russian Political Encyclopedia (ROSSPEN). These stenograms are an important new source that has illuminated questions addressed in this book.

Let me turn to the more distant origins of this publication. Since 1992, under the auspices of two projects—Decision-Making Mecha-

nisms within the Stalinist Command Economy in the 1930s and the series Documents of Soviet History—I have been investigating the archives of the Politburo and the Council of People's Commissars, which were opened to researchers in the former Central Party Archive (now RGASPI) and the Central State Archive of the October Revolution and the Supreme Organs of State Power of the USSR (now the State Archive of the Russian Federation—GARF). This research led to several articles and a collection entitled *Stalinskoe politburo v 30-e gody* (Stalin's Politburo in the 1930s) (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 1995). Even more than these (undoubtedly important) publications, I value the personal and scholarly relationships I developed over the course of this work. Thanks to these relationships, for many years now I have considered myself a member of two extraordinarily interesting teams. The first is the Birmingham University team headed by R. W. Davies. The members of this team—Arfon Rees, the late Derek Watson, Melanie Ilič, Mark Harrison, Stephen Wheatcroft—have become valued colleagues. I have derived great pleasure and benefit from the discussions we shared concerning the problems of Soviet history of the 1930s. My participation in the second team came about thanks to the involvement of Andrea Graziosi and Moshe Lewin in the Documents of Soviet History series, which is supported by the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici. It has provided me with invaluable experience in the study and publication of archival materials. Suffice it to say that over the course of fifteen years' work on this project, thirteen collections of documents have been published, many of which are directly tied to the political history of the Soviet Union.

My first monograph dealing with the highest echelons of power in the Soviet Union of the 1930s was devoted to the conflict between Stalin and his close comrade-in-arms Grigory "Sergo" Ordzhonikidze. The book was first published in Russian and has come out in an English-language edition thanks to the efforts of Donald J. Raleigh (Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's Shadow: The Career of "Sergo" Ordzhonikidze* [New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1995]).

Nicolas Werth proposed writing a book about Stalin's Politburo for his series of Soviet historical studies (O. Khlevniouk, *Le Cercle du Kremlin. Staline et le Bureau politique dans les années 1930: Les jeux du pouvoir* [Paris, Seuil, 1996]). Also in 1996, an expanded and revised Russian version of this book was put out by the publisher ROSSPEN

under the title *Politbiuro. Mekhanizmy politicheskoi vlasti v 1930-e gody* (The Politburo: Mechanisms of political power in the 1930s). Markus Wehner, Reinhard Müller, and the scholars and directors of the Hamburg Institute of Social Research arranged to have my work published in German translation. For this edition (Oleg W. Chlewnjuk, *Das Politbüro. Mechanismen der politischen Macht in der Sowjetunion der dreißiger Jahre,* Hamburger Edition [Hamburg: Hamburg Institute of Social Research, 1998]) I again revised and expanded the manuscript. This additional work on the book was necessitated by rapid growth in the historiography of the Soviet period and by the constant emergence of documents that shed light on the subject, primarily from the Presidential Archive of the Russian Federation (APRF). The book you now hold in your hands is substantially different from the previous versions in terms of its sources. While I was researching it the opportunity arose to work with exceptionally important archival documents (primarily from Stalin's personal papers) that were moved from APRF to RGASPI in recent years, as well as a number of other sources from Politburo thematic folders, which continue to be held by APRF.

Several recent projects greatly influenced the writing of this book. First among them is the collaboration between the Hoover Institution and RGASPI, which culminated in the publication of a three-volume collection of Politburo stenograms (*Stenograms of the TsK RKP[b]-VKP[b] Politburo Meetings, 1923–1938* [Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2007]), which facilitates further study into the period. The driving force behind this project was Paul Gregory. The second project that should be mentioned was carried out by my friend Yoram Gorlizki and me and was devoted to the highest bodies of Stalinist power during their heyday (Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945–1953* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2004]). This project provided new opportunities for a comparative study of the development of the Soviet system and, consequently, for a better understanding of each development stage. Yoram proved to be a patient and wise coauthor who not only bravely endured my shortcomings but took upon himself the main burden of preparing the book. Third, together with Viktor Danilov and Aleksandr Vatlin, I edited five volumes of Central Committee plenum stenograms for 1928–1929 (*Kak lomali nep. Stenogrammy plenumov TsK VKP[b] 1928–1929 gg.* [How NEP was broken: TsK VKP(b) plenum stenograms, 1928–1929] [Moscow: MDF,

2000]). This provided valuable experience researching new sources that illuminate the period of struggle between Stalin and the "rightists." Unfortunately, the death of Viktor Danilov prevented us from carrying out other endeavors and deprived us of a wise and experienced colleague.

Collaboration and communication with my fellow historians have had an incalculable impact on my work. Although I will not be able to name them all, I would nonetheless like to express my sincere gratitude to Golfo Alexopoulos, Jörg Baberowski, Dietrich Beyrau, Alain Blum, Yves Cohen, Marta Craveri, Benno Ennker, Antonio Gargano, Klaus Gestwa, Arch Getty, Julie Hessler, Jana Howlett, Vladimir Kozlov, Hiroaki Kuromiya, Terry Martin, Jan Plamper, Silvio Pons, Andrea Romano, Robert Service, David Shearer, Peter Solomon, Ronald Suny, Takeshi Tomita, Valery Vasiliev, Lynne Viola, Haruki Wada, Amir Weiner, Viktor Zaslavsky, and Elena Zubkova. I am particularly thankful for my interactions with Sheila Fitzpatrick, who has now been supporting my efforts for twenty years.

Spending, as I do, a significant portion of my time in archives, I have developed many valued relationships there with true friends, colleagues, and coauthors. At RGASPI I have been fortunate to work with M. S. Astakhova, G. V. Gorskaya, E. E. Kirillova, L. P. Kosheleva, L. N. Malashenko, and L. A. Rogovaya. Our congenial and highly professional team has prepared quite a few collections of documents. Efforts at GARF would not be possible without the constant support and valuable guidance of G. A. Kuznetsova, D. N. Nokhotovich, S. V. Somonova, and T. Yu. Zhukova.

Many important documentary publications and monographs would never have seen the light of day had Jonathan Brent not overcome a multitude of problems and obstacles to launch the Annals of Communism series at Yale University Press in the early 1990s. It is largely thanks to Jonathan Brent and Vadim Staklo that this series has achieved the recognition it deserves. Within Russia, books from this series are known not only to specialists familiar with the original English-language publications but also to a broader audience, reading Russian-language editions put out by ROSSPEN under the stewardship of A. K. Sorokin. I am pleased to have my name on the covers of three books in the Annals of Communism series and excited that the endeavor begun with this series will expand into new projects, including the joint undertaking of the Hoover Institution and Yale University Press to publish

The Yale-Hoover Series on Stalin, Stalinism, and the Cold War, the significance of which cannot be overstated. I am grateful to Paul Gregory, who not only selected my book for publication under the auspices of this project but undertook the challenging task of editing it.

It was a pleasure working with Nora Favorov, who not only translated the book into English but was its highly professional, good-natured, and patient critic. I am grateful to Mary Pasti of Yale University Press for the skill and effort she put into editing the book.

As always, I wish to express particular gratitude to my wife and daughter.

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Introduction

In December 1929, Joseph Stalin wrote to his closest comrade-in-arms, Viacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov, who was on vacation in the south. "Hello, Viacheslav. Of course I got your first letter. I know you are cursing me in your heart for my silence. I can't deny that you are fully within your rights to do so. But try to see things my way: I'm terribly overloaded and there's no time to sleep (literally!). Soon I will write a proper letter [. . .]. Once again: I promise to write a proper letter. Warm regards."[1] A few years later, Stalin fundamentally changed his relationship with Molotov. In 1937 and 1938, Stalin ordered that Molotov's assistants be arrested. Molotov's people were no safer than those working for other members of the Politburo, many of whose aides were swept away in the Great Terror. In 1939 the NKVD fabricated a case against Molotov's wife (although her arrest would not come until later). Molotov himself was subject to numerous demeaning attacks, and in May 1941 he was removed from the post of chairman of the Council of People's Commissars in disgrace. On 6 December 1945, Stalin, who was away on vacation, wrote the following to Lavrenty Beria, Georgy Malenkov, and Anastas Mikoyan: "I have become convinced that Molotov does not hold the interests of our state and the prestige of our government in very high regard—all he cares about is popularity in certain foreign circles. I can no longer consider such a comrade to be my first

deputy." As a final humiliating blow he added, "I am sending this cipher to you three only. I didn't send it to Molotov since I don't have faith in the trustworthiness of certain of his close associates. I am asking you to summon Molotov and read him my telegram in its entirety, but don't give him a copy of it."[2] Molotov's response was humbly repentant. "I will try to earn your trust through my deeds. For any honorable Bolshevik, your trust represents the trust of the Party, which is dearer to me than life itself."[3] Nevertheless, Molotov continued to be subjected to indignity. Under pressure from Stalin, Molotov divorced his wife, who was arrested in 1949. In October 1952, just a few months before he died, Stalin made Molotov the target of a sharp public rebuke during a plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and then removed him almost entirely from government affairs.[4]

Unlike many other high-ranking members of the Soviet leadership, not to mention millions of Soviet government officials and ordinary citizens, Molotov survived the terror. But although his life was spared, he still had to pay a price for his role in helping Stalin defeat the oppositionists in the Politburo in the 1920s, for his long years of friendship with Stalin, for his past "oligarchic" independence, and for the fact that Stalin had once felt compelled to offer excuses for not writing to him.

The evolving relationship between Stalin and Molotov reflected changes at the highest echelons of power in the Soviet Union, changes that I investigate in this book. In short, I address the interrelated processes that led to the breakdown of the oligarchic collective leadership of the Politburo and the consolidation of Stalin's dictatorship. This outcome, which not only proved tragic for old Bolsheviks and the Soviet *nomenklatura* but also had an enormous impact on the fate of the entire country undoubtedly had historic antecedents and identifiable causes. Many prefer to believe that Stalin's dictatorship was inevitable, either because "that's all you can expect from Russia/the Bolsheviks" or because that is what the underlying ideology of state ownership and administrative planning give rise to. Both this thesis and its antithesis (that chance played an important role in Stalin's takeover of power) belong to a realm of history where we will never have clear-cut answers. Which side we come down on is largely a matter of our "historical faith" or our political inclinations. But for the historian, it seems to me, the concept of the "iron march of history" is, at the very least, uninspiring. Chronicler of the inevitable—why would anyone who has read and analyzed

tens of thousands of pages of the most diverse documents, who has learned the fates of faceless millions, not to mention hundreds of flesh-and-blood individuals, many of whom desperately fought for their interests and ideals—why would such a person agree with such a characterization? The idea of inevitability comes when we try to arrange history into some kind of orderly progression. Specific knowledge complicates the picture, revealing the diversity of factors involved in any human endeavor, the complex interplay between historical traditions and the logic governing events as they unfold, between political conflict at the top and social pressures at the bottom, and, in the end, the role of chance.

This work presents and synthesizes evidence about the change in models of power at the highest political levels in the Soviet Union that took place between the late 1920s and the early 1940s. The gradual consolidation of Stalin's dictatorship that characterized this period went through several stages. Each chapter of this book is devoted to one of these stages.

The main result of the struggle at the highest levels of the party that took place in the 1920s between Lenin's heirs was the gradual Stalinization of the Politburo. The essence of this Stalinization was Stalin's ascent to dominance within a system of collective leadership that nonetheless remained primarily oligarchic in nature. The Politburo's acceptance and implementation of the political course that Stalin was advocating—accelerated industrialization and forced mass collectivization—can be seen as the culmination of this process. But although Stalin may have dominated the Politburo, it was several years before he achieved dictatorial powers. Victory over Aleksei Rykov, Nikolai Bukharin, and Mikhail Tomsky in 1928 and 1929, which was vital to Stalinization at the highest levels, demanded significant effort on the part of Stalin and his supporters.[5] Furthermore, the growing crisis that came out of the policy of accelerated economic reorganization forced Stalin to act with more restraint than would have been expected from an absolute victor. Evidence of this can be found in behind-the-scenes actions taken against the rightists and certain thoroughly loyal members of the Politburo, as well as the confrontation between Stalin's Politburo and Rykov's Council of People's Commissars in 1930, discussed in the first chapter of this book.

At the end of 1930 a resolution to the problem of the rightists (or,

rather, the problem of Rykov) meant that the Politburo leadership of Stalin, Rykov, and Bukharin was replaced by Stalin's sole leadership, albeit leadership that still bore many of the hallmarks of oligarchy. This was an important step on the road to consolidating his one-man dictatorship, but it still did not constitute such a dictatorship.[6] The early 1930s was a transitional period, and historians have come up with several theories to explain it. I will talk about them in the order in which they emerged.

The first theory asserts that policy at the highest levels of the Soviet leadership during this period was shaped by a confrontation between two factions—the "radicals" and the "moderates." At this point Stalin still lacked the strength to consolidate his dictatorship, and, according to this version, the outcome of the confrontation finally tilted the scales in his favor. This theory had its origin in the 1930s. By then, news of conflict at the top and of clashes between proponents of harsher and more moderate lines had already appeared in the foreign press. These political rumors were lent credence by an article entitled "How the Moscow Trial Was Prepared: Letter of an Old Bolshevik," published in *Sotsialisticheskiy vestnik* (Socialist herald).[7] The article, which detailed evidence of a standoff within Stalin's Politburo, was published anonymously. Years later, the well-known historian Boris Nikolaevsky acknowledged his authorship and revealed that in "Letter of an Old Bolshevik" he had relied on the testimony of Nikolai Bukharin, with whom he met in Paris in 1936.[8] The article contained truly sensational allegations. Nikolaevsky described a battle for influence over Stalin between proponents of a policy of moderation and a gradual diminution of the terror, headed by Sergei Kirov, who had the support of the influential Soviet writer Maxim Gorky, and their opponents, led by Lazar Kaganovich and Nikolai Yezhov. After Kirov's death, the last two triumphed.

For many years, there was no way to verify the authenticity of Nikolaevsky's account through archival sources, but as soon as Bukharin's widow, Anna Larina, was able to publish her memoirs, she categorically denied that Bukharin had given any information to Nikolaevsky.[9] Her denial was received skeptically.[10] In any event, over subsequent decades, Nikolaevsky's work exerted tremendous influence both over scholarly literature and textbooks and over the testimony of individual eyewitnesses, who used the appealing idea of factions within the Polit-

buro for their own purposes. Such, for example, was the case with former NKVD general Alexander Orlov, who constructed his well-known but absolutely inauthentic book around Nikolaevsky's account.[11]

Nikolaevsky's version of events was further bolstered by official Soviet propaganda during the years of Khrushchev's thaw. The cornerstone of Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinization was the sorting of Stalin's former comrades-in-arms into "bad" and "good." Beria, Malenkov, Molotov, Kaganovich, and Yezhov all fell into the first category. That left, for the second category, Khrushchev himself, Kliment Voroshilov, Mikoyan, Mikhail Kalinin, and Grigory "Sergo" Ordzhonikidze, as well as all of the Politburo members who had been repressed during the 1930s. The crimes of the former regime were attributed to Stalin's "bad" cohort (Stalin himself was often absolved of blame and labeled a victim of Politburo members' intrigues). At the same time, Khrushchev vaguely suggested that the "good" members of the Politburo had attempted to fight abuse of power, even during Stalin's lifetime. These ideas found their fullest expression in Khrushchev's speech to the 20th Party Congress and later in the memoirs of old Bolsheviks collected by dissident historians. New versions of events, countenanced from above, entered into circulation through a variety of channels. There were new accounts of meetings of high-level party functionaries, who purportedly were hatching plans during the 17th Party Congress to replace Stalin with Kirov as general secretary of the Central Committee; a new notion that Kirov was killed by order of Stalin, who saw in the Leningrad party secretary a political rival; a new version of the circumstances of Ordzhonikidze's death and allegations that it resulted from conflict with Stalin; and a new suggestion that Postyshev spoke out against repression during the February–March 1937 Central Committee plenum, among others.

None of these accounts were backed up with documentary evidence. Even Khrushchev, who had the entire party archive at his disposal, preferred to rely on the recollections of old Bolsheviks returning from the camps. This did not faze historians. The complete inaccessibility of Soviet archives and the lack of candidness, to put it mildly, of Soviet political leaders were both taken for granted. Given the unavailability of hard evidence, for many historians the slightest hint in a speech by Khrushchev or in the official Soviet press took on the weight of fact. As a result, every scrap of evidence that there was conflict within the Politburo was stitched together into a confused patchwork in which it was

hard to distinguish rumor from hard fact or opportunistic falsification from mistaken recollection.

The testimonies of Nikolaevsky and other memoirists made the faction theory appealing, but the theory also fit with actual events in the early 1930s. Its appeal and fit notwithstanding, careful investigations of all available sources have allowed historians to identify apparent inconsistencies in economic, social, punitive, and foreign policy and to discern a circuitous path leading to Stalin's dictatorship, quite separate from factionalism.[12] Such scholarship has stood the test of time.

In addition to factions, historians took a growing interest in *vedomstvennost',* the competing interests of government agencies within the Stalinist political system. Fruitful areas for investigation were the commissariats that drove the Soviet economy and the collective process of drafting plans for industrial production and capital investment.[13] The research spotlighted the role of the influential Politburo member Sergo Ordzhonikidze, who appeared to follow two opposing models of behavior during his tenure in different posts, depending on the interests of the particular institution he was currently representing—in the late 1920s he was chairman of the party's Central Control Commission, and starting in 1931, he became chairman of the Supreme Economic Council and then head of the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry. Ordzhonikidze is also worthy of attention as the sole Politburo member to express his opposition to aspects of the incipient terror to Stalin. The confrontation with Stalin, which can be traced through numerous archival sources, ended in Ordzhonikidze's death.[14] Another active participant in inter-institutional conflicts was Viacheslav Molotov. As head of the government, he fought for overall state interests. Recent studies have made significant contributions to our understanding of Molotov's positions and the role of government structures.[15]

One of the objectives of research for this book was to gather archival evidence of clashes and disagreements within the Politburo and through this evidence to investigate political decision-making mechanisms in place during the early 1930s. Three of the chapters reflect the results of this effort, each covering a specific stage in the development of the USSR, periods when shifts in the "general line" provide a window onto the mechanisms of power. In chapter 2, I explore the crisis years of 1931–1933. At the same time that the Stalinist leadership was turning to terror, it was also making inconsistent attempts at reform. The swings

between liberalization and terror, which had their origins in the Politburo, provide an opportunity to study the alignment of forces at the highest echelons of political power. In chapter 3, I examine evidence associated with the moderate policies undertaken in 1934 and explore the role played by Sergei Kirov in these initiatives. Changes to the makeup and activities of the Politburo, as well as political trends after Kirov's death (in 1935 and 1936), are addressed in chapter 4.

Although extensive evidence of discord within the Politburo exists, archival sources have yet to be found that would support the hypothesis that there was a clash between moderates and radicals. Almost all of the discord within the Politburo was generated by conflicting institutional interests. As a result, individual Politburo members on different occasions took stances that could be characterized as moderate or radical, depending on the circumstances. Furthermore, all of the most important political decisions previously attributed to one of the supposed factions turn out, upon closer examination, to be initiatives of Stalin. Although Politburo members may have enjoyed a certain independence in deciding many matters, primarily those of an operational nature, the historical record shows that Stalin tended to have the final word. As time went on, this tendency became more pronounced.

Even though these conclusions may lack a certain sensationalism, they are the conclusions that the evidence forces us to accept. It is possible that in the future some lucky historian will find hard evidence of a more dramatic struggle within the Politburo. Some may also be disappointed to read the conclusions drawn in chapter 5, in which I analyze how and why the party and government purges and large-scale repression of 1937–1938 were carried out. Over the past ten years, a vast number of documents have been discovered that advance our understanding of these exceptionally important events.[16] As far as the question of who was behind the Great Terror is concerned, we can now state with greater certainty what was clear to many observers and historians long before the archives became accessible: "The nature of the whole Purge depends in the last analysis on the personal and political drives of Stalin."[17] Correspondingly, it is argued in chapter 5 that theories about the elemental, spontaneous nature of the terror, about a loss of central control over the course of mass repression, and about the role of regional leaders in initiating the terror simply are not supported by the historical record.[18]

Now that we have access to essentially all of the key documents associated with the mass repression of 1937 and 1938, we have every reason to see the Great Terror as a series of centralized, planned mass operations that were conducted on the basis of Politburo decisions (that is, Stalin's decisions) aimed at destroying "anti-Soviet elements" and "counter-revolutionary national contingents." The objective, given growing international tensions and the threat of imminent war, was the liquidation of a "fifth column." This is why the majority of those arrested in 1937 and 1938 (at least 700,000 people) were shot. Executions on such a large scale had not been seen in the Soviet Union before, nor have they been since. The special role played by Stalin in orchestrating this eruption of terror is beyond doubt and is fully supported by documentary evidence. His role can be put even more starkly. Everything we know today about the preparations for and conduct of the large-scale operations of 1937 and 1938 supports the idea that without Stalin's orders, the Great Terror simply would not have taken place, and the mass repressions (which were characteristic of Stalin's regime overall) would have remained at the normal or slightly elevated level that was seen in the mid-1930s and again from 1939 until Stalin's death.[19] (Of course, what was normal under Stalin was exceptional by the international standards of the twentieth century.)

Of all the means of governing exercised by Stalin, terror was the simplest and easiest to apply. The organs of state security had a much easier time fulfilling and surpassing arrest and execution quotas than the industrial and agricultural commissariats had achieving their targets for construction, manufacturing, harvests, and animal husbandry. The most sophisticated propaganda was not able to instill in society a shared vision of where it was headed or destroy many traditions. Even after anti-religious campaigns had roiled the country for years, the 1937 census showed that only 43 percent of the adults in the population called themselves nonbelievers (even though, as the authorities understood, this figure was surely inflated by those reluctant to admit their religious feelings). Using terror, these "alien ideologies" could be destroyed by destroying their adherents—for example, priests and other religious practitioners. Some historians seem to have trouble imagining the ease with which the dictatorship carried out mass repression. The limited level of centralization and the absence of total state control in many areas of socioeconomic and political life—for example, the rather tenuous

relationship between economic plans and the actual economy, the persistence of many elements of mass culture, the existence of family and professional relations, and the complex nature of interactions between the center and regional officials—are indisputable. But presuming that this imperfect control applied to every aspect of the Stalinist dictatorship distorts the true picture. The institutions of government responsible for carrying out state terror were the most centralized and totalitarian elements of the system.

The large-scale operations of 1937 and 1938 were a clear demonstration of the essence and capabilities of the Stalinist dictatorship, which achieved its full powers with the onset of the Great Terror. One decisive step along this path was the purge of high-level and mid-level party and state officials, carried out under Stalin's close supervision.[20] By physically destroying some members of the Politburo, promoting a new generation of functionaries in their place, and persecuting the close associates and relatives of his comrades-in-arms, Stalin achieved the total subjugation of the Politburo. The Politburo ceased to function as it had in the past. All important questions were decided by Stalin alone, who consulted with other Politburo members in small informal meetings on particular matters as he saw fit. The running of the country (primarily the economy) fell increasingly to the apparatus of the Council of People's Commissars. The organizational culmination of this process was Stalin's takeover of the chairmanship of the council and the restructuring of the system of supreme authority. The apparatuses of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik), or TsK VKP(b), and the Council of People's Commissars, which had been placed under the leadership of two of Stalin's newly promoted favorites, Georgy Malenkov and Nikolai Voznesensky, respectively, functioned as supercommissions, drafting resolutions to be approved by Stalin. Power became even more centralized. This period is examined in the book's final chapter.

Like any other scholarly investigation, this one was made possible by the availability of a substantial complex of sources, primarily archival. The study of archival sources and the collation of the information they contain with previously published materials was one of my main objectives in writing this book.

Among the most important archival sources are the protocols of Politburo meetings.[21] For the past fifteen years scholars have been able

to study reference copies of protocols from the former Central Party Archive, now known as the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI; the protocols are in collection [fond]17, inventory [opis'] 3). These reference copies are typed folio-sized booklets, each of which contains the protocol of one Politburo meeting, with any meeting decisions approved through polling after the fact appended to them. Politburo resolutions voted on during the meeting are arranged by date and the order in which they were considered; each has its own number.[22] Some of the Politburo decisions were designated "special file" decisions, putting them in the highest classification of confidentiality. Such decisions were recorded in special meeting protocols that are also stored at RGASPI (f. 17, op. 162). Many of these resolutions, especially those concerned with the activities of the secret police and international issues, have been widely published.[23]

The original Politburo meeting protocols, which were moved to RGASPI (f. 17, op. 163) from the Presidential Archive of the Russian Federation (APRF), have undergone less scholarly study. The original protocols are the initial versions, often handwritten, of the typed reference copies of protocols. These original protocols provide additional opportunities for studying the decision-making process followed by the Politburo. From them, for example, we can determine what changes were made to a particular resolution, in whose hand it was written, how voting was conducted, and whether there even was a vote, among other things. They are also valuable for the background materials (memorandums, reports) on which were based the decisions that were often appended to them.

Most of the original background materials associated with Politburo decisions are not yet available to researchers, however. These documents currently make up most of the collection of APRF.[24] The Politburo materials held by APRF are organized along thematic lines, with files containing copies of Politburo decisions, background materials pertaining to the decisions, and informational sources (for example, secret police reports) related to particular issues. Despite the restricted access to APRF holdings, individual historians have studied materials from this archive in recent years and shared their findings with the scholarly community.[25] Some thematic files from APRF were used in researching this book.

Allowing scholars occasional peeks at Politburo documents held by

APRF is not sufficient to satisfy the requirements for complete historical understanding. The historical portion of APRF's holdings should be made available to researchers, although the prospects of this happening in Russia anytime soon do not look good. Still, historians should not view the inaccessibility of portions of the Politburo archives as an insurmountable obstacle. The body of documents accessible in other archives, along with the tremendous number of already published materials, allows the investigation of most problems of Soviet history. For example, copies of background materials on which Politburo decisions were based, the originals of which are in the closed thematic folders in APRF, can be found in open archives of the various government bodies from which these materials were sent to the Politburo. The most notable example of this is the bountiful archive of the Council of People's Commissars, which is stored in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF, f. R-5446). The personal papers of individual Politburo members held by RGASPI—Stalin, Molotov, Mikoyan, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, Ordzhonikidze, Kuibyshev, Kirov, Kalinin, Zhdanov, and Andreev—are also extremely valuable.

One additional aspect of Politburo recordkeeping should be mentioned: the stenographic records of meetings. According to the rules governing Politburo procedures approved on 14 June 1923, the main delivered reports on questions being considered by the Politburo, supplementary reports by commissions, and the concluding remarks by those delivering reports were supposed to be included in the stenographic record of a meeting. Discussions of a given matter could be included in the record at members' discretion.[26] These guidelines were not followed. The number and length of Politburo meetings made it virtually impossible to record everything required by the rules. Certainly the growing secretiveness and closed nature of the Politburo also played a role here. The collection of original Politburo meeting protocols moved from APRF to RGASPI included twenty-eight stenograms of meetings from 1923 to 1929 and five from 1930 to 1938 (f. 17, op. 163).[27] An extensive search of the archives suggests that this collection of stenograms is probably almost complete. It has been possible thus far to identify only two stenograms, surviving as fragments, that were not included in this collection. These were stenograms of joint sessions of the Politburo and the presidium of the Central Control Commission on 30 January and 9 February 1929. It was at these sessions that the deci-

sive confrontation between the Rykov, Bukharin, and Tomsky group and the Stalinist majority took place.[28]

Although the stenograms of Politburo meetings that we do have are not plentiful, they are exceptionally valuable sources for studying power at the top levels of the party. The stenogram of the 4 November 1930 session of the Politburo, which dealt with the Syrtsov-Lominadze affair, is, for example, one of the few sources to permit a rather complete understanding of this important episode in Soviet political history.

The rarity of stenographic records of Politburo meetings and meetings of other top party-state bodies severely limits opportunities for studying the logic of political decision making and the actions and positions of particular Soviet leaders. Matters are made worse by the paucity of memoirs in both numbers and content and the almost total absence of personal journals left by either Politburo members or their assistants. Beside the famous memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev and the recently published recollections of Anastas Mikoyan, we have the fairly interesting record of discussions that the poet Feliks Chuev had with both Viacheslav Molotov and Lazar Kaganovich.[29] Rumors that Kaganovich left several volumes of memoirs, supposedly written during the final years of his life, turned out to be greatly exaggerated. The recently released book of notes by Kaganovich amounts, with a few exceptions, to little more than a rehashing of the official *Short Course on the History of the VKP(b),* works by Stalin and Lenin, and stenograms of party congresses.[30]

At this point, the only thing we have to substitute for missing stenograms of Politburo meetings and the dearth of memoirs is the correspondence between members of the Soviet leadership. It sheds light on many unofficial aspects of how party and state structures conducted themselves and on the relationships between Politburo members, allowing us a window onto the conflicts that arose within the top Soviet leadership, among other things. Several thousand letters and telegrams exchanged by the country's leaders have been preserved among the personal papers of Politburo members. A significant portion of this correspondence from the 1930s has been published.[31]

Although the correspondence between Soviet leaders should be seen as an invaluable and unique historical resource, the shortcomings of this sort of document should be recognized. The main drawback is that these letters and telegrams were both fragmentary and intermittent.

Politburo members wrote to one another only when one of them was out of town on vacation. Whether or not letters were written often depended on the state of communications between Moscow and southern vacation spots, telephone lines in particular. It is a stroke of historical luck that during the early 1930s these phone lines were unreliable. "It's hard to talk on the telephone—you have to shout, you can barely hear, although sometimes you can hear pretty well," wrote Ordzhonikidze to his wife from the south in March 1933. "I'm writing this letter and sending it with Com. Ginzburg. I tried to call you on the telephone, but I couldn't get through." A statement made by Voroshilov in a letter to Stalin dated 21 June 1932 gives us some indication of what might have been the fate of written correspondence if Politburo members had had a decent telephone line at their disposal. "Too bad that in Sochi (I don't understand why) there is no *vertushka* connection [a government direct line]; then we could get in touch directly and not via letters."[32]

Improved telephone service may be one reason that we see almost no correspondence between Politburo members after 1936, although political factors were probably more important here than technical ones. Beginning in 1937, Stalin and, following his example, many other members of the Politburo stopped taking lengthy vacations in the south, limiting themselves to time off at their dachas outside Moscow. By the late 1930s things had changed radically, and Stalin no longer felt the need for extensive consultation with his comrades-in-arms, and they were even less inclined toward frank discussion. As a result, fewer and fewer sources shed light on the unofficial aspects of high-level Soviet politics of this and subsequent periods. Nevertheless, despite the many lacunae and the limited access to a number of archival collections, the sources that are available to historians of the Soviet period are extensive enough that it will take a great deal more time and effort to assimilate them. This book is just one step along that path.

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Abbreviations

APRF	Presidential Archive of the Russian Federation
Com.	Comrade
GARF	State Archive of the Russian Federation
Gosplan	State Planning Commission
Komsomol	All-Union Leninist Youth League
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
OGPU	Unified State Political Administration (state security)
ORPO	department of leading party organs [of the Central Committee of the VKP(b)]
RGASPI	Russian State Archive of Social and Political History
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic
SNK, Sovnarkom	Council of People's Commissars
STO	Labor and Defense Council
TsK VKP(b)	Central Committee of the VKP(b)
TsKK	Central Control Commission [of the VKP(b)]
VKP(b)	All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik)
VSNKh	Supreme Economic Council

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Master of the House

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1 The Stalinization of the Politburo
1928–1930

AFTER LENIN'S DEATH the most important outcome of the power struggle among Bolshevik leaders was the formation of a majority faction within the Politburo that went on to become the Stalinist faction. Once Stalin managed to eliminate almost all of the prominent revolutionary figures who had been a part of Lenin's circle, he became the strongest figure in the Politburo and began to set the "general line" the party would follow. This was the main sign of the Stalinization of the Politburo. While a number of the traditions and procedures of collective leadership remained in place, from this point forward the Politburo had a leader who was concentrating power in his own hands.

Although it is possible to point to milestones along the way, the Stalinization of the Politburo did not happen in a single step, nor was it predetermined. Even the defeat of the Rykov-Bukharin group in April 1929 was not a decisive victory for Stalin. Ensuring victory demanded further efforts to crush leaders of the "right deviation" and, most important, rightist ideology, which life's realities had led many Communists to embrace, whether or not they were consciously aware of it. That the fight was not yet over was confirmed by political events of 1930: new attacks against the rightists, fabricated cases against "terrorist organizations," the castigation of Sergei Syrtsov and Vissarion Lominadze, and reshufflings at the highest echelons of party and state power. The elimination

of Rykov, the last of the rightist leaders, from the Politburo marked the definitive Stalinization of that body. This occurred a year and a half after the Rykov-Bukharin group had been destroyed.

FORMATION OF THE STALINIST MAJORITY

The formation of a majority faction was a natural outcome of the fierce struggle for leadership among Lenin's successors. The key aspects of this struggle are well known and have been the subject of extensive scholarly investigation. Initially, from the end of 1923 through 1924, most members of the Politburo were united in their struggle against Lev Trotsky, whose political ambitions were a source of great alarm and resistance. A majority faction was established to coordinate this fight, in August 1924. The *semyorka* (group of seven) that headed it included six members of the Politburo (everyone except Trotsky)—Bukharin, Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, Rykov, Stalin, and Tomsky—as well as Valerian Kuibyshev, chairman of the Central Control Commission (TsKK) of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik), or VKP(b). The semyorka ruled the party, issuing ready-made decisions at official meetings of the Politburo (at which Trotsky was present). Once the former allies had removed Trotsky from power, they began to clash among themselves. Now a Politburo majority took shape in opposition to Zinoviev and Kamenev, who had previously formed a questionable alliance with Trotsky. By the end of 1926, all three leaders of the opposition had been removed from the Politburo. As a result of these changes, the Politburo membership included Bukharin, Mikhail Kalinin, Molotov, Yan Rudzutak, Rykov, Stalin, Tomsky, and Kliment Voroshilov. In November 1929, the important post of Central Control Commission chairman was taken over by Grigory "Sergo" Ordzhonikidze (party rules precluded this post from being held by a Politburo member). In December of 1927, Kuibyshev was made a full member of the Politburo.

In the 1930s, most of these men were part of Stalin's inner circle. It would be incorrect, however, to say that they all started out as loyal Stalinists. The alignment of forces within the Politburo on the eve of Stalin's clashes with the so-called rightists (Rykov, Bukharin, and Tomsky)—clashes that settled once and for all who would come out on top—was more complex. The collective leadership that had taken shape by the beginning of 1928 was based on a division of labor and a degree

of rivalry among top party and government leaders. For this reason, Politburo members remained relatively independent political figures. To a certain extent, this was also true of those at the middle of the pyramid of power, members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, or TsK VKP(b), whose votes affected how leadership problems within the Politburo were resolved. Something akin to a patron-client relationship began to develop between members of the Politburo and members of the Central Committee. Taken together, all these organizational details and personal ties constituted a serious obstacle on Stalin's path toward establishing a dictatorship.

The clash that took place within the Politburo in the summer of 1927 shows the mechanisms of collective leadership. The breaking of diplomatic relations with Great Britain, the murder of the Soviet ambassador to Poland, and reprisals against Communists in China (which raised doubts about the "united front" policy) all provoked alarm and mutual recriminations among Politburo members. Letters that Viacheslav Molotov sent to Stalin, who was vacationing in the south, suggest that the primary disagreements within the leadership revolved around the policies related to China and Great Britain and the expulsion of opposition leaders from the Central Committee—Trotsky and Zinoviev were becoming increasingly active. Members of the Politburo conducted themselves independently in these disagreements, forming diverse and unexpected (given subsequent events) tactical coalitions. For example, Ordzhonikidze, Voroshilov, Rykov, and Rudzutak criticized the policy being conducted in China (Molotov complained to Stalin in a letter dated 4 July 1927 that Voroshilov "is going so far as to express sweeping disparagement of 'your leadership over the past two years'"). At the same time, Molotov and Bukharin, with Stalin's support, defended the correctness of the course being pursued.[1] The votes were evenly divided on whether or not Trotsky and Zinoviev should be immediately expelled from the Central Committee. Kalinin, Rykov, Ordzhonikidze, and Voroshilov felt that this question should not be decided until the party congress. Stalin, who was out of town, protested in vain. On 20 June 1927, a bare majority voted to expel Trotsky and Zinoviev, but only after Stalin demanded that his vote be counted in absentia and Kalinin joined those in favor of immediate expulsion.[2] This decision was implemented after a lengthy delay. The opposition leaders were not expelled at the next Central Committee plenum, which took place at the

end of July and the beginning of August but in October. In the middle of the conflicts, Molotov sent Stalin an anxious letter, on 4 July 1927. "The worst part of it is the situation within the 'semyorka.' On the opposition, on China, on ARK [Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee], more or less clear divisions can already be seen, and a single vote will wind up being decisive [. . .]. I'm increasingly wondering whether you may need to come back to M[oscow] ahead of schedule. This may be undesirable from the point of view of your treatment, but you yourself see the situation [. . .]. The signs are bad, things may not hold. I haven't talked to anyone about this, but I feel things aren't going well."[3]

In 1927, Viacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov appeared generally to be Stalin's most reliable and absolute supporter in the Politburo. The son of a shop clerk in Vyatka Province, he had entered the party in 1906 at the age of sixteen. Molotov was a simple but hardworking Soviet functionary who in the 1920s held the important post of secretary of the Central Committee. That was when he made his political choice to cast his lot with Stalin. Molotov's unconditional loyalty was one of Stalin's greatest advantages in the struggle for power. This struggle erupted with new force in 1928, after the defeat of the united opposition of Trotsky and Zinoviev, when members of the Politburo lost the common enemy that had united them for several years.

Personal ambition and pretensions to leadership fueled this discord, but so did matters of principle. Facing serious economic difficulties in 1928, especially in the countryside, the Politburo embarked on a path of repressive—or, to use the contemporary name, emergency—measures, including the forced expropriation of grain from the peasants and the suppression of private merchants. At first there was no disagreement over this *chrezvychaishchina* (emergency regime) within the Politburo. But when the emergency measures not only exacerbated the situation but seemed poised to turn into a permanent policy, two groups within the party leadership came into conflict. The first, led by Stalin, insisted on continuing the emergency measures. The second, represented by Rykov, Bukharin, and Tomsky, demanded a retreat from the emergency regime, even at the risk of certain political and economic consequences.

During this final stage in the struggle for power, Stalin and his supporters had important advantages. They held key posts within the party apparatus. Their battle cries for an "offensive against the *kulaks*" and in

favor of forced industrialization struck a chord with a significant portion of party officials. But this did not mean that Stalin's victory was inevitable. Among mid-level functionaries, who constituted a majority in the Central Committee and in the Politburo itself, the prevailing mood favored unity. Almost everyone was worried about new clashes, not only because a critical situation was developing in the country, creating a growing threat to the regime itself, but also because conflict at the top endangered the existing balance of power and undermined the system of collective leadership that was advantageous for mid-level politicians. A schism within the Politburo would force them to immediately take sides and be drawn into the fight, placing their careers at risk if their side lost.

Those members of the Politburo who supported Stalin did not view the Rykov-Bukharin group the same way they had viewed previous opposition forces, such as Trotsky and Zinoviev. Even during the bitter conflict, Bukharin, Rykov, Tomsky, and Nikolai Uglanov tended to be viewed as "one of us." The rightists were less inflexible and tried to act within the framework of party legality, not making categorical demands about Politburo staffing changes, which is why they were labeled a "deviation" rather than an "opposition." Before their fall, the rightists had good personal relationships with many members of the Politburo, with whom they had shared years of merciless struggle against a common enemy, the Trotsky-Zinoviev opposition.

All of these circumstances forced Stalin to act cautiously against the Bukharin group in 1928 and at the beginning of 1929 and keep an eye on the mood of his comrades-in-arms. We can see this in letters he wrote to Molotov in August 1928. "I was at Sergo's. He's in a good mood. He's standing firm and decisively supports the TsK line against the waverers and vacillators. [. . .] It appears that Andreev visited Sergo and talked to him. Sergo believes that Andreev firmly supports the TsK line. Apparently Tomsky tried (at the plenum) to 'corrupt' him [. . .] but he wasn't able to 'lure' Andreev." And, "Under no circumstances should Tomsky (or anyone else) be allowed to 'turn' Kuibyshev or Mikoyan."[4]

This expression of confidence in Ordzhonikidze's firm stance was probably calculated to encourage Molotov, but it did not reflect Ordzhonikidze's actual frame of mind, which was more complex. In a letter to Stalin dated 18 August 1928, Ordzhonikidze himself demonstrated an attitude that was fully "conciliatory." After informing Stalin about his conversation with Bukharin, who had shared his concerns about the

current policy and assured Ordzhonikidze that he wanted to avoid a confrontation within the Politburo, Ordzhonikidze wrote, "Even now, in my opinion, he wants to restore good relations with you, but he doesn't know how. I think everything possible should be done to avoid losing him, and without him Al[eksei Rykov] will instantly stop his grumbling."[5] Based on the evidence, it appears that Ordzhonikidze had a sincere desire to preserve the status quo in the Politburo. Despite the obvious escalation of the situation, he wrote the following in a letter to Rykov in November 1928: "I am begging you to try to reconcile Bukharin and Stalin [. . .]. It is ridiculous, of course, to talk about 'replacing' you, or Bukharin or Tomsky. That would be crazy. It appears that the relationship between Stalin and Bukharin has significantly deteriorated, but we have to do everything we can to reconcile them. This is possible [. . .]. In general, Aleksei, we have to be incredibly careful in dealing with any issues that could trigger a 'fistfight.' The greatest restraint is needed to keep a fight from breaking out."[6]

Signs that many Politburo members still held the rightists in high regard were evident even after the Bukharin-Rykov-Tomsky group suffered their decisive defeat in April 1929. For example, in June 1929 the Politburo was deciding on a post for Bukharin, who had by then been replaced as editor of *Pravda*. Stalin insisted on appointing Bukharin people's commissar of education. This was an honorable but dangerous form of political exile for Bukharin. The post of education commissar looked like an important and prestigious party assignment. Stalin had proposed this solution, feigning impartiality and a readiness to reestablish a working relationship with Bukharin. In actuality, things were quite different. Maximally removed from real political power, the Education Commissariat was subject to constant attacks and criticism from party functionaries, the All-Union Leninist Youth League (Komsomol) leadership, labor unions, and other quarters. Nor was the situation within the commissariat simple. As education commissar, then, Bukharin would be drawn into a maelstrom of endless arguments, squabbles, and public censure, which would guarantee his being cut off from the center of political power. Understanding this, Bukharin resisted, and made an unexpected move—he asked to be given the unpretentious post of head of the Scientific-Technical Administration of the Supreme Economic Council. This demotion would have made Bukharin's disgrace and Stalin's true aspiration to drive him out of the party leadership

more explicit. Unlike the post of education commissar, this post guaranteed a relatively peaceful and easy job and would have left Bukharin time to follow high-level policy decisions.

Despite Stalin's objections, the Politburo supported Bukharin. We know what happened from a letter dated 8 June 1929 from Voroshilov to Ordzhonikidze: "Bukharin begged everyone not to appoint him to the Commissariat of Education and proposed and then insisted on the job as administrator of science and technology. I supported him in that, as did several other people, and because we were a united majority, we pushed it through (against Koba [Stalin])."[7] Stalin had to deal with the possibility of such conflicts and the prevailing inclination toward solidarity. He acted carefully, publicly supporting unity while delivering stealthy blows behind the scenes. In the end, his ruthlessness, decisiveness, and cunning led to his victory, as did a number of serious political blunders on the part of the rightists, especially Bukharin. The entire sequence of intrigues and clashes within the Politburo and the party apparatus over the course of almost two years fully supports the arguments of historians who assert that Stalin achieved victory by playing the role of advocate of the golden mean, impressing others with his pragmatism and his "calm tone and quiet voice."[8]

There is reason to believe that Stalin gained the loyalty of some Politburo members through blackmail. The Ordzhonikidze archive includes pre-revolutionary police records, which he received in December 1928 and March 1929 (when he was serving as chairman of the Central Control Commission), indicating that Kalinin and Rudzutak gave candid testimony while in the custody of the tsarist police—testimony that enabled the police to make further arrests within underground revolutionary organizations.[9] Such materials could well have served as the basis for expulsion from the party or even arrest. It is probably not a coincidence that these documents surfaced at this decisive stage of the confrontation with the rightists.

Outplaying his opponents in political intrigue, Stalin transformed himself into Politburo leader. He no longer faced opposition from any in the first circle of Soviet leaders who had begun the fight over Lenin's legacy. The positions of rank-and-file members of the Politburo and the Central Committee, who were no longer able to maneuver between different centers of influence, were also seriously undermined. The former balance of power at the highest echelons of power had been destroyed.

Nonetheless, Stalin's own position could not be considered absolutely secure. His political future depended on the success of the program he had advocated throughout his march to victory. In 1928 and 1929 this had been the program of forced industrialization and the strong-arm amalgamation of peasants into kolkhozes.

Stalin's ultraleft policies plunged the country into what amounted to a state of civil war. A particularly critical situation developed in the countryside. The response there to forcible grain collection and collectivization, accompanied by mass arrests of peasants and the ruin of their farms, was violent protest. According to Unified State Political Administration (OGPU) figures for 1926–1927, those two years had seen a total of 63 riots in the countryside. The number rose to more than 1,300 (involving 244,000 participants) for the single year of 1929.[10] For the month of January 1930 alone, the number of riots slightly exceeded 400 (approximately 110,000 participants), in February it reached 1,066 (214,000 participants), and in March it reached 6,512 (1,400,000 participants).[11] The wave of rebellion in the countryside could be subdued only through harsh repression and political maneuvering. The frightened authorities promised to fix the "distortion of the party line in the kolkhoz movement." While uprisings on the scale seen in the countryside during the first months of 1930 did not recur after that time, the kolkhoz adventure undermined the productive capability of agricultural areas and led to "food difficulties" and famine throughout the country.

The other leg of Stalin's policy, forced industrialization, wreaked havoc from the start. The efforts were devastating and inefficient. As a result of ill-conceived expenditures of resources, many hundreds of millions of rubles went to construction projects that were never completed. Manufacturing facilities, especially those that were serving the needs of the population, cut back production owing to shortages of equipment and raw materials. The cost of production went up, and quality went way down. Like the agricultural sector of the economy, the industrial sector was gripped by crisis during the summer of 1930. One of the outcomes of this crisis was the breakdown of the monetary system and the complete bankruptcy of the government. The enormous budget deficit was covered through price increases, the introduction of compulsory loans, and, most important, the printing of paper rubles. Over the course of twenty-one months—from the autumn of 1928 until July

1930—1.6 billion rubles went into circulation, even though only 1.3 billion were supposed to be issued for the entire period of the First Five-Year Plan.[12] The fall in value of the ruble led to the hoarding of goods and the naturalization of barter. In open-air markets, peasants sold produce to city dwellers not for money but in exchange for soap, thread, sugar, textiles, footwear, and other everyday products. Since paper money was constantly dropping in value, the population amassed coins, which still contained some silver. The monetary system bifurcated, with prices depending on whether purchasers were using coins or paper money; in many places sellers refused to accept paper money. Vast sums of silver languished in money boxes. Despite the minting of new coins, mostly out of scarce imported silver, there were never enough in circulation. The country had a coin crisis.

The breakdown of agriculture, the channeling of tremendous resources into heavy industry, and the allocation of enormous amounts of food for export all led to a sharp drop in the standard of living. Even in large cities, which the government viewed as its main base and which were given distribution priority, huge lines formed for food, which was rationed. The price of food sold on the free market was out of the reach of the typical consumer.

Inevitably, the flip side of people's dissatisfaction with the government was an increase in the popularity of leaders of the right deviation, who had warned of the heavy price that would be paid for repression of the peasants and accelerated industrialization. The publication of an article by Stalin in March 1930 entitled "Dizzying Success"—in which he was forced, in light of pressures created by the peasant uprisings, to recognize that wholesale forcible collectivization had been a mistake—brought a wave of criticism down on him. An eyewitness of events, the trade union activist B. G. Kozelev, wrote in his diary on 14 March 1930: "At Mostrikotazh Factory no. 3 in Mos[cow], one worker gave a speech, stating, 'St[alin] wrote a correct article, but too late. Bukharin wrote the same thing half a year ago and now it's being done Bukharin's way. Ilyich [Lenin] was right in saying, 'Don't trust St[alin], he'll ruin you.'[13] Everyone there was so stunned by the unexpectedness of it that they didn't know how to react."[14] Such moods were widespread, and the country's top leadership undoubtedly knew it. In a letter to Ordzhonikidze dated 17 September 1930, for example, E. M. Yaroslavsky noted that "conversations with workers at meetings, their notes and

questions, letters to the editors of *Pravda,* reports [*svodki*]—everything indicates a tremendous strain. Of course there is greater awareness; the enthusiasm of workers at the forefront, shock workers, is strong; the successes of workers at the forefront have been colossal. But there are many whose moods are not so good because of the supply situation. The mood has soured. You can hear workers reminiscing out loud about how things were three years ago, when you could buy as much *chow* as you wanted *freely.*"[15]

Under such circumstances, the predominant tools used in implementing the great leap leftward were violence and mass repression, as mandated by the general line. In 1930 more than 330,000 people were arrested and 208,000 convicted on the basis of cases initiated by the OGPU. Of those convicted, 20,000 were shot. This is approximately the same number convicted and shot based on cases brought by the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage (VChK, better known as the Cheka) and the OGPU for the entire nine-year period of 1921–1929. More than 550,000 kulaks were sent into exile in 1930.[16] The prevalence of rightist tendencies within the party was the main reason for the party purge conducted around that time. From 1929 through 1931 approximately 250,000 people were expelled from the Communist Party, a significant proportion of whom were paying the price of involvement in the right deviation with their party membership cards.[17]

Despite Stalin's commitment to violence as the primary method for solving the multiplying problems, occasionally he would retreat and take a more roundabout approach. It is evident, for example, that he was careful in shaping the new system of relationships within the Politburo. Even though political victory over the rightists had been achieved by April 1929, Bukharin, Tomsky, and Rykov were removed from the Politburo gradually and with a degree of caution. Bukharin was removed from the Politburo in November 1929. Tomsky was not elected to a new Politburo term after the 16th Party Congress in July 1930. Rykov was included in the newly constituted Politburo and remained there for several more months, until December 1930. But Stalin was not able to permit himself too much caution. Policy failures strengthened the position of the rightists. Circumstances could be envisioned that might lead to a shifting of power within the leadership. This would have been all the more natural as Rykov continued to hold key posts within

the party-state apparatus. The Rykov factor and the fate of the chairmanship of the Council of People's Commissars (SNK) were among the most significant political problems facing Stalin at this stage.

Aleksei Ivanovich Rykov was one of the oldest and most distinguished members of the party, which he had joined in 1898 at the age of seventeen. Abandoning his study of law at Kazan University, he became a professional underground revolutionary. He took part in the revolution of 1905–1907 and was repeatedly arrested and exiled. During the first Soviet government, Rykov held the post of people's commissar of internal affairs. In the Civil War he was in charge of managing the economy and supplying the Red Army. In his Civil War work Rykov, as one scholar noted, "appears to us more as a practical man, carefully studying what was going on around him, not giving in to extremism, ready to compromise."[18]

After Lenin's death, Rykov replaced him as chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. As head of the government, Rykov held significant power. It was difficult for Stalin to control the council, especially since traditions established in the 1920s gave the organs of government a great deal of independence. That Rykov was an ethnic Russian with a peasant background (and therefore a more fitting leader for peasant Russia than were Stalin and his Caucasian comrades-in-arms) contributed to his stature.

Having more experience and self-restraint, Rykov did not commit the sorts of naive political blunders that, for example, Bukharin had. Despite his political defeat in April 1929, Rykov tried to conduct himself with dignity, albeit circumspectly. He condemned his own past mistakes in speeches at various party meetings but made an effort to save political face, never crossing a certain line. He tried to maintain good relations with Stalin's numerous commissars and managed to steer clear of conflict by resisting obvious pressure from the Central Committee apparatus. But whenever possible, he showed his mettle, asserting his rights as head of state.

In early February 1930, for example, the Central Committee's Organizational Bureau (Orgburo) decided to dismiss an employee of the Council of People's Commissars. When Rykov received a document that included this decision, he sent an official letter to the Central Committee secretary, A. P. Smirnov, stating, "I will not dispute this decision, but I urge you in the future to dismiss SNK employees with my knowl-

edge or the knowledge of my deputies."[19] Two months later, on 3 April 1930, Rykov reacted strongly to a proposal by Smirnov, who was overseeing the Central Committee department of agitation and mass campaigns, that a special committee be established for printing and publishing. "In connection with your letter [. . .] concerning the Committee on Publishing Issues, I am expressing (along with the SNK) my categorical opposition to the establishment of such a committee within the Sovnarkom [SNK] of the Union of the USSR. The Sovnarkom can render a determination about the allotment of paper for various users in the course of its normal functioning, just as this is done in regard to the distribution of construction and other such materials, without the creation of a special Committee."[20]

Rykov's behavior at a conference of the Ural Province party organization in Sverdlovsk in June 1930, to which he (as a member of the Politburo) had been sent to present a report on the eve of the upcoming party congress, provides a clear picture of his position. The leadership of the Ural Province committee had arranged for a display of public criticism of Rykov for his "rightist errors" to take place at the conference, possibly on its own initiative but more likely on orders from Moscow. Several specially rehearsed orators made speeches featuring harsh allegations and calls for "repentance" from Rykov. He, however, rebuffed them. In his closing remarks on 4 June he said, "I am here to speak on behalf of the Politburo, and the report I delivered was delivered by me as a member of the Politburo, empowered to defend the TsK line at your conference. [. . .] Speeches by several orators sounded as if they were made not in response to a report by a member of the Politburo, an official Politburo speaker, but in response to a report simply made by Rykov, who, during a particular period [. . .] had a disagreement with the TsK majority and the majority within the Politburo."[21] One delegate to the conference, who had demanded an accounting of Rykov's work and his repentance, was the object of a particularly harsh rebuke.

> Com. Rumiantsev, and he is not a rank-and-file member of the party, should weigh his words. We are members of the ruling party. I am chairman of the Sovnarkom of the [Soviet] Union, a member of the Politburo, and if after my statement that I voted for the resolutions and took part in the drafting of some of them [. . .] if after seven months of political, economic, and council work [. . .] a person comes here and asks me, "How do you feel about the general line of the party?" then there is only

> one thing I can say in response: I absolutely do not understand what basis there could be for such a question. The danger is absolutely clear to me. Because the very fact that I am being addressed as if I were the leader of some sort of splinter group [. . .] suggests to the party the certainty that such a splinter group, created within the party with my participation, exists. Why sow such doubts? [. . .] And if someone incorrectly states such things, he is inflicting a severe blow to the unity of the party. [. . .] Therefore I must demand an explanation of why, on the basis of what findings, Com. Rumiantsev is able to present me with questions as if he is talking to the leader of some existing organization.[22]

Having demonstrated his resoluteness and confidence, Rykov drew an appropriate reaction from the auditorium. His speech was repeatedly interrupted by applause and ended, according to the stenographic record, "with a lengthy and thunderous ovation," as befitted a speech by one of the leaders of the party.

To ensure that such scenes were not repeated, sowing confusion among party officials, Stalin had to remove Rykov from the highest post in the government. But as usual in such situations, Stalin did not rush headlong to do so.

NEW ATTACKS AGAINST THE RIGHTISTS

There is substantial evidence that Stalin began working on a solution to the problem of the rightists, including the replacement of Rykov, immediately after the 16th Party Congress. Initially his attack centered on the Conference of Deputies, which was made up of the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and the Labor and Defense Council (STO)—Rykov—and his deputies.

The USSR constitution did not provide for the creation of a Conference of Deputies. Rykov and his deputies at the Council of People's Commissars created this working government body in January 1926, and a decision of the Politburo legalized it in May 1926. The conference was established to develop operating plans for the Council of People's Commissars and the Labor and Defense Council, put together agendas for their meetings, and review "administrative issues that do not need to be submitted to the SNK and STO."[23] Over time, the Conference of Deputies became quite influential. Convening weekly in the meeting hall of the two composite councils, it dealt expeditiously with many impor-

tant issues. In addition to Rykov and his deputies, the Conference of Deputies came to include the heads of key government agencies: the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), the people's commissars of finance, agriculture, commerce, and transport, and the chairmen of the Supreme Economic Council, State Planning Commission (Gosplan), and Gosbank. Formally, Stalin, Kalinin, Molotov, and Voroshilov were all members of the conference. All administrative orders coming out of the conference regarding the admission of new members, the drafting of agendas, and such were issued by Rykov personally.[24]

On several occasions during the summer and fall of 1930, Stalin managed to overturn decisions by the Conference of Deputies related to a variety of questions. One of the most contentious issues was the coin shortage.

The breakdown of the financial system and the disappearance of metal coins from circulation was both a serious economic problem and a serious political problem, prompting widespread discontent. The heads of the Finance Commissariat and Gosbank proposed increasing the release of coins into circulation. In February 1930, N. P. Briukhanov, the finance commissar, warned the Council of People's Commissars of the difficulties surrounding the minting of silver coins and the need to purchase imported silver. He proposed producing coins out of nickel rather than silver. At the time, these measures were rejected.[25] However, the worsening financial crisis necessitated a return to this question in the summer of 1930. On 18 July, on Briukhanov's initiative, the Conference of Deputies adopted a decision to accelerate the minting of bronze coins and to submit a proposal to the Politburo to approve additional expenditures for the purchase of silver overseas, for which an additional four million rubles were to be allocated. The conference also assigned the OGPU the task of organizing a "decisive fight against the malevolent hoarding of and speculation on silver coins."[26]

Stalin decided to use the situation to his own advantage. He suddenly showed a keen interest in the coin problem and took matters into his own hands. First, Stalin condemned the proposal to mint additional coins from imported silver. On 20 July 1930 the Politburo overturned the proposal that had come out of the Conference of Deputies.[27] The only methods that would now be applied to the problem were repressive ones. At the end of July, a campaign was launched in the Soviet press ty-

ing the coin crisis to an underhanded plot by the class enemy. Newspapers featured stories of numerous arrests of coin speculators and the employees of commercial establishments, banks, and other institutions assisting them.[28] On 2 August 1930, Stalin sent the OGPU chairman, Viacheslav Menzhinsky, the following inquiry: "Can you send a memo on the results of the struggle (through [O]GPU channels) against the small-change speculators (how much silver was confiscated and for which period; what institutions are most involved in this; the role of foreign countries and their agents; how many people have been arrested, what sort of people, and so on). Report also on your thoughts about what measures to take for further struggle."[29] The inquiry was answered within a few days. On 9 August, once he had familiarized himself with the issue and learned that only 280,000 rubles in change had been confiscated, Stalin sent Menzhinsky a written reprimand for his poor performance.[30]

Stalin spelled out a more detailed characterization of the problem, as he understood it, in a letter to Molotov. He wrote that the situation taking shape was the consequence of mistakes by Yury Piatakov, head of Gosbank, and Briukhanov, head of the Finance Commissariat, who had allowed themselves to be controlled by "specialist-wreckers" from these organs of government. "It is thus important to a) fundamentally purge the Finance and Gosbank bureaucracy, despite the wails of dubious Communists like Briukhanov-Piatakov; b) definitely shoot two or three dozen wreckers from these apparatuses, including several dozen common cashiers; c) continue OGPU operations throughout the USSR that are aimed at seizing small change (silver)."[31] Soon afterward, on 20 August 1930, the Politburo assigned the OGPU to "apply stronger measures in the fight against speculators and those concealing stashes of coins, including those within Soviet-cooperative enterprises."[32] On 15 October 1930 the Politburo relieved Piatakov and Briukhanov of their duties.[33]

In taking control of the campaign against coin speculators, Stalin was pursuing a number of goals. First, he was yet again accusing Rykov and his apparatus of being incompetent. Second, he was demonstrating his own decisiveness and effectiveness. Third, he was using the financial crisis as an excuse for escalating the campaign against "bourgeois specialist-wreckers" that had started with the Shakhty trial in 1928 and was an important instrument in the effort to discredit the "rightist Commu-

nists." In the mid-1930s this campaign—as evidenced by the coin affair—took a new turn. By attacking "wreckers" from among "bourgeois specialists," Stalin was shifting blame for the many failures in the economy and the sharp drop in the standard of living caused by the policy of the great break (*veliky perelom*). He was also accusing rightist leaders and a number of top Soviet administrators of having ties to and even aiding and abetting the wreckers. Such accusations were an important part of the political game that Stalin was playing in the highest echelons of power.

To aid in the fabrication of a case alleging an extensive network of counterrevolutionary wrecker organizations, during the summer of 1930 the OGPU began arresting high-level specialists from the central agencies charged with running the economy. Those arrested were primarily well-known academics and experts who had played a prominent role during the years of the New Economic Policy (NEP). Among them were Nikolai Kondratiev, a former socialist revolutionary, a deputy to the minister for food supply in the Provisional Government, who had worked in Soviet agricultural agencies and headed the Finance Commissariat's Institute of Economic Trends (Koniunkturny institut); Professors N. P. Makarov and A. V. Chaianov, who held positions in the RSFSR Agriculture Commissariat; Professor L. N. Yurovsky, a member of the collegium of the Finance Commissariat; Professor P. A. Sadyrin, a former member of the Central Committee of the People's Freedom Party who had joined the management of Gosbank; and V. G. Groman, an experienced statistician and economist who until 1921 had been a Menshevik and who worked in Gosplan and the USSR Central Statistical Administration. Another prominent Menshevik, V. A. Bazarov, had followed a career path similar to Groman's and since 1921 had worked at Gosplan. N. N. Sukhanov, who worked in economic agencies in the 1920s and in the Soviet trade offices in Berlin and Paris, was the author of the famous *Zapiski o revoliutsii* (Notes about revolution).[34] On 10 October 1917, Sukhanov's apartment had been the site of the famous meeting of the Bolshevik Central Committee (his wife was a Bolshevik) where the decision was made to organize an armed revolt.

Through the efforts of the OGPU and with Stalin's attentive guidance, materials were assembled demonstrating the existence of a network of anti-Soviet organizations that were supposedly united under the "Peasant Labor Party," chaired by Nikolai Kondratiev, and the "Industrial

Party," led by Professor L. K. Ramzin. In addition to testimony about preparations to overthrow the Soviet government and ties to foreign anti-Soviet organizations and intelligence agencies, evidence of contacts with rightists and other members of the country's leadership and of the "wreckers'" desire to include rightist leaders in their government after the overthrow was beaten out of those arrested. Stalin intended to make this evidence available to a wide circle of party functionaries. At his request, on 10 August 1930 the Politburo adopted a decision to circulate the testimony of those arrested in the case of the "Peasant Labor Party" to all members of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission, as well as to "managerial personnel in the economic agencies."[35] However, Molotov, who was handling Central Committee matters in Stalin's absence, decided not to circulate Makarov's testimony, which included allegations that, along with the finance commissar Grigorii Sokolnikov, Rykov, and others, the "wreckers" planned to install Kalinin in the "coalition government." On 11 August, Molotov wrote to Stalin, who was vacationing in the south, that Makarov was "intentionally smearing" Kalinin.[36] Stalin was adamant. In his reply to Molotov he insisted that all "testimony" be circulated. "There can be no doubt that Kalinin has sinned. [. . .] The Central Committee must definitely be informed about this in order to teach Kalinin never to get mixed up with such rascals again."[37] In another letter to Molotov, on 2 September, Stalin again asserted that the "wreckers" from the Groman-Kondratiev group "indisputably" helped Rykov, and Kalinin wound up being involved in the matter through his subordinates.[38] As a result of Stalin's insistence, on 6 September the Politburo adopted a decision to circulate additional testimony by Kondratiev, Groman, Sukhanov, and others.[39]

Once he had achieved his objective of having the "testimony" circulated, Stalin gave the already obedient Kalinin a scare for added effect and, in so doing, won the attention of other Politburo members. But the main targets of this operation were the rightists—primarily Rykov. Furthermore, the fact that the rightists were only indirectly implicated in sabotage probably did not seem sufficient to Stalin. The OGPU began to investigate another "lead" indicating direct involvement of the party opposition in the activities of the "underground parties" and their "terrorist plans." Several arrested instructors from the Military Academy gave testimony revealing a "military plot" supposedly headed by the commander of Leningrad Military District, Mikhail Tukhachevsky,

who had ties to the party rightists. The OGPU asserted that the plotters were preparing to take over power and kill Stalin. On 10 September 1930, Stalin received all of these materials from Menzhinsky, who wrote, "It is dangerous to arrest the participants in this group one at a time. There seem to be two ways out: either we immediately arrest the most active participants, or we wait for your arrival, taking undercover measures so as not to be caught off guard. I feel I should point out that all insurrectional groups are maturing very quickly these days, and the latter option involves a certain risk."[40] Stalin was not frightened by the OGPU chief's warnings. Two weeks later, on 24 September, Stalin wrote to Ordzhonikidze:

> Take a look right away at the testimony by Kakurin and Troitsky [two arrested military instructors] and think about ways to liquidate this unpleasant business. This material, as you see, is top secret: only Molotov, I, and now you know about it. I don't know whether or not Klim knows about it. It would seem that Tukh[achev]sky was captured by anti-Soviet elements and was given quite a working over, also by rightist anti-Soviet elements. That's what the materials imply. Is it possible? Of course, if it can't be disproved, then it's possible. It appears that the rightists would go as far as military dictatorship if it will get rid of the TsK, of kolkhozes and sovkhozes, of a Bolshevik pace of industrialization. [. . .] The Kondratiev-Sukhanov-Bukharin Party—that's what we have here. What a business. . . . We can't put an end to this business the usual way (immediate arrest, etc.). We have to think things through thoroughly. It would be better to postpone the solution Menzhinsky suggests until the middle of October, when we will all be on hand. Talk to Molotov about all this when you're in Moscow.[41]

Stalin's letter shows that he knew the true value of this latest OGPU fabrication. Otherwise it is difficult to explain his good-natured willingness to "postpone the solution" for several more weeks, leaving the "conspirators" free, despite the dangers that Menzhinsky had signaled. Most likely, Stalin did not intend to arrest the army generals. As with Kalinin, this was purely a preventive measure as far as the military was concerned. Subsequent events confirm this. Upon returning from vacation, Stalin, together with Ordzhonikidze and Voroshilov, conducted simultaneous interrogations of Tukhachevsky, Kakurin, and Troitsky, apparently in mid-October. Tukhachevsky was pronounced innocent.[42]

Having abandoned the investigation of a military plot (undoubtedly on Stalin's orders), the OGPU continued fabricating cases concerning

"terrorist organizations" and their connections with "rightist Communists." Correspondingly, moral responsibility for abetting "terrorism" and plotting Stalin's physical removal was placed on the shoulders of rightist leaders, primarily Bukharin. Upon returning to Moscow, Stalin stated as much to Bukharin over the telephone. Several months later, at a joint meeting of the Politburo and the Central Control Commission presidium on 4 November 1930, Stalin himself related how this had transpired: "On October 14 of this year, Com. Bukharin called me at my office, where I was talking with Coms. Kuibyshev and Molotov. Com. Bukharin demanded that I have a heart-to-heart talk with him about certain 'important,' in his opinion, issues. I replied that I had nothing to discuss with him heart to heart. I told him that it would be strange to have a heart-to-heart talk with him when he, Com. Bukharin, was cultivating terrorists among right deviationists through his unbridled personal agitation against Stalin. I alluded to the Smirnov-Orlov (right deviationists) terrorist group, which has direct ties to Uglanov, and therefore with Bukharin."[43] On 14 October, Bukharin had answered these charges in an emotional letter: "Koba. After our telephone conversation I immediately left work in a state of despair. Not because you had 'scared' me—you will not scare me and you will not intimidate me. But because those monstrous accusations that you threw at me are clear evidence of the existence of some sort of devilish, vile, and low *provocation,* that you believe, on which you are building your policy, and *that will lead to no good,* even if you were to destroy me physically as thoroughly as you are destroying me politically."[44] Bukharin demanded a face-to-face meeting and explanation from Stalin. Stalin stated that he was prepared only for official explanations in front of the Politburo.

On 20 October the conflict between Stalin and Bukharin was discussed in a closed session of the Politburo. As might have been expected, the Politburo supported Stalin, adopting a decision "To support Stalin's refusal to have a 'heart-to-heart' talk with Bukharin as correct. To propose that Com. Bukharin place all questions that interest him before the TsK."[45] Bukharin's assertive behavior, however—he accused Stalin of violating the truce they had reached, and, in the end, walked out of the session—cast a shadow over Stalin's victory. This is what Sergei Syrtsov told his supporters (information about the session has been preserved in investigative materials from the Syrtsov-Lominadze case). As A. Galperin, who was arrested in association with the case, wrote in his state-

ment, "Com. Syrtsov told us that Bukharin's letter to Com. Stalin had been discussed in the Politburo on October 20 and that Bukharin had written in this letter that he recognizes his mistakes and asked, 'What else is wanted from me?' He then told us that Com. Stalin had refused to see Com. Bukharin for personal negotiations and that the PB [Politburo] had approved Com. Stalin's response to Com. Bukharin. In describing the significance that Stalin attributed to Com. Bukharin's letter, Com. Syrtsov said that in discussing this question Com. Stalin proposed drawing the curtain."[46] In a denunciation (the one that initiated the Syrtsov-Lominadze affair), B. G. Reznikov described this episode as follows: Syrtsov "described in great detail what happened and what had been said in the PB. He spoke in such great detail that he even felt the need to tell us things like 'Stalin ordered that the windows be closed, even though we were on the fifth floor.' He said that during Com. Stalin's second speech, Bukharin left, not waiting for it to finish. After that, Stalin ended his speech, saying, 'I wanted to give him a talking to, but since he's left, there's nothing to say.' [. . .] Syrtsov said that [Bukharin's] letter was written by hand, and Stalin read it without showing it to anyone."[47]

The Bukharin question was considered at the 20 October meeting in conjunction with a report by the OGPU administrators (Agranov, Menzhinsky, and Yagoda) on the testimony of the "wreckers." In this regard, the Politburo resolved:

a) That the OGPU report about the latest testimony by members of the *prompartiia* [Industrial Party] central committee concerning terrorist activity be taken into consideration and that it be proposed that further investigation be continued.
b) That it be proposed that the OGPU coordinate matters regarding necessary arrests with the TsK Secretary. Sabotage groups should be immediately arrested.
c) That Com. Stalin be immediately required to cease traveling around the city by foot.
d) That the necessity of moving the secret department of the TsK from Staraya Square to the Kremlin as soon as possible be recognized.
e) That Voroshilov be assigned to accelerate the further clearing of the Kremlin of a number of residents who are not entirely reliable.[48]

It is easy to see that the fabrication of cases against "terrorist organizations" in which the party opposition was supposedly involved was a

sort of rehearsal for the political trials of 1935–1938, during which Stalin's political opponents were at first put in prison and later shot. In 1930 everything ended peacefully. In November, Bukharin published a statement in *Pravda* recognizing the correctness of the decisions of the 16th Party Congress and denouncing any factional work and attempts to conduct veiled struggles against the party leadership (in other words, Stalin). For now, Stalin neither wanted nor was able to take stronger measures. All of the provocations of this period were designed to achieve modest goals: to lay the groundwork for more decisive actions against the opposition and to intimidate those who were dissatisfied and wavering. Another step on this path was the removal of the unreliable Syrtsov from the Politburo.

THE SYRTSOV-LOMINADZE AFFAIR

Born in 1893, Sergei Ivanovich Syrtsov was younger than many Soviet leaders and had joined the party later, in 1913. But his entry into the party took place under propitious circumstances—his first moves within the party were guided by Molotov. Like Rykov, Syrtsov had abandoned his studies, having traded his place at Saint Petersburg Polytechnic Institute for a place as a political defendant and subsequent Siberian exile. During the Civil War he fought in the south, where he met several of Stalin's future comrades-in-arms (for example, Ordzhonikidze). In 1921 he joined the Central Committee apparatus as a department head. In 1926 he was sent as secretary to the Siberian territorial committee of the Communist Party. In early 1928 he was able to fulfill the dream of any party functionary—Stalin himself came to Siberia on a mission to organize emergency grain expropriations, which was successful, in part because of Syrtsov's efforts. Immediately after Stalin won decisive victory over Bukharin's group in 1929, he had the thirty-six-year-old Syrtsov appointed to the post of chairman of the RSFSR Council of People's Commissars, a post that had been held by Rykov, among his other duties. In June 1929, Syrtsov was made a candidate for membership in the Politburo.[49] But the young man did not justify the faith Stalin had placed in him, proving to be obstinate and excessively independent and siding with Rykov on a number of occasions.

Several documents indicate that Syrtsov was in rather close contact

with Rykov even before he was appointed chairman of the RSFSR Council of People's Commissars. In 1927 rumors had circulated within the highest party circles that Syrtsov was planning to support Rykov's candidacy for general secretary of the party Central Committee at the Central Committee plenum. Syrtsov was forced to refute this in writing to Ordzhonikidze and Molotov.[50] But he still continued a close correspondence with Rykov, and he later showed him support even when the rightists had obviously suffered political defeat in their struggle with Stalin. On 18 February 1929, Syrtsov wrote to Rykov, "The organization is following reports from Moscow with anxiety. The public was very pleased to hear a report that you were not retired along with Bukharin and Tomsky. [. . .] It seems that things are really getting out of hand in Moscow. We are afraid that [this] will disrupt work and will raise the muzhiks' [peasants'] activity. [. . .] I would truly hate to see this whole story end with you being personally damaged politically."[51]

At this point it is hard to understand why—given Rykov and Syrtsov's relationship—Stalin decided to name Syrtsov to a responsible post in Moscow and bring him into the Politburo. Perhaps Stalin was not well informed about their contacts. Perhaps, in advancing someone neither for nor against Rykov, Stalin was demonstrating his impartiality, hoping at the same time that a grateful Syrtsov would come over completely to Stalin's side. Perhaps Syrtsov's close ties with Molotov and Ordzhonikidze played an important role in his appointment.

After Syrtsov moved to Moscow, his new post brought him into constant contact with Rykov. As chairman of the RSFSR Council of People's Commissars, Syrtsov was involved in the workings of various Soviet government agencies; in particular, he took part in the regular meetings between the chairman of the USSR Council of People's Commissars and his deputies, which Rykov presided over (the Conference of Deputies). Syrtsov often had to work with the USSR council in solving problems. The growing crisis pushed Syrtsov ever closer to the views held by the rightists regarding the situation in the country. Furthermore, disillusioned with Stalin's policies, he carefully, but publicly, expressed some of his concerns. In early 1930, Syrtsov released a large edition of a critical brochure entitled *Concerning Our Successes, Our Shortcomings, and Our Challenges*. In July, at the 16th Party Congress, he spoke not only about successes but about problems.[52] It appears that Rykov sensed Syrtsov's mood and was particularly well disposed toward him.

In a letter from the south dated 7 September, Stalin warned Molotov: Rykov will "make advances toward" Syrtsov.[53]

A few days after this warning it became clear that Rykov and Syrtsov shared almost identical political positions. A row broke out in the Politburo on 16 September during a review of the credit plan. In response to criticism, Rykov again spoke of major economic problems and accused the Politburo of ignoring them. What happened next was described to Stalin in an irate letter written the following day by Molotov. Rykov was supported, according to Molotov, by "Syrtsov, with an absolutely alarming right-opportunistic statement to the effect that it is impossible to solve difficult questions that are arising in the economy using GPU measures, that 'radical measures are needed,' and that it is difficult to talk about them 'given the absence of the head of the party' [Stalin], etc."[54]

Undoubtedly, this démarche was the last straw for Stalin. Immediately after Stalin's return from vacation, the Politburo began to deal seriously with Syrtsov. The pretext they chose was a speech delivered by Syrtsov on 30 August 1930 before a joint session of the Council of People's Commissars and the RSFSR Economic Council, which had then been published as a brochure in an edition of ten thousand copies. On 15 October, acting on a proposal by Stalin, the Politburo adopted a resolution "to consider the publication of a speech by Com. Syrtsov on a number of issues that were not subject to publication and circulation to be a mistaken political step on the part of Com. Syrtsov."[55] This was a clear warning, but as subsequent events showed, Syrtsov did not fully appreciate its significance.

On 21 October, B. G. Reznikov, who was close to Syrtsov, wrote a denunciation addressed to Lev Mekhlis, Stalin's former assistant and the editor of *Pravda*. In the denunciation Reznikov alleged that Syrtsov and his supporters, displeased with Stalin's policies, had established contact with a group associated with the first secretary of the Transcaucasian regional party committee, Vissarion Lominadze. Both groups, Reznikov asserted, felt that it was necessary to replace Stalin. Reznikov's denunciation was delivered to Stalin on 21 October, almost immediately after the Politburo session at which the Bukharin question had been examined and members had decided that heightened vigilance was needed. The timing of the denunciation was probably not a coincidence. Most likely, Reznikov had begun to follow Syrtsov's actions earlier and presented his denunciation at the time Stalin considered best.

Later on the morning of the denunciation, after Stalin informed Ordzhonikidze, chairman of the party's Central Control Commission, and Pavel Postyshev, secretary of the Central Committee (Kaganovich and Molotov were out of town), he ordered that Syrtsov be summoned. Syrtsov was not found until it was almost evening. Then he read the denunciation and announced that he would give official testimony only in front of the Central Control Commission. As soon as Syrtsov entered the Central Committee building, Reznikov also arrived, and he wrote a new statement. He alleged that Syrtsov had come to the Central Committee straight from a meeting that he had conducted with his supporters (including Reznikov). At the meeting, as Reznikov described it, the topic under discussion was talks with Lominadze on both groups' decision to prepare to replace Stalin using both legal and illegal means. Reznikov also alleged that Syrtsov had described to his followers in great detail the 20 October Politburo meeting where Stalin had raised the issue of Bukharin's letter. In the new denunciation, Reznikov quoted Syrtsov as saying:

> A significant portion of the party's most active members, of course, are unhappy with the regime and the party's policies, but this portion evidently feel that there is a unified Politburo that is following a firm line, that there exists a TsK, even if it isn't Lenin's TsK. These illusions should be dispelled. The Politburo is a fiction. In fact, everything is decided behind the Politburo's back by a small circle that meets in the Kremlin, in Tsetkin's former apartment; such Politburo members as Kuibyshev, Voroshilov, Kalinin, and Rudzutak are outside this circle, and inside the circle there are those who are not Politburo members, such as [Yakov] Yakovlev, [Pavel] Postyshev, etc. Then he said that Com. Voroshilov had been kicked out of his job; he had been replaced by Uborevich, an unprincipled man, devilishly proud, an obvious Thermidorian. They were thinking of putting Voroshilov in Rykov's place.[56]

Syrtsov also refused to say anything about Reznikov's second statement. Then other participants in the meeting were summoned—I. S. Nusinov, V. A. Kavraisky, Galperin. In front of Reznikov they denied his accusations and were therefore arrested and sent to the OGPU.

Through the joint efforts of the Central Control Commission and the OGPU, every one of the accused, including Syrtsov and Lominadze, confessed to anti-party factional activities. On 4 November 1930 there was a joint session of the Politburo and the Central Control Commis-

sion presidium to consider, based on a report by Ordzhonikidze, the matter "Concerning the factional work of Comrades Syrtsov, Lominadze, Shatskin, and others." After lengthy discussion, a decision was adopted to expel Syrtsov and Lominadze from the Central Committee and Lazar Shatskin from the Central Control Commission. A special Central Committee and Central Control Commission was set up to draft a resolution. Ordzhonikidze, Stalin, Stanislav Kosior, Kaganovich, Kuibyshev, Voroshilov, Rudzutak, Matvei Shkiriatov, Yaroslavsky, Kalinin, Molotov, and Sergei Kirov were all appointed members. The resolution prepared by the commission was approved only a month later, on 1 December, and published in newspapers on 2 December. It stated that Syrtsov and Lominadze had organized a "left-right" bloc whose platform coincided with the views of the right deviation. The decision to expel Syrtsov from the Central Committee and Shatskin from the Central Control Commission was approved.

In his presentation to the joint session of the Politburo and the Central Control Commission presidium on 4 November, Ordzhonikidze stated that Syrtsov believed the case against him was "manufactured." "He actually thinks, for example," Ordzhonikidze said, "that the TsK and TsKK knew what Nusinov, Kavraisky, Reznikov and he were up to and allowed him to follow that path. Even now he is convinced that Kavraisky, Nusinov, and Reznikov were either agents of the GPU or agents of the TsK and TsKK who had been assigned to look after him. All one can do is throw up one's hands and wonder how Syrtsov can make such absurd and criminal assertions. That is all you can do."[57] Ordzhonikidze's bewilderment was probably feigned. Syrtsov was undoubtedly right in many of his suspicions. As in similar cases, the Syrtsov-Lominadze affair involved the interweaving of certain events with deliberate provocations. The preparation of this case serves as a good example of Stalin's method of political warfare during the stage when he was consolidating one-man rule but still had to use subtle measures against his comrades-in-arms. Two circumstances are of particular relevance here. The first is Syrtsov's accusation regarding Stalin's limitation of the Politburo's rights. The second concerns the reasons why the leaders of the "anti-party group" were dealt with unusually leniently.

As already stated, Reznikov reported Syrtsov's allegations that Stalin's faction met separately and that a portion of the Politburo leader-

ship was "cut off" in his 22 October denunciation. On the next day, 23 October, the issue arose again when Syrtsov was being interrogated by the Central Control Commission, headed by Ordzhonikidze. Ordzhonikidze, who was "having a discussion" with Syrtsov, tried to steer away from it. The corresponding stenographic record reads as follows:

Syrtsov: It doesn't seem right to me to have a situation where a good number of Politburo decisions are made in advance by a certain group. I can completely understand why Rykov is excluded as a person who has committed rightist errors and has been following an incorrect political line. But as I understand it, Kuibyshev, Rudzutak, and Kalinin have not been taking part in this ruling group and are purely mechanical [pro forma] members of the Politburo, and this creates a situation whereby . . .

Ordzhonikidze: Who makes up this group?

Syrtsov: Those in the remainder, evidently, or a portion of the rest of them.

Ordzhonikidze: Well, if you're the one talking, you should know.

Syrtsov: This is how I am explaining it, that concerning a number of questions, individual Politburo members—if there were some other discussion, if there were some other approach—would not be tied down by preliminary discussion and would be putting questions somewhat differently.[58]

Syrtsov's testimony in this case has particular significance. As a candidate member of the Politburo, he knew a lot about the relationships between Politburo members and was aware of subtle nuances that were accessible only to those directly involved in events. The fact that Syrtsov was not fully informed in some key areas (for example, his belief that Voroshilov was being prepared for Rykov's post as chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, even though Stalin had already agreed with his closest associates on Molotov's candidacy) attests to the level of conspiracy within the Stalin "faction." It also confirms Syrtsov's observation about the existence of such a faction. Syrtsov most likely had good reason to talk about "factions" and "purely mechanical" members of the Politburo. Knowing the complex situation within the Politburo, he was probably hoping for some support from the "purely mechanical" members whose rights were being ignored by Stalin.

An accusation of factionalism was the most serious of all possible accusations that could have been leveled against Stalin. While the situation in the country was still under control, nobody was able to convince top party officials (primarily the members of the TsK) that the general line chosen was mistaken and ruinous. Collectivization and dekulakiza-

tion had been taken too far, and the members of the Central Committee who had supported Stalin against the rightists bore direct responsibility for this. But certain accusations would upset even his most loyal followers. In a fight Stalin always tried to come out looking like a victim of the intrigues of his political opponents, so the implication that immediately after victory in the drawn-out fight against the opposition, he began to cut his loyal comrades-in-arms off from the leadership—preparing for yet another split—could be damaging. Stalin undoubtedly understood this. In his speech before a joint session of the Politburo and the Central Control Commission presidium on 4 November, he immediately stated that there had been no meetings in the former apartment of Klara Tsetkin (one of the leaders of the German Communist Party), that the only thing he did there was work on his speech for the 16th Party Congress ("far from ringing telephones") and speak with individual members of the Politburo. "While I was working in this apartment, at different times Molotov, Kalinin, Sergo, Rudzutak, and Mikoyan each came to see me once. Despite what Com. Syrtsov says, neither Kaganovich, nor Yakovlev, nor Postyshev were in this apartment and no meetings were held there and nor could have been held in that apartment. Did certain Politburo members occasionally meet? Yes, we met. Mostly we met in the TsK building. And what's wrong with that?"[59]

There is every reason to believe that Stalin was lying. The practice of holding "factional" meetings of the Politburo—at which the most important questions to be raised at the official meetings were discussed and decided in advance—had taken shape back in the 1920s. The group of seven (semyorka) that existed during the period of struggle against Trotsky was a "factional" Politburo, which included all the members except Trotsky. In 1926–1927, after Stalin broke with Zinoviev and Kamenev, he and his supporters in the Politburo also coordinated their stances on key issues, acting as a united front during official Politburo sessions. Stalin's letters to Molotov, for example, many of which were essentially addressed to the majority faction in the Politburo, serve as evidence of this. It is still unclear exactly how Stalin and his supporters in the Politburo coordinated their actions against the rightists in 1928–1929, but that such coordination took place regularly is attested to by the entire course of Stalin's fight against Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky. In 1930, Stalin used tried and true methods of political intrigue. He had reasons—Rykov was still in the Politburo. What was new in this case

was that Stalin had decided to distance not only his political opponent—Rykov—from decision-making but a number of his close associates as well. Maybe he felt that they were not sufficiently "steadfast," and he was worried that they might waver at the decisive moment, or maybe he simply assumed that they were not capable of being useful in such a delicate matter. I will point out that Syrtsov placed Kalinin among the "purely mechanical" members of the Politburo, and at that time Stalin was indeed purposefully discrediting Kalinin, accusing him of ties with the "wreckers."

In any event, Stalin surely wanted to avoid any rumors of a factional Politburo and to limit the dissemination of the other accusations that Syrtsov was making. This appears to be one of the main reasons that such an important matter was not even discussed in a Central Committee plenum. As early as the joint session of the Politburo and the Central Control Commission presidium on 4 November, Stalin had stated that the business concerning the Syrtsov-Lominadze bloc was not serious.[60] And on 20 November 1930, on Stalin's suggestion, the Politburo adopted a decision, in response to reports by a Western news agency, not to publish any denials in the Soviet press and to have TASS indicate through the foreign press that the report of a "military plot" and the arrest of Comrades Syrtsov, Lominadze, and others was nothing but "malicious falsehood."[61]

The motives behind such decisions are understandable. It was not advantageous for Stalin to have the idea get out that he was facing opposition from those who had recently been his strong supporters. Such reports would have weakened Stalin's position and cast further doubt on the durability of his regime. In the Syrtsov-Lominadze affair, we see Stalin's efforts to find the optimal balance in suppressing dissent within the party leadership. By exercising just the necessary degree of toughness, Stalin avoided the brutality that later became commonplace and thus underscored his confidence in the strength of his position and the lack of seriousness of opposition members' intentions.[62] Based on what we know, Stalin was also forced to deal with the positions of individual Politburo members, or at least that of Ordzhonikidze. Ordzhonikidze spoke openly about his friendships with Syrtsov and Lominadze in his 4 November speech. Publicly Ordzhonikidze demanded harsh punishment for the "factionalists," but privately to Stalin he probably expressed different feelings. Later, in 1936–1937, when the conflict be-

tween Stalin and Ordzhonikidze reached the breaking point, Stalin openly accused Ordzhonikidze of condoning Lominadze's anti-party activities.

RYKOV'S REPLACEMENT

The Syrtsov-Lominadze affair forced certain adjustments to plans for replacing Rykov as head of the Council of People's Commissars. Stalin first communicated his intention to remove Rykov in a letter to Molotov written in the south on 13 September 1930. The letter was confidential and was intended only for Molotov. Stalin wrote, "Our top Soviet hierarchy (Labor Defense Council, Council of Commissars, Conference of Deputies) suffers from a fatal disease. The Labor Defense Council has been transformed from an active, businesslike body into an idle parliament. The Council of Commissars is paralyzed by Rykov's insipid and basically anti-party speeches. The Conference of Deputies [. . .] has now tended to become the headquarters [. . . and] is now *opposing* itself to the Central Committee. Clearly this can't go on. Radical measures are needed. As to what kind—I'll tell you when I get to Moscow."[63] But soon he decided not to wait for a face-to-face meeting with Molotov in Moscow. In a letter to Molotov dated 22 September, Stalin made a more clear-cut proposal to "definitively resolve the question of the Soviet top leadership" by removing Rykov and Vasily Shmidt, Rykov's deputy, from the Council of People's Commissars and undertake a reorganization of the government. Stalin proposed reducing the number of members in the Labor and Defense Council, organizing an Implementation Commission within the Council of People's Commissars with the goal of monitoring the implementation of decisions by the center, and abolishing the council chairman's Conference of Deputies as a permanently functioning government body. He suggested handing over the duties of chairman to Molotov. Stalin now asked Molotov to discuss all of these ideas within the "small circle of close friends" and let him know about any objections.[64]

Politburo members met on 7 October to discuss Stalin's letter. As they agreed among themselves, each of them sent Stalin his own letter on the matter.[65] Voroshilov spelled out the overall discussion and its conclusions in a letter to Stalin dated 8 October. First of all, Voroshilov reported unanimous support for the idea of replacing Rykov: "The cur-

rent situation cannot be tolerated any longer." However, opinion was divided over the new candidate. "I, Mikoyan, Molotov, Kaganovich, and to some extent Kuibyshev believe that the best solution would be to consolidate leadership. It would be good to put you in the SNK so you could really take over running the entire country as only you can." Voroshilov went on to justify this proposal. First, he flattered Stalin ("As never before, the SNK now needs someone who has a strategist's gift"). Second, in Voroshilov's opinion, having the "main office and general headquarters" on Staraya Square (where the party Central Commitee apparatus was located) was "cumbersome, inflexible, and [. . .] poorly organized." "Under such circumstances," Voroshilov wrote, Lenin "would be at the SNK and would be running the party and Comintern." Trying to anticipate Stalin's objections, Voroshilov wrote about possible obstacles to implementing such a decision. "They generally fall into three categories. 1. International questions. 2. Your personal attitude, and 3. Questions of direct party leadership." Voroshilov did not elaborate on the first two points, leaving unclear what he meant by "international questions" (probably Stalin's reduced involvement in Comintern matters). But being well grounded in matters of high-level Kremlin politics and knowing Stalin's moods and inclinations, Voroshilov outlined "questions of direct party leadership" in some detail—in other words, the threat of having Stalin's attention distracted from managing party affairs. Such a threat, Voroshilov acknowledged, was truly present. But he dismissed it using a purely demagogic technique, again citing the example of Lenin: "I think [. . .] there is no basis for presuming that the party and its organizations in 1930 are any less organized, durable (in every regard), etc., than they were ten years ago."[66]

Voroshilov's letter reflected his perspective on the change of SNK leadership as well as his understanding of the positions of individual Politburo members on the change. The letters of other Politburo members to Stalin painted a somewhat different picture than that presented by Voroshilov. Mikoyan was unequivocal in expressing his support of the idea of a "consolidated leadership" ("like we had when Ilyich was alive").[67] It is possible that Kuibyshev was equally unequivocal, but his letter has not yet been found. As far as Molotov and Kaganovich were concerned, both of whom Voroshilov had listed among his supporters, things were not so simple. In a letter to Stalin dated 9 October, Molotov pointed to the "tremendous pluses" of making Stalin chairman of the

Council of People's Commissars, especially at a time when the council's authority had diminished. But he also introduced arguments against such a decision. Stalin would not be able to manage the Comintern and the party the way he had been (in which case it was not out of the question that the post of Central Committee general secretary would be abolished). In the end, Molotov avoided clearly stating his position. "In any case, this question can and should only be discussed with you," he concluded. As for his own candidacy, Molotov, as might have been expected, took himself out of the running, citing his weakness as a worker and his lack of authority.[68]

Kaganovich's letter of 9 October, in which he, as usual, bent over backwards to please Stalin, demonstrated equal skill in navigating the issues. He essentially left it to Stalin to decide the matter as he saw fit, expressing support in advance for any outcome. "From the mouths of party members one often hears something to the effect that 'If only Stalin were appointed, that would be the real thing [. . .]. Of course it would be the real thing, and the party and the masses would see this as the real thing." However, Kaganovich immediately expressed his doubts: "First, would this decision restrict the scope of your work, in regard to the Comintern line in particular, and second, of life within the party? After all, especially in recent years the leading role of the party and the TsK has risen to unprecedented heights and this, Com. Stalin, speaking without exaggeration, is all thanks to you. The most important strategic maneuvers in the economy and in politics were determined, and will and should be determined, by you, wherever you might be. But will things get better if there is a change? I doubt it. The details of economic questions could even make it harder to see the entire field of battle." All of this, Kaganovich concluded, forces one to "decide in favor of Molotov's candidacy."[69]

More direct and less diplomatic, Ordzhonikidze expressed himself in a letter dated 9 October: "Of course Molotov should be put in Rykov's place."[70]

As Voroshilov's letter indicates, a number of Politburo members did not accept the proposal about forming an Implementation Commission, either. "First Kuibyshev, then I, and then Sergo expressed doubts about what purpose such a commission would serve," Voroshilov reported. Ordzhonikidze was particularly unhappy with the idea, expressing "concern that the creation of an IC would involve an element of weak-

ening the role of the RKI [Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate]"—of which he was head.

On the basis of these letters it is possible to re-create a fairly detailed picture of the meeting of the "small circle of close friends." Six men had gathered in Moscow on 7 October: Voroshilov, Molotov, Kuibyshev, Kaganovich, Mikoyan, and Ordzhonikidze. Other members of the Politburo based in Moscow—Kalinin and Rudzutak—were away on vacation (and in any event were not part of the group of "close friends"). Sergei Kirov and Stanislav Kosior, Leningrad and Ukraine party heads respectively, who were also members of the Politburo, only rarely came to Moscow. Rykov was still formally a member of the Politburo, but he was not invited to the meeting for obvious reasons.

Molotov probably opened the meeting, since Stalin's letters had been addressed to him. Because his task at this meeting of "equals" was to exhibit appropriate modesty and not express a particular interest in promotion to the new position, he talked mostly about his reluctance to accept such an elevated post. "He expressed doubts about how much authority he would hold for the likes of us and, in particular, for Rudzutak, but of course that's all nonsense. We will all support him, including, I believe, Rudzutak. If it turns out that we are wrong, then Rudzutak could be given another job," Ordzhonikidze wrote Stalin.[71] Rudzutak, as deputy chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, would be directly affected by the changes.

This aspect of the discussion deserves special attention. The comparisons drawn by Molotov between Rudzutak's "authority" and his own are evidence that a hierarchy still existed within the highest circle of leadership, a hierarchy not yet governed by closeness to Stalin (in that regard, Molotov stood much higher than Rudzutak), but by previous service. This hierarchy was an important component of the system of "collective leadership." At the same time, Ordzhonikidze's statement about the option of transferring Rudzutak to another job indicates that this hierarchy was more a thing of the past than a vital political factor.

In justifying his wholehearted support for Molotov's candidacy at the 7 October meeting, Ordzhonikidze cited his previous conversations with Stalin. In particular, he insisted that Stalin had always objected to the idea of his being made chairman of the Council of People's Commissars because of the "undesirability at present of a complete merger (including the appearance of such a merger before the entire world) [. . .]

of party and Soviet leadership."[72] Molotov's letter suggests that Ordzhonikidze's information about previous conversations with Stalin was confirmed by Voroshilov. Voroshilov, however, did not consider the idea of Stalin's weakened control over the Comintern and the party as sufficient reason for rejecting the new appointment. Mikoyan felt the same way, and, so, apparently, did Kuibyshev. The discussion within the "small circle of close friends" apparently left a very distinct impression on the final two members, Kaganovich and Molotov. In letters sent to Stalin two days after the meeting, they expressed understanding of certain negative consequences of Stalin's possible appointment that Stalin himself had not mentioned in his letters to Molotov. Kaganovich and Molotov may have had a change of heart after hearing what Ordzhonikidze and Voroshilov had to say. This would explain the contradiction between Voroshilov's assertion that Kaganovich and Molotov had supported the proposal to appoint Stalin as council head and the content of letters from these two men, in which they favored the solution proposed by Stalin.

The discussion among the "small circle" sheds a good deal of light on Stalin's frame of mind and that of his closest comrades-in-arms, as well as on interactions within the party leadership during the early stages of the consolidation of Stalin's position as the unquestioned leader of the Politburo. Stalin's strength rested in his ability to concentrate on personnel decisions and control of the party apparatus, but essentially without answering for the specific actions of the economic and political leadership. Only occasionally did Stalin intervene in the resolution of economic or social problems that were either, in his opinion, of fundamental political significance or from which he would be able to derive specific political benefit. This extremely strategic advantage—being able to observe events from the side and act as arbiter—would be impossible to maintain if Stalin were appointed chairman of the Council of People's Commissars.

It is easy to imagine that Stalin did not want to take on the enormous burden of running the government. This would have demanded a great deal of experience and skill at handling a torrent of daily problems, qualities that Stalin did not have. The job would have come with a grueling workload, which is something Stalin always avoided. It would also have limited Stalin's opportunities for political maneuvering and would have made him directly responsible not only for political solu-

tions but for the day-to-day implementation of policies that even by 1929–1930 were a great strain on the society and the economy. All this tempered any desire he might have had to take on the post of chairman of the government and formally establish himself as Lenin's heir. Replacing Rykov dragged on for some time, however, which leaves room for speculation that Stalin was wavering, weighing the advantages and disadvantages before making up his mind to give the post of council chairman to Molotov. Ten years later he nonetheless took on the post, an indirect indication of his hidden desires.

The time needed to coordinate decisions about the new leader of the Council of People's Commissars and Stalin's own wavering may have been among the reasons it took so long to convene a party Central Committee plenum to enact the necessary resolution. The need to convene a Central Committee plenum was first put before the Politburo on 15 September 1930; however, an exact date was not immediately chosen. On 29 September the Politburo returned to this question and resolved to convene the plenum on 5 December.[73]

During the months leading up to the plenum, major personnel reorganizations implemented at the Supreme Economic Council, Gosplan, and the Finance Commissariat constituted lateral assaults on Rykov. The ideological ties between Rykov and the opposition were variously underscored during the 4 November joint session of the Politburo and the Central Control Commission presidium, where the case of Syrtsov and Lominadze was considered. A significant portion of Stalin's speech was devoted to these ties. Accusing Rykov of defending "wreckers" and "rotten Communists," Stalin stated, "The Chairman of the Sovnarkom exists in order, through daily practical work, to carry out the instructions of the party, instructions that he himself has a hand in developing. Is this being done or not? No, unfortunately, it is not being done. That is the problem, and that is the source of our dissatisfaction. And of course this cannot go on for long."[74] The same themes came up in Molotov's speech. He accused the rightists of "totally supporting, shielding, and inspiring the struggle of anti-Bolshevik elements against the party." Within the Politburo, Molotov stated, "Com. Rykov, without formally declaring war, has in fact been engaged in this very thing in recent weeks, while the TsK has been forced to work hard at fixing the crude mistakes of the economic, finance-credit, and other government bodies."[75]

Against this backdrop, on the very next day, 5 November, the Polit-

buro approved the agenda for the upcoming plenum based on Stalin's speech. The plenum was scheduled to consider targets for 1931, a report by the Supply Commissariat on procurement of meat and vegetables, and a report from the Central Cooperative Society (Tsentrosoiuz) on consumer-goods cooperatives. On 20 November the Politburo again moved the start of the plenum, to 15 December. On 30 November the question of council elections was added to the agenda.[76]

While the plenum was being prepared, Rykov was essentially kept from power. On 29 November 1930, for example, a Politburo commission headed by Voroshilov considered questions having to do with developing Red Army forces in 1931 and a procurement plan for the Military and Naval Affairs Commissariat for 1931. Politburo members in attendance were Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, Kuibyshev, Molotov, and Rudzutak. Rykov, chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, was absent, although such questions came under his purview and should not have been dealt with, nor had in the past been dealt with, except when he was present.[77]

On 11 December 1930 the Politburo discussed drafts of resolutions on the main issues to be addressed by the plenum, but on the eve of the plenum's being convened, its start was again rescheduled, this time for 17 December.[78] The reason became clear the following day. On 15 December a member of the presidium of the Central Control Commission, Ivan Akulov, sent a special letter to the Politburo on the presidium's behalf proposing that a joint plenum of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission be convened instead of a Central Committee plenum. Such joint plenums of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission were usually convened to decide the most critical party and government matters. The last time such a joint plenum had taken place was in April 1929, when the final blow had been delivered to the rightists. This time, Akulov argued, a joint plenum was necessary to discuss "major economic questions." In actuality, the reason for a joint meeting was undoubtedly the upcoming replacement of Rykov. Akulov's proposal was accepted.[79]

The machinations surrounding the convening of the plenum were evidence that Stalin was trying to hide his true intentions regarding Rykov as long as possible. This effort continued even during the plenum itself, where the question of Rykov arose as if by chance.

The first two days of the plenum did not seem to foretell the emer-

gence of any organizational issues. There was the usual discussion of agendas, and there were the traditional bureaucratic reports. Signs that an attack on Rykov had been prepared appeared on the third day. On the morning of 19 December, Rykov's remarks, made during discussions of Kuibyshev's report on economic targets for 1931, were repeatedly interrupted by comments from the floor reminding him of his past "sins" and demanding repentance. Rykov defended himself forcefully, asserting that it was pointless to recall "old arguments," although in closing he did assert his loyalty. "I am absolutely convinced that the general line of the Party is the only correct line, that our achievements point to this completely and categorically, that any double-dealing—as the vilest form of infighting is now called—any passivity, any neutrality, is now absolutely unacceptable for a member of the Party."[80] Nonetheless, plenum participants who spoke subsequently competed in condemning Rykov, accusing him of insincerity and calling his speech opportunistic.

At the evening session of 19 December, Kuibyshev made his closing remarks. Setting aside the subject of his talk—the economic plan for 1931—he denounced Rykov and essentially proposed removing him from the post of chairman of the Council of People's Commissars.

> I believe that tremendous cohesion will be needed between top Soviet and Party leaders in carrying out the exceptionally difficult plan that confronts us in 1931. There should not be the tiniest crack between the Council apparatus and the comrades and party leadership heading it. [. . .] The fact that Comrade Rykov has not taken a place among active champions of the general line, has not become a champion against the system of views the harm of which he himself has recognized, shows that such a crack exists as long as Comrade Rykov heads the Council apparatus. [. . .] What we wind up with is a TsK and its leadership, represented in the Politburo, and a TsK plenum—this is a leadership gripped by heartfelt enthusiasm for socialist construction that is leading the proletariat into ever newer and newer battles, that is bitterly fighting class enemies and every manifestation, even veiled manifestations, of hostile class ideology, and then there is the top of the Soviet government that is doing "what it can"! This cannot go on.[81]

Kosior, who was given the floor at the conclusion of the plenum, proposed relieving Rykov of his duties as chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and as a member of the Politburo, making Molotov the new chairman and making Ordzhonikidze a member of the Politburo. The plenum unanimously accepted this proposal.[82]

Stalin had no apparent role in Rykov's replacement. But throughout the operation, his guiding hand could be sensed—starting with the way things were handled leading up to the plenum and ending with the way the break between the party and the Soviet leadership was formulated. Stalin had expressed the formulation in his September letter to Molotov, and the December plenum repeatedly echoed it. Molotov, during his plenum appearance, publicly introduced Stalin's proposals for reorganizing the Council of People's Commissars (without naming their author, of course): the creation of an Implementation Commission and the introduction of changes to the makeup of the Labor and Defense Council. The action against the leadership of the Council of People's Commissars that had been painstakingly planned over a long period had finally taken place.

The year 1930 was the period when the Stalinization of the Politburo was completed. The year that saw the final and tragic victory of Stalin's Great Leap policy—brutally forced industrialization and mass collectivization also saw Stalin confirmed as the sole leader of the Politburo. The Stalinization of the Politburo was not an inevitable outcome of the defeat of the rightists in 1929, although Stalin's victory here was critical. Throughout 1930, Stalin persistently and purposefully worked to secure his leadership through political intrigue and the suppression of dissent. This was all the more necessary inasmuch as the policy of the Great Leap subjected the country to a growing crisis. Stalin's policies (and, correspondingly, the authority he gained through his policies) could not enjoy a victory grounded in positive outcomes and therefore had to be based primarily on force and terror.

Mass arrests, executions, and deportations affecting a wide swath of the country's population were accompanied by smear campaigns and personnel purges at the highest echelons of power. The main objects of Stalinist attacks were still the rightists, both Bukharin, who had been expelled from the Politburo, and Rykov, who had held on to his formal position within the Politburo and the Council of People's Commissars. As the situation in the country worsened, Stalin resorted to harsher and more radical ways of dealing with his opponents. During the first stage of the struggle against the rightists, Stalin had accused them of unscrupulous underground contacts with Zinovievites (with some justification), but in 1930 he made more sinister allegations that the opposi-

tion had been indirectly involved in "political terror" and "sabotage." Under Stalin's painstaking guidance, the OGPU fabricated numerous cases against "anti-Soviet organizations" whose plans, one way or another, relied on alliances with leaders of the "right deviation." Using this same template, on Stalin's orders (obviously to set an example before other members of top Soviet leadership), the OGPU undertook to discredit Mikhail Kalinin. The fabrication of the case against Syrtsov and Lominadze aided Stalin in consolidating his power. The December 1930 expulsion of Aleksei Rykov from the Politburo and his removal from the post of chairman of the Council of People's Commissars put the finishing touches on this campaign.

Despite the overall intensification of repressive policies, at this stage we do not yet see a double standard in their application. Stalin was not yet accusing oppositionists (as he would several years later) of direct involvement in terrorist organizations. They were merely shouldered with moral responsibility for encouraging "terror" and "sabotage." Although they were dismissed from their posts, participants in the Syrtsov-Lominadze "organization" remained free. To a significant degree, such a policy was determined by the situation at the highest echelons of power. The surviving traditions and practices of collective leadership and "intra-party democracy" provided for a degree of loyalty toward distinguished members of the party, even those who succumbed to "heresy." Stalin was forced at this point to contend with such traditions and with the fact that the Politburo was still a collective body of the highest authority. Stalin's public self-justification when faced with Syrtsov's allegations of a "factional Politburo" is indicative in this regard, as are the drawn-out and detailed preparations to replace Rykov, in which members of the Politburo were included.

As subsequent events demonstrated, the model of collective leadership with a single leader at its head, which had taken shape in 1929 and 1930, could not withstand Stalin's moves toward a dictatorship. Nonetheless, the mechanisms of such a model deserve close examination, which they will be given in the following chapter.

5 Stalin and the Great Terror
1937–1938

AN EXTENSIVE BODY of scholarship is devoted to the history of the Great Terror, the mass repression that engulfed all segments of Soviet society in 1937 and 1938. One question central to this scholarship and to the subject of this book has been debated for many years: To what extent was the terror centrally orchestrated, determined by orders from the top, and to what extent did more elemental, spontaneous factors affect the course of events? A number of historians believe that elemental forces played a greater role than is generally recognized. Though not denying the role of the center in directing the repression, they argue that the Great Terror was the result of contradictions inherent in the party-state, the uncontrolled actions of regional bosses who, in their desire to deflect attacks away from themselves, directed the terror against countless scapegoats, or the active support that broad sectors of the population gave to the repression.[1]

Increased archival access has permitted a clearer picture of the Great Terror. As documents show, over the course of 1936, on Stalin's initiative, a policy aimed at the "wholesale liquidation" of former oppositionists was conducted, reaching its culmination in the Moscow trials of August 1936 and January 1937. During the first half of 1937 army officers were also purged, and attacks were undertaken against the middle-level nomenklatura. Throughout the rest of 1937 and continuing into

1938, the attacks became large-scale purges of managerial cadres. Despite their breadth and cruelty, within the context of the Stalin era, these measures were somewhat limited in nature. Had the purges stopped with the destruction of former oppositionists, party-state functionaries, and the military, we would probably not be justified in calling this repression the Great Terror.

The Great Terror began when repressive measures engulfed the broadest strata of the country's population. This, as we now know from archival investigation, occurred between August 1937 and November 1938, when a series of mass operations against "anti-Soviet elements" and "counterrevolutionary national contingents" took place, including mass deportations. There is now a basis for believing (and the literature increasingly reflects this belief) that the Great Terror was a series of purposeful and carefully planned centralized operations. The repressive measures differed from others organized by the Stalin regime in terms not only of scale (arrests and deportations of peasants in the early 1930s also encompassed a significant portion of the population) but also in exceptional cruelty, especially in the enormous numbers of people shot.[2]

Considering the fundamental importance of the Great Terror, it is inevitable that every interpretation, in the end, shapes both our understanding of the mechanisms by which key political decisions were made and implemented within the Stalinist system and our overall characterization of the system. It is therefore essential that the tragic events of 1937–1938 be reevaluated with a focus on their political aspects.

THE MOTIVES BEHIND MASS OPERATIONS

A great number of conjectures and assertions have been produced to explain the mass repressions of the late 1930s and the motives of Stalin and his comrades-in-arms in unleashing the Great Terror.

Official Stalinist propaganda gave a single, unequivocal explanation: the targets of these purges were enemies. Honest citizens had nothing to fear. The only way innocents could be swept up by the terror was if they fell victim to enemies who had infiltrated the NKVD (in which case Stalin would see that the victims were expeditiously rehabilitated). Even today, there are those who adhere to such views.

Justly rejecting any apologies for the terror, some anti-Stalinists succumb to the opposite extreme. Not wishing to explain anything, they

view any analysis of the reasons for the terror as attempts to justify it. Insofar as information about the terror does have to be somehow interpreted, everything is boiled down to Stalin's mental deficiencies, to the brutal nature of the leader and his comrades, and to generalizations about the totalitarian nature of the regime.

While the psychological tendencies of Soviet leaders certainly may have played a role in shaping many of the events of 1930–1950, the leaders' actions were not necessarily devoid of a certain criminal logic. Reconstructing the calculations made by the organizers of the terror is an essential step in studying the principles governing the political system that took shape during the late 1930s because the large-scale repression of 1937–1938 is the clearest expression of what sets the Stalinist political regime apart from other regimes in Soviet history.

The factors shaping the Great Terror can be conditionally divided into two categories. First, there are the overall reasons behind the use of terror and milder forms of violence by the Soviet state over the entire span of its existence, especially from the late 1920s to the early 1950s. Here, a wide range of ideas support the theory of a "permanent purge," according to which constant repression was essential to the viability of the Soviet regime, as it would be to any similar regime. Historians note that repression, the "subsystem of terror," served many functions. Among the most important were ensuring that society was kept in a state of submissiveness, suppressing dissent and opposition, and solidifying the sole authority of the leader. The campaigns against saboteurs and "degenerate" officials were also an effective method for manipulating social consciousness and shaping the myth of a just leader. Repression was also undoubtedly an essential condition for the functioning of the Soviet economy, which was based on compulsory labor, supplemented at various stages by the large-scale exploitation of convicts. The list of such observations could be continued. Every repressive act, including the large-scale operations of 1937–1938, to a certain degree served these overall functions.

Even once we have understood the reasons for the terror as an underlying element of the Stalinist system, we must still explore its application during particular periods of Soviet history. At different stages, state terror was used to varying extents and in varying forms not only as a way to bolster the regime but as a means of solving problems specific to a particular period.

We can analyze the specific reasons for acts of state terror both in terms of the acts themselves and on the basis of political slogans used in laying the groundwork for particular campaigns. The theoretical basis for the mass repression of the late 1930s was enunciated most clearly during the notorious plenum of February–March 1937. The stenographic record of the plenum, in combination with other documents, suggests that the mass arrests and executions of 1936–1938 pursued two primary interrelated goals: the large-scale purge of leading cadres in light of a growing military threat and the destruction of a potential "fifth column" in society.

During the first months after the trial of former oppositionists that took place in Moscow in August 1936, the main thrust of the purge was directed against the administrative cadres of the party and the state economic apparatus. A clamorous anti-bureaucratic propaganda campaign, launched during the February–March plenum, accompanied these shakeups. In a plenum speech, Stalin announced the objective of pouring "fresh forces awaiting deployment" into the administrative ranks. Indeed, over the course of the two years that followed, the old cadres were largely destroyed and replaced with a new generation of officials.

On the eve of the February–March plenum, the Central Committee department in charge of party personnel (ORPO), headed by Georgy Malenkov, compiled names of nomenklatura workers from various agencies who had been involved in opposition movements or in other parties or who had in any way "wavered." The compilation was divided into two lists. The first included administrators who had been removed from their posts, expelled from the party, and arrested. The second enumerated the political "sins" of workers who still held their jobs.[3] Most of those included in the second list were soon arrested, and the majority were shot.

Stalin wanted to get rid of the old guard for several reasons. He was particularly suspicious of those who had been involved in opposition movements, as many who held party-state posts at the middle- and lower-management level had been. Stalin was undoubtedly aware that he was not an indisputable authority even for those veteran Bolsheviks who had never taken part in opposition movements and who had followed him loyally. Whatever these people might say in their speeches, however fervently they might pledge their loyalty, Stalin knew that longtime party members remembered the numerous policy failures of the

1930s and that Lenin's testament had at one point come close to dooming Stalin's political career. At one time the party leadership had every reason to see Stalin as merely one among many equals. Even though such a time seemed increasingly distant, Stalin was suspicious of his comrades-in-arms who could recall the heyday of party democracy. To make matters worse, the influence of the "party generals," though reduced to a minimum, had not fully disappeared.

Through long years of collaboration, the old cadres had grown close and established strong mutual ties. Stalin periodically reshuffled the party bosses, moved around provincial party committee secretaries, replaced secretaries and Central Committee department heads. But to completely sever the ties, to break up groups that had grown up around leaders at various levels based on the principle of personal loyalty, was impossible. Moving from one place to another, party bosses often brought their people with them. Groups had formed within the party-state apparatus whose members had a dual allegiance: to the top leader (Stalin) and to their own patrons within the Politburo or other government entities. Although we have yet to hear of a single instance where such a group posed the slightest opposition to Stalin's sole authority, the existence of such informal structures was a source of apprehension for Stalin.

Stalin expressed these apprehensions with particular candor in his concluding remarks at the February–March plenum. "People are sometimes selected based not on a political or business principle but on personal acquaintance, personal allegiance, friendships—generally criteria of a narrow-minded nature." He singled out for particular criticism the secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, Levon Mirzoyan, and the Yaroslavl Province party committee, A. R. Vainov. The former, according to Stalin, brought thirty to forty of his people to Kazakhstan from Azerbaijan and Ural Province, where he had worked previously, and placed them in positions of authority. The ones who had been brought to Yaroslavl from Donbass had also brought a group of his subordinates. Stalin was frank in explaining what he did not like about such a practice. "What does it mean to drag a whole group of cronies with you? It means that you have acquired a certain independence from local organizations and, if you want, a certain independence from the TsK. He has his group, I have my group, they have a personal allegiance to me."[4]

In speaking out against groups based on personal allegiance to a patron, Stalin was not just talking about secretaries of local party organizations. He appears to have seen a similar threat in all structures, however loosely organized, and leveled particular criticism for pursuing institutional self-interest (vedomstvennost') and placing the interests of a given group above those of the state against the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry and its head, Ordzhonikidze. The concern that Stalin expressed over the question of sabotage in the army and the NKVD, which was the subject of special discussions at the plenum, may have masked his anxiety over such dual loyalties within these organs of government. One institution where personal allegiances clearly played an oversized role was the Politburo itself. The damage it suffered as the result of purges had a character all its own.

Stalin did not have a very high opinion of the managerial abilities of the older administrators. In his plenum speech, as if warding off charges that he was destroying highly skilled cadres, Stalin asserted, "Today's saboteurs do not have any technical advantages over our people. To the contrary, our people are technically better trained." The advantage of the saboteurs, Stalin insisted, was only their "possession of a party membership card."[5] This appears to have been Stalin's opinion about old Bolsheviks as an "estate." The old cadres, in Stalin's opinion, had lost their revolutionary zeal and were drawn to a tranquil, "petit bourgeois" life. A significant portion of Stalin's speech at the plenum was devoted to denouncing a "mood of nonchalance and self-satisfaction," an "atmosphere of grand ceremonies and mutual salutations," that "undermines people's sense of direction and tends to make them rest on their laurels."[6]

The older cadres were also accused of widespread abuse of power. As the new wave of terror got under way, the anti-bureaucratic propaganda campaign in the press intensified. Many administrators were accused of breaking the law, being degenerate, having a heartless attitude toward people, suppressing criticism, encouraging sycophants, and creating local cults. All of these themes were developed during the February–March plenum. Boris Sheboldaev, secretary of the Azov-Black Sea party territorial committee, and Pavel Postyshev, secretary of the Kiev Province committee, were the butts of criticism at the plenum, especially for encouraging toadies and creating their own cults. But to varying degrees, analogous accusations were leveled against the heads of almost

all major organizations. One of Stalin's closest aides, Lev Mekhlis, editor of *Pravda,* devoted almost his entire speech to criticism of the secretaries of provincial committees. Citing numerous examples from local newspapers, he excoriated a flourishing "toadyism and *vozhdizm* [leaderism]." In Gorky Territory, according to Mekhlis, a newspaper was named *For the Implementation of Comrade Pramnek's Instructions,* and the territorial committee halted its publication only after sharp criticism in the pages of *Pravda.* In another case, the newspaper *The Chelyabinsk Worker* had published a report that concluded with the words "Long live the head of Cheliabinsk Bolsheviks, Com. Ryndin!"[7]

As a rule, those so criticized were eventually labeled enemies of the people. They were assigned full responsibility for lawlessness, violence, economic failures, and the unprecedented hardships endured by the populace in the past.

Stalin seems to have felt that the best way to strengthen the regime was to promote a new generation of leaders. They were better educated, energetic, and free of any inflated sense of their own worth due to "revolutionary service," nor were they responsible for the crimes and violence during collectivization and industrialization. Their life experiences and rapid advancement were the best guarantees of their loyalty to Stalin. It was from his hands that they received positions of authority; it was with him that hope for further advancement rested. In fact, a turnover of cadres in the late 1930s became not only possible but essential. Sheila Fitzpatrick, who has studied this question in detail, has shown that the mass advancement and training of new "proletarian cadres" in the late 1920s and early 1930s created a "potential problem: the *vydvizhentsy,* better qualified than the old cadres, were on the average only about ten years younger. In the natural course of things, they would probably have had to wait a very long time for top jobs."[8] Stalin's remarks at the plenum suggest that he was aware of this problem. "We have tens of thousands of free people, talented people. We just have to recognize them and promote them in time so they don't languish too long in one place and start to rot."[9]

Of course, the promotion of new officials did not require the murder of old ones. But like any dictator, Stalin preferred to destroy his aggrieved former comrades, suspecting that at a critical moment they might unite and remind their leader how unfairly he had treated them. Under Stalin, disgraced officials did not simply go into retirement, and

this forced anyone fortunate enough to survive to work with redoubled effort to prove how indispensable and devoted he or she was.

While much of the Soviet nomenklatura was destroyed during this period, the vast majority of victims of the Great Terror—the mass operations conducted between August 1937 and November 1938—were ordinary citizens. Some of their contemporaries, in attempting to understand the brutal logic of the terror, advanced the theory that Stalin's main goal was the destruction of opponents of the regime that could potentially constitute a fifth column in case of war. This notion was expressed in letters to Stalin both by Nikolai Bukharin (writing from prison) in December 1937 and Mikhail Sholokhov in February 1938.[10] Analogous theories were proposed by Western observers. The U.S. ambassador to Moscow Joseph Davies wrote about repression as a method for destroying a potential fifth column.[11] Isaac Deutscher expresses a similar viewpoint in his biography of Stalin.[12]

Documents that have become available in recent years support these theories. In and of themselves, we should note, the numerous assertions by Stalin and his comrades-in-arms of a military threat are not proof that the Kremlin actually believed that one existed. In many cases, especially in the 1920s, the flames of war hysteria were fanned purely as a propaganda tool to distract the people from failures in the domestic policy arena. But in the mid-1930s things were different. Suffice it to point out that in 1936–1937 there was a significant (even explosive) growth in the military budget, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of total expenditures.[13] The international situation in 1936 and 1937, when the mass purges were under way, had all the hallmarks of a prewar period. An important indicator from the perspective of the Soviet leadership, besides the increasingly aggressive posture of German Fascists, was the war in Spain. Events in Spain convinced Stalin, who was already highly mistrustful of the Western democracies, that England and France were not able to effectively resist Germany. These events also served as reminders of the destructive potential of foreign intervention in a civil war, as well as of the fifth-column factor, which had emerged as a concept within the Spanish context. There is documentary evidence that Stalin, who devoted a lot of time to Spain, was convinced that one of the main reasons the republicans had been defeated was the presence of traitors in their camp, and he demanded that traitors be dealt with decisively.[14] Interestingly, at the same time that Stalin was demanding the

liquidation of spies in Spain, preparations were being made in Moscow to launch the case against a "counterrevolutionary organization" in the Red Army.

In July 1937, when decisions were being made about large-scale operations against "anti-Soviet elements," Japan invaded China, heightening tensions in the Far East. Soon afterward, on 21 August, two important events coincided: the Soviet Union and China signed a nonaggression treaty aimed against Japan, and the Council of People's Commissars and the Central Committee issued a decree "On the Exile of the Korean Population from Border Regions of the Far Eastern Territory." The decree gave the goal of the deportations of Soviet Koreans as "stopping the infiltration of Japanese espionage into the DVK [Far Eastern Territory]."[15]

Stalin viewed the deteriorating international situation in 1936–1937 with extreme concern. Over the course of Russian history in general and the history of Bolshevism in particular, war was not just a threat from without; it was a time of social cataclysm and political upheaval. After the Bolsheviks emerged from the Civil War as victors, no force within the country had been capable of overthrowing the regime. Soviet leaders themselves had achieved power as a result of war and always believed that they might succumb to a combined effort by a foreign enemy and domestic anti-Bolshevik forces.

One of Stalin's closest comrades-in-arms, Viacheslav Molotov, spoke frankly about this several decades later.

> Nineteen thirty-seven was necessary. If you consider that after the revolution we were slashing left and right, and we were victorious, but enemies of different sorts remained, and in the face of impending danger of fascist aggression they might unite. We owe the fact that we did not have a fifth column during the war to '37. After all, even among Bolsheviks there were the sorts who were fine and loyal when everything was going well, when the country and party were not threatened with danger. But if something started, they would falter and switch sides. I think a lot of the military who were repressed in '37 shouldn't have been rehabilitated. [. . .] These people probably weren't spies, but they had ties to reconnaissance, and, most important, you couldn't count on them at a time of crisis.[16]

Another of Stalin's close comrades, Lazar Kaganovich, made similar statements in the early 1960s. Here is how he explained the reasons for

the repressions: "This was a struggle against a 'fifth column' that came to power in Germany under Hitlerite fascism and was preparing war against the land of Soviets."[17]

There is good reason to believe that Molotov and Kaganovich were repeating ideas that had been circulating among the Soviet leaders in 1937 and 1938. Stalin's preoccupation with the threat of a potential fifth column is confirmed, for example, by notes he made on the draft of Molotov's speech to the February–March 1937 plenum. Stalin underlined the point in the speech where it was asserted that Trotsky had directed his supporters in the Soviet Union to "save their strength for a more important moment—for the beginning of the war—and at that moment strike decisively at the most sensitive areas of our economy."[18] In the margins of this document, opposite assertions that "we [the party] were left by those who were not up to the fight against the bourgeoisie, who intended to cast their lot with the bourgeoisie, and not with the working class," Stalin wrote: "This is good. It would be worse if they had left during wartime."[19] Stalin's speeches during the plenum contained this notion of the particular danger of saboteurs and spies at a time of war: "To win a battle in wartime several corps of soldiers are needed. And to subvert this victory on the front, all that is needed are a few spies somewhere in army headquarters or even division headquarters able to steal battle plans and give them to the enemy. To build a major railroad bridge, thousands of people are needed. But to blow it up, all you need are a few people. Dozens or even hundreds of such examples could be given."[20]

Along the same line, Stalin took active part in writing an article entitled "On Certain Cunning Techniques of Foreign Intelligence in Recruiting" that was published in *Pravda* on 4 May 1937. This lengthy feature, which spread across the bottom halves of three newspaper pages, was an important element in laying the ideological groundwork for the Great Terror. It was reprinted in several editions, used widely in propaganda and discussed in political meetings across the country. Since the First World War, the article asserted, German intelligence had maintained a vast file of citizens of Russia, France, and Great Britain who were seen as "a reserve that could be called on for espionage work." As evidenced by the initial version of the article, preserved in the archives, Stalin not only changed the headline of this feature, which started out with the prosaic title "On Certain Methods and Techniques

Used by Foreign Intelligence," but also added a page of new text about the subversion of a Soviet worker in Japan.[21]

The conviction held by Stalin and his comrades-in-arms that a potential fifth column existed in the Soviet Union was based on genuine data. The brutal confrontation that took place during the Civil War, repression during the period of the New Economic Policy, collectivization and dekulakization, the struggle against saboteurs, and party purges had affected many millions of people. The injured parties were, by definition, under suspicion. Along with their families, they constituted a significant proportion of the country's population.[22] The OGPU and later the NKVD had kept track of these "suspicious" elements. From articles by historians who have access to NKVD archives we learn that in 1939 (after the conclusion of the Great Terror) there were eighteen such categories, including, among others former nobility; tsarist officials; merchants; police; officers of the tsarist and White armies; former members of various parties hostile to the Bolsheviks (Socialist Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, and others); members expelled from the party for "anti-Soviet activities"; kulaks; and those convicted of counterrevolutionary crimes and members of their families. A number of categories contained those viewed as potential targets for recruitment by foreign intelligence: members of German, Polish, Japanese, Korean, and other ethnic groups; repatriated Soviets; those with foreign citizenship or contact with foreigners; and the clergy and members of religious organizations.[23] Documents governing the operations of 1937–1938 suggest that approximately the same categories of suspects had been used in preceding years as well. Criminals, too, were registered with the police.[24]

The OGPU-NKVD files were an important instrument of terror and were periodically used to act against population groups in a particular region. In July 1937, however, a decision was made to liquidate or isolate those groups that were being monitored by the secret police through these files. This decision does not appear to have been made abruptly. The same logic of "complete liquidation" had governed measures taken against former oppositionists, and since early 1937 the idea of a vast network of enemies—not only among former oppositionists but in the population at large—had taken hold at the highest echelons of power.

The leadership was worried about the number of people who had been expelled from the party over the course of numerous purges. We

can see this, for example, in a memorandum dated 15 February 1937, where Malenkov draws Stalin's attention to this fact. "It should be noted in particular that there are currently more than 1,500,000 former members and candidate members of the party who have been expelled or lost their membership over the course of events at various times dating back to 1922. Many enterprises have large numbers of former Communists; in fact, they sometimes outnumber the members of party organizations working in these enterprises." The memorandum gave the following examples: at the Kolomensky Locomotive Factory there were 2,000 former party members and 1,408 Communists; at the Krasnoe Sormovo Factory this ratio was 2,200 to 550; and at the Moscow Ball Bearing Factory it was 1,084 to 452.[25] Stalin took note. During his concluding remarks at the February–March plenum he cited a number of figures from Malenkov's memorandum, stating, "All of these outrages that you have let by, this is all grist for the mill of our enemies. [. . .] All of this creates a situation that allows enemies' reserves to be augmented."[26]

The victims of dekulakization posed another thorny problem in the mid-1930s. As Sheila Fitzpatrick, who has studied this question in depth, has shown, the former kulaks tried to return to their native lands and lay claim to their confiscated property. In a number of cases they were able not only to regain a portion of their property but to reestablish their former influence over the rural population, to whom they now did not look so bad in comparison to the Soviet bosses who had replaced them as the dominant force in village life. The result was a new tangle of conflicting forces: the state versus the kulaks who had had their rights restored; the kulaks versus the new rural bosses, many of whom had distinguished themselves by "liquidating kulaks"; the kulaks versus the kolkhoz workers who were now farming their former property. Fitzpatrick concludes that the shadow of the kulak "hung over the countryside throughout the 1930s."[27]

By 1937 a decision was made to use terror to cut through this tangle. At the February–March plenum, all talk of repression was aimed at the kulaks. The secretary of the Western Siberian party territorial committee, Robert Eikhe, who in previous years had come forward with initiatives for a "peaceful" solution to the problem, asserted at the plenum that among a large number of kulaks who had been resettled in his territory there was still "a sizable group of inveterate enemies who would

stop at nothing in their efforts to continue fighting."[28] The secretary of the Sverdlovsk Province committee, Ivan Kabakov, complained that the combination of intense industrial construction during the First Five-Year Plan and massive dekulakization had "opened up giant gaps through which flowed" "alien elements" into urban enterprises.[29] The secretary of the Turkmenian party organization, Yakov Popok, also brought up the dangers posed by kulaks returning from imprisonment or exile: "A large number of kulaks passed through Solovki and other camps and now are coming back as 'honest' toilers, are demanding an allotment of lands, and are laying all kinds of claims, going to the kolkhoz and demanding to be taken into kolkhozes."[30] As subsequent events showed, former kulaks were one of the main targets of the actions of 1937–1938.

During plenum discussions about preparations for elections based on the system outlined in the new constitution, much was said about the threat to Soviet authority supposedly posed by the country's millions of religious believers, especially those active in religious organizations and the Orthodox Church. The head of the Union of Militant Atheists, Yemelian Yaroslavsky, for instance, stated that the approximately thirty-nine thousand registered religious organizations (and approximately one million religious "activists") counted in the Soviet Union constituted an "organization for promoting anti-Soviet voting across the country." In addition to official religious organizations, Yaroslavsky acknowledged the existence of a large number of underground sects. The number of believers in the country was very large, as evidenced by the census of 1937. Yaroslavsky did not provide specific census figures (citing their unavailability), but as an example he gave the figure for two districts of Saratov Province: in the Cherkassky district 78.9 percent of the population was religious and in the Balandinsky district, 52.2 percent. "There are districts where it is even worse, with an even greater number of believers," Yaroslavsky lamented.[31] A large number of kolkhoz chairmen, according to Yaroslavsky, also served as church elders.[32]

As if trying to outdo one another, party functionaries speaking at the plenum pointed to one new target after another. Lavrenty Beria, secretary of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party, reported that during the past year alone approximately fifteen hundred

"former members of anti-Soviet parties—Mensheviks, Dashnaks, and Musavatists"—had returned from exile. "With a few exceptions, most of those returning are still enemies of the Soviet authorities; most are people who organize counterrevolutionary sabotage, espionage, diversionary operations. [. . .] We know that they have to be treated as enemies."[33] The secretary of the Eastern Siberia territorial committee, M. O. Razumov, asserted that "Buryat bourgeois nationalists" were joining forces with Trotskyites to spy for Japan.[34] The Moscow party secretary, Nikita Khrushchev, complained that vast numbers of people "who have something to hide" were creeping into the capital from all over the country in a desire to blend into the large city: "Not only people we have already made note of are creeping in, but so are people whom we haven't gotten to yet. [. . .] Those who have been expelled from the party are also making their way here."[35]

As documents show, the Soviet leadership continued to discuss the threat of a potential fifth column after the February–March plenum. On 20 May 1937, Malenkov sent Stalin a note in which he proposed abolishing the relatively simple procedure for registering religious associations (*dvadtsatki*). Malenkov asserted that because of existing laws, "we ourselves have created a wide-reaching legal organization that is hostile to Soviet authority." Throughout the entire Soviet Union, he said, more than 600,000 people belonged to dvadtsatki, and "in recent times the hostile activities of clerics have greatly intensified."[36] Stalin felt that it was necessary to circulate this note for review by members of the Politburo. Nikolai Yezhov also received it. On 2 June, Yezhov sent Stalin a response in which he heartily supported Malenkov. "From experience in the fight with religious counterrevolution in past years and at present, we are aware of numerous instances where the anti-Soviet forward ranks of the church use legally existing 'church dvadtsatki' as ready-made organizational forms and as cover in the interest of anti-Soviet operations."[37]

By attempting to play to Stalin's mood and by digging up more and more ominous signs of subversion, the Soviet leaders raised tensions and lay the groundwork for a "final solution" to the problem of "enemies." The idea that massive operations against a potential fifth column were essential took decisive hold of the top Soviet leadership in July 1937.

DIRECTIVES AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

In recent years most of the important documents concerning the large-scale operations carried out in 1937–1938 have become available, and historians now have an opportunity to investigate in detail the mechanisms involved in their implementation. While the country's political leadership was engaged in the discussions about the need to destroy "enemies," small-scale actions, serving as precursors to the large-scale operations, were conducted during the spring and summer of 1937. In March 1937 the NKVD published an order mandating that a special registry be created for all foreigners who had been given Soviet citizenship since 1 January 1936.[38] On 29 March 1937 the Politburo adopted a decision to remove any senior officer from the Red Army who had been expelled from the party for political reasons. For the time being, they were sent to work in economic commissariats.[39] On 23 May 1937 the Politburo approved a decision to exile two categories of "enemies" from Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev: former oppositionists who had been expelled from the party and family members of former oppositionists who had been sentenced to death or to incarceration for a term of more than five years.[40] These measures were made more stringent by instructions approved by the NKVD on 15 June 1937. The list of cities from which exiles would be sent was extended to include Sochi, Taganrog, and Rostov-on-Don.[41]

These and other relatively limited actions laid the groundwork for the truly massive repressive measures that unfolded starting in August 1937.[42] The 2 July 1937 Politburo resolution entitled "On Anti-Soviet Elements," which ordered that directives be sent to local officials by telegram, can be seen as the starting point for the Great Terror, which was actually a series of large-scale operations. This telegram required local authorities to register criminal offenders (the meaning of this phrase was not elaborated) and kulaks who had fled their places of exile and determine how many of them should be arrested and how many should be shot. There were also instructions to organize local tribunals, "troikas" made up of regional bosses. These troikas would determine who would be imprisoned and who would be shot.[43]

On 30 July 1937, after some back-and-forth with the Politburo, the commissar for internal affairs issued Order no. 00447, entitled "On an Operation to Repress Former Kulaks, Criminals, and Other Anti-Soviet

Elements."[44] The order mandated that the operation begin between 5 and 15 August 1937 (depending on the region) and be completed within four months. First and foremost, it identified "contingents subject to repression." The order essentially targeted anyone who had shown the slightest resistance to Soviet authority or who had been a victim of state terror during its earlier stages: kulaks who had left their place of exile, even if they had completed their full term of punishment; former party members who had opposed the Bolsheviks (Socialist Revolutionaries, Georgian Mensheviks, Musavatists, Dashnaks, and others); former members of the White Guard; surviving tsarist officials; "terrorists" and "spies" involved in cases fabricated by the OGPU-NKVD in past years; political prisoners still in the camps—the list goes on. In addition to people in these political categories, ordinary criminal offenders were also mentioned as targets of the purge.

All those targeted in the order were divided into two categories. Those in the first were subject to immediate arrest and execution; those in the second were to be sent to a camp or prison for a term of eight to ten years. Each province, territory, and republic was given quotas for each of the two categories. A total of 268,950 people were to be arrested, and 72,950 of them were to be shot (this figure included 10,000 already in the camps). It is important to note that the order included a mechanism for escalating the terror, since local officials were able to ask Moscow to increase their quotas for arrests and executions. The special troikas that would hand down the sentences would be guided by the limits approved by Moscow. As a rule, the troikas comprised the local NKVD chief, the secretary of the regional party organization, and the procurator of the given republic, province, or territory. They were given extraordinary powers: they handed down sentences (including death sentences) and gave orders related to the implementation of the sentences with no oversight.

On 9 August 1937 the Politburo adopted another NKVD order, "On Liquidating Polish Sabotage-Espionage Groups."[45] This order specified procedures for dealing with "counterrevolutionary national contingents." In 1937–1938 operations were carried out against Poles, Germans, Romanians, Latvians, Estonians, Finns, Greeks, Afghans, Iranians, Chinese, Bulgarians, and Macedonians. A special operation was carried out against the so-called Harbintsy (former employees of the Chinese-Eastern Railroad who returned to the Soviet Union from China

after the railroad was sold in 1935). The Stalinist leadership saw all of these populations as fertile ground for espionage and collaborationism and placed no limits on the numbers of arrests or executions that could be carried out in operations against them. However, the center did exercise a form of loose control over the operations through a procedure for approving the summary reports of sentences handed down, the so-called albums that were sent to Moscow to be signed by the heads of the regional NKVD administrations and the regional procurators.[46]

Archival materials give us the following picture. After receiving the quota for the arrest and execution of kulaks and "anti-Soviet elements" from Moscow, NKVD chiefs (on either the provincial or the territorial level) convened a board composed of municipal and district NKVD bureau heads to map out exactly what needed to be done. Initially, the files of "anti-Soviet elements" were used to compile lists of those to be arrested and shot. After the arrests, investigations were conducted. Their primary objective was seen as identifying the arrestees' "counterrevolutionary associations" and any "counterrevolutionary organizations" to which they belonged.[47] "Evidence" was obtained in various ways, but most often torture was used. New arrests were then made on the basis of "testimony" obtained under torture. Those arrested during this second wave provided new names, also under torture. Using this method for acquiring new names, the dragnet thrown out could, in theory, expand indefinitely to encompass the vast majority of the country's population.

In parallel with the large-scale operations that were at the core of the Great Terror, the purges of border regions that had begun at earlier periods continued into 1937–1938. The most significant was the September–October 1937 deportation of more than 170,000 Koreans from the Far East into Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.[48]

As the targets that had been initially approved by the Politburo were achieved, local NKVD bureaus, as provided for by Order no. 00447, began to ask Moscow to authorize higher quotas for arrests and executions, and as a rule, these requests were approved.[49] As a result, by the beginning of 1938 more than 500,000 people had been convicted based on Order no. 00447.[50] The figure far exceeded the initial target set by the order (269,000). Furthermore, the four-month timetable indicated in the order had already come to an end.

Given this background, the political signals emanating from Moscow at the very beginning of 1938 take on special significance. On 9 January

the Politburo labeled as incorrect the firing of relatives of "individuals arrested for counterrevolutionary crimes purely on the basis of their blood relations" and assigned USSR procurator Vyshinsky to issue appropriate instructions to the procuracy.[51] On 19 January newspapers published a Central Committee plenum decision entitled "On Decisions by Party Organizations Concerning Expulsions of Communists from the Party, and the Formal-Bureaucratic Attitude toward Appeals by Those Excluded from the VKP(b), and Measures for Fixing These Shortcomings," which mandated a more attentive attitude to the fate of party members. The leadership of the USSR Procuracy and the Commissariat of Justice took several steps as a result of these decisions.[52]

The true meaning of these political maneuvers is still not entirely clear. It is entirely possible that in early 1938 Stalin really was preparing to put an end to the purges and that the January plenum was supposed to send a signal to that effect. One thing that supports this theory is that when the purges finally ended in early 1939, their conclusion was proclaimed at the 18th Party Congress under the banner of fighting for an attentive attitude toward the fate of Communists. In any event, the decision adopted during the January 1938 plenum was never more than political theater. Despite the enormous scope of the terror during the second half of 1937 and initial statements about concluding operations against "anti-Soviet elements" in 1937, it was ultimately decided to continue the purges into 1938. In late January and early February 1938 the Politburo sanctioned a continuation both of the operations mandated by Order no. 00447 and of those targeting ethnic and national groups.[53]

The reasons behind these decisions are still unclear, but there is firsthand evidence that the idea of continuing the mass operations into 1938 had Stalin's support. Stalin was actively engaged in managing repressive measures in 1937. Documents show that he personally authorized increasing quotas for arrests and executions in many regions. Nor did he go away for vacation in 1937, something he had done in all recent years, usually leaving in July or August and staying away until October. On 17 January 1938, when the decision had to be made whether or not to put a halt to large-scale operations, Stalin sent Commissar of Internal Affairs Yezhov the following directive.

> The SR [Socialist Revolutionary] line (both left and right) has not been fully uncovered. [. . .] It is important to keep in mind that there are

> still many SRs in our army and outside the army. Can the NKVD account for the SRs (the "former") in the army? I would like to see a report promptly. Can the NKVD account for "former" SRs outside the army (in civil institutions)? I also would like a report in two–three weeks. [. . .]
>
> What has been done to expose and arrest all Iranians in Baku and Azerbaijan?
>
> For your information, at one time the SRs were very strong in Saratov, Tambov, and the Ukraine, in the army (officers), in Tashkent and Central Asia in general, and at the Baku electrical power stations, where they became entrenched and sabotaged the oil industry. We must act more swiftly and intelligently.[54]

Directives of this sort from Stalin (perhaps in the future other such documents will be uncovered) were undoubtedly connected to Politburo decisions in support of continuing operations in 1938. In terms of scope, operations against "national counterrevolutionary contingents" took first place among operations in 1938.

In total, secret internal NKVD statistics indicate that in 1937–1938, branches of the NKVD (excluding the police) arrested 1,575,259 people (87.1 percent for political crimes). Of these, 1,344,923 were convicted in 1937–1938, with 681,692 sentenced to be shot (353,074 in 1937 and 328,618 in 1938).[55] While these figures demand further study and refinement, overall they reflect the scale of the Great Terror. At the center of the Great Terror were operations against "anti-Soviet elements" (based on Order no. 00447) and operations against nationalities. Evidence for this can be seen in the following statistics. According to figures from 1 November 1938, the number of people convicted during operations targeted at "anti-Soviet elements" was 767,000 (of these almost 387,000 were sentenced to be shot), and the number swept up in operations targeting nationalities was 328,000 (of whom 237,000 were shot). In fact, these figures are low, since operations continued until mid-November.[56] These two operations thus accounted for more than 80 percent of those convicted and more than 90 percent of those shot.

The conclusion of large-scale operations was just as centrally orchestrated as their beginning had been. On 15 November 1938 the Politburo approved a directive banning trial by troikas, and on 17 November a Politburo decision prohibited all "mass arrest and banishment opera-

tions."[57] On 24 November, Yezhov was relieved of his post as commissar of internal affairs.[58]

Even a brief enumeration of the main actions making up what we call the Great Terror suggests that the center tightly controlled the large-scale repressive measures in 1937–1938. Instructions on the conduct of various operations and significant trials were issued by the Politburo, which also approved all of the main NKVD orders. The actions of the troikas were governed by quotas adopted in Moscow. Most sentences of high-level arrestees were officially handed down by the military collegium of the USSR Supreme Court; in actuality, they were decided by a small group of the highest-level Soviet leaders (Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Zhdanov, and, in some cases, Mikoyan and Kosior). The 383 lists containing the sentences (mostly death sentences, but in a few cases prison sentences) of more than forty thousand Soviet nomenklatura personnel were first publicly mentioned by Nikita Khrushchev during the 20th Party Congress.[59] The lists have since been made available on the Internet.[60]

Finally, regular trips by members of the Politburo throughout the country encouraged the Great Terror. The objective of the trips was to conduct purges of republic and provincial party organizations. We know of such trips by Kaganovich (to Chelyabinsk, Yaroslavl, and Ivanovo Provinces, as well as to Donbass), by Zhdanov (to Bashkiria, Tataria, and Orenburg Province), and by Mikoyan (to Armenia). In 1937–1938, Andreev acted essentially as a roving commissar dealing with repressive measures.[61]

Just because the center controlled the operations that made up the Great Terror (and other similar operations) does not mean, however, that "elemental factors" and local initiative did not play a role in shaping them. The elemental factors were officially labeled "excesses" or "violations of socialist legality." Among the aspects of the 1937–1938 operations that were attributed to "excesses" were the "inordinately large" number of deaths during interrogations; arrests and executions that surpassed the quotas established by Moscow (although local overages were generally approved retroactively by Moscow); and failures to terminate a given operation on schedule. However, such elemental factors and initiatives by local authorities were the inevitable results of incentives inherent in orders from Moscow coupled with a tendency to

put unflinching people in charge of NKVD operations and to eliminate NKVD operatives who were not sufficiently ruthless.

Once we recognize the special role played by the center in carrying out the terror we are confronted with new questions. Who specifically among the top party leaders initiated the change in political course, and to what degree are we justified in assuming that there was at this stage a radical group within the Politburo putting pressure on Stalin? The first name to come up when such questions are raised is inevitably that of Nikolai Yezhov, who was directly in charge of the government's main instrument of terror—the Commissariat of Internal Affairs, the USSR NKVD.

STALIN AND YEZHOV

Yezhov was one of the figures most actively behind the Great Terror. In the historical memory of the Russian people, his name is inextricably linked with the mass repressions, called the *yezhovshchina*. Because historians often place Yezhov within the radical group supposed to have existed within Stalin's inner circle and blamed for the hardening of the political line and the turn toward terror, they have therefore looked to Yezhov himself when seeking some explanation for the unbelievable cruelty of the mass repressions. The physical shortcomings of the "bloodthirsty dwarf"—who was only one and a half meters (five feet) tall, with a malformed face and figure—are frequently mentioned and are apparent even in his meticulously retouched official photographs. Many historians have speculated that his physical unattractiveness was the source of an inferiority complex, emotional impairment, and a cruel nature. Even before Yezhov wound up at the helm of repression campaigns, many saw signs of cruelty in him. Robert Conquest cites the impression he made on one old Communist: "He was reminded of one of those slum children whose favorite occupation was to tie paraffin-soaked paper to a cat's tail and set fire to it."[62]

Such characterizations notwithstanding, up to a certain point Yezhov did not stand out among the Stalinist leaders. His political biography and administrative resume were typical of those of his colleagues.

Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov was born into a working-class family in Saint Petersburg in 1895. Like many of his contemporaries, he had little education (in the questionnaire filled out after his arrest in 1939 he

wrote "incomplete elementary" on the line for educational background) and began to work early, at age fourteen. He apprenticed with a tailor and then worked in the Putilov Factory. During the First World War, when he was drafted into the army, he served on the northern front and worked as a metalworker in ordnance shops. In May 1917 he joined the Bolshevik party, and then he served as a commissar in one of the combat support units in Vitebsk. During the Civil War he was appointed commissar for a number of Red Army units. He wound up working in Kazan for the Tatar Province committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik). In August 1921 he was called to work in Moscow, where, as the historian Bulat Sultanbekov speculates, Yezhov was probably able to gain the support of several Central Committee members (for example, Lazar Kaganovich or Mendel Khataevich), whom he had met earlier in Belorussia.[63] In early 1922, Yezhov was appointed secretary of the Mari Province party committee, and a year later he was named secretary of the Semipalatinsk party committee. In 1925 he was appointed head of the organization department of the Kazakh territorial party committee.

Many of those who encountered Yezhov during these years gained a favorable impression of him. The Soviet writer Yury Dombrovsky (who experienced his share of arrests, prison camps, and exiles) has left the following recollections. "Three out of four of my investigations took place in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, and Yezhov served for some time as secretary of one of the Kazakhstan provincial committees (Semipalatinsk). Many of my contemporaries, especially party members, met him through work or on a personal basis. Not a single one of them spoke ill of him. This was a sympathetic, humane, mild-mannered, and tactful person. [. . .] He would always try to settle any unpleasant personal matter quietly, without creating a stir. I repeat: This was the general feeling. Was everyone really lying? After all, we were talking after the fall of the 'bloody dwarf.' That's what a lot of people called him, the 'bloody dwarf.' And it's true—in history there probably hasn't been anyone bloodier than he."[64]

Anna Larina, Bukharin's widow, heard similar things about him. "In particular, I clearly remember an exiled teacher, the Kazakh Azhgireev, whom I chanced to meet in Siberian exile. He had gotten to know Yezhov well when the latter was working in Kazakhstan, and expressed utter bafflement at his terrible career. [. . .] He would often sit with me

and start talking about Yezhov: 'What happened to him, Anna Mikhailovna? They say by now he's not a man but a beast! I wrote him twice to tell him I was innocent—no answer. And there was a time when he responded to any request at all; he was always ready to help in any way he could.'"[65]

Yezhov was given a job in the party Central Committee apparatus in Moscow in 1927. He served as deputy commissar for agriculture in 1929–1930, the period of forced collectivization and mass dekulakization, in which Yezhov had a hand. Later, he was returned to the Central Committee, where he first held the important post of head of the department handling staffing for administrative and labor union positions and then of the industrial department. Yezhov's immediate superior within the Central Committee was Lazar Kaganovich, whose introduction of Yezhov led to a special Politburo decision on 25 November 1930 allowing Yezhov to be present at Politburo meetings and to receive "all materials circulated to TsK members and TsK candidate members."[66]

According to several of Yezhov's contemporaries, during this initial period of his Central Committee career he did not distinguish himself as particularly bloodthirsty.[67] The American historian Robert Thurston, who studied repression in Soviet industrial enterprises in the 1930s, has suggested that Yezhov's experience working in heavy industry in Saint Petersburg, when conflict between workers and factory owners was intensifying, may have played a role in the many cases the NKVD developed against enterprise managers.[68] However, Yezhov's actions as head of the department in charge of Central Committee personnel does not support speculation that he had strong "anti-specialist" inclinations. Indeed, documents show that on several occasions Yezhov took the initiative in defending economic managers. In November 1932, for example, Yezhov's Central Committee personnel department introduced the question of the high turnover in the coal industry. Investigations conducted by Yezhov's subordinates had revealed that the failure to meet coalmining targets was directly tied to the high turnover rate among mine managers. On average, mine managers and chief engineers served just six months in one place, and mine superintendents served three to three and a half months. For operations to run smoothly, senior personnel needed to spend several years at the same facility. Yezhov drafted a memorandum on this matter, which served as the basis for discussion at

a session of the Central Committee's Orgburo on 19 January 1933.[69] The resulting decision established a new procedure for appointing and replacing the top management of coalmining enterprises. Now, trust administrators could be appointed or replaced only with approval from the Central Committee, with changes at the deputy level requiring an order from the commissar of heavy industry and changes at the superintendent level, an order from the trust administrator. The objective was to have management remain in one place no fewer than three to four years.[70]

In April 1933, Yezhov sent a report to Central Committee secretary Kaganovich about the dismissal of directors of four metallurgical plants in the Urals by local authorities who did not obtain authorization from the commissariat and the Central Committee. On 7 June the Orgburo issued a resolution in which it reversed the decisions to dismiss the directors and punished the guilty authorities.[71]

During the 17th Party Congress, Yezhov was made a member of the Central Committee. After the congress he became a member of the Orgburo, deputy chairman of the Party Control Commission, and head of the Central Committee's industrial department.

The turning point for Yezhov came after the death of Kirov. Stalin chose Yezhov as his main assistant in carrying out a political purge. His first assignment along these lines was an investigation into Kirov's murder. Despite a lack of evidence, Stalin ordered him to develop a case implicating Zinoviev, Kamenev, and their supporters. Top NKVD officials were skeptical about this approach and attempted to undermine Stalin's instructions. This is where Yezhov came in. Stalin effectively made Yezhov his representative within the NKVD. Delving into every detail, Yezhov coaxed the investigation down the necessary path. This upset the chekists, who were not used to such interference. But Stalin was adamant. During the February–March 1937 plenum, Yezhov gave the following account:

> Com. Stalin began, as I recall it now, by calling me and Kosarev, and he said, "Look for murderers among the Zinovievites." I must say, the chekists didn't believe this, and just in case they covered themselves by following up other leads here and there, foreign leads—maybe something would turn up. [. . .] At first our relations with the chekists, the relationship between the chekists and our oversight, took a while to smooth out. They didn't really want to show us [the results of] their in-

> vestigations. [. . .] Com. Stalin had to get involved. Comrade Stalin called Yagoda and said, "Look here, we'll knock your teeth in." [. . .] Institutional considerations were at play here: this was the first time that suddenly the TsK was asserting some kind of control over the cheka. People found that hard to swallow.[72]

Yezhov fulfilled the mission Stalin had assigned him. The investigation into the case culminated in two trials of former oppositionists, including Zinoviev and Kamenev, who were held politically accountable for the act of terrorism. After being appointed Central Committee secretary and Party Control Commission chairman, Yezhov continued to oversee the NKVD. Working closely with the secret police, he orchestrated the party purge conducted in the guise of an inspection and reissuing of party membership documents.

Stalin showed Yezhov great favor during this period. On 23 August 1935, for instance, Stalin forwarded to Yezhov proposals by Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya, on adult education, the publication of her article in *Pravda,* and organizing a Lenin museum. He appended the following note: "Com. Krupskaya is right on *all* three points. I am sending you this letter because when you commit to do something, it usually gets done, and there is hope that you will carry out my request—summon Krupskaya, have a talk with her, and so on. Greetings! How is your health? J. Stalin."[73] Stalin was satisfied with Yezhov's handling of these requests. "It is good that you took the matter firmly in hand and moved it forward," he wrote to Yezhov on 10 September. After making comments on plans for the Lenin museum, Stalin added, "Now the *most* important thing. You must go on vacation as soon as possible—to a resort in the USSR or abroad, as you wish, or as the doctors instruct. Go on vacation as soon as possible if you don't want me to raise a fuss."[74] Such letters attest to the high regard in which Stalin held this rising star. Upon returning from vacation with restored vigor, Yezhov was thrown into preparations for the trials of leaders of the former opposition movements.

Here again, as in early 1935, Stalin used Yezhov to advance his agenda within the NKVD over NKVD resistance. After making mass arrests among former supporters of Trotsky, the NKVD leadership wanted to try them and shoot them. Stalin, however, demanded that a case be fabricated demonstrating the existence of a United Trotskyite-Zinovievite Center being directed from overseas by Trotsky to wage a war of terror against the party leadership. For various reasons, NKVD

leaders had reservations about this. Then Yezhov took the cases in hand. In carrying out Stalin's instructions, he became party to a scheme against Yagoda, the NKVD commissar, and his supporters, acting in concert with Yagoda's deputy, Yakov Agranov. Several months later, Agranov related details during a meeting at the NKVD headquarters: "Yezhov summoned me to come see him at his dacha. I have to say that this meeting had a conspiratorial tone. Yezhov conveyed Stalin's feelings about mistakes made in the investigation into the case of the Trotskyite Center and ordered that measures be taken to uncover the Trotskyite Center and expose the terrorist band that had obviously not been uncovered yet, along with the personal role played by Trotsky in this affair. Yezhov put the question like this: either he himself would convene an operational meeting or else I could get involved in this case. Yezhov's instructions were specific and put us on the correct path toward breaking the case."[75]

The result of Yezhov's efforts was the first Great Moscow trial of Kamenev, Zinoviev, and other former oppositionists in August 1936. They were all shot.

Enthusiastically taking part in the falsification of cases against a Unified Troskyite-Zinovievite Center, Yezhov became increasingly involved in the activities of the secret police. At this point it is hard to say whether Stalin was preparing Yezhov to take Yagoda's place or planning to exploit the antagonism between the two men. But in late August, during the final stage of the Kamenev-Zinoviev trial, something happened that increased the probability that Yagoda would be replaced.

On 22 August 1936, after Kamenev and Zinoviev testified in court about their ties to the rightists—Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky—and it was officially announced that this testimony was being investigated by the procuracy, Mikhail Tomsky committed suicide. In a suicide note addressed to Stalin, Tomsky renounced the testimony that had been given at the trial. "I am turning to you not only as the head of the party but as an old comrade in common struggles, and here is my last request—don't believe Zinoviev's brazen slander. I was never in any kind of blocs with him, I never took part in any kind of plots against the party."[76] The letter concluded with a surprising postscript: "If you want to know who it was that pushed me onto the path of right opposition in May 1928, ask my wife personally. Only then will she name them."[77]

After arriving at Tomsky's dacha, where the suicide had occurred,

Georgy Molchanov, head of the NKVD secret political department, had been given Tomsky's suicide note. Tomsky's widow had refused to give Molchanov the names of those referred to in the postscript, so Tomsky's note was sent to Stalin, who was in the south. At the same time, Kaganovich and Ordzhonikidze, who had been left in charge in Moscow, sent Yezhov to meet with Tomsky's widow. Yezhov was able to learn that Tomsky had been referring to Yagoda, who had supposedly "been actively engaged with the troika of top rightists, regularly providing them with materials about the situation in the Central Committee and in various ways supporting their activities." Upon returning to the Central Committee, Yezhov conveyed this news to Kaganovich and Ordzhonikidze, who were awaiting his return. At first they decided that Yezhov should go to see Stalin in the south and personally report to him on the latest developments. A little later, possibly after consultation with Stalin, Kaganovich instructed Yezhov not to make a trip, but to compile a written report.

The several rough drafts of this document that have been preserved among Yezhov's papers attest to the care he took in writing the report.[78] On 9 September 1936 the final version of the letter was sent to Stalin. After informing Stalin of the circumstances of Tomsky's suicide and the contents of his suicide note, Yezhov devoted a significant portion of the letter to efforts to uncover new organizations of Trotskyites and to criticisms of the NKVD for poor performance in this area. He reported on the lack of success in searches for a "military line" of Trotskyites, even though "undoubtedly [. . .] Trotskyites in the army still have some cadres that have yet to be exposed." He bemoaned as well the failure to uncover Trotskyite connections inside the NKVD, despite indications that chekists had ignored evidence of terrorist activity by Trotskyites, Zinovievites, and their bloc that had emerged in 1933–1934. "I would very much like to tell you about certain shortcomings in the work of the cheka that cannot be tolerated much longer. Without your involvement in this matter, nothing will get done," Yezhov concluded.[79]

All this creates the impression that Yezhov was calling for a change of leadership at the NKVD. Most likely, however, he simply was in tune with Stalin's mood and was playing up to it.[80] The idea that the NKVD had been slow in exposing conspiracies (an idea that most likely originated with Stalin rather than Yezhov) appeared a month later in a telegram from Stalin demanding that Yagoda be removed.

That Yezhov was not the author of the main scenarios according to which the terror played out is seen in portions of the drafts of the letter where he spelled out the accusations that would, in his view, ultimately be leveled against the Trotskyites and rightists (Bukharin and Rykov). "Personally," Yezhov wrote, "I doubt that the rightists formed a direct organizational bloc with the Trotskyites and Zinovievites. The Trotskyites and Zinovievites are politically so discredited that the rightists must have been afraid of forming such a bloc with them." He asserted that the rightists had their organization, that they believed in terror, and that they knew about the activities of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite bloc, but that they were biding their time, wanting to exploit the Trotskyite terror to their own ends. "The very least punishment" for the rightists, Yezhov felt, would be expulsion from the Central Committee and reassignment to jobs in remote areas. "Here we need your firm instructions," he wrote to Stalin. As far as Piatakov, Karl Radek, and Sokolnikov were concerned, Yezhov had no doubt that they were heading a "counterrevolutionary gang," he wrote, but he understood that it probably did not make sense to "undertake a new trial." "The arrest and punishment of Radek and Piatakov without a trial will undoubtedly get into the foreign press. Nonetheless, it has to be done." Yezhov reported that he had carried out Stalin's request for a review of the lists of everyone arrested in association with recent cases and the cases tied to Kirov's murder to see if any new sentences should be handed down. "A rather formidable number will have to be shot. Personally, I think that we have to do this and finish with this scum once and for all." "It is understood that no trials need to be arranged. Everything can be handled in a simplified manner based on the Law of 1 December and even without convening a formal trial."[81]

So Yezhov's writings show him to be a worthy disciple of Stalin's. He obviously did not yet know of Stalin's intention to organize new trials and a large-scale purge. For now, everything being done was for the purpose of dealing with former oppositionists—and without trials, as for Kamenev and Zinoviev. What Yezhov did do was bring this plan, devised by Stalin, to life during the summer and early fall of 1936. It is possible that Stalin himself did not know what he would do over the coming months. In any event, we can see that Yezhov was not the author of the scenario as it would play out, nor its inspiration.

While carrying out Stalin's will and acting in complete secrecy, Ye-

zhov was able to maintain a reputation as a relatively moderate figure. From time to time he would help the heads of various agencies defend their own people from repression. On Stalin's instructions, Yezhov was already moving ahead full steam to prepare the case alleging rightist "terrorist activity." Not knowing this, Nikolai Bukharin, according to his widow, Anna Larina, liked Yezhov "very much." "He understood that Yezhov had become a creature of the Central Committee apparatus and that he ingratiated himself with Stalin, but he [Bukharin] also knew that he was not the only one. He considered him to be an honest man and sincerely dedicated to the party. [. . .] It seemed to Bukharin back then, paradoxical as it may seem, that Yezhov, while not a highly cultured man, had a kind heart and a clear conscience. [. . .] Bukharin was sincerely glad when Yagoda was replaced with Yezhov: 'He won't turn to falsification.'"[82] We also have evidence from V. F. Nekrasov that Ordzhonikidze's widow, Zinaida Gavrilovna, who had been friendly with Yezhov's wife, harbored no ill will toward Yezhov, who certainly bore some responsibility for her husband's death. She did not, according to Nekrasov, consider Yezhov to be a "horrid scoundrel." "He was a toy," she said. "They played with him as they wished."[83]

Yezhov was a major presence at the Central Committee plenum in February–March 1937. He delivered two reports: one on the Bukharin-Rykov case and another on sabotage within the NKVD. By dealing with high-priority government issues, Yezhov became part of the country's top leadership, even though he was not an actual member of the Politburo. On Stalin's suggestion, he was made a member of the permanent Politburo commission charged with formulating and resolving questions of a secret nature. During the mass terror, the old members of the Politburo depended on the NKVD and its head to a certain extent, checking with Yezhov on a number of matters, especially personnel issues. On 2 September 1937, for example, in asking the Politburo to approve a number of personnel changes in the Defense Commissariat, Voroshilov framed his request in the following way: "Yesterday Com. Yezhov met with Com. Gribov. Afterward I spoke with Com. Yezhov by telephone and he told me that he had no materials or cases unfavorable to Gribov. I believe Com. Gribov can be appointed com[mander] of SKVO [North Caucasus Military District] troops and Com. Timoshenko can be transferred to the KhVO [Kharkov Military District] as troop commander."[84]

To what extent does all this demonstrate that Yezhov had become an independent political figure? Extensive documentary evidence shows that what Yezhov did was carefully controlled and directed by Stalin. Stalin read the most important documents issued by Yezhov's commissariat, oversaw investigations, and determined the scripts that show trials would follow. Stalin spent a significant portion of his time in 1937–1938 reading the volumes of interrogation transcripts that Yezhov sent to him.[85] Stalin also gave Yezhov instructions urging particular arrests. Historians have noted that during investigations into the case of Tukhachevsky and other military leaders implicated in a "military conspiracy," for example, Stalin saw Yezhov almost every day.[86] Overall, as indicated by the log of visitors to Stalin's office, Yezhov visited Stalin 288 times in 1937–1938 and spent slightly fewer than 855 hours with him. This was something of a record—the only person to spend more time in Stalin's office was Molotov.[87]

Although the majority of directives concerning the terror took the form of Politburo decisions, available documents show that their true author, again, was Stalin. To varying degrees, all members of the Politburo—but most prominently Molotov, Kaganovich, Andreev, and Voroshilov—were involved in orchestrating the mass repression. They were all following Stalin, however, who determined its course and scale. Stalin signed all the Central Committee directives on arrests and trials sent to points across the country.[88] In many cases, Stalin sent out telegrams in his own name with instructions to take harsher measures than a report might have indicated. An example is Stalin's reaction to a telegram from S. M. Sobolev, secretary of the Krasnoyarsk territorial party committee, who reported on 27 August 1937 that there had been a devastating fire at the Kansk Mill and that arson by enemies of the people was suspected. Even though Sobolev promised to send additional details of the investigation to Moscow, Stalin immediately telegraphed, "Arson of the mill must have been carried out by enemies. Use any means to uncover the arsonists. Try the guilty expeditiously. Death sentence. Publish an account of the execution in the local press."[89]

Yezhov was, without doubt, a gifted and motivated disciple of Stalin. He deftly organized several public trials that, despite a few glitches, concluded with full confessions of guilt by the accused, who were active members of the Bolshevik party. Yezhov was personally involved in in-

terrogations and ordered the use of torture. Under his leadership, the NKVD instigated many repressive actions. Wishing to please Stalin and prove his indispensability, Yezhov encouraged his subordinates to "overfulfill plans" for mass arrests and executions set by the Politburo. Stalin must have urged Yezhov on to ever harsher measures. Historians have widely commented on the unprecedented propaganda campaign surrounding the NKVD and Yezhov personally in 1937–1938. Yezhov was given every imaginable award and title, held numerous key party-state posts at once (Central Committee secretary, Party Control Commission chairman, commissar of internal affairs, and, starting in October 1937, candidate Politburo member). Cities, factories, and collective farms were named after him.

Overall, Yezhov should not be cast as the orchestrator of the Great Terror or considered an independent political force determining the scope and shape of repressive measures. He was a diligent executer of Stalin's will who acted on precise instructions from above. There is not a shred of evidence that Yezhov strayed from under Stalin's control. Then, when Stalin felt that it was expedient, Yezhov was relieved of his duties.

A change in the general line would come with a halt to the mass repression and the removal of Yezhov, and Stalin began preparing for the change far in advance, one step at a time, hiding his true intentions. On 8 April 1938 the Politburo approved the appointment of Yezhov to the additional post of water transport commissar.[90] This looked like a way to honor Yezhov in accordance with Bolshevik tradition: Felix Dzerzhinsky, while serving as the Soviet Union's first secret police chief, was placed in charge of rail transport in order to bring this critical sector under control. In truth, Yezhov's new appointment was a prelude to another reshuffling of NKVD cadres. Over the following weeks, the Politburo approved the transfer of a large number of high-level NKVD personnel to the Water Transport Commissariat.[91] Major reassignments of cadres continued for several months.

The erstwhile "chekist heroes" sensed that trouble was brewing, and some of them attempted to avoid arrest. News that Genrikh Liushkov, head of the Far Eastern NKVD administration, had fled abroad made a stunning impression. In 1937 and early 1938 he had overseen the arrests, executions, and deportations of ethnic Koreans from the border regions of Central Asia. In late May 1938 the Politburo adopted a deci-

sion to relieve Liushkov of his duties in the Far East and call him back to the central NKVD apparatus. Liushkov had enough experience to realize what this "promotion" meant. During the night of 12–13 June, with classified documents in hand, he left the office on an "inspection" and crossed the border into Manchukuo (Manchuria). He provided valuable intelligence to the Japanese, and in August 1945, when he had outlived his usefulness, the retreating Japanese shot him.

Liushkov's defection was a major blow to Yezhov, who would have to take responsibility for it. He realized then just how tenuous his position was. In late November 1938, after he had already been replaced as NKVD commissar, in a confessional letter written to Stalin he remarked, "A critical moment was Liushkov's defection. I literally went mad. I called Frinovsky and proposed that we go together to report to you. I didn't have the strength to do it alone. I said to Frinovsky then, 'Now we'll face serious consequences.' [. . .] I understood that you were bound to develop doubts about the work of the NKVD. And you did. I sensed that the entire time."[92]

Soon enough, Yezhov had further cause for concern. In August, Lavrenty Beria, Central Committee secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, was appointed as Yezhov's first deputy at the NKVD. On the surface, it appeared that Yezhov was still in favor and in power, but he now had a deputy serving under him that he would never have chosen of his own free will. "I also worried about the appointment of Com. Beria," Yezhov admitted in the same letter to Stalin. "I saw in this a lack of trust in me, but I thought that this would all pass. I sincerely believed and believe that he is an outstanding worker, and I presumed that he might take over the post of commissar. I thought that his appointment set the stage for my being relieved."[93]

The ease with which his closest aides were replaced and arrested showed just how powerless the commissar of internal affairs was in and of himself. In desperation, he attempted to undertake certain countermeasures. As he admitted to Stalin, he was encouraged in this by his other NKVD deputy, Mikhail Frinovsky, who did not get along with Beria. Frinovsky tried to convince Yezhov that it would be impossible to work with Beria and that Beria would give biased information to Stalin about the state of the commissariat. Frinovsky advised "keeping a firm hold on the reins. Not to sulk, but to stay firmly in charge of the apparat so it wouldn't split between Com. Beria and me [Yezhov]. Not to let

Com. Beria's people into the apparat." As a matter of routine, NKVD cadres began to gather materials compromising Beria, but on Frinovsky's advice, Yezhov gave them to Stalin.[94]

Obviously, Yezhov no longer had any control over the situation taking shape. While making fitful attempts to keep his head above water, he undoubtedly understood that the purge of NKVD cadres sooner or later would reach the top. Unable to cope with the emotional stress this created, Yezhov reportedly began to drink without restraint.

Beginning in October, Stalin's maneuvers that centered on the NKVD took on new life. On 8 October the Politburo appointed a commission to draft a Central Committee, Council of People's Commissars, and NKVD resolution outlining new policies on arrests, procuratorial oversight, and the conduct of investigations. For the time being, Yezhov was appointed chairman of the commission, which included Beria; USSR procurator Andrei Vyshinsky; chairman of the USSR Supreme Court Nikolai Rychkov; and Georgy Malenkov, who dealt with judicial matters for the Central Committee. The commission was given ten days to draft the document. In fact, the initial resolution creating the commission, which was written in Kaganovich's hand, did not stipulate a timetable. Stalin added the ten-day limit to the final version.[95] Nevertheless, the Politburo did not adopt a resolution entitled "On Arrests, Procuratorial Oversight, and the Conduct of Investigations" until 17 November, more than a month after the commission had been created. It is doubtful that the resolution took this long to draft. The protocols of Politburo meetings seem to indicate that Stalin needed this month to purge additional cadres from the NKVD apparatus. Between 8 October and 17 November the Politburo approved the appointment of a new head of the NKVD secretariat, placed a group of instructors from the party personnel department in top positions within the NKVD personnel department, and appointed new heads for the foreign and operational departments of the NKVD's Main Administration of State Security, as well as a new head for the Leningrad Province administration, among others. All of these new appointments were Beria's people.[96] Before landing the decisive blow, Stalin, as usual, was ensuring that nothing unexpected would happen—that is the impression created.

Apparently Stalin had reason to be wary of desperate moves by doomed NKVD bosses. Following in Liushkov's footsteps, Alexander Uspensky, commissar of internal affairs for Ukraine, went into hiding

on 14 November 1938. As Nikita Khrushchev recalled, Stalin believed that Yezhov, who had listened in on a telephone call about Uspensky's fate that Stalin and Khrushchev (then Ukrainian party secretary) were having, had warned Uspensky of his impending arrest.[97] Experience and well-developed conspiratorial channels permitted Uspensky to hide in various cities around the country for five months. Not until 16 April and only after great effort did the secret police manage to find Uspensky—a success that resulted in a large number of medals for NKVD agents.

A resolution dated 17 November signaled the imminent demise of the old NKVD leadership. Even though it recognized the NKVD's success under the leadership of the party in rooting out "enemies of the people and espionage-sabotage by foreign intelligence agents" and the need to continue the task of purging the Soviet Union of "spies, saboteurs, terrorists, and wreckers," Yezhov's agency was harshly criticized. In the end, the NKVD and the procuracy were forbidden to conduct any mass operations involving arrests and resettlement, and arrests were heretofore to be carried out only with a court order and with the approval of the procurator. The judicial troikas were abolished, and the cases under their jurisdiction were either transferred to the courts or sent for review by the special board of the USSR NKVD. Chekists were reminded of the necessity of observing the code of criminal procedure in conducting investigations.[98]

Many such resolutions were no more than declarations, passed one day and forgotten the next. But the accusations against the NKVD and the allegations that saboteurs were present in the agency left no doubt that Stalin had decided to lay all the blame for the mass terror on the secret police. That is what happened, and one of the first victims of this new shift in policy was Yezhov. Just two days after the resolution about arrests and investigations was adopted, on 19 November 1938, the Politburo reviewed allegations by the head of the NKVD bureau in Ivanovo Province, V. P. Zhuravlev. There is reason to believe that his denunciation was arranged at the top. Zhuravlev stated that at one point he had reported to Yezhov about suspicious behavior among a number of high-ranking NKVD agents, but the commissar had not given the report appropriate attention, even though the allegations turned out to be well founded. The process of reviewing Zhuravlev's statements to the Politburo turned into a public rebuke of Yezhov. He was accused of

clogging investigative departments with foreign spies but also, most important, with inattention to the department charged with protecting Central Committee members and the Politburo, allowing it to be infiltrated by conspirators.

On 23 November, Yezhov was called to a meeting with Stalin, Molotov, and Voroshilov in Stalin's office that lasted from nine in the evening to one the following morning.[99] They discussed, among other things, a letter of resignation from Yezhov. In this letter, which was addressed to Stalin and dated the same day, Yezhov took full responsibility for operational failures in his commissariat and for the infiltration of enemies into chekist ranks and asked to be relieved of his duties as head of the agency. Clearly seeing the direction events were taking, Yezhov furthermore attempted to remind Stalin about his faithful service and energetically pledged his limitless devotion to the leader. He closed his letter with the following words: "Despite all the major shortcomings and failures in my work, I must say that, with the daily guidance of the TsK, the NKVD really trounced the enemy. I give my word as a Bolshevik and my pledge before the TsK VKP(b) and before Com. Stalin to keep all these lessons in mind in my future work, to bear in mind all my errors, to reform myself, and, in any area where the TsK sees fit to use me, to justify the trust of the TsK."[100]

On 24 November the Politburo granted Yezhov's request. The decision was formulated charitably: the reasons that Yezhov had stated in his letter to Stalin were cited as the context for his departure, as were supposed health problems that did not permit him to simultaneously administer two major commissariats: internal affairs and water transport. While Yezhov would no longer head the NKVD, the Politburo allowed him to continue to serve as Central Committee secretary, chairman of the Party Control Commission, and water transport commissar.[101] Nevertheless, both the members of the Politburo and the many ordinary Soviet citizens reading the report of Yezhov's replacement in newspapers certainly understood that his fate was sealed. "The comrades with whom I had been friendly and who had seemed to like me—suddenly everyone has turned from me as if I have the plague. They didn't even want to talk," Yezhov lamented in a letter to Stalin.[102]

During the 18th Party Congress Yezhov was not even elected to the Central Committee. The well-known Soviet military commander Admiral Nikolai Kuznetsov, who took part in the plenum of current Central

Committee members that decided who would be included in the newly constituted body the day before actual voting, left the following recollections: "First they eliminated those TsK members who they felt had not coped with their duties or who had somehow tarnished themselves and therefore were not worthy of being included in the new membership. [. . .] I remember how Stalin spoke against Yezhov and, pointing to his poor performance, emphasized his drunkenness rather than any abuse of authority or unwarranted arrests. Then Yezhov spoke and, acknowledging his mistakes, asked to be appointed to less independent work, which he would be able to handle."[103]

Soon after the congress, on 10 April 1939, Yezhov was arrested. Almost a year later, in February 1940, he was shot, charged with heading a "counterrevolutionary organization" within the NKVD. None of this was accompanied by the usual fanfare. The low-profile manner in which Yezhov was removed is consistent with evidence that Stalin was worried about drawing attention to the activities of the NKVD or the Great Terror. Yezhov was just one of the many scapegoats who, having carried out the will of the leader, paid with their lives so that Stalin could remain above suspicion.

Newly available archival documents have contributed greatly to our understanding of the mass repression of the late 1930s known as the Great Terror. Starting with campaigns to eliminate former oppositionists who had survived thus far, the repression grew into a sweeping purge of party-state cadres. The next stage of the terror comprised the large-scale operations against "anti-Soviet elements" and "counterrevolutionary national contingents," conducted from June 1937 through November 1938, which affected a significant portion of the Soviet population. The purge of cadres and the large-scale operations were based on a common logic. They were motivated by Stalin's desire to eliminate a potential fifth column, solidify the state apparatus and Stalin's personal power, and forcefully unite society in the face of a growing threat of war. One of the important results of this wave of terror was the almost total destruction, with a single blow, of an entire generation of managers. The large-scale advancement of young cadres created a societal basis for the conclusive consolidation of Stalin's dictatorship.

There is extensive evidence that the terror was centralized in nature and was initiated and orchestrated from Moscow. The statutes circu-

lated at its inception supplied the mechanism by which repression was undertaken and was escalated. Despite the enormous sweep and momentum of the huge undertaking, it began and ended almost simultaneously throughout the entire country with orders from Moscow. There is every reason to believe that the author and driving force behind the policy of terror was Stalin. The preparation and execution of measures aimed at destroying former oppositionists and conducting party-state purges and large-scale operations, as well as the formulation of the ideological grounds for doing so, were the focus of Stalin's unflagging attention in 1937 and 1938. To varying degrees, each and every member of the Politburo shared responsibility for the immense crimes of this period. Nikolai Yezhov, the commissar of internal affairs, played the most direct role in carrying out Stalin's plans and directives. But despite Yezhov's exceptional diligence in prosecuting the terror, there is no evidence whatsoever to indicate that he ever acted independently in conducting repressive measures or had any particular influence on Stalin in shaping policy. Yezhov's position, which was enhanced as the terror grew, nevertheless was always fully dependent on Stalin. Once Stalin made the decision to halt large-scale operations, he used Yezhov as a scapegoat for "violations of socialist legality" and destroyed him.