

4. Stalin's 1936 Show Trial against the 'Trotzkyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Centre'

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The show trial is a propaganda arm of political terror. It aims to personalize an abstract political enemy, to place it in the dock in flesh and blood and, with the aid of a perverted system of justice, to transform abstract political-ideological differences into easily intelligible common crimes. It both incites the masses against the evil embodied by the defendants and frightens them away from supporting any potential opposition.

George H. Hodos (1987)¹

4.1. Introduction

This chapter on the first of the three show trials staged in the Soviet Union in the years 1936–1938 offers a comprehensive reconstruction of an enormous travesty of justice. Recounting a complex 'Orwellian' conspiracy, in which perceptions and realities stood far apart, it is longer than the other chapters in this volume. In part this is also due to the fact that it goes beyond a mere description of the trial itself, a trial that was the catalyst to a tragedy leading to the death of hundreds of thousands of innocent people. A broad contextualisation of events that preceded, accompanied and followed the trial that took place more than three quarters of a century ago in a closed society is necessary for its full understanding. Given the fact that this trial was one of the most brazen miscarriages of justice in the 20th century and its consequences have nevertheless been largely forgotten, this chapter also serves as a reminder of what totalitarianism can do to individuals and whole societies, using the justice system to enable and 'legitimise' injustices on a large scale.

In our previous case study on the trial of Vera Zasulich, it was demonstrated that the defence had the greater 'performative power'. In this chapter the balance of power is altogether on the side of the prosecutor. The real target of the trial, Lev Trotsky, called it 'the greatest frame-up in the political history of the world'.² He was not far off the mark.

In the Zasulich case, the perpetrator was declared innocent of the alleged crime, although her crime had been objectively established and, as such, was not contested.

In the present case study, those accused were *de facto* innocent, at least of the crimes they were charged with. The real perpetrators were Joseph Stalin, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and some members of his innermost circle—Nikolai I. Yezhov, Andrei Y. Vyshinsky and Genrikh G. Yagoda. The trial was set up as part of a campaign to eliminate the ‘Old Bolsheviks’. The outcome was that Stalin won the trial, justice was denied, truth was trampled upon and much of the world fooled. Many local and foreign observers, especially those who stood on the left side of the political spectrum, professed that this trial against Kamenev and Zinoviev—Lenin’s closest comrades, according to Lenin’s wife³—and their co-defendants was fair and that the confessions made by those accused were genuine. The show was so well orchestrated that the term ‘show trial’ was later invented to describe this and subsequent trials that were perversions of justice.

Jeremy Peterson wrote that a ‘show trial’ requires two essential elements: a heightened probability of the defendant’s conviction, and a focus on the audience observing the trial rather than on the defendant.⁴ Peterson’s characterisation applies here but does not go far enough. Instead of ‘a heightened probability’ of conviction the verdicts in the Moscow show trials were a foregone conclusion.⁵ Show trials are often characterised by apparently unforced and completely unexpected confessions by defendants to improbable crimes.⁶

Between 1936 and 1938, three major show trials were held in Moscow. The key crime in the first trial was ‘terrorism’, in the second trial it was ‘wrecking’ and ‘high treason’, and in the third it was ‘espionage’.⁷ Those accused in the first Moscow trial in August 1936 were Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev and 14 others; in the second, held in late January 1937, Levid Pyatakov, Karl Radek and 15 others stood in front of the bench. The third trial saw Nikolai Bukharin, Alexei I. Rykov and 19 others accused in March 1938.⁸ Of the 54 people accused in these three trials, 47 were sentenced to death; the others received long prison sentences.⁹

Here the focus is on the first of these three show trials. Between 19 and 24 August 1936, the trial against the so-called ‘Trotzkyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Centre’ was conducted at a Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR in Moscow and given great publicity.¹⁰ Those accused were charged, *inter alia*, with forming a terrorist organisation with the purpose of killing Joseph Stalin and other members of the Soviet government. Before their trial, there had been a secret trial of a disturbed young Communist, Leonid Nikolayev, who had been charged with killing Sergei Kirov on 1 December 1934. In some respects, his case was comparable to that of Dutch Communist Marinus van der Lubbe, who allegedly set fire to the German Reichstag

building on 27 February 1933. The Nazis implicated Van der Lubbe in a Comintern (Communist International) plot and staged a trial in Leipzig. In both cases—Stalin's and Hitler's—there are indications of a false flag operation where those accused were pawns in a larger game. Their crimes and the trials were designed to consolidate power for each leader. The trial against Van der Lubbe and other alleged conspirators was public and did not quite play out the way Hitler had intended—only Van der Lubbe was sentenced to death, not his alleged Comintern comrades. The Zinoviev-Kamenev trial was staged more successfully, despite the fact that the prosecutor, Andrei Vyshinsky, had practically no evidence to prove his case—only the coerced confessions of the accused and those of equally coerced witnesses.¹¹ Nevertheless the Soviet prosecutor managed to persuade (or fool) most of the public and, incredibly, to some extent, even some of the defendants themselves. They played their roles completely against their own best interests, for reasons to be explored later.

The Kirov murder, the three Moscow show trials and the Great Purges that accompanied them still baffle historians—though not as much as those who lived through them. The chain of events is complex, and many documents relating to them have been hidden, destroyed or falsified.¹² Those writing about these events have often had political, ideological and personal motives to stress one interpretation over the other—for example, to whitewash Communist policies or to place most of the blame exclusively on Stalin. Not all archives are accessible and what they have yielded so far is complex and often confusing. As one recent Stalin biographer put it 'The events of 1935–1938, which led to the total destruction of the Leninist Party, remain the greatest riddle of Stalin's reign. Why did he destroy the Party, now completely subservient to him, with such inordinate cruelty?'¹³ The interpretation presented here is based on a broad reading of secondary sources; it is also based on the official 'Report of the Court Proceedings' of the first show trial. These texts from the trial sometimes only offer summaries of what was said, while at other times reproducing the courtroom dialogues verbatim. The Report is the only officially approved version of the recordings as they were published in 1936; it is neither complete nor fully accurate. The original protocols were apparently destroyed in a fire.¹⁴

The first Moscow show trial was a political trial, that is, legal procedures were used for political ends by a regime that did not recognise the separation of powers between legislative, executive and judicative branches of government as it evolved in Europe since the 18th century. The classical political trial involves, in the words of Otto Kirchheimer, 'a regime's attempt to incriminate its foe's public behaviour with a view to evicting him from the political scene'. A variant on this, the 'derivative political trial', Kirchheimer identifies as one 'where the weapon of defamation, perjury, and

contempt are manipulated in an effort to bring disrepute upon a political foe'.¹⁵ Both definitions are fully applicable in this case.

The trial under consideration was also 'political' in a peculiarly Marxist sense, explained by George Katkov:

Law, being like the state, only a superstructure in the organization of human society, was interpreted as one of the instruments of the class struggle, an instrument which in the hands of the property-owning classes served to maintain their privileges but which in the hands of a proletarian dictatorship (in the period of transition to socialism and Communism) was to be a revolutionary weapon to bring about the desired historical changes. Not merely legislation itself, but its practical application in court was to serve the militant purpose of the Party. It would be self-contradictory, un-Marxist and counter-revolutionary for a Marxist to object to the use of legal procedures for political ends.¹⁶

While in the beginning of Soviet rule the judiciary was politically instrumentalised mainly against class enemies, under Stalin it was also used against rivals, enemies and deviationists in the ruling Bolshevik Party as we shall see in the unfolding of events between 1934 and 1936.

4.2. What Happened before the Trial

4.2.1. *The Stalin–Trotzky Rivalry*

It has been said that all history is biography. To the extent that this is true, the present case reflects also a clash of two biographies, those of Joseph Stalin and Lev Trotzky. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was, initially, little more than a coup d'état the main architect of which was Lev Trotzky. Joseph Stalin, writing about the seizure of power in St. Petersburg on the first anniversary of the revolution in the *Pravda* (the Party newspaper), acknowledged this:

All practical work in connection with the organization of the uprising was done under the immediate direction of Comrade Trotzky, the president of the Petrograd Soviet. It can be stated with certainty that the Party is indebted primarily and principally to Comrade Trotzky for the rapid defection of the garrison to the Soviet side and for efficiently organizing the work of the Military-Revolutionary Committee.¹⁷

The origins of the conflict between Josef Stalin and Lev Trotsky go back to the civil war (1918–1920). Trotsky was the founder of the Red Army and the leading force in the civil war victory against the 'White Guards'.¹⁸ Stalin played a very minor role in these events but later rewrote history to enhance his place in it. By the early 1920s that civil war, and a war with Poland, had come to an end and an internal power struggle within the Bolshevik cadres took shape. The struggle for control of the Bolshevik Party intensified from 1922 onwards, when Lenin had his first incapacitating stroke. In that year Stalin became Secretary of the Party, a position for which Ivan N. Smirnov had also been proposed. By 1923 the Politburo consisted of V. Lenin, L. Kamenev, A. Rykov, M. Tomsy, G. Zinoviev, L. Trotsky and J. Stalin.¹⁹ The struggle for leadership which followed Lenin's death in January 1924 lasted more than three years. At the end Trotsky (and others) were defeated and Stalin had consolidated his power by 1927. In the beginning, this power struggle had not been overtly violent. After Lenin's death, as one of the six remaining Politburo members, Stalin proclaimed in 1924:

It is the task of the Party to bury Trotskyism as an ideological trend. There is talk about measures of repression against the opposition and of the possibility of a split. This is all nonsense, comrades. Our Party ... will not allow any splits. As for repressions, I am decidedly opposed to them. What we want now is not repressions, but a[n] ... ideological struggle against ... Trotskyism.²⁰

That was his declaratory policy, but Stalin's vindictiveness already surfaced in a conversation he had in the summer of 1923 with Felix Dzerzhinski, the chief of the Cheka, the political police (later renamed NKVD)²¹—a conversation Lev Kamenev also witnessed. Stalin: 'To choose one's enemy, to prepare every detail of the blow, to slake an implacable vengeance, and then go to bed. [...] There is nothing sweeter in the world!'²² Stalin developed a simple conflict resolution model early in his career: 'Death solves all problems. Where there are no people, there are no problems.'²³

Stalin was a master 'technician of power', his love of political intrigue driven by a thirst for revenge, and haunted by constant suspicion, bordering on paranoia in later life.²⁴ He could not forgive past insults and humiliations. In 1926 Trotsky had called Stalin the 'gravedigger' of the Party and the revolution. Pyatakov (who was to be tried ten years later in the second show trial), told Trotsky '[Stalin] will never forgive you for this, neither you nor your children, nor your grandchildren'.²⁵ During the 14th Party Congress in 1926, Kamenev and Zinoviev had also broken with Stalin, who formed a

new coalition with the ‘Party’s favourite’ (as Lenin called him) Nikolai Bukharin.²⁶ The following year, in August 1927, Stalin had Trotsky and Zinoviev expelled from the Central Committee. Numerically, the Trotskyists were only a very small faction in the Party: out of 854,000 Party members only 4,000 voted for the Trotskyists and only about 12,000 Party members at that time openly sympathised with Trotsky.²⁷ Trotsky tried to regain lost ground by revealing the existence (but not the content) of Lenin’s testament in public in October 1927.²⁸ In this document Lenin had discussed five possible successors: Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin and Pyatakov; at the same time he had suggested the removal of Stalin who was judged to be too brutal.²⁹ However, that did not help Trotsky; he was exiled to Alma Ati in 1927. Later he fled to Norway where he stayed during the first show trial. When Stalin put pressure on Norway, he sailed to Mexico.

After Lenin’s death, there were shifting coalitions among the main actors in the Communist Party’s power struggles. The events of 1936–1938 were in part a replay of these alliances and splits.³⁰ Yet at the same time, by the mid-1930s, the power struggles of the 1920s were largely history; Stalin was the acknowledged supreme leader of the Party and the Soviet state.³¹ He had implemented his first Five-Year Plan (1928–1933) with an emphasis on heavy industrialisation and arms production on the one hand and a collectivisation of agriculture on the other. The human costs, especially in the countryside, were enormous: six million died in 1932–1933 alone, as collectivisation led to repression through forced deportations, and to famine.³² As a consequence, in the late 1920s and early 1930s criticism of Party politics was widespread, but subdued and unorganised.³³ Throughout the 1920s, the Bolshevik Party had not been held in high esteem by most of the workers, let alone the peasants. They experienced a continuation of repressive tactics used during the Red Terror and the civil war. These tactics had kept the Bolsheviks in power.³⁴

By the early 1930s, those Party members (and common people) who took issue with the brutality of collectivisation created more problems for Stalin than the Trotskyists.³⁵ To escape deportation and starvation, some 12 million peasants had fled to the cities.³⁶ Reflections of widespread social unrest surfaced at the Party Congress in 1933. The gross mismanagement of the economy motivated some Congress delegates to discuss among themselves the possibility of replacing Stalin with the Party’s chief in Leningrad, who was Zinoviev’s successor. Kirov was more popular among the workers than most other Party bosses. He actually ventured into the factories, spoke to and listened to workers—something most Party bosses did not dare or care to do any more, except in tightly controlled settings. Kirov was asked privately whether he would accept Stalin’s position if it was offered to him. Yet Kirov informed Stalin about this

exploratory move to replace him, and said he had no interest in becoming leader of the Party.³⁷ Stalin was nevertheless anxious about this challenge. Kirov in turn became worried too as now he felt threatened.³⁸

In order to address the latent revolt by those who had wanted to see Kirov replace him, Stalin came up with the idea of bringing Kirov from Leningrad to Moscow to be appointed as one of the four Party secretaries. On the surface, this would appear to be a concession to the wishes of many in the Communist Party. In reality, it would bring Kirov under the direct control of Stalin, his bodyguards and his secret police. Kirov tried to avoid and then postpone the promotion. A compromise was reached: Kirov became third secretary of the Party but would stay for the time being in Leningrad. Stalin and Kirov had once been friends, but now Stalin saw Kirov as his rival. The events that follow are difficult to understand without acknowledging the duality of this love/hate relationship. Sergei Kirov had a number of qualities Stalin admired—popularity, eloquence, charisma—and Stalin was also jealous of Kirov. Ominously, when Kirov postponed his move to Moscow, Stalin tried to replace some of Kirov's personal security personnel in Leningrad.

Events taking place in Germany around this time may have influenced Stalin. On 30 June 1934, Adolf Hitler arranged what has become known as the 'Night of the Long Knives'. With his close allies Hermann Goering, (Prime Minister of Prussia), Joseph Goebbels (Propaganda) and ss chief Heinrich Himmler and his Deputy Reinhard Heydrich, Hitler had manufactured false evidence, implicating the chief of the Sturm Abteilung SA—a paramilitary unit of Hitler's party, Ernst Röhm, in a conspiracy to organise a Putsch and execute the Fuehrer and his closest allies. On 30 June, when all the SA leaders were meeting in Bad Wiessee, Hitler ordered a commando action to have them arrested, purged and, as in Röhm's case, killed (after he refused to commit suicide). Altogether some 130 SA members as well as some others were executed. Hitler's bold move to get rid of his rivals impressed Stalin, who commented to Politburo member Anastas Mikoyan, 'Did you hear what happened in Germany? Some fellow that Hitler! Splendid. That's a deed of some skill!'³⁹

What Stalin did to his own Old Bolsheviks in the coming years was many times 'bolder' (and deadlier) than Hitler's purge of the rival SA leaders. It was a nightmare that engulfed the Party, then the country and even the Comintern (the Communist International Organisation), for more than four years. We know that he conceived the idea to purge the Party of oppositionists and rivals in the summer of 1934,⁴⁰ at the same time as the SA purge took place in Germany. There is an ongoing controversy among historians as to the planning for each consecutive step in Stalin's ascent to total power in the USSR. Some argue that he followed a diabolical strategy; others see

him stumbling from one deadly game of chess to another, sometime retreating, then attacking again.⁴¹ Newly released sources tend to support the first view.

What triggered the Great Purge and the first Stalinist show trial was the murder of the Leningrad Party chief Sergei Kirov, on 1 December 1934. The apparent murderer was Leonid Nikolayev, but there is an ongoing controversy as to whether or not Stalin personally ordered Kirov's assassination. Some questions remain unanswered, such as who tipped off Nikolayev that Kirov was making an unplanned visit to his office at the Smolny Institute? Khrushchev later thought that Stalin had a hand in this, and Mikoyan also believed that Stalin 'was somehow involved in the death'.⁴² The murderer and key witnesses conveniently disappeared under dubious circumstances,⁴³ evidence was lost or altered,⁴⁴ and different interest groups, then and later, pushed or prevented interpretations as to who was behind Kirov's murder. Kirov's bodyguard (M.D. Borisov) was killed the next day in a contrived car accident. On the afternoon of the murder, as Borisov had accompanied Kirov to his office on the third floor of the Smolny Institute, he lagged behind him on the staircase—either because he could not keep pace with the more agile Kirov or because he was apparently held back for a few moments by some Chekists from Moscow. This gave Nikolayev, who was waiting for Kirov in the corridor on the third floor, the opportunity to approach him from behind and shoot him in the neck. A second shot was fired in the corridor shortly afterwards and hit the ceiling. It is unclear whether this shot was a bungled attempt at suicide by the assassin, perhaps prevented by the interference of an electrician who happened to step into the corridor. When Borisov arrived moments later with his pistol drawn, Kirov was already mortally wounded.⁴⁵

The assassin was a disgruntled young Communist who felt mistreated by the Party bosses. In this he was not alone; feelings of resentment were widespread among the population, as revealed by secret reports the NKVD produced on reactions to Kirov's murder.⁴⁶ In the month before the murder, Nikolayev had lost his job, and was first excluded but then reinstated in the Party. He had written to both Stalin and Kirov in desperation, saying, 'I am ready to do anything if no one responds.' Perhaps this gave Stalin the idea of using him as his instrument to get rid of Kirov.⁴⁷ However, no 'smoking gun' points directly to Stalin. Some pieces of the evidence puzzle are difficult to reconcile, perhaps also because evidence was altered in the aftermath of the murder, but the case against Stalin is a strong one.⁴⁸ Philip Medved, Leningrad NKVD chief, later held that Stalin had suggested the assassination of Kirov to Yagoda. He did not survive the purges, probably because he knew too much.⁴⁹

The murder of Kirov marks the beginning of a chain of events that cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, and affected countless others who were exiled

to Siberia or placed in camps.⁵⁰ The Great Terror of 1936–1938 was mainly a purge of the Bolshevik Party. The Party had grown considerably during the First Five-Year plan, more than doubling between 1929 and 1933 to 3.5 million members. Communist Party insiders enjoyed privileges and protection from persecution, so membership was sought not only by true believers, but by opportunists and careerists of all hues. Attempts were made to control the influx into the Party, for example by withdrawing old Party cards and issuing new ones, and in 1933 alone more than 18 per cent of Party members lost their membership. This process of purging Party membership continued throughout the 1930s.⁵¹ Until 1936, exclusion from the Party meant at worst exile, prison or labour camp. In the 1920s, a show of regret had often been sufficient for re-admission to the Party, certainly for Old Bolsheviks (who had been Party members before 1917, or had distinguished themselves in the civil war against the 'White Guard' counter-revolutionaries). Zinoviev and Kamenev, who had been expelled twice from the Party, were readmitted in the late 1920s after showing repentance.⁵²

By the mid-1930s the Communist Party was the new elite, far removed from the proletariat it was supposed to represent. In reality, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' meant rule by cliques of local bosses with their patronage networks. Party discipline had brought the Bolsheviks to power in 1917. Stalin and others considered the Party as the instrument to bring about a new society. But first the Party had to be cleansed of parasites, opportunists and 'double-dealers' (those who professed Bolshevik principles but secretly advanced their own careers). Vigilance was called for to keep the Party 'pure'. Those who deviated from the Party line had to be purged. Although Kirov had not openly deviated from the Party line, he wanted reconciliation within the Party, as well as between the Party and the 165 million citizens of the Soviet Union.⁵³ He was also, as we have seen, Stalin's potential rival. His murder marked the beginning of a catastrophic series of events. To understand the show trial that began on 19 August 1936 some additional background information—provided here in the following paragraphs in chronological fashion—is necessary.

On 1 December 1934, within hours of learning of the Kirov murder, Stalin drafted a new law, published in *Pravda* on 5 December; it stipulated rapid procedures for processing cases involving terrorism. Investigations of terrorist cases were to be completed within ten days; the accused would be informed of the charges only 24 hours before the trial, and the trial would take place without the presence of the defendant or counsel. Appeals for clemency would not be permitted and death sentences would be carried out immediately. This decree was soon to be included under Article 58 of the Penal Code (1927) and gave the NKVD a licence to kill suspects without due process. This fateful decree was to provide the legal basis for the arrest,

trial and execution or deportation to labour camps of up to two million people over the next four years.⁵⁴ On the same day he drafted the draconian new law, Stalin travelled to Leningrad in order to supervise the investigation into Kirov's murder. He personally spoke with the assassin Nikolayev, seeking to link him to a group of Zinovievites, an allegation Nikolayev denied.⁵⁵ Following Kirov's state funeral on 3 December 1934, Stalin created a personality cult around the fallen comrade; within a week, several books in praise of Kirov were published.⁵⁶ By mid-December, Kamenev and Zinoviev, already confined in a 'political isolator' (a procedure similar to house arrest) since 1932, were arrested in Moscow;⁵⁷ In Leningrad, 843 others were arrested in the two and a half months after the murder. Until 1938, more than 90,000 others were to follow them in the Leningrad district alone.⁵⁸ By 22 December 1934, the NKVD announced that investigations had shown that Nikolayev was a member of an underground terrorist organisation established by Zinoviev oppositionists in Leningrad.⁵⁹ Stalin instructed that all involved should be condemned to death.⁶⁰ A week later Soviet newspapers reported that Nikolayev and 13 'young Zinovievites' associated with a Leningrad terrorist Centre had been sentenced in a closed trial and executed.⁶¹ Neither the indictment nor the verdict mentioned Zinoviev and Kamenev.⁶² During December, 6,501 people were shot, many of them from Kirov's entourage.⁶³

At the beginning of 1935, Stalin instructed the NKVD to find and bring to trial any members of the Zinovievite 'Moscow Centre'. In a secret trial, 19 accused persons were found guilty of 'objectively contributing to inflaming terrorist moods' among adherents in Leningrad. They were tried on 15–16 January; Kamenev received a five-year prison sentence and Zinoviev ten years.⁶⁴ Yezhov, speaking on behalf of Stalin, had assured Zinoviev that the secret trial would be the last sacrifice he would have to make 'for the sake of the Party'.⁶⁵ No death sentences were issued. In a secret letter Stalin ordered that all opposition had to be treated like White Guards, i.e. were to be arrested and taken to camps.⁶⁶ On 16 January it was announced that further investigations had produced 'new material relating to the underground counter-revolutionary activities of G.Y. Zinoviev, G.E. Evdokimov, L.B. Kamenev and G.F. Fedorov'.⁶⁷ Two days later Stalin drafted a letter on the lessons of the events connected to the Kirov murder, calling the Zinoviev oppositional group 'the most treacherous and despicable of all fractional groups in the history of our country', adding that 'with such double-dealers we cannot restrict ourselves to their exclusion from the Party'.⁶⁸ Stalin also demanded a check of all Party membership cards by the Party. It was alleged that Kirov's murderer had entered the Smolny Institute with a falsified Party card. Some 250,000 members were subsequently deprived of Party membership.⁶⁹

On 23 February 1935, after a series of arrests, during which part of Trotsky's archive from the 1927 period was recovered (from I.I. Trusov), Stalin asked Yezhov to build a case against a 'Trotsky-Zinoviev Centre'.⁷⁰ By late April or early May, Yagoda, Commissar-General of State Security, in a text edited by Stalin and entitled 'From Factionalism to Open Counter-revolution', 'proof' was offered that in its struggle against the Party the former opposition around Zinoviev had resorted to methods of terror.⁷¹ On 13 May, a secret Central Committee decree led to the creation of a Special Security Commission of Politburo members charged with directing the liquidation of 'enemies of the people'. Its members included Stalin, Yezhov, Vyshinsky, Zhdanov, Malenkov and Shkiryatov.⁷² In mid-1935, Yezhov announced the existence of a Centre of Trotskyists. Yezhov said that he was sanctioned to carry out operations against Trotskyists in Moscow.⁷³ Towards the end of the year Yezhov, by now the deputy chief of the NKVD, reported to the Central Committee that 33 per cent of all those purged from the Party since July 1935 had been spies, White Guards and Trotskyists.⁷⁴ Yezhov initiated an investigation into the case of a 'United Trotsky-Zinoviev center'.⁷⁵ In early 1936, Valentine Olberg, a former Trotsky associate, was arrested in Gorky. Under interrogation, Olberg 'confessed' to being a Trotsky emissary.⁷⁶ On the last day of March 1936, Stalin ordered Yagoda and Vyshinsky to submit a concrete proposal for the trial of 82 Trotskyists. Among those interrogated during April in preparation of such a trial were Smirnov, Mrachkovsky and Ter-Vaganyan.⁷⁷ When Yagoda, Commissar-General of State Security, looked at the evidence, he came to the conclusion that the charge that Trotsky had ordered terrorism in the USSR was 'nonsense'.⁷⁸ Stalin threatened to 'punch him in the nose' if he continued to drag his feet with the investigations.⁷⁹

In mid-May, Molchanov, an NKVD investigator, presented to Stalin, Yezhov, Yagoda and others a diagram depicting Trotsky as part of a 'terrorist conspiracy' in the USSR.⁸⁰ By 20 May the Politburo decided that Trotskyists already in prison were to be handed over to the NKVD so that death sentences could be passed on them.⁸¹ By 19 June 1936 Yagoda and Vyshinsky, the State Prosecutor, presented to Stalin the requested list of 82 Trotskyists who could be brought to trial for participating in terrorist activity. Stalin suggested that a combined case against Trotskyists and Zinovievites should be prepared for an open trial.⁸² In preparation of a public trial, by mid-July 'confessions' were obtained from Kamenev, Zinoviev, Bakayev, Dreitzer and Mrachkovsky.⁸³ On 29 July 1936, just before going on holiday to Sochi, Stalin sent a secret letter, which had been drafted by Yezhov, to the Politburo, the Central Committee and the Party organisations. This letter, 'On the Terrorist Activity of the Trotsky-Zinoviev Counter-revolutionary Bloc', came as a total surprise to most of the recipients.⁸⁴ It claimed

that plans to assassinate Stalin, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Ordzhonikidze, Zhdanov, Kosior and Postyshev were the ‘main and principal task of the [Trotzky–Zinoviev] Centre’.⁸⁵ A week later, on 7 August 1936, Vyshinsky sent Stalin a draft indictment for the forthcoming trial of Zinoviev, Kamenev et al.; Stalin edited it twice and accepted the third version.⁸⁶ In preparation of the trial a further decree was issued with regard to terrorist trials, apparently to create the illusion for those accused that all would be window dressing and that in the end they would be spared the full weight of the verdict. To achieve this, on 11 August 1936, partly undoing the decree of 1 December 1934, a further decree was issued re-establishing public hearings for terrorist trials. Contrary to the decree of 1 December (which had entered the Penal Code under article 58), appeals from the accused were allowed for three days after a sentence had been passed, and the use of defence lawyers was again permitted.⁸⁷ This opened the possibility of a public show trial. Four days later, on 15 August 1936, *Pravda* announced that the NKVD had uncovered a Trotzkyist–Zinoviev plot to murder Stalin and other leaders, and that these ‘enemies of the people’ were the same who had also killed Kirov.⁸⁸

Three days later, on 19 August 1936—which, by coincidence, was also the day the official theatre season in Moscow began⁸⁹—the show trial could begin. The person who had done the *mise en scène*, Stalin, had, in the meantime, left the scene; on 13 August he arrived at the Black Sea where he would spend the coming six weeks on holiday in Sochi. However, how well he prepared the show can be gathered from his involvement in the preparations, including the production of ‘confessions’.

4.2.2. How ‘Confessions’ were Secured

In 1939 chief prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky published a book with the title *The Theory of Legal Evidence in Soviet Law*. In this work he postulated that ‘confession is a queen over all sorts of evidence’.⁹⁰ Confession also happens to be the essence of show trials. Before we turn to the trial itself, it is important to examine the way the evidence for the trial was collected. It consisted almost exclusively of self-incriminating ‘confessions’. How were these astounding confessions obtained? At the time, some suggested the defendants had been given chemical substances, or were hypnotised. Another theory was that actors (who resembled the more well-known defendants) sat in the courtroom, rather than the Old Bolshevik heroes themselves. Others thought that torture had elicited the confessions.⁹¹ There is some substance to this last charge, but the issue depends on how torture is defined. According to Khrushchev, extreme torture only became, on Stalin’s initiative, standard practice by 1937.⁹² However the defendants of the 1936 show

trial were certainly under great pressure. The key defendants, Zinoviev and Kamenev, were broken men after years of imprisonment. They had been twice excluded from the Party and then readmitted after submitting to the Party line. They may have hoped that the trial was the final humiliation to undergo before they were welcomed back into the arms of the Party. Or they may have hoped that if the death sentence was pronounced, it would be commuted immediately to a lesser penalty. There is some dispute as to whether or not they were tortured to extract confessions. Yet this does not seem to have been the case, at least for these two defendants. Yet those arrested and prepared for trial were certainly placed under enormous psychological pressure. Originally, some 300 'Trotzkyists' had been rounded up from prisons and the Gulag and brought to Moscow where they had been prepared for possible use in the trial.⁹³ Within such a large group, some prisoners would inevitably be prepared to confess anything and denounce anybody if it would help to save themselves, or at least the lives of their family members. Some of those brought to trial were actually, as we shall see, provocateurs—pseudo-defendants working for the NKVD who were instructed to denounce some of the real defendants.

When the usual interrogative methods (sleep deprivation, sub-standard food and general bullying) used on Kamenev did not produce the desired result, Stalin was annoyed. He reprimanded one of the interrogators, Mironov: 'Now, then, don't tell me anymore that Kamenev, or this or that prisoner, is able to withstand that pressure. Don't come to report to me until you have Kamenev's confession in this briefcase!'⁹⁴ Further 'pressure' was brought on Kamenev, including Yezhov's threat to shoot Kamenev's son if he did not submit. During a critical phase of the interrogations, Stalin's secretary would phone every two hours to find out whether Kamenev and Mrachkovsky had been 'broken' (had confessed).⁹⁵ Stalin's instructions on how to obtain a confession on another occasion had been: 'Mount your prisoners and don't dismount till they have given you the testimony!'⁹⁶ At one point in the summer of 1936, Kamenev and Zinoviev were allowed to consult with each other. As a consequence, they 'agreed to go on trial on condition that Stalin would confirm his promise to them of executing neither themselves nor their followers, in the presence of the whole Politburo'.⁹⁷ According to Orlov, an NKVD chief, they were then brought to the Kremlin, but instead of the full Politburo only Stalin, Voroshilov and Yezhov were present. Stalin explained that they formed the special 'commission' of the Politburo authorised to hear the case. The two defendants asked for a guarantee that their lives would be spared in exchange for confessions. Stalin made it clear that they were in no position to make demands, but also gave them false hope, telling them:

First: that the trial is directed not against them, but against Trotzky, the principal enemy of the Party; Second: if we did not shoot them [Zinoviev and Kamenev] when they fought actively against the Central Committee, then why should we shoot them after they have helped the Central Committee in the struggle against Trotzky? Third, the comrades forget also ... that we are Bolsheviks, disciples and followers of Lenin, and that we don't want to shed the blood of Old Bolsheviks, no matter how grave their past sins against the Party.

Zinoviev and Kamenev consented to go on trial 'if it were promised that none of the Old Bolsheviks would be executed, that their families would not be persecuted and that in the future the death sentence would not be applied to any of the former members of the opposition'. Stalin's reply was, according to Orlov, 'That goes without saying.'⁹⁸ As soon as Zinoviev and Kamenev had made what they thought was a deal with Stalin, their surrender was rewarded: by mid-July 1936, they were held in much better conditions of detention—more like a sanatorium than a prison.⁹⁹ They were no longer subject to the 'conveyor belt' (non-stop interrogations by a series of NKVD interrogators) that had deprived them of sleep.¹⁰⁰ The other main defendants—Bakayev, Dreitzer, Mrachkovsky—confessed between 13 and 21 July. Mrachkovsky had endured the 'conveyor belt' for hours in a row.¹⁰¹ In the end, all but Smirnov confessed, and even he seemed to be close to a confession by the 5th of August.¹⁰² Two days later, the prosecutor, Andrei Vyshinsky, felt confident that he had a sufficiently large pool of 'confessing' oppositionists to present a list of twelve to be indicted. Stalin changed parts of Vyshinsky's draft indictment and added two more names (Moissei Lurye and Nathan Lurye). A revised indictment draft reached Stalin on 10 August, and Stalin again added two more names—Ter-Vaganyan and Evdokimov.¹⁰³

These men were all Old Bolsheviks for whom the Party was sacred. For the sake of the Party, they were expected to make great personal sacrifices. Zinoviev was asked by Molotov:

How many times have you lied to the Party? How many times have your lies damaged the Party? You are now asked to calumniate yourself for the good of the Party. At a time when Trotzky is trying to split the workers' movement, and the Germans are preparing to attack us, your lies will undoubtedly be of help to the Party. That is undeniable. So what is there to discuss? If the interests of the Party demand it, it is our duty to sacrifice not only our miserable reputations but our very lives. Although, objectively, you are not being asked to lie. Objectively, everything you did was [a] betrayal of the Party's interest.¹⁰⁴

Molotov assumed that if Zinoviev and Kamenev played the game in the show trial well, they would be pardoned and he told Stalin so.¹⁰⁵ That belief would put Molotov himself for a while in the danger zone.¹⁰⁶

The scriptwriter for the trial was Stalin, who followed the interrogations in every detail.¹⁰⁷ Russian historian Roman Brackman, author of a recent biography of Stalin, writes:

The interrogators had to force the defendants to confess their roles in the plot, the details of which had been provided by Stalin who probably convinced himself that the plot indeed existed. But to buttress his conviction, he felt the need to force the defendants to confess their involvement in it. When some of his subordinates dared to suggest that many people at home or abroad would not believe these accusations against Old Bolsheviks, Stalin's contemptuous reply was: 'Never mind, they'll swallow it.'¹⁰⁸

Not only was the audience to be fooled; the accused were also misled. Before the trial began, Yagoda and Yezhov met with the chief defendants—Zinoviev, Kamenev, Evdikomov, Mrachkovsky, Bakayev and Ter-Vaganyan. They were reminded of Stalin's promise that their lives would be spared if they all played their roles as expected. Yezhov also warned them that the whole group would suffer if there was a single attempt at 'treachery'.¹⁰⁹

During the trial, Yagoda would monitor the performance of the accused through a loudspeaker from an adjacent room.¹¹⁰ In the Kremlin, Lazar Kaganovich ('Iron Lazar', the Politburo member who had been one of the chief people responsible for the genocidal famine in the Ukraine) was entrusted with controlling the course of the trial.¹¹¹ Each day, protocols of the court proceedings were brought or transmitted to Stalin. His hand had been in almost every detail of the trial, including selecting the cast of defendants, rewording the indictment prepared by Vyshinsky, and pre-determining the sentences to be meted out by the court.¹¹² His invented plot for this play was guided by his paranoia and a desire for revenge against Trotsky and others who had crossed his path, rather than on credible evidence.

One would have expected that Stalin would want to be close to the trial and watch the show. Indeed, there was a story circulating that Stalin watched the show trials from behind a curtained window overlooking the October Hall where the trials took place. Stalin could also listen to the trial, transmitted from microphones placed in the October Hall through a loudspeaker in his office in the Kremlin.¹¹³ This was probably true for the show trials of 1937 and 1938, but in August 1936¹¹⁴ Stalin was far away from Moscow. This may have been a deliberate tactic to obscure his role in the

trial. Neither the Central Committee nor most members of the Politburo were really aware of what was going on. Many were also away on summer holidays. Stalin had, in the preparations, worked closely with an eager Yezhov, a reluctant Yagoda and a servile Vyshinsky. But Stalin himself was the stage manager, he ‘personally conceived, initiated, and directed the entire process, including the planning, preparation, and actual conduct of the purge trials’, as Tucker and Cohen concluded in their study.¹¹⁵ Recent research has made this even clearer. Simon S. Montefiore, for instance, found that ‘Stalin set to work on the script for the Zinoviev trial, reveling in his hyperbolic talents as a hack playwright. The new archives reveal how he even dictated the words of the new Procurator-General, Andrei Vyshinsky, who kept notes of his leader’s perorations.’¹¹⁶

The trial was to be a travesty of justice. As one historian put it, ‘The spectacle about to be performed would not be a trial with elements of a show, but a show with elements of a trial.’¹¹⁷ As in real theatre performances, there were rehearsals. An NKVD chief (who later defected) wrote, ‘The last week before the opening of the trial was spent in giving detailed instructions to the defendants, who were made to rehearse their parts under the direction of Prosecutor Vyshinsky and the NKVD interrogators.’¹¹⁸ We do not know in detail what they were told, but we know that in the third show trial the defendants were instructed that if they did not give the necessary testimony, torture would continue even after the trial.¹¹⁹ Similar pressure may have also played a role in the first show trial.

Press coverage had been fixed by Yezhov and Kaganovich: every day both *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* would publish a full-page account of the trial. Stalin had instructed that the trial should begin on 19 August 1936. He could rely on Vyshinsky—they had once shared a prison cell together in their underground days before the revolution. Vyshinsky had already conducted a successful show trial for Stalin in 1928.¹²⁰ Now, in August 1936, Yezhov and Kaganovich reported the trial’s progress to Stalin every day—altogether 87 packages of trial-related materials were sent to Sochi.¹²¹ Stalin had been involved in every phase of the trial’s preparations. As Vyshinsky’s biographer, A. Vaksberg, noted: ‘The final version of the Prosecutor-General’s speech for the prosecution—a model of impassioned eloquence by a great orator—was edited and approved by the Leader and Teacher [Stalin] before he set off on holiday to the shores of the Black Sea.’¹²²

The script was Stalin’s, based on drafts from the prosecutor, Vyshinsky, and Lev Sheinin, chief investigator at the Procurator’s office, who, ironically, was also the author of various real plays for theatre performances.¹²³ The sixteen players in the show trial belonged to two different groups and were not all known to each other. One group of eleven defendants belonged to a ‘united opposition bloc’ of Old Bolsheviks

who had opposed Stalin mainly in the 1926–1927 period. A younger group of five defendants were members of the German Communist Party who had emigrated to the Soviet Union, and worked in the Comintern department where they had been writing anti-Trotskyist articles. Yet in the trial it was implied that they constituted the link between the Zinoviev group and Trotsky in exile, with the German Gestapo acting as go-between and facilitator.¹²⁴

4.3. What Happened in Court during the Trial

For the trial itself, our main source is a much condensed printed version of the court proceedings, edited to fit the propaganda needs of Stalin and his entourage.¹²⁵ For example in this official document all sixteen defendants are identified simply as 'employees'. In fact, many had held outstanding positions and it is worth recalling some biographical data here:

1. Grigory Y. Zinoviev, chairman of the Comintern (1919), editor of *Pravda* (1917), full member of the Politburo since 1921, member of the ruling triumvirate with Stalin and Kamenev, 1923–1924, head of the Leningrad Soviet before Kirov. Close friend of Lenin.
2. Lev B. Kamenev, head of the Moscow Soviet section (1919–1925), founding member and later chairman of the Politburo, member of the ruling triumvirate with Stalin and Zinoviev, 1923–1924. Close friend of Lenin.
3. Sergei V. Mrachkovsky: hero of the Russian Civil War in Siberia and the Far East; Deputy People's Commissar for Agriculture.
4. Vagarshak A. Ter-Vaganyan: former leader of the Military Department of the Moscow Committee of the Party, leader of the Armenian Communist Party; founding editor of the Party's scientific monthly *Under the Banner of Marxism*.
5. Ivan N. Smirnov: founder of the Bolshevik Party; leader of the 5th Army that defeated Kolchak's White Guards in the civil war; member of the Executive Committee of the Russian Communist Party (1920–1923), People's Commissar for Communications (1923–1927); expelled from Party in 1927.
6. Ivan F. Bakayev: former chairman of the Petrograd (Leningrad) Cheka, a major figure in the civil war who was also a member of the Central Committee.

These 'employees'—like some of those who would be facing similar show trials in 1937 and 1938—were the cream of the Old Bolsheviks. Zinoviev, Kamenev and the

absent Trotzky had been named in Lenin's will as his potential successors¹²⁶ The remaining ten defendants were a mixed group, including Old Bolsheviks and the five young members of the German Communist Party.¹²⁷ Three, perhaps four, among the sixteen accused were pseudo-defendants—accomplices of the NKVD mobilised as provocateurs and false witnesses for the judicial frame-up: Valentine Olberg, Fritz David and Berman-Yurin and, to a lesser extent, Isak Reingold, a former acquaintance of Kamenev, and Richard V. Pickel, the former head of the secretariat of Zinoviev in Leningrad (before Kirov succeeded Zinoviev).¹²⁸ At least three of them saw themselves more as actors executing secret NKVD directives rather than as genuine defendants in this trial.¹²⁹ The real defendants had been carefully selected. As an NKVD insider explained later:

At the beginning Stalin planned to stage the first Moscow trial with at least fifty defendants; then, as the investigation progressed, that figure had been decreased several times and finally reduced by Stalin to sixteen men. For the trial only those of the accused were selected who promised to repeat in court the false testimony which they had signed at the NKVD. Even some of those who agreed to play the part of conspirators and terrorists were not admitted to the trial, because the NKVD chiefs were not completely sure that they would scrupulously carry out their promises.¹³⁰

The chief target of this trial was not in court: Lev Trotzky was in exile in Norway.¹³¹ Some of those in the dock who had been associated in the past with Trotzky had to serve as scapegoats for the absent Trotzky.

The show trial opened on 19 August 1936. The scene of the trial was the House of Trade Unions, where in early December 1934 the slain Sergei Kirov had laid in state. While there were larger halls in the building, the sixteen defendants were tried in the October Room, a small hall able to accommodate only three hundred people. The room was re-decorated in various shades of red for the purpose of the trial. The judge's desk was covered with bright red cloth and the chairs were embossed with the Soviet Union's coat of arms. The three judges and the court's president, Military Jurist Vasilii Ulrich, sat in the centre on throne-like, decorated chairs.¹³² Zinoviev, Kamenev and the other 14 defendants sat in four rows, within a fenced wooden dock on the right side. Opposite them, near the left wall, Prosecutor Vyshinsky sat at a small table.¹³³ At the back stood uniformed guards, their rifles fixed with bayonets. There was no jury,¹³⁴ and no defence lawyer was present. Before the trial, the defendants had been made to promise that they would defend themselves.¹³⁵ President of the Court, Ulrich, consequently announced that 'all the accused [had] declined the services of counsel for

defence'. They would, he said, defend themselves personally.¹³⁶ No relatives of the defendants were allowed among the public in the hall.¹³⁷

In fact, the public consisted predominantly of NKVD personnel in civilian clothes.¹³⁸ On Stalin's orders, no member of the Central Committee of the Party or the government was admitted.¹³⁹ There were a few carefully selected guests of honour—some 30 foreign journalists and diplomats.¹⁴⁰ The International Association of Lawyers had been invited by the authorities to attend and it had sent Joseph Edelman (an American) and Denis Noel Pritt, Dudley Collard and Robert Lazarus (all British) to the trial.¹⁴¹ Many of the foreigners may not have understood Russian. One wonders whether they could, as they entered the courtroom, read the writing on the wall: a banner, allegedly from the 'Workers of Moscow', which read 'To the mad dogs—a dog's death.'¹⁴²

This slogan would at the end of the trial be alluded to by Andrei Vyshinsky, Stalin's Prosecutor. He had already helped shape the pre-trial interrogations. Years later, after de-Stalinisation, a historical commission of the Politburo would conclude that this son of Polish nobility from Odessa, who was a former Menshevik, now played a 'provocative role in the judicial inquiries'. Like Nikolai Yezhov from the NKVD, the chief prosecutor had pressured the investigators to obtain direct evidence from the accused. As a report to the Politburo in the 1950s found, 'When the evidence was analysed, he demanded sharper political conclusions and generalizations and, essentially, the falsification of cases.'¹⁴³ Vyshinsky's biographer wrote on this trial:

... Vyshinsky was himself the principal falsifier. In the most important cases the indictments were compiled by him personally before the investigation was even over, and the drafts were then presented to Stalin so that he could edit them, ascribing to the accused other 'crimes' as he saw fit. [...] Vyshinsky fulfilled his wish by making an appropriate entry in the indictment, after which the investigators had no difficulty in obtaining the necessary confession from the 'assassin'.¹⁴⁴

The trial began shortly after noon with the reading of the indictment by the secretary of the court. The indictment was partly based on the charges issued at a previous secret trial held in January 1935 against Zinoviev and Kamenev. At that closed January trial there had been 19 defendants. Of these, only four were at this new trial; the rest were not even there as witnesses,¹⁴⁵ probably because they had already been executed. The indictment was based on Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), drawn from the 1 December 1934 decree Stalin had drafted immediately upon hearing of the assassination of Sergei Kirov.

The relevant paragraph in the article (58.8) referred to ‘The perpetration of terrorist acts, directed against representatives of Soviet authority or activists of revolutionary workers’ and peasants’ organizations, and participation in the performance of such acts, even by persons not belonging to a counter-revolutionary organization ...’¹⁴⁶

The underlying charge was ‘terrorism’, a code word for anti-Stalinism. As one of Stalin’s biographers explained: “‘terrorism’ simply signified “any doubt about the policies or character of Stalin”. All his political opponents were *per se* assassins. More than two “terrorists” was a “conspiracy” and, putting together such killers from different factions created a “Unified Centre” of astonishing global ... reach.’¹⁴⁷

The indictment claimed that the preliminary and court investigations of that secret trial held in January 1935 had ‘established that for a number of years this so-called “Moscow Centre” guided the counter-revolutionary activities of diverse underground groups of Zinovievites, including the counter-revolutionary activities of the Leningrad group of Nikolayev-Kotolynov which on Dec. 1, 1934, foully murdered Comrade S.M. Kirov’. At that secret trial Zinoviev and Kamenev had denied that they had any part in the murder, but in the end accepted that they bore moral and political responsibility for the assassination.

The long indictment read out on the afternoon of 19 August 1936 claimed that since January 1935 new facts had surfaced which showed that the accused not only ‘knew their adherents in Leningrad were inclined towards terrorism’, but ‘were the direct organizers of the assassination of Comrade S.M. Kirov’. According to the indictment, the investigation also revealed that Zinoviev, Kamenev and others accused in this court were the ‘initiators and organizers of attempts on the lives of other leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the Soviet Government’. In particular, it named Stalin, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Orzhonikidze, Zhdanov, Kosior and Postyshev as their targets. Furthermore the indictment claimed that the Zinovievites had acted in conjunction with Trotskyites and with L. Trotsky himself since 1932. The alleged goal of the Trotskyite–Zinovievite bloc, according to the indictment, was ‘to seize power at all costs’, by terrorist means—‘the most detestable method of fighting’. The conspirators chose the strategy of political assassination due to lack of support from the working class, it claimed, and due to their own ideological bankruptcy. The indictment quoted from a ‘confession’ which Zinoviev, ‘compelled by the weight of evidence’, had allegedly made, namely that ‘The main object which the Trotskyite–Zinovievite Centre pursued was the assassination of the leaders of the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union], and in the first place the assassination of Stalin and Kirov.’¹⁴⁸ ‘Confessions’ along the same lines made by others during the investigation phase were also quoted, including a statement, attributed to Kamenev, stressing the necessity of

killing Stalin, the head of the Party and state. Kamenev was quoted as saying that 'heads are peculiar in that they do not grow back again'. The indictment concluded that 'there is no doubt left that the Trotskyite-Zinovievite bloc had turned into a group of unprincipled, political adventurers and assassins striving at only one thing, namely, to make their way to power even through terrorism'. The chief instigator behind this was, according to the indictment, Lev Trotsky. His son, Lev Sedov, was said to have acted as go-between and liaison to the conspirators in the Soviet Union, including the 'Trotskyite agent' Olberg, who allegedly was arrested travelling with a Honduran passport, which he had obtained 'with the aid of the German Secret Police (Gestapo)'. This passport was presented as an 'exhibit' during the trial—the only material evidence in the case against the sixteen.

The case rested almost exclusively on the confessions of the accused about their own misdeeds, and those of their alleged fellow conspirators. Some witnesses, under threat of being accused themselves, also testified against those in the dock. This group included Ms. Safonova, who testified against her former husband I. Smirnov. After Khrushchev had informed the 20th Party Congress about the true nature of Stalinism (on 25 February 1956), she would explain that her testimony, like that of others who had testified at the trial and the pre-trial investigation, 'did not correspond to reality 90 percent of the time'.¹⁴⁹

The link with fascist Germany and its Gestapo (roughly the equivalent of the NKVD) was a side theme in the indictment. Two of the accused, M. Lurye and N. Lurye in particular, were included in the cast of defendants by Stalin himself to suggest a plausible link to the German Secret State Police. Yet the main tie, the indictment stressed, was the one between Trotsky and the 'Moscow Centre' of Zinoviev et al. Both were now linked to the assassination of Kirov. Kirov's murder was portrayed as a first blow in a planned series of assassinations to eliminate the leadership of the USSR.¹⁵⁰ Zinoviev was quoted from pre-trial testimony as saying, 'while speaking of the necessity of assassinating Comrade Kirov as Comrade Stalin's closest assistant ... It is not enough to fell the oak; all the young oaks growing around it must be felled too.' These words were dictated by Stalin himself.¹⁵¹ Later in the trial another of Stalin's own additions was again spoken by Kamenev: 'Stalin's leadership has become as solid as granite, and it would be foolish to hope that this granite will begin to crack.'¹⁵²

The indictment charged the 16 accused of organising 'in the period 1932–1936 a united Trotskyite-Zinovievite Centre ... in the city of Moscow with the object of committing a number of terroristic acts against the leaders of the CPSU and the Soviet Government for the purpose of seizing power' and of having 'carried out the foul murder of Comrade S.M. Kirov on December 1, 1934'. It ended by stating that all but

one of the accused 'have fully admitted their guilt of the charges preferred against them'. The exception was Ivan N. Smirnov who 'categorically denies that he took part in the terroristic activities of the united Trotzkyite-Zinovievite Centre'. However, the indictment listed statements made by his ex-wife A.N. Safonova, and by his alleged fellow conspirators, that served to incriminate him as well. The indictment, signed by Vyshinsky, also instructed that Trotzky and his son, 'in the event of their being discovered on the territory of the U.S.S.R., are subject to immediate arrest and trial'. While Trotzky and son were not in the courtroom, E.A. Dreitzer, the former chief of Trotzky's bodyguard, was in the dock to suggest proximity and guilt by association.

The opening session concluded with the President asking the accused whether they pleaded guilty as charged. All but Smirnov and Holtzman accepted the charges, although they denied 'personal participation in the preparation of terroristic acts'. When such apparent dissent arose, some defendants would pitch in to denounce others. Dreitzer, according to the Report of Court Proceedings, objected to Smirnov's denial: 'I am surprised at the assertions of Smirnov, who, according to his words, both knew and did not know, spoke and did not speak, acted and did not act. This is not true!' ¹⁵³ Some defendants also tried to shift blame to other defendants. Zinoviev, for instance, said at one point, 'Smirnov, in my opinion, displayed more activity than anyone else, and we regarded him as the undisputed lead[er] of the Trotzkyite part of the bloc, as the man best informed about Trotzky's views, and fully sharing these views.' ¹⁵⁴

After a 15 minute break—it was already late afternoon—the examination of the accused followed. Mrachkovsky, the first to be interrogated in public, was accused of conducting 'Trotzkyite anti-Soviet work' since 1923. ¹⁵⁵ However, according to his testimony, 'The terrorist bloc of the Trotzkyites and the Zinovievites was only formed at the end of 1932.' There was reference to a 'letter of Trotzky's, written in invisible ink'—but no such letter was produced as evidence in court. It was said that Mrachkovsky, 'after reading it, burnt it for reasons of secrecy'. ¹⁵⁶ Part of the proceedings took the form of a defendant being asked to read passages from his own 'confession' as laid down in the signed interrogation protocols (which in some cases had been prepared for signature before the interrogations had even begun!). The prosecutor would also quote from pre-trial examinations and the defendants, except for minor details, confirmed now in public—to the extent that the predominantly NKVD audience could be considered 'the public'—what was 'agreed upon' behind closed doors. Sometimes the accused gave only very brief, self-incriminating answers. We do not know whether the explanations offered in court are summaries or directly transcribed. A typical excerpt reads:

Vyshinsky: Did you receive from Trotsky instructions on terrorism as a means of struggle?

Smirnov: Yes¹⁵⁷

Mrachkovsky then goes on to tell the Court about the activities of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite terrorist Centre.

Vyshinsky: In that centre there were you, Kamenev, Smirnov, Mrachkovsky and Ter-Vaganyan?

Zinoviev: Yes.

Vyshinsky: So you all organized the assassination of Kirov?

Zinoviev: Yes.

Vyshinsky: So you all assassinated Comrade Kirov.

Zinoviev: Yes.

Vyshinsky: Sit down.¹⁵⁸

What the Report of Proceedings tells us and what actually happened in court may not be quite the same.¹⁵⁹ That even Smirnov confessed with a monosyllabic 'Yes' is doubtful, as reports on his behaviour in court showed that he used irony and other devices to distance himself from the mechanical routines prescribed by the prepared script. Precautions had been taken in case one of the accused should attempt to deviate from the script. The following strategy was agreed upon, as one NKVD chief later revealed:

In the courtroom, among the 'public' were seated several groups of specially trained officers of the NKVD. At the first attempt of a defendant to expose the judicial frame-up, these groups were ready, at a signal from the prosecutor, to spring up from their chairs and with loud outcries drown the words of the rebellious defendant. The commotion was then to be used by the President of the Court as a pretext for declaring a recess.¹⁶⁰

The culprit who had deviated from the script could then be given the necessary 'treatment' in an adjacent room. Failing that to achieve the desired result, he would not be brought back into the court. Judging from the available transcripts we have, this measure was not necessary. The interrogators had done their work well. Almost everybody 'played' their role as Stalin had scripted it.

One of the accused, Bakayev, admitted to having met Nikolayev, Kirov's murderer, in Leningrad, and to having discussed details of the crime with him. Kamenev also admitted to having been involved in the plot, saying 'The blow [against Kirov] was

planned and prepared on the order of the centre of which I was a member, and I regarded it as the fulfilment of the task we had set ourselves.’¹⁶¹

The choice of assassination as a tactic was portrayed in the examination as weapon of last resort. Reingold ‘recalled’ that back in 1932 Zinoviev had argued that ‘although terror is incompatible with Marxism, at the present moment these considerations must be abandoned. There are no other methods available of fighting the leaders of the Party and the Government ... Stalin combines in himself all the strength and firmness of the present Party leadership. Therefore Stalin must be put out of the way in the first place.’ Kamenev enlarged on this ‘theory’, adding that the former oppositional methods, namely, attempts to win the masses, combining with the Rightists, and banking on economic problems, had failed. That left only terroristic acts against ‘Stalin and his closest comrades-in-arms, Kirov, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Orjonikidze, Postyshev, Kosior and the others’ as a means of struggle.¹⁶²

According to Reingold’s testimony, summarised in the available proceedings, Zinoviev and Kamenev insisted that ‘every advantage be ... taken of legal possibilities for the purpose of “crawling on the belly into the Party”—this he said was Zinoviev’s favourite expression—and of winning the confidence of the Party, particularly Stalin’s. After this confidence had been restored, strictly secret terroristic work was to be carried out in parallel with open work.’¹⁶³ (Reingold was probably a pseudo-defendant, planted among the 16 defendants due to his former close ties with Kamenev). Both Kamenev and Zinoviev admitted to this ‘monstrous plan’ (Vyshinsky’s words), portrayed as a coup d’état. According to Reingold’s summarised testimony, this would lead to a seizure of power after which Trotzky would be recalled from exile abroad, and with his support ‘all those who were most devoted to Stalin were to be removed from Party and Soviet posts’.¹⁶⁴

Each of the cross-examinations revealed more details of an alleged plot or sub-plots. Bakayev, for instance, testified that in October 1934 Kamenev had already organised an attempt on Stalin’s life in Moscow—a ‘failure’, like another attempt (equally fictional), the year before, ‘confessed’ by another probable pseudo-defendant, Richard Pickel.¹⁶⁵ Pickel, a member of the Soviet Writers’ Union, had visited Spitzbergen ‘for creative work’ in 1934—hardly the place to conspire against the Kremlin. However, at the trial even such an innocent ‘fact’ was turned by the prosecutor against the accused. In this case, Pickel’s sojourn close to the North Pole was said to serve ‘to wipe out all traces and save their terrorist organization’.¹⁶⁶

The morning session of the second day began with the examination of Lev Borisovich Kamenev, the former head of the Moscow Soviet and, briefly in late 1917, nominally the first President of the Soviet Union. When he gave his ‘evidence’, he still

displayed a certain dignity but soon lost it in the cross-examination.¹⁶⁷ His opening sentence must have come straight out of the 'script': 'The terrorist conspiracy was organized and guided by myself, Zinoviev and Trotsky.'¹⁶⁸ Vyshinsky then set out to expose Kamenev's apparent 'double-dealing' in his attempt to regain a central place in the Communist Party. Here is a typical extract from the pre-arranged exchange of words:

Vyshinsky: What appraisal should be given of the articles and statements you wrote in 1933, in which you expressed loyalty to the Party? Deception?

Kamenev: No, worse than deception.

Vyshinsky: Perfidy?

Kamenev: Worse.

Vyshinsky: Worse than deception, worse than perfidy—find the word. Treason.

Kamenev: You have found it.

Vyshinsky: Accused Zinoviev, do you confirm this?

Zinoviev: Yes.¹⁶⁹

In this courtroom spectacle, past Bolshevik heroes had become present anti-Soviet villains. The main defendant in the dock was Grigory Zinoviev. Previously a great orator, he now appeared cowed after years of imprisonment, gasping for air due to his asthma.¹⁷⁰ He 'confessed' that at the secret trial in January 1935 he had not told the court the 'whole truth', adding that he was prepared to do so now. In self-accusations he 'revealed' that 'After the murder of Sergei Mironovich Kirov our perfidy went to such lengths that I sent an obituary about Kirov to *Pravda*' (a text that had not been published).¹⁷¹ Zinoviev's cross-examination added little to the accusations in the indictment, except for references to alleged links with the German Gestapo and its chief Heinrich Himmler. More ominous was Zinoviev's name-dropping of Old Bolsheviks, listing them as potential allies he had hoped to win against Stalin. Many of them would soon also appear in show trials. Zinoviev's public examination by the prosecutor was relatively short, if we can believe the transcripts in the Report of Court Proceedings.

Zinoviev was followed by a witness, Smirnov's former wife, A. Safonova. Smirnov's denials about the extent of his involvement with the 'Trotskyite centre' required the testimony of his former wife to fill the gaps and implicate him in the plot, which she did.¹⁷² Smirnov's own turn came in the evening session of 20 August. He, a former leader of the Red Army who had defeated Admiral Kolchak and the 'White Guards' on the eastern front in the civil war, and who later had become a member of the

praesidium of the eleventh Bolshevik Conference, was now portrayed as ‘the closest friend of Trotzky and the actual organiser and leader of the underground Trotzkyite counter-revolutionary activities in the U.S.S.R.’.¹⁷³ Smirnov apparently put up some verbal resistance during the public trial. As a consequence, much of his testimony was abridged and only summarised in the published proceedings.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, traces of his resistance remain in his testimony—for example when he was interrogated about the ‘Trotzkyite centre’. His sarcasm must have kept Vyshinsky on guard.¹⁷⁵ An example:

Vyshinsky: So when did you leave the centre?

Smirnov: I did not intend to resign; there was nothing to resign from.

Vyshinsky: Did the centre exist?

Smirnov: What sort of a centre ...

Vyshinsky: Mrachkovsky, did the centre exist?

Mrachkovsky: Yes.

Vyshinsky: Zinoviev, did the centre exist?

Zinoviev: Yes.

Vyshinsky: Evdokimov, did the centre exist?

Evdokimov: Yes.

Vyshinsky: Bakayev, did the centre exist?

Bakayev: Yes.

Vyshinsky: How, then, Smirnov, can you take the liberty to maintain that no centre existed?¹⁷⁶

The trial record noted that ‘Under the weight of all these irrefutable facts, Smirnov at last admits that it was he and no one else who was the head of the Trotzkyite organization.’¹⁷⁷ As Smirnov had been in prison since January 1933, it was not very credible to suggest he was a leader of a terrorist centre supposedly operating for the past four years. At one point, when a fellow defendant incriminated him as the leader of the conspiracy, Smirnov turned on him sardonically: ‘You want a leader! Well, take me!’ Vyshinsky interjected by explaining that this was said ‘in rather a jocular way’.¹⁷⁸ Of all the defendants, Smirnov managed, within the little room for manoeuvre that was granted to them, to sow confusion; his public confession was only partial.¹⁷⁹

Next in line was pseudo-defendant Valentine Olberg. He ‘confessed’ his personal connection with the Gestapo, saying that ‘in 1933 there began organized systematic connection between the German Trotzkyites and the German fascist police’.¹⁸⁰ He admitted to travelling on a Honduran passport into the USSR. Oddly, the passport was

allegedly given to him by the Gestapo, but according to the proceedings he also had to pay a large sum of money for it. Olberg admitted to being directly involved in a plan for the assassination of Stalin in Moscow on 1 May 1936.¹⁸¹

The second day closed with the cross-examination of yet another pseudo-defendant, Berman-Yurin. He admitted to yet another failed (because fictional) attempt on Comrade Stalin's life and also claimed to have been inspired by Trotsky: 'He [Trotsky] said that the terroristic act should, if possible, be timed to take place at a plenum or at the congress of the Comintern, so that the shot at Stalin would ring out in a large assembly. This would have a tremendous repercussion far beyond the borders of the Soviet Union and would give rise to a mass movement all over the world. This would be an historical political event of world significance.'¹⁸²

The third day began with the ritualistic examination of E.S. Holtzman, a genuine ex-Trotskyite and former friend of Smirnov. He recalled meetings in Berlin with Trotsky's son Sedov who was said to have invited him to accompany him to Copenhagen to see his father (there in exile before moving to Norway). Holtzman: 'I agreed, but told him that we could not go together for reasons of secrecy. I arranged with Sedov to be in Copenhagen within two or three days, to put up at the Hotel Bristol and meet him there. I went to the hotel straight from the station and in the lounge met Sedov. About 10 a.m. we went to Trotsky.'¹⁸³ Vyshinsky prodded him: 'So Trotsky plainly told you that the fundamental task now (that is in the autumn of 1932) was to assassinate Comrade Stalin? You remember for sure?' Holtzman: Yes.¹⁸⁴

Probably neither the audience nor the rest of those present in the courtroom (except Holtzman who knew it was a lie) were aware that the Hotel Bristol in Copenhagen—the alleged venue of the 1932 conspiratorial meeting—had been demolished in 1917, a fact which also demolished this story (but only after the trial was long over).¹⁸⁵ In addition, it later turned out that he could not possibly have met Sedov in Copenhagen, as Sedov was taking examinations at that same time in a technical institute in Berlin.¹⁸⁶ When a Danish Social-Democratic newspaper revealed that the Bristol Hotel had ceased to exist 19 years before the trial, the defendants had already been executed.¹⁸⁷ Apart from Smirnov's, Holtzman's was the only confession that was incomplete. Perhaps he was inspired by Smirnov's subliminal resistance. Despite his claim not to share Trotsky's view about the necessity of terror, Vyshinsky managed to get him to confess that he nevertheless remained a member of the Trotskyite organisation.¹⁸⁸

In the evening session of 21 August the examination of the pseudo-defendant Fritz David (aka I.I. Kruglansky) followed. He declared, *inter alia*, that in alleged meetings with Trotsky he learned from him that 'the advent of the Trotskyites to power in the

U.S.S.R. was possible only if Stalin was physically destroyed'.¹⁸⁹ He confessed that he had been unable to commit the terroristic act 'because it was impossible to get near Comrade Stalin'.¹⁹⁰

Some ominous name-dropping occurred during the trial. Zinoviev had been the first to implicate others in his testimony, and later Reingold 'confessed' that not only had the Trotzkyites and the Zinovievites joined forces, but negotiations were carried on about joint activity with 'Leftists' like Shatskin, Lominadze and Sten, as well as with representatives of the Right like Rykov, Bukharin and Tomsy.¹⁹¹ In total, 123 individuals were incriminated in this trial, not counting those already in the court who often incriminated each other.¹⁹²

At the end of the 21 August session, Vyshinsky cultivated these cues when he announced:

At preceding sessions some of the accused (Kamenev, Zinoviev and Reingold) in their testimony referred to Tomsy, Bukharin, Rykov, Uglanov, Radek, Pyatakov, Serebryakov and Sokolnikov as being to a greater or lesser degree involved in the criminal counter-revolutionary activities for which the accused in the present case are being tried. I consider it necessary to inform the Court that yesterday I have orders to institute an investigation of these statements of the accused in regard to Tomsy, Rykov, Bukharin, Uglanov, Radek and Pyatakov, and that in accordance with the results of this investigation the office of the State Attorney will institute legal proceedings in this matter.¹⁹³

Vyshinsky's statement at the end of the day's session was printed in the newspapers the next morning, together with a demand from a workers' meeting at the Dynamo Factory that this should be 'pitilessly investigated'.¹⁹⁴ Vyshinsky's words ('I have orders ...') did not make explicit from whom the State Attorney of the USSR took his orders. But it could be only from Stalin.

This list of names was a time bomb, pointing to events to come in the next two years—presaging the purge of almost the entire Old Bolshevik elite. Mikhail Tomsy, the head of the Combined State Publishing House and a former civil war hero, saw the writing on the wall and shot himself the same day, leaving behind a letter in which he tried to prove his innocence.¹⁹⁵ Stalin learned of this suicide the next morning. Kaganovich, Yezhov and Ordzhonikidze wrote to him, with a cynicism typical for Stalin and his entourage, 'We have no doubt that Tomsy ... knowing that now it is no longer possible to hide his place in the Zinoviev-Trotskyite band had decided to dissimulate ... by suicide ...' Alexei Rykov (the former Premier who had ruled the

Soviet Union from 1925 to 1928 together with Bukharin and Stalin) having read this list in *Pravda* and heard about Tomsy's fate, was also on the point of committing suicide but his family held him back.¹⁹⁶ Not all of those mentioned by Vyshinsky were arrested immediately. Stalin decided that Karl Radek, a German revolutionary who had become secretary of the Comintern, could be a 'useful idiot' (to use one of Lenin's terms) and ordered on 19 August '... to delay for the moment the question of Radek's arrest and to let him publish in *Izvestiya* a signed article ...'¹⁹⁷ Radek duly complied, writing in support of the liquidation of the 16 defendants in the dock.¹⁹⁸

The climax of the trial was Vyshinsky's long rhetorical summary of the 'crimes'. As one of Stalin's biographers puts it:

Procurator-General Vyshinsky brilliantly combined the indignant humbug of a Victorian preacher and the diabolic curses of a witch doctor. Small, with 'bright black eyes' behind horn-rimmed spectacles, thinning reddish hair, pointed nose, and dapper in 'white collar, checked tie, well-cut suit, trimmed grey moustache', a Western witness thought he resembled 'a prosperous stockbroker accustomed to lunching at Simpson's and playing golf at Sunningdale'.¹⁹⁹

On 22 August in the morning session, the prosecutor summarised what had emerged so far: 'Horrible and monstrous is the chain of these crimes against our socialist fatherland; and each one of these crimes deserves the severest condemnation and severest punishment.' He then referred to the murder of Kirov, eulogising Kirov as 'one of the best sons of the working class, one of the most devoted to the cause of socialism, one of the most loved disciples of the great Stalin, the fiery tribune of the proletarian revolution, the unforgettable Sergei Minronovich Kirov'.²⁰⁰ Vyshinsky then referred to Comrade Stalin, quoting him as saying that 'We must bear in mind that the growth of the power of the Soviet state will increase the resistance of the last remnants of the dying class.' He also complimented Comrade Stalin for his foresight: 'Three years ago Comrade Stalin not only foretold the inevitable resistance of elements hostile to the cause of socialism, but also foretold the possibility of the revival of Trotskyite counter-revolutionary groups. This trial has fully and distinctly proved the great wisdom of this forecast.'²⁰¹ The prosecutor's rhetoric, including phrases directly dictated by Stalin himself, was becoming more exaggerated:

This contemptible, insignificant group of adventurers tried with their mud-stained feet to trample upon the most fragrant flowers in our socialist garden. These mad dogs of capitalism tried to tear limb from limb the best of the best of our Soviet land.

[...] They killed our Kirov; they wounded us close to our very heart. To the murderers' treacherous shot of December 1, 1934, the whole country replied with unanimous execration. The whole country, millions and tens of millions of people, were aroused and once again proved their solidarity, their unity, their loyalty to the great banner of the Party of Lenin–Stalin. The land of Soviets rose up like an unshakable, iron wall in defence of its leaders, its guides, for every hair of whose heads these criminal madmen will answer with their lives.²⁰²

The prosecutor then went into overdrive in his praise of Stalin: 'With great and unsurpassed love, the toilers of the whole world utter the name of the great teacher and leader of the peoples of the U.S.S.R.—Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin!'²⁰³ Vyshinsky lauded the victories of the 'great Stalin': 'These victories have brought our whole country, every factory worker and collective farmer, every office worker and intellectual, a happy and a well-to-do life. And these victories are the guarantee of the unity of all the Soviet people with our government, with our Party, and with its Central Committee.'²⁰⁴

Vyshinsky juxtaposed the genius Stalin with the 'gang of contemptible terrorists' who 'tried to pose as genuine political figures in the Court', calling them 'Liars and clowns, insignificant pygmies, little dogs snarling at an elephant.'²⁰⁵ Vyshinsky continued:

After this, can we speak with these people in any sort of political language? Have we not the right to say that we can speak with these people in one language only, the language of the Criminal Code, and regard them as common criminals, as incorrigible and hardened murderers. [...] They came to terrorism, because their position had become hopeless, because they realized that they were isolated from power, from the working class. They came to terrorism because of the complete absence of favourable prospects for them in the fight for power by other methods and by other means.

Turning to the judges, the prosecutor proceeded:

Comrade judges, in drawing up your verdict in your council chamber, you will carefully—I have no doubt about that—once again go over not only the material of the court investigation but also the records of the preliminary investigation and you will become convinced of the animal fear with which the accused tried to avoid admitting that terrorism was precisely the basis of their criminal activities. That is why Smirnov wriggled so much here.²⁰⁶

At one point Vyshinsky even invoked Lenin's last will and testament:

All their bestial rage and hatred were directed against the leaders of our Party, against the Political Bureau of the Central Committee, against Comrade Stalin, against his glorious comrades-in-arms. It was upon them, headed by Comrade Stalin, that the main burden of the struggle against the Zinovievite-Trotskyite underground organization lay. It was under their leadership, under the leadership of Comrade Stalin, that great executor and keeper of Lenin's will and testament, that the counter-revolutionary Trotskyite organization was routed.²⁰⁷

This was a somewhat risky manoeuvre since Lenin's will had been a sore point with Stalin. Apparently the trial also provided Stalin with an opportunity to rewrite Lenin's secret testament. Lenin's political testament, written in 1922 and 1923 after his incapacitating strokes, said something quite different, namely: 'Stalin, having become General Secretary has concentrated enormous power in his hands, and I am not sure that he always knows how to use that power with sufficient caution.' In a postscript Lenin had added, 'I propose to comrades to find a way to remove Stalin from that position and appoint to it another man' who would be 'more loyal, more courteous and more considerate to comrades, less capricious, etc.'²⁰⁸ It was Kamenev who had made the testament known to the Central Committee and, at the time, a secretary of Stalin noted that 'Terrible embarrassment paralyzed all those present. Stalin, sitting on the steps of the praesidium's rostrum, felt small and miserable. I studied him closely: notwithstanding his self-possession and show of calm, it was clearly evident that his fate was at stake ...'²⁰⁹

Lenin's testament had never reached the public, but for Kamenev and Zinoviev, who knew of its contents, this reference must have been especially hurtful. However, there can be no doubt that this passage entered the prosecutor's speech with Stalin's approval. We know that the final version of the Prosecutor General's summing up speech had been edited by Stalin before he left Moscow for his holiday on the Black Sea.²¹⁰ Then, the prosecutor asked:

I would like now to get a straight answer from Zinoviev to the following question: Does Zinoviev now accept only moral responsibility [as he had done in the January 1935 trial behind closed doors], or the whole criminal responsibility, full responsibility, for preparing, organizing and committing the murder of Sergei Mironovich Kirov?²¹¹

Not waiting for the defendant's response Vyshinsky provided the answer himself:

Of course, Zinoviev will say ‘yes’. He cannot say anything else. He said this on the very first day of this trial when caught in the grip of the iron chain of evidence and proof.²¹²

In fact there was no proof, beyond false witness testimonies and coerced confessions—except for that odd Honduran passport which was shown during the trial.²¹³ The passport in itself, of course, did not prove the existence of a ‘terrorist centre’ or the responsibility of anyone for the Kirov murder. Yet Vyshinsky repeated in many variations in his long statement that ‘This centre existed, and, what is most important, it was formed on the direct instructions of Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev’, adding: ‘I take it as absolutely proven by the personal evidence of literally all the accused, including Smirnov on this point, that this centre was organized on a terroristic basis’²¹⁴

How this centre could have existed was hard to understand. Even the prosecutor admitted at one point during the trial that ‘In 1932–1933 Kamenev and Zinoviev were in exile ... It is known that in 1934 Smirnov, too, was not at liberty; he was arrested in January 1933 ...’ His conclusion was a kind of *conclusio ad absurdum*. Despite the absence of the central players—Kamenev, Zinoviev and Smirnov—the centre was there: ‘I draw the conclusion that if the centre functioned it was because of the well-organized technique of communication which enabled even those who were not at liberty, Smirnov, for example, to take part in guiding the work of this centre’.²¹⁵

Turning to Kamenev, the Prosecutor reminded the court that in 1934 Kamenev was head of the ‘Academia’ Publishing House, which had printed a translation of *The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli. Kamenev had written a preface to the Russian edition, calling the Italian political thinker ‘A master of political aphorism and a brilliant dialectician.’ Vyshinsky, turning to the accused, claimed, ‘You, Kamenev, adopted the rules of Machiavelli, you developed them to the utmost point of unscrupulousness and immorality, you modernized them and perfected them.’²¹⁶ In his preface to the Russian edition, Kamenev had apparently called Machiavelli’s book ‘a shell of enormous explosive force’. Twisting these words, Vyshinsky concluded that ‘Evidently Kamenev and Zinoviev wanted to use this shell to blow up our socialist fatherland. [...] They miscalculated!’ he announced triumphantly, ‘Their program of home policy was confined to murder; their program of foreign policy was confined to defeat of the U.S.S.R. in war; their method was perfidy, cunning and treason.’²¹⁷ Generously, he added that he did not ask the comrade judges to regard this book as material evidence in this case. With hindsight, we might add that if anyone was a pupil of Machiavelli

in the Moscow of 1936, it was Stalin. In fact, Machiavelli could have learned a lesson or two from Stalin rather than the other way round.

Vyshinsky emphasised the highlights of previous days and the 'confessions' of the accused and their mutual 'denunciations' (either in the pre-trial phase or in court) to build a case: that they deserved the penalty provided for by Article 58 of the Penal Code. In the case of Moissei and Nathan Lurye, for example, he used the formula of guilt by association, elaborating on their alleged link to a certain Franz Weiss, 'the fascist agent and a trusted man of Himmler, chief of the fascist black secret service, chief of the German S.S. detachments and subsequently, chief of the German Gestapo'.²¹⁸

Coming to the end of his final speech, the Prosecutor turned to Russia's terrorist heyday in the 1880s and noted that some of the accused tried to draw a parallel with the historical past, with the period of the *Narodnaya Volya* (the People's Will). He said that they tried to compare some people with the heroic terrorists who in the last century entered into combat with the 'terrible, cunning and ruthlessly cruel enemy, the tsarist government'. But the prosecutor concluded that 'This argument does not hold water', explaining:

That was a struggle by a handful of self-sacrificing enthusiasts against the gendarme giant: it was a fight in the interests of the people. We Bolsheviks have always opposed terrorism, but we must pay our tribute to the sincerity and heroism of the members of the *Narodnaya Volya* [...]. You, however, a handful of downright counter-revolutionaries ... you took up arms against the vanguard of the world proletarian revolution! You took up arms against the liberty and happiness of the peoples. The comparison with the period of *Narodnaya Volya* terrorism is shameful.²¹⁹ [...] I empathetically reject this sacrilegious parallel. I repeat this parallel is out of place here. Before us are criminal, dangerous, hardened, cruel and ruthless towards our people, towards our ideals, towards the leaders of our struggle, the leaders of the land of Soviets, the leaders of the toilers of the whole world!²²⁰

What the prosecutor did not and could not mention was that both he and Stalin had, at one time, actually been working, before the revolution, as agents or informers for the same Tsarist secret police that was fighting *Narodnaya Volya*.²²¹ Incidentally, the defendants themselves, at least in the Report of the Proceedings, did not mention *Narodnaya Volya*—one of the many inconsistencies of the official report.

In conclusion, the prosecutor reminded the comrade judges of those demands the law makes in cases of the gravest crimes against the state. He reminded the court to

apply to the accused in full measure the articles of the law, ending with a reference to the slogan written on a large banner on the wall hanging in the court room: 'I demand that dogs gone mad should be shot—every one of them!'²²²

The next day, 22 August, there was no morning session. In the evening session the court began hearing the last pleas of the accused. The texts of these pleas had been revised by Yezhov,²²³ and the protocol we have here is very thin, probably because the accused tried to elaborate on their past services to the Party—something they had been instructed to avoid. We glimpse this where the protocol notes that 'The accused Mrachkovsky starts his last plea by relating his autobiography.' Mrachkovsky went on to say, 'In 1923 I became a Trotzkyite. I took a despicable path, the path of deception of the Party [...] I am a counter-revolutionary ... I do not ask for mitigation of my punishment. [...] I want to depart from life without carrying any filth with me. [...] I depart as a traitor to my Party, as a traitor who should be shot'. While the official minutes in the Report of Court Proceedings of the session provide us with few details of the 'last pleas', Alexander Orlov (then an NKVD official) later gave us these details:

He [Mrachkovsky] recounted that his grandfather had been an organizer of the famous Southern Russian Workers Union, that his father and mother, both factory workers, had served prison sentences for revolutionary activities, and that he himself, at the age of thirteen, had been arrested for disseminating revolutionary leaflets. 'And here I stand before you as a counter-revolutionary!' exclaimed he with bitter resentment and irony in his voice.²²⁴

Next came Evdokimov. Rather than trying to defend himself, he too was self-incriminating: 'Who will believe us, who played so detestable a comedy at the fresh grave of Kirov whom we had killed; who will believe us, who only by accident, not through any fault of our own, did not become the assassins of Stalin and other leaders of the people?' [...] He finished by saying that 'Our crimes against the proletarian state and against the international revolutionary movement are too great to make it possible for us to expect clemency.'²²⁵ For those who could read between the lines at the trial, Evdokimov's exclamation, 'Who will believe us ...?' hinted at the show being put on.²²⁶

Isak Reingold, one of the pseudo-defendants, came next, saying, 'Whatever our fate may be, we have been already shot politically', and then went to quote the representative of the state Prosecution who, 'speaking with the voice of 170,000,000 Soviet people, demanded that we be shot like mad dogs'. He ended by saying, 'I fully

admitted my guilty. It is not for me to plead for mercy.'²²⁷ Reingold was the best actor among the pseudo-defendants, Orlov recalled:

Assisting Vyshinsky during the whole trial, he displayed a remarkable ability as a prosecutor and a brilliant memory. Every time when he noticed in the testimony of some other defendant a slight deviation from the approved scenario, he would jump up from his seat and angrily correct him, as if that defendant wanted to conceal something. If Reingold noticed that the prosecutor made an error, he would get up and respectfully ask permission to add something to what the prosecutor had just said, using that pretext for the purpose of correcting him. Vyshinsky would rein up quickly and accept Reingold's prompting with a smile of gratitude.²²⁸

After Reingold came I.F. Bakayev, the former Cheka chief of Leningrad. He began by saying, 'I am guilty of the assassination of Kirov', and ended by declaring that he awaited 'the deserved and just verdict of the proletarian court'.²²⁹ Richard Pickel was next to plead. The former head of Zinoviev's secretariat when the latter was Party boss in Leningrad, Pickel was the other probable pseudo-defendant. He too concluded by saying 'I must bear my deserved punishment'.²³⁰

It had been a perverse performance of those who said they would need no defence counsel: rather than *defending* themselves, they used the opportunity of the last plea to *accuse* themselves, no doubt hoping that such a performance would be rewarded rather than used against them when it came to the court's sentence.

The morning session of 23 August continued with Kamenev's plea. His too, was a full confession. He ended by saying, 'Thus we served fascism, thus we organized counter-revolution against socialism, prepared, paved the way for the interventionists. Such was the path we took, and such was the pit of contemptible treachery and all that is loathsome into which we have fallen.'

Having spoken what must have been his prescribed lines, Kamenev rose again from his chair and made a desperate attempt to save at least the lives of his children:

I should like to say a few words to my children ... I have no other way of addressing them. I have two children: one is a military pilot, the other a Pioneer. Standing, maybe, with one foot in the grave, I want to tell them: no matter what my sentence will be, I in advance consider it just. Don't look back. Go forward. Together with the Soviet people follow Stalin.²³¹

Orlov continued, explaining that:

Having spoken these simple words, Kamenev sat down and shielded his eyes with his hand. Those who were present in the courtroom were shaken by this tragic moment. Even the faces of the judges lost the studied expression of stony indifference.²³²

Kamenev's plea for his children—the elder a pilot (already in prison), the younger, Yuri, only 16—was in vain; both would be shot, like their father.²³³

Then it was Grigory Zinoviev's turn. Again, we have only Orlov's account beyond the censored words of the official minutes of proceedings:

When he began to speak, it was impossible to recognize the brilliant orator, who in the old times charmed huge audiences at Party conferences and congresses of the Comintern. Breathing with difficulty, he began to speak incoherently and without emotion. Zinoviev didn't look at the audience and did not seek contact with it, as he used to do in his famous appearances of the past. But within a few minutes he regained his self-possession and skill, and his speech began to flow easily. Standing in the dock and speaking the words which were written for him by Stalin's inquisitors, he was like a superb actor, using the oratorical technique of the great Zinoviev in order to give a new interpretation of the personality of the Old Bolshevik Zinoviev and to demonstrate that Zinoviev's revolutionary past was a myth and that in reality he had always been an enemy of socialism and a traitor. Zinoviev's speech was patterned along the same lines as Kamenev's. He also defended not himself but the Party and Stalin. Zinoviev concluded his speech with an involved syllogism, the literary form of which resembled very much the clumsy style of Stalin, but by no means the refined style of Zinoviev. 'My defective Bolshevism became transformed into anti-Bolshevism, and through Trotskyism I arrived at fascism. Trotskyism is a variety of fascism and Zinovievism is a variety of Trotskyism.'²³⁴

Zinoviev, also pleaded 'fully and completely guilty ... of having been an organizer of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite bloc second only to Trotsky, the bloc which set itself the aim of assassinating Stalin, Voroshilov and a number of other leaders of the Party and the government. I plead guilty to having been the principal organizer of the assassination of Kirov.'²³⁵

Ivan Smirnov, in turn, was dealing 'in detail with the history of his struggle against the Party leadership after he was forgiven by the Party and reinstated into its ranks in 1929', as the protocol summarises. However, Smirnov apparently did not make a full guilty plea. The protocol notes that 'Smirnov continues, just as during the preliminary investigation and the trial, to deny responsibility for the crimes

committed by the Trotskyite-Zinovievite terrorist centre after his arrest.' Smirnov did turn against Trotsky, appealing 'to all his adherents resolutely to break with the past, to fight Trotskyism and Trotsky'.²³⁶ But his testimony during nearly three hours of interrogation by Vyshinsky, is reduced to only a very brief record in the transcript.²³⁷

The pseudo-defendants' pleas contained no drama. As an NKVD witness recalled later, 'As fictitious defendants, they were sure their lives were not in danger.'²³⁸ The last two pleas were made in the evening session of 23 August 1936. The testimonies of Fritz David, a pseudo-defendant, and Ter-Vaganyan, a real defendant, take only twelve lines in the protocol. Ter-Vaganyan claimed to be 'crushed by the speech of the State Prosecutor' and assured the Court that whatever its decision may be, 'I accept it as deserved'. Due to the short preparation time before the trial (he had not been on the original list of those accused), there was no evidence against Ter-Vaganyan, not even falsified evidence. However, Vyshinsky, following Stalin's instructions, also 'substantiated' his guilt: '... all the investigators could do was to obtain the necessary "confession" from the accused at lightning speed', Vyshinsky's biographer found.²³⁹

Even in their last pleas, the defendants were prohibited from saying what they wanted to say. Their final words were edited by Yagoda or Stalin. References to their closeness to Lenin, their past positions in the Soviet government and the Party, and their revolutionary credentials were replaced in the final script prepared for the session with words like 'traitors and murderers'.²⁴⁰

Why would the defendants engage in such masochistic self-accusations even to the end? We have no better answer than Orlov's: 'The defendants were struggling for their lives with desperation, but they did it not by trying to prove their innocence, as is done in genuine and impartial courts of law, but by striving to carry out with the utmost precision the conditions which Stalin had laid down for them: to slander themselves and glorify him.'²⁴¹ The pseudo-defendants, on the other hand, testified as they did because they thought they were 'on a secret assignment of the Party'.²⁴² In a similar way, the main defendants, Zinoviev and Kamenev, also thought they had struck a bargain with Stalin, namely, that in return for playing their role in court their lives would be saved. They now stuck to their side of the bargain. But Stalin would not.

The verdict had already been written before the trial was completed, but a decent interval was created before it was announced.²⁴³ On the afternoon of the following day, 24 August 1936, Ulrich, the president of the Court, read the verdict. Ulrich again summarised what would pass as 'evidence' against the accused. His focus, however, was more on the distant target of the trial, Lev Trotsky, and his influence on the international workers' movement. According to Ulrich, Trotsky had been '... systematically sending a number of terrorists into the U.S.S.R. from abroad', to target

‘the leaders of the Soviet Government and the C.P.S.U.’ Among these emissary terrorists were, according to the verdict, Berman-Yurin, Fritz David, Dr. Nathan Lurye and Moissei Lurye, as well as Valentine Olberg. Seven of the accused, including Zinoviev, Kamenev and Smirnov, were found guilty of having organised the ‘united Trotskyite–Zinovievite terrorist centre’, having prepared and perpetrated the murder of Kirov, and having organised a number of terrorist groups who made preparations to assassinate seven Communist leaders, including Stalin, Voroshilov, Zhdanov and Kaganovich—crimes covered by one or several of the 14 paragraphs of Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR.²⁴⁴ The remaining nine, including David, Olberg and Berman-Yurin, were found guilty of having been ‘active participants in the preparations for the assassination of the leaders of the Party and the Government, Comrades Stalin, Voroshilov, Zhdanov, Kaganovich, Ordzhonikidze, Kosior and Postyshev’. In addition, the president of the Court also ordered that Trotsky and his son Sedov, who were in exile, were ‘convicted by the evidence of the accused’.²⁴⁵

When Ulrich finally announced that all were sentenced to ‘the supreme penalty—to be shot—there was silence and consternation, even among the NKVD employees who formed most of the audience. They had expected the President to add: ‘... but taking into consideration the past revolutionary services of the defendants, the court has decided to commute the death penalty’. When these expected words did not come, one of those just condemned to death, broke the silence—it was either M. or N. Lurye—and rose to shout hysterically, ‘Long live the cause of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin!’²⁴⁶

The trial had come to an end after six days. Those sentenced were taken back to prison, where they began to work on their appeals for mercy.²⁴⁷ It was the customary rule at the time that when an appeal for mercy was made, any death sentence would be suspended for 72 hours, even when no pardon was granted.²⁴⁸ Those just condemned to death still had one last hope. After all, Stalin had promised them *in camera* that, as Old Bolsheviks, their lives would be spared.

Stalin did not keep his word.²⁴⁹ Still on holiday, he was informed shortly before nine on the evening of 24 August 1936 in a telegram sent by Kaganovich, Yezhov and two others. They wrote, ‘The Politburo proposed to reject the demands and execute the verdict tonight.’²⁵⁰ Stalin waited until almost midnight before he gave his one word reply: ‘okay’. The execution of the three main ‘terrorists’, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Smirnov, took place in the Lubianka prison. Yezhov and Yagoda were present. Stalin had also sent Voroshilov to the headquarters of the NKVD’s slaughter chamber to supervise the execution. A dignified Smirnov apparently said, ‘We deserve this because of our unworthy attitude at the trial.’²⁵¹ Kamenev was said to be calm, walking as if

in a dream when he was shot from behind. Zinoviev, however, was hysterical and, according to one account, shouted, 'This is a fascist coup!'²⁵² To silence his screams an NKVD officer reportedly took him to a separate cell and shot him in the back of the head. Later, that officer received a citation for 'acting expeditiously under difficult conditions'.²⁵³ Yagoda apparently kept the bullets that killed Zinoviev and Kamenev as trophies.²⁵⁴ The other defendants—except three planted NKVD agents—David, Olberg and Berman-Yurin—were also shot that night.²⁵⁵ Their families would soon suffered similar fates; they were either shot or sent to labour camps.²⁵⁶

This tragedy was turned into a macabre comedy show four months later. At the end of 1936, on 20 December, on the occasion of the anniversary of the founding of the secret police, Stalin gave a small banquet for the heads of the NKVD. After much drinking by the party, the head of Stalin's personal security, Karl Pauker, who had personally witnessed the execution of Zinoviev and Kamenev, put on a show for Stalin. Assisted by two officers who played the parts of warders dragging Zinoviev to the site of execution, Pauker is said to have dramatised Zinoviev's last desperate moments, falling on his knees and clinging to the boots of one of the warders: 'Please, for God's sake, Comrade, call Yosif Vissarionovich!' Yosif Vissarionovich Stalin liked the parody so much that Pauker had to re-enact the scene once more. This time he added new elements to the role, raising his hands and crying, 'Hear, Israel, our God is the only God!' Choking with laughter, Stalin had to wave Pauker to stop.²⁵⁷

4.4. What Happened outside the Courtroom

In parallel with the show trial, a press campaign had been set up by the authorities in the Kremlin. A secret letter sent from Stalin to all Party organs, dispatched on 29 July 1936, called for extra vigilance: 'The indelible mark of every Bolshevik in the current situation ought to be the ability to recognize and identify the enemies of the Party, no matter how well they may have camouflaged their identity.'²⁵⁸ Two weeks later, *Pravda* carried the announcement from Procurator Andrei Vyshinsky, stating that a case on 'the United Trotsky-Zinoviev Centre' had been transferred to the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR. The trials were given saturation coverage in the Soviet media. The press contained what purported to be verbatim reports of the daily proceedings, parts of which were broadcast by radio and filmed for cinema audiences.²⁵⁹ The newspapers reproduced multiple resolutions from 'workers' meetings' demanding, to quote from one, 'No mercy, no leniency for enemies of the people who have tried to deprive the people of its leaders.' One telegram

from the Dagestani Party organisation in Makhachkala, insisted ‘... that the Supreme Court execute the three-time contemptible degenerates, who have slid into the mire of fascism and aimed their guns at the heart of our Party, the great Stalin’.²⁶⁰ Directives from the Kremlin had mobilised such propaganda support, which resulted in local Party resolutions as well as letters purporting to come from ordinary citizens.²⁶¹

Well-known public figures were also pressed to publish press statements of support for the prosecutor.²⁶² The poet Demian Bedny was forced by Kaganovich and Khrushchev to write some verses for *Pravda* which played on the theme of ‘no mercy’.²⁶³ Editorials with titles like ‘Trotzky-Zinoviev-Kamenev-Gestapo’ and ‘The People’s Wrath is Mighty and Terrible’ appeared.²⁶⁴ Karl Radek, the former secretary of the Comintern, wrote (prompted by Stalin) a piece in the *Izvestia* of 21 August 1936, demanding that ‘The people who raised their weapons against the lives of the favourite leaders of the proletariat must pay with their heads for their boundless guilt.’²⁶⁵ (Maybe he did so hoping to avoid arrest, but 28 days later he too was apprehended). Another prominent Party figure who raised his voice against Zinoviev and his co-defendants was Pyatakov, the former first President of the Government of the Soviet Ukraine. Like Radek, he too would soon be subject to a show trial. In many cases we do not know where pressure was applied, where pre-emptive opportunism was at work, or whether they really believed what they wrote.

However, we know that Pyatakov was motivated by fear. When his former wife was arrested by the NKVD, some old correspondence found in the apartment linked him to the opposition of the 1920s. In an attempt to save himself, he wrote an article in *Pravda* demanding the accused ‘be destroyed like carrion’.²⁶⁶ He even asked Yezhov that he, Pyatakov, be allowed to shoot all those sentenced to death in the trial, as well as his former wife [sic!].²⁶⁷ A month later he was arrested and prepared for the second show trial to be held the following year, in January 1937. Alexei Rykov, former Premier and Lenin’s successor as Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars, and K. Rakovsky, former head of the Ukrainian Government and a well-known figure in the international workers’ movement, also turned against their former colleagues, demanding in the press that no pity be shown towards Kamenev and Zinoviev.²⁶⁸ Even Lenin’s widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya, was mobilised. She lent her name to an article entitled ‘Why the Second International Defends Trotzky’, asserting that ‘It is also no accident that the Second International rants and raves, raises the Trotzky-Zinoviev gang of killers on its shield, and tries to break up the [anti-fascist] Popular Front.’²⁶⁹

These orchestrated endorsements of the trial and calls for the death penalty were meant to give a semblance of legitimacy to the trial. The charges which surfaced in the

trial were given more credence with the endorsement of respected commentators like Lenin's widow. Their voices, and the resolutions from local Party organisations that were flooding the newspapers, created a momentum and rationale for the nightly arrests by the NKVD. As Tucker and Cohen's study of the third Moscow trial points out:

... the purge trials had, in the first place, a political symbolic function, which was to provide a rationale for the purge, to make publicly meaningful the campaign of arrests that was going on night after night. The underlying assumption of the Great Purge was that treason was abroad in the land, especially among Party members, and that it had to be cleaned out and exterminated on the massive scale that this treason itself had assumed. The three great Moscow show trials and a number of lesser local trials held at this time were designed to dramatize this idea, to show the existence, enormity, and scope of the purported treasonable activity, which had—it was thus made to appear—been organized and directed by men at the pinnacle of the Party and state as well as their counterparts at the provincial level.²⁷⁰

There was no civil society in Russia at the time. All public opinion was controlled by Party and state. While many people must have been shocked to see that the former Bolshevik heroes were exposed as traitors and murderers, they could not articulate this in public. The NKVD, however, did report anonymous protests to Stalin: messages like 'Down with the murderers of the leaders of October' and 'Too bad they didn't finish off the Georgian snake', appeared on the walls of several factories in Moscow.²⁷¹ Yet such voices did not reach a wider public. The voice of 'the people' was expressed by *Pravda*, Stalin's official mouthpiece. *Pravda* stated on 25 August 1936, for example, reporting on the execution of sixteen 'terrorists', that millions of working people were starting their day with the joyful feeling that a loathsome creature had been crushed.²⁷² By the time of the second show trial, in January 1937, against Pyatakov, Radek and twelve others, the mobilisation of the public to support the court's decision ('The court's verdict is the people's verdict') was even more frenetic. On 29 January 1937, a crowd of 200,000 people gathered in Red Square despite sub-zero temperatures, denouncing 'Judas-Trotsky'. They were addressed by a member of the Politburo in these words, 'By raising their hand against Comrade Stalin, they raised their hand against all the best that humanity has, because Stalin is hope ... Stalin is our banner. Stalin is our will, Stalin is our victory.'²⁷³ The public speaker was none other than Nikita Khrushchev, who in 1956 would denounce Stalin in a 'secret speech' to the Twentieth Party Congress.

Why did the masses acquiesce to Stalin and his colleagues in the Politburo? The First Five-Year Plan and its aftermath had created great confusion in the country. The massive forced social and economic changes—and the traumatic disruptions these triggered in people's lives—called for an explanation. To blame the regime was risky. In this situation the regime offered scapegoats to blame: economic saboteurs termed 'wreckers' and political saboteurs called by various other names—White Guards, Trotskyists, or simply 'enemies of the people'. As historians Getty and Naumov put it:

From peasant to Politburo member, the language about evil conspirators served a purpose. For the plebeians, it provided a possible explanation for the daily chaos and misery of life. For the many committed enthusiasts it explained why their Herculean efforts to build socialism often produced bad results. For the nomenklatura member, it was an excuse to destroy their only challengers. For local Party chiefs, it was a rationale for again expelling inconvenient people from the local machines. For the Politburo member, it provided a means to avoid self-questioning about Party police and a vehicle for closing ranks. The image of evil, conspiring Trotskyists was convenient for everybody ...²⁷⁴

However, many foreign observers in Moscow and abroad were also accepting the trials as real, rather than as a parody of justice. Great care had been taken to prepare the defendants and witnesses for the trial. As a consequence, the fake character of the first Moscow trial was missed by many, if not most, especially if they had no command of the Russian language. The American ambassador to Moscow, Joseph Davis, for instance, held that the treason charges—in particular the collaboration of the accused with the Gestapo—were factually true.²⁷⁵

We do not know whether he was among the few foreign observers who were invited to attend the first Moscow trial. However, the delegation from the International Association of Lawyers, who had attended the trial, issued this statement:

We consider the claim that the proceedings were summary and unlawful to be totally unfounded. The accused were given the opportunity of taking counsel; every counsel in the Soviet Union is independent of the Government. The accused, however, preferred to be defended individually. Hardly a state exists in which people involved in terrorist acts are not given the death penalty. [...] We hereby categorically declare that the accused were sentenced quite lawfully. It was fully proven that there were links between them and the Gestapo. They quite rightly deserved the death penalty.²⁷⁶

One of the delegation's members, British Labour Party Member of Parliament Denis Pritt, added in a newspaper article, 'What first struck me as a British lawyer was the defendants' completely free and unconstrained conduct. They all looked well; they all stood up and spoke when they wanted to ... I consider the entire trial and the manner of addressing the defendants to be an example for the whole world in a case where the defendants are charged with the conspiracy to assassinate leading statesmen and to overthrow the government, which the defendants confessed to'.²⁷⁷ Pritt's article for the *British News Chronicle* was entitled 'The Moscow Trial was a Fair Trial'. *Pravda* did not miss the opportunity to reprint such an endorsement in block letters.²⁷⁸

The International Human Rights League also took the confessions at face value, calling the trial lawful. Left-wing intellectuals in Europe were fooled, among them Bernard Shaw, André Malraux and Romain Rolland. In public they all took Stalin's side—although at least one of them (Rolland) privately held grave concerns about the conduct of the trial.²⁷⁹

However not everybody was fooled. In the United States a Commission of Inquiry was set up in May 1937, chaired by 78-year-old philosopher John Dewey, to investigate the Moscow show trial. The Inquiry was responding to appeals from an American Committee for the Defence of Lev Trotsky, and from French intellectuals, trade unionists and some parliamentarians. Trotsky and his son Sedov provided the Dewey Commission (of eighteen men) with documents and evidence. At the same time, Soviet diplomats abroad worked hard to discredit this fact-finding exercise.²⁸⁰ Journalists from a number of countries had covered hearings in Cocoyan, Mexico, where Trotsky had been given asylum by the Mexican president after pressure was put on Norway to have him extradited to the Soviet Union. Since most charges of the Moscow trial were linked to a conspiracy allegedly masterminded by Trotsky, his explanations and refutations were crucial in determining the truthfulness of such accusations. Trotsky defended himself forcefully on this and other occasions. Here he replies to accusations from the Moscow trials in his own words:

According to the statements in both trials [the first and the second], the content of my criminal work was as follows: Three meetings in Copenhagen, two letters of Mrachkovsky and others, three letters to Radek, a letter to Pyatakov, another to Muralov, a meeting with Romm lasting twenty to twenty-five minutes, a meeting with Pyatakov lasting two hours ... Altogether, the conversations and correspondence of the conspirators, according to their own testimony, did not take more than twelve or thirteen hours of my time. I do not know how much time was taken up by my

conversations with Hess and the Japanese diplomats. Let us add twelve more hours. Altogether, this totals a maximum of three working days ... the eight years of my most recent exile comprise two thousand nine hundred and twenty possible working days ... During two thousand nine hundred and seventeen working days I wrote books, articles and letters and held conversations devoted to the defence of Socialism ... On the other hand, I devoted three days ... to a conspiracy in the interests of fascism.²⁸¹

The report of the Cocoyan hearings was six hundred pages long and managed to question many of the assertions made during the Moscow trial.²⁸² The Dewey Commission's final report was 422 pages long and published in 1937 under the title *Not Guilty*, with the conclusion, 'We therefore find the Moscow Trials to be frame-ups.'²⁸³ That conclusion did not reach many in the Soviet Union, nor did it manage to convince many on the political Left, outside the inquiry. Although part of the less doctrinaire democratic intelligentsia did have second thoughts about the character of the Soviet regime following the publication of the Dewey report, those on the political Right tended to accept the veracity of the charges brought against Trotsky and his followers.²⁸⁴

The sad truth about the reaction to the trial was that many people in the Soviet Union believed what they were told to believe, while others outside Russia believed what they wished to believe. Evidence and counter-evidence were accepted or ignored based on ideology, convenience or short-term self-interest. That said, however, most people were simply confused about what was going on. As Robert Tucker put it, '... even politically literate people were [far] from understanding what was happening in the country, who was behind it, and "why"'.²⁸⁵ In many ways, what happened was simply beyond comprehension.

4.5. Judicial, Social and Political Consequences

4.5.1. Judicial Consequences

On 5 December 1936, the Soviet Union received a new Constitution from the Communist Party, the product of a commission set up in February 1935. This Constitution had been drafted mainly by Nikolai Bucharin, with the help of Karl Radek. They would be among the main defendants in the second (January 1937) and third (March 1938) Moscow trials. The new Constitution 'guaranteed' freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press and freedom of religious worship as well as the

inviolability of individuals, their homes and their correspondence. More to the point, it also 'guaranteed' Soviet citizens freedom from arbitrary arrest and the right to defence in a public trial before an independent judge.²⁸⁶ The Constitution was supposed to identify the superior democratic and humanistic features separating Communism from Fascism.²⁸⁷ Yet the contrast between the 'theory' of the Constitution and the practice, manifested in the show trials and the purges, could not have been greater.²⁸⁸

On 1 September 1935, one week after the execution of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and the other defendants, Stalin issued an order to Yagoda and Yezhov. Five thousand members of the former opposition, who were already held in concentration camps, were to be secretly executed. Former NKVD chief Orlov remembered this as an order 'which shocked even the most callous of the NKVD chiefs'. That order was soon followed by another, asking the NKVD to prepare a further list of five thousand opponents destined to be executed.²⁸⁹ Compiling such lists of names would become a frequent occurrence. On some evenings, Stalin would sign off on more than thousand names.

This was the beginning of a purge that would, according to a conservative estimate, cost some 700,000 lives over the next two years.²⁹⁰ What were the 'crimes' of those who were executed? Perhaps they had, somewhere in the past, abstained from voting in a resolution against Trotsky, or made a careless remark that was recorded by NKVD informers. Others may have shown a perceived lack of faith in the Party line. 'Trotskyism' was not specifically named as a crime in the Penal Code. The definition of Trotskyism was very fluid and included not only opponents left and right of Stalin's line in the past, but also 'wreckers' and 'fascist spies'.²⁹¹ In November 1937, during a toast for the twentieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, Stalin told the Politburo members and a few select others, 'We will destroy every enemy, even if he is an Old Bolshevik, we will destroy his kin, his family. Anyone who by his actions or thoughts encroaches on the unity of the socialist state, we shall destroy relentlessly.'²⁹² It was Stalin and the NKVD who decided what was a crime, not the Constitution, the Penal Code or the Ministry of Justice.

Show trials like those held in Moscow were also conducted in the republics, regions and districts of the Soviet Union in the following two years. They served to provide the rationale for local purges.²⁹³ The following two major show trials held in Moscow in 1937 and 1938 clearly indicated that Stalin must have considered the first show trial a success. While that trial had been targeting the Trotskyist Left, and the second targeted Trotskyist 'wreckers', the third trial focused mainly on the 'Bloc of Rightists and Trotskyists', with Bukharin as the most prominent representative.²⁹⁴

Legal safeguards, which existed at least on paper, had gravely deteriorated since Kirov's murder and the first Moscow trial. Until December 1934, for example, executions

of political opponents had to be confirmed by a commission of the Politburo. However, by September 1934 in some regions of the Soviet Union, the death penalty no longer had to be confirmed by Moscow if the matter was judged to be only of local concern.²⁹⁵ Until early 1936, Vyshinsky had advocated reducing the NKVD's powers to impose sentences directly. We must assume that he did this mainly to preserve this power for the judiciary rather than the NKVD.²⁹⁶ Vyshinsky was not averse to drastic measures—in 1937 he said that 'One has to remember Comrade Stalin's instruction that there are sometimes periods, moments in the life of a society and in our life in particular, when the laws prove obsolete and have to be set aside.'²⁹⁷ In April 1938 he instructed his procurators not to obstruct the 'mass operations' of the NKVD.²⁹⁸ 'Troikas' (consisting of the local Party boss, the local NKVD chief and the local procurator) were at that time arranging and supervising mass arrests and executions in the provinces.²⁹⁹ Often, the representative from Vyshinsky's office was not even consulted. In late 1938, Vyshinsky managed to regain some lost ground in that regard. The activities of the 'troikas' were in practice brought to an end by mid-November 1938 by a Politburo decree.³⁰⁰ Some dubious cases of NKVD arrests were even reopened and some of those unjustly sent to labour camps were freed. But this affected only a minority of the nearly two million people who had been sent to the camps by that time.³⁰¹

The purges that followed did not stop when it came to the Soviet criminal justice system itself. The search for political enemies meant that ordinary criminal justice cases became political cases, and the standards for issuing convictions were lowered. The judiciary was also purged. Those within its ranks who did not sufficiently facilitate the work of the NKVD became objects of persecution themselves. Almost half of all judges and prosecutors lost their jobs in 1937 and 1938; many of them were arrested. Some two thousand new investigators and prosecutors hired in early 1938 could not fill all the vacancies created by the purges.³⁰²

The Military Collegium of the Supreme Court which had sentenced Zinoviev, Kamenev and the others would, in the next two years, rubber-stamp the death sentences and other sentences not only for tens of thousands of old Party members, but also bring death to young Komsomol (Communist Youth Organisation) members, economic and military functionaries, writers, artists and others. The Committee of Justice of the Politburo, which included Nikolai Yezhov, would draw up hundreds of lists of names. Stalin and a few colleagues from his inner circle in the Politburo would sign them, often dealing with thousands in a single day; *de facto* pronouncing the sentence—death or camp. Stalin signed 362 such lists, Molotov 373, Voroshilov 195, Kaganovich 191, Zhdanov 177 and Mikoian 63. In this way, lists containing 44,000

names passed through their hands and were forwarded to the Military Collegium. 39,000 thousand of the 44,000 were then sentenced to death by the Collegium.³⁰³

This procedure did not apply to the 'national operations' which paralleled the Party purges. The Soviet Union was home to people of more than hundred different nationalities. From this large pool of non-ethnic Russians, large numbers of people were sent to the camps or sentenced to death. According to one NKVD document dated December 1938, between 1 October 1936 and 1 November 1938, 1,565,041 people had been arrested in national and other operations.³⁰⁴ Of these, 1,336,863 were sentenced. The first category of punishment was death, the second was being sent to camps. Of those arrested, more than 90,000 people died in camps in 1938,³⁰⁵ and 668,305 of them were given the death sentence.³⁰⁶ These figures are incomplete; there were also other operations. Operational order No. 00486, dated 15 August 1937, for instance, ordered the 'Liquidation of the families of arrested enemies of the people.'³⁰⁷ When Yezhov sent Stalin a list with the names of wives of 'enemies of the people', he signed that list as well.³⁰⁸ The slaughter was on an almost industrial scale. In one instance, between August 1937 and October 1938, twelve NKVD men in a special facility for killing people by neck-shots in Butovo, outside Moscow, killed 20,000 people. As the volume of liquidations increased, gassing in carriages was also said to have occurred.³⁰⁹ The purges gradually shifted focus, from Old Bolsheviks to members of non-Russian nationalities. This continued until at least late 1938. In addition, the NKVD also operated abroad. Its most prominent target was Trotsky himself, who was assassinated in Mexico in 1940 at Stalin's order.

It took the Soviet Union a long time to admit to the miscarriage of justice in this trial. In 1956 Khrushchev admitted to 'glaring abuses of Socialist legality which resulted in the death of innocent people' in his secret speech to the twentieth Party Congress. However, it would take 32 more years before at least some symbolic measures were taken to address some of the damage. In 1988, the USSR Supreme Court reviewed the evidence against Zinoviev and Kamenev and others tried in August 1936, and rehabilitated them, declaring that all the defendants in the first Moscow trial had been innocent of the charges.³¹⁰

4.5.2. Social and Political Consequences

With hindsight, it seems astounding that nobody realised what would stem from the Kirov murder—nobody except Trotsky. Yet even he did not attribute Kirov's murder in December 1936 to Stalin. Yet he had suggested in the same month that Stalin's goal was 'to terrorize completely all his critics and oppositionists, and this not by expulsion

from the Party nor by depriving them of their daily bread, not even by imprisonment or exile, but by the firing squad. To the terrorist act of Nikolayev, Stalin replies by redoubling the terror against the Party.³¹¹

Despite the breadth and the horror of the purges, they were smaller in terms of casualties than the deaths accompanying the forced collectivisation of the peasantry in the late 1920s and early 1930s. According to the highest estimates, two million people were killed or sent to the camps during the Great Purge. At least three times as many people had perished through hunger or shootings during the forced collectivisations. The common people were affected by the purges less than Party members and the middle levels of society. In fact, Stalin tried to tap into the discontent of the common man, including those at the bottom of the Party pyramid, using their dissatisfactions and denunciations as the rationale and engine for his purges against the Old Bolsheviks.³¹²

When the death sentences against Zinoviev and Kamenev were carried out in the early hours of 25 August 1936, and *Pravda* had announced this, many in the Communist Party were shocked. An unwritten contract had been broken: Party members do not kill Party members and, above all, Old Bolsheviks do not kill Old Bolsheviks.³¹³ While Stalin was still in Sochi (where he stayed until the end of September), the Politburo discussed the trial on 27 August 1936. While nothing could now be done about Zinoviev's, Kamenev's, Smirnov's and Tomsky's deaths (Tomsky had committed suicide), many worried as their names had also been mentioned by defendants or by the prosecutor during the trial. Rykov and Bukharin were the most prominent members named—and two days after the executions, most Politburo members were not ready to let them share the same fate. Confronted with a false witness Yezhov had presented to denounce Bukharin (editor of *Izvestia*), Lazar Kaganovich reportedly told Bukharin, 'He's lying, the whore, from beginning to end! Go back to the newspaper, Nikolai Ivanovich and work in peace.'³¹⁴ The wide-ranging purge Stalin had in mind for even the top ranks of the Party was still alien to many Politburo and Central Committee members. Their instincts told them, 'Repression was something we did to them [the enemies of the Party] ... and it was inconceivable that we would repress us.'³¹⁵ Due to this resistance, Stalin, still away from Moscow, had to take a step back. On 10 September 1936 Vyshinsky announced in *Pravda* the closure of investigations against the two 'Rightists' (Bukharin and Rykov—both non-voting members of the Central Committee) for lack of evidence.³¹⁶

Stalin blamed Yagoda for this setback in going after the 'enemies of the people', a term soon applied, as Khrushchev later explained, to all 'those who in any way disagreed with Stalin' as well as to 'those who were only suspected of hostile intent'. Khrushchev

called Stalin 'a very distrustful man, sickly suspicious'.³¹⁷ In Stalin's dictionary 'anti-Stalin' meant 'counter-revolutionary', 'oppositional activity' meant 'treason', and 'anti-Stalin grouping' meant 'conspiratorial terrorist centre'. In short, anyone who engaged in criticising or opposing Stalin's policies could be charged with 'counter-revolutionary terrorism'.³¹⁸ Few claims that surfaced in the first show trial had been true, although there was an undercurrent of opposition in the Bolshevik Party, and this opposition had been linked with Trotsky and one of his sons abroad in the past. All the evidence we have indicates that they planned no terrorist assassinations.³¹⁹ Yagoda, the NKVD chief who studied the pre-trial 'confessions' and 'evidence' of Pickel, Dreitzer and others in the first show trial, annotated one report supposedly documenting Trotsky's terrorist orders with words like: 'untrue', 'nonsense', 'rubbish' and 'this cannot be'.³²⁰ Yagoda's unwillingness to purge Old Bolsheviks on the basis of blatant lies would soon cost him his job and, in the third show trial, his own life. Perhaps Stalin was 'inventing new enemies to intimidate his real opponents' and to 'destroy not only his opponents but the less radical among his allies', as Montefiore has suggested.³²¹

Given Yagoda's reluctance to act on false evidence, Stalin was determined to replace him with the more aggressive Nikolai Yezhov. In a telegram of 25 September 1936, co-signed by Andrei Zhdanov, Secretary of the Central Committee, Stalin demanded that Yezhov be made People's Commissar for Internal Affairs, blaming Yagoda for handling the trial poorly.³²² Yagoda, like Molotov, had probably expected that Zinoviev and Kamenev would be pardoned. An Old Bolshevik himself (he had joined the Party in 1907), he was sceptical about the widening of the purges, knowing that the charges were fabricated and supported only by false confessions.³²³ Nikolai Yezhov became Yagoda's successor by the end of September 1936.

When Yezhov became chief of the secret police, he quadrupled NKVD salaries, making them higher than those of others who worked in comparable positions in government or the Party.³²⁴ Yezhov took with him from the staff of the Central Committee three hundred men loyal to him. These men were the inner core to administer the purges to come—purges that would include the old Chekist Bolsheviks in the NKVD as well.³²⁵ With their help Yezhov would soon purge another 14,000 people. Why did they have to go? Perhaps because Stalin thought they knew too much about the crimes he had ordered them to commit in the past. The purge of the Old Chekists in 1937 occurred without trials.³²⁶ Yezhov, the 'poison dwarf' (he was just 151 cm tall, about 10 cm shorter than Stalin) was notorious for his ruthlessness. On one occasion, he claimed it was 'better that ten innocent people should suffer than one spy get away', and on another he declared, 'If during this operation an extra thousand people will be shot, that is not such a big deal'.³²⁷ He participated

personally in shootings, and also engaged in torture, sometimes cutting off the ears and noses of his victims.³²⁸ In 1937, Stalin promoted Yezhov, the 'Iron Commissar', to the position of candidate member of the Politburo.³²⁹ Except for Molotov, who was a full member of the Politburo, Yezhov was Stalin's most frequent visitor at that time; Stalin's appointment book records 278 of his visits, averaging three hours in length each, during 1937–1938.³³⁰ Stalin told Yezhov on the occasion of his appointment as head of the NKVD that there was a four-year backlog of 'work' to be done (presumably a hint at the insufficient punishment meted out to the 1932 supporters of the Ryutin platform).³³¹ Stalin authorised Yezhov to impose death sentences when it came to 'national operations'. But he kept the 'political' Party purges under his own tight control.³³²

The show trials provided sensational confessions which, when publicised, created an atmosphere of crisis, tension and suspicion—enemies could be everywhere, even in the Party, and the utmost vigilance was called for. In this sense, the trials served to 'legitimise' the purges, suggesting an enormous conspiracy that justified drastic measures.³³³

The second Moscow trial (also known as the Pyatakov–Radek trial) in January 1937 was ostensibly 'necessitated' by the fact that, in addition to the 'Leningrad Centre' (consisting of Nikolayev and others) and the 'Moscow Centre' (Zinovievites and Trotzkyites), a third, 'Parallel Centre' (or 'Reserve Centre') had been 'discovered' by the NKVD investigators. Among those arrested and brought to trial were, in addition to the Party's renowned theorist Bukharin, Karl Radek, former secretary of the Comintern, Leonid Serebriakov, former secretary of the Central Committee, and Mikhail Sokolnikov, former candidate member of the Politburo. This 'Parallel Centre' was said to have organised since 1933 sabotage and terrorist groups engaged in 'wrecking' at industrial plants, especially those of the defence industry. It was claimed they had been preparing terrorist attacks against Soviet leaders and engaged in spying for foreign states, ultimately aiming to overthrow the Soviet regime and restore capitalism.³³⁴ The outcome of the second Moscow trial was that 13 out of 17 defendants were sentenced to death; the remainder received lesser sentences. Pyatakov (whom Lenin had described in his testament as 'undoubtedly a person of outstanding strength of purpose and abilities'³³⁵) was executed, while Radek was given ten years in the camps. He did not survive; Lavrentiy Beria who became chief of the NKVD following Yezhov ordered his murder despite the fact that Radek was already in a prison camp.³³⁶

In March 1938 the largest of the show trials was held, against Nikolai Bukharin, the former head of the Communist International and member of the Politburo (according

to Lenin 'the darling of the Party'),³³⁷ Alexei Rykov (Lenin's deputy and later head of the Soviet government), and more than a dozen others.³³⁸ Among those others was Arel Yenukidze, the Secretary of the Central Executive Committee, who had helped Stalin in drafting the 1 December 1934 decree and Yagoda, who had prepared the first show trial together with Yezhov. Yagoda was accused of belonging to a 'Bloc of Rightists and Trotskyists' who had allegedly conspired with foreign powers; he was also accused of complicity in the murder of Kirov. He had allegedly instructed his deputy in Leningrad 'not to place any obstacles in the way of the terrorist act against Kirov'.³³⁹ This may have been the only true charge made at this trial. However, if it was true, Yagoda could not have done it without the approval of Joseph Stalin.³⁴⁰ As Stalin's biographer, Montefiore, found: 'Stalin sometimes accused others of his own crimes'.³⁴¹

It goes beyond the scope of this chapter to give a detailed account of the Great Terror that followed the show trials. It engulfed ever widening circles. Quotas were set on how many 'former kulaks and criminals' had to be arrested in 'mass operations' and the specific selection of the victims was often left to lower level officials who were even encouraged to exceed their quotas.³⁴²

To create the right public atmosphere for the country-wide purges, local show trials were organised across the Soviet Union. The audience was no longer NKVD people only, as in the first Moscow trial. Workers and farmers were brought in to attend the trials and local newspapers published full accounts. There was also a spin-off into real theatre, as Sheila Fitzpatrick writes:

The show trials, which were themselves political theater, spawned imitations in the regular theater, both professional and amateur. Lev Sheinin, whose cross-over activities between criminal investigation and journalism we have already encountered, was coauthor of one of the most popular theatrical works on the themes of the Great Purges, a play called *The Confrontation*, which played in a number of theaters throughout the Soviet Union in 1937. Since Sheinin was reputed to be the author also of the scenarios of the big Moscow show trials, this switch to 'legitimate' theater, using the same themes of spies and their unmasking and interrogation, is intriguing.³⁴³

The purges also affected the NKVD and the Red Army, the two wings of government with the largest capacity for organised violence. Here Stalin did not dare to use a show trial as the instrument of bringing the Army under his full control. The Red Army, created and led by Trotsky in the years of the Civil War, still contained many who had served under his command and who now risked being labelled as

‘Trotskyists’. On 1 May 1937, after the annual May Day parade, Stalin told his inner circle that it was time ‘to finish with our enemies because they are in the army, in the staff, even in the Kremlin’.³⁴⁴ And indeed, in 1937 an ‘Anti-Soviet Trotskyist Military Organization in the Red Army’, allegedly led by Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, was ‘discovered’.³⁴⁵ Tukhachevsky, the Deputy Commissar, was arrested on 22 May 1937, and admitted under torture to both having been a German agent and having tried to seize power together with Bukharin. The charismatic commander of the Red Army was secretly tried by the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court and shot on 12 June 1937.³⁴⁶ The people of the USSR learned of his death in a brief newspaper notification.³⁴⁷ About 10,000 officers of the Red Army were purged, including three (out of five) marshals, fifteen army commanders, fifteen army commissars, 63 commanders of corps and an equal number of their commissars, 151 division commanders and 86 division commissars, 243 commanders of brigades and 143 respective commissars, 318 commanders of regiments and 163 of their commissars.

The purges in the Party were equally drastic. In the spring of 1937 Stalin had told NKVD leaders that the entire pre-revolution and civil war generations of the Old Bolsheviks were a millstone around the neck of the revolution.³⁴⁸ While he did not destroy them all, his purge was extensive: the Central Committee, formally the supreme authority in the Party, saw 70 per cent of its members and candidate members—98 men in total—arrested and shot in 1937–1938.³⁴⁹ The purges did not stop at the Politburo either: five of its members—Rudzutak, Eiche, Cubar, Kosior and Postyshev—were arrested and shot.³⁵⁰ When the eighteenth Party Congress began on 10 March 1939, 90 per cent of the 1,900 attending were under 40 years of age. The Old Bolsheviks—apart from Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Zhdanov and a few others—had all gone. They were replaced by rising stars like Andrei Gromyko, Yuri Andropov and Leonid Brezhnev. Nearly 60 per cent of those who had belonged to the Party in 1933 were no longer part of it.³⁵¹ Of the regional Party leaders, 293 out of 333 had been replaced. Altogether half a million new appointments had been made in the Party and the state, as the Party Congress learned from ‘the wisest man of the epoch’, the ‘genius’ Stalin.³⁵² Speaking at the opening of the Congress, Stalin, with characteristic duplicity, also referred to the Old Bolsheviks, saying ‘... there are never enough Old cadres, there are far less than required, and they are already partly going out of commission owing to the operation of the laws of nature’.³⁵³

By early 1939 the purges had practically come to an end. From January 1938 onwards, the Central Committee had begun to criticise ‘false’ or ‘excessive’ vigilance.³⁵⁴ But

this referred more to unrestrained repression from below, especially in the provinces, which was often fuelled by denunciations and personal vendettas by Party bosses.³⁵⁵ On 17 November 1938 the Politburo had abolished the 'Troikas' that had been so active identifying and trying 'enemies of the people' in the country, often exceeding quotas set by the Kremlin.³⁵⁶ Yezhov was first side-lined and later arrested. He was replaced in December 1939 by Lavrentiy Beria, the Stalin confidant from Georgia. What had Yezhov done wrong? His biographers, Marc Jansen and Nikita Petrov, hold that 'there are no indications that Yezhov ever exceeded the role of Stalin's instrument'.³⁵⁷ However, Stalin was now eager to shift the blame onto him: 'Yezhov was a scoundrel. He ruined our best cadres. He had morally degenerated.'³⁵⁸ The manoeuvre of blaming Yezhov for 'excesses' was successful. The Great Terror of 1937–1938 is still referred to in Russian history as 'Yezhovshchina', the 'time of Yezhov',³⁵⁹ as if it was principally Yezhov's crime and not Stalin's. The General Secretary claimed in March 1939 at the Party Congress that 'serious mistakes' had been made by the NKVD.³⁶⁰ On 10 April 1939, Yezhov was arrested by Beria at a meeting Stalin had ordered Yezhov to attend.³⁶¹ Yezhov was to be accused of planning a coup d'état on the 21st anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution. He was accused of treasonable espionage for Poland, Germany, England and Japan. Under torture Yezhov admitted it all, and much more readily than many of his own victims. He was shot on 4 February 1940, probably at the same special execution site near the Lubianka NKVD headquarters he had built for some of his victims: a declining concrete floor with wooden logs at one end to absorb the bullets and a hose to flush away the blood. Yezhov's last request reportedly was 'Tell Stalin I shall die with his name on my lips.'³⁶² However after his death, when his personal safe was opened, materials about Stalin's pre-1917 past were allegedly found, including police records which contained incriminating evidence of Stalin's relationship with the Tsarist secret police, the Okhrana.³⁶³ Yezhov's relatives and close collaborators as well as their wives and children—altogether 346 people—were also shot.³⁶⁴ His divorced wife had already committed suicide before she could be arrested (she was accused of being an English spy) and made to testify against Yezhov, as Stalin and Beria reportedly had planned.³⁶⁵

Yezhov's successor, L. Beria, managed to survive Stalin (and may even have had a hand in his death by poisoning him in 1953).³⁶⁶ He also succeeded in killing Stalin's distant rival, Trotsky, the author of the volume *The Revolution Betrayed*. Stalin's order to Beria in 1939 was that 'Trotsky should be eliminated within a year'.³⁶⁷ Beria set up a special team, giving them three floors at NKVD headquarters. It required several attempts before Beria succeeded. Trotsky had fled Norway for Mexico in 1937. In 1938,

Trotsky's son Sergei was arrested and his older son Sedov was killed.³⁶⁸ Beria managed to infiltrate Ramon Mercader into Trotsky's inner circle. Mercader was an NKVD recruit from the Spanish civil war. He killed Trotsky in Mexico City at his desk with an ice axe on 20 August 1940.³⁶⁹ The previous day Stalin had Molotov, his Minister of Foreign Affairs, sign a non-aggression pact with Hitler—the fascist leader Stalin had accused Trotsky of conspiring with.³⁷⁰

4.6. Conclusion

Following the Kirov murder, there were two secret trials (in December 1934 and January 1935) and three show trials (in 1936, 1937 and 1938). We have focused here in some detail on the first of the public Moscow trials and its consequences. Today we know much more about what happened behind the scenes than most contemporaries did in August 1936. During the Great Purge, even otherwise well-informed people like the writers Ilya Ehrenburg and Boris Pasternak thought that Stalin had nothing to do with the mass violence. 'If only someone would tell Stalin about it', Pasternak said at the time—and he was not alone.³⁷¹ Those who were at the receiving end of the terror wanted to know the reason for it all. 'Koba, [Koba was Stalin's name from the days in the underground before the revolution] why do you need me to die?', wrote Nikolai Bukharin on 13 March 1938, after he (who had saved Stalin in the 1920s from being politically side-lined) was also condemned to death.³⁷² Could someone with paranoia have acted the way Stalin did? While there is considerable evidence of paranoia in Stalin's last phase of life after the Second World War, pathological paranoia does not conform well with the precision of his manoeuvres during the years of the Great Purge, as Vadim Rogovin, and, before him, Boris Nicolaevsky have pointed out.³⁷³ Rogovin rightly observes that:

Stalin was not mad, and he conducted a precisely determined line. He arrived at the conclusion about the need to destroy the layer of Old Bolsheviks not later than the summer of 1934, and then he began to prepare this operation. [...] in 1937 Stalin held the entire grandiose mechanism of state terror under his unwavering and effective control. Without weakening or losing this control for even a minute, he displayed in his actions not the nervousness and alarm of a paranoiac, but on the contrary, a surprising, almost superhuman self-control and the most refined calculation. During the 1930s, he conducted the 'Yezhov' operation very precisely (from his point of view),

since he prepared everything and seized his enemies unawares; they didn't understand him ... Even many of his supporters didn't understand him.³⁷⁴

It is clear that Stalin wanted to maintain a 'monolithic structure of the Party'³⁷⁵ with himself undisputedly at the top. The Old Bolsheviks were the only ones who could combine and challenge him, and in that sense they posed a potential danger. However, they were divided and had in fact already lost their battle by the late 1920s. In the end one has to search for explanations within Stalin himself. Bukharin found one possible answer:

He [Stalin] is ever unhappy because he cannot convince everyone, even himself, that he is greater than everybody else, and this is his misfortune, perhaps his only human trait But what is no longer human, but something diabolical is that for his 'misfortune' he cannot help but get revenge over people, all people, and particularly those who are higher in some way, or better than him.³⁷⁶

How did Stalin manage to lead his closest allies and countless others he did not even know, to the Gulag camps and the execution sites? Perhaps the main reason he succeeded was that he was a good actor. As Robert Tucker observed, '... noteworthy is the extraordinary cunning and duplicity that Stalin showed in his dealings with various individuals who were condemned in his own mind to destruction. He would convincingly reassure them that they had nothing to worry about.'³⁷⁷ In March 1937, when the purges he had ordered were already in full swing, he could sanctimoniously caution other members of the Central Committee against 'a heartless attitude toward people' and blame those who 'think it is a mere bagatelle to expel thousands and ten thousands of people from the Party'.³⁷⁸ His ability to manipulate his colleagues and subordinates was extraordinary.³⁷⁹ While it is true that he needed helpers and willing executioners, one year after the first Moscow show trial, by mid-1937, as Robert Tucker put it, '... he effectively was the regime'.³⁸⁰

New evidence which has surfaced since the Soviet Union came to an end basically corroborates (for the first show trial) what Tucker and Cohen concluded in 1965 when they wrote about the third Moscow trial:

As we re-examine the problem of the Moscow show trials, then, it is essential to bear in mind that these were basically one-man shows of which Stalin himself was organizer, chief producer, and stage manager as well as an appreciative spectator from a darkened room at the rear of the Hall of Columns, where the trial was held. Vyshinsky spoke

for the prosecution, but we must understand that he spoke with the voice of Stalin. Although he did not claim personal authorship, Stalin was the chief playwright of the case of the ‘Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites’ and the other cases enacted in the show trials.³⁸¹

With his show trials, Stalin managed to frighten his enemies, punish his former opponents in the Party, mobilise the public to be ‘vigilant’ and expose and denounce ‘enemies of the people’, while at the same time shifting the blame for the crimes he committed to others. Perhaps that was also the deeper purpose of the ‘confessions’—if he was at all capable of feelings of guilt, the confessions of others to his crimes could serve to take away that guilt. This is the interpretation proposed by Robert Tucker:

For Stalin, the execution of Zinoviev and Kamenev, in violation of his promise to spare their lives, represented the final measure of vindictive triumph over loathsome enemies. He not only humiliated, exploited, and destroyed them, but he caused them to die knowing they had publicly abased and besmirched themselves and very many others, taken on the guilt for his murder of Kirov, his duplicity, and his terrorist conspiracy against the Party state. They had confessed to representing a variety of fascism when he was introducing just that in Russia by, among other things, this very pseudo-trial; and they wound up groveling at their murderer’s feet and glorifying him—all for nothing but to serve his purposes.³⁸²

The ‘show’ trial was, if we follow this line of interpretation, perhaps first of all a show for himself, and then only one for the 165 million people in the Soviet Union and the workers’ movement beyond the USSR. Of his opponents, only Trotsky stood up to challenge him from abroad, for which he paid the same price as those who had ‘crawled on their bellies’ during the trial in an attempt to save their lives.³⁸³ Not only are the ruthlessness and vindictiveness of Stalin reflected in the crimes he attributed to his enemies in the show trial. The trials also became the model for the kind of society the Soviet Union became under Stalin after he seized on the Kirov murder to shape Russia in his own image. Amy Knight has correctly observed that:

The Kirov case—not just the murder, but the investigation, trials, and propaganda that followed—served as a prototype for all future cases that the secret police would investigate. Marking the beginning of a collusion between Party leadership and the secret police in a travesty of justice for the Soviet people, it incorporated all the elements of the Soviet system of repression that would be refined in the decades to come—

falsified testimonies, scapegoats, arbitrary punishments, physical and psychological torture, intimidation and threats, and meaningless judicial jargon.³⁸⁴

Before the advent of electricity (and even thereafter), theatres in Russia and elsewhere had to have an 'iron curtain', a barrier that could separate the stage, with its petrol lamp illumination, from the audience. In case of fire the curtain could be lowered to the edge of the stage, allowing the audience to escape unharmed. After the Second World War, Stalin put up an Iron Curtain around the Soviet Union and its satellites. It served the opposite purpose, namely to prevent the audience from escaping. Those in the Soviet Union who did not like his 'show' were put away and, in many cases, were worked to death in labour colonies and camps. By 1939 the camp population numbered 1.7 million people (not all of them political prisoners). By 1941 some seven million people had passed through the Gulag and labour colony system since 1934. By the time Stalin died, in 1953, there were 12 million in the Gulag system.³⁸⁵ In the years 1937–1938 alone, 680,000 people had died following the monstrous trials and special tribunals at the hands of the NKVD. To this day, even these figures are incomplete and provisional.³⁸⁶

The chain of events that had led to this national tragedy began on 1 December 1934 with the assassination of Sergei Kirov and the decree that Stalin drafted in response, which became the heart of Article 58 of the Soviet Penal Code. The Great Purge ended four years later on 17 November 1938 with a decree of the Central Committee that put a stop to the extensive arrest and deportation operations. As Nikolaus Werth has observed, 'The Great Terror ended as it had begun, with an order of Stalin.'³⁸⁷ He had never lost control of the 'show'. Stalin's compelling performative power has been unmatched to this day—as has his moral depravity.

Notes

- 1 George W. Hodos, *Show Trials. Stalinist Purges in Eastern Europe, 1948–1954* (New York: Praeger, 1987), p. xiii.
- 2 Cit. Vadim Z. Rogovin, 1937. *Stalin's Year of Terror* (Oak Park, Michigan: Mehring Books, Inc., 1998), p. 46.
- 3 Arkady Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey. Vyshinsky and the 1930s Moscow Show Trials* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), p. 73.
- 4 Jeremy Peterson, 'Unpacking Show Trials: Situating the Trial of Saddam Hussein', *Harvard International Law Journal*, 48:1 (2007), p. 257.

- 5 Ernest Clark, 'Revolutionary Ritual: A Comparative Analysis of Thought Reform and the Show Trial', *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 9:3 (1976), pp. 226–227, 232–233 and 243.
- 6 Robert C. Tucker and Stephen F. Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1965), pp. ix–x.
- 7 Nathan Leites and Elsa Bernaut, *Ritual Liquidation. The Case of the Moscow Trials* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1954), p. 449.
- 8 Ron Christenson (ed.), *Political Trials in History. From Antiquity to the Present* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1991), p. 304.
- 9 Gudrun Persson, 'And they all confessed ...', http://art-bin.com/art/amosc_preeng.html. Retrieved 9 June 2011.
- 10 Documents relating to the trial were destroyed in a fire in Moscow's Pravda building in February 2006. Adrian Blomfield, 'Stalin show trial files go up in smoke', *The Telegraph UK* (15 February 2006). The official transcript is partly paraphrased, shortened and incomplete; it has certainly been edited. It can be found in: People's Commissariat of Justice of the USSR. Report of Court Proceedings. The Case of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Centre. Heard before the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR, Moscow (19–24 August 1936). In re G.E. Zinoviev, L.B. Kamenev, G.E. Evdokimov, I.N. Smirnov, I.P. Bakayev, V.A. Ter-Vaganyan, S.V. Mrachkovsky, E.A. Dreitzer, F.S. Holtzman, I.I. Reingold, R.V. Pickel, V.P. Olberg, K.B. Berman-Yurin, Fritz David (I.I. Kruglyansky), M. Lurye and N. Lurye. Charges under Articles 19, 58.8 and 58.11 of the Criminal Code of the R.S.F.S.R. Published by the People's Commissariat of Justice of the USSR Moscow (1936).
- 11 Alexander Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes* (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 43. Orlov (pseudonym. for Lev Feldbin), himself a high-level former NKVD agent, noted: '... at the three Moscow trials the state prosecutor was unable to produce a single material proof of the defendants' guilt: not a conspiratorial letter, not a document relating to espionage, and not even a single political proclamation or leaflet'.
- 12 One of our chief sources is Alexander Orlov whose account was published in 1953. While its authenticity has been doubted in the past, recent archive findings corroborate what he wrote. In the words of Rogovin: 'The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes is the most complete and reliable account of the mechanism of Kirov's murder and the organization of the Moscow Trials, especially the first, which occurred when Orlov was in the USSR'. See Rogovin, 1937, p. 469.
- 13 Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin. The First In-Depth Biography Based on Explosive New Documents from Russia's Secret Archives* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996), p. 310.
- 14 A fire in the Pressa Printing complex in Moscow on 14 February 2006 destroyed files of

- the Stalin show trials. See Adrian Blomfield, 'Stalin show trial files go up in smoke', *The Telegraph UK* (15 February 2006); cit. *The Telegraph* (23 January 2011).
- 15 Otto Kirchheimer, *Political Justice. The Use of Legal Procedures for Political Ends* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 46.
 - 16 George Katkov, *The Trial of Bukharin* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1969), pp. 9–10.
 - 17 *Pravda* (6 November 1918); cit. Leites and Bernaut, *Ritual Liquidation*, p. 444.
 - 18 Alex P. Schmid, *Churchill's privater Krieg. Intervention und Konterrevolution im Russischen Bürgerkrieg, 1918–1920* (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1974), p. 26.
 - 19 Robert Conquest, *Stalin and the Kirov Murder* (London: Hutchinson, 1989), p. 122. The first Politburo consisted of five members; later it was expanded to fourteen full members and eight candidate (non-voting) members, but its actual size varied over time.
 - 20 Stalin, in a speech at a trade union conference (19 November 1924); cit. Leites and Bernaut, *Ritual Liquidation*, p. 192.
 - 21 NKVD stands for NarodnyiKommissariat Vnutrennykh Del (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs). The secret police changed its name many times: from 1917 to 1922 it was known as Cheka (All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Fighting Counter-Revolution and Sabotage), and as GPU or OGPU (State Political Administration/Combined State Political Administration), 1923–1934; NKVD, 1934–1946; Ministry of State Security (MGB), 1946–1953, and KGB (Committee for State Security) from 1953 to the early 1990s—Roj Medvedev, *All Stalin's Men* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 169.
 - 22 Boris Souvarine, *Stalin: A Critical Survey of Bolshevism* (New York: Alliance Book Corporation, 1939), pp. 482–485; cit. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 25; Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, p. xviii.
 - 23 Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin. The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Phoenix, 2004), p. 34.
 - 24 Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), p. 248. Cf. Stalin's fear of assassination was real. While he could have an eye on his main political opponents, a lone-wolf-type of attack like Nikolayev's murder of Kirov was always a possibility although his personal security measures were extremely thorough. Cf. Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 172; cf. Concern about terroristic assassinations also prompted Stalin to launch a campaign for the creation of an international court against terrorism after the assassination of the king of Yugoslavia and the French foreign minister in 1934. The Geneva-based Commission of Lawyers worked on the status of the future tribunal. However, when on 22 October 1936 Trotsky demanded that his case be brought to the tribunal once it was established, Stalin's efforts to bring about such an international court came to a halt. Cf. Rogovin, 1937, p. 85.
 - 25 Cit. Rogovin, 1937, pp. 146–147.

- 26 Stuart Kahan, *The Wolf of the Kremlin. The First Biography of L.M. Kaganovich, the Soviet Union's Architect of Fear* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1987), pp. 137–138.
- 27 Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power. The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (New York: WW. Norton, 1990), p. 431.
- 28 Kahan, *The Wolf of the Kremlin*, p. 138.
- 29 Alexander Dallin and George W. Breslauer, *Political Terror in Communist Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), p. 28.
- 30 Leites and Bernaut, *Ritual Liquidation*, pp. 9–10.
- 31 Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, p. xxviii.
- 32 Nicolas Werth, *Ein Staat gegen sein Volk. Das Schwarzbuch des Kommunismus—Sowjetunion*. (München: Piper Verlag 2002), pp. 186–187; Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, p. xviii; Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 87n.
- 33 John Arch Getty & Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror. Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 473.
- 34 F. Beck and W. Godin, *Russian Purge and the Extraction of Confession* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1951), p. 27.
- 35 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 372.
- 36 Werth, *Ein Staat gegen sein Volk*, p. 151.
- 37 Cit. Montefiore, *Stalin*, pp. 131–132.
- 38 Rogovin, 1937, p. xiii.
- 39 Cit. Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 133; Michael Heller and Alexander Nekrich, *Geschichte der Sowjetunion*. Vol. 1: 1914–1939 (Königstein: Athenäum, 1981), p. 266.
- 40 Rogovin, 1937, p. xv.
- 41 John Getty, for instance, adheres to one theory, writing ‘he [Stalin] was not a master planner, and studies of all of his policies before and after the 1930s have shown that he stumbled into everything from collectivization to foreign policy. Stalin’s colossal felonies, like most violent crimes everywhere, were of the unplanned, erratic kind’. Cit. John Arch Getty & Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror. Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 62; Rogovin takes the opposite position: ‘... the idea that the entire ‘Yezhov period’ was a diabolically calculated game, a crime, but not madness is profoundly justified. Cit. Rogovin, 1937, p. xv. R. Tucker and S. Cohen also support this position: ‘A crucially important point that emerges from the post-Stalin Soviet revelations about the Great Purge is that Stalin personally conceived, initiated, and directed the entire process, including the planning, preparation, and actual conduct of the purge trials’. Cit. Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, p. xii. This position has been strengthened by analyses based on archive materials released after the demise of the USSR.

- 42 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 154.
- 43 A German historian, Jörg Baberowski, noted that 'Following the trial [of Nikolayev and others, AS] NKVD people from Leningrad mysteriously lost their lives, others were arrested, shot or placed elsewhere as punishment'. Cit. J. Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror. Die Geschichte des Stalinismus* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2007), p. 14.
- 44 Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, p. 144.
- 45 Montefiore, *Stalin*, pp. 146–147.
- 46 Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, p. 267.
- 47 Cit. Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, pp. 203–204; Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 155.
- 48 Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, p. 229.
- 49 Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, pp. 224–225.
- 50 The numbers of those who were then in the camps was, according to one estimate, around 3.5 million but not all of them were 'political' criminals; J. Getty and O. Naumov cite a statistical report of the NKVD from 1953 who showed that 1,575,259 people were arrested by the security police in 1937–1938 (87 per cent of them on political grounds) of whom 1,344,923 were convicted and taken to the camps. However, this report covered only one part of those who during those two years were arrested, imprisoned and taken to labour colonies and camps. Cf. Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, pp. 589–590. Many of those who managed to survive in the camps were only released after Khrushchev's secret speech to the twentieth Party Congress in 1956. Cf. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 217. When the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on 25 August 1938 discussed the possibility of an early release of prisoners who had distinguished themselves in the camps, Stalin was opposed to this, arguing, 'From the point of view of the economy it is a bad idea'. He made sure that those convicted would serve their full sentence because his 'dictatorship of the proletariat' needed slave workers. Cit. Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 402.
- 51 Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, pp. 157–160.
- 52 Conquest, *Stalin and the Kirov Murder*, p. 59.
- 53 Conquest, *Stalin and the Kirov Murder*, p. 35.
- 54 Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, p. 200; The Politburo approved the decree only after it had been published by *Pravda* on 5 December. Cf. Conquest, *Stalin and the Kirov Murder*, p. 38. This decree, which became Article 58 of the Russian Penal Code, penalised high treason, armed revolt, espionage, sabotage, terror, counter-revolutionary propaganda and association with a counter-revolutionary organisation. Cf. Beck and Godin, *Russian Purge and the Extraction of Confession*, p. 43. For an English translation of Art. 58, see: <http://www.cyberussr.com/rus/uk58-c.html#58-1a>.

- 55 Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, p. 220. According to one source, ‘The murderer told the prison guard who brought him back to his cell that Stalin ‘promised me my life if I named my accomplices, but I had no accomplices’’. (p. 207).
- 56 Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, p. 6 and 205; The personality cult of the dead Kirov in subsequent years, encouraged by Stalin, placed him almost on the same saintly pedestal as Lenin. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 235–236.
- 57 Wladislaw Hedeler, ‘Ezhov’s Scenario for The Great Terror and the Falsified Record of the Third Moscow Show Trial’, in: Barry McLoughlin and Kevin McDermott (eds), *Stalin’s Terror. High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 37; Radzinsky, *Stalin*, pp. 317–321.
- 58 Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, p. 243.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 14; Stalin had earlier instructed the interrogators: ‘Nourish Nikolaev well, buy him chicken and other things, nourish so that he will be strong and then he will tell us who was leading him. And if he doesn’t talk we will give him ... and he will tell and show everything’. Cit. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 220.
- 61 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin’s Crimes*, pp. 4–5; Their families were executed soon thereafter. Cf. Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 167.
- 62 Cf. Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 167.
- 63 *Ibid.*
- 64 Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, p. 222; Rogovin, 1937, p. 1.
- 65 Rogovin, 1937, p. 8.
- 66 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 167.
- 67 Conquest, *Stalin and the Kirov Murder*, p. 59.
- 68 Cit. Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, p. 222.
- 69 Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, p. 159; Werth, *Ein Staat gegen sein Volk*, pp. 158–159.
- 70 Rogovin, 1937, p. 2.
- 71 Marc Jansen and Nikita Petrov, *Stalin’s Loyal Executioner: People’s Commissar Nikolai Ezhov, 1895–1940* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2002), p. 20.
- 72 Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*, p. 70.
- 73 Rogovin, 1937, p. 1.
- 74 Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, p. 159.
- 75 Rogovin, 1937, p. 4; In the February–March 1937 Plenum of the Central Committee, Yezhov, secretary of the Central Committee and boss of the NKVD, recalled that ‘the person responsible for opening the case [of the Trotzky-Zinoviev Centre] was essentially Comrade Stalin’. Cit. Rogovin, 1937, p. 2.
- 76 Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p. 247.

- 77 Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror. A Reassessment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 83.
- 78 Montefiore, *Stalin*, pp. 189–190.
- 79 Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p. 247.
- 80 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 107.
- 81 Hedeler, 'Ezhov's Scenario for The Great Terror', p. 38.
- 82 Rogovin, 1937, p. 5.
- 83 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, pp. 87–88.
- 84 Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, p. 204.
- 85 Rogovin, 1937, p. 12.
- 86 Hedeler, 'Ezhov's Scenario for The Great Terror', p. 38.
- 87 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, pp. 90–91. Art. 58 of the Penal Code with Stalin's amendments of 1 December 1934 did not allow for appeal or clemency. However, since the expectation of a pardon was what made the defendants confess this revision was necessary to lull the defendants in a false sense of security.
- 88 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 367.
- 89 Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 332.
- 90 Cit. Hans Sherrer, 'Stalin's Prosecutor: the Life of Andrei Vyshinsky—Review by Hans Sherrer', *Justice Denied Magazine*, http://forejustice.org/wc/vyshinsky/stalin%27s_prosecutor.html. Retrieved 19 May 2015.
- 91 Rogovin, 1937, p. 164.
- 92 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 378; Rogovin, 1937, p. 93 also underlines that '.... according to the documents and eyewitness accounts we have, in 1936 the people under investigation were still not subjected to inhuman physical torture. The investigators limited themselves to such devices as sleep deprivation, conveyor belt interrogations lasting many hours, and threats to shoot or arrest relatives.'; In 1937, Stalin had hand-written the secret document allowing torture of arrested persons and had the other members of the Politburo to sign it. Cf. Rogovin, 1937, p. 499. Sometimes, when Stalin went through the arrest lists prepared for him by Yezhov, he would add behind a name as specific instruction 'beat, beat!'. Cf. Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, p. 111. A rationale given for torture, in a telegram signed by Stalin to provincial Party committees, informing them that the application of physical pressure by the NKVD had been authorised by the Central Committee argued that 'It is well known that all bourgeois agencies use physical pressure on representatives of the proletariat. The question is why should socialist countries have to be more humane with sworn enemies of the working class?' Cit. Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 343.
- 93 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 83.

- 94 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, pp. 129–130.
- 95 Rogovin, 1937, p. 10.
- 96 Cit. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 74; Montefiore, *Stalin*, pp. 189–190.
- 97 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 87.
- 98 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, pp. 126–127.
- 99 Before that, they had been put in overheated cells despite the fact that it was summer; as a consequence, Zinoviev who suffered from asthma, could hardly breathe. Cf. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 122; Montefiore, *Stalin*, pp. 189–190.
- 100 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 190.
- 101 Rogovin, 1937, p. 10.
- 102 During the pre-trial interrogations Smirnov asked Abram Slutsky, one of the interrogators, 'I should like to see how you are going to prove in court that I organized the assassination of Kirov in 1934 and that I was preparing a terrorist act against Stalin, when everybody knows that since January 1933 I have been in prison'. Slutsky's reply was 'We don't have to prove that. The Politburo expects that you confirm that yourself. If you refuse, you won't be taken to the trial'. At this point Slutsky reminded '.... Smirnov of Stalin's word that the life of those who consented to testify at the trial would be spared, and that those who refused to carry out the demands of the Politburo would be shot without trial by order of the Special Council of the NKVD'. Cit. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, pp. 99–100.
- 103 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 87.
- 104 Cit. Radzinsky, *Stalin*, pp. 329–330; Yezhov used similar language when trying to persuade Zinoviev to confess, telling him that his testimony was a political necessity since '.... Soviet intelligence had seized documents of the German general staff which showed the intentions of Germany and Japan to attack the Soviet Union the following spring. Therefore, what was now needed more than ever was the support of the international proletariat for the 'fatherland of all labourers''. Trotzky was impeding this support with his 'anti-Soviet propaganda'. Zinoviev must 'help the Party strike a shattering blow against Trotzky and his band in order to drive the workers away from his counterrevolutionary organization' [summary of Rogovin]. Cit. Rogovin, 1937, p. 7. The same type of reasoning was also given by one of the few surviving witnesses, Smirnov's former wife, A. Safonova, who testified in 1956 before a Party Control Commission: 'Yes, it was with this understanding—that the Party demands this and we were obliged to pay with our heads for Kirov's murder—that we arrived at giving false testimony, not only I, but all other accused ... That's what happened during the pretrial investigation, and at the trial this was aggravated by the presence of foreign correspondents; knowing that they could use our testimony to harm the Soviet state, none of us could tell the

truth'. Cit. Rogovin, 1937, p. 18; Robert Conquest also noted that 'Their surrender was not a single and exceptional act in their careers, but rather the culmination of a whole series of submissions to the Party made in terms they knew to be 'objectively' false [...] The oppositionists—with the exception of Trotsky himself—had made a basic tactical error. Their constant avowals of political sin, their admissions that Stalin was after all right, were based on the idea that it was correct to 'crawl in the dust', suffer any humiliation, to remain in or return to the Party'. Cf. Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 179.

- 105 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 216.
- 106 Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 330; One way this showed was that during the trial Molotov's name was not on the list of those the defendants had drawn up as their victims. Kaganovich had put his own name on that list while Molotov's name was missing. Cf. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, pp. 151–156.
- 107 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 189.
- 108 Roman Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin. A Hidden Life* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), p. 254; Stalin had dissolved the Society of Old Bolsheviks in May 1935. That society had its own publishing house. In the Party, the revolution and civil war history of these Old Bolsheviks, Stalin's minor role in the Bolshevik Party's history was almost never mentioned. This irritated Stalin and inspired him to re-write the history of Bolshevism in his own 'official' Party publications. Cf. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 32.
- 109 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 154.
- 110 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 194.
- 111 Rogovin, 1937, p. 13.
- 112 Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p. 256; Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 160.
- 113 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 500.
- 114 Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 369; Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 154.
- 115 Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, pp. xiii–xiv.
- 116 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 193.
- 117 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 367.
- 118 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 157.
- 119 Conquest, *Stalin and the Kirov Murder*, p. 131.
- 120 According to R. Brackman, 'Stalin first used Vyshinsky's animosity toward the Old Bolsheviks in 1928 when he appointed Vyshinsky to preside over the Shakhty show trial. Vyshinsky performed to Stalin's satisfaction' Cit. Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin*, p. 252.
- 121 Montefiore, *Stalin*, pp. 194–196.
- 122 Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*, p. 80.
- 123 Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*, p. 74.

- 124 Rogovin, 1937, p. 14.
- 125 People's Commissariat of Justice of the USSR. Report of Court Proceedings. The Case of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Centre. Heard before the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR. Moscow, August 19–24, 1936 In re G.E. Zinoviev, L.B. Kamenev, G.E. Evdokimov, I.N. Smirnov, I.P. Bakayev, V.A. Ter-Vaganyan, S.V. Mrachkovsky, E.A. Dreitzer, F.S. Holtzman, I.I. Reingold, R.V. Pickjel, V.P. Olberg, K.B. Berman-Yurin, Fritz David (I.I. Kruglyansky), M. Lurye and N. Lurye. Charges under Articles 58.8, 19 and 58.8, 58.11 of the Criminal Code of the R.S.F.S.R. Published by the People's Commissariat of Justice of the USSR Moscow, 1936.
- 126 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 374.
- 127 Rogovin, 1937, p. 14.
- 128 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 157.
- 129 Ibid., p. 157; Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 154; Olberg, for instance, had in 1930 been ordered by Stalin to infiltrate Trotsky's exile circle and kill him, but Trotsky mistrusted him and excluded him. During the pre-trial investigation, Molchanov had explained to Olberg that he would now be given a chance to expose Trotsky in the impending trial and he was told that he would be given an important position after the trial if he agreed to confess to a plot, involving several students, who were planning to assassinate Stalin during a parade on the Red Square. Olberg also agreed to state in his signed deposition that he had met Trotsky's son Lev Sedov who was to be depicted as a Gestapo agent. To strengthen Olberg's testimony, two other NKVD agents were to confess that they had met Trotsky himself in 1932 in Copenhagen where they were given the assignment to kill Stalin and other members of the Politburo. Cf. Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin*, pp. 254–255.
- 130 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 157.
- 131 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 193.
- 132 Ibidem, p. 194.
- 133 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 159.
- 134 A. Orlov explained the absence of defence lawyers in these words: '... before the defendants were brought into court they were made to promise that they would decline counsel. Besides that, they promised their inquisitors that they themselves would not raise a finger in their own defence. And indeed, when the time came for them to make speeches of defence, all the defendants, with one voice, declined to do so'. Cit. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 161.
- 135 Ibid.
- 136 Report of the Court Proceedings. The Case of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Centre. Heard Before the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR

- Accused: G.E. Zinoviev, L.B. Kamenev, G.E. Evdokimov, I.N. Smirnov, I.P. Bakayev, V.A. Ter-Vaganyan, S.V. Mrachkovsky, E.A. Dreitzer, E.S. Holtzman, I.I. Reingold, R.V. Pickel, V.P. Olberg, K.B. Berman-Yurin, Fritz David (I.I. Kruglansky), M. Lurye and N. Lurye. Charged under Articles 58.8 58.11 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR. Moscow: People's Commissariat of Justice of the USSR 1936; August 19 [1936] (morning session).
- 137 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 158.
- 138 A. Orlov noted, 'Stalin ordered Yagoda to fill the hall only with NKVD officials and not to admit there any 'outsiders', even members of the Central Committee and of the government. [...] Yagoda carried out Stalin's order with unusual thoroughness and filled the hall with NKVD office employees—filing clerks, typists and code clerks. These employees received passes valid for half a day only and attended the trial in shifts. They had been instructed to come dressed in civilian clothes and to sit there the number of hours allotted them. Only the NKVD chiefs were allowed to attend the court proceedings in uniform'. Cf. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 158.
- 139 Ibid.
- 140 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 152.
- 141 Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*, p. 123.
- 142 Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*, p. 81.
- 143 Report prepared for the Politburo; cit. Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*, pp. 78–79.
- 144 Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*, p. 79.
- 145 Rogovin, 1937, pp. 15–16.
- 146 Article 58, Criminal Code of the RSFSR (1934), <http://www.cyberusssr.com/rus/uk58-e.html#58-1a>. Retrieved 22 March 2011.
- 147 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 195.
- 148 RCP, pp. 3–4.
- 149 Cit. Rogovin, 1937, p. 60.; Trotsky's son, L. Sedov would later write on the veracity of the trial, 'These two facts, i.e. that the meetings of Smirnov and Holtzman with Sedov actually took place, were the only grains of truth in the sea of lies at the Moscow Trial'. Cit. Rogovin, 1937, p. 61; The chance meeting between Smirnov and Sedov in Berlin was, however, in 1931. In reality, there was a bit more substance to contacts between Trotsky and some members of the 16 defendants. However, there was no terrorist plot involved. Cf. Rogovin, 1937, pp. 62–63.
- 150 RCP, p. 15 (19 August 1936; morning session).
- 151 RCP, p. 8. (19 August 1936; morning session). Quoting from Vol. xxvii, p. 70 of the interrogation files. According to A. Orlov, Stalin himself added this sentence to Reingold's testimony. Cf. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 69.
- 152 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, pp. 69–70.

- 153 RCP, p. 1 (19 August 1936; evening session).
- 154 RCP, p. 3 (19 August 1936; evening session).
- 155 RCP, p. 22 (19 August 1936; morning session).
- 156 RCP, p. 1 (19 August 1936; evening session).
- 157 It is doubtful whether Ivan N. Smirnov simply said 'Yes' as the proceedings state. In prison, in a confrontation with Mrachkovsky who had tried to convince him to confess ('Ivan Nikitich, let us give them what they want. It has to be done'), Smirnov replied: 'I have nothing to confess to. I never fought against the Soviet power. I never fought against the Party. I was never a terrorist. And I never tried to murder anyone'. Cit. W.G. Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service. Memoirs of the First Soviet Master Spy to Defect* (New York: Enigma Books, 2000), p. 176. Like Trotsky, Krivitsky was assassinated abroad in 1940 on the orders of Stalin.
- 158 RCP, p. 25 (19 August 1936; evening session).
- 159 This also emerges from some references to the secret trial in mid-January. – Conquest, *Stalin and the Kirov Murder*, p. 65.
- 160 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 159; see also: Radzinsky, *Stalin*, pp. 332–333; Conquest, *Stalin and the Kirov Murder*, p. 80; Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*, p. 81.
- 161 RCP, p. 30 (19 August 1936; morning session).
- 162 RCP, p. 4 (19 August 1936; evening session).
- 163 Ibidem.
- 164 RCP, p. 6 (19 August 1936; evening session).
- 165 RCP, p. 7 (19 August 1936; evening session).
- 166 RCP, pp. 9–10 (19 August 1936; evening session); Pickel, who, at the time of his arrest was director or commissar of the Kamerny theatre in Moscow, had been promised a light sentence for his cooperation and testimony in the trial. In the words of Alexander Orlov: 'Pickel's friend told him frankly that they could not save him from the trial, because that had been decreed 'from above', but if he would agree to assist the NKVD against Zinoviev they promised him that he would serve his term, whatever the court sentence might be, not in prison, but at liberty, as one of the chiefs of a new big construction job on the Volga'. Cf. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 71.
- 167 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 159.
- 168 RCP, p. 1 (20 August 1936; morning session).
- 169 RCP, p. 3 (20 August 1936; morning session).
- 170 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 160.
- 171 RCP, p. 7 (20 August 1936; morning session).
- 172 RCP, p. 3 (20 August 1936; morning session); During the pre-trial interrogations, Smirnov was shown a deposition made by his former wife in which she 'confessed' that Smirnov

- had received 'terrorist instructions' from Trotsky in 1932. When confronted with him in prison she had pleaded with her former husband to save both himself and her by agreeing to provide the required testimonials in court. He finally agreed, provided that Safonova would not be hurt. Cf. Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin*, p. 256. Safonova managed to survive Stalin—probably more by good luck than thanks to a promise kept.
- 173 RCP, p. 1 (20 August 1936; evening session); A. Orlov had this to say about Smirnov's previous relationship with Stalin after Lenin's death: 'but Smirnov was one of the first who had demanded that Lenin's Testament, which recommended the removal of Stalin from the post of General Secretary, be carried out. Stalin knew how great was Smirnov's popularity within the Party and how the Old Bolsheviks heeded Smirnov's advice. Now, being firmly in the saddle, Stalin could not deny himself the long awaited pleasure of taking revenge on Smirnov by dragging him through the excruciating inquisition of the NKVD and the comedy of the trial to the cellar of the executioner'. Cit. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 96.
- 174 Rogovin, 1937, p. 177.
- 175 A. Orlov commented: 'Of all the defendants only Smirnov gave his testimony in a manner so ironical as to leave no doubt that he considered that all the charges against him and the other Bolsheviks were trumped up. His sarcastic remarks and frequent hints that the whole story about the conspiracy was a pure myth kept Prosecutor Vyshinsky on tenterhooks. Before conceding some point of the accusation, Smirnov took care to discredit first the whole accusation and only then would say in a contemptuous tone, 'Well, let it be so''. Cit. A. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 162.
- 176 RCP, p. 3 (20 August 1936; evening session).
- 177 RCP, p. 4 (20 August 1936; evening session); Earlier, during the interrogation phase, Y.D. Agranov who had to interrogate him, had told Stalin: 'I am afraid that we won't be able to accuse Smirnov. He, after all, was in prison for a number of years'. Cit. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 96. (Smirnov had been in prison since at least the beginning of 1933; some of his 'crimes' therefore had to be situated in the year 1932).
- 178 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 161.
- 179 Ibidem.
- 180 RCP, p. 9 (20 August 1936; evening session).
- 181 RCP, p. 12 (20 August 1936; evening session).
- 182 RCP, p. 14 (20 August 1936; evening session).
- 183 This meeting was also subject to investigation, in 1937, by the so-called Dewey Commission (more on it later) which wrote in its report: '... Trotsky, testifying before the preliminary Commission ... stated that ... Sedov had met Smirnov on the street in Berlin in 1931. Trotsky said that his son thereafter wrote him that Smirnov was unhappy and

without political orientation, and had given him information about Old friends Sedov testified before the *Commission Rogatoire* ... that he did meet Smirnov accidentally in Berlin in July 1931; that he did subsequently have an interview with him at Smirnov's apartment during which he gave him two addresses and a phone number, and suggested that Smirnov should take advantage of the trips of comrades to send him information on conditions in the Soviet Union; that Smirnov said jokingly that if anyone came to find Sedov he would present himself in the name of Galya ... the little girl who had accompanied Smirnov at their first meeting Sedov further affirmed that the defendant Holtzman did get in touch with him in Berlin around the end of September or the beginning of October 1932, that in presenting himself he stated that he brought ... a document for Trotsky from Smirnov which he had carried in a spectacle case ...' Sedov further testified that the document delivered to him by Holtzman was an unsigned report on economic conditions in the Soviet Union, which he, Sedov, published in the *Bulletin of the Opposition*, No. 31, of November 1932, p. 20. Sedov said that in publishing it he affixed as a signature the syllable 'Ko' [from Kolokol, a bell] which was an allusion to Trotsky's having compared Smirnov, in polemicizing with him, to a bell-ringer'. Cit. Leites and Bernaut, *Ritual Liquidation*, pp. 323–324.

184 RCP, p. 3 (21 August 1936; morning session).

185 This point was later highlighted by Sedov in a book trying to expose the lies of this trial. The 'mistake' arose perhaps as the NKVD's script for this session had originally situated the meeting in Norway (where there was a Hotel Bristol). When this blunder was later brought to Stalin's notice, he shouted, according to one account: 'What the devil did you need the hotel for? You ought to have said 'railway station'. The station is always there'. Cit. Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 196. However, according to R. Brackman, the Bristol Hotel in Copenhagen could, in fact, have been Stalin's own idea: in 1906—according to Brackman's account—Stalin, like Yagoda, a former part-time informer (code name 'Vasily') for the Okhrana, the Tsarist secret police, apparently met the chief of Okhrana's Foreign Agency, Arkady Garting, in the Bristol hotel which was destroyed in 1917. Cf. Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin*, p. 255 and 233–234. See also: Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, pp. 501 and 377.

186 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 164.

187 Rogovin, 1937, p. 17.

188 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 163.

189 RCP, pp. 1–2 (21 August 1936; evening session).

190 RCP, p. 2 (21 August 1936; evening session).

191 RCP, p. 3 (21 August 1936; evening session).

192 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 374.

- 193 RCP, p. 15 (19 August 1936; evening session).
- 194 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 166; Karl Radek, a prominent journalist and former secretary of the Communist International and Yuri L. Pyatakov, Deputy Commissar of Heavy Industry, had been siding with Trotsky in the 1920 but had forsworn Trotskyism in the early 1930s. Cf. Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p. 262.
- 195 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 374.
- 196 Ibidem, p. 375.
- 197 Cit. Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 338.
- 198 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 197.
- 199 Cit. Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 195.
- 200 RCP, p. 1 (22 August 1936; morning session).
- 201 Ibid., p. 2.
- 202 Ibid., p. 3.
- 203 Ibid.
- 204 Ibid., p. 4.
- 205 Ibid., pp. 4–5.
- 206 RCP, p. 6 (22 August 1936; morning session).
- 207 Ibid., p. 7; Vyshinsky, like Stalin, had been an agent /informer for the Tsarist secret police, the Okhrana, a fact with which Stalin was familiar and which allowed him to blackmail Vyshinsky if necessary. Roman Brackman writes: 'Stalin kept in Vyshinsky's dossier an order, signed by Vyshinsky in 1917, to arrest Lenin. [...] Stalin's blackmail worked: Vyshinsky was his obedient tool. The Old Bolsheviks despised Vyshinsky, whom they called 'a rat in human image', and he hated them for this. Stalin first used Vyshinsky's animosity toward the Old Bolsheviks in 1928 when he appointed him to preside over the Shakhty show trial. Vyshinsky performed to Stalin's satisfaction, and Stalin chose him to play the leading role of prosecutor in the show trial of Kamenev, Zinoviev and other defendants scheduled for the summer of 1936'. Cf. Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin*, p. 252; E. Radzinsky also refers to Vyshinsky as a '... former enemy of the Bolsheviks, a man who had called for Lenin's arrest in 1917 as a traitor and a German spy ...' Cit. Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 382; see also: Rogovin, 1937, p. 57.
- 208 Cit. Lev Trotsky, *Stalin. An Appraisal of the Man and His Influence* (New York: Harper & Bro., 1941), p. 375.
- 209 Cit. Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin*, p. 183; When Lenin's Testament was read at a special closed session of the Central Committee on 22 May 1924, Zinoviev and Kamenev had come to Stalin's rescue. In the words of Brackman, 'It hardly seemed possible for the Central Committee members to ignore Lenin's wish, having loudly pledged to 'hold Lenin's word sacred'. But Zinoviev and Kamenev did the impossible. Stalin's fate was

in their hands; they could have used Lenin's words to remove Stalin from power, but instead rushed to his rescue, imploring the Central Committee not to deny him the post of general secretary. 'Lenin's word is sacred', Zinoviev exclaimed. 'But Lenin himself, if he could have witnessed, as you all have, Stalin's sincere efforts to mend his ways, would not have urged the Party to remove him'. Displaying a considerable flair for theatrical performance, Kamenev and Zinoviev persuaded delegates that Stalin was a reformed man. The majority voted in Stalin's favour. Trotsky watched the scene, remaining aloof and silent. Stalin pretended to offer his resignation, but Zinoviev and Kamenev 'persuaded' him to stay. The decision was not to read Lenin's Testament to the delegates of the congress and not to enter it into the congressional record. [...] Why Trotsky did not use Lenin's 'Testament' as a weapon to fight Stalin remains an unanswered question'. Cf. Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin*, p. 183.

210 Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*, p. 80.

211 RCP, *ibid.*, p. 20.

212 RCP, *ibid.*

213 There are multiple testimonies about the falsifications in this trial, both contemporary and from the post-Stalin period. For instance, G.S. Lushkov, the deputy chief of the Secret Political Department who had assisted Molchanov, the chief of the Secret Political Department of the NKVD, in organising the first Moscow trial and who had fled the USSR in 1938, declared: '... at the trial ... accusations that Trotsky via Olberg, was connected with the German Gestapo; accusations against Zinoviev and Kamenev for espionage; accusations that Zinoviev and Kamenev were linked to the so-called 'Right Centre' via Tomsy, Rykov and Bukharin—all these accusations were completely fabricated.' Cit. Rogovin, 1937, pp. 17–18; Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 219.

214 RCP, *ibid.*, p. 22.

215 RCP, *ibid.*, p. 24. Elsewhere the prosecutor said, 'And they must bear full responsibility for this, irrespective of whether any one of them was at liberty at the time or not' (*ibid.*).

216 RCP, p. 15 (22 August 1936; morning session).

217 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

218 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

219 Actually the published version of the proceedings make no mention that the defendants referred to *Narodnaya Volya* (the People's Will) themselves.

220 RCP, *ibid.*, p. 30.

221 See: Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin*; Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*.

222 RCP, *ibid.*, p. 31.

223 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 163.

224 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, pp. 164–166.

- 225 RCP, p. 2 (22 August 1936; evening session).
- 226 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 168.
- 227 RCP, pp. 2–3 (22 August 1936; evening session); According to A. Orlov, Reingold was included among the defendants, '... because his personal acquaintance with Kamenev and Sokolnikov afforded an opportunity to use him as witness against them, and also because his short-lived membership in the opposition could be used against ...' Reingold was arrested. Cf. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 65. Orlov added: 'The testimony of Reingold, carefully revised by Moronov, chief of the Economic Administration, and Agranov, Yagoda's assistant, was taken by Yagoda to Stalin. On the next day Stalin returned Reingold's [pre-trial, AS] testimony with corrections which created the incredible sensation among the chiefs of the NKVD. From the part of the written testimony where Reingold testified that Zinoviev insisted on the assassination of Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich and Kirov, Stalin with his own hand crossed out the name of Molotov.' Cf. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, pp. 68–69.
- 228 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 163.
- 229 RCP, p. 3 (22 August 1936; evening session).
- 230 Ibidem.
- 231 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 166.
- 232 Ibidem.
- 233 Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin*, p. 259; Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 333; Rogovin, 1937, p. 8; Earlier, in the pre-trial investigation, when Kamenev refused to confess, Stalin told his interrogator: 'Tell him [Kamenev] that if he refuses to go to the trial, we'll find a suitable substitute for him—his own son, who will testify at the trial that on instructions from his dad he was preparing terroristic acts against the leaders of the Party. Tell him that you have information that his son together with Reingold were trailing the automobiles of Voroshilov and Stalin on the Mozhaisk road. This will bring him to his senses at once ...' Cit. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 118.
- 234 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, pp. 166–167.
- 235 RCP, p. 2 (23 August 1936; morning session).
- 236 Ibid., pp. 2–3.
- 237 Rogokin, 1937, p. 22.
- 238 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 167.
- 239 Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*, p. 79.
- 240 Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin*, p. 259; Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 164.
- 241 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, pp. 48–49.
- 242 Ibid., p. 72.

- 243 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 169.
- 244 RCP, p. 5 (24 August 1936; afternoon session).
- 245 Ibid., pp. 6–7.
- 246 Cit. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 167.
- 247 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 371. One of them, Hotzmann, apparently did not appeal for clemency.
- 248 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 168.
- 249 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 169.
- 250 Cit. Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 198.
- 251 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 170.
- 252 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 373.
- 253 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 170.
- 254 Radzinsky, *Stalin*, pp. 334 and 337.
- 255 Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin*, p. 260. However, the other two pseudo-defendants were apparently also shot.
- 256 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, pp. 170–171.
- 257 Cit. Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 202; Pauker, a former hairdresser at the Budapest opera, was, according to Montefiore, ‘an accomplished actor performing accents, especially Jewish ones, for Stalin’. Cf. Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 69. Pauker too would soon fall from grace; he disappeared without a trace. Cf. Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 381.
- 258 The Central Committee of the VKP(b), Moscow (29 July 1936), repr. in Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p. 255.
- 259 Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 202–203.
- 260 Repr. In Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p. 257.
- 261 Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p. 257.
- 262 Rogovin, 1937, p. 14.
- 263 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 197.
- 264 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 320.
- 265 Cit. Rogovin, 1937, p. 67.
- 266 Ibid., p. 70.
- 267 Ibid.
- 268 Rogovin, 1937, p. 54; Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 162. All three would soon be arrested and tried.
- 269 Cit. Rogovin, 1937, p. 40.
- 270 Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, pp. xxviii–xxix.
- 271 Cit. Rogovin, 1937, p. 83.
- 272 Cit. Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 371.

- 273 Cit. Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 214.
- 274 Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, pp. 273–274.
- 275 Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, p. xxxiii.
- 276 Cit. Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*, p. 123.
- 277 Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*, p. 123. In 1954 Pritt would receive the Lenin Award from the USSR.
- 278 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, pp. 372–373.
- 279 Vaksberg, *The Prosecutor and the Prey*, pp. 124–125.
- 280 Rogovin, 1937, pp. 305–307.
- 281 Cit. Leites and Bernaut, *Ritual Liquidation*, p. 207.
- 282 Rogovin, 1937, p. 309.
- 283 Not Guilty. The Dewey Commission Report (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1938), p. xv.
- 284 Rogovin, 1937, pp. 41 and 43.
- 285 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 391.
- 286 Constitutional Rights Foundation, 'The Stalin Purges and "Show Trials"', *Bill of Rights in Action*, 7:4 (1991), <http://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/bria-7-4-a-the-stalin-purges-and-show-trials>. Retrieved 9 April 2014.
- 287 Conquest, *Stalin and the Kirov Murder*, p. 35; Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, p. xxxv.
- 288 However, maybe there was a link between the Constitution which promised to erase class borders and give back suffrage to former White Guards, Kulaks and priests: if these classes were eliminated by the purges, then they could be safely given the vote. See: Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, pp. 107–108.
- 289 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 170.
- 290 Werth, *Ein Staat gegen sein Volk*, p. 181.
- 291 Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, pp. 272–274.
- 292 Cit. Georgii Dimitrov, Secretary of the Comintern; as quoted by Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, p. 111. Later, when Dimitrov would plead with Stalin on behalf of arrested colleagues of his, Stalin lied to him: 'What can I do for them, Georgi? All my own relatives are in prison too'. Cit. Montefiore, *Stalin*, pp. 296–297.
- 293 Peter H. Solomon, *Soviet Criminal Justice under Stalin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 238–239.
- 294 Hedeler, 'Ezhov's Scenario for The Great Terror', pp. 51–52.
- 295 Werth, *Ein Staat gegen sein Volk*, pp. 156–157.
- 296 Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, pp. 146–148.
- 297 Cit. Vaksberg, *The prosecutor and the prey*, p. 105; His attitude and loyalty to Stalin got him far. In 1939, Vyshinsky was promoted to Deputy Chairman of the Soviet People's

- Commissariat. Later Vyshinsky became Minister of Foreign Affairs (1949–1953) and then the Soviet Union's Permanent Representative to the United Nations (1953–1954).
- 298 Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p. 546. On 7 August 1937 Vyshinsky instructed the regional procurators to attend the troika meetings, adding, 'The observance of legal procedure and the preliminary approval of arrests are not demanded'. Cit. Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, p. 88.
- 299 Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, p. 191.
- 300 Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p. 530.
- 301 Ibid., p. 547; After April 1939, 327,000 people, many of them from the armed forces, were freed, pardoned by Stalin after Yezhov's arrest. Cf. Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 415.
- 302 Solomon, *Soviet Criminal Justice under Stalin*, pp. 144–145, 252.
- 303 Werth, *Ein Staat gegen sein Volk*, p. 167.
- 304 All told, the 'national operations' affected more than 350,000 people of whom almost 250,000 were shot by NKVD commandos. Cf. Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, p. 200.
- 305 Werth, *Ein Staat gegen sein Volk*, pp. 170 and 184.
- 306 Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, pp. 102–104.
- 307 Werth, *Ein Staat gegen sein Volk*, pp. 166–167.
- 308 Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, p. 182; The interpretation of Edvard Radzinsky is illuminating in this context: '... Stalin had been reared in the Caucasus, where the blood feud was a living tradition, and he was afraid that he might be rearing his own future assassins. As always, he found a revolutionary solution. At Yezhov's (and not, of course, the Boss' [Stalin's]) suggestion, the Politburo adopted a secret resolution on July 5, 1937. [...] The wives of convicted enemies of the people were sent to prison camps for a term of five to eight years. Children under the age of 15 were cared for by the state (that is, they were consigned to a dreadful state orphanage).' Cf. Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 407.
- 309 Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, p. 195.
- 310 Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, p. 15.
- 311 Ibid., p. 260.
- 312 Werth, *Ein Staat gegen sein Volk*, p. 171.
- 313 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 372.
- 314 Cit. Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 203.
- 315 Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p. 326.
- 316 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 214.
- 317 Cit. Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, pp. xxx–xxx.
- 318 Ibid., p. xxxi.
- 319 Rogovin, 1937, p. 63. Most of the oppositional activities of Trotzky against Stalin dated back to 1926 and 1927 when he was heading a United Left Opposition inside the Bolshevik

Party, numbering some 8,000 adherents. In the description of Stuart Kahan, 'Clandestine meetings of the Left Opposition were held in workers' homes outside Moscow, almost like old times; almost, but not quite [...]. But the new front, led by Trotsky, Kamenev, and Zinoviev, was determined not to attack the principle of Party unity but rather the Party bureaucracy, which they blamed for many defects ...' Cf. Stuart Kahan, p. 137; By 1927–1929 the Old Bolsheviks who had opposed Stalin's rise to supremacy had (with the exception of Trotsky who went into exile) capitulated and publicly renounced their opposition. Cf. Rogovin, 1937, p. 374; Leites and Bernaut noted that, 'According to the Letter of an Old Bolshevik, the Leningrad Zinovievites had before the assassination of Kirov: ... no secret organization, but maintained mutual friendly relations, which, in some cases, had been of long standing. At their gatherings they exchanges information about Party affairs and ... comrades still in prison or in exile. They took up collections on their behalf, and ... abused opponents ... This was ... the limit of their political activity ...' Cit. Leites and Bernaut, *Ritual Liquidation*, p. 133.

320 Cit. Rogovin, 1937, pp. 4–5.

321 Montefiore, *Stalin*, pp. 58, 156.

322 Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 218; In this telegram he said that 'Yagoda has definitely proved himself to be incapable of unmasking the Trotskyite–Zinovievite bloc. This is noted by all Party workers and by the majority of the representatives of the NKVD'. Cit. Robert Conquest, *Inside Stalin's Secret Police. NKVD Politics, 1936–1939* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 11. Yagoda could not find such a 'bloc' because it never existed as was admitted by the Soviet regime after Stalin's death. Cf. Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, p. xxiv.

323 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 203; Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 376.

324 Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 336.

325 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 378.

326 Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p. 80; Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. x.

327 Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, p. 201.

328 Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, p. 206.

329 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 444.

330 Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, pp. 206–207.

331 Hedeler, 'Ezhov's Scenario for The Great Terror', p. 39; Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, p. 164.

332 Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, p. x.

333 Robert C. Tucker, 'Stalin, Bukharin, and History as Conspiracy', in: Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, p. xxix.

334 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 415.

335 Cit. Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 337.

- 336 Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*, p. 187.
- 337 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. xxxi.
- 338 See Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial* for a transcript. With notes by the editors.
- 339 Cit. Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, p. 205.
- 340 In court, Yagoda testified that 'In 1934, in the summer, Yenukidze informed me that the centre of the "bloc of Rights and Trotskyites" had adopted a decision to organize the assassination of Kirov. Rykov took a direct part in the adoption of this decision [...] Needless to say, my objections were not taken into consideration and had no effect. Yenukidze insisted that I was not to place any obstacles in the way; the terrorist act, he said, would be carried out by the Trotskite-Zinovievite group. Owing to this, I was compelled to instruct Zaporozhetz, who occupied the post of Assistant Chief of the Regional Administration of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, not to place any obstacles in the way of the terrorist act against Kirov. Some time later Zaporozhetz informed me that the organs of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs had detained Nikolayev, in whose possession a revolver and a chart of the route Kirov usually took had been found. Nikolayev was released. Soon after that Kirov was assassinated by this very Nikolayev.' Cf. Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial* [Transcript], pp. 493–494.
- 341 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 295.
- 342 Solomon, *Soviet Criminal Justice under Stalin*, pp. 235–236.
- 343 Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, p. 203; She called Lev Sheinin 'an intriguing figure who combined a day job as a high-ranking investigator ... [and] deputy to Andrei Vyshinsky, with an avocation as a writer and journalist'. Cf. Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, p. 78.
- 344 Cit. Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 225.
- 345 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, pp. 379–380.
- 346 Montefiore, *Stalin*, pp. 226–227.
- 347 Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, pp. 169–172.
- 348 Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, p. 151; cit. Leites and Bernaut, *Ritual Liquidation*, p. 409.
- 349 Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, p. xx.
- 350 Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, p. 179.
- 351 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, pp. 526–529.
- 352 Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 413.
- 353 Cit. Leites and Bernaut, *Ritual Liquidation*, p. 403.
- 354 Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, p. 493.
- 355 *Ibid.*, p. 523.

- 356 Ibid., p. 530; These 'troikas'—groups of three—consisted of the local Party secretary, the local NKVD chief and the local prosecutor. Together they decided about the categorisation of the victims (category 1: execution; category 2: deportation to camps). Often the Troikas existed only on paper and the local prosecutor did not participate in the decision-making. The fate of most of those placed on lists was decided in their absence and neither prosecutors nor judges were present. Cf. Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, pp. 191–193.
- 357 Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, p. 208.
- 358 Cit. Ibid., p. x.
- 359 Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, p. xiii; According to Jansen and Petrov, the Yezhovshchina period saw some 1.5 million people arrested, of whom 700,000 were shot. Cf. Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, p. 104.
- 360 Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 412.
- 361 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 304.
- 362 Cit. Radzinsky, *Stalin*, p. 417.
- 363 There was, according to the testimony of the son of one of the closest collaborators of Stalin, Malenko, a file on Stalin in Yezhov's safe, showing that Stalin had, in his previous career, also been an agent provocateur of the Tsarist secret police. Cf. Radzinsky, *Stalin*, pp. 334, 337; Leites and Bernaut noted that 'In the late period of tsarism there was a distinctive pattern of police agents occupying top positions in revolutionary organizations'. Cit. Leites and Bernaut, *Ritual Liquidation*, p. 450; see also: Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 304.
- 364 Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, p. 203.
- 365 Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, pp. 166–167.
- 366 'I did him in, I saved you all', Beria later reportedly told Molotov and Kaganovich. Cit. Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 655.
- 367 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 302.
- 368 Radzinsky, *Stalin*, pp. 423–424.
- 369 Franklin L. Ford, *Political Murder. From Tyrannicide to Terrorism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 269–270; In order to deflect attention away from Stalin, a letter found in his pockets made it appear that he was a disillusioned Trotskyist. Cf. Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 613.
- 370 Werth, *Ein Staat gegen sein Volk*, p. 187. A week after the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact was signed, the German Army attacked Poland and Stalin followed on 17 September to take his share of Poland.
- 371 Cit. Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, pp. xii–xiii.
- 372 Cit. Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 500. 'Koba' was one of the names used for Joseph Stalin by his friends from the pre-1917 days of life in the underground.

- 373 Rogovin, 1937, pp. xvi–xvii; B. Nicolaevsky, a prominent Menshevik, published in late 1936/early 1937 an anonymous ‘Letter of an Old Bolshevik’ in the *Bulletin of the Opposition*, an exile journal. The Letter was largely based on conversations he had with Nikolai Bukharin whom he had met in the spring of 1936 in Paris. Cf. Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, p. 248.
- 374 Rogovin, 1937, p. xiii, xvi.
- 375 Leitens and Bernaut, *Ritual Liquidation*, p. 15.
- 376 Cit. Rogovin, 1937, p. 238.
- 377 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 446.
- 378 Cit. Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, p. xiv.
- 379 Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, p. 267.
- 380 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 475.
- 381 Tucker and Cohen (eds), *The Great Purge Trial*, pp. xi–xv.
- 382 Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 373. Expanding on this line of thought, Robert Tucker also wrote, ‘He [Stalin] was driven to ‘see through and expose’ in others the duplicity that he had to remain blind to himself. Then, with a sense of only meting out justice, he could and did visit on those unfortunates the rage and fury that he could not bear to direct at himself. No torture, he seems to have thought, was too cruel as punishment for their villainy. As a result, he virtually wrecked Soviet Russia in the great manhunt against ‘wreckers’, and by means of the Terror that purported to cleanse the land of enemies, he made many very loyal citizens into real covert enemies of his state’. Cf. Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, p. 478.
- 383 Stalin had instructed the NKVD chiefs regarding the interrogation of Zinoviev and Kamenev in the pre-trial phase: ‘Tell them that no matter what they do, they won’t be able to stop the march of history. The only thing that they still can do is—either die or save their hides. Give them the works until they come crawling to you on their bellies with confessions in their teeth!’ Cit. Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin’s Crimes*, p. 117.
- 384 Knight, *Who Killed Kirov?*, pp. 268–269.
- 385 Werth, *Ein Staat gegen sein Volk*, pp. 185–186; H. Rappaport, *Joseph Stalin: A Biographical Companion* (St. Monica: ABC-CLIO, 1999).
- 386 Werth, *Ein Staat gegen sein Volk*, pp. 185–186.
- 387 *Ibid.*, p. 168.