

The Purges (summary of Morris, Todd and Phillips)

What's new?

- Terror is not new, but typical of this is that this time the terror is turned against the members of the Communist Party and old friends of Lenin.
- The use of “Show Trials” became very popular.

What motives did Stalin have for the Purges?

- **Official explanation** was that the party was full of Trotskyites, Zinovievites and Bukharinites. Doesn't explain why?
- **Scapegoats** to blame failures? Doesn't explain why Stalin, not Lenin used this method.
- **Personality of Stalin?** Mental debase
- More probable cause is the **growth of opposition** against Stalin and his policies from within the party. He was losing personal power and had to do something.
 - Trotsky wrote from exile, claiming Stalin was a destructor of the revolution.
 - Bukharin used the party paper *Izvestiya* (News), to promote a new guy, Kirov, as a potential good leader.

The Purges begins

- **Stage 1: The murder of Kirov:**
 - December 1 1934 Sergei Kirov was assassinated in his office.
 - Kirov was the leader of the party in Leningrad
 - He was popular and had questioned Stalin's economic policies.
 - He was a rising star.
 - December 2 Stalin issues a decree and gives the secret police the job to start **cleaning out the Terrorist** from the Russian society.
 - Head of the Secret Police NKVD is **Yagoda**; he himself will be shot 1938.
 - **The method of interrogation** is easy and effective, arrest one guy, beat him silly make him snitch on some other "suspects", arrest them, beat them silly and have them snitch on other suspects, and so on.
 - Within weeks 100 party members are shot and thousands of Trotskyites etc are arrested.
 - Did Stalin order the murder?
 - Stalin blames Zinoviev and Kamenev saying that the assassin was a member of their opposition group.
 - Zinoviev and Kamenev were arrested and put in prison.
 - Stalin starts a cleansing of the party of Left opposition.
 - Left opposition was opposed to Stalin's idea of revolution in one country.
 - Stalin puts loyal friends in the empty seats, Khrushchev becomes head of the party in Moscow and another friend takes Kirov's seat.

- **Stage 2: august 1936 Kamenev and Zinoviev + 14 others were arrested and executed.**
 - In early 1936 the NKVD reveals a major conspiracy against Stalin and the whole of Soviet Union.
 - Behind this counter-revolution stood Zinoviev and Kamenev with Kulaks, capitalists and others.
 - The confessions were beaten out from the accused. Same method as in 1934 is used.
 - Results in **“the trial of the 16” in August 1936**. All 16 are executed plus 43 other top communists disappear.
 - In January **1937 there is “the trial of the 17”**, this time among others “the deputy commissar for heavy”, industry is executed.
 - In February and March 1937 the newly appointed head of state security **Yezhov** accuse Bukharin of knowing about Trotsky’s plans.
 - In early March Bukharin and Rykov along with the former head of NKVD were taken to Lubianka (the headquarters of NKVD).
 - During 1937 a huge cleansing operation takes place within the Red Army too. 50 % of the officers are shot.
- **Stage 3: Moscow Trials in 1938.**
 - In the Moscow trials in 1938 among others Bukharin and Rykov were sentenced to death in September for Trotskyite sabotage. Bukharin never confessed but was shot anyway.
 - Yezhov, “the black dwarf”, heads an unprecedented wave of terror on the Russian people. Yagoda is shot, accused of not being efficient enough in finding Trotskyites in the party.

- The period is called the “**Yezhovshchina**” in Russian.
- At all levels of the Russian society terror struck.
- The **quotas** on how many people to be arrested are made by Stalin and the Politburo.
- Order nr 00447 of July 30 1937 written by Yezhov speaks of:
 - 259 450 people should be arrested.
 - 72 950 of these should be shot.
 - Local officials ask for “extra quotas” are granted that.
- **Family to the victims** are also arrested, this is done besides the quotas.
- **Within the NKVD** there is a big cleansing. 85 % is arrested, out of these 51 % are shot.
- Certain areas of the Soviet Union is particularly struck by terror on **ethnic bases**:
 - In Ukraine in 1938 Khrustev arrests 106 000 people, most of them are shot.
 - In one day 1940 (after the great Terror had “stopped”) 186 000 Chechens are transported to the Urals. The whole people disappear.
 - 8 complete peoples are whipped of the face of the earth.
 - The Volga-Germans are arrested (during the war)
- **Children** were encouraged to snitch on parents.
- Farmers should report if the collective didn't work properly the responsible person were

shot, this led to unrealistic goals being set and “followed”.

- Workers were encouraged to snitch on workers. If you wanted somebody’s job, inform on them!
 - **If you didn’t report someone as suspicious that meant that you yourself were suspicious and hence you should be shot.**
 - One sign of the magnitude of the Terror is that in local offices there were no signs on the doors saying whose office it was since nobody knew who would show up one week from another.
 - Everyone knew the method of arresting people. In the middle of the night a black car would stop at the living place of a person, minutes later there was a big knock on the door and a person was taken away, most commonly never to be seen again. In Moscow people were taken to the Lubyanka prison and shot in the basement and taken away to “malenky robot” (a little work) meaning work camp for a while.
- The end of the Great Terror:
 - Yezhov is arrested and shot. Beria is replacing him in March 1939.
 - Stalin announced that mass cleansing was no longer needed; he admitted to some mistakes but said that it had been a necessary method to save the Revolution.
 - People continued to be arrested and shot but at much smaller scale.
 - Robert Conquest states that 6 million were arrested, 3 million were executed and 2 million died in the camps. These figures are considered by other historians to be exaggerated.

Did the political purges strengthen Stalin's regime?

- Stalin managed to get full power over the Communist Party and hence the Soviet Union.
- He replaced all of the old guard with his men.
- Out of 139 Central Committee members of 1934, 90 were shot. Out of the 1961 delegates of the 17th party congress 1108 had been arrested.