

## 6. Stalin's "St. Bartholomew's Day"

The important thing about the 'constitutional' was that, as they were being prepared, Stalin was also beginning to carry out his acts of repression on a gradual basis. In the beginning, Stalin likely anticipated significant resistance, but he managed to prevent this in the end. In January 1935 in an atmosphere saturated with the murder of Kirov and the trials that followed and affected so many former leading party officials, a remarkable investigation got underway in the Kremlin. Its target was the source of rumours of a 'counterrevolutionary' nature, and the investigation centred on the 'terrorist intentions' of a 'conspiracy'. In the end, 112 people were taken into custody. Investigators stated there were three terrorist groups in the Kremlin and proposed penalties for 109 people.<sup>166</sup>

There is much speculation about the meaning of the investigation. Aside from changes to the protection of the Kremlin, its tangible result was the removal of Avel S. Enukidze, Secretary of the VCIK Presidium, who also oversaw the federal legislation. The party leadership reproached him for lacking a personnel party and criticized his lifestyle, with the result that he was transferred to the Transcaucasia, where he fell victim to Stalin's repression.<sup>167</sup> The leaders of the VCIK were replaced and legislation was now subject to the party, i.e., to Stalin, V. M. Molotov, L. M. Kaganovich, K. Voroshilov and A. A. Zhdanov.<sup>168</sup>

We have already spoken of Stalin's effort to break through the walls of the 'fortress' to present the party as a leading power with true national scope. To this point, a clear nationalistic element was in evidence in Stalin's politics. His 'patriotism' was undoubtedly also a reaction to developments in Germany—he offered his experience from the mobilization.<sup>169</sup> He perceived foreign countries as permanent external threats and used the term 'patriotism' with exceeding care, preferring to speak instead of 'Soviet patriotism', thereby emphasizing that Russian patriotism within a multinational USSR could easily become an explosive issue. He was suspicious of people from nations whose statehood, religion and

---

166 See *Lubyanka: Stalin i VCK–GPU–OGPU–NKVD, janvar' 1922–dekabr' 1936*, eds. Chaustov V.N. et al., Moscow, MFD, 2003. pp. 658–660 and 663–669.

167 *Pravda*, 8.6.1935; also *Reabilitatsiya: Kak eto bylo*, Vol. II, pp. 339–341 and 554.

168 Zhukov Yu., *Inoy Stalin*, p. 54, in detail O. Khlevniuk, *Politbyuro: Mechanizmy politicheskoy vlasti*, pp. 62–69.

169 This is testified to by contents of Soviet press. See *Pravda*, 9.6.1934 (Za rodinu!), 7.8.1934 (U rabochikh yes' rodina) and 19.3.1935 (Sovietsky patriotizm).

culture originated outside Soviet borders, and this gave rise to a space within which to differentiate between ‘Soviet’ versus ‘Russian’ patriotism.<sup>170</sup> Reinforcement came from the teaching of history<sup>171</sup>, whose resurrection had generated a flurry of patriotic themes in history, fiction, and the media. Its importance, however, should not be overestimated. Although Stalin’s regime wished for a kind of national legitimacy, it continued to call upon October 1917 as its key source. This relationship to the country’s past was tied to ‘Marxist-Leninist’ postulates that had been verified by the party.<sup>172</sup> Stalin’s political orientation was therefore not determined by patriotism so much as an effort to eliminate demonstrations of opposition of any kind, including nationalist thinking.

Here we come full circle back to the murder of the post-revolution Soviet elites. The purpose of this slaughter was not to promote Russian patriotism, but to eliminate any possibility of resistance to Stalin’s regime, to get rid of the people and structures that embodied it. One can hardly assess Stalin’s motives without a thorough analysis available of his thinking, and of the political and overall culture. As goes the brutality of his methods, Stalin was no exception for the twentieth century. He differed from other twentieth century dictators by reason of two things. The first was that starting in 1935, he brought terrorism to his own party, and the second, that he justified it by Marxist principles. Marxism was considered a universal theory of emancipation, even though it had acquired content and a number of features specific to Russia that made it extremist, used also against the Soviet post-revolution elite.<sup>173</sup>

Stalin’s turn toward terror originally arose because of the shock and insecurity the regime experience during the 1932 famine, caused, as it was, by mistakes the regime made in setting out the first five-year plan. The impact was probably enhanced by the fact that Stalin had promoted his plans in the face of strong resistance from both the right and left wings of the party opposition. That he worried

---

170 This was characterised by Stalin’s rejection of an essay written by Friedrich Engels entitled “The Foreign Policy of Russian Tzarism” (1934) which included harsh criticism of the foreign policy practised by the Czar’s government. Cf. Vdovin A. I. / Zorin V. Ju. / Nikonov A. V., *Russkiy narod v natsionalnoy politike, XX vek*. Moscow, Russkiy mir, 1998, pp. 133–135.

171 See *Istoriyu – v shkolu: sozdaniye pervykh sovietskikh uchebnikov*. (Eds. Kudrjashov S.) Vestnik archiva Prezidenta Rossiyskoy federatsii, Moscow 2008, pp. 121–124, cf. Barsenkov / Vdovin, *Istoriya Rossii*, p. 242.

172 A substantial portion of this history consisted of “party history”.

173 In this respect, as already noted by Trotsky, it possesses similarities to the French Thermidor.

about the results of this resistance is apparent from his allegiance to a ‘moderate course’ on social change, as we have discussed.

At the time, Stalin probably lacked enough support from the top leadership to immediately shift in the direction of repression, particularly inside the party.<sup>174</sup> Such a shift could not be made as a one-off, rapid move but only following the arrests and trials ‘justified’ by Kirov’s murder. Stalin continued to apply pressure in this direction. Once the first trials were over, Stalin sent a letter to party organizations on behalf of the Central Committee of the VKS/b, and without consent of the Politburo. Its title was self-explanatory: ‘On the Terrorist Actions Taken by Trotsky and Zinoviev’s Counterrevolutionary Block’. He claimed this ‘block’ had been formed in late 1932, not only from Zinoviev’s supporters, but also from Trotsky’s. Their alleged goal was to assassinate leading officials, in particular Stalin, and these allegations clearly embodied Stalin’s key objective, which was to put an end to organized opposition once and for all.<sup>175</sup> Already by 1935, 16,000 people had been apprehended on ‘terrorism’ charges, punishable by death. Arrests were made frequently, with no material basis, and paranoia reigned both within the party and within security agencies.

Large-scale trials against the opposition were also implemented only after some time. Only in March 1936 did G.Yagoda inform Stalin that instructions for terrorist actions in the USSR had allegedly been issued by Trotsky and brought to the country by ‘Gestapo agents’. He proposed imprisoning the Trotskyites for three to five years in remote camps, and executing those convicted by the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of terrorism. Stalin had the proposition approved by the Politburo by memorandum. Yagoda had recommended bringing Zinoviev and Kamenev before the court once again, but he did not mention the ‘Trotsky-Zinoviev core’ at all. It was Stalin who insisted that they be ‘exposed’. Yagoda’s choice was likely no accident, and it was his and the NKVD leadership’s fatal mistake. Its members were removed from their positions, then arrested. Yagoda’s position was taken over by Yezhov, who brought in his own team, consisting primarily of members of NKVD regional branches who, having no supporters upon whom they could rely in Moscow, were easier manipulated than their predecessors had been.

---

174 See Stalin, Zhdanov – to Kaganovich, Molotov, 25.9.1936 g., in: Stalin i Kaganovich: *Perepiska. 1931–1936 gg.*, pp. 682–683; on 1932 as a milestone see also *Materialy fevral’sko–martovskogo plenuma CK VKP/b 1937 goda*, in: *Voprosy istorii* No 10/94, pp. 13–27; No 11–12/94, pp. 3–29; No. 2/95, pp. 3–26.

175 Chaustov-Samuelson, *Stalin, NKVD I repressii 1936–1938*, pp. 58–59.

The investigation into the ‘Trotsky-Zinoviev core’ took place relatively quickly, from 23 July until the mid-August 1936.<sup>176</sup> The key defendants were Zinoviev and Kamenev, along with Ivan N. Smirnov, the former leader of the Siberian Bolsheviks. Beating, torture, and penalizing families were all used during the investigation, and Stalin personally interfered with both the indictments and the list of those accused, who included five members of the German Communist Party, still in the USSR after 1933 for understandable reasons. The trial itself took place in Moscow during the period from 19 to 24 August 1936, and all defendants were sentenced to death, with the sentences carried out straightaway.

This trial is notable not only because it was a bloodstained farce. Its reception told Stalin that both the party and the public were disoriented, surprised by the boldness of the accusations, to the extent that no protest would be mounted against the executions of former leading personalities, and this allowed him to launch a two-and-a-half year campaign of murder against the Soviet political and cultural elite.<sup>177</sup> Soviet criminal law was expanded to include extrajudicial judgments and the murder of party members and functionaries, creating an atmosphere of deep-rooted fear in the country in which the public and party remained mute about the endless string of arrests and murders.<sup>178</sup> Calling these trials against former Bolshevik party and government officials ‘Trotskyite Trials’, as was done at the time, was as deceitful as were the trials themselves. A great majority of the accused had no relationship to Trotskyism in that era, and they presented no opposition, let alone engaged in terrorist acts. The January 1937 trial clearly targeted the leadership of the People’s Commissariat of Heavy Industry, run by G. Ordzhonikidze, who committed suicide immediately after the trial. He had been considered a member of Stalin’s circle of friends, and the public learned of his conflict with Stalin only decades after his death.<sup>179</sup> A number of other former opposition members—Georgi L.

---

176 Many historians originally thought that resistance by the accused prolonged the ‘investigation’ for many weeks.

177 Chaustov V./Samuelson L., in *Stalin, NKVD i repressii* (p. 93) indicate the following numbers of arrests of opposition members (supporters of Zinoviev and Trotsky): 1934 – 631, 1935 – 3447 and 1936 – 23,279 persons.

178 In addition to the trial focused on the “Trotsky-Zinoviev Centre” in July-August 1936, there were trials against the so-called “Parallel Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Centre” (23–30 January 1937), “Anti-Soviet Military-Fascist Organization” (11 June 1937) and “Anti-Soviet Right-Wing Trotskyite Bloc” (2–13 March 1938).

179 O. Khlevniuk, *Chozjajin: Stalin i utverzheniye stalinskoy diktatury*, pp. 269–285; *ibid*, *Stalin i Ordzhonikidze: Konflikty v Politbyuro v 30–e gody*, Moscow. Rossiya molodaya, 1993, pp. 29–139.

Pyatakov, Leonid P. Serebryakov, Karl Radek and Grigori Ya. Sokolnikov—were also brought for judgment at the same trial. But when they were arrested, they were loyal high officials of the regime.<sup>180</sup> And the subsequent trial against the leadership of the Red Army had no relation to organized political opposition.<sup>181</sup> The accused were instead members of the top leadership of the Soviet armed forces who were in favour of modernization, and who doubted the capabilities of Kliment Ye. Voroshilov, the People's Commissar for the Military.

The final 'Trotskyite Trial' targeted the 'block of Trotskyites and the right wing'. Key defendants were Rykov and Bukharin who, since 1936, had stood against Trotskyism. In fact the only thing the trial and Trotskyism had in common came with the artificial inclusion of the Trotskyites Ch. Rakovsky and Nikolay N. Krestinsky. Before his arrest, the latter had been First Deputy of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs and, briefly, held the identical position for the Commissar of Justice. Many of the accused had occupied ministerial posts as People's Commissars or served as their deputies, such as Alexei I. Rykov, Vladimir I. Ivanov, Mikhail A. Chernov, Nikolay N. Krestinsky, Genrikh G. Yagoda and Arkady P. Rosengolts, or were high-level representatives of republics such as Uzbekistan and Belarus. Defendants also included physicians accused of killing prominent patients, such as Maxim Gorky and Valerian V. Kuybyshev. Most of the people judged thus had no real part in the anti-Stalin opposition; most had recently served as high-level functionaries. In this, the trial was laid bare the real purpose of Stalin's trials: to justify the massacre of the post-revolution Soviet elite.

But this was not the only goal of Stalin's policy of repression. Again in June 1937, the purge of 'class-hostile and kulak elements' was renewed. Initiated with a Politburo resolution on 2 July 1937, it ordered local, regional, and republic-level bodies to keep tabs on the suspect group. This resolution was followed by another, Yezhov's Order 00447, impacting 267,000 people, 76,000 of whom were executed.<sup>182</sup> Quotas were drawn up for individual regions, areas, and republics

---

180 G. Ya. Sokolnikov, G.L. Pyatakov and L.P. Serebryakov were Deputies in various People's Commissariats. Pyatakov was the Deputy of Ordzhonikidze and member of the Central Committee. K. Radek also had a high position at the Central Committee of the VKS/b.

181 Originally, V.M. Primakov and V.K. Putna were also arrested. Putna worked as a military attaché in Britain. Primakov was a military attaché in Japan and later a Deputy to the Chief of Leningrad Army District.

182 *Lubyanka: Stalin i Glavnoye upravleniye gosbezopasnosti NKVD 1937–1938*, Eds. Chaustov V.N. et al. Moscow, MFD, 2004, pp. 234–235, 273–282, 467–468; Reabilitatsiya: Kak eto bylo, Vol. II, p. 609.

stating how many were to be imprisoned or executed. Yezhov cared nothing for the life stories or actual culpability of these individuals. The measure was preventive. Such zeal in carrying out the campaign was shown by NKVD administrators that the quotas were rapidly met; new quotas were requested. Data from 1 November 1938 showed 770,000 people had been rounded up, 390,000 of whom were executed. And current calculations show that even these figures were probably eight and a half percent lower than the real number.<sup>183</sup>

A fascinating if horrible twist<sup>184</sup>: in 1934, the civil rights of the displaced kulaks had been partially reinstated, along with the right to vote in 1935.<sup>185</sup> The 2 July resolution and Order 00447 came out of the June Plenum of the Central Committee of VKS/b, held to discuss election preparations for the Supreme Soviet. The 'Kulak Action' was to end in late November of that year, with the elections following on 12 December. This means it is likely that the action was intended to set the limits of the equal rights possessed by the kulaks and prevent them from returning to their original homes. In any event, it offers proof in itself of the actual nature of the equal rights held by citizens of the USSR.

Repugnant as it was, the Kulak Action had nowhere near the impact on the villages as had forced collectivization and the expropriation of the kulaks. The focus should thus be shifted to acts undertaken against foreigners (inonatsionalnosti).<sup>186</sup> First, they impacted nationals who had been part of the Russian Empire prior to 1917, but remained outside the borders of the USSR after the revolution. Second, they impacted those in nations that, after the disintegration of the Empire, had been cut in two by state borders. And finally, they impacted nationals whose countries had been outside the borders of the former Russian Empire. The Soviet leadership suspected these nations or national minorities might have been influenced by foreign intelligence services. For statutory nations like Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan, or Armenia, the repression was usually justified by claiming a connection to foreign intelligence or to national or religious centres abroad. Important steps were directly under the control of Stalin and his immediate circle. He

---

183 Khlevniuk O., Chozhajin: *Stalin i utverzhdennye stalinskoy diktatury*, p. 320; *Stalinizm v sovetskoy provincii 1937–1938 gg.: Massovaya operatsiya na osnove prikaza No. 00447.* (Ed.) Junge M, Bonwetsch B., Moscow, ROSSPEN, 2009, (p. 15) indicates a total of 800,000, approximately half of whom were killed.

184 *Lubyanka: Stalin i Glavnoye upravleniye gosbezopasnosti 1937–38*, pp. 234–235.

185 Barsenkov / Vdovin, *Istoriya Rossii*, p. 231.

186 The term "inonatsionalnosti" is used by Chaustov V. / Samuelson L. in *Stalin, NKVD i repressii*, p. 286; another designation is used in the 1963 committee report *Reabilitatsiya: Kak eto bylo*, Vol. II, p. 613.

approved not only the scope of the repression, but also consented to the lists of people who would be affected. In this case, it was members of the Soviet establishment. They were Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians<sup>187</sup>; they were Comintern officials and former political émigrés. Their persecution was a political priority. Yezhov claimed 357,000 of them had been rounded up—today 328,000 seem closer to the mark—and 237,000 were executed.<sup>188</sup>

Stalin's personal antipathies were in clear evidence in the sanctions he placed on individual national groups. According to the Shvernik Commission, 147,500 Poles had been affected as of 1 July 1938.<sup>189</sup> Only half as many sanctions—65,300—were visited on Germans who dwelt permanently in the Volga Basin, in Ukraine, the Baltics, who had a place to stay in Leningrad, or who, after 1933, fled the Nazis and came to join these people.<sup>190</sup> Sanctions against people hailing from nations not officially members of the USSR began to attract attention from foreign embassies.<sup>191</sup> There were fourteen such nationalities. The sanctions laid bare Stalin's real attitude to the national issue during the time socialism was being 'constructed'. For him, nations whose statehood was formed outside the USSR's borders were dangerous, and that included the Communists in their number. Most affected of the official members of the USSR were the Ukrainians, but the Islamic nations of the North Caucasus and the Transcaucasia were also targeted. For these countries, the Soviet secret service manufactured an allegiance to Turkey. Stalin clearly did not himself trust the results of his policy on the nations.

We have already noted that Stalin was substantially motivated to enact mass terror by his wish to bring under his control administrative, economic, and other state and political bodies that had previously maintained elements of independence. The January 1937 trial thus fell hard on the People's Commissariat for Heavy Industry. But more significant were the trial of the leadership of the Red Army and the action against the leaders of the NKVD. Stalin probably chose

---

187 Chaustov V./Samuelson L., *Stalin, NKVD i repressii* 288–292; *Lubyanka: Stalin i Glavnoje upravleniye gosbezopasnosti NKVD 1937–1938*, pp. 301–322, 325–326, 351, 352–359, 366–373 etc.

188 *Reabilitatsiya: Kak eto bylo*, Vol. II, p. 617.

189 Victims from Katyn and Ostashkov and persons affected in territory annexed by the USSR in September 1939.

190 The penalizing of "imperial" Germans, i.e., citizens of Germany, see Vatlin A. Yu., Graf Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg i epocha massovykh repressiy v SSSR, in: *Voprosy istorii*, 2/2012, pp. 32–54; also Barsenkov / Vdovin, p. 254.

191 See. Chaustov V / Samuelson L., *Stalin, NKVD i repressii* pp. 307–308.

this parallel strike against the leadership of the army and that of the NKVD not simply because they possessed traces of internal autonomy, but because they were armed units.

The autonomy of the army had already been a thorn in Stalin's side when Trotsky was the leader of the military forces. After his exit, the officer corps was thoroughly cleansed—K. Ye. Voroshilov stated up to 47,000 officers were 'dismissed' over a period of a few years.<sup>192</sup> But the motivation was economic as well as political: the state didn't have the money to maintain the army. Only 26% of troops were full-time soldiers; the rest were in the so-called territorial divisions, where members served without being forced to leave their civil employment or their homes.<sup>193</sup>

The senseless massacre of the Red Army leadership took place on the eve of war, at a time when the USSR's international position was threatened by potential conflicts. Stalin's motive in carrying out the purge could therefore not have been to ensure the country's safety. It was about making internal political changes to secure his own control over the country.<sup>194</sup> The massacre of the top brass was done blitzkrieg-style and, as is often forgotten in the literature, in parallel with the elimination of the NKVD leadership.<sup>195</sup> Stalin and his circle likely feared the potential for solidarity between these uniformed centres of power.

We suffer no illusions as to the NKVD's willingness to moderate the terror against regime opponents. After all, its predecessor, OGPU, had been responsible for a number of show trials and groundless acts of repression. But one must not forget that during the years of Soviet power, NKVD's top leaders built ties with party and governmental leaders, and these influenced their personal and professional attitudes. We may also presume that members of the security forces were not spared by the 1932 famine and the outrage over Stalin's ruthless policies. Testimony to this lies in materials from the Plenum of the Central Committee of VKS/b from February and March 1937 focused on NKVD operations. One of the key accusations against the NKVD leadership was its lack of enthusiasm

---

192 Chaustov V./Samuelson L., *Stalin, NKVD i repressii* (p. 106) indicate that the most extensive discharge of soldiers (22,300) took place in 1933.

193 Pechenkin A. A., *Voyennaya elita v 1935–1939 gg.: Repressiii i obnovenie*, Moscow 2003, pp. 14–15; service consisted of training exercises and camps.

194 See, Kantor Ju. Z., *Zaklyataya družhba: sekretnoye sotrudnichestvo SSSR i Germanii v 1920–1930-ye gody*. SPb, Piter, 2009.

195 See Naumov L., *Stalin i NKVD*, pp. 198–213.

about particular acts of repression, something which was labelled a 'betrayal' and penalized as such.<sup>196</sup>

The cause behind the massacre of the Soviet post-revolution elite may be seen as lying in the spontaneous dynamics that arose from the paranoia ignited by Stalin's search for enemies. The waves of repression may thus have markedly exceeded what their organizers had intended. Added to this was the factor of surprise. Very little time elapsed between the arrest of Yagoda's NKVD leadership, the army brass, and the onset of repression against the Soviet elite. Only two weeks after the execution of the army commanders, on the 23–29 June 1937 the Plenum of the Central Committee of VKS/b took place to discuss election preparations and agriculture. But in listening to Yezhov's report on the NKVD investigation, Central Committee members found themselves confronted with a mandate to eliminate thirty-six of their own for 'loss of confidence' or 'betrayal of the party'. This relieved the committee of almost one-third of its membership.<sup>197</sup> The same session heard a proposal to create an extrajudicial troika for Western Siberia, authorized to serve as a quorum to issue death sentences. It set a precedent. Soon, these troikas became tools of mass terror throughout the USSR. In 1937–38, they handed down the majority of the more than 700,000 death sentences.<sup>198</sup>

The scope of loss among the political and social elites in the USSR during these years defies comprehension. A huge number of the leading officials of the party and of the government, of unions and autonomous republics, interest and social organizations, the diplomatic corps, the security services, Comintern—all were executed or sentenced to long stretches behind bars on the basis of lists drawn up by the NKVD for Stalin. Also impacted were scientists and artists, particularly those whose work contradicted Stalin's ideology, or his politics, or

---

196 See *Materialy fevral'sko–martovskogo plenuma CK VKP/b 1937 goda*, in: *Voprosy istorii* No 10/94, pp. 13–27; No 11–12/94, pp. 3–29; No 2/95, pp. 3–26. Naumov L., *Stalin i NKVD*, 198, cites the former Chekist M. Shrejder: "Aside from sabotaging the heightened fight against paper Trotskyites, Old Chekists showed no enthusiasm in these matters"; Chaustov V./Samuelson L. in *Stalin, NKVD i repressii* (p. 258) stated the number of the state security members dismissed between 1.10.1936 and 1.9.1938 was 9171 and those apprehended 2273 (296 – at the central administration, rest at regional offices).

197 Chaustov V./Samuelson, L. *Stalin, NKVD i repressii* pp. 260–263; also Khlevniuk O., *Chozjajin: Stalin i utverzhenije stalinskoj diktatury*, pp. 311–312.

198 Khlevniuk O., *Chozjajin: Stalin i utverzhenije stalinskoj diktatury*, p. 320. He refers to the fact that even here the actual figures were 8.5% higher than those indicated in official sources.

his views on art. The new generation of social scientists was accordingly heavily impacted.

Between 27 February and 29 September 1938, Stalin received a total of 383 lists featuring the names of 44,161 people. Recommended punishments were attached. With these in hand, Stalin and his circle sentenced 38,627 people to death; 5430 to ten years' imprisonment; and 104 people to eight years in prison. Three additional such lists were found later, dating to the time when Yezhov was replaced by Lavrentiy P. Beria at the NKVD. The total number of people sentenced to death thus reached almost 40,000, and more were sentenced to long prison terms, as well.<sup>199</sup> Among the executed were several members of the Politburo, many People's Commissars and their deputies, and 98 out of the 139 members of the Central Committee of the governing party. Of the 1,966 delegates to the Seventeenth Congress of the VKS/b in 1934, 1,108 were arrested. And the situation was similar in the Soviet 'Parliament', the VCIK: in 1937, 149 members were arrested without the Presidium having been informed. Added to all this was the torture, imprisonment, and execution of family members of these 'people's enemies'.<sup>200</sup>

But even these numbers fail utterly to capture the real depth of the loss suffered by those in the Soviet elite. Stalin and his circle were not the only ones culpable. There were also the troikas, as well as NKVD bodies and judicial colleges, responsible for thousands of people who were tortured to death or killed in camps with no judicial oversight. Evidence of the time or circumstances of their deaths is usually difficult to find. And to make matters worse, in autumn 1937, Stalin started trials at the regional level, with the same outcome as what had occurred before on the national level.<sup>201</sup>

Party members also suffered notable losses. The 1963 Shvernik Commission put the figures at 55,428 victims for 1937 and 61,457 victims four 1938, a total of almost 117,000. But later sources raise that to more than 170,000 people. Around 40%, 46,000 of the victims, were sentenced because their names appeared on the

---

199 *Reabilitatsiya: Kak eto bylo*, Vol. II, 592 and 646. Records from Beria's period include a document dated 16.2.1939 consenting to the executions of 469 people, a document dated 8.4.1939 including 931 names, 198 of whom were to be sentenced to death, with 'at least 15 years' for the rest, and another document featuring 457 names, 346 of whom were to be sentenced to death and the rest to 'at least 15 years in prison'.

200 *Reabilitatsiya: Kak eto bylo*, Vol. II, pp. 621–623 and 576.

201 *Vert Nikolay (Wert, Nicolas): Terror i besporyadok: Stalinizm kak sistema (La Terreure et le Désarroi: Staline et son système, Paris, Perrin, 2007)* Moscow, ROSSPEN, 2010, p. 267/288.

lists that had been signed by Stalin and his circle.<sup>202</sup> But the actual figures are likely much higher. One-and-a-half to two million party members were ousted. When arrested, they were not registered as communists. And there were some in the post-revolution upper stratum in the USSR who, for various reasons, had remained without any party affiliation. They were also turned over to the executioner.

In speaking of the elimination of these post-revolution elites, we have primarily intended people who were formerly communists or who held significant positions in society and government. We have avoided terms such as 'nomenklatura' and 'partocracy' that have been used by some authors. The nomenklatura we have dealt with elsewhere: it ordinarily consists of the members of a party or a state bureaucracy. But in our case, its members hail from a social stratum consisting of people who, twenty years after the revolution, were distinguished by their qualifications, their professions, and their employment. In addition to the power bureaucracy, members of the nomenklatura were also highly qualified economic directors and experts, military commanders, officers in interest organizations, and people who were active in cultural, scientific, and educational pursuits. These people had gained extensive knowledge and experience since the revolution, and many significantly impacted the development of the sciences and the arts in the 1920s and 1930s. It is therefore wrong to assess their competency on the basis of party affiliation or level of education attained. After being purged, they were replaced by others brought up during the Stalin era, people who lacked experience in independent decision-making. The mass nature of the campaign, and the fact that the liquidation of post-revolution elites took place both within the centre and across the republics, regions, and among large enterprises, was intended to ensure the long-term stability and resilience of Stalin's regime.

---

202 *Reabilitatsiya: Kak eto bylo*, Vol. II, 592, pp. 646 and 668; recent data (Khlevniuk; k O., *Chozjain*, pp. 350 and 352) indicate 117,500 excluded members in 1937 and 57,000 in 1938. We have not provided corrected figures, because we have no way to verify their credibility.

