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Stalin: From Terrorism to State Terror, 1905-1939

Matthew Walz

St. Cloud State University, mawalz05@gmail.com

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Stalin:

From Terrorism to State Terror, 1905-1939

by

Matthew Walz

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Thesis Committee:

Marie Seong-Hak Kim, Chairperson

Mary Wingerd

Edward Greaves

Plamen Miltenoff

Abstract

While scholars continue to debate the manner in which the Great Terror took shape in the Soviet Union, Stalin's education as a revolutionary terrorist leader from 1905-1908 is often overlooked as a causal feature. This thesis analyzes the parallels between the revolutionary terrorists in Russia in the first decade of the twentieth century, particularly within Stalin's Red Brigade units, and the henchmen carrying out the Great Terror of the 1930s. Both shared characteristics of loyalty, ruthlessness and adventurism while for the most part lacking any formal education and existing in a world of paranoia. As violence spread after the 1905 Revolution, the justifications for indiscriminate murder expanded across a variety of revolutionary parties in the face of state repression. In a striking resemblance to the 1930s, revolutionary terrorists employed ideology to legitimize atrocious acts which were criminal in nature and often intended only for personal gain or empowerment. In the revolutionary atmosphere of the first decade of the twentieth century, Stalin learned how to manipulate ideology to commit unseemly acts of violence, and discovered the criminal types needed to carry them out. By viewing the Great Terror in this context, this thesis attempts to break down the categorizations between insurgency terrorism and state terror, and refute the interpretation of state terror as a character or regional-based tradition.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
Chapter I: THE EVOLUTION OF REVOLT.....	14
Peasant Revolts and the Russian Enlightenment	15
The Decembrists and Palace Coups	17
Formation of a Revolutionary Class.....	19
Political Assassinations and the Populists.....	23
The People’s Will.....	26
Chapter II: REVOLUTIONARY TERRORISM IN RUSSIA, 1905-1910	31
Party of Socialists-Revolutionaries	33
The Evolution of Terrorism.....	37
The Maximalists	41
The Anarchists.....	44
Expropriations, Thrill-Seeking and Sadism	46
Chapter III: STALIN THE GANGSTER, 1905-1908	56
Lenin’s Trusted Terrorist Leader	59
Kamo and the New Revolutionary Terrorist	63
Political Assassination and Mass Murder	65
Chapter IV: THE TERROR OF THE 1930s.....	70
Historical Determinism to Consolidate Power.....	72
Constructing and Labelling Enemies	75
The First Five Year Plan	81
The Great Terror and the Moscow Trials.....	88
Chapter V: STALIN’S CIRCLE.....	100
The Henchmen Abuse the Ideology	102
Bolshevik Loyalty	107
Bolshevik Paranoia.....	111
Lack of Education	113
CONCLUSION.....	117
BIBLIOGRAPHY	123

INTRODUCTION

In order to perpetrate an atrocity, one must become accustomed to such behavior, unless, of course, there exists some psychological impediment. This is as true for the common criminal as it is for the terrorist. One does not simply go from the cradle to wielding the executioner's sword without drastic, life-changing events and a cognitive transformation along the way. This was certainly the case for Josef Stalin, a leader of one of the most murderous regimes in modern history. While the dismal outcome of his leadership is not debatable, the reason and method behind the terror, which some historians have estimated caused the death of as many as twenty million people, is still up for discussion.¹ Stalin's revolutionary education as a Red Brigade fighter from 1905-1908 has so far received little attention as a contributing factor to forming the ideological and criminal makeup behind the Great Terror of the 1930s. When analyzing and comparing these historic situations, however, significant parallels are evident. Stalin learned lessons about the vast uses of political violence and its emotional appeal during his involvement in the terrorism which engulfed Russia in the first decade of the twentieth century. He used similar tactics to consolidate his hold over power and to move forward his version of socialism in the Soviet Union. To achieve his aims, he surrounded himself with pitiless criminals willing to do his bidding, and by using their ruthlessness he oversaw a massive transformation of society.

¹ The figure of 20 million takes into consideration those who died once Stalin assumed power by 1928 and up until his death in 1953. It is taken from Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, 40th anniversary Ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 488. The author concluded that this estimate could be off and is almost certainly too low. Revisionist scholars contest these numbers, believing that they are far too inflated. See Alec Nove, "Victims of Stalinism: How Many?" in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, ed. J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 260-274. The author argued that less than ten million deaths can be placed at the hands of the Stalin regime during his time in power. Needless to say, this number is still being contested by scholars.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, terrorism exploded in Russia across a variety of revolutionary parties. The members of these parties implemented violent tactics in order to overthrow the tsar. They organized terrorist units and gangs, often in separation from party leadership, and their only goal was to wreak havoc on government officials. Vladimir Lenin in 1905 called for followers of the Bolsheviks to “kill spies, policemen, gendarmes, Cossacks, and members of the Black Hundreds; to blow up their headquarters, along with police stations; and to throw boiling water on soldiers or fling acid at the police.”² On his bidding, Red Battle Squads were formed. In Georgia, Stalin took charge of these units.³ He assumed the role of a mob boss, conducting expropriations across the country, organizing rackets, extorting from wealthy entrepreneurs, and even ordering assassinations. After a successful heist, the spoils went directly to Lenin and the Bolshevik Party. Stalin’s units were effective; they successfully “disarmed Russian troops, ambushed hated Cossacks, raided banks and murdered spooks and policemen.”⁴ As stated by the prodigious writer Simon Sebag Montefiore: “Stalin preferred rogues to revolutionaries. He was ‘always seen in the company of cutthroats, blackmailers, robbers and the gunslingers—the Mauserists...’ In power, he shocked his comrades by promoting criminals in the NKVD, *but he had used criminals all his life.*”⁵

Revolutionary parties attracted seedy characters at the turn of the century. These organizations provided an outlet for violence and illegal behavior as long as it was committed in the name of the revolution. Thus, the radicals appropriated ideology to commit and legitimize

² This quote is taken from Anna Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894-1917* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 91.

³ For more information on the conduct of Stalin and his direct involvement in these units, see Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Young Stalin* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 192-200.

⁴ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 132.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 204. Italics added for emphasis.

acts normally considered criminal, when in fact they had nothing to do with the revolution but were driven by personal gain, profit or pure vengeance. A majority of these new revolutionaries did not possess simple rudimentary knowledge of their party's stand. They justified their exploits with "half-literate and clumsy street language,"⁶ and many only undertook a study of theory while in prison after being arrested, where they had ample time and little else to do.⁷ The public deliberated over the involvement of "an increasing number of the "freedom fighters" in "banditry and robberies in most cases not for any political motives, but exclusively for the satisfaction of their base instincts.""⁸ Certain so-called revolutionaries retired to other countries after accruing significant wealth on their exploits, while others spent their riches to lead a life consumed with adventure, alcohol and debauchery.⁹

The violence soon engulfed the country in chaos. Between the years 1905 and 1907, terrorists had killed or injured 4,500 state officials, along with 4,710 private individuals. Between January 1908 and May 1910, officials recorded 19,957 terrorist attacks, including robberies, resulting in the death of 732 state bureaucrats and 3,051 private individuals. Over the five-year period of 1905-1910, it is estimated that 17,000 people died or were injured at the hands of revolutionary terrorists in Russia.¹⁰ As conspicuous as these significant numbers, was the increase in the death ratio of private citizens compared with state officials toward the year 1910. This in part can be attributed to the dehumanization of individuals and enemies amidst the fervor of revolution, justified and called for under the spell of the radical parties' ideologies.

⁶ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 60.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁹ See *ibid.*, 163.

¹⁰ These statistics are taken from *ibid.*, 21.

Fed up with the lack of progress in effecting change, certain organizations during this time began reverting to more extreme measures to spawn the revolution. This included conforming to the ideology of radical theorists. These thinkers constructed a worldview of society split into two groups: friend and enemy.¹¹ The enemies needed to be liquidated in order to purify society for the future coming of socialism or anarchism.¹² Numerous parties shared the language of purification, including the Mensheviks, even though they denounced terrorism as a tactic. A leader of this group, Georgi Plekhanov, declared: “We will not shoot at the tsar and his servants now as the Socialist-Revolutionaries do, but after the victory we will erect a guillotine in Kazanskii Square for them and many others.”¹³ The symbolism of the guillotine, as was used in the French Revolution, was clear: the transformation and moral purification of society would only come through violence. Two decades later, Stalin forced the Soviet Union on the path to socialism by eliminating “enemies of the people” in the Great Terror of the 1930s. Applying ideology, Soviet leaders dehumanized certain quarters of the population in order to legitimize mass terror. On December 12, 1937, Stalin and Premier Molotov individually signed off on 3,167 death sentences.¹⁴ After a day full of sanctioning these murders, they spent the evening together in the cinema, as if their work was just another day in the office.

Stalin’s reign of terror has frequently been analyzed as a symptom of his psychological makeup stemming from issues he experienced in youth. Some have seen it as a mere continuation of the leadership of earlier tsars and their attempt to move Russia into new frontiers

¹¹ One such theorist is Ivan Pavlov, whose pamphlet *The Purification of Mankind* called for elimination of the “ethical race” which consisted of the titans of government and industry. According to Pavlov, traits of greed and avarice were inherited, so even children could be perceived as threats. For more information, see *ibid.*, 81-83.

¹² See Susan Morrissey, “The ‘Apparel of Innocence’: Toward a Moral Economy of Terrorism in Late Imperial Russia,” *The Journal of Modern History* 84 (2012), 630-636.

¹³ This quote is taken from Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 97.

¹⁴ This is recounted in Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 235.

of social development. In contemporary biographies, his rule has regularly been likened to Peter the Great, and even more frequently Ivan the Terrible, who the Soviet leader himself had an affinity for.¹⁵ Most recently, significant research has been conducted analyzing and comparing the regimes of Stalin and Adolf Hitler in the context of totalitarian administrations.¹⁶

Undoubtedly, such a comparison is a result of the notoriety of these personalities, but it is also due to their similarity as dictators instituting measures of state terror. While this kind of approach has brought new insight on totalitarianism, it has viewed state terror as more or less a character-based tradition and therefore tends to muddle how regimes supporting terror often develop in highly ideological environments encouraging violence. Stalin's troubling ten years spent at the strict Gori Theological School, as well as his childhood family life consisting of an abusive father and a mother who worshipped him, have all been thoroughly analyzed to illuminate their impact on the formation of Stalin's revolutionary character.¹⁷ Little attention has been paid, however, to the part he played as a leader of Bolshevik terrorist units beginning in 1905, and

¹⁵ For a brief comparison see Martin Malia, "The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia," in *Stalinism: The Essential Readings*, ed. David L. Hoffman (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 68-79. Helen Rappaport in *Stalin: A Biographical Companion* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999) stated that "Stalin's worst excesses have often been compared to those of the infamous Russian ruler, Ivan IV," and then proceeds to draw those comparisons. See pgs. 133-134. Stalin himself revered Ivan the Terrible, going so far as to call him his "alter ego." See Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 177. For scholarship on how Stalin, Ivan the Terrible, and Peter the Great were perceived in Russia during the Soviet period, see Maureen Pierre, *The Cult of Ivan the Terrible in Stalin's Russia* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); and Kevin M. F. Platt, *Terror and Greatness: Ivan and Peter as Russian Myths* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 176-207.

¹⁶ For contemporary examples see Michael Geyer and Shelia Fitzpatrick, *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

¹⁷ For a prominent example of this, see Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, 64-114. The author focused the most attention on Stalin's time at the Gori Theological School. A lot of young men came out of these seminaries as new revolutionaries in reaction to the strict discipline imposed on the students. At the same time, the author indicated that the abuse Stalin received at the hands of his father aided in the development of a "vindictiveness and mean streak reminiscent of the father whom he despised." See pg. 75. Also, he argued that Stalin's mother worshipped and praised the boy, creating in him the "feeling of a conqueror." See pg. 76. Additionally, see Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 13-21. The author indicated here that from his earliest days, Stalin looked to dominate people, a personality trait which carried over to his later years.

subsequently the impact of this in shaping him for the eventual role as the ruthless despot.¹⁸

Drawing from his extensive work in the Georgian archives, a recent biographer, Simon Sebag Montefiore, described in detail Stalin's involvement in these terrorist units. In the words of the author: "For the first time, we can document his [Stalin] role in the bank robberies, protection-rackets, extortion, arson, piracy, murder—the political gangsterism—that impressed Lenin and trained Stalin in the very skills that would prove invaluable in the political jungle of the Soviet Union."¹⁹ While Montefiore has offered much evidence of these events in his account, he has attempted little analysis on the ways they shaped Stalin's political and ideological outlook in his later life. This thesis aims to shed light on the transition from Stalin "the bandit" to Stalin "the tyrant" by focusing on his terrorist activities as a youth.

Significant work has been produced on the topic of terrorism in nineteenth and twentieth-century Russia, especially since the opening of Soviet archives in 1990. Norman Naimark has conducted outstanding work charting the evolution of the revolutionary organization the People's Will, which assassinated Tsar Alexander II in 1881.²⁰ The activities of these radicals ushered in a new wave of revolutionary thinkers. These ideologists placed terrorism at the forefront of the path to revolution. The work of Anna Geifman has critically shown the connection between the developments at the end of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. She has conducted extensive research on the tumultuous years of 1905-1910. During this period, terrorism was rampant across

¹⁸ Robert Tucker in *Stalin as Revolutionary* only referenced Stalin's role in the expropriations between 1905 and 1908 in brief passages on pgs. 102 and 146; Stephen Kotkin in his expansive biography *Stalin Volume I: Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), dedicated two chapters to Stalin's youth and development (pgs. 11-55), and only a few pages on his revolutionary banditry (pgs. 112-116).

¹⁹ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, xxii.

²⁰ See Norman Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats: The Russian Revolutionary Movement under Alexander III* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

a variety of political organizations in Russia.²¹ Her scholarship is particularly valuable, given the fact Stalin partook in terrorist activities in the Caucasus during 1905-1908. Even though Geifman discussed him only in passing references, her work has successfully mapped the environment in which Stalin operated. While she has yet to tackle the impact of this time period on Stalin's ideological outlook in the 1930s, she does hint at its likelihood.²²

A significant amount of scholarship regarding the Soviet Union and Stalin has focused on the events leading to, as well as the consequences of, the Great Terror. Robert Conquest's work has been substantial to this discourse. His research placed Stalin as the main actor in the arena, the architect and overseer of the murder of millions of people, including some of those closest to him.²³ In Conquest's work, Stalin appears as a ruthless and vicious leader committing atrocities without second thought on his quest for absolute power. While this outlook on the character of Stalin has been widely accepted in academia, certain revisionist scholars, such as J. Arch Getty, have questioned Conquest's argument about the implementation and nature of the terror.²⁴ The academics supporting the revisionist model contend the totalitarian paradigm ignores the autonomy of individual actors, both perpetrators of crimes and the victims. Consequently, Getty has shown local officials across the regions of the vast empire disobeyed the imposed limits by

²¹ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*; and *Death Orders: The Vanguard of Modern Terrorism in Revolutionary Russia* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2010).

²² In *Death Orders* the author covered how the Bolsheviks used terror after coming to power in the Revolution, but she stops shy of the 1930s. See pgs. 122-138. In *Thou Shalt Kill*, she stated: "It is worth speculating whether it is simply a historical coincidence that in the twentieth century, which has been dominated by totalitarian ideology and persecutions...the initial traits of totalitarianism were in evidence among revolutionary extremists in Russia." See pgs. 82-83.

²³ See Conquest, *The Great Terror*. The name "The Great Terror," which refers to the period of 1937-1939 when the purges were at their peak, is attributed to this monumental work.

²⁴ See J. Arch Getty and Robert Manning, ed., *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

the Kremlin on deportations and arrests, and Stalin stepped in to stop these excesses.²⁵ Moreover, while there is no disputing Stalin's central role in the terror, more research is needed on the interactions and outlook of society at large. With that said, the current scholarship on the period of the 1930s is extensive and continues to grow.

This thesis argues there is a critical connection between the revolutionary terrorism in 1905-1910, including among Stalin's Red Brigade units, and the state terror of the 1930s. Through an analysis of secondary sources, complemented by primary documents including personal memoirs and the collective works of Josef Stalin, I attempt to map the nexus between the two, particularly within the use and manipulation of ideology.²⁶ My argument is Stalin carried the important lessons he learned about ideologically motivated violence during his time as a revolutionary fighter with him throughout his political career. His "learning" included how to justify murder and other criminal activities by enlisting ideology, no matter how remote. This is not to say Stalin did not believe in Marxism and Leninism; on the contrary, he was a devout follower of these ideologies. But he also understood the power and the basic emotional appeal of these ideas. When properly implemented, they could legitimate the commitment of unseemly acts of violence. At the same time, he also recognized the importance of finding the right, like-minded people to carry out his atrocities. These individuals would never qualify as intellectuals, by any stretch of the word, and instead were as ruthless as they were loyal to the tyrant.

²⁵ See J. Arch Getty, "'Excesses Are Not Permitted' Mass Terror and Stalinist Governance in the Late 1930s," *The Russian Review* 61 (2002), 113-138.

²⁶ Stalin's Collected Works are hosted online, translated into English, in the *Marxists Internet Archive*. Because of Stalin's affinity for tampering with documents to promote his best image, as well as only publicly releasing the works of his own choosing, the validity of these writings and speeches has to be questioned. Nonetheless, this does not mean they have no important historical use.

In this thesis, I attempt to chart the development of ideological terrorism in Russia up to the mid-twentieth century. Chapter I discusses the historical background. Russian history is mired with peasant revolts in the countryside and palace coups since the sixteenth century. But these events, given their reactionary nature and limited goals, cannot be considered revolutionary in outlook. Nor can the Decembrist revolt in the early nineteenth century, though it was a precursor to the People's Will and the onset of the use of terrorism as a revolutionary tool to overthrow the Tsar. In Chapter II, I provide a window into the first decade of the twentieth century, and show the ways a variety of revolutionary parties in Russia resorted to political violence to effect change. Individuals in these organizations used the fervor of the revolution to commit criminal activities for personal gain or vengeance. As the violence progressed, certain extremists applied ideology to dehumanize the population in order to commit indiscriminate terror. In Chapter III, I discuss Stalin's role as the leader of Red Brigade units in 1905-1908, and describe the criminals he closely associated with. In Chapter IV, I attempt to contextualize the manipulation of ideology in the first decade of the twentieth century in terms of how it was used during the Great Terror. Stalin employed ideology as a never-ending transformative tool to consolidate his power and protect the revolution by constructing and attacking an array of perceived enemies. Both prior to the Russian Revolution and in the 1930s, radicals constructed a dichotomous outlook of society to debase victims and justify mass murder. In the final chapter, Chapter V, I compare the characteristics of Stalin's gangs in the first decade of the twentieth century with his henchmen who carried out the terror in the 1930s. Both groups consisted of mostly uneducated individuals sharing qualities of ruthlessness, loyalty, and adventurism. Likewise, they both used the fervor of the revolution for their own personal gain.

Stalin's involvement in the rampant terrorism during 1905-1910 should be considered fundamental to his revolutionary education. His willingness to apply violence to the extent he did in the 1930s to consolidate power and push forth his vision of socialism can be seen as a logical evolution from this early period in his life. To be sure, other factors, such as his youth spent at the theological seminary, had an important impact on Stalin's development. There are, however, compelling parallels which should not be ignored between his experiences during his formative years in the first decade of the twentieth century and his use of ideology to commit the Great Terror. While categorizing the events of the 1930s as state terror, one may be tempted to draw the conclusion of Stalin as a continuation of earlier tsars such as Ivan the Terrible. This interpretation, however, risks making authoritarian rule a Russian tradition and obfuscates the development of state terror under Stalin as a unique historical situation. It is important not to let categorizations prevent us from perceiving the forces of continuity outside of these confined classifications. By viewing the state terror under Stalin as taking shape during a revolutionary insurgency thirty years prior, we can open a new window through which we confront historical events, and analyze why so many innocent people were murdered at the hands of one tyrant.

CHAPTER I: THE EVOLUTION OF REVOLT

Scholars have often considered Russia to be the birthplace of modern terrorism.¹ This position is due to the recurrence of politically motivated assassinations beginning in the 1870s and reaching their peak in 1905-1910 when revolutionary terrorists killed and wounded an estimated 17,000 individuals.² On the other hand, the tyrannicide in the Greek and Roman empires prior to the Common Era, and the discussions of its use across Western Europe during the Renaissance and Reformation periods, never threatened Russian tsars.³ Their ability to avoid upheaval and assassination is in part attributed to the lack of literature and scholarship available to Russians debating the justifications for killing a tyrant.⁴ This is not to say political violence never occurred. Peasant revolts were prevalent in the countryside and palace coups often took place following the death of a tsar. Violent and political in nature, these events cannot be called revolutionary because their intentions were reactionary and did not include fundamental change. Even the Decembrist revolt, which looked to reform the current system by bringing the voice of the people (at least the nobility) to the government, cannot be considered revolutionary in outlook. Political violence for the sake of revolution did not take place in Russia until the latter half of the nineteenth century, when radicals thought killing the tsar would engender systemic

¹ It is considered the birthplace of modern terrorism because of the prolific use of violence to promote systemic political and societal change. Prior uses of terrorism, typically in the form of tyrannicide, were mostly not intended to fundamentally change these functions of government, and thus differ categorically. While terrorism of this nature occurred across the globe in the nineteenth century, Anna Geifman in *Death Orders* contended that the concentration in Russia in the 1870s was greater than anywhere else. See pgs. 12-13. A.I. Suvorov in “Политический Терроризм в России XIX - Начала XX Век: Истоки, Структура, Особенности,” *Историческая социология* (2002), argued that Russian terrorism was different from other countries because of its high level of organization and participation. See pgs. 57-58.

² For these statistics, see Geifman, *Death Orders*, 15.

³ The earliest philosophies justifying the use of tyrannicide can be traced to Xenophon (430-354 BC) and Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC).

⁴ See Martin A. Miller, *The Foundations of Modern Terrorism: State, Society, and the Dynamics of Political Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 59.

change to the political and social order. Nonetheless, it is important to distinguish between these types of political violence and their true ideological motivations.

Peasant Revolts and the Russian Enlightenment

In the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, the Russian countryside experienced a series of peasant revolts. The major uprisings include the Bolotnikov movement of 1606-1607, the Stenka Razin revolt in 1670-1671, the Bulavin rising of 1707-1708, and the most famous and well documented Pugachev revolt of 1773-1775. Generally, these revolts were reactions to the situation the peasants experienced at the hands of the gentry. By all accounts, peasants lived a harsh and difficult life given the social and economic situation and their dependence upon the landowning classes. The gentry treated serfs “like cattle” and the “grip of lord over serf was absolute.”⁵ The result of each of these revolts was devastating: the peasants burned farms, destroyed houses, and murdered landowners. During the insurrection bearing his name, Pugachev laid out his aims in the late eighteenth century; these included replacing Catherine the Great with a new emperor as well as a general redistribution of land from the gentry to the peasantry. While he fought for the betterment of his lot, Pugachev had no intention to systematically replace the current socio-political system. His distaste for Catherine and demand for her removal did not include a limitation on the sovereign’s powers.⁶

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, during the time of Pugachev and the rule of Catherine the Great, a Russian Enlightenment transpired among members of the nobility. The

⁵ Philip Longworth, “The Pugachev Revolt: The Last Great Cossack-Peasant Rising,” in *Rural Protest: Peasant Movements and Social Change*, ed. Henry A. Landsberger (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1973), 207.

⁶ See Longworth, “The Pugachev Revolt,” 220-230.

Empress, enamored by the French philosophes, regularly corresponded with prolific writers and thinkers such as Voltaire, Denis Diderot, and Baron von Grimm.⁷ At the time, it appeared as if “Catherine tried to give the impression that she was essentially a republican and was aiming at the gradual abolition of despotism.”⁸ During her rule, books on philosophy and liberal thought spread across literary circles. Inspired by Parisian literary salons, and as an avid reader and writer herself, she intended to make literature a social activity. Catherine established the Society for the Translation of Foreign Books in November 1768, allowing more Russians to read and discuss questions of morality and liberalism.⁹ The opening of society to Western ideas spawned a generation of Russian Enlightenment thinkers; included in this group was Alexander Radishchev.

Radishchev, considered the “Enlightenment thinker par excellence” and “the most radical and consistent representative of the Age of Reason in Russia,” took a strong stance on the condition of the peasantry.¹⁰ On the dawn of the Pugachev revolt, Radishchev wrote his *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* which caused a stir across the country. In it the author issued “a generalized cry of indignation” against the government and warned of a peasant uprising that would overthrow the current system and order.¹¹ To prevent this revolution, the results of which he thought would be disastrous for Russia, Radishchev concluded reforms were necessary, including the abolition of serfdom.¹² After reading the book, Catherine had a different reaction,

⁷ Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism* (California: Stanford University Press, 1979), 3.

⁸ Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, 3.

⁹ See W. Gareth Jones, “Russia’s Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment,” in *A History of Russian Thought*, ed. William Leatherbarrow and Derek Offord (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 85.

¹⁰ See Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, 36.

¹¹ See *ibid.*, 48.

¹² See Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1965), 2.

calling Radishchev “a rebel worse than Pugachev.”¹³ Nearing the end of her reign, Catherine took notice of the French Revolution and feared the atmosphere of egalitarianism and revolt might spill over to Russia. The public discussions and Enlightenment thinking at first encouraged during her reign, she now censored and more or less outlawed. A crackdown on dissenters ensued, and Catherine ordered the arrest of Radishchev who was subsequently condemned to death by beheading.¹⁴ The tide could not be contained, however, as his ideas, as well as those of other Enlightenment thinkers, continued into the nineteenth century, and made their mark on the Decembrists.

The Decembrists and Palace Coups

For the first time in Russian history, the Decembrists intended to influence the government in order to benefit the population as a whole and not just members of one group or class. To do so, they challenged Nicholas I’s ascension to the throne in what could more or less be called a coup. This was not the first time, however, these methods were used. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Guards attempted multiple palace coups due to the absence of any sort of law of succession. Consequently, after the death of a ruler, aristocratic families aligned with military leaders to fight and murder disputed tsars in order to seize the throne. These leaders acted strictly out of self-interest: to put their favorite candidates in power to gain the advantages and rewards that come with the rule of government.¹⁵ While seeking their own betterment through reforms, the Decembrists also sought to improve the situation of their fellow

¹³ See Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, 37.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7-8. The sentence was later commuted to banishment to Siberia

¹⁵ See Marc Raeff, *The Decembrist Movement* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 3-11.

countrymen. At the same time, they held no intentions to overthrow the firmly established system of governance. Instead, they acted to effect change within the structure, meaning the Decembrists cannot be ascribed the status of revolutionaries.¹⁶

Preceding the revolt, the Decembrists, consisting primarily of members of the nobility and military leaders, continued to hold loyalty to the monarchy. Alexander I took the throne in 1801 in the midst of optimism, particularly among the educated elite. His coming to power elicited a general expectation of reform which included limiting the absolutism of the autocracy and replacing it with the implementation of the rule of law.¹⁷ The young men in the Decembrist movement discussed Enlightenment thinking in secret societies and understood Western political philosophy. They saw the rule of law as a bulwark against arbitrary brutality by the state, and paramount to their cause was a concern for the security of the individual. “It was the first time that an influential group in Russian society held a conception of the Russian state as distinct and separate from the ruler.”¹⁸ They wanted to open government to include participation from the elite and implement reforms to aid the impoverished peasantry. Many of the Decembrists partook in the Napoleonic Wars as officers in the Russian Army, during which time the government made statements indicating fundamental reform would follow the conclusion of the fighting.¹⁹ When these reforms did not come to realization, educated elites joined secret societies discussing ways to best propel the state forward modeled on the rule of law. While they would have liked

¹⁶ See Malia, *Alexander Herzen*, 2; although Walicki in *A History of Russian Thought* called the group “revolutionary,” he at the same time indicated they “represented a continuation of the eighteenth-century aristocratic opposition.” See pg. 53.

¹⁷ Raeff, *The Decembrist Movement*, 7-12.

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, 15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

the monarchy to voluntarily set limits on his sovereign power, they gradually understood this would not freely come about.

Poorly planned and organized, the revolt started on December 14, 1825 as a conflict over the succession of Tsar Alexander I. On this day, Nicholas prepared to take the oath of allegiance. The Royal Guards, however, had already taken an oath of allegiance to his brother Constantine on November 27. Earlier, Constantine had removed himself from the line of succession, opening the path to the throne for Nicholas. In opposition to the accession of Nicholas to the throne, 3,000 men led by officers and members of the Decembrists lined the Senate Square in preparation for combat. Nicholas, already wary about the loyalty of the troops and the Guards, planned for a potential uprising. He used loyalist troops to easily squash the rebellion.²⁰ In the end, the state sentenced five leaders of the Decembrists to be hanged and 121 others to “hard labor, disciplinary battalions, and exile.” 300 others were transferred to remote regions and kept under special supervision.²¹

Formation of a Revolutionary Class

On the surface, it looked as if the autocracy had defeated the Decembrist movement quickly and painlessly. This, however, was not the conclusion of the affair. Educated society popularly decried the punishments handed out to the Decembrists. They believed these young men, though acting foolishly and recklessly, did so in the service of their country.²² At the same time, the Decembrists awakened an ongoing conflict between the nobility and the autocracy.

²⁰ See *ibid.*, 1-2.

²¹ For these statistics see *ibid.*, 3.

²² See *ibid.*, 27.

Members of the elite increasingly felt alienated from the government. After Peter the Great's reforms, the tsar no longer relied on their service to the nation, causing a void and lack of purpose in high-status society. Moreover, as Western ideas infiltrated their ranks, the elite began to see themselves not as servants of the government, but instead of the people.²³

Even though the Decembrists respected and revered the monarchy and had no intention to develop a rift between the tsar and the people, intellectuals such as Alexander Herzen adopted the movement to indicate the defining moment of division between state and society.²⁴ The failure, arrests, and execution of members of the Decembrists strongly stirred a young Herzen and other liberals. He stated in his memoir: "The accounts of the rising and of the trial of the leaders, and horror in Moscow, made a deep impression on me; a new world was revealed to me which became more and more the center of my moral existence... The execution of Pestel and his associates finally dissipated the childish dreams of my soul."²⁵

Straying from the path of the Decembrists, intellectuals like Herzen emerged as true revolutionaries, at least in theory, since they promoted the implementation of a new system of society and governance—socialism. Accordingly, numerous scholars have concluded "the development of a fully democratic and apocalyptic ideal of revolution *only came after the Decembrists*."²⁶ In this sense, socialism, anarchism, and Marxism, which all came to fruition during this time, were simultaneously entwined with revolution. Similar to the Decembrists, theoreticians behind the development of these ideologies were members of the gentry, who,

²³ See *ibid.*, 26. Along with other similar changes, Peter implemented a system called the Table of Ranks removing the hereditary nature of high-ranking state positions and replacing it with a meritocracy. This was felt to be a direct blow to the nobility.

²⁴ See *ibid.*, 28.

²⁵ Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, trans. Constance Garnett (California: University of California Press, 1982), 42. Pavel Pestel, who Herzen referred to, was the leader of the Southern Society of the Decembrists.

²⁶ See Malia, *Alexander Herzen*, 2. Italics added for emphasis.

being “*from* the possessing classes,” were “no longer *of* them,”²⁷ through their Western education and isolation from the monarchy. By 1848, the Year of Revolution, these ideologies were firmly established across the globe, and “turned from general theory to considerations of practical politics and strategy.”²⁸ In 1852, while exiled in London, Herzen established the Free Russian Press. He produced and funded a large collection of Russian works attacking the current system of government. Smuggled into the country, these journals, including the *Polar Star* and *The Bell*, held extraordinary influence. Resulting from his work, and the effort of other intellectuals, a revolutionary class started to form, and Herzen donned the role as the “father of Russian socialism.”²⁹ Nikolay Chernyshevsky published similar ideological books and journals including *The Contemporary* in Russia as a complement to Herzen writing abroad.

In 1863, Chernyshevsky wrote one of his most influential books entitled *What is to be Done?*. An important piece of literature for radicals during this time, it expressed how a revolutionary should possess an extreme devotion to the cause. In *What is to be Done?* the main characters share this outlook and dedicate their lives to the struggle. One of the characters, Rakhmetov, devotes himself so much to the cause he sleeps on a bed of nails as a matter of self-abnegation and discipline.³⁰ Eventually, the police arrested Chernyshevsky for his writings (he wrote *What is to be Done?* in the Peter and Paul Fortress) and exiled him to Siberia. The state, however, could not silence what he had already written. Enamored with the novel and the depiction of such a caring and devoted revolutionary, a young Lenin constructed a work of his own with the same title.

²⁷ See *ibid.*, 4. Italics added for emphasis.

²⁸ See *ibid.*, 3.

²⁹ See Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, 162-180.

³⁰ See *ibid.*, 189-190.

An important aspect in the evolution of the revolutionary fighter is embodied in the life of Sergey Nechaev. The disturbing fanaticism and outlook aside,³¹ his *Catechism of a Revolutionary* written in 1869 became a vital document for defining what it means to be a revolutionary. Nechaev wrote the radical is a “doomed man” who must dedicate himself solely to the cause. “He knows only one science: the science of destruction.”³² The revolutionary “must ally himself with the savage world of the violent criminal, the only true revolutionary in Russia.” According to Nechaev, the radical’s only task was to overthrow the current order by any means necessary, including the use of terrorism and torture, without concern for the reconstruction of a future society.³³ This work, particularly in the form of political assassination, would bring about a massive uprising of the peasantry. Nechaev classified how targets of assassination should be chosen based on how their deaths would “inspire the greatest fear in the government.” In the end, amidst all the destruction and chaos, the ultimate goal was “the complete liberation and happiness of the masses.”³⁴

Even before Nechaev, by mid-century revolutionaries around the world vehemently called for political violence as a remedy to despotism. While Herzen and Chernyshevsky never promoted the use of violence and instead believed socialism would come about through the education of the masses, others considered terror paramount in order to effect real change. An example of such a revolutionary is Karl Heinzen. In 1853, he published *Murder and Liberty* in

³¹ Nechaev was able to convince devoted revolutionaries like Mikhail Bakunin and Nikolay Ogarev to financially support him by claiming he had an army of backers across several nations, which was untrue. He convinced others that “deception, murder, and blackmail were appropriate revolutionary methods,” and killed one of his own comrades. This scene is grotesquely portrayed in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novel *The Devils*. See Philip Pomper, *Sergei Nechaev* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1979), 1-3

³² See Sergey Nechaev, “The Revolutionary Catechism, 1869,” *Anarchism Archive*, accessed August 10, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/subject/anarchism/nechayev/catechism.htm>.

³³ According to Nechaev, destruction was the one and only job of the revolutionary, and it was the duty of the rest of society to rebuild and reconstruct a new world along more appropriate and equitable lines.

³⁴ See Nechaev, “The Revolutionary Catechism, 1869.”

France. Heinzen called on anyone facing government repression throughout the world to respond with equal viciousness and ferocity. According to the author, the state cloaked their consistent repression and murder of citizens from the public by labelling these activities “war.” The only logical response to such violence was to equally match its devastation. And because ordinary citizens did not possess the weapons of the state, they must rely on individual acts of terror. In fact, he argued it was the responsibility of revolutionaries to kill despotic leaders because by doing so they would be saving countless future lives.³⁵ While Heinzen may not have been popularly read in Russia, young radicals in St. Petersburg distributed Peter Zaichnevsky’s “Young Russia” written in 1862, and another pamphlet called “To the Young Generation.”³⁶ Both advocated a violent overthrow of the system which would “shed twice as much blood as did the Jacobins during the 1790s.”³⁷

Political Assassinations and the Populists

In the midst of revolutionary calls, some more violent than others, on April 4, 1866 Dmitry Karakozov attempted to assassinate the Tsar, the first effort as such by a revolutionary. He believed the Tsar’s assassination would stir a rebellion against the regime.³⁸ Even though his shot missed the target, and his arrest shortly followed, his voice resounded: “My death will be an example for them and inspire them.”³⁹ And indeed, to some degree, it did. The assassination

³⁵ See Daniel Bessner and Michael Stauch, “Karl Heinzen and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Terror,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22 (2010): 143-176.

³⁶ See Oleg V. Budnitskii, ““Кровь по Совесть”: Терроризм в России (Вторая Половина XIX – начало XX в.),” *Сообщения* (1994): 203.

³⁷ Miller, *The Foundations of Modern Terrorism*, 66.

³⁸ For a detailed account of his assassination attempt and the life of Dmitry Karakozov, see Claudia Verhoeven, *The Odd Man Karakozov: Imperial Russia, Modernity and the Birth of Terrorism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009).

³⁹ Verhoeven, *The Odd Man Karakozov*, 130.

attempt influenced Nechaev, and fifteen years later the People's Will finished what Karakozov could not—the successful murder of the Tsar.⁴⁰ The assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 by members of the People's Will occurred as a result of ideology and action coming together. Similar to Karakozov, members of this terrorist outfit believed his death would spark the revolution and institute the move towards socialism. Of course, the assassination did not result in such idealized goals, though it did succeed in drawing revolutionaries together for a greater push in the twentieth century.

It is important to note while the practice of terrorism gained traction before the assassination in 1881, only a small proportion of revolutionaries believed in its use. In the 1860s, the People's Will consisted of approximately 100 active members, and by 1879 still fewer than 500, a comparatively small amount of the total revolutionaries.⁴¹ After the assassination, membership vastly expanded and the government responded with a crackdown on the organization. Most revolutionaries before 1881, however, continued to hold a strong belief socialism could develop through peaceful and populist measures.

In the “mad summer” of 1874, the populists took the message of socialism directly to the Russian peasantry. They believed they could teach the peasants the village commune was an ideal form of living where government oppression would disappear along with the “sickness of capitalism.”⁴² This enlightenment of the peasantry would then engender the creation of a

⁴⁰ Alla Zlochevskaya in “Дмитрий Каракозов: русский революционный терроризм и национальный Вопрос,” *Новая русистика* 1 (2014), contended that Nechaev had a much larger role in the development of the Russian revolutionary movement than Karakozov. She argued this was because Karakozov was Polish and not Russian, and it was important for the revolutionaries that the murder of the tsar be an expression of Russian will in order to spark the overthrow of the government. See pgs. 171-176.

⁴¹For these statistics see Norman Naimark, “Terrorism and the Fall of Imperial Russia,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2 (1990): 174.

⁴² See Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 10.

federation of communes throughout Europe, and only then would the people be truly free. As such, the populists cared little for political revolution, or the seizure of power, and so they deemed violent measures against the government unnecessary. Regardless of their outlook on violence, police and local authorities hounded populists across the countryside. The state arrested 700 individuals in the summer of 1874, and of this group held 267 for trial. Of those 267, only 193 would stand trial three years later; the rest either died, went insane from the conditions in prison, or had already been exiled by the state.⁴³ At the same time, the peasantry often rejected the populists and their message, causing some to rethink their outlook on how best to achieve the social revolution. Formed in 1876, The Land and Liberty Party, which looked out for the interests of the populists, began discussing how best to achieve change, and the idea of political violence started to arise more frequently.⁴⁴

Along with the constant harassment of the police, the populists turned to methods of political violence in response to the “Zasulich affair.” In January 1878, the day after the state issued convictions of the individuals involved in the mad summer, Vera Zasulich shot and wounded F.F. Trepov, the governor of St. Petersburg. In her attack she sought to bring to light the flogging of one of the prisoners whose only crime was he did not remove his hat in the governor’s presence. A liberal court later acquitted Zasulich for the assassination attempt, and radicals immediately heralded her as a model for the use of terrorism.⁴⁵ After this event, “the motives of the terrorists became increasingly political,”⁴⁶ and soon a split formed in the Land and

⁴³ See Miller, *The Foundations of Modern Terrorism*, 66.

⁴⁴ See Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 8-11.

⁴⁵ For a more detailed account of the “Zasulich Affair,” see *ibid.*, 11-12. Strangely enough, Zasulich was actually against the use of political violence in the name of the revolution, and did not join the People’s Will after the split from the Land and Liberty Party. She viewed her attack as reactionary and without the intention of influencing the political landscape.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 11

Liberty Party.⁴⁷ Georgii Plekhanov, arguing terrorism should not be used since it was not effective in concert with the social revolution, formed the Black Repartition Party. He indicated “political revolutions can *never* and in *no place* assure the people of economic and political freedom.”⁴⁸ Those promoting the use of terrorism believed in its capacity to alter political institutions, a necessary step, it was thought, in the transition to socialism. These individuals formed the People’s Will.

The People’s Will

The People’s Will understood the Russian masses needed help, and through their acts of terrorism they could bring about a revolution and hand over power to the people in the form of a constituent assembly.⁴⁹ They wielded terror to dismantle the state by eliminating its highest figure, Tsar Alexander II. In a proclamation written in 1880, they claimed to have begun “the armed struggle, being forced to it by the government and its tyrannical and violent suppression” of the people.⁵⁰ In his diary, Lev Tikhomirov, a former member of the Executive Committee of the People’s Will, wrote the Emperor was not particularly a bad man, but he represented a system of repression, and “something higher was visible” in the goal of the revolutionaries.⁵¹ Members of the People’s Will fought in the name of the masses, and believed the majority of the

⁴⁷ See Suvorov, “Политический Терроризм в России,” 56.

⁴⁸ Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 12.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁵⁰ See “Прокламация Исполнительного комитета по поводу взрыва в Зимнем дворце 5 февраля 1880 г. 7 февраля 1880,” *historydoc.edu.ru*, accessed November 20, 2016, http://historydoc.edu.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=16527&cat_ob_no=14736.

⁵¹ See Lev Tikhomirov, “Убийство народолюбцами Александра II. 1 марта 1881. Дневниковая запись Л.А. Тихомирова. 1889,” *historydoc.edu.ru*, accessed November 30, 2016, http://historydoc.edu.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=16515&cat_ob_no=14736.

Russian population supported their activities.⁵² As it turned out, their faith in the Russian people was misplaced.

The People's Will succeeded in assassinating Tsar Alexander II on March 13, 1881. The supposed revolution, however, did not follow. Instead, the people mourned the passing of the Tsar, and the government responded "with an unambiguous determination to reaffirm autocracy as the only law of the land."⁵³ Under G.D. Sudeikin, the secret police apparatus grew and succeeded in infiltrating the People's Will. Sudeikin was an expert at turning radicals into his own agents. The scholar Richard Pipes documented this process in the case of Sergei Degaev. His betrayal was responsible for information leading to the arrests and near dismantlement of the terrorist faction of the People's Will.⁵⁴ Degaev's conscience eventually got the best of him, and he informed the Executive Committee of the People's Will of his duplicity. Instead of being banished or executed, the Executive Committee turned Dagaev into a double agent and ordered him with the task of murdering Sudeikin. After completing the deadly endeavor, the Committee excommunicated Dagaev from the People's Will, and he spent the rest of his days in the United States working as a mathematician at South Dakota State University until his death in 1897.

The crackdown on revolutionary groups hit the People's Will particularly hard. Between 1881 and 1894, the judiciary convicted 5,581 members of political crimes. The state executed 27 of the worst of this group and imprisoned or sent to hard labor 342 others.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, while the police repeatedly arrested their leaders, the boldness and success of the Tsar's assassination

⁵² See "Письмо Исполнительного комитета «Народной воли» Александру III. 10 марта 1881," *historydoc.edu.ru*, accessed November 30, 2016, http://historydoc.edu.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=14201&cat_ob_no=14736.

⁵³ Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 13.

⁵⁴ See Richard Pipes, *The Degaev Affair: Terror and Terrorism in Tsarist Russia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 2003. While Degaev worked there, the institution was called Dakota Agriculture College. Not until 1964 did it take the name South Dakota State University.

⁵⁵ For these statistics see Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 42.

kept membership steady at this time. Simultaneously, the authority of the Executive Committee, in shambles after March 1881, diminished and their responsibility dispersed among a variety of sections and groups leaving no central leadership. The People's Will continued their terrorist tactics and assassinations as isolated cells, keeping the fear alive for the life of the new tsar, Alexander III. The arrests and lack of access to resources, however, eventually brought the terrorism more or less to a halt, particularly after Dagaev's betrayal had taken its toll. By 1883, in the words of Lev Tikhomirov: "The entire revolutionary organization was wholly in the hands of the police."⁵⁶ Dagaev's involvement led to the arrests of more than 200 revolutionaries in the winter of 1883 alone.⁵⁷

In 1884 and 1885, The People's Will launched occasional terrorist attacks, but by 1886 a new calm had for the most part settled in the country. This ended abruptly in March 1887 after the police foiled another plot intending to assassinate the Tsar. They arrested the conspirators in Nevsky Prospect, three of which carried concealed bombs while waiting for the Tsar to approach. As Norman Naimark indicated: "Despite its failure, this conspiracy has become renowned as the most important event in the history of Russian radicalism during the reign of Alexander III."⁵⁸ The reason for this can in part be ascribed to the participation and leadership of Aleksandr Ilyich Ulyanov—Vladimir Lenin's older brother. Also, the terrorists carried out this act without the permission and oversight of the Executive Committee of the People's Will. As a group, the Terrorist Faction consisted of a combination of revolutionaries adhering to differing ideologies, such as populism, scientific socialism, and Marxism. The one thing which held the

⁵⁶ This quote was taken from Pipes, *The Degaev Affair*, 87.

⁵⁷ For these statistics and the general crackdown on the People's Will see Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 42.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

group together was a staunch belief in the effectiveness of terrorism. Moreover, their attempt proved revolutionaries willing to use terrorism as part of the struggle against the tsar were not limited to one ideological outlook. They existed not only in the People's Will, but also outside of this organization in groups such as the Social Democrats, even if not in the majority.⁵⁹

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the People's Will started to turn away from the use of terrorism. This came about in part from the influence of the Social Democrats aligning with the working class and rejecting the concept of a seizure of power, a central facet to the People's Will. They pushed towards the construction of a constitution which they believed would ultimately lead to the implementation of socialism. By 1890, the secret police so often thwarted assassination attempts by the People's Will they began to "turn away from the terrorist underground and to join a broader struggle for democratic rights in Russia."⁶⁰ After the famine in 1891, revolutionaries again wielded terrorism for a brief period as a weapon for the people, but this fervor slowed to halt by the end of the century. The credence supporting the use of terrorism never disappeared, but as revolutionary parties started to form and unify at the end of the nineteenth century, the discussion of violence took a back seat to party ideology.⁶¹

Violence of a political nature has been a part of Russian history. It did not, however, take revolutionary form until the latter half of the nineteenth century. By the end of the 1800s, revolutionary groups progressed towards the consensus of a democratic and parliamentary Russia to reflect the interests of the entire population. Since the state continued to crackdown on dissidents, the strength of the revolutionaries had to come from their numbers, and thus they began to rally and unify around this cause. Formed in 1893, the Party of People's Rights

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, 130-153.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁶¹ See *ibid.*, 213-238.

resembled a modern political party combining both liberals and radicals. Its short life and quick demise meant less than the circumstance that “a new phase of political activity began” at this time as antigovernment political parties increasingly formed.⁶² Although never abandoned, the use of terror took on a secondary role.⁶³ And when this happened, the People’s Will ceased to exist; most members joined the Social Democrats or the Party of People’s Rights. Less than a decade later, however, with the formation of the Socialist-Revolutionary party in 1901, terrorism once again took prominence on the revolutionary stage.

⁶² See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 15.

⁶³ Geifman in *Thou Shalt Kill* calls this “a time of deceptive calm before the storm.” See pg. 16; for more information on this time period, see Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 213-238.

CHAPTER II: REVOLUTIONARY TERRORISM IN RUSSIA, 1905-1910

On January 22, 1905, unarmed workers and demonstrators, including women and children, marched to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg to deliver a petition to the Tsar pleading for better working conditions. Nicholas II, not even in the capital at the time, stationed troops in advance of the demonstration. During the protest, events took a bloody turn when the soldiers opened fire on the mass of people. Moderate estimates claim the soldiers killed and wounded 200 individuals.¹ Father Gapon, leading the marchers, summarized their emotions when he exclaimed: “There is no longer any Tsar for us!”² This event, which is now known as Bloody Sunday, sparked the 1905 Revolution, and kicked-off a wave of revolutionary terrorism which ended with the death of thousands of officials, terrorists, and innocent citizens.

Between the years 1905-1910, ideologically driven violence consumed Russia in chaos. A variety of revolutionary organizations operated at this time, and party leaders continually sought after individuals to become foot soldiers in the revolution. To find those willing to sacrifice themselves as well as commit murder and other crimes, they “recruited from among the uncultured but zealous revolutionary youth.”³ This primarily included uneducated people of the lower or working-class strata of society. “Some peasant-turned-working-class terrorists had not even had elementary education and did not know how to read.”⁴ A portion of the radicals could be classified as mentally unstable, and for others their actions bordered on sadism. Fellow revolutionaries often described terrorists as “turbulent and unbalanced,” “hysterical,” or even

¹ These statistics are most commonly cited even though journalists reporting on the day claimed that 4,600 were killed and wounded. See Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 25; Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 74.

² George Gapon, *The Story of my Life* (New York: E.P Dutton & Co, 1906), 187.

³ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 113.

⁴ Geifman, *Death Orders*, 59.

“suicidal.”⁵ At the same time, radicals sought adventures and thrills, and the revolution provided an opportunity to fulfill these desires. These individuals, hardly devoted to any cause, nevertheless committed the majority of terrorist attacks in this decade.

This analysis includes expropriations, committed in the name of the revolution, as a form of terrorism. By including expropriations within the grouping of terrorist activities, it is feasible to conclude most terrorist attacks in Russia were committed by criminals and not revolutionary ideologues.⁶ This is not to say that true revolutionaries, particularly from the lower and uneducated masses, did not exist. And in the face of repression from the Russian autocracy, many whole-heartedly believed in the cause they were fighting for. With that said, this chapter focuses on the political violence committed by revolutionaries which was inherently criminal—intended to benefit the individual and not the revolution. In no manner is this approach meant to provide a holistic picture of revolutionary organizations and their activities in the early twentieth century.

In order to commit violence on such a massive scale, terrorists justified their exploits through the ideology of revolutionary parties. In such an environment, individuals could defend their use of murder and expropriations in the name of the revolution. As the atmosphere devolved and became more violent, revolutionaries used the opportunity to commit these acts for their own personal benefit or enjoyment. In fact, a portion of the terrorists could not even adequately express the creed of the party they supposedly were fighting for.⁷ Nonetheless, they still wielded the ideology to commit heinous crimes, and some organizations even encouraged

⁵ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 170.

⁶ This interpretation of terrorism follows the general guidelines laid out by Bruce Hoffman in *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 2. The author defined terrorism broadly as “violence—or, equally important, the threat of violence—used and directed in pursuit of, or in service of, a political aim.”

⁷ Geifman, *Death Orders*, 59.

revolutionaries to commit large scale indiscriminate terror as a tool to cleanse and purify the population. This purification, it was thought, would eliminate enemies and nonbelievers in order to lead Russia on the path to socialism.

Party of Socialists-Revolutionaries

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the People's Will no longer existed. Their mantle of adopting political assassinations in the struggle against the government continued with the formation of the Party of Socialists-Revolutionaries (SRs) in 1901. Of the leftist revolutionary parties, the SRs were the only ones which "formally incorporated terrorist tactics into its program."⁸ As it turned out, other revolutionary organizations used terrorism as a political weapon, but at the same time they theoretically decried its effectiveness.⁹ Orthodox Marxism, which both the SRs and the Social Democrats adhered to, indicated individual actions and deeds did not influence historical development. In this light, political assassinations appeared to be against Marxist doctrine. The SRs, however, argued their primary objective was not individual terror but the revolution; therefore, political assassinations were inseparable from the cause and the "general struggle of the toiling masses."¹⁰ Many radicals still held a strong belief terrorism could be used as a rallying cry to awaken the Russian people. The continued theoretical

⁸ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 44.

⁹ This is particularly true for the Social Democrats, both the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions. At the same time, even those who condemned terrorism, such as the Kadets, still encouraged others to perform these acts. See Anna Geifman, "The Kadets and Terrorism, 1905-1907," *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge* 36 (1988): 248-267.

¹⁰ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 46.

disputes and ongoing interparty fighting caused revolutionaries at this time to view the SRs as a party of action which could produce immediate results.¹¹

Given their theoretical backing for the use of terror as a form of struggle against the government, the SR organization grew and garnered significant financial support. By openly adhering to a pro-terrorist stance, radicals supporting and willing to use political violence flocked to the organization. Some left the Social Democrats in order to do so. In his memoirs, Boris Savinkov discussed his role as an SR with another member. He was asked,

- “Do you want to take part in terror?”
- “Yes.”
- Only in terror?”
- “Yes.”
- “Why not the general work?”
- I said that I attached crucial importance to terror.¹²

While radicals joined the SRs in larger numbers, simultaneously the organization amassed substantial financial support from benefactors less willing to donate large sums to fringe terrorist groups. They opened their pocketbooks to what they viewed as an organized political party.¹³ On a scale unseen in Russia before, this financial backing allowed the SRs to purchase countless weapons and build explosives. Bombs and bomb-making shops were so common in Russia these small devices entered the general vocabulary as “oranges.”¹⁴ While not yet matched, the development of revolutionary weaponry diminished the technical advantages the government held in warfare at this time. Their growing support also meant the establishment of an international party network capable of smuggling arms into the country.¹⁵

¹¹ See *ibid.*, 46-48.

¹² Boris Savinkov, “Вспоминания террориста,” *Lib.ru*, accessed December 2, 2016, az.lib.ru/s/sawinkow_b_w/text_0010.shtml.

¹³ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 15.

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, 16.

¹⁵ See *ibid.*, 15.

Instead of concentrating on the elimination of the tsar like the People's Will had done in the nineteenth century, the SRs first focused on assassinating high public officials. They did so taking active precautions to minimize collateral damage, meaning they preferred "revolvers to bombs."¹⁶ While not all of the terrorists at this time were similarly as vigilant, the liberal public often deemed the actions of the Combat Organization of the SRs as virtuous. As Susan Morrissey indicated: "This was the era of the "avengers": lone heroes courageously assassinating evildoers in the tsarist administration, turning the courtroom into a site of political resistance, and sacrificing themselves on the scaffold, ideally producing daring letters or poetry in the interim."¹⁷ The story of Ivan Kaliaev and his aborted attempt on the life of Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich on February 15, 1905 exemplified this outlook. Kaliaev, in position to toss his bomb into the oncoming carriage, stopped once he noticed the Grand Duke's wife and nephews inside the cab with him. Two days later, he succeeded in his attempt, and the general public looked on in condemnation of the victim and approval of the assassin as the bomb blew the Grand Duke's body into several pieces strewn across a Moscow street.¹⁸

Kaliaev's refusal to murder those considered "innocent" attested to at least some moral aptitude of the terrorists. The Grand Duke represented the oppression and violence of the government which they viewed as an indiscriminate killing machine, particularly after the events of Bloody Sunday. The revolutionaries saw his assassination as a defensive and reactionary response to the ongoing situation at the time. Increasingly, the public perceived the terrorists not as the guilty party, but rather hailed them as heroes and concurrently judged the government

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, 68.

¹⁷ Susan Morrissey, "The "Apparel of Innocence": Toward a Moral Economy of Terrorism in Late Imperial Russia," *The Journal of Modern History* 84 (2012): 620.

¹⁸ See Morrissey, "The "Apparel of Innocence,"" 620-625.

unjust.¹⁹ Even though the radicals committed murder and often rejected any feelings of remorse or repudiation, they seemingly sacrificed themselves for the benefit of the masses, and the people took notice. After arrests, revolutionaries used the public trials to express the moral basis for their terrorism in the face of repression and state violence. A prosecutor witnessing the hanging of some revolutionaries observed, “How these people died...no sighs, no remorse, no pleas, no signs of weaknesses... These were real heroes.”²⁰ Given the public reception of terrorism, violence took prominence on the revolutionary scene. Even Kaliev “dreamed of a future of terror and its decisive influence on the revolution,” as he famously stated “SRs without bombs are not SRs.”²¹ Consequently, the moral basis and support for committing acts of violence triggered an increase in the use of terror among revolutionaries. As terrorism spread it created an atmosphere leading to its application in a more reckless and indiscriminate manner.²²

The revolutionaries perceived the support of liberal intellectuals as validation for their actions, causing an increase in the resort to violence. The intelligentsia, after all, had the same goal in mind as the terrorist revolutionaries: the ultimate overthrow of tsarist Russia. While most intellectuals abhorred the violence and destruction, they also saw how its impact awakened the public while causing disarray in the ranks of the government. Their support, or even silent disapproval, was enough justification for the masses to soon fall in line with the terrorists.²³ “The liberal intelligentsia thus promoted a culture in which, under the impact of fabricated reverence for terror, common people came to venerate terrorists’ portraits, as if they were icons.”²⁴ The

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, 621-623.

²⁰ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 64.

²¹ Savinkov, “Вспоминания террориста.”

²² See Morrissey, “The ‘Apparel of Innocence,’” 624-625.

²³ Geifman, *Death Orders*, 107-111.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

Constitutional Democrats (Kadets), consisting of educated professionals, openly condemned terrorism as a method while at the same time extolling the individual terrorists as martyrs for the cause and celebrating their successes.²⁵ The intelligentsia thus led the way for the general romanticizing of terrorism. This outlook inspired the public, particularly the youth who admired individual terrorists and dreamed of growing up to fight the regime.²⁶

The Evolution of Terrorism

As the use of political violence exploded on the scene in the year 1905, the terrorists increasingly started to operate outside of any theoretical dimensions and party networks. In 1902, the SRs formed the Combat Organization as the terrorist faction of their party. As a small unit within the organization, they oversaw single cadres of terrorists, and in many ways resembled the Executive Committee of the People's Will. They functioned in the strictest sense of secrecy and were for the most part removed from SR members and leadership. This isolation impacted individuals of the group by making "solidarity among themselves" more important than "loyalty to the party."²⁷ Increasingly, members of the Combat Organization grew frustrated with the Party, viewing them only as useless politicians and not true revolutionary fighters.²⁸ This was particularly evident when Party leadership attempted to regulate how terrorism was to be

²⁵ See Geifman, "The Kadets and Terrorism," 248-267. The author argued that the Kadets had to walk a fine line; they could not openly support the terrorists, for the government would remove them from the Duma. At the same time, they could not openly condemn the terrorists, for they were popularly supported and making great strides in the overthrow of the government. In the end, since the Kadets refused to openly criticize the terrorists, they were disbanded from participation in the Duma.

²⁶ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 173-180.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁸ Here, the influence of earlier revolutionaries, like Sergei Nechaev, is visible. Nechaev saw the revolutionary as an isolated fighter whose sole mission was causing terror and destruction. Members of the Combat Organization similarly believed politicking was worthless and fighting was the only real source of revolution.

employed. Members of the Combat Organization saw this as an infringement of their efforts by those unwilling to risk their lives for the cause. In disregard to a Party statute granting the right to choose targets solely to the leadership, they began to conduct political assassinations without consulting the Central Committee. They violated this principle to allegedly maintain the secrecy of the Combat Organization, but also because they “considered such matters beyond the competence of anyone not directly involved with terror.”²⁹ As one radical stated: “I believe in terror. For me, the whole revolution is in terror.”³⁰

Similar to the SRs, terrorists from other revolutionary organizations also increasingly broke from the direction of their parties. One group which was particularly affected by this was the Social Democrats (SDs). Contrary to the Socialists-Revolutionaries, the SDs thought individual acts of terror went against the principles of Marxism. At first, they used Marxist doctrine to criticize and condemn the SRs and their adherence to violence. After witnessing the effectiveness of the SRs in disabling the government, however, some theoreticians of the party altered course. By 1905, Lenin had changed his mind about terrorism. He now believed political violence was appropriate given the historical moment and the ability of terrorism to be utilized in coordination with the movement. In fact, he now strongly advocated for its use, calling it “the duty of every person” to attack the police, spies and government officials.³¹ Without any central terrorist committee such as the Combat Organization leading the SRs, small units in the SDs commenced attacks with more or less full autonomy. While by 1905 Lenin had accepted the use of political violence, the Menshevik faction still argued against terrorism citing their interpretation of Marxism in defense. This outlook, however, did not stop them from praising,

²⁹ Giefman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 50.

³⁰ Savinkov, “Вспоминания террориста.”

³¹ Giefman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 91.

aiding, and even committing acts of economic terrorism, often leaving the details unknown to the leadership.³²

As terrorists more and more operated outside of organizational networks, they also started to ignore party doctrine on the acceptable uses of terrorism. The Combat Organization of the SRs disbanded in 1907, but this did not mean the party abandoned terrorism as tool for revolution.³³ Instead, they relied on smaller combat units or isolated individuals to perform attacks. As Anna Geifman indicated: “The smaller combat units came to represent the new type of terrorist in their largely indiscriminate behavior and increasing callousness toward bloodshed, as well as in the composition of their ranks, which included many individuals who could not be considered conscious revolutionaries and socialists.”³⁴ These units, such as the Northern Flying Combat Detachment led by Al’bert Trauberg, held themselves to far less scrupulous standards compared with Ivan Kaliaev or members of the Combat Organization. Instead of selecting their targets from state leaders who knowingly committed atrocities, Trauberg’s plans included the assassination of officials “en masse not for any particular offense, but merely because of their positions.”³⁵ Kaliaev targeted the Grand Duke because he was a former dictatorial governor of Moscow and advisor to the tsar. These smaller units, however, did not adhere to any strict selection process. And while Kaliaev aborted his first attempt because he would have harmed innocent bystanders, these new terrorists strapped bombs to their bodies and carelessly tossed grenades towards their targets with little concern for collateral damage. As one revolutionary

³² See *ibid.*, 97-101.

³³ The Combat Organization underwent a series of arrests and intraparty squabbles that dismantled it as an effective unit. At the same time, the leaders of the SRs were noticing how terrorist activities were more and more taking on the appearance of common criminal activity and thus wanted to shut it down. See *ibid.*, 48-58.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

terrorist who had accidentally killed a schoolgirl in an attack stated: “I am very sorry about this, but it is impossible not to have innocent victims in a time of war.”³⁶

The justifications for the use of terrorism expanded over the course of 1905-1910 to eventually accept and encourage indiscriminate violence and murder. This fits with what Martin Miller calls “ordinary terrorism.”³⁷ According to Miller’s definition, sovereign states and their civilians are continually in a discourse over citizen rights. Often times this interchange escalates into violence if one side is unfairly represented in the conversation. Without a solution to the conflict, the violence becomes more and more extreme in nature. In Russia, as revolutionaries responded to the repression of the state with violence of their own, the autocracy answered in return by implementing more repressive measures, forcing the revolutionaries to retaliate, again, in kind. As Susan Morrissey pointed out: “Even as Kaliev’s self-restraint seemingly embodies the principle of setting moral limits, his example also became a rallying cry promoting an ever-expanding field of combat.”³⁸ In reaction to the events which led to Bloody Sunday, terrorists felt morally justified in their use of violence against the state. Instead of working with the social forces of change, the government responded in a manner of vicious suppression. In mid-June, government soldiers attacked striking workers in Odessa, along with the crew of the *Potemkin*, leaving an estimated 2,000 dead and 3,000 injured.³⁹ In the Moscow Uprising later that year in December, over 1,000 Muscovites died at the hands of Russian troops, including 86 children.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ibid., 137.

³⁷ See Martin Miller, “Ordinary Terrorism in Historical Perspective,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2 (2008): 125-154.

³⁸ Morrissey, “The ‘Apparel of Innocence,’” 620.

³⁹ For these statistics see Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 26.

⁴⁰ Morrissey, “The ‘Apparel of Innocence,’” 616.

By the time the government issued the October Manifesto⁴¹ in 1905, it was already too late, not to mention the fact it failed to address real systemic problems or create a peaceful path to socialism. As a result, the “Russian struggle against the “siege” of the autocracy was entering a new phase.”⁴² The wave of reactionary violence against the guilt-ridden government only increased in barbarity. “The Kaliaev case had become a reference point among SRs justifying an open-ended spiral of violence rather than self-restraint. Indeed, its very articulation of moral limits came to demonstrate the absence of absolute limits.”⁴³ The Maximalists, a terrorist branch which evolved out of the body of the SRs, were indicative of this new wave of violence.

The Maximalists

After the October Manifesto, the SRs temporarily halted their terrorist activity. They practiced this cessation of hostilities mainly in theory, since the independent terrorist factions of the SRs disregarded the statute. The Maximalists, discouraged the Party would issue such a decree, decided to branch off from the SRs at this time. At their first conference after splitting with the Party at large, they voted to move towards institutional rather than individual acts of violence. The Party concluded: “Where it is not enough to remove one person, it is necessary to eliminate them by the dozen; where dozens are not enough, they must be gotten rid of in hundreds.”⁴⁴ This type of outlook left no room for the concern of innocent civilians. On August 12, 1906, the Maximalists made an attempt on the life of Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin: three

⁴¹ The October Manifesto was a decree issued in response to the 1905 Revolution which guaranteed basic civil rights to Russian citizens, and instituted the elected representative Duma to approve and enact future laws.

⁴² This quote is taken from the memoir of Pavel Milyukov. See “Вспоминания,” *Lib.ru*, accessed December 3, 2016, az.lib.ru/m/miljukow_p_n/text_0050.shtml.

⁴³ Morrissey, “The “Apparel of Innocence,”” 627.

⁴⁴ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 74.

members blew themselves up with sixteen pound bombs at Stolypin's villa. The terrorists purposefully waited until his visiting hours, when it was easiest to reach the Prime Minister, but also when everyday civilians were in close proximity. As it turned out, Stolypin survived the blast, but up to 60 others, including women and the elderly, were killed along with numerous injured.⁴⁵ In response to this attack, the government began its "single most controversial policy of repression," by opening military field courts which could try, convict, and execute civilians accused of political crimes within four days of arrest.⁴⁶

Part of the reason the Maximalists decidedly made the move to kill on such a large scale had to do with how they justified mass murder in their ideology. One of the theoreticians of the Party, Ivan Pavlov, wrote a pamphlet in 1907 called *The Purification of Mankind*. According to Pavlov, those born to rule and in control of the levers of power consisted of a different "ethical race" than the rest of mankind. He equated them and their covetous greed to "morally inferior" predators. At the same time, Pavlov believed these negative traits were somehow inherited and transmitted from generation to generation. Accordingly, he drew a clear and distinct line in the sand dividing society into two groups. Pavlov argued the only way to stop these individuals from corrupting the world was to eliminate their entire "race." In essence, he advocated for a total civil war.⁴⁷ Although the Maximalists never adopted Pavlov's theory as part of the formal program, they still considered him a primary theoretician in the Party. Other Maximalists, such as M.A. Engel'gardt, held similar views. Engel'gardt indicated it would be necessary to eliminate what he

⁴⁵ See Geifman, *Death Orders*, 65.

⁴⁶ Morrissey, "The "Apparel of Innocence,"" 629.

⁴⁷ For an analysis of Pavlov and his ideas, see Geifman, *Death Orders*, 81-83; and Morrissey, "The "Apparel of Innocence,"" 635-36.

estimated to be 12 million land and factory owners, bankers and priests.⁴⁸ The future order of society depended upon it.

Even if Pavlov's ideology did not fully direct the agenda of the Maximalists, it represents how in certain organizations the "martyrology" and the stress revolutionaries earlier placed on moral superiority was substituted with a "language of purification" encouraging violence.⁴⁹ The Maximalists expressed outrage when the SR leaders called for a halt of terrorist activity immediately following the October Manifesto. According to their ideology, parliamentary politics and political reform could not fix society's issues. Only systemic change and a "full-fledged socialist transformation" would free the people.⁵⁰ One Maximalist justified the death of innocent civilians in the attack on Stolypin by indicating they were "figures involved in the cause of the oppression of the people, whether directly or indirectly, and they are not worthy or deserving of sympathy."⁵¹ According to this revolutionary, the victims of the attack were not "innocent" at all. This viewpoint more less insinuates anyone, whether knowingly or not, could be classified as a target for attack simply because of their situation and status in society. Thus, the Maximalists constructed a very binary outlook not too far off from Pavlov's theory. In this manner, they justified large scale attacks and indiscriminate murder in an attempt to cleanse society of perceived enemies in preparation for the oncoming socialist revolution.

⁴⁸ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 83.

⁴⁹ Morrissey, "The "Apparel of Innocence,"" 629.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 630.

⁵¹ This quote is taken from *ibid.*, 631.

The Anarchists

In no other organizations was indiscriminate murder more accepted than among those of the Anarchists. Even though they numbered far fewer than the SRs and the SDs, their terrorism resulted in the majority of the casualties between 1901-1910.⁵² While certain Anarchist leaders like Petr Kropotkin argued against the use of terrorism and its ability to effect change in the sociopolitical order, the majority of Anarchists viewed it as a useful weapon.⁵³ And since no unified Anarchist Party existed, but rather separate groups adhered to the ideology, the use of terrorism was left mostly to the individual. As a central tenet of anarchism, some of these groups believed the application of indiscriminate and reckless violence required no justification. According to the ideology, in order to build a better future, society first needed to be broken apart and its inherent beliefs destroyed. In this manner, the use of violence was employed as a tool to undermine and overthrow the current system. No matter how small the act of terror, it still aided in the takeover of the government and breakdown of society.⁵⁴

Under these circumstances, “violence no longer required immediate and direct justification; anyone wearing a uniform was considered a representative of the government camp and was therefore subject to execution at any moment as an enemy of the people.”⁵⁵ This is how the Anarchists-Individuals proclaimed themselves “free to attack and kill anyone” even if only for “personal gratification” since it “contributed to the destruction of the bourgeois world in its own way.”⁵⁶ The Anarchists commonly targeted everyday policeman. When patrolling the

⁵² This is taken from Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 124-125.

⁵³ See *ibid.*, 125-126.

⁵⁴ See *ibid.*, 128-133.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

streets, they were liable to get acid flung in their faces.⁵⁷ Since they considered the system of capitalism itself an enemy, Anarchists freely attacked factory owners, directors, managers, and merchants. Professionals and specialists of any kind, such as engineers and technicians, were also subject to violence.⁵⁸ The Anarchists thus took ideology to an extreme level; certain radicals attacked individuals who “simply appeared more fortunate in their economic status” and “were relatively well dressed.”⁵⁹ These extremists threw bombs into restaurants, train cars, and theatres simply because the patrons could seemingly afford the fare.⁶⁰

Disgruntled revolutionaries from the SDs or SRs frequently left to fill the ranks of Anarchist groups. Mostly young and restless, and from the lower strata of society, the rebellious nature of these young men and women prevented them from conforming to a structured political organization. Many felt parties like the SDs and the SRs preferred to engage in political debate, which they did not have the patience or desire for, and strayed from the real revolutionary action. Often from working-class backgrounds, those joining with the Anarchists had little education and were unconcerned with intellectual matters.⁶¹ Since on the surface anarchism offered a platform for unrestrained destruction, the ideology could suit their desires without any theoretical backing. It was “entirely typical” an Anarchist “who engaged in casual conversation with a comrade, could not defend his revolutionary views” and “was unaware of the differences among the programs of the existing political parties.”⁶² This situation was not unique to just the Anarchists, but occurred in most revolutionary parties. Former working class men carried out

⁵⁷ See *ibid.*, 131.

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, 132.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁶⁰ Geifman, *Death Orders*, 43.

⁶¹ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 123-125.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 134.

approximately 70 percent of SR terrorist attacks, and this number was even higher in other radical groups.⁶³ In essence, by joining an Anarchist outfit, these individuals put ideology and tactics aside to more or less engage in thrill-seeking revolutionary activity. Therefore, their use of violence had little to do with a conviction terror was tied to the revolutionary struggle of the masses. Some, as one radical put it, held an “extremely obscure perception of the revolution,”⁶⁴ calling for revenge against the government and capitalists referred to in the commoner slang as “scoundrels” and “jerks.”⁶⁵

Expropriations, Thrill-Seeking and Sadism

For certain radicals, the ideology of the party they supported was nothing more than a useful tool to justify their appetites for adventure, riches, and even murder.⁶⁶ As one revolutionary stated: “I cannot live peacefully. I like danger, so as to feel the thrill.”⁶⁷ As has been previously discussed, terrorist units in the SDs and SRs continually violated and ignored their party’s doctrine on the acceptable uses of terrorism. They felt party leaders were too concerned with theoretical issues, when the only effective means to winning the revolution were real action and fighting. At the same time, radicals also used the ideology to justify actions which hardly could be considered aiding the revolutionary struggle. As Anna Geifman stated: “Doctrine is the extremists’ mouthpiece to validate a purpose; it is not the purpose; it is a means, not the

⁶³ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁴ Geifman, *Death Orders*, 59.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 60.

⁶⁶ See Suvorov, “Политический Терроризм в России,” 58-59. He indicated there was a romantic edge drawing in youthful revolutionaries. Also many individuals who were mentally instable joined, and some had mental breakdowns because of the constant pressure and stress of revolutionary activity.

⁶⁷ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 156.

end.”⁶⁸ Revolutionary activity, supported and financed by a party, provided rebellious, uneducated youths the opportunity to act lawlessly as long as it was in the name of the ideology. This created a community of daring individuals who felt anything was permissible, even violence, if cloaked in the ideological language of the party. The goals of the party took a secondary role to individual desires. If tasked with a risky mission, some terrorists questioned why they would sacrifice their lives today for the future of society, believing to do so would be “plainly foolish.”⁶⁹ This does not sound like a dedicated revolutionary, but instead someone exploiting a situation for personal gain. More than willing to risk their lives for the opportunities the revolution provided, many of which were financially motivated, the concept of doing so for the future of society they deemed inconceivable.

Across most organizations, revolutionaries in the twentieth century commonly committed expropriations. Between January 1905 and July 1906, officials recorded close to 2,000 major robberies with political motivations.⁷⁰ The Anarchists often justified expropriations in their ideology. The Beznachal'tsy organization believed true Anarchists satisfied their basic material needs of survival by stealing from the wealthy.⁷¹ They legitimized theft of this nature by linking this criminal act to the destruction of capitalist society. From this type of outlook, “many anarchist groups deteriorated into semicriminal gangs occupied primarily with robbery and looting for personal profit,” and “they merely used anarchist rhetoric to justify pure banditry.”⁷² In Warsaw, “Jewish gangsters disguised as “anarcho-Communists” broke into affluent

⁶⁸ Geifman, *Death Orders*, 69.

⁶⁹ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 160.

⁷⁰ For this statistic see Suvorov, “Политический Терроризм в России,” 55.

⁷¹ See *ibid.*, 133.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 136.

residences, “expropriating” money and whatever else struck their fancy.”⁷³ The chaotic atmosphere at this time provided an opportune moment for this type of activity, and its recurrence created difficulty to discern the difference between a criminal and a revolutionary.

Whereas the SDs and SRs primarily stole from banks and other institutions, Anarchists had no problem stealing from individuals. They chose victims from the bourgeoisie based on their perceptions of wealth and status. Stealing from members of high society could be justified in the ideology because certain Anarchists classified them as mortal enemies promoting a capitalist system. Once again, countless individuals abused the ideology and took it to the extreme. There are recorded occurrences of self-proclaimed Anarchists stealing and terrorizing the poor, both on purpose and by accident. In one instance, a group of Anarchists bombed a café in Odessa on December 17, 1905. They effectively killed 12 people, destroyed the building, and made the front page news. If they intended to target the bourgeoisie, however, they failed since the café was actually a second-class establishment frequented by none other than the intelligentsia.⁷⁴ In another instance in Odessa, a group of Anarchists robbed an old woman forced to selling lemons on the street. In the end, they murdered her simply for putting up a fuss.⁷⁵ Accordingly, Anarchists perceived these crimes “as progressive steps contributing to the destabilization of the sociopolitical order,” when in truth they had little to do with the end goal of revolution.⁷⁶

Members of the SDs and the SRs also committed similar crimes and were drawn to this type of work for the opportunities it provided. The SR Central Committee approved of the

⁷³ Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 26.

⁷⁴ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 133.

⁷⁵ See *ibid.*, 135.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

expropriation of funds and weapons belonging to the state as long as the Central Committee planned and directed the activities. Nevertheless, SR terrorists often disregarded this statute by continually expropriating private property without any direction by the proper channels. Because these funds were vital to the finances of the organization, the Party either attempted to cover up this type of banditry or ignored it altogether. The proliferation of expropriations, however, harmed the organization's prestige as a true revolutionary outfit.⁷⁷

Of the SDs, Lenin was the only leader willing to decree robbery acceptable in the name of the revolution.⁷⁸ The RSDRP Stockholm Congress in 1906 rejected expropriations of private property, similar to the SRs. They feared this type of activity would make the Party look like its ranks consisted of bandits instead of revolutionaries.⁷⁹ But this decree did not stop individuals, particularly the Bolsheviks, from committing these acts. They attacked banks, post offices, factory administration buildings, liquor stores, and diners. They did so typically without notifying leadership, and to the fear of the Party, "their actions quickly came to bear a strong resemblance to those of common criminals."⁸⁰ The recurrence of Bolshevik expropriations of both private and state property soon gave them a steep financial advantage compared to others, most noticeably the Mensheviks. Because of these events, the Mensheviks decried the use of expropriations, and in 1907 the Fifth Party Congress outlawed all involvement in terrorist activities including banditry. This ban had little practical effect on the Bolsheviks, however, as they continued to commit these acts by claiming the terrorists were not members of the Party, even though the majority of the spoils went directly to Lenin.⁸¹

⁷⁷ See *ibid.*, 75-81.

⁷⁸ See *ibid.*, 112.

⁷⁹ See *ibid.*, 112-113.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸¹ See *ibid.*, 118-120.

As banditry spread amongst the revolutionaries and across parties, the activity degenerated to a point where certain individuals clearly used revolutionary ideology as a scheme to get rich. Anarchists acted like “gangster bands, occupied primarily with robbery, extortion, and looting for personal profit.”⁸² Some “freedom fighters” committed expropriations to live and sustain “corrupt” lifestyles consisting of heavy alcohol consumption and debauchery.⁸³ The ability to steal large amounts of money in the name of the revolution drew seedy characters with criminal backgrounds. They used the ideology simply to satisfy their gluttonous appetite. Increasingly, these individuals failed to deliver their spoils to the party originally stolen for, and instead split up the money amongst themselves.⁸⁴ In 1906, a Georgian Socialist-Federalist revolutionary named Kereselidze and his crew expropriated 315,000 rubles from the Dushet Treasury. Instead of giving these funds to the Party, or even splitting it up with the members of his outfit, Kereselidze took the money and moved to Geneva to retire and hang up his revolutionary jacket.⁸⁵ Due to prolific examples like Kereselidze, the public increasingly regarded revolutionaries in a far more negative light.

As radicals rivaled common criminals in their conduct, the prestige revolutionary parties once held began to significantly diminish. As noted, by 1907 the SDs outlawed expropriations and terrorism, not only because the sole benefactor was the Bolshevik faction, but also because of the harm it was causing to the Party’s image. After the ban on expropriations, the Bolsheviks still prepared and conducted operations, such as one in Tiflis which they projected to haul in two to four million rubles. While this operation never took place, they understood the potential

⁸² Geifman, *Death Orders*, 76.

⁸³ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 163.

⁸⁴ See Geifman, *Death Orders*, 78.

⁸⁵ See *ibid.*, 79.

consequences of it, and were prepared to “renounce the practice publicly with the hope of saving the party’s image.”⁸⁶ The SRs attempted to combat this felonious element by expelling criminals from the Party.⁸⁷ The Anarchists, since there was no central party leadership to denounce them, were by far the worst of the organizations where criminality flourished. By 1908, some Anarchists admitted the early idealism of their movement had waned and “drowned in a sea of banditry.” It is no wonder then why other radicals generally referred to the Anarchists as “the scum of the revolution.”⁸⁸

While greed influenced criminals to become revolutionaries, others drawn to radical parties could be classified as mentally unfit, insane, or sadistic. There are countless recorded instances of unprovoked brutality by revolutionaries amongst each other and their victims: these include physical beatings, torture, and killing for fun.⁸⁹ “It became favored entertainment” for certain revolutionaries “to open fire at soldiers or Cossacks and to throw bombs into the police barracks,” or “throw sulfuric acid in the face of the first policeman encountered on the street.”⁹⁰ In one instance, a Maximalist rang the doorbell at the apartment of a policeman, and then shot randomly leaving three dead.⁹¹ In undertaking a profession where “all means were permissible” as long as they seemingly advanced the revolutionary cause, radical organizations provided an outlet in political terrorism for those inclined to sadistic behavior.

⁸⁶ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 116.

⁸⁷ See *ibid.*, 77.

⁸⁸ See *ibid.*, 152.

⁸⁹ For specific examples of this type of behavior, see *ibid.*, 166-173.

⁹⁰ Geifman, *Death Orders*, 32.

⁹¹ See *ibid.*, 32.

Living in an environment surrounded by death and the fear of being caught by the police had a major psychological impact on some revolutionaries.⁹² Existing in complete isolation from society, radicals lost the ability to relate to other human beings. The act of terror was their only association with livelihood. The Maximalist Tat'iana Lenot'eva shot and killed a 70-year-old man staying in the same hotel as her because he resembled the former Minister of the Interior she had once been plotting to assassinate.⁹³ Sofia Khrenkova, a mother of three, became psychotic after her arrest, and set herself on fire in a prison cell.⁹⁴

For those causing bloodshed, if at first difficult, submersion in this environment led to normalization. Soon, revolutionaries increasingly expressed indifference and disassociation to violence. In one example, several revolutionaries lured a suspected traitor away from town, and without giving him a chance to defend himself, took turns stabbing the man with a knife, with each perpetrator passing the victim on to the next. The official report indicated they “enjoyed cutting his throat” and later “attempted to decapitate him.”⁹⁵ Some celebrated terrorism as a sport, competing with others in their overall body counts, calling themselves “woodchoppers.”⁹⁶ This utter dehumanization of individuals, legitimized by ideology, and exploding in the midst of the revolution, turned victims into numbers, and revolutionaries into executioners.

Anna Geifman contended the cruelty and indifference to murder revolutionary terrorists expressed was unique in Russia to the twentieth century.⁹⁷ Thanks to the work of

⁹² For a discussion on those whose living circumstances impacted their psyches, see *ibid.*, 106-120; and see Suvorov, “Политический Терроризм в России,” 58-59, for a list of revolutionaries who would end up in mental hospitals and those who committed suicide.

⁹³ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 170.

⁹⁴ See *ibid.*, 170.

⁹⁵ See *ibid.*, 166.

⁹⁶ See Geifman, *Death Orders*, 32. Geifman also stated: “The extremists often challenged and ‘raced’ one another to see who would commit the greatest number of murders, often exhibiting jealousy over others’ skill.” See pg. 31.

⁹⁷ Geifman in *Death Orders* argued that this was one of the classifications that differentiated nineteenth-century revolutionaries from the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, targets were chosen based on their use of

Richard Pipes and Norman Naimark, however, this type of behavior has proven to be evident in the nineteenth century as well. Both scholars discussed how revolutionaries prior to the turn of the century used ideology as a justification to commit violence for the sake of violence itself. Naimark pointed out how the “psychologically unstable activists of the 1880s gravitated to both the terrorist and Jacobin solutions.”⁹⁸ Similarly, he indicated the foot soldiers actually committing terrorist actions, or “the bomb-throwers and the spotters” as he called them, “cared little for ideology and were motivated simply by “extreme hatred” for the government.”⁹⁹ Pipes went even further by suggesting the terrorists typically “displayed suicidal tendencies” and “gave no evidence of feeling remorse about killing people who have personally done them no harm.”¹⁰⁰ He drew the conclusion the terrorist factions fashioned an atmosphere where violence for its own sake could proliferate. He stated:

A sizable body of the young is seized by an overpowering destructive urge which, at the same time, exhibits self-destructive symptoms. When this happens, the ostensible objective—an ideal political and social order—serves but as a pretext for resort to violence: violence, ostensibly the means to an end, becomes an end in itself.¹⁰¹

The wielding of ideology precipitated the escalation of violence in 1905-1910. It increasingly justified more and more extreme terrorist and criminal behavior. Without ideology, these events could only be perceived as criminal acts, some of which bordered on sadism. The fact radicals committed them in the name of a revolution, however, made these men not the gangsters and bandits they should appropriately be called, but instead “freedom fighters.”

Indeed, the Anarchists were the worst perpetrators using ideology to legitimize almost any act of

repressive measures and their vindictive nature in the eyes of the revolutionaries, whereas in the twentieth century all scruples were more or less thrown out the window. See pg. 13.

⁹⁸ Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, 243.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁰⁰ Pipes, *The Degaev Affair*, 14-15.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

violence, no matter how remote or extreme. Similarly, the Maximalists' dichotomous view of the world permitted and encouraged large scale terrorism, including the murder of innocent civilians. At the same time, the individuals committing these actions fit a very specific profile: young, restless, impoverished, adventure seeking, uneducated, and some even mentally unstable. The SRs and the SDs specifically sought these type of men who were "ready for everything."¹⁰² These individuals supported by party ideology were paramount in conducting the terrorist activity which wreaked havoc on the government in the early twentieth century.

The works of Naimark and Pipes, as well as Martin Miller's research on "ordinary terrorism," have shown us the sadistic and criminal behavior of the revolutionaries was not isolated to the first decade of the twentieth century. Nor should we then assume the atmosphere and ideology used to contribute to this behavior was contained to this time period. The utter disregard for human life is similarly seen in Russia during the state terror of the 1930s. Accordingly, parallels appear between these two time periods, even though they represent different forms and categorizations of terror.¹⁰³ It is probable Stalin, as a young Bolshevik who partook in the revolutionary fervor rampant in 1905-1908, learned a great deal about the uses of ideologically driven violence at this time. And it is for these reasons Anna Geifman stated:

"It is worth speculating whether it is simply a historical coincidence that in the twentieth century, which has been dominated by totalitarian ideology and persecutions...the initial traits of totalitarianism were in evidence among the revolutionary extremists in Russia, and in particular among the Maximalists."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Ibid., 113.

¹⁰³ See Ariel Merari, "Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5 (1993): 213-251. Here, the author categorized different forms of political violence. Accordingly, Stalin's state terror of the 1930s would be classified as "States against Citizens" and a form of "Political Violence," whereas the pre-revolutionary terrorism would be classified as more or less a combination of the "Leninist Revolution" and "Guerilla War" forms of "Insurgent Violence."

¹⁰⁴ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 83.

The next chapter thus discusses Stalin's involvement in the terrorism and banditry of the first decade of the twentieth century, and proposes ways this shaped him moving forward.

CHAPTER III: STALIN THE GANGSTER, 1905-1908

On June 13, 1907, revolutionaries attacked two mail coaches carrying hundreds of thousands of rubles destined for the Tiflis branch of the State Bank. Leading the charge was the notorious Simon “Kamo” Ter-Petrosyan, a close friend of Stalin’s since they grew up together in the town of Gori. Twenty members comprised the outfit. Most of them were part of Stalin’s battle squad. The revolutionaries tossed multiple bombs; Kamo threw two of his own which annihilated three guards, two bank employees, and many innocent bystanders. After neutralizing the threat of the guards, he entered the coach and stole 250,000 rubles, a spectacular sum for a heist, and the largest the Bolsheviks would conduct. Fleeing by train with his pretend bride (a member of the gang in disguise), Kamo personally delivered the money to Lenin in Finland. All in all, the radicals murdered three dozen people in the heist and wounded up to 50 others.¹

The Tiflis robbery is one well documented account of an expropriation where Stalin’s role was clear; although he did not participate, “he was instrumental in plotting the heist,” a specialty of which he thrived at between the years 1905 and 1908.² Along with picking members of the raid who were part of his gang known as “the Outfit,” he also groomed a bank clerk and courted a friend working for the banking mail office. Some observers, including P.A. Pavlenko, an author during the dictator’s lifetime, indicated Stalin had attacked the carriage himself and had been wounded by a bomb.³ While this has yet to be disproven, it is highly unlikely Stalin took part in the robbery, the same as many other expropriations he conducted from afar.⁴

¹ See Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 113-114.

² Ibid., 113; Stalin is documented as openly admitting that he presided over the operation according to the unpublished diaries in the Georgian archives of his sister-in-law, Sashiko Svanidze. See Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 9.

³ See *ibid.*, 11.

⁴ See *ibid.*, 12.

Stalin's life before becoming the undisputed leader of the Soviet Union has been analyzed more thoroughly than almost any other state leader. Until 1990 and the opening of the Soviet archives, however, scholars more or less speculated his role in certain events, given the limitations of primary evidence. The fall of the Soviet Union and the opening of the archives generated a renewed interest in Stalin in all facets of his life. Researchers could now comparatively verify or discredit details which were one time surmised. With this plethora of information in the hands of scholars, little research has been conducted on Stalin's role from 1905-1908 as a Red Brigade leader and trusted revolutionary terrorist of Lenin. The one exception to this is Simon Sebag Montefiore's *Young Stalin* published in 2007.

One reason there is little scholarship analyzing this period of his life can be ascribed to Stalin's efforts to hide it from the record. Since no one claimed responsibility for the Tiflis heist described above, the Mensheviks launched investigations to find out the cause, and the two inside-men recruited by Stalin gave up his name. Though no recorded evidence of his involvement existed, the Tiflis Committee expelled him from the Party.⁵ This fact has been confirmed in an article written in 1918 by the Menshevik Martov.⁶ Stalin needed the credentials of a long standing Bolshevik in order to defeat Trotsky and secure his succession as leader after Lenin's death in 1924. Thus, he did everything he could to conceal his role in the expropriations, even launching a libel case against Martov. Accordingly, Stalin conducted an effort to expunge from the official record any known mention of his activity in the assassinations and robberies

⁵ There is reason to believe that he was never banned by the Social Democratic Party itself but banned from just the local Tiflis branch, since the split between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks by this point was strong and it would be difficult for the Mensheviks to expel a Bolshevik without an outcry. The Mensheviks wanted to put an end to expropriations for political reasons, and there is archival proof that they led an investigation into the Tiflis heist and Stalin himself was interviewed. See Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 184-185.

⁶ See Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 267-268. At this time, the Mensheviks wanted to undermine Bolshevik rule and attempted to do so by discrediting the leadership.

between 1905 and 1908.⁷ Such was the case with Kote Tsintsadze's diary. A chief gangster in one of Stalin's units, and later a staunch opponent, Tsintsadze wrote a detailed description of Stalin's role as a Red Brigade leader in his published memoirs in 1924. When they were republished in 1927, Stalin had already consolidated power, and ordered the deletion of the passages which referenced these events.⁸ His role as a revolutionary terrorist thus began to disappear, and for this reason little evidence exists on the topic, discouraging further research.

Simon Sebag Montefiore has successfully brought to light the extent to which Stalin had become a "gangster" in his activities from 1905-1908. Drawing from memoirs and sources in the Georgian archives, as well as what became available after the opening of the Soviet archives, Montefiore constructed a map of Stalin's activities during this time period. According to Montefiore, Stalin not only directed expropriations but also ordered political assassinations.⁹ Stephen Kotkin, on the other hand, claimed while Stalin was undoubtedly involved in "hostage taking for ransom, protection rackets, piracy, and, perhaps, a few assassinations," his involvement in planned murder was minor compared to others in the Caucasus.¹⁰ Moreover, he hinted Montefiore's work romanticized Stalin's exploits as a revolutionary fighter during these early years. Even if this is the case, Stalin himself stated during his time as a Red Brigade leader: "I received my second baptism in revolutionary combat."¹¹ While some of the conclusions Montefiore drew about Stalin's direct participation might only come from single sources, thus

⁷ See Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 15.

⁸ See *ibid.*, 15.

⁹ Montefiore in *Young Stalin* argued that in one example of a political assassination, Stalin worked with the Mensheviks to order a hit on a Georgian General. Reportedly, one of the hitmen was Kamo. See pgs. 149-150.

¹⁰ See Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 115.

¹¹ For this quote see *ibid.*, 115.

making their accuracy hard to confirm, nevertheless he painted a picture which is hard to deny of an early terrorist surrounding himself with like-minded criminals.

Lenin's Trusted Terrorist Leader

During 1905-1908, Stalin primarily worked as a leader of Bolshevik terrorist factions in the Caucasus. Similar to other revolutionary extremists during this time, his outfits conducted large and small expropriations, created protection rackets, kidnapped wealthy individuals and held them for ransom, and committed other feats which could fill the Party coffers. "Stalin became the effective godfather of a small but useful fund-raising operation that really resembled a moderately successful Mafia family."¹² The members of his gangs exemplified the typical revolutionary type in the first decade of the twentieth century; for the most part, they consisted of uneducated criminals and thrill-seekers willing to kill at moment's notice. At the same time, the radicals in his units used ideology to justify their exploits. During these years, Stalin underwent his true revolutionary education, and we can see how the foundation for the Great Terror he unleashed in the 1930s was starting to be built.

The only direct participation with expropriations Stalin might have been involved in was the piracy of the steamship *Tsarevich Giorgi* in 1906. Fleeing the scene of the crime, the robbers hid in a safe house which one revolutionary and his father, Kamshish Gvaramia, owned and were residing. As an old man, Gvaramia stated he was tasked to "hide the pockmarked chieftain of the gang that held up the mail-ship off Cape Kodori who subsequently became leader of this great country."¹³ Later, locals of Abkhazia, a region the bandits passed through, told the historian Fasil

¹² Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 196.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 163.

Iskander how Stalin ordered the murders of the unreliable gangsters in the heist and fled with the cash on packhorses to catch the train to Tiflis.¹⁴ There is some credibility to this statement, since Stalin was known on multiple occasions to have transported stolen cash by packhorses across the countryside. After the heist, the police description of the pirate chieftain resembled Stalin in looks and mannerisms.¹⁵ This information, along with the fact Stalin was familiar with the area and the dates fit perfectly with an absence in his active schedule, led Montefiore to conclude “there is no documentary proof of Stalin’s role, but his participation is at the very least highly probable.”¹⁶ Other memoirs of the period, however, claim Stalin did not participate in the raid, but rather organized it like countless others.¹⁷

Similar to a mob boss, Stalin typically kept himself removed from the ordinary gangsters, issuing his instructions through one or two trusted allies, such as Kamo.¹⁸ His units were responsible for “conducting shakedowns, currency counterfeiting, extortion, bank robberies, piracy and protection rackets.”¹⁹ Given this unlawful activity, Stalin continually felt the need to emphasize to both comrades and others he and those in his outfit were “revolutionaries through and through, not criminals.”²⁰ Like so many other radicals at this time, Stalin and his units employed ideology to legitimize their illegal actions and conduct criminal activities; however, unlike other supposed revolutionaries during these years, Stalin gave the majority of the spoils of his exploits to the Party. In fact, he and others like Kamo showed little interest in money, and lived in poor and wretched conditions. Often, Stalin would be seen in the bitter winter months

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, 163.

¹⁵ See *ibid.*, 163.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, 163.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

without a proper coat, and would have to write to fellow comrades to borrow as little as five rubles.²¹ Though from time to time he would spend some of the riches on a wild party, Stalin did not hesitate to order the execution of any gangster caught stealing from the Bolsheviks.²²

Given his conduct, Stalin should be considered a dedicated revolutionary, but the same cannot be said of the rest of his gang who shared numerous traits with common criminals. The fact Stalin is often recorded as articulating the he was a “revolutionary not a criminal,” indicates his awareness the public often perceived his actions as common banditry. This is particularly true given the exorbitant amount of expropriations occurring in Russia at this time under the name of the revolution, which radicals used to personally enrich themselves. When forming his gangs, Stalin did not necessarily care about an individual’s dedication to the Party, but first and foremost looked for traits distinguished in the underworld. In creating the outfit he called “the Mauserists,” Stalin sought after “hotheads” and “cutthroats,” and only when he found these individuals did he surround them “with the aura of revolutionary fighters.”²³ Accordingly, the criminal thus became the revolutionary and often only in name.

Criminals were often the only ones willing to perform the violent conduct the revolution demanded. Stalin understood the importance of these individuals, given he believed victory would be achieved through a mass uprising. In July 1905, he called for the creation of armed fighting squads in the Party:

Hence, our committees must at once, forthwith, proceed to arm the people locally, to set up special groups to arrange this matter, to organize district groups for the purpose of procuring arms, to organize workshops for the manufacture of different kinds of explosives, to draw up plans for the seizing of state and private stores of arms and arsenals... In addition to increasing stock of arms and organizing their procurement and manufacture, it is necessary to devote most serious attention to the task of organizing

²¹ See *ibid.*, 207.

²² See *ibid.*, 153.

²³ See *ibid.*, 195-196.

fighting squads of every kind for the purpose of utilizing the arms that are being procured... The armed fighting squads, ready to go out into the streets and take their place at the head of the masses of the people at any moment, can easily achieve the object set by the Third Congress.²⁴

Stalin argued radical terrorist activity, not politicking, would win the revolution. In a speech in 1906 he stated: “The victory of the people must be achieved mainly in the street, by street fighting and not by the Duma, not by talking in the Duma.”²⁵ In a 1905 call to workers, he attempted to rally the masses by asserting: “Not empty phrases, not senseless ‘self-arming,’ but real arming and an armed uprising,” this alone can “lead to the defeat of the government.”²⁶ He understood Bloody Sunday provided “glaring proof that arms must be countered only by arms,”²⁷ and “you cannot stand up against bullets with bare hands!”²⁸ Similar to the Maximalists, he rejected the SR decree demanding a halt to terrorist activity after the Tsar issued the October Manifesto in 1905. He considered it a poor attempt by the autocrat to prevent the oncoming socialist revolution which required systemic changes. “Down with the State Duma!” his voice resounded in reaction to it.²⁹ This outlook and a characteristic “detached magnetism” attracted “amoral, unbounded psychopaths” to rally around his cause.³⁰ Stalin’s childhood friend and closest comrade Kamo best represented this type of revolutionary terrorist.

²⁴ Josef Stalin, “Armed Insurrection and our Tactics, July 15, 1905,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed July 13, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1905/07/15.htm>.

²⁵ Josef Stalin, “The Present Situation and the Unity Congress of the Workers’ Party,” *Marxist Internet Archive*, accessed July 11, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1906/x01/x01.htm>.

²⁶ Josef Stalin, “To All Workers,” *Marxist Internet Archive*, accessed July 12, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1905/10/19.htm>.

²⁷ See Josef Stalin, “Two Clashes (Concerning January 9), January 7, 1906,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed July 13, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1906/01/07.htm>.

²⁸ Josef Stalin, “The Present Situation and the Unity Congress of the Workers’ Party, 1906,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed July 13, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1906/x01/x01.htm>.

²⁹ See Josef Stalin, “To All the Workers, October 19, 1905,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed July 13, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1905/10/19.htm>.

³⁰ See Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 7.

Kamo and the New Revolutionary Terrorist

A notorious radical extremist, and by various accounts psychologically unbalanced with sadistic tendencies, Kamo nonetheless was the model fighter Stalin coveted. He began as a revolutionary bandit in February 1906, stealing around 7,000 rubles from a bank coach.³¹ A month later, on a busy street in Kutais, he assaulted another bank coach, this time killing the driver and wounding the cashier. After this first taste of blood, Kamo's heroic and daring feats became that of legend, garnering the attention and appraisal of both Stalin and Lenin. His comrades raised questions of his mental stability, however, due to his indifference to and propensity for unprovoked violence and murder. Kamo strategized to cleanse the Bolsheviks of potential police informers by staging a fake arrest of leading Party activists, torturing them, and killing those who talked or were perceived as cowards.³² "The personality of Kamo presents a striking example of an individual whose derangement became a catalyst for violent behavior that in the prevailing circumstances of the era happened to take revolutionary form."³³ Outside the revolutionary environment, those attracted to this type of brutal conduct would have been labelled "criminals" or perhaps "criminally insane." But radicals like Stalin used these individuals by classifying their activities as "revolutionary" and thus justified by the ideology. Lenin even recognized Kamo most likely suffered from a psychiatric disorder,³⁴ but this did not

³¹ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 113.

³² See *ibid.*, 166-167. Later, in 1918, as a member of the Red Guards, Kamo would successfully carry out this proposal. Geifman indicated: "During a training exercise, the prospective members of his terrorist group were attacked, taken captive, and brutally interrogated by a group they assumed to be a band of White Soldiers, but who in reality were Kamo's assistants in disguise wearing enemy epaulets. The captors flogged their prisoners and staged fake hangings, and a number of the Bolsheviks broke under the torture, thus justifying in Kamo's eyes his method of separating the "real Communists" from the cowards." See pg. 256.

³³ *Ibid.*, 167.

³⁴ See *ibid.*, 168.

stop him from employing the outlaw to do what he did best—steal and murder—making him in Lenin’s eyes “a truly amazing person.”³⁵

Kamo exemplified Anna Geifman’s reference of the “revolutionary of a new type.” This sort of character thrived in the atmosphere of the first decade of twentieth-century Russia. He personified many of the traits other radicals possessed during this time, setting them apart from the revolutionaries of earlier generations.³⁶ Kamo hailed from an impoverished background, like so many other of the terrorists, and exploited the opportunity of revolution to escape this lifestyle. Stalin also came from poverty; his father was a cobbler. Historians contend their respective fathers abused both Stalin and Kamo growing up, which may have influenced their psyche and capacity for violence.³⁷ Expelled from school at the age of 14, Kamo had little formal education.³⁸ This was common among revolutionaries in Stalin’s combat units, who would have “never been seen with a book” in their hands.³⁹ At the same time, while his peers considered Stalin a smart and studious student, the Gori Theological Seminary expelled him before he could graduate. Individuals like Kamo also sought adventure and were willing to risk their lives in the fervor of the revolution. Moreover, these characteristics made them more prone to violence as long as it was recognized or rewarded.

Stalin’s intellectual capacity and gift for organization helped him rise above the common revolutionary terrorist. Lenin revered him for his meticulousness and attention to detail. Clearly,

³⁵ See Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 7.

³⁶ For a description see Geifman, *Death Orders*, 3-10. The author concluded that these revolutionaries were different because they were from impoverished backgrounds, were reckless, had little education, did not understand party theory, but nonetheless were willing to commit murder in the name of the Party.

³⁷ Robert Tucker in *Stalin as Revolutionary* contended that the abuse from his father aided in the formation of Stalin’s characteristic vileness. He stated: “He [Stalin] also developed the vindictiveness that would characterize him later in life, and became a rebel against paternal authority in all guises: undeserved dreadful beating made the boy as hard and heartless as the father himself was.” See pg. 73.

³⁸ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 167.

³⁹ See *ibid.*, 115.

he was no mere common criminal, as he so often stated, but rather a devoted revolutionary. His comrades even indicated he was “married to Bolshevism.”⁴⁰ But at the same time, he surrounded himself with those, like Kamo, who were reckless and bloodthirsty and willing to commit atrocities for an ideology they did not wholly understand. The revolution meant something different to them than to Stalin and Lenin. For the bandits, pirates, and assassins, it provided them the opportunity to seek thrills and adventure while being justified to act outside the law. Kamo did not use the ideology to steal for his own benefit like countless other revolutionaries, but instead took advantage of the occasion because he thrived in the role and received recognition and praise for it. Some comrades mentioned members in Kamo’s group “literally worshipped” the Bolshevik leaders and “would have followed Lenin even against the entire party.”⁴¹ They expressed little desire to learn or study theory, but instead craved action. Moreover, this was reason for Kamo, a person with little knowledge of rudimentary Marxism, to deal with controversy by relying on violence.⁴² Hence when a Bolshevik and Menshevik were debating about an agrarian issue, he pulled the Bolshevik aside, and while pointing at the other, said, “What are you arguing with him for? Let me cut his throat.”⁴³ Theory meant little when faced with a knife or revolver.

Political Assassination and Mass Murder

Not only did Stalin oversee expropriations and other forms of banditry, he also planned assassinations. In 1905, Stalin worked with the Mensheviks in ordering a hit on General Fyodor

⁴⁰ See Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 15.

⁴¹ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 115.

⁴² See *ibid.*, 113-115.

⁴³ See Geifman, *Death Orders*, 66.

Griizanov in Tiflis.⁴⁴ In another instance, a member of one of his Red Brigade units indicated Stalin had commanded them to kill “as many of the Black Hundreds,” as possible.⁴⁵ While Stalin ordered the assassinations of individuals obedient to the state, he also monitored the followers of his own Party. He directed the executions of anyone acting outside the will of the Party, whether as a police agent or thief of Party funds. Bachua Kupriashvili, a member of “the Outfit,” stated: “On the initiative and orders of Stalin... Our tasks were procuring arms, organizing prison escapes, holding up banks and arsenals, and *killing traitors*.”⁴⁶ On one occasion, Davrichewy, the chief of the military wing of the Socialists-Federalists, witnessed Stalin command Kamo to murder a revolutionary bandit accused of stealing from the Party.⁴⁷ While there is little evidence to prove Stalin was regularly involved in assassinations, there is enough to show on more than one occasion he organized and ordered them.

Even though there are no recorded instances during this time of Stalin assassinating opponents himself, many of those he interacted with on a daily basis, his closest comrades in arms, were murderers. He was “always seen in the company of cutthroats, blackmailers, and robbers.”⁴⁸ It was no accident Stalin was involved with these characters. Existing within the revolutionary fervor, where political violence could thrive, he viewed these men as the true soldiers of the revolution. Stalin existed in this world of killers and their victims. In the ordering of assassinations, he had his first taste of blood, even if it not done by his own hand.

⁴⁴ See Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 150.

⁴⁵ See *ibid.*, 196. The pro-autocratic Black Hundreds and the revolutionaries often engaged in violence that resulted in death.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 151. Italics added for emphasis.

⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, 153.

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, 204.

Similar to how the Maximalists and Anarchists used ideology to commit indiscriminate murder, the formations for this type of thinking were visible in Stalin's words and actions. The Maximalists created a dichotomous world pitting one side against another, and used this outlook to cleanse society of enemies on a large scale. Likewise, in 1905, Stalin stated: "In our times only two ideologies can exist: bourgeois and socialist."⁴⁹ And also, "Two big armies have entered the arena—the army of the proletarians and the army of the bourgeoisie—and the struggle between these two armies embraces the whole of our social life."⁵⁰ Later in the year, he argued these two classes were engaged in a "life-and-death struggle," the results of which could only be a "decisive clash between the two."⁵¹ And "whoever tries to sit between two stools betrays the revolution. Those who are not for us are against us!"⁵² Given this type of rhetoric, Stalin viewed the world in a binary lens, similar to the Maximalists, where no room existed for neutrality. He categorized the population in groups of loyalists and enemies. These classifications set the framework for labelling "enemies of people" in the 1930s and the subsequent murder of millions of innocent citizens.

The pre-revolutionary situation in Russia was ripe with the dehumanization not only of victims but perpetrators of crimes as well. In such a chaotic setting, conceptions of morality more and more become distorted as the violence increases.

The rank-and-file, recruited for homicide and dispatched to spill blood for the sake of a subversive organization or terrorist state, are conditioned to perceive their victims as

⁴⁹ Josef Stalin, "Briefly about Disagreement in the Party, May 1905," *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed July 12, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1905/05/x01.htm>.

⁵⁰ Josef Stalin, "The Proletarian Class and the Proletarian Party (Concerning Paragraph One of the Party Rules), January 1, 1905, *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed July 12, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1905/01/01.htm>.

⁵¹ Josef Stalin, "Tiflis, November 20, 1905," *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed July 10, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1905/11/20.htm>.

⁵² See Josef Stalin, "The Present Situation and the Unity Congress of the Workers' Party, 1906."

inanimate targets of annihilation. Before the terrorist is capable of slaughter, he is dehumanized into a mechanism of destruction.⁵³

One has to be habituated to killing before doing so, and the atmosphere of the revolution, along with radical ideology, provided the catalyst for this behavior. Individuals became lost in the rampant terror and violence obfuscating their vision and notions of normalcy. Supposed revolutionaries turned into rabid killing machines.

Once terrorism increased in scale between 1905-1910, the public started to view this activity as more or less commonplace. Seeing violence in the streets and reading about it daily in the newspapers, Russians gradually became desensitized. Similarly, the empathy or sympathy of the terrorists towards their victims soon disappeared. At first radicals targeted only those pre-conceived as “enemies,” but as the violence spread, so did the victims which more and more included innocent people. As Stalin stated: “What can we do? One can’t pick a rose without pricking oneself on a thorn. Leaves fall from the trees in autumn—but fresh ones grow in the spring.”⁵⁴ Given this outlook, individuals radicals injured or killed, even when innocent, were not victims of the terrorists, but of the natural progression of the revolution. In this environment, “human life was cheapened” and was “not worth a penny.”⁵⁵ The more an individual experienced death, the more their humanity left them, and their capacity for destruction only increased. Stalin learned how to kill in these early years of the revolution. He understood the type of environment necessary to commit these atrocities. And he performed them knowing his actions were justified by the ideology he whole-heartedly believed in.

⁵³ Geifman, *Death Orders*, 7.

⁵⁴ This quote is taken from Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 154.

⁵⁵ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 39.

Stalin's involvement in the pre-revolutionary terrorism during the years 1905-1908 significantly impacted his development as a revolutionary. During this time, he began to directly experience the extent ideology could be used to commit murder and other atrocities. It is little wonder then for Stalin as "one of the first professional revolutionaries, the underground was his natural habitat."⁵⁶ In some ways, even after consolidating power as the supreme leader of the Soviet Union, Stalin never left the criminal underground. The gangsters surrounding him as a Red Brigade leader resembled those forming his inner circle once in power, ruthlessly obeying and carrying out his orders of terror. Individuals like Stalin thrive in an environment desensitized to violence where ideology trumps morality. This is where he underwent his true revolutionary education. And this is where he initially developed the capacity to murder millions of innocent people in the name of socialism.

⁵⁶ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 10.

CHAPTER IV: THE TERROR OF THE 1930s

During a summer day in 1923, Stalin, the Old Bolshevik Lev Kamenev, and the director of the secret police Felix Dzerzhinsky, amicably conversed over a bottle of wine. By then, the bulk of the fighting during the Russian Civil War had already ceased, and the Bolsheviks succeeded in securing power under the guidance and directive of Lenin and the war hero Trotsky. The men, speaking freely, discussed things they enjoyed most in life, and once it came to Stalin's turn he said: "The greatest delight is to mark one's enemy, prepare everything, avenge oneself thoroughly, and then go to sleep."¹ Whether Stalin spoke these words in honesty or to cause a stir is more or less irrelevant. As uncontested leader of the Soviet Union he pursued this course over and over again. Trotsky, after recording this instance in his diary once Kamenev related the story to him, became one of the countless victims of Stalin's terror. Unlike the millions of others who perished in labor camps, the extreme conditions of prisons, shot by firing squads, or under torture in an investigation chamber, Trotsky met his demise in Mexico from the ice pick of a Soviet agent stabbing him in the head. Stalin's confession, if it can be called such, came to be known amongst the Party as his "theory of sweet revenge."²

There are two schools of thought regarding the state terror of the Stalin regime: the totalitarian and revisionist models. The totalitarian paradigm, supported by scholars such as Robert Conquest, Roy Medvedev, Hannah Arendt, and Oleg Khlevniuk, contends Stalin implemented and oversaw the terror throughout all phases.³ On the other hand, revisionist

¹ This quote is taken from Leon Trotsky in *Trotsky's Diary in Exile, 1935* (New York: Atheneum, 1963), 64.

² See Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, 211.

³ See respectively Conquest, *The Great Terror*; Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The origins and consequences of Stalinism*, trans. Colleen Taylor (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1971); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Harcourt, Inc., 1976); Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *Master of the House: Stalin and His Inner Circle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). In this work, the author contested the views of revisionist theorists. He stated that "theories about a loss of central control over the course of mass repression, and about the role of regional leaders in initiating the terror simply are not supported by historical record." See pg. xix. Also, see Barry McLoughlin and

scholars⁴ such as J. Arch Getty, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Roberta Manning argue the repression, while implemented from above, was also influenced and directed from below.⁵ According to the latter school, local officials had more control over the situation than mere servants, and Stalin did not intend to launch a “campaign-style operation” in the late 1930s, forcing him to reign in the terror from its excesses.⁶ Also, revisionist scholars attempt to include social and cultural values and bring agency into the picture for the victims they claim under the totalitarian model are more or less “atomized” and “passive” members controlled by the regime.⁷ Regardless of these differences, both schools agree Stalin was the key player in this arena of death and despair.

My intention in this chapter is not to claim I have the answers to the ongoing debate between the revisionist and totalitarian schools of thought. Nor do I propose to present subjects as passive victims during the terror. My objective, rather, is to show the ways Stalin and his henchmen manipulated ideology during this time period to commit violence, and highlight similarities which can be traced back to his revolutionary experiences between 1905 and 1908. Also, I argue Stalin employed ideology to dehumanize victims, similar to how the Maximalists and Anarchists did so in pre-revolutionary Russian society. In doing so, he organized and

Kevin McDermott, ed., *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003). The editors of this compilation argued that both the “totalitarian” and “revisionist” paradigms bring important work to light, but agree more with “totalitarian” methods. See pgs. 4-5.

⁴ In Getty and Manning, *Stalinist Terror*, the editors of this compilation argued that the “revisionist” label is an unfair categorization, since most scholars that are ascribed this label do not adhere to a single approach in studying the period. The relationship between the “revisionist” scholars is that they attempt to step outside the totalitarian paradigm, and look at the terror as something other than the creation of Stalin’s personality. The editors stated: “An understanding of the personal factor is necessary, but not sufficient, to explain the phenomenon of the repression completely... There are at least two halves to this story, which interacted with one another constantly to feed the repressions: the personal and the contextual; the input from above and that from below...” See pg. 15.

⁵ See respectively Getty and Manning, *Stalinist Terror*; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁶ See Getty, ““Excesses Are Not Permitted,”” 116.

⁷ Zbigniew K. Brzezinski in *The Permanent Purge* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), indicated that citizens in totalitarian societies become mere “robots,” signifying a lack of agency. See pgs. 1-2. Brzezinski is a proponent of the totalitarian paradigm.

encouraged indiscriminate murder on a massive scale unheard of in the modern era. Whether local officials, the ruling elites, or Stalin's henchmen committed the violence, they conducted and justified it based on an ideological platform. Stalin, as leader of the Party, represented this ideology. Therefore, even when wielded as a tool, the terror of the 1930s placed Stalinism front and center.

Historical Determinism to Consolidate Power

Once in power, Stalin oversaw an amorphous terror reaching every crevice of his empire. The terror shadowed Stalin's interpretation of Marxism-Leninism and its deterministic outlook on the flow of history and nature. He played the role of the facilitator of the ideology. Because it followed the laws of history, which supposedly were leading to an ideal communist state, then the best way to achieve that goal was to rid the world of anything obstructing its path.⁸ This meant any individual in support of capitalism or fascism, appearing as a member of a class other than the "proletariat," an ambiguous term in itself, or standing in the way of societal development, needed to be removed as a hindrance to progress. Thus, Stalin brandished terror as an effective tool of the ideology by masking it in the language of Marxims-Leninism.

Since the Party was always right, given they were acting in accordance with historical laws, the Bolsheviks could manipulate ideology to commit any atrocity. Stalin seized this opportunity to obtain complete control over the Soviet Union. As Nikolai Bukharin correctly predicted, Stalin's objectives resulted in the creation of a police state. He concluded "nothing

⁸ For more information on the historical determinism of the Soviets, see Brzezinski, *The Permanent Purge*, 1-8; also see Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 464-467.

will stop Stalin” in pushing forward his version of socialism.⁹ As facilitator of the ideology, Stalin justified any action he committed as right, because he and his inner circle alone understood the laws of historical development. Since every decision he made was part of an already determined process, his opponents said “he changes his theories according to the need he has of getting rid of somebody at such-and-such moment.”¹⁰ Even if his decisions directly contradicted the writings of Marx or Lenin, Stalin still justified it within his ideology. And, since he had mastered the texts of Lenin, he commanded any quote he wished, even if taken out of context, to support his actions.

It has been more or less agreed upon by scholars that Stalin’s personal drive for power formed the nature of the purges and the terror. This perspective does not indicate he and other leaders did not whole heartedly believe in Marxism-Leninism. In fact, it was quite the opposite; Marxism was “a key source of his power,”¹¹ and his comrades indicated “he was married to Bolshevism.”¹² Throughout his whole life, Stalin held a “tenacious dedication to the revolutionary cause.”¹³ As a bandit in 1905-1908, he did not extort millions of rubles for his own wealth and betterment like numerous other of the supposed revolutionaries.¹⁴ Almost all of the money went to the Party, leaving the future leader with torn second-hand clothing, scrapping for his meals.¹⁵ After Lenin’s death, Stalin believed he alone could bring forth Lenin’s vision. Whereas Trotsky, Stalin’s biggest rival for power, attempted to be seen as Lenin’s equal, Stalin

⁹ This quote is taken from Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹ Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 427.

¹² Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 15.

¹³ Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 427.

¹⁴ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 148-164. In her work, she accounted how multiple revolutionaries across different parties committed expropriations in the name of a revolutionary organization when in the end they kept the funds themselves and retired living a life of debauchery and luxury.

¹⁵ See Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 207.

sold himself to the Russian population as Lenin's pupil.¹⁶ For him to achieve his goals, however, he needed to rid the country of unbelievers and any possible threats to the state. As threats changed throughout the 1930s, so did the classifications of enemies needing to be eliminated. This list included anyone potentially willing to challenge Stalin's supreme power. In this light, he used the terror, blanketed in ideological phrasing of "class enemies" and "enemies of the people," both for the attainment of personal power and to continue the revolution, for without Stalin, the revolution, at least in his mind, would have failed.

Stalin's use of ideology to commit mass murder was not a new experience for him. In the tumultuous period of 1905-1908, while in charge of the Red Brigade units, the terrorists from different revolutionary parties often intermingled and worked together. In fact, of the Social Democrats, the Bolsheviks contributed most to the terrorism of non-SD parties.¹⁷ The bombs the Maximalists used on their assault of Pyotr Stolypin, which killed dozens of innocent people, were created in a Bolshevik laboratory.¹⁸ Similarly, they were involved in various exploits of the Anarchists, particularly in the border areas where Stalin operated.¹⁹ While further research may establish or deny connections between Stalin and the Maximalists or Anarchists, it can be assumed even if they did not directly interact with one another, Stalin was aware of their actions and theories. And for a man repetitively calling for "real arming and an armed uprising" and "not empty phrases"²⁰ or politicking, the direct action taken by the Maximalists and Anarchists would have only been appealing. At the same time, their attempts to dehumanize victims using ideologically coded language of purification to conduct indiscriminate murder may also have

¹⁶ Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 591-592.

¹⁷ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 189.

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, 190.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, 188-195.

²⁰ Josef Stalin, "To All the Workers: October 19, 1905."

influenced a young Stalin. By the late 1920s, in his own words Stalin called for the “liquidation” and “smashing” of “exploiting classes.” Once the revolution succeeded, he concluded “the gates” to the new society would be “opened only to those who are worthy.”²¹ Similarly, the Maximalist theoretician Ivan Pavlov believed “the purifying force of violence would eliminate all the guilty, like cockroaches, inaugurating a new world of magnanimous and selfless innocence.”²² These ideas of a prominent Maximalist theoretician could have come out of Stalin’s mouth as long as it fit within Marxism-Leninism, meaning the guilty were “class enemies” or “enemies of the people,” and the new world was communist.

Constructing and Labelling Enemies

As scholars of totalitarianism have noted, historically these movements have had to continually construct enemies in order to survive and grow.²³ For if there were no enemies, the movement would cease to exist. In the Russian scenario this means all classes would be destroyed, the dictatorship of the proletariat no longer needed, and communism achieved. Since communism never fully developed, however, Stalin had to continually find new enemies to fight, otherwise his ideology could not be legitimized.²⁴ The Bolsheviks used “Trotskyist” as a main classification of enemies throughout the 1930s. At the same time, they changed the definition of

²¹ See Josef Stalin, “The Proletarian Class and the Proletarian Party: (Concerning Paragraph One of the Party Rules), January 1, 1905,” for how the new society would only be opened to “worthy” individuals; for examples of when Stalin called for the “liquidation” and “smashing” of classes see Josef Stalin, “They have Sunk to New Depths: 1929,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed July 12, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1929/x01/x01.htm>; and Josef Stalin, “Concerning the Policy of Eliminating of the Kulaks as a Class: January 21, 1930,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed July 12, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1930/01/21.htm>.

²² Morrissey, “The “Apparel of Innocence,”” 636.

²³ See Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 341-388; Brzezinski, *The Permanent Purge*, 2-11.

²⁴ See Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 464.

a “Trotskyist” during the different peaks of the terror, and the majority of those persecuted for Trotskyism had no connection or allegiance to him whatsoever.²⁵ The leading Bolsheviks could label anyone opposed to Stalin and the revolution a Trotskyist. “Had there been no Trotsky, Stalin would have had to invent him. Or more precisely, Stalin invented the Trotsky he needed.”²⁶ In a speech in 1929, Stalin stated: “The subversive activities of the Trotskyist organization demand that the Soviet authorities wage an implacable fight against this anti-Soviet organization.”²⁷ Indeed, they did just that; the Bolsheviks hunted and executed countless innocent people they labelled “Trotskyists.”

Since opponents always exist and are actively scheming in a totalitarian state, the rulers respond by segregating the population into groups in support of the regime and groups in support of the enemy. Hannah Arendt described how in this scenario “the world is divided into two gigantic hostile camps, one of which is the movement, and that the movement can and must fight the whole world—a claim which prepares the way for indiscriminate aggressiveness of totalitarian regimes in power.”²⁸ Anyone not in support of the Bolsheviks inherently was against the revolution, socialism, and the advancement of society—an enemy of the people. The Maximalists and Anarchists, while fighting for the revolution in the first decade of the twentieth century, held a similar view of the population. The Maximalists constructed a “radically bipartite world with no space for neutrality.”²⁹ This is part of the reason why the Anarchists, even though

²⁵ See J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), xii. Also see pg. 21.

²⁶ Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 591.

²⁷ Josef Stalin, “They Have Sunk to New Depths.”

²⁸ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 367.

²⁹ Morrissey, “The ‘Apparel of Innocence,’” 634.

they numbered fewer than the other revolutionary groups, were responsible for the most murders in the time period.³⁰

After the Bolsheviks divided the world into two competing camps, indiscriminate violence flourished in Russia in the 1930s. Similarly, this also occurred in the first decade of the twentieth century; revolutionaries threw bombs into trains, theatres, and dining halls simply because they presumed these places were frequented by the bourgeoisie.³¹ If they murdered an innocent person, which occurred frequently with such careless use of weaponry, they justified it in the name of the revolution. In this environment, victims became tallies on a revolutionary's kill list.³² In the 1930s, while rounding up either kulaks or those considered enemies of the people, local officials had to meet given quotas. In one example, a Politburo resolution passed in January 1930 designated how many thousands of "oriental" individuals in each region must be sent to concentration camps or deported. The resolution also indicated three to five percent of all kulak farms must be liquidated per province.³³ Resolutions such as these continued to be passed throughout the terror of the 1930s. This dehumanization and arbitrary arrest meant an individual was no longer a human, but rather a number.

Stalin himself verified the lists of deported and murdered Soviet citizens. On November 12, 1938, Stalin and Molotov signed off on 3,167 executions admitting around "one or two out of ten were wrongly caught" and thus were innocent.³⁴ They rationalized the murders of guiltless civilians as being part of the larger cause. In one instance in July 1938, Nikolai Yezhov, then

³⁰ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 124-125.

³¹ See Geifman, *Death Orders*, 42.

³² See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 40. The author indicated that the number of individuals that a terrorist killed was a bragging right and became a competition between terrorists.

³³ Christopher R. Browning and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Frameworks for Social Engineering: Stalinist Schema of Identification and the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft" in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, ed. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 240-241.

³⁴ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 232.

head of the NKVD, sent Stalin a list of 138 names he requested to execute. Both Stalin and Molotov signed their death sentences, “Shoot all 138.” Each one of those names indicated a member of the Party in a directorial position, constituting the “largest massacre of the leadership in the whole period.”³⁵ This arbitrary violence stifled any outcry or response from individuals constantly worried if or when their time would come. In appearance, the logic behind the ideology makes little sense at this time. The populations they murdered, after all, were “the people” socialism should have benefitted most. The terror, thus, must be looked at as a tool of totalitarian control. Even though Stalin cloaked the violence in ideological phrasing, he wielded the terror as an instrument of dominance over the individual.

Throughout the 1930s, the Bolsheviks continued to alter their definitions and classifications of enemies. At first, they targeted “class enemies.” This category originated from the Marxist view that in order to achieve communism a classless society first needed to be created. Therefore, the idea of a “class enemy” was ideological in itself. The term “class” more or less “turned out to be an ambiguous category,” since the revolution provided a platform for biographical reinvention.³⁶ At the same time, the state also targeted others, such as the peasants during collectivization and forced grain requisition. Peasants certainly were not part of the bourgeoisie, but their persecution fit Stalin’s model of central planning. Many of those classified as “enemies of the people” were victims of the First Five Year Plan. They fled collectivization and moved to the cities, forcing Stalin to implement new methods to eradicate them. Other “enemies of the people,” whether criminals, intellectuals, or those with different ideological leanings, the Bolsheviks rounded-up and murdered or deported. As the move towards

³⁵ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 420.

³⁶ See Shelia Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks! Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-century Russia* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 5.

industrialization during the First Five Year Plan did not progress according to plan, the Bolsheviks perceived enemies called “wreckers” were the ones ruining the economy. Approaching World War II, the state began targeting individuals from “enemy nations.” This included anyone of a different ethnicity, who they assumed was willing to help a foreign power attack the Soviet Union.³⁷

An “enemy of the people” could be a spy, traitor, wrecker, kulak, criminal, fascist, capitalist, a member of the bourgeoisie, intellectual, Trotskyist, foreigner, or counterrevolutionary. The Bolsheviks used these terms interchangeably and forced these ambiguous categorizations on people. Anyone could be an enemy, even the most outspoken and ardent supporter. “Simply because of their capacity to think, human beings are suspects by definition, and this suspicion cannot be diverted by exemplary behavior, for the human capacity to think is also a capacity to change one’s mind.”³⁸ Numerous individuals were “killed not because of what they *had* done but because of what they *might* do.”³⁹ In order to coerce absolute subservience to the totalitarian state, the state must enforce control over the arbitrary individual; this was the effect of the terror. In order to implement the vast directional changes in society, and to stay in power, Stalin needed a population which either expressed loyalty to the regime or remained silent out of fear.

Nikolai Bukharin correctly predicted Stalinism would lead to a police state. In order to progress, Stalin expanded the state apparatus and secret police to enforce his ideology upon an often unwilling population. For instance, the peasants raised a massive outcry against the

³⁷ For more information about these categorizations of enemies given the current situation and circumstances in the Soviet Union see Browning and Siegelbaum, “Frameworks for Social Engineering,” 240-254.

³⁸ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 430.

³⁹ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 243.

implementation of the First Five Year Plan. Because of their unrest, the Bolsheviks forcefully imposed the plan upon the peasantry through state control and police brutality. At first, the policies were unsuccessful, causing massive grain shortages and weakened production and quality of goods nearly resulting in bankruptcy. By 1932, peasants led strikes and rioted around the country in response to the socio-economic crisis.⁴⁰ Per Boris Nicolaevsky, the circumstances were so dire “the predominant view in Party circles” was “the situation could be saved only by his [Stalin’s] removal from Party domination.”⁴¹ Martemyan Riutin, a non-voting member of the Central Committee, wrote a critique of Stalin, fifty pages of which he dedicated to an attack on Stalin’s personal characteristics. In response, the police arrested Riutin, and for the first time the leadership discussed the death penalty for an oppositionist stance among prominent Bolsheviks.⁴² While they dismissed execution as an option for the time being, the ongoing situation called for extreme measures. Since Stalin’s policies “could not enjoy a victory grounded in positive outcomes,” they “therefore had to be based primarily on force and terror.”⁴³ The worse the situation became, the more the government responded with repressive measures.⁴⁴ While a crackdown ensued, it is important to note Stalin cloaked the terror resulting from these

⁴⁰ Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 43-45.

⁴¹ Boris I. Nicolaevsky, “The Letter of an Old Bolshevik” in *Power and the Soviet Elite: “The Letter of an Old Bolshevik” and Other Essays*, ed. Janet D. Zagoria (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc: 1965), 28.

⁴² See Nicolaevsky, “The Letter of an Old Bolshevik,” 28-31. The author argued that Stalin wanted to execute Riutin, but was denied the ability to by other leading Bolsheviks. Nicolaevsky contended that this event then created a divide among ruling Bolsheviks between radicals and moderates, and the moderates thought they might be able to overthrow Stalin. Khlevniuk in *Master of the House* argued that no such split happened and questions the validity of Nicolaevsky’s source. See pgs. 64-66.

⁴³ Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 37.

⁴⁴ David Shearer in “Social Disorder, Mass Repression and the NKVD during the 1930s,” in *Stalin’s Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union*, ed. Barry McLoughlin and Kevin McDermot (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), argued against the idea that the terror was a reactionary response to the social crises. Along with others in this compilation, he indicated instead that these measures were preemptive to what were perceived as potential threats to the Soviet Union. See pg. 85. On the other hand, Getty and Naumov in *The Road to Terror*, agree more with Klevniuk that the regime resorted to terror out of crises, fear, and lack of popular support. See pgs. 15-18.

circumstances in ideological language. As such, the NKVD undertook an operation to rid the country of “class enemies” and “enemies of the people.”

The First Five Year Plan

The First Five Year Plan called for the complete collectivization of the peasantry within a year. Stalin initiated this portion of the plan in January 1930, and in the first five months, over half of the agrarian population had been collectivized.⁴⁵ The peasantry responded with hostility, arming themselves against local Party workers and destroying their livestock in protest. It is estimated during the First Five Year Plan, peasants slaughtered 26.6 million cattle and killed 15.3 million horses in protest to the policy.⁴⁶ They viewed the First Five Year Plan as a reversal of the New Economic Policy (NEP) implemented after the Civil War. The NEP provided individual enterprise and prevented forced grain requisition in order to grow an economy devastated by war. At the same time, it made the peasantry more inclined to socialism. Collectivization, on the other hand, ended individual ownership and required the collective farms to hand over designated amounts of grain to the state. In January 1930, officials recorded over 400 riots in the countryside. By February it reached 1,066 and in March 6,512. This amount is significant especially compared with a combined 63 riots recorded in 1926 and 1927.⁴⁷ In reaction to the peasant outcry, Stalin did not abandon the First Five Year Plan, but rather slightly adapted it making the process more gradual. Concurrently, he responded with repressive

⁴⁵ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 18.

⁴⁶ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 47.

⁴⁷ Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 8.

measures to silence the peasant uproar.⁴⁸ By 1932, the state had collectivized the majority of all farms in the country.⁴⁹

Stalin had two primary goals in mind regarding the collectivization of the peasantry. The first was to expand production, which the Bolsheviks achieved thanks primarily to technological advances. The second, and more important objective, was to simply crush the peasantry at any cost.⁵⁰ Stalin wanted it widely known that central planning, a core method of Stalinism, was here to stay no matter the countless lives lost in the process. “The GPU and the 180,000 Party workers sent from cities used the gun, the lynch mob and the Gulag camp system to break the villages.”⁵¹ A major issue with the forced requisition of grain was the state demanded far too high of quotas. Even in a good year it was difficult for the collectives to produce enough. Nonetheless, if the peasants did not meet the quotas, the local police took whatever they had on hand, and left the collective to starve. “The main methods of grain collected were house-to-house searches, mass arrests, shootings, and deportations...The OGPU “cleansed” industrial enterprises of ‘disruptors,’ ‘kulaks,’ and ‘wreckers.’”⁵² A significant problem arrived in 1932 and 1933, once the North Caucasus and the Ukraine experienced a famine. Under these circumstances, the collectives could not conceivably achieve the level of grain demanded. Even so, on July 14, 1933, Stalin issued an order to shoot “hungry peasants who stole even husks of grain.”⁵³ Officials ransacked peasant homes, stealing rubles and any items they could get their hands on, including insignificant things such as handkerchiefs. After this humiliation, they evicted the

⁴⁸ For details about Stalin’s repressive tactics in this regard see *ibid.*, 39-49.

⁴⁹ See Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 20.

⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, 20.

⁵¹ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 64.

⁵² Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 47.

⁵³ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 90.

peasants from their houses.⁵⁴ It is estimated through the years 1930 and 1933 anywhere between four and ten million peasants died because of the First Five Year Plan and the famine.⁵⁵

The same time Stalin announced the First Five Year Plan, the regime also broadcasted the liquidation of the kulaks as official policy.⁵⁶ In January 1930, Molotov divided kulaks into three categories: the first included those to be immediately eliminated, the second were to be imprisoned in camps, and the third deported. The Bolsheviks placed between five and seven million individuals in one of these three categories.⁵⁷ In the year 1930 alone, the NKVD and police deported over 550,000 kulaks from their homes.⁵⁸ In order to meet their industrialization targets, many of the “dekulakized” peasants arrived to work at industrial cities under harsh conditions. Stephen Kotkin presented how one of these cities came to fruition in his remarkable work *Magnetic Mountain*.⁵⁹ In response to the rebellious peasants who killed livestock, the government issued a decree claiming the homes of those partaking in these activities would be confiscated and the individuals exiled or sent to a camp.⁶⁰ The state and police liquidated up to

⁵⁴ For examples, see “Факты извращения при раскулачивании,” accessed September 8, 2016, <http://www.memorial.krsk.ru/DOKUMENT/KK/3004.htm>; and “Информационная сводка Колхозцентра СССР и РСФСР в перегибах в раскулачивании. Не ранее 25 февраля 1930,” *history.doc.ru*, accessed September 8, 2016, http://historydoc.edu.ru/catalog.asp?cat_ob_no=13730&ob_no=13983.

⁵⁵ Robert Conquest in *The Great Terror* estimated that ten million peasants died during the years of the famine. See pg. 20. In Aelx Nove, “Victims of Stalinism: How Many?,” in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, ed. J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), the author argued that a better estimate is approximately seven million who died during the famine. See pgs. 265-266. In Stephen G. Wheatcroft, “More light on the scale of repression and excess mortality in the Soviet Union in the 1930s,” in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, ed. J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), the author indicated the death total from the famine was approximately between four and five million. See pg. 280. Needless to say, these numbers are still being contested by scholars as more data becomes available.

⁵⁶ Josef Stalin, “The Work of the April Joint Plenum of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission: Report Delivered at a Meeting of the Active of the Moscow Organisation of the C.P.S.U.(B.), April 13, 1928,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed July 13, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1928/04/13.htm>.

⁵⁷ See Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 46.

⁵⁸ This statistic is taken from Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 10.

⁵⁹ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 81.

⁶⁰ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 47.

three million households during this time.⁶¹ As one Bolshevik saw it: “Corpses—corpses in ragged sheepskin coats and cheap felt boots; corpses in peasant huts; in the melting snow of the Old Volgoda, under the bridge of Kharkov.”⁶²

The Bolsheviks destroyed the kulaks in the name of Marxism-Leninism. Given the end goal of communism was a classless society, the kulaks were a hindrance since they represented the wealthy peasants owning large tracts of land and animals. Even so, the term “kulak” was used ambiguously, meaning “anyone who resisted” collectivization, no matter their status as a peasant, became a “kulak enemy.”⁶³ Stalin himself even scribbled in his notes: “What does kulak mean?”⁶⁴ Regardless, he employed the language of Marxism to implement a program to “liquidate” the kulaks through the use of terror. In a similar manner, the Maximalists and Anarchists called for the liquidation of the bourgeoisie and any remnants of tsarism in the first decade of the twentieth century. The Anarchists “attacked anyone who represented the oppressive economic order, namely factory owners and directors, managers, merchants, land and store owners, and all of the exploiters.”⁶⁵ While they did not have the state bureaucracy to implement the level of terror Stalin had, they used individual acts of terrorism to bring about this change.

The other major aspect of the First Five Year Plan was the rapid improvement of the industrial sector. The majority of resources in the Soviet Union during these years went towards the goal of catching and exceeding the capitalist countries in heavy industrial output. The state

⁶¹ Ibid., 84. See Montefiore’s notes at the bottom of the page.

⁶² This quote is taken from *ibid.*, 100.

⁶³ Ibid., 37. Getty and Naumov in *The Road to Terror* similarly argue that, “The regime itself could never define precisely who was a kulak according to its own purported criteria about size of farm, numbers of animals, and so forth.” See pg. 21.

⁶⁴ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 46.

⁶⁵ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 132.

incentivized production and handed out awards to those exceeding their quotas. This led to the Stakhanovite movement during the Second Five Year Plan, when workers did everything they could to break records of production. To do so included a reorganization of labor to promote the individual at the expense of overall production, meaning it deprived raw materials to some other sector of industry. This resulted in a massive dislocation of materials. At the same time, few skilled engineers lived in Russia—a backwards country which confronted intellectuals. This led to faulty construction of plants and machinery, breaking down for months on end to be repaired. Because of these factors, the quotas directors had to meet, or even exceed, were so unrealistic managers increasingly falsified their production numbers to out of control proportions. As a result of all of this, the cost of production went way up, the quality of goods down, and the government verged on financial collapse.⁶⁶

The impossible goals established by the Bolshevik leadership and forced upon the Soviet people caused the economy to plummet, triggering protests and unrest. In April 1932, laborers across mills in the Ivanono-Vaoznesensk region went on strike. A few days later, riots spread throughout the area. To prevent further agitation, the police rounded up strike leaders in a decision to “eliminate anti-Soviet” elements.⁶⁷ Because the Bolsheviks perceived Stalinism to be “scientifically correct,” they concluded “all industrial mistakes must be the result of sabotage by the workers.”⁶⁸ The state blamed managers for the lack of production and accused them of “wrecking.” And because Stakhanovism was supported by Stalin, there was little they could do

⁶⁶ See Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 39-42.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶⁸ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 122.

to combat its inefficiencies.⁶⁹ In the year 1930, the NKVD and police arrested more than 330,000 individuals in industry, 208,000 of which were convicted, and of those the state executed approximately 20,000 by firing squad.⁷⁰

The Stalin regime feared the idea of subversive elements, particularly in the industrial sector, and believed foreign capitalists or remnants of the bourgeois class were actively plotting to overthrow the Soviet Union. While Marx harkened it was the duty of the dictatorship of the proletariat to fight these counterrevolutionary forces, the extent of terror the Bolsheviks unleashed went way beyond the protection of the revolution. In the Shakhty Trial of 1928, the state had arrested and charged a group of engineers for conspiring with members of the bourgeois class in order to sabotage the Soviet economy. As Stalin stated in a report to the Moscow CPSU: “The facts show that the Shakhty affair was an economic counter-revolution, plotted by a section of the bourgeois experts, former coal-owners... [It] marks another serious attack on the Soviet regime launched by international capital and its agents in our country.”⁷¹ According to Stalin, the only response to the Shakhty affair was to “strengthen the revolution and meet our enemies fully prepared.”⁷² Moreover, strengthening the revolution meant an increased use of terror to coerce conformity to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, or keep society subservient to the state out of fear.

⁶⁹ See Robert Thurston, “The Stakhanovite Movement: Background to the Great Terror in the factories, 1935-1938,” in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspective*, ed. J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 142-160.

⁷⁰ Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 10.

⁷¹ Josef Stalin, “Speech Delivered at the Eighth Congress of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, May 16, 1928,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed July 12, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1928/05/16.htm>.

⁷² Josef Stalin, “Against Vulgarising the Slogan of Self-Criticism, June 26, 1928,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed July 12, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1928/06/26.htm>.

In order for the Soviet Union to undergo such a massive industrial transformation, the workers had to submit to the ideology of the regime. For those unwilling, the Bolsheviks installed forcible and violent measures. Starting in 1930, the state restricted the free movement of labor, and to change locations or jobs, workers needed to receive permission from their current employer. Similarly, in 1932, the Bolsheviks revoked a law protecting workers from forced relocation without their consent as new industrial sites were constructed and needed labor. Later that year, the state introduced a passport requirement among the urban populations. At the same time, they sent secret details to Party officials instructing them to deny passports to those not engaged in “socially useful work,” to kulaks or peasants who fled the farm collectives, and to anyone dismissed from work for any reason as well as the members of their respective families.⁷³ To be denied a passport essentially prevented these individuals from living in Soviet towns. Consequently, the state banished countless of these classified “enemies” and punished others with labor camp sentences.

The famine of 1932-1933 created cadres of impoverished and starving beggars and vagrants moving to the major cities, becoming criminals just to survive. In reaction to the perceived degradation of cities, the regime ordered police sweeps across major urban centers targeting “socially harmful elements.” In April 1933, they arrested over 6,000 of these individuals in Moscow and Leningrad deporting them to Tomsk. Without food or tools to work, 4,000 died of hunger and exhaustion within weeks.⁷⁴ Similar raids continued throughout the 1930s, targeting any individuals classified as dangerous.

⁷³ See Christian Gerlach and Nicolas Werth, “State Violence—Violent Societies,” in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, ed. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 139-140.

⁷⁴ Gerlach and Werth, “State Violence,” 141.

The Great Terror and the Moscow Trials

Between 1935 and 1939, the regime instituted purges that the police and NKVD carried out in almost every facet of state and society: The Party, the Army, the NKVD, former kulaks, different ethnic groups, and the Foreign Services, to name a handful.⁷⁵ These purges consist of what has come to be known as the Great Terror. According to Stalinist propaganda, the regime only targeted “enemies,” and as such “honest citizens had nothing to fear.”⁷⁶ In the end, however, the victims mostly included innocent citizens supposedly part of a “fifth column” preparing to attack the Soviet Union in case of war.⁷⁷ Accordingly, the regime focused their attention on anyone perceived to have an association with a foreign entity. Police conducted arrests often based simply on an individual’s ethnicity. In March 1937, the NKVD issued an order which mandated the creation of a registry for foreigners who had received Soviet citizenship after January 1, 1936.⁷⁸ They then used this registry to draw up lists of those to incarcerate, exile, or eliminate.

Scholars often argue Stalin, Nikolai Yezhov, and other leaders of the NKVD sincerely believed the Soviet Union was under threat of attack during this time by a “fifth column” of spies, traitors, and Trotskyites.⁷⁹ At the same time, historians have noted the “most important” function of the terror was “ensuring that society was kept in a state of submissiveness,

⁷⁵ For a comprehensive look at the terror in each of these facets of society, see Conquest, *The Great Terror*.

⁷⁶ Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 167.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 173. Revisionist historians often contend that it was mainly the elites and individuals in management positions who were repressed throughout the various sectors of society affected by the terror. See Getty and Manning, *New Perspectives*, 12-13. Barry McLoughlin in “Mass Operations of the NKVD, 1937-8: A Survey,” in *Stalin’s Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union*, ed. Barry McLoughlin and Kevin McDermott (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), agreed with Khlevniuk and contended that the majority of victims were not elites but ordinary citizens. See pgs. 118-152.

⁷⁸ Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 180.

⁷⁹ See Gabor Tamas Rittersporn, “The Omniscient Conspiracy: On Soviet Imagery of Politics and Social Relations in the 1930s,” in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, ed. J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning (New York: Cambridge University Press), 99-115.

suppressing dissent and opposition, and solidifying the sole authority of the leader.”⁸⁰ Both of these outlooks fit together when viewing Stalin’s terror in context of the ideology. The NKVD began the purge of the Party by generating lists of names of Party members in administrative roles. One of the lists had two columns: those already expelled from the Party and those who “wavered” from their roles yet still held jobs. The police soon arrested and shot the majority of both columns.⁸¹ In July 1937, the Politburo resolution entitled “On Anti-Soviet Elements,” required local authorities to register criminal offenders and kulaks fleeing exile. From this registry, Party leaders determined the numbers to be killed and sent to labor camps.⁸²

Later in the same month, the Bolsheviks issued Order no. 00447, which expanded the targets to include anyone committing the “slightest resistance to Soviet authority.”⁸³ This resolution added former non-Bolshevik Party members, former members of the White Guard, surviving tsarist officials, spies and terrorists, political prisoners, and others who fit this classification, to the registry to be purged.⁸⁴ The regime then divided the list into two categories: those to be arrested and immediately executed, and those to be sent to camp or prison for eight to ten years. The state provided local officials in each region with quotas to fulfill for each category. Shortly after receiving these quotas, most officials requested higher targets later authorized by Moscow.⁸⁵ After the NKVD arrested an individual, they next interrogated and tortured the perceived enemy to obtain evidence. This evidence led to new arrestees put through

⁸⁰ Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 168.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 180.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁸⁴ See “ОПЕРАТИВНЫЙ ПРИКАЗ НАРОДНОГО КОМИССАРА ВНУТРЕННИХ ДЕЛ СОЮЗА С.С.Р. № 00447 об операции по репрессированию бывших кулаков, уголовников и др. антисоветских элементов,” accessed December 9, 2016, <http://www.memo.ru/history/document/0447.htm>.

⁸⁵ Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 181; Getty in ““Excesses Are Not Permitted,”” argued that here the terror got out of control as local officials began abusing their power, and Stalin had to intervene in order to quell the excesses as local officials went well beyond the quotas established in Moscow. See pgs. 120-132.

the same steps. In total, NKVD statistics reveal they arrested 1,575,259 people between 1937 and 1938, and of the 1,344,923 convicted, they sentenced 681,692 to be shot.⁸⁶ As stated in a Politburo resolution: “Purification of the country from rebel sabotage and espionage cadres played a positive role in ensuring the continued success of socialist construction.”⁸⁷

While it is clear the Bolsheviks used ideology to terrorize the population in order to secure the revolution and Stalin’s role as Party leader, another primary function was to remove Old Bolsheviks from positions of power. This type of purge had its difficulties given the accused enemies were clearly not traitors of the regime. Therefore, Stalin and Yezhov manufactured crimes and forced the Old Bolsheviks to confess to them. The Moscow Trials represent the most distinct use of ideology to remove any opposition to Stalin and clear his path as totalitarian leader.

Before Stalin could obtain complete directional control over the Soviet Union, he first needed to emancipate himself from any potential Party regulation. He also understood long time Bolsheviks, even if they pledged their loyalty to him, remembered the policy failures he had implemented in the First Five Year Plan as well as Lenin’s “testament” about his removal.⁸⁸ Therefore, he wanted to eliminate the old guard and replace it with a younger generation unquestionably loyal to the dictator. To do so at the top level in the Politburo and the Central Committee, he built up cases against Old Bolsheviks, including anyone with the potential to contest his power or question his outlook, and forced them to confess to made-up crimes in

⁸⁶ These statistics are taken from Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 184.

⁸⁷ “Постановление Политбюро ЦК ВКП(б) «Об арестах, прокурорском надзоре и ведении следствия»,” accessed November 10, 2016, <http://shieldandsword.mozohin.ru/documents/pb171138.htm>.

⁸⁸ See Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 169. The “testament” was a dictation of Lenin’s near the time of his death where he called for the removal of Stalin from the position of General Secretary of the Party. Lenin concluded that Stalin had accrued too much power in his hands and his rudeness was off-putting. The “testament” was read to the Central Committee, but in the end, no thanks to the attempts by Trotsky, it did not lead to Stalin’s removal. For more information, see Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 498-509.

public show trials. The Moscow Trials consisted of three separate hearings: The Zinoviev-Kamenev Trial in 1936, the Pyatakov-Radek Trial in 1937, and the Bukharin-Rykov Trial in 1938. Using the courts, Stalin not only crushed the opposition, but also through the process understood the extent the terror could be wielded. At first, since these Old Bolsheviks were popularly supported among the leadership, Stalin resorted to using public trials to prove the guilt of the accused. But by the end, he comprehended he could murder anyone at will without needing justification.⁸⁹

Despite being informed his or her life would be spared once they issued a confession, Stalin ordered the execution of almost everyone in the trials charged with a crime. Before he could get away with the obvious murder of close comrades, he first had to test the political environment and the Party's willingness to kill one of their own. The opportunity presented itself, or perhaps more appropriately was fashioned by Stalin, with the assassination of Sergei Kirov. Immediately following his death, the regime issued an emergency law permitting trials of accused terrorists to occur within ten days of arrest, and a sentence of execution could now transpire without an appeal.⁹⁰ As a direct result of this law, in a three-year period the regime sentenced approximately two million individuals to death or labor camps.⁹¹ In the month of Kirov's murder alone, the NKVD shot a recorded 6,501 individuals.⁹²

⁸⁹ See Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 419-423. The author emphasized throughout this great work that by eliminating the Old Bolsheviks, Stalin was able to unleash the terror without any restraint.

⁹⁰ See "Постановление Президиума ЦИК СССР от 1 декабря 1934 года," *100 главных документов российской истории*, accessed December 12, 2016, <http://док.история.рф/20/postanovlenie-prezidiuma-tsik-sssr-ot-1-dekabrya-1934-goda/>.

⁹¹ See Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 147-148.

⁹² See *ibid.*, 162.

Leonid Nikolayev murdered Kirov just outside his office on December 1, 1934. An early supporter of Stalin and head of the Leningrad Party, Kirov's murder, according to Robert Conquest, "has every right to be called the crime of the century." He stated:

Over the next four years, hundreds of Soviet citizens, including the most prominent political leaders of the Revolution, were shot for direct responsibility for the assassination, and literally millions of others went to their deaths for complicity in one or another part of the vast conspiracy which allegedly lay behind it. Kirov's death, in fact, was the keystone of the entire edifice of terror and suffering by which Stalin secured his grip on the Soviet peoples.⁹³

Without direct supporting evidence, Conquest contended Stalin himself, with the help of NKVD chief Genrikh Yagoda, hatched the plot to kill Kirov.⁹⁴ There were reasons for Stalin to do so, including Kirov's ascension and popularity. Also, he began to take a much more conciliatory approach to Party members, causing Stalin to fear a possible alliance with the Rightists which could challenge his authority.⁹⁵ To kill Kirov then "would remove the immediate obstacle, and at the same time create an atmosphere of violence in which the enemies on to whom he [Stalin] shifted blame for the murder could be wiped out." Thus, according to Conquest, at this point Stalin "shows more clearly than anything else the completeness of his lack of moral or other inhibitions."⁹⁶ It fits then that Stalin chose the Old Bolsheviks Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev to be the first arrested and tried for ordering Kirov's assassination. When Lenin was

⁹³ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 37.

⁹⁴ See *ibid.*, 37-52. The scholars who tend to agree with this outlook trust the information provided by Boris I. Nicolaevsky in "The Letter of an Old Bolshevik." The author argued that Kirov was ascending among the leadership and Stalin felt threatened by his power. Without any direct evidence, Conquest argued that the circumstances surrounding the murder point to Stalin's involvement and direction. This is contested by multiple scholars including Oleg Khlevniuk in *Master of the House*. See pgs. 111-116. He is unwilling to make this claim given the lack of evidence.

⁹⁵ See Nicolaevsky, "The Letter of an Old Bolshevik," 31-32. Oleg Khlevniuk in *Master of the House* indicated that Kirov never pursued a "moderate" agenda and always remained loyal to Stalin. See pgs. 111-116. Regardless if Stalin was involved in Kirov's death or not, it was manipulated as a tool for Stalin to commit the Great Terror.

⁹⁶ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 38.

alive, both were in his immediate trusted circle of leaders. After his death, however, they joined the Leftist opposition in the 1920s crushed by Stalin during the battle of Lenin's succession.

In 1936, the Party brought Zinoviev, Kamenev and fourteen others to the trial for the assassination of Kirov. The prosecutors also charged them with other crimes such as forming a terrorist organization intending to murder Stalin, and attempting to overthrow the Soviet government.⁹⁷ In doing so, the prosecutors alleged the defendants proposed to transition the Soviet Union to a Trotskyist course. During interrogations prior to the trial, Zinoviev and Kamenev denied any involvement with Trotsky. Only after sleepless nights with the heat cranked up in their cells, and fearing for the lives of family members after repeated threats made by their captors, did the Old Bolsheviks decided to confess.⁹⁸ They agreed to do so after receiving guarantees from Stalin neither they nor their families would be executed. In 1935, the state extended the death penalty to children the age of 12 years; this lawful revision meant Stalin could "legally" threaten opponents with the murder of their children.⁹⁹ After the Old Bolsheviks kept their word and confessed to crimes they did not commit, Stalin went back on his; the court sentenced all defendants to death and the NKVD subsequently shot them in prison.

During the trial of Georgy Pyatakov and Karl Radek in 1937, the Party made similar accusations against the defendants including "Trotskyism" and attempted "sabotage."¹⁰⁰ While again, these accusations were implausible, Stalin coerced confessions. This time, he approached Radek with the offer to spare his life if he confessed to a history of Trotskyism and its influence throughout a variety of political sects in Russia. As a result, not only did he accuse himself,

⁹⁷ For a detailed account of the trial, see Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 71-108.

⁹⁸ See Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 185.

⁹⁹ See Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 75.

¹⁰⁰ For a full account of this trial, see *ibid.*, 135-181.

Pyatakov and their followers, he also included Zinoviev as well as a “third group” of Trotskyists. “Establishing “Trotskyism” of the second and third rank Stalinists in the entourage of men he wished to remove, Stalin was setting up precedents which, as resistance weakened, gave him a freer and freer hand to deal with more important men with perfect records.”¹⁰¹ With the accusation of a “third group” of Trotskyists Stalin intended to denounce Nikolai Bukharin and the Rightists. At the same time, during his testimony, Radek openly insinuated Trotskyism had spread and infiltrated all aspects of society, and thousands of regular people helped their organization and sympathized with their cause.¹⁰² In essence, this allegation established precedence for a massive purge of the entire population.

Radek’s accusation of a “third group” of Trotskyists helped enable Stalin to defeat the rest of his opposition and ensure his position of absolute power. It is important to understand up until the conclusion of the Moscow Trials, Stalin’s decisions could be and often were contested by other members of the Party.¹⁰³ He could not just remove those he disliked from positions of power, and having them killed was out of the question. The Old Bolsheviks held influence and were popular in the Party, and Stalin had to respect this or face even greater opposition. “Stalin realized that the Politburo could easily unite to dismiss him” and he “knew he could be outvoted, even overthrown.”¹⁰⁴ This political vulnerability is why Stalin allowed Zinoviev to live in 1927 after his expulsion from the Party. Similarly, after Bukharin challenged Stalin and his authority in 1929, Stalin limited his response to removing Bukharin and other Rightists from the Politburo

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 175.

¹⁰² See *ibid.*, 152-153.

¹⁰³ The most often cited example of this is the Riutin Affair, where Stalin wanted to execute Riutin after he wrote a 200-page critique of Stalin and his direction for the Party in 1933. According to Nicolaevsky in “Letter of an Old Bolshevik,” it was Kirov who led the charge against the death penalty. See pgs. 29-30. Again, this source has come under questioning by scholars for its accuracy. In the end, Riutin’s life was spared until 1937 when he was executed on Stalin’s orders.

¹⁰⁴ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 55.

and nothing more. Their reputations as Bolsheviks were impeccable, and most considered Bukharin the main theoretician of the Party. Their popularity and political influence is why the Kirov assassination and the subsequent confessions from long standing Bolsheviks were so important to Stalin. It provided the context to remove and purge those who he would have been unable to years prior. “In the autumn of 1936, Stalin had had to argue and exert pressure to secure the arrest and trial even of potential rivals. After the conclusion of the trials he could order the arrest of his closest colleagues without consulting anyone. He could strike when and where he liked, without appeal.”¹⁰⁵ After the Pyatakov-Radek Trial, Stalin reached the point where his “despotism became an absolute autocracy.”¹⁰⁶ He completed the removal of the Old Bolsheviks from the Party, and over the next few years, arrested and executed no fewer than 70 percent of the Central Committee.¹⁰⁷

The Bukharin-Rykov Trial in 1938 comprised of the most prominent and last remaining oppositional Old Bolsheviks in power. Included were former members of the Politburo—Bukharin, Rykov, and Nikolay Krestinsky—as well as the former head of the secret police, Genrikh Yagoda. “By physically destroying some members of the Politburo, promoting a new generation of functionaries in their place, and persecuting the close associates and relatives of his comrades-in-arms, Stalin achieved the total subjugation of the Politburo.”¹⁰⁸ While Bukharin offered some resistance during the trial by refusing to confess to charges of terrorism and espionage, he nonetheless still admitted guilt to other crimes. The prosecutor accused the defendants of failed assassination attempts on the life of Lenin and Stalin, the murder of the

¹⁰⁵ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 179.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁰⁷ See *ibid.*, 179.

¹⁰⁸ Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, xxi.

famous Soviet writer Maxim Gorky, and plotting to overthrow the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁹ After the court sentenced the defendants and the NKVD carried out their executions, Stalin no longer needed public show trials to commit his purges. From here on out, he murdered at will.

Out of the conclusion of the Moscow Trials, the question arises as to why so many stout Bolsheviks confessed to crimes they did not commit. One important aspect was the frequent use of torture. A coded telegram circulated throughout the NKVD in 1939 indicated from the year 1937 onward, “physical pressure” was to be used on “known and obstinate enemies of the people.”¹¹⁰ During trial, if a testifying defendant reneged on a signed confession, when seen again a few days later his body often would look battered and swollen, his speech reserved, and more often than not he would confess openly to the charges against him. Bukharin commented during his trial, Pyatakov looked like “a skeleton with his teeth knocked out.”¹¹¹ The NKVD used torture to get arrestees to confess to the guilt of other associates. The beatings would stop only when the interrogator received enough names.¹¹² If torture did not work to garner admissions of guilt, interrogators told defendants unless they confessed, their families and friends would be rounded up and thrown into the gulags. No matter if they confessed or not, once the NKVD arrested a member of the Party, there was little doubt sooner or later they would come for his or her family. On July 5, 1937, a Politburo resolution ordered the confinement of “all wives of condemned traitors...in camps for 5-8 years.” During the Great Terror, it is estimated the NKVD collected 18,000 wives and 25,000 children of those arrested and typically sent them

¹⁰⁹ For a detailed account of the trial, see Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 341-398.

¹¹⁰ See *ibid.*, 122.

¹¹¹ See Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 208.

¹¹² For a detailed account of the methods of torture used, see Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 121-130.

to the gulags.¹¹³ Accordingly, “the rule in Stalin’s world was that when a man fell, all those connected to him, whether friends, lovers or protégés, fell with him.”¹¹⁴

Even though the NKVD forced confessions through torture and interrogation, larger ideological forces were also at play. Bolsheviki often believed in the righteousness of their Party, no matter the circumstances, since the Party was an arbiter of history. In this light, it was impossible for the Party to be wrong, even if there were obvious contradictions. As Pyatakov remarked about a devout Bolshevik: “There could be no life for him outside the ranks of the Party, and he would be ready to believe that black was white, and white was black, if the Party required it.”¹¹⁵ Similarly, Trotsky stated: “I know it is impossible to be right against the party. It is possible to be right only with the party and through the party, because history has created no other paths to the realization of what is right.”¹¹⁶ Some Bolsheviks before the Great Terror willingly accepted humiliation by Party accusations as long as they were able to remain members.¹¹⁷ As Hannah Arendt pointed out: “So long as the movement exists, its peculiar form of organization makes sure that at least the elite formations can no longer conceive of a life outside of the closely knit band of men who, even if they are condemned, still feel superior to the rest of the uninitiated world.”¹¹⁸ During his trial, to save his life, prove his innocence, and remain in the Party, Pyatakov went so far as to ask if he could be “personally allowed to shoot all those sentenced to death at the trial.”¹¹⁹ Included in this group was his former wife.

¹¹³ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 232.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹¹⁵ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 113.

¹¹⁶ Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 547.

¹¹⁷ See Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 116. In this instance, Conquest is referring to Zinoviev who on multiple occasions apologized to Stalin for his behavior and begged to be reinstated in the Party.

¹¹⁸ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 381.

¹¹⁹ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 203.

Sometimes, the defendants confessed to such absurd or improbable crimes one has to question if the public believed or accepted the results of these show trials. According to sources, most Soviet citizens did not trust the admissions of guilt and were confused by the proceedings.¹²⁰ On one occasion, Pyatakov confessed to a meeting with Trotsky in December 1935 which took place in Berlin. In this rendezvous, Trotsky supposedly laid out the entire program the plotters were to follow. Central to the prosecution, this was the only piece of evidence of Trotsky's involvement in the affair. However, a Norwegian newspaper published the fact the airport where Pyatakov supposedly had landed for the meeting did not have any civilian aircraft arrivals for the entire month of December. In response to the news, the prosecution wrote off this glaring hole as more or less a technicality.¹²¹ Given the absurdity of the situation, it is understandable that the Soviet people for the most part did not believe in the seriousness of the confessions. While this may be true, the fact the majority of citizens accepted the results without popular appeal hints they held little confidence in each other to stand up to the regime. The temptation to yield out of fear or loyalty was far greater.¹²² Again, this outlook is in part a creation of totalitarian societies. If an individual openly doubted the results of the trials, the fear someone would report on him or her was ubiquitous. And this fear was exactly what Stalin intended.

Undoubtedly, Stalin used the terror of the 1930s to consolidate his own power as well as establish the permanence of the revolutionary regime. Since Stalin and other leading Bolsheviks believed in an historically determined version of Marxism-Leninism, they legitimized the use of force and violence by claiming it was for the revolution and the betterment of mankind. They

¹²⁰ See Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 110.

¹²¹ See *ibid.*, 151-152.

¹²² Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 353.

were, in essence, facilitating the development to communism. Through an ideological lens, they viewed the world as divided between two competing camps. Therefore, enemies existed everywhere, and were constantly changing and threatening to topple the regime. The Bolsheviks employed indiscriminate murder to quell these threats and produce a subservient population. In 1905-1910, the Maximalists and the Anarchists viewed the pre-revolutionary society in a similar manner. They used violence to overthrow the tsar and his government, but at the same time wielded terrorism as a tool to cleanse the population of enemies and disbelievers. By placing people into categories of enemy and friend, the terrorists dehumanized a section of society. They then willingly killed indiscriminately for the cause, without feelings of remorse or fear of party repercussions.

Ideology, and its counterpart religion, have often been used in their extreme to commit violent acts. To perpetrate such levels of violence, individuals have typically held a devout belief in their cause. In Russia, “the Party justified its “dictatorship” through purity of faith. Their Scriptures were the teachings of Marxism-Leninism, regarded as a “scientific” truth.”¹²³ Stalin, a revolutionary for life, and a devout believer, justified the murder of millions of people for a goal never achieved. On the other hand, through the terror he successfully solidified his own power. To institute a violent regime, he surrounded himself with people as equally as ruthless as the dictator, but also unquestionably loyal. During 1905-1908, as a Red Brigade leader, Stalin was always on the lookout to recruit the cruelest of characters to do his bidding, the ‘cutthroats’ as he called them. As the leader of the Soviet Union, he encircled himself with the same type of people. The next chapter discusses these individuals and what made them so abhorrent.

¹²³ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 86.

CHAPTER V: STALIN'S CIRCLE

Stalin once told his head of the secret police, Genrikh Yagoda, he preferred people to support him through fear and not conviction. In the Machiavellian logic, fear was the stronger impulse and Stalin knew he could not rely on his men to back him through everything.¹²⁴ In menacing the Russian population throughout the 1930s, he also terrorized those closest to him. By using these methods, he created a tight circle of leadership completely devoted and loyal. At the same time, this group of individuals shared some of Stalin's nefarious characteristics; they became the henchmen carrying out the terror. The loyalty Stalin demanded from these selected Bolsheviks is similar to the requirements of his Mauserist and Red Brigade units in the first decade of the twentieth century. Other like traits include a strong sense of paranoia among uneducated members willing to use ideology to commit vicious assaults including acts of personal vengeance or private gain.

The group of Bolsheviks leading the country on a new historic course were not the typical figure heads of a civilized state. For example, nearly all Politburo members carried guns on them at all times.¹²⁵ This might be more understandable if the Politburo consisted mostly of former military veterans, but the majority were not—they were paranoid. At the same time, they facilitated an ideology requiring terror to move the Soviet Union towards the new order of communism. In the atmosphere of total violence, Stalin's trusted circle abused the ideology to commit atrocities, some of which were of a personal nature. Robert Conquest had no qualms calling the leadership "a group of hatchet men" and "truly disgusting characters" who were "ready for any violence."¹²⁶ He often compared these men to gangsters because of their loyalty

¹²⁴ See Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 14.

¹²⁵ See *ibid.*, 151.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

and everyday viciousness.¹²⁷ Molotov himself even once indicated it appeared as if “the Politburo was filled with gangsters.”¹²⁸ Stalin learned in his years before the revolution this was the most effective type of individual to implement tasks calling for violence. He carried this belief with him as ruler of the Soviet Union.

While Stalin’s circle consisted of ruthless individuals willing to kill, the reason the leadership comfortably applied the methods of terror had to do with Stalin’s encouragement. He desired this type of character to do his bidding. In 1905, when forming his Red Brigade units, Stalin sought after the ‘hotheads’ the ‘criminal types’ and the ‘cutthroats.’¹²⁹ He emboldened and led this group by calling for “armed uprisings,” “street fighting,” and the creation of “armed fighting squads” while denouncing forms of politicking.¹³⁰ The men in the 1930s, besides having a more thorough revolutionary education, were no different. Stalin inspired them to behave in a callous and unscrupulous manner. Depending on his mood, he either laughed at their weaknesses or pounced on them. Repeatedly, Stalin ordered Molotov and other officials to be more assertive by metaphorically “punching people in the face” and to “smash their bones.”¹³¹ On the phone with Lazar Kaganovich, he once exhorted him to make the terror operation larger and “not to be too liberal” in his conduct.¹³² More than once Stalin compared his terror to Ivan the Terrible’s massacre of the boyars. In a conversation with Anastas Mikoyan, Stalin told him, “Ivan killed too few boyars. He should have killed them all, to create a strong state.”¹³³ Stalin talked openly

¹²⁷ For one example see *ibid.*, 15. Conquest referred to this comparison throughout a variety of passages in his nominal work.

¹²⁸ This quote is taken from Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 246.

¹²⁹ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 195-196; and Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 204.

¹³⁰ See Josef Stalin, “Armed Insurrection and our Tactics, July 15, 1905”; and Josef Stalin, “To All the Workers, October 19, 1905.”

¹³¹ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 45.

¹³² Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 219.

¹³³ This quote is taken from Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 231.

about the terror with his inner circle, indicating it was necessary to “finish with our enemies” without “looking at their faces.”¹³⁴ This type of behavior reassured others, some perhaps even viler than Stalin, to act in accordance with their instincts. Given they employed ideology to justify this conduct, a dangerous situation prevailed. Polikarp Mdivani, while being tortured in 1937, shouted at the interrogators offering to spare his life if he confessed: “You are telling me that Stalin has promised to spare the lives of Old Bolsheviks! I have known Stalin for 30 years. Stalin won’t rest until he had butchered all of us, beginning with the unweaned baby and ending with the blind great-grandmother!”¹³⁵ Indeed, Stalin’s own ruthlessness permitted and encouraged the mean and malicious in those around him.

The Henchmen Abuse the Ideology

Of the leadership, Stalin chose Nikolai Yezhov as his right-hand man in implementing the terror. Yezhov was the architect behind the Moscow Trials. By numerous accounts of old Soviets, Yezhov was said to have had a “repellent personality,” with “low moral qualities” and “sadistic inclinations.”¹³⁶ Boris Nicolaevsky wrote, “Upon looking at him I am reminded irresistibly of the wicked urchins of the courts in Rasterayeva Street, whose favorite occupation was to tie a piece of paper dipped in paraffin to a cat’s tail, set fire to it, and then watch with delight.”¹³⁷ Some Party members reported women working in the NKVD feared meeting him in

¹³⁴ Ibid., 221.

¹³⁵ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 225.

¹³⁶ See *ibid.*, 15. While Conquest contended that Yezhov was a vile character, others like Oleg Khlevniuk in *Master of the House* (pgs. 186-188) and Montefiore in *Young Stalin* (pg. 168) argued that many who worked with Yezhov had a favorable impression of him, and he was often perceived as charming.

¹³⁷ Nicolaevsky, “The Letter of an Old Bolshevik,” 48.

the corridors.¹³⁸ Both Yezhov and Lavrenti Beria, Yezhov's replacement as head of the NKVD in 1939, were the only members of the leadership who actually partook in the torture of individuals. The blackjack and the truncheon were two of Beria's favorite weapons.¹³⁹ He personally took charge of the torture of Nestor Lakoba's family, an Old Bolshevik acquainted with Stalin since his revolutionary underground days in the Caucasus. Beria placed a snake in the prison cell of Lakoba's wife, driving her mad, and he beat their children to death, just mere teenagers.¹⁴⁰

Even though not all the loyal Stalinists in leadership positions physically harmed individuals by their own hands, they organized aspects of the terror, so long as the foot soldiers did the dirty work. Kliment Voroshilov had been a close associate of Stalin's since the Civil War. During the war in Tsaritsyn, he helped Stalin implement the imprisonment and murder of Trotsky "specialists."¹⁴¹ His comrades indicated, "There was something mean about the lips that revealed a petulant temper, vindictive cruelty, and a taste for violent solutions."¹⁴² Molotov signed off with Stalin on the lists of "enemies" the NKVD and regional officials requested to deport, send to the gulags, or murder. Often times he would add names to the list of those he wanted to execute.¹⁴³ In Leningrad, Sergei Kirov "unflinchingly enforced Stalin's collectivization and industrialization policies" resulting in the death of thousands of peasants and

¹³⁸ See Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 15.

¹³⁹ See Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 246 and 276.

¹⁴⁰ See *ibid.*, 250.

¹⁴¹ While in Tsaritsyn in 1918 during the Civil War, Stalin would construct a barge floating in front of Checka headquarters that contained Bolshevik enemies. The prison barge slowly filled to a population of 400 or so inmates, the majority of which starved to death or were executed following Stalin's orders. Among those included were ex-tsarist officers, Serbian officers, SRs, trade unionists, White Guards, and Black Hundred Officers. See Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 302-307.

¹⁴² See Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 53.

¹⁴³ See *ibid.*, 239.

workers.¹⁴⁴ Kaganovich physically abused his subordinates and had an “explosive temper”¹⁴⁵ and a “total lack of restraints of humanity.”¹⁴⁶ He oversaw the terror of the kulaks and the peasantry in its peak years, driving from region to region, making sure local officials met their quotas while witnessing the destruction and loss of life firsthand. Throughout the 1930s, he attempted to dissuade Stalin from any relaxation of the terror, believing it would lead to his downfall.¹⁴⁷

Similar to the pre-revolutionary terrorists in 1905-1910, leading Bolsheviks used ideology in the 1930s to perpetrate violent acts having less to do with the revolution and more with personal vengeance or gain. Numerous radicals in the first decade of the twentieth century wielded the fervor of the revolution to commit expropriations for their own personal benefit. This was particularly true of the Anarchists, who justified their exploits by claiming these actions aided in the destruction of capitalist society.¹⁴⁸ In the 1930s, while most Bolsheviks expressed dedication to the cause, in their push for “naked careerism” many “sought to attach themselves to the general secretary.”¹⁴⁹ They “jealously protected their position as the elite” and understood “if the regime fell, their various privileges and immunities would disappear.”¹⁵⁰ Therefore, they often acted skeptically, using the terror to remove any potential threats to their power. Once Yezhov noticed Beria’s ascension, he attempted to arrest the emerging Bolshevik after feeling threatened. As it turned out, Yezhov’s foresight was apt because in the end Beria took his place

¹⁴⁴ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 13.

¹⁴⁵ See Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 63.

¹⁴⁶ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 13.

¹⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, 14. Conquest drew the conclusion that there were factions among the leadership, those who encouraged the terror and those who tried to stop it. This information is primarily derived from Nicolaevsky’s “The Letter of an Old Bolshevik.” Others, like Khlevniuk, in *Master of the House* argued that Nicolaevsky was not a valid source. See pgs. 64-66. In his work he contended that there was no factionalism among the leadership and everyone was more or less in agreement with the decisions made.

¹⁴⁸ See Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 128-133.

¹⁴⁹ Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 427.

¹⁵⁰ Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 11.

during Yezhov's fall. Stalin also sought similar type of men in his Red Brigade and Mauserist units. Whether fed up with society or their place in it, they killed because they were told to, and received recognition for doing so, in the form of praise from the leadership or monetary compensation.

The leaders of the Great Terror could perpetrate acts of a personal nature because they understood certain innocent individuals would be caught in the web of extensive violence. As Yezhov once famously stated: "We are launching a major attack on the Enemy; let there be no resentment if we bump someone with an elbow. Better than ten innocent people should suffer than one spy get away. When you chop wood, chips fly."¹⁵¹ Similarly, Kaganovich mirrored these remarks in stating: "When the forest is cut down the chips fly."¹⁵² The Bolsheviks used this type of language throughout their ranks. Thus, individuals across society could abuse the ambiguous persecution of citizens to justify murder or other illegal activities without any real threat of recourse. In everyday life, police arrested supervisors and kulaks for "wrecking" or "sabotage" simply because the workers and peasants coveted their positions and turned them in.¹⁵³ If an employee held a personal distaste for a manager, the simple solution was denounce him or her and have them arrested.

Once again, Stalin's behavior led the way. There are numerous instances of Stalin using the terror to commit personal acts of vengeance. As Nikolai Bukharin once indicated, Stalin "cannot help taking revenge of people, on all people but especially those who in any way are higher and better than he."¹⁵⁴ In one example, the NKVD arrested and executed Dmitri Shmidt, a

¹⁵¹ This quote is taken from Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 218.

¹⁵² This quote is taken from Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 13.

¹⁵³ See Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 10; and Thurston, "The Stakhanovite Movement," 142-160.

¹⁵⁴ For this quote, see Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, 424-425.

tank unit commander in the Army, because of what appeared to be an insult he hurled at Stalin once when passing him in the hall. In a half-joking, half-sincere manner, he cursed Stalin and told the leader he would one day “lop his ears off.”¹⁵⁵ Officially, the NKVD arrested him for taking part in the opposition, but no one believed Shmidt had committed any crime. Other Bolsheviks similarly used the terror for their personal liking, including Molotov. “He was cruel and vengeful, actually recommending death for those, even women, who crossed him.”¹⁵⁶ Often times, while signing off on NKVD kill lists, Molotov added names of the wives of enemies he disliked, effectively penning their execution.¹⁵⁷ Beria used the fervor of the terror to settle personal scores as well. Such was the case with Alexander Kosarev, whose only crime, similar to Shmidt, was insulting the spiteful Bolshevik.¹⁵⁸ Once Beria assumed control of the NKVD, he brought with him a slew of Georgians, some even convicted murderers, as his lead officials.¹⁵⁹ This could only be reminiscent for Stalin, a Georgian himself, whose gangs composed of ‘cutthroats’ operated in the Caucasus in 1905-1908.

Just as Stalin’s circle of leadership capitalized on the nebulous oppression of the terror to commit acts of individual violence, so did pre-revolutionary terrorists. “One of the most common motives for participating in violent crimes with political overtones” was “a primitive desire for immediate revenge.”¹⁶⁰ In 1905, a postal worker made an attempt on the life of his superior because he treated him poorly and did not pay a fair enough wage. Later that year, a porcelain factory worker attacked his shop manager for the same reasons.¹⁶¹ Although their motives were

¹⁵⁵ See Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 188-189.

¹⁵⁶ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 39.

¹⁵⁷ See *ibid.*, 239.

¹⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, 285.

¹⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, 284.

¹⁶⁰ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 155.

¹⁶¹ See *ibid.*, 155.

clearly personal, the workers claimed they acted in the name of the revolution. Individuals in management or supervisory roles could be threatened for simply being a part of the capitalist system.

Some revolutionaries had no difficulties making the decision to take a life and “extremists frequently exhibited unnecessary cruelty bordering on sadism.”¹⁶² In 1909, members of the Polish Socialist Party mutilated a comrade by cutting off body parts including his nose and ears. He died from the torture and his executioners subsequently chopped up the corpse and hid it in a chest.¹⁶³ In a remarkable resemblance, during the Great Terror, Yezhov took charge of the interrogation of an old friend turned enemy. He ordered the interrogators first “to cut off his ears and nose, put out his eyes, cut him to pieces.”¹⁶⁴ A clear example of this type of sadistic extremist is Stalin’s closest gangster in 1905-1908, Kamo. He killed without hesitation or second thought, and even relished the opportunity to do so. Likewise, one day in 1937, when walking by Yezhov in the hall, Khrushchev noticed spots of blood on the NKVD leader’s clothing. Yezhov turned to him and informed the future premier, “one should take pride in such specks because they were the blood of the Enemies of the Revolution.”¹⁶⁵

Bolshevik Loyalty

Of the traits members of the leadership possessed, Stalin regarded loyalty among the highest. Similar characteristics are commonly held in such esteem among “leading gangsters” who “nourish a sense of allegiance to the mystique of an organization in much the same way as

¹⁶² Ibid., 166.

¹⁶³ See *ibid.*, 171-172.

¹⁶⁴ This quote is taken from Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 237.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 245.

Yezhov and his colleagues.”¹⁶⁶ Often, this loyalty took the form of devout worship of the dictator. Like Kamo and his associates idolizing both Stalin and Lenin, Kaganovich’s commitment went unquestioned and bordered on adoration. Of the leadership, Molotov considered him “the most devoted to Stalin.”¹⁶⁷ One evening, Stalin commanded Kaganovich to “Get rid of that beard!” an order which he promptly complied with by locating a pair of scissors and cutting it then and there.¹⁶⁸ Yezhov expressed similar subservience to the despot. “He was truly a servant of the regime of personal power who compensated for his low moral and political qualities by exhibiting selfless love for, faith in, and devotion to the leader.”¹⁶⁹ The terror eventually claimed Yezhov as a victim, but before his execution he was said to have had the name of Stalin on his lips.¹⁷⁰ Likewise, Voroshilov was “usually described as a sniveling coward before his master.”¹⁷¹ And others, such as Valerian Kuibyshev, who died in 1935 from alcohol poisoning but was very close to Stalin in the 1920s, did not have any special traits except for his “loyalty to Stalin was absolute.”¹⁷² Stalin sought and promoted those most devoted to him; through this method he acquired absolute power. Beria rose through the ranks to become head of the NKVD because of his enthusiastic faithfulness. Comrades described him as “fawningly sycophantic,”¹⁷³ and Svetlana, Stalin’s daughter, called him a “zealot” who treated her father “like a Tsar instead of a first comrade.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁶ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 15.

¹⁶⁷ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 63.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁶⁹ Boris A. Starkov, “Narkom Ezhov,” in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, ed. J Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 21.

¹⁷⁰ See Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 431-435.

¹⁷¹ See Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 53.

¹⁷² See Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 454.

¹⁷³ See *ibid.*, 76.

¹⁷⁴ See *ibid.*, 277.

Stalin considered Bolsheviks in leadership positions not expressing some level of adoration as potential opposition to his rule. Accordingly, he purged them from Party ranks. Even the close allies Stalin had promoted through the years had to remain loyal or face arrest and execution. At one time a dedicated associate to the leader, because of his defiance Sergo Ordzhonikidze fell out of Stalin's good graces.¹⁷⁵ While the relationship deteriorated, Ordzhonikidze encouraged the implementation of a plan which eased and thwarted a new wave of repression.¹⁷⁶ Before he could publicly open an assault against Stalin, however, he unexpectedly died. The reasons for his death are questionable at best, but it is plausible Stalin had him murdered.¹⁷⁷ A similar fate may have befallen Kirov. When alive, Kirov did not hold the "streak of malice" common in Stalin's men, and his popularity challenged the dictator's authority.¹⁷⁸ In 1935, the NKVD arrested Avel Yenukidze, the godfather of Stalin's wife Nadya, charging him with leading a terrorist cell. Before his arrest, he had written an article snubbing Stalin and failed to embellish his exploits during the Russian Revolution.¹⁷⁹ Once he found out about the charges brought against him, Yenukidze complained: "What does he want?... I am doing everything he has asked me to do but it is not enough for him. He wants me to admit he is

¹⁷⁵ Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 151-152.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁷⁷ According to the official medical report, Sergo Ordzhonikidze "died of paralysis of the heart." He was known to have health issues, and recently before his death suffered a heart attack. Robert Conquest in *The Great Terror* argued that the records of his death were falsified, and Stalin was involved in organizing Ordzhonikidze's murder. See pg. 170. Oleg Khlevniuk in *Master of the House* disagreed with this assessment and claimed that Ordzhonikidze committed suicide as form of protest. See pg. 165.

¹⁷⁸ Similar to Ordzhonikidze's death, the reasons for Kirov's murder are debatable, particularly regarding Stalin's involvement. This is covered in detail earlier in this thesis in Chapter 4: "The Terror of the 1930s."

¹⁷⁹ Revolutionary history was important for Bolsheviks. After his consolidation of power, Stalin rewrote the history of the Revolution, making himself out to play a much larger role than he actually did. He mostly worked as an agitator, pundit, and editor. When rewriting history, he put his own name on some of the accomplishments of others, particularly Trotsky. See Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, 330-367.

a genius.”¹⁸⁰ With this simple slip, Stalin questioned Yenukidze’s loyalty, and eventually ordered his execution for it.

Old Bolsheviks were particularly vulnerable if their loyalty appeared to falter in the least. They had, after all, witnessed Stalin’s follies and did not see him as the revolutionary hero and heir to Lenin the younger generation of loyalists did. Those in the Moscow Trials, such as Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Bukharin, were all at one point very close with Stalin. “It did not occur to them that their opponent could use the methods of a common criminal” to arrest and frame them for crimes they did not commit.¹⁸¹ After Stalin’s wife Nadya took her own life in 1932, Bukharin, in a friendly gesture, offered to trade apartments with Stalin since the dismal act had occurred in their bedroom. Stalin graciously accepted his offer. In 1938, when the NKVD arrested Bukharin, it was this same apartment where they came to collect him.¹⁸² Stalin eliminated these one-time leaders because they in one way or another provided an immediate or potential opposition to the dictator and threatened his power. Therefore, the purges intended to bring up new Party leaders wholly devoted to him. Three decades earlier, in 1906, it is on record Stalin once ordered Kamo to execute a comrade suspected of stealing from the Party.¹⁸³ If any of his bandits could not be trusted, Stalin had them ousted or murdered. He looked for and attracted a particular type of person, exemplified by Kamo, who was reckless, violent, yet unquestionably devoted to him. “Those young men followed Stalin selflessly,” and their “admiration for him allowed him to impose on them his iron discipline.”¹⁸⁴ Those around him acted similarly in the 1930s and aided him in the implementation of the terror.

¹⁸⁰ This quote is taken from Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 173.

¹⁸¹ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 111.

¹⁸² See Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 215-216.

¹⁸³ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 153.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

For a leader looking to attain absolute power in a state, the removal of any opposition appears as an obvious step since it represents a direct challenge to his or her supremacy. The purge of close supporters expressing nothing but unquestioned loyalty, however, seems less obvious. This is true unless, of course, it is looked at as a calculated move, which is exactly what Stalin intended with the removal of Yezhov, his trusted executioner and architect of the terror. As Hannah Arendt pointed out, if a totalitarian leader “wants to correct his own errors, he must liquidate those who carried them out; if he wants to blame his mistakes on others, he must kill them.”¹⁸⁵ After the conclusion of the Party purges, Stalin terrorized the NKVD. He targeted those instrumental in planning and carrying out the extensive terror and replaced them with a fresh crop of new loyalists. In this manner, Stalin hid the fact he was the prime force behind the violence, and placed the fault and carnage at the feet of others. As such, “throughout the purge Stalin had largely avoided public responsibility. And now, when the Terror had gone as far as it conceivably could, he could profitably sacrifice the man who had overtly carried out his secret orders, the man the Party and public then blamed most.”¹⁸⁶ Stalin had Yezhov arrested and executed simply because he did his job and did it well.

Bolshevik Paranoia

Witnessing the downfall of close comrades, paranoia became a central facet of the Bolshevik Party. This fear and distrust originally spawned from the fact they achieved power through a coup and never held popular support. “Established regimes that rest on a base of

¹⁸⁵ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 375.

¹⁸⁶ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 433.

general popular acceptance and consensual order do not need to resort to terror.”¹⁸⁷ Since this was not the case in the Soviet Union, Stalin relied on violence to crush opposition and subdue the population. This plan of action meant enemies could be anywhere, at any time, prepared to subvert the system. “Indeed the Bolsheviks believed that paranoia, which they called “vigilance,” was an almost religious duty.”¹⁸⁸ According to the leadership, the combination of two terrorists equaled a “conspiracy,” and putting these terrorists from different factions together made a “Unified Centre.” These centers existed everywhere and had an international reach.¹⁸⁹

While the results of the Russian Revolution embedded conspiracy into Bolshevik ideology and ascension to power, paranoia was also “formed by decades of underground life.”¹⁹⁰ In the first decade of the twentieth century, revolutionary organizations lived in constant distrust. This fear more or less had to do with how the Okhrana had infiltrated so many groups and made daily arrests of revolutionaries. Stalin himself had been detained at least nine times, and in each instance escaped imprisonment or fled exile.¹⁹¹ Mariia Seliuk, a Socialist-Revolutionary who attempted an assassination on the director of the police, grew so paranoid by Okhrana surveillance she “perceived spies and agents in everyone, including the children of the streets.”¹⁹² If the revolutionaries caught a spy or traitor, there was little doubt he or she would be executed. Radical fighters frequently uttered the phrase ‘a dog’s death to a spy’ to intimidate potential agents in the ranks.¹⁹³ One of the most severe examples of paranoia was Kamo’s

¹⁸⁷ Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 15.

¹⁸⁸ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 55-56.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁹¹ This statistic is taken from Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 221.

¹⁹² Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 169.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 41.

attempt to torture all members of the Bolsheviks to ensure they were not spies or cowards.¹⁹⁴ If they cracked under pressure, a bullet was waiting for them. As Montefiore stated: “The Okhrana may have failed to prevent the Russian Revolution, but they were so successful in poisoning revolutionary minds that, thirty years after the fall of the Tsars, the Bolsheviks were still killing each other in a witch hunt for nonexistent traitors.”¹⁹⁵

Lack of Education

The same as revolutionary terrorists in the first decade of the twentieth century were uneducated and had little knowledge of party doctrine, the majority of those in leadership positions in the 1930s could not be considered intellectuals in any form of the word. During his revolutionary underground days, Stalin understood “street fighting” and “armed uprising” were necessary for the revolution, and “only when he is fighting” can a revolutionary make real change.¹⁹⁶ Accordingly, a firm grasp of the theoretical understanding of socialism was superfluous to the fight against the tsar. Anarchist terrorists shared this strong opinion. One revolutionary “considered it unnecessary to familiarize himself with the various philosophies, because, in his opinion, during a revolution it would simply be more important to act.”¹⁹⁷ In his memoirs, Boris Savinkov indicated, “that I attach crucial importance to terror,” and volunteered

¹⁹⁴ See *ibid.*, 256.

¹⁹⁵ Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, 221. For an analysis on how Stalin’s terror was a comparison to the European witch hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries, see Sean Armstrong, “Stalin’s With-Hunt: Magical Thinking in the Great Terror,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10 (2009): 221-240.

¹⁹⁶ See Josef Stalin, “The Proletarian Class and the Proletarian Party,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed July 13, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1905/01/01.htm>.

¹⁹⁷ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 134.

only for tasks which included political assassinations because he perceived general party work as less impactful.¹⁹⁸

While Stalin required those around him to study Party doctrine in the 1930s, the majority were for the most part uneducated and anti-intellectual. Yezhov's intelligence "has universally been described as low."¹⁹⁹ When filling out a questionnaire, for his educational background he wrote "incomplete elementary."²⁰⁰ Stalin's secretary, Alexander Poskrebyshev, gave off the impression of "being almost totally uneducated."²⁰¹ Voroshilov was raised a locksmith and completed less than two years of school.²⁰² Kaganovich, often left in charge when Stalin was absent from the Kremlin, originally trained as a cobbler and had little primary education.²⁰³ Sergo Ordzhonikidze's only real education came through informal training as a nurse.²⁰⁴ While Molotov had a secondary education, his comrades did not consider him an intellectual by any standards. Trotsky liked to joke Molotov was "mediocrity personified," and Lenin, while intended as a compliment but also seen as a slight, called him "the best filing clerk in Russia."²⁰⁵ Although the majority of these individuals lacked a formal education, they recognized the importance of carrying out orders. And like the earlier revolutionary terrorists, they understood to kill you did not need to be an intellectual.

While the individuals composing Stalin's circle of leadership cannot be considered theoreticians, they all had administrative capacities, a strong work ethic, and a willingness to use

¹⁹⁸ Savinkov, "Воспоминания Террориста."

¹⁹⁹ See Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 15.

²⁰⁰ See Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 187.

²⁰¹ See Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 15.

²⁰² See Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 53.

²⁰³ See *ibid.*, 62.

²⁰⁴ See *ibid.*, 123.

²⁰⁵ Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 454.

these traits to terrorize the population. Stalin expected all Bolsheviks to work long hours and spend their free time studying Marx and Lenin.²⁰⁶ Of the leadership, Kaganovich, was considered a “worker intellectual,” and his comrades called him “the brains behind the militarization of the Party state.”²⁰⁷ He spent countless hours, long into the night, studying in the library and educating himself on Party matters. His lack of education showed, however, when he endlessly requested Stalin to proofread his work, and Stalin frequently was left “teaching him how to spell and punctuate.”²⁰⁸ Even though Molotov took it as an insult when Lenin called him “the best filing clerk in Russia,” this characterization was no underestimation of his talent. His comrades considered Molotov an “industrious bureaucrat”²⁰⁹ and gave him the nickname “Stone-Arse” for his “indefatigable work rate.”²¹⁰ Similarly, evaluations of Yezhov’s work typically reference his “discipline and his diligence in fulfilling orders.”²¹¹ Undoubtedly, this is in part why Stalin chose him to head the NKVD during the time of the Great Terror. Andrei Zhdanov, the “sole representative in top Party circles of the nineteenth-century educated middle class,” was also a “workaholic obsessive.”²¹² Stalin considered Zhdanov to be a true intellectual, and they worked together to re-write the general Soviet history. These leaders operated around the clock, in their respective fields, in order to implement Stalin’s version of socialism.

The similarities between the traits of the criminals who made up Stalin’s Red Brigade units and those in his circle of leadership in the 1930s are abundant. Clearly, Stalin trusted this

²⁰⁶ See Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 86.

²⁰⁷ See *ibid.*, 63.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 64. Of course, as the author indicated, by bringing this work directly to Stalin, Kaganovich was also showing his reverence for the leader.

²⁰⁹ See Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 454.

²¹⁰ See Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 39.

²¹¹ Starkov, “Narkom Ezhov,” 21.

²¹² Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 138.

type of individual to follow orders and act with malevolence when the appropriate time came. To be certain, he required much more dedication and work from those in the Soviet leadership than in his earlier revolutionary days. Even so, he understood what type of men could be trusted to do the dirty work he demanded of them. These men were ruthless, uneducated, and undeniably loyal. They were paranoid and attacked anyone they perceived as a threat. They justified their actions in the name of the revolution, and used its fervor to mask personal objectives or to correct grievances. In choosing these individuals to fill positions of leadership, Stalin never left the frame of mind formed during his underground revolutionary days. Instead, he demanded more of the leading Bolsheviks and required their utmost devotion and enthusiasm, given the scope of his end goals had vastly enlarged.

CONCLUSION

Stalin was hardly alone in calling for the use of terror after the Russian Revolution, nor was he the first to implement these methods. In fact, “Lenin had spoken of it frankly as an instrument of policy.”¹ Felix Dzerzhinsky, the head of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Profiteering and Corruption (Cheka), stated in an interview in 1918: “We stand for organized terror... Terror is an absolute necessity during times of revolution.”² A Bolshevik proclamation in 1918 indicated: “It is necessary to ensure the Soviet Republic from class enemies by isolating them in concentration camps; to be shot, all persons, touching the White Guard organizations, conspiracies and revolts.”³ During the Civil War, the Red Army frequently murdered those perceived as enemies without any trial or legal proceeding. Over a two-month time span in 1918, they summarily executed 6,185 Bolshevik enemies. This number is significant once compared with the 6,321 death sentences issued by the state, not all of which were carried out, between the years 1825 and 1917.⁴ The Russian historian Stephen Kotkin stated: “Faced with extinction, the Bolsheviks wielded the specter of “counterrevolution” and the willingness of masses of people to risk their lives defending “the revolution” against counterrevolution in order to build an actual state.” At the same time, “Bolshevism’s core convictions” driven by ideological determinism, meant “any and all means up to lying and summary executions were seen as not just expedient but morally necessary.”⁵

¹ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 251.

² “Communist Secret Police: Cheka,” *Spartacus Educational*, accessed September 19, 2016, <http://spartacus-educational.com/RUScheka.htm>.

³ “Постановление Совета Народных Комиссаров «О красном терроре»,” *100 главных документов российской истории*, accessed November 10, 2016, <http://док.история.рф/20/postanovlenie-soveta-narodnykh-komissarov-o-krasnom-terrore/>.

⁴ See Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 287.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 288.

The idea of considering the terror as a “moral necessity” is similarly found a century earlier during the French Revolution, when the Jacobins executed over 16,000 individuals by the guillotine.⁶ Robespierre utilized methods of terror in France to quell the counter-revolution and to create new and pure citizenry in society. Those in opposition to the revolution, by threat of force had to adapt or face elimination. The same as the revolutionaries in France executed King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette, the Bolsheviks murdered the Tsar and his family in 1918. Without a trial or any charges brought against them, revolutionaries executed the Tsar, his wife Alexandra, their son (aged 13) and four daughters, as well as the family physician and three servants, by firing squad in the dead of night. The son, Alexei, survived the hail of bullets, and the assassins shot him point blank afterwards. Some of the daughters also survived and were “bayoneted to pieces.”⁷ Afterwards, the hit squad poured sulfuric acid over the bodies to disguise their identities, then buried them off a dirt road.

Throughout the Civil War, summary executions continued to take place, with the presupposition enemies comprised not only those fighting the Red Army, but any members of the bourgeois class or kulaks among the peasantry. “Party thinking equated Bolshevism with the movement of history and thereby made all critics into counterrevolutionaries, even if they were fellow socialists.”⁸ The Civil War launched class warfare and the move to socialism to create an ideal world. At the same time, the revolutionaries thought executions were only temporary until the war was won and the enemies of Bolshevism submitted to the ideology. By the end of the war, the Red Terror claimed up to 200,000 victims.⁹

⁶ Jonathan Matusitz, *Symbolism in Terrorism: Motivation, Communication, and Behavior* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 405.

While the Bolsheviks considered the terror a temporary measure, Stalin, the revolutionary fighter, understood its influence and impact on society, both to inspire others and silence opposition. During the Civil War, in the city of Tsaritsyn, he imprisoned 400 men, consisting mostly of Trotsky's appointed military specialists, on a barge floating near the coast. Of those 400, the majority starved to death or were executed on Stalin's orders.¹⁰ According to some sources, the barge may even have sunk killing all on board.¹¹ Trotsky once wrote: "There is no doubt, that Stalin, like many others, was molded in the environment and experiences of the civil war, along with the entire group that later enabled him to establish a personal dictatorship."¹² While this is undoubtedly true, Stalin had already learned these lessons a decade prior. The Red Terror during the Civil War was one stepping stone on the way to the Great Terror.

While the Bolsheviks used the terror in the Civil War to eliminate enemies and secure the revolution, Stalin held a deeper understanding of the potential of wielding ideology to commit atrocities. He had, after all, witnessed this first hand as a revolutionary fighter in 1905-1908. During the Civil War, Stalin "was executing "counterrevolutionaries" without proof or trial, not from sadism or panic, but as a political strategy, to galvanize the masses."¹³ According to the French philosopher Georges Sorel, myths and ideology are far more influential in motivating mass movements compared with the appeal to reason.¹⁴ And people are willing to act outside of the bounds of typical behavior when swayed by emotional appeal and involvement in such an undertaking. It seems Stalin had already learned this lesson by the time of the Civil War. The Maximalists and Anarchists employed ideology in the first decade of the twentieth century to

¹⁰ Ibid., 304.

¹¹ Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 33.

¹² Kotkin, *Stalin Volume I*, 295.

¹³ Ibid., 307.

¹⁴ See Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T.E. Hume and J. Roth (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004).

convince individuals to kill indiscriminately. For the revolutionaries, violence was necessary for the creation of a purified society. Stalin understood how the terror not only suppressed the opposition, but also inspired others to commit acts they otherwise might not have been willing to perform.

The Great Terror was both a continuation and extension of the terror unleashed during the Civil War. There are significant differences, however, between the two. The most important is the Great Terror started during conditions of peace and calm, and people, for the most part, had accepted the stability of the Soviet regime.¹⁵ The Red Terror during the Civil War, on the other hand, was implemented immediately following the Revolution after counterrevolutionaries threatened to topple the new state. As Nikolai Bukharin indicated: “In 1919 we were fighting for our lives. We executed people, but we also risked our lives in the process. In the later period, however, we were conducting a mass annihilation of completely defenseless men, together with their wives and children.”¹⁶

Stalin legitimized the Great Terror by claiming he was defending the revolution and pushing forward his version of socialism. But given the circumstances, it is clear he also did so for his own personal power and glory. Ever since he first read the works of Lenin, Stalin revered the Bolshevik leader whom he called the Bald Eagle. He worshipped him as one would a hero, and thought of himself as Lenin’s true successor. Robert Tucker even contended Stalin initiated the terror to ensure his place as the next Lenin.¹⁷ Kaganovich once said, “Everyone keeps talking about Lenin and Leninism, but Lenin’s been gone a long time...Long live Stalinism.” And Stalin

¹⁵ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 251.

¹⁶ This quote is taken from *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷ See Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, 492. According to the author, Stalin constructed the idea of “socialism in one country” to build a legacy on par with Lenin’s. And because Stalinism was rejected by a large part of the population, particularly the peasantry, he was forced to use measures of terror.

hastily replied, "How dare you say that...Lenin was a tall tower and Stalin a little finger."¹⁸

While he feigned modesty in the face of Kaganovich's sycophancy, Stalin certainly cherished the opportunity to be compared in such a light.

Throughout his political career, Stalin held a desire and need to be perceived as a great leader and warrior of the revolution. This is in part the reason he felt he had to re-write the history of the Russian Revolution, making himself out to be a champion when in fact he worked mostly behind the scenes. At the same time, any perceived faults he wiped clear of the record.¹⁹ The purges of the Party and leadership in the 1930s effectively silenced those who had first witnessed his blunders and follies throughout the 1920s. Those having read and heard Lenin's "testament" urging the dismissal of Stalin from the position of General Secretary could no longer question his authority. Stalin thus used the ideology for his own personal motives; the same as it was used by revolutionaries in the first decade of the twentieth century to seek adventure, steal, and kill out of personal desire and pleasure; the same as other Soviet leaders used the terror to secure their positions and commit acts of personal gain and vengeance.

Stalin represents a logical outcome of the Bolshevik ideology and its violent deployment. This is not to conclude the terror was an inevitable result of the ideology; however, all of the ingredients mixed perfectly for this to occur. Once in power, Stalin used his position to implement a policy of terror which was more or less called for three decades earlier by the Maximalists: the difference being the earlier revolutionaries did not have the bureaucracy to implement the violence on such a massive scale. Instead, they led individual terrorist campaigns with the weapons available to them. Stalin, a true persona of the revolutionary underground, was

¹⁸ This interaction is taken from Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, 64.

¹⁹ For more information see Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary*, 330-367. Here he discussed the political importance Stalin attributed to his revolutionary biography and his desired perception as a hero among the public.

first and foremost a radical fighter. After all, he once stated: “The victory of the people must be achieved mainly in the street, by street fighting and not by the Duma, not by talking in the Duma.”²⁰ In a 1905 call to workers, he remarked: “Not empty phrases, not senseless ‘self-arming,’ but real arming and an armed uprising,” this alone can “lead to the defeat of the government.”²¹ It is clear at this point Stalin was more comfortable as a street fighter and soldier for the revolution than as a theoretician. Once coming to power, he wielded the necessary levers to make the ideological rants of the past a reality.

²⁰ Josef Stalin, “The Present Situation and the Unity Congress of the Workers’ Party.”

²¹ Josef Stalin, “To All Workers.”

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