

Russian churches. Today there are six – and these are to be transformed into ‘public offices’ in the next two years.

In the southern towns many of the older people are still believers, but the younger generation, which has been trained in the atheist schools, is bitterly hostile to all forms of worship, and any kind of spiritual faith is ridiculed as ‘bourgeois ideology’.

Source: John Brown, *I Saw for Myself* (London, Selwyn and Blount, n.d.), pp. 218–19, 219–20.

Document 5.16 The Defeat of Time

Stalinism represented the triumph of human endeavour over the physical environment. One of the classics of early Stalinist literature celebrating the building of socialism was Kataev's novel *Forward, Oh Time!*, reflecting the belief that through the hard work of this generation in building a modern industrial infrastructure, generations to come would enjoy a better life. Happiness was measured in tons of steel produced, a theme reflected in another representative novel of the time, Nikolai Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered*. Note the staccato, breathless style considered proper for a direct, proletarian approach in the school of socialist realism.

There would be a flagstone under the fifth battery. On the flagstone sixty-nine coke ovens would be erected. Blast furnaces need coke. The blast furnaces were being put together. The mountain would be blown up. The ore would be extracted. The ore would go into the blast furnaces. The coke would be lighted. Molten iron would flow. The molten iron would be boiled into steel. They would make rails, wagons, saws, axes, ploughs, machines.

And all this would be for the needs, for the happiness of ‘him’.

To make life happy, it was not enough to say good words. It was not enough. One needed steel, steel, steel! With steel, there will be a new, happy life, a life that has never been before, a life that has never been seen before!

And all this was for ‘him’. And ‘he’ – that is I. And ‘he’ and I – are we. And we – that is life!

Until now, life had gone by like a river, from backwater to backwater, from lake to lake. Time was life. Life flowed as it wished. When it wished, it flowed slowly. When it wished, it flowed swiftly.

Now Ishchenko opened his eyes, and, for the first time in his life, looked down the entire length of time. It flowed too slowly. But it flowed for him. The past flowed for the future.

And it lay securely in his hands.

Oh, how good life was, after all!

Source: Valentine Kataev, *Forward, Oh Time!*, translated by Charles Malamuth (London, Victor Gollancz, 1934), pp. 175–6.

Anticipating the Terror

The debate over the origins and logic of the purges continues. Were they provoked by Stalin's paranoia and morbid suspiciousness, or was there a deeper purpose behind them? Alarmed by the rise of Nazism in Germany, was Stalin securing the rear by destroying all potential opponents, or were the purges no more than the logical outcome of the establishment of an all-powerful bureaucratic system?

Document 5.17 The ‘Ryutin Group’

Amid the imagined plots against Stalin there were genuine expressions of dissatisfaction with his personalised regime of terror. Already in late 1929 Beso Lominadze and Sergei Syrtsov, formerly Stalin's supporters, gave voice to their concerns; they were denounced and expelled from the Central Committee. In 1932 a group around Mikhail Ryutin, calling itself ‘The Union of Marxists-Leninists’, called for a shift of priorities from industry and agriculture to consumer goods. There appeared to be growing pressure for a relaxation of the pressure against society following the successful completion of collectivisation and the first stages of industrialisation. Alarmed by the analysis reproduced below, for the first time Stalin demanded the death penalty against a ranking party oppositionist; the Politburo refused his wish and Ryutin was sentenced to ten years in the Gulag. This was to be one of the last times that Stalin's bloodthirsty vengefulness was thwarted.

Stalin and the Crisis of the Proletarian Dictatorship

A regime of unheard of terror and colossal spying, achieved through an extraordinarily centralised and ramified gigantic apparatus, concentrating in its hands all the material resources of the country and placing in direct dependence on itself the physical survival of tens of millions of people, this is the main basis of Stalin's dictatorship. The whole state apparatus, including the party, terrorises others and at the same time itself lives under the constant Damocles sword of terror, is like a machine, despite the consciousness of each individual cell, forced to move and fulfil the will of the ‘mechanic’.

But having entered a dead end and established throughout the country, in the most diverse forms, the dominance of terror, Stalin has deprived himself of any path of retreat or the possibility of an evolutionary outcome of the crisis. He has placed himself on a pedestal like an infallible pope and cannot admit either the criminality of his policies or even the smallest mistake. The dictator cannot make a mistake – only his subordinates can be at fault . . .

In practice the sum of measures required to remove the party and the country from the crisis and the dead end can be summarised as follows:

I In the party sphere.

1. The elimination of Stalin's dictatorship and that of his clique.

2. The immediate replacement of the entire leadership of the party apparatus and new elections to party organs on the basis of genuine intra-party

democracy and the establishment of firm organisational guarantees against the usurpation of the rights of the party by the party apparatus.

3 An immediate emergency party congress.

4 The decisive and immediate return of the party to Leninist principles on all questions.

II In the state sphere.

1 Immediate new elections to the soviets with the decisive and genuine removal of appointees.

2 The replacement of the judicial apparatus and the introduction of strict revolutionary legality.

3 The replacement and severe purge of the GPU apparatus.

III In the sphere of industrialisation.

1 The immediate end of anti-Leninist methods of industrialisation and playing with tempos at the expense of the impoverishment of the working class, employees and the countryside, provided for by direct and indirect, open and masked but equally intolerable taxes and inflation. The achievement of industrialisation on the basis of the genuine and steady growth in the well-being of the masses.

2 Bringing investment and capital construction into correspondence with the general condition of all available resources of the country.

Sources: Reabilitatsiya: politicheskie protsessy 30–50gg (Moscow, Politizdat, 1989), pp. 434, 440; Istoriya otechestva v dokumentakh 1917–1993gg, vol. 2 (Moscow, Ilbi, 1994), pp. 119–21.

Document 5.18 'The Congress of Victors'

The Seventeenth Party Congress met in January 1934. The storm of collectivisation appeared over, at enormous cost the first stages of the country's industrialisation had been completed, but Stalin insisted that vigilance against 'the remnants of capitalism' should not only be maintained but intensified. As far as Stalin was concerned, 'cadres decide everything'. Stalin remained associated with a policy of pressure and the intensification of the class struggle. Sergei Kirov, the leader of the Leningrad party organisation since 1926 when he had replaced Zinoviev, emerged as the putative leader of a policy of reconciliation and the end of Stalin's personal tyranny.

Comrades, more than three years have passed since the Sixteenth Congress. That is not a very long period. But it has been fuller in content than any other period . . .

While in the capitalist countries the economic crisis is still raging, the USSR is advancing steadily both in the sphere of industry and in the sphere of agriculture. While in the capitalist countries feverish preparations are in progress for a new war, for a new redivision of the world and of spheres of

influence, the USSR is continuing its systematic and persistent struggle against the menace of war and for peace; and it cannot be said that the efforts of the USSR in this sphere have been entirely unsuccessful . . .

During this period, the USSR has become radically transformed and has cast off the integument of backwardness and medievalism. From an agrarian country it has become an industrial country. From a country of small individual agriculture it has become a country of collective, large-scale mechanized agriculture. From an ignorant, illiterate and uncultured country it has become – or rather it is becoming – a literate and cultured country covered by a vast network of higher, intermediate and elementary schools teaching in the languages of the nationalities of the USSR . . .

More than 200,000 collective farms and 5,000 state farms have been organized, with new district centres and industrial centres serving them . . . Unemployment, that scourge of the working class, has disappeared . . . With the disappearance of kulak bondage, poverty in the countryside has disappeared . . .

I now come to the question of the Party . . . The anti-Leninist Trotskyite group has been defeated . . . The anti-Leninist group of Right deviationists have been defeated and scattered . . . The national deviationist groups have been defeated and scattered . . . Everyone now sees that the line of the Party has triumphed. (*Loud applause.*) . . .

A number of problems of Leninism could be taken to demonstrate the tenacity of the survivals of the ideology of the defeated anti-Leninist groups in the minds of certain Party members. Take, for example, the problem of building a *classless Socialist society* . . . It goes without saying that a classless society cannot come of itself, spontaneously, as it were. It has to be achieved and built by the efforts of all the working people, by strengthening the organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat, by intensifying the class struggle, by abolishing classes, by eliminating the remnants of the capitalist classes, and in battles with enemies both internal and external . . .

These people evidently think that Socialism calls for levelling the requirements and the individual lives of the members of society. Needless to say, such an assumption has nothing in common with Marxism, with Leninism. By equality Marxism means, not equalization of individual requirements and individual life, but the abolition of class . . .

Or take, for example, the *national problem* . . . It should be observed that the survivals of capitalism in people's minds are much more tenacious in the sphere of the national problem than in any other sphere. They are more tenacious because they are able to disguise themselves well in national costume . . . The deviation towards nationalism reflects the attempts of 'one's own' 'national' bourgeoisie to undermine the Soviet system and to restore capitalism . . .

As you see, here too, in the sphere of deviations from the line of the Party – regardless of whether they are deviations on general policy or deviations on

the national problem – the survivals of capitalism in people's minds, including the minds of certain members of our Party, are quite tenacious . . .

Now that the correctness of the Party's political line has been confirmed by the experience of a number of years, and that there is no longer any doubt as to the readiness of the workers and peasants to support this line, the part played by so-called objective conditions has been reduced to a minimum; whereas the part played by our organizations and their leaders has become decisive, exceptional. What does this mean? It means that from now on nine-tenths of the responsibility for the failures and defects in our work rests, not on 'objective' conditions, but on ourselves, and on ourselves alone . . . the main thing in organizational work is – *choosing the right people and keeping a check on the fulfilment of decisions.*

Source: Stalin, 'Report on the Work of the CC to the Seventeenth Congress of the CPSU(b)', 26 January 1934, in *Problems of Leninism*, pp. 454, 455, 470, 471, 489, 497, 499, 506, 508, 510, 512.

Document 5.19 The Murder of Kirov

The murder of Kirov in December 1934 signalled the beginning of the great purges. He was shot by a disaffected former Zinovievite called Leonid Nikolaev, apparently with Stalin's connivance and probably with his support. Kirov appeared to support a relaxation of coercive policies of the type suggested by Ryutin. At the Seventeenth Party Congress (the 'congress of victors') in February 1934 he emerged as a popular alternative to Stalin. The depth of disenchantment is revealed by Kravchenko's comment about this period.

But whatever the immediate cause or the deeper motivations of Nicolayev's shot, to thinking Communists it seemed a symbol of the desperations under the policed surface of their country's life. Each of us knew the bitterness and despair in his own heart. Sometimes we dared to share our doubts in twos and threes. It took the murder of one of Stalin's closest associates to make us conscious that our private griefs were part of the great subterranean river of discontent flowing through the heart of a vast nation.

Outwardly everything was tranquil. Critics from the Left and the Right had been crushed and Stalin, Our Sun, shone benignly over a united Party. The peasant had been whipped into surly submission by firing squads and famine. No murmur of protest was any longer heard about the killing tempo of industrialisation, the food shortage, the hardships, the mass arrests. But inwardly many in the Party and the nation seethed with resentment. Under the stupor of indifference, under the crust of silent despair, there was the hot lava of primitive angers.

This should be made clear to the world in ordinary justice to the Russian people. They were impotent in their suffering; weakened by twenty years of

war, revolution, undernourishment and systematic persecutions, dizzied by slogans and bewildered by lies; cut off completely from the outside world. Yet they never approved the brutality of their rulers. The bitterness was deepest in the Party itself, because it was mixed with a feeling of guilt and churned by galling helplessness against the rulers and their might.

It was no accident that Nicolayev and those accused of direct complicity in his crime were all young people, products of the Soviet epoch, mostly students. Traditionally the higher schools of Russia have been the breeding ground of revolutionary idealism. Now such idealism was called counter revolutionary but it was still in the same tradition.

Source: Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom*, p. 168.

Document 5.20 Bukharin's Assessment of Kirov and Stalin

Boris Nicolaevsky was a former Menshevik who had emigrated to Paris. On a visit there in 1936 at the head of a Soviet delegation Bukharin apparently shared his feelings with Nicolaevsky. The conversation was published in the form of a 'Letter of an Old Bolshevik', which gives a vivid picture of the politics of the period, although it might appear that some of the statements were more the product of wishful thinking than fact. Nicolaevsky in this and other works revealed the depth of the intra-party struggle against Stalin between 1932 and 1934, the background to Kirov's murder and its significance.

Kirov played an important part in the Politburo. He was a 100 percent supporter of the general line and distinguished himself during its operation by great energy and inflexibility. This caused Stalin to value him highly. But there was always a certain independence in Kirov's attitude which annoyed Stalin. The story is that Stalin had prevented Kirov from attending the meetings of the Politburo in Moscow for several months under the pretext that his presence in Leningrad was indispensable. However, Stalin could never make up his mind to take strong measures against Kirov. It would have been folly to add to the already large number of the dissatisfied an important party leader such as Kirov, especially since Kirov had succeeded in surrounding himself in Leningrad with reliable and devoted aides. A new conflict with the Leningrad party might have been more fatal now than in Zinoviev's day. In the winter of 1933–34, Kirov had so strengthened his position that he could afford to follow his own line. He aimed not only at a 'Western orientation' in foreign policy, but also at the conclusions which would follow logically from this new orientation as far as home policy was concerned . . .

Kirov stood for the idea of *abolition of the terror*, both in general and inside the Party. We do not desire to exaggerate the importance of his proposals. It must not be forgotten that when the first Five-Year Plan was being put into

- (a) Freedom of speech;
- (b) Freedom of the press;
- (c) Freedom of assembly and meetings;
- (d) Freedom of street processions and demonstrations.

These rights of citizens are ensured by placing at the disposal of the working people and their organisations printing shops, supplies of paper, public buildings, the streets, means of communication and other material requisites for the exercise of these rights.

Article 126. In accordance with the interests of the working people, and for the purpose of developing the organised self-expression and political activity of the masses of the people, citizens of the USSR are ensured the right to unite in public organisations – trade unions, cooperative associations, youth organisations, sport and defence organisations, cultural, technical, and scientific societies; and the most active and politically conscious citizens from the ranks of the working class and other strata of the working people unite in the All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks), which is the vanguard of the working people in their struggle to strengthen and develop the socialist system, and which represents the leading nucleus of all organisations of the working people, both social and state.

Article 127. Citizens of the USSR are guaranteed inviolability of the person. No one may be subject to arrest except by an order of the court or with the sanction of a state attorney.

Article 128. The inviolability of the homes of citizens and secrecy of correspondence are protected by law . . .

Chapter XI: The Electoral System

Article 135. The elections of deputies shall be universal: all citizens of the USSR who have reached the age of 18, irrespective of race and nationality, religion, education qualifications, residence, social origin, property status or past activity, shall have the right to take part in the elections of deputies and to be elected, with the exception of insane persons and persons sentenced by court with deprivation of electoral rights.

Article 136. The elections of deputies shall be equal: every citizen shall have one vote; all citizens shall take part in the elections on an equal basis.

Article 137. Women shall have the right to elect and to be elected on equal terms with men.

Source: 'The New Constitution of 1936', in Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The Truth about Soviet Russia* (London, Longmans, 1942), pp. 55–6, 56–7, 58, 71–3, 73–4.

The Great Terror

The great purges emerged out of the general reregistrations of party membership. The one in early 1935 saw the expulsion of nearly 300,000 communists from the party, with the usual consequence of an investigation by the secret police. Following Kirov's assassination simplified judicial procedures were introduced allowing NKVD troikas to decide cases on their own and to impose the death penalty without the right of appeal. The delegates to the Seventeenth Party Congress, as Khrushchev later reported (Document 8.4), were decimated. Three 'show trials' provide the enduring image of the purges: the first in August 1936 saw Kamenev and Zinoviev joined together in death as in life; the second in January–February 1937 featured Radek and Pyatakov; and the third in March 1938 (see Documents 5.24 and 5.25) included Bukharin and the former head of the NKVD, Genrikh Yagoda.

Document 5.23 The Purge Plenum

The Central Committee plenum of 23 February–5 March 1937 is considered to be the one that formally approved the policy of mass terror. Little, however, is known about its deliberations, perhaps indicating some resistance to Stalin's policy of mass liquidation. The report encouraged denunciations from below, particularly in the workplace.

The plenum of the Central Committee of the VKP(b) [All-Union Communist Party] cannot countenance the objectionable phenomenon that a number of the organs of industry and transport remain passive in the face of the very exposure and unmasking of trotskyite diversionists, after the diversionist work of the trotskyites becomes evident. Usually the trotskyites are unmasked by the organs of the NKVD and individual party members – volunteers. In this situation the organs of industry themselves, and also, to some extent, of transport, display neither action nor, more important, initiative. Moreover, certain organs of industry even retard in this matter . . . [Ellipsis in original.]

The bureaucratic distortion of the principle of one-man authority (as contrasted with collective management, which was formerly practised) consists of the fact that many leaders in the economy think that one-man authority makes them entirely free of the control by the public opinion of the masses and the rank and file of workers in the economy. They do not think it necessary to be guided by these activists. They cut themselves off from the activists and thereby deprive themselves of the support of the activists in the matter of exposing and liquidating inadequacies and lapses that are exploited by the enemies for their diversionist work.

Source: Pravda, 21 April 1937, in McNeal (ed.), *Resolutions and Decisions of the CPSU, vol. 3, The Stalin Years: 1929–1953*, pp. 182–3.

Document 5.24 Vyshinsky and the Show Trials

In 1938 in the third of the great 'show trials' Bukharin and Rykov were in the dock together with the Trotskyites Rakovsky and Krestinsky and the former NKVD leader Yagoda. As before, elaborate chains of conspiracy were alleged along with fantastic accusations. In his final speech Bukharin confessed to enormous crimes but denied any specific offence, thus apparently exposing the absurdity of the charges. Most of the defendants were shot, and the rest perished in the Gulag. Andrei Vyshinsky, a Menshevik up to the early 1920s, was the chief prosecutor in this as in earlier trials. His call to 'shoot the mad dogs' became the slogan of the purges.

The Trotskyites and Bukharinites, that is to say, the 'bloc of Rights and Trotskyites', the leading lights of which are now in the prisoners' dock, is not a political party, a political tendency, but a band of felonious criminals, and not simply felonious criminals, but of criminals who have sold themselves to enemy intelligence services, criminals whom even ordinary felons treat as the basest, the lowest, the most contemptible, the most depraved of the depraved . . .

Our people and all honest people throughout the world are waiting for your just verdict. May this verdict of yours resound through the whole of our great country like a bell calling to new feats of heroism and to new victories! May your verdict resound as the refreshing and purifying thunderstorm of just Soviet punishment!

Our whole country, from young to old, is awaiting and demanding one thing: the traitors and spies who were selling our country to the enemy must be shot like dirty dogs!

Our people are demanding one thing: crush the accursed reptile!

Source: Daniels, Communism in Russia, pp. 269, 270.

At this time Pashukanis was purged and his radical Marxist theory on the withering away of law was replaced by Vyshinsky's formulations that the proletariat required the state and a strengthened socialist legal order to regulate the new Soviet system – the 'legalising' of illegality. Law, like the state, would only wither away in the highest stage of communism, when capitalist encirclement had been overcome and the community could regulate its own affairs without the aid of constraint.

Document 5.25 The Show Trials – an American View

Joseph E. Davies was the US ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1936 to 1938, the period of the most intense terror. Supported by a sophisticated intelligence-gathering network and many personal contacts in the hierarchy, Davies nevertheless gave credence to the charges laid against former Bolshevik leaders in the three great show trials. In the third the 'rightists' Bukharin and Rykov were charged with heinous crimes. In a letter to his daughter of 8 March 1938 Davies gives his view of the event; in the second extract he comments on the verdict in a confidential cable of

17 March to the US Secretary of State; and in a note written in 1941 he looks back at the trials and repressions of his time in Moscow and marvels at the foresight of the Soviet government in clearing the country of all potential 'fifth columnists'.

For the last week I have been attending daily sessions of the Bukharin treason trial. No doubt you have been following it in the press. It is terrific. I have found it of much intellectual interest, because it brings back into play all the old critical faculties involved in assessing the credibility of witnesses and sifting the wheat from the chaff – the true from the false – which I was called upon to use for so many years in the trial of cases, myself.

All the fundamental weaknesses and vice of human nature – personal ambitions at their worst – are shown up in the proceedings. They disclose the outlines of a plot which came very near to being successful in bringing about the overthrow of this government.

This testimony now makes clear what we could not understand and what happened last spring and summer. You will recall that the folks at the chancery were telling us of extraordinary activity around the Kremlin, when the gates were closed to the public; that there were indications of much agitation and a changing of the character of the soldiers on guard. The new guards, you will remember we were told, consisted almost entirely of soldiers recruited from Georgia, Stalin's native land.

The extraordinary testimony of Krestinsky, Bukharin, and the rest would appear to indicate that the Kremlin's fears were well justified. For it now seems that a plot existed in the beginning of November, 1936, to project a coup d'état, with Tukhachevsky at its head, for May of the following year. Apparently it was touch and go at the time whether it actually would be staged.

But the government acted with great vigour and speed. The Red Army generals were shot and the whole party organization was purged and thoroughly cleansed. Then it came out that quite a few of those at the top were seriously infected with the virus of the conspiracy to overthrow the government, and were actually working with the Secret Service organizations of Germany and Japan.

This situation explains the present official attitude of hostility towards foreigners, the closing of various foreign consulates in this country and the like. Quite frankly, we can't blame the powers-that-be much for reacting in this way if they believed what is now being divulged at the trial.

On March 13, 1938, at approximately five o'clock in the morning, all the defendants in the trial were adjudged guilty and the sentences were imposed. Three of the defendants were condemned to imprisonment and the remainder to death through shooting. Eight of the most prominent former members of the Soviet government, including a former premier, six former cabinet officers, one of the most prominent party leaders and members of the Politburo, and also a former president of one of the constituent republics

Secretary; in exactly the same way, and for a similar reason – the world war – that Winston Churchill, with the consent of the House of Commons, became Prime Minister and Minister of Defence with Chamberlain, the outgoing Prime Minister, as a prominent member of the British Cabinet. As Prime Minister I doubt whether Stalin would have offered, as Churchill did, to amalgamate the USSR on terms of equality with another Great Power without consulting the Presidium of which he was a member. Neither the Prime Minister of the British Cabinet nor the presiding member of the Sovnarkom has anything like the autocratic power of the President of the USA, who not only selects the members of his Cabinet subject to the formal control of the Senate, but is also Commander-in-Chief of the American armed forces and, under the Lease-Lend Act, is empowered to safeguard, in one way or another, the arrival of munitions and food at the British ports. By declaring, in May this year, a state of unlimited national emergency, President Roosevelt legally assumes a virtual dictatorship of the United States. He has power to take over transport, to commandeer the radio for the purposes of propaganda, to control imports and all exchange transactions, to requisition ships and to suspend laws governing working hours, and, most important of all, to decide on industrial priorities and, if necessary, to take over industrial plants.

In what manner, then, does Stalin exceed in authority over his country's destiny the British Prime Minister or the American President? The office by which Stalin keeps his livelihood and owes his predominant influence is that of general secretary of the Communist Party, a unique organisation the characteristics of which, whether good or evil, I shall describe later on in this pamphlet. Here I will note that the Communist Party, unlike the Roman Catholic and Anglican Church, is not an oligarchy; it is democratic in its internal structure, having a representative congress electing a central committee which in its turn selects the Politbureau and other executive organs of the Communist Party. Nor has Stalin ever claimed the position of a dictator or fuhrer. For otherwise; he has persistently asserted in his writings and speeches that as a member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR he is merely a colleague of thirty other members, and that so far as the Communist Party is concerned he acts as general secretary under the orders of the executive. He has, in fact, frequently pointed out that he does no more than carry out the decisions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Thus, in describing his momentous article known as 'Dizzy with Success', he expressly states that this was written on 'the well-known decisions of the Central Committee regarding the fight 'against Distortions of the Party Line' in the collective farm movement . . . In this connection', he continues, 'I recently received a number of letters from comrades, collective farmers, calling upon me to reply to the questions contained in them. It was my duty to reply to the letters in private correspondence; but that proved to be impossible, since more than half the letters received did not have the addresses of the writers (they forgot to send their addresses). Nevertheless

the questions raised in these letters are of tremendous political interest to our comrades . . . In view of this I found myself faced with the necessity of replying to the comrades in an open letter, i.e., in the press . . . I did this all the more willingly since I had a direct decision of the Central Committee for this purpose.'

Is the USSR a Political Democracy?

In answer to the second question – is the USSR a political democracy? – it is clear that, tested by the Constitution of the Soviet Union as revised and enacted in 1936, the USSR is the most inclusive and equalised democracy in the world. The Supreme Soviet of the USSR consists of two chambers – the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities. The Soviet of the Union is directly elected by the citizens in electoral districts of one deputy for three hundred thousand inhabitants, the number of deputies today being over twelve hundred. The Soviet of Nationalities, with over six hundred deputies, also directly elected, aims at giving additional representation to ethnical groups whether manifested in colour or figure, language or literature, religion or manners, inhabiting large areas of the USSR. These separate Constituent Republics (now sixteen, formerly eleven) are supplemented by smaller local areas also distinguished by racial characteristics, termed Autonomous Republics or Autonomous Regions, to all of whom are allotted a smaller number of deputies to the Soviet of Nationalities. The two chambers which make up the Supreme Soviet of the USSR have equal rights, and their sessions begin and terminate simultaneously. Joint sessions of both chambers are needed to ratify legislation and meet twice a year, and are convened by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet at its direction, or on demand of one of the Constituent Republics. All these assemblies, whether the Soviet of the Union or the Soviet of Nationalities, together with a network of subordinate provincial, municipal and village soviets, are directly elected by secret ballot, by all the inhabitants over eighteen years of age, without distinction of sex, race or religion, or political or social opinion. For instance the 'deprived class' of the earlier constitutions, former landlords and capitalist profit-makers, relations of the late Tsar, or members of a religious order, are now included on the register of voters. I may add that nearly fifty thousand practising priests of the Greek Orthodox Church, together with several hundreds of Roman Catholics, Evangelicals, Mohammedans and Buddhist officiants, were enfranchised by the Constitution of 1936.

Source: Sidney and Beatrice Webb, The Truth about Soviet Russia, pp. 14–17.

Document 5.30 Raskolnikov's Letter to Stalin

Fedor Raskolnikov had joined the party in 1910 and participated in the October uprising at the head of the Kronstadt sailors. He had then worked in the Soviet

military establishment until taking up diplomatic work in the 1930s. In 1939 he was declared an 'enemy of the people' and escaped abroad where he wrote this letter denouncing Stalin, and he died that year in Nice.

Stalin, you have declared me 'outside the law'. With this act you have made me equal in rights – more accurately, in rightlessness – with all Soviet citizens, whom under your rule live beyond the law . . . Your 'socialism', under whose triumph there is room only behind camp wires for its builders, is so far from true socialism as the arbitrariness of your personal dictatorship has nothing in common with the dictatorship of the proletariat . . .

No one in the Soviet Union feels themselves secure. No one, going to bed, can be sure that they will not be arrested at night. There is no mercy for anyone. The innocent and the guilty, hero of October and enemy of the revolution, Old Bolshevik and non-party people, kolkhoz peasant and political representative, people's commissar and worker . . . are all equally under your whip, all on the same devilish and bloody carousel . . . You are the cook of hot dishes, intolerable for the stomachs of normal people.

You have destroyed the party of Lenin, and on its bones you have built a new 'party of Lenin and Stalin', which serves as a cover for your one-man rule . . . You are a renegade who has betrayed your past, betraying Lenin's work. With the cruelty of a sadist you are beating cadres who are useful and necessary for the country. They appear to you dangerous to your personal dictatorship. On the eve of war you are destroying the Red Army, the love and pride of the country, the foundation of its strength . . . You have deprived the kolkhoz peasant of any incentive whatsoever to work . . . There is not a corner or area where one can quietly get on with anything . . .

Your social base is narrowing every day. Your mindless bacchanalia cannot continue much longer. The list of your crimes is endless. The list of your victims is endless. It is not possible to list them all.

Source: Fedor Raskolnikov's Letter to Stalin, 17 August 1939, in Vozvrashchenie k pravde: reabilitirovan posmertno (Moscow, Yuridicheskaya literatura, 1988), p. 198.

Document 5.31 *The God that Failed*

This was the title of a book edited by Richard Crossman that came out in 1950 in which six former communists or communist sympathisers (Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Richard Wright, André Gide, Louis Fischer and Stephen Spender) described how they came to support the movement, and their subsequent disillusionment. Since the early 1920s Gide (1869–1951) had sympathised with the struggle of the young Soviet regime to establish itself. Finally, in June 1936 he visited the object of his admiration, and was deeply shocked.

Some years ago I wrote of my love and admiration for the Soviet Union where an unprecedented experiment was being attempted, the thought of which inflamed my heart with expectation and from which I hoped a tremendous advance, and impulse capable of sweeping along the whole of humanity. It was certainly worth while to be alive at such a moment to be able to witness this rebirth and to give one's whole life to further it. In my heart, I bound himself resolutely, in the name of future culture, to the fortunes of the Soviet Union . . .

Like many other visitors I saw model factories, clubs, pleasure-grounds, at which I marvelled. I asked for nothing better than to be carried away with admiration and to convert others as well. And so, as it is very pleasant to be enraptured and to persuade others, if I protest against all this enchantment, I must have serious grounds for doing so. I only began to see clearly when, abandoning the government transport, I travelled alone through the country in order to be able to get into direct contact with the people. I had read too much Marxist literature to feel a fish out of water in Russia, but I had also read too many accounts of idyllic trips and too many enthusiastic apologies. My mistake, at first, was to believe all the praise that I heard and everything which might have enlightened me was always said in a spiteful tone of voice. It happens too often that the friends of the Soviet Union refuse to see anything bad there – or at least to recognize it – so it happens that truth is spoken with hatred and falsehood with love. My mind is constituted in such a way that my greatest severity is directed especially towards those of whom I would like always to approve and I do not think that it is the best way to express one's love to be content with praise alone. I think that I do more service to the cause which the Soviet Union represents by speaking without pretence and without too much circumspection and consideration. I certainly had personally nothing to complain of in the course of my trip, in spite of all the spiteful explanations which were invented subsequently to invalidate my criticism, which was too often interpreted as the result and expression of personal pique and disappointment – that is most absurd of all . . .

Certainly it seemed to me quite natural that they should want to receive a guest as well as possible and to show him the best of everything, but nevertheless it surprised me to find so great a difference between the best and the common lot, such excessive privileges beside such depths of poverty. It is on account of my admiration for the Soviet Union and the marvels she has already accomplished by herself, that my criticism is going to be severe; because of what we expect from her and what she gave us reason to hope from her. I trusted her and so, in Russia, what distressed me most was not what was not yet perfect, but rather to find there everything from which all my longing was directed; it was a land where I imagined Utopia was in process of becoming reality. The Soviet Union, is, however, at an early stage of construction – that needs to be remembered constantly – and we are

present at the parturition of the future. There are both good and bad points – I should say both the best and the worst; one moves from the brightest to the darkest with alarming and disconcerting suddenness. Much has already been accomplished which has filled our hearts with joy, and this, doubtless, made me exacting. It seemed at first to me as if the most difficult [tasks] had already been achieved and I was ready to throw myself with all my heart into the contract, as it were, into which I had entered with the Soviet Union in the name of all suffering mankind. I felt myself so much committed that failure was not to be contemplated.

I admired particularly in Russia the extraordinary impulse towards education and culture. But the sad thing is that the education the people receive only informs them on what leads them to flatter themselves on the present state of affairs and to believe in the Soviet Union 'Ave spes unica.' Culture is directed towards one aim only, the glorification of the Soviet Union; it is not disinterested and critical discrimination is entirely lacking. I know well that they make a parade of self-criticism, and at first I believed and hoped in that, thinking that it might lead to great results if it was applied with integrity. But I soon discovered that criticism consists solely in inquiring whether such or such a work is in agreement with the Party line. It is not the Party line which is discussed or criticized, but only the question whether a certain theory tallies or not with this sacred line. No state of mind is more dangerous than this, nor more likely to imperil real culture. Soviet citizens remain in the most complete ignorance of everything outside their own country and – what is worse – have been persuaded that everything abroad is vastly inferior to everything at home. On the other hand, although they are not interested in what prevails outside their country, they are very much interested in what foreigners think of them. What they are very anxious to know is whether they are sufficiently admired abroad; what they fear above all else is that foreigners may not be sufficiently well informed concerning their merits; what they want from them is praise and not information . . .

In the Soviet Union it is accepted once and for all that on every subject – whatever may be the issue – there can only be one opinion, the right one. And each morning *Pravda* tells the people what they need to know, and must believe and think . . .

The disappearance of capitalism has not brought freedom to the Soviet workers – it is essential that the proletariat abroad should realize this fully. It is of course true that they are no longer exploited by share-holding capitalists, but nevertheless, they are exploited, and in so devious, subtle and twisted a manner that they do not know any more whom to blame. The largest number of them live below the poverty line and it is their starvation wages which permit the swollen pay-packets of the privileged workers – the pliant yes-men. One cannot fail to be shocked by the indifference shown by those in power towards their inferiors, and the servility and obsequiousness on the part of the latter – I almost said the poor. Granted that there are no longer

any classes nor class distinctions in the Soviet Union, but the poor are still with them – and there are far too many of them . . .

Although the long-heralded dictatorship of the proletariat has not materialized there is nevertheless dictatorship of one kind – dictatorship of the Soviet bureaucracy. It is essential to recognize this and not to allow oneself to be bamboozled. This is not what was hoped for – one might almost say that it is precisely the last thing in the world that was hoped. The workers have no longer even the liberty of electing their own representatives to defend their threatened interests. Free ballot – open or secret – is a derision and a sham; the voters have merely the right of electing those who have been chosen for them beforehand. The workers are cheated, muzzled and bound hand and foot, so that resistance has become wellnigh impossible. The game has been well played by Stalin, and Communists the whole world over applaud him, believing that in the Soviet Union at least they have gained a glorious victory, and they call all those who do not agree with them public enemies and traitors. But in Russia this has led to treachery of a new sort. An excellent way of earning promotion is to become an informer; that puts you on good terms with the dangerous police which protects you while using you. Once you have started on that easy, slippery slope no question of friendship or loyalty can intervene to hold you back; on every occasion you are forced to advance, sliding further into the abyss of shame. The result is that everyone is suspicious of everyone else and the most innocent remarks – even of children – can bring destruction, so that everyone is on his guard and no one lets himself go . . .

The Soviet Union has deceived our fondest hopes and shown us tragically in what treacherous quicksand an honest revolution can founder. The same old capitalist society has been re-established, a new and terrible despotism crushing and exploiting man, with all the abject and servile mentality of serfdom.

Source: Richard Crossman (ed.), *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1950), pp. 179, 181–2, 182–4, 184–5, 185–6, 187–8, 198.

Document 5.32 Anna Akhmatova

There can be no more eloquent conclusion to a discussion of the Soviet 1930s than to draw on one of the greatest of Russia's poets. In a cycle of poems under the general rubric 'Requiem', some of which were written some years later, Anna Akhmatova gave profound poetic voice to the victims of Stalin's terror. Yezhov was head of the Soviet secret police, the NKVD, from September 1936 to December 1938. Known as 'the bloody dwarf', he oversaw the great purges of those years, which are forever inscribed in folk memory as the 'Yezhovshchina'.

Requiem

No, it wasn't under a foreign heaven,
It wasn't under the wing of a foreign power, –
I was there among my countrymen,
I was where my people, unfortunately, were.

1961

INSTEAD OF A PREFACE

In the awful years of Yezhovian horror, I spent
seventeen months standing in line in front of various
prisons in Leningrad. One day someone 'recognized' me.
Then a woman with blue lips, who was standing behind me, and
who, of course, had never heard my name, came out of the stupor
which typified all of us, and whispered into my ear (everyone there
spoke only in whispers):

– Can you describe this?

And I said:

– I can.

Then something like a fleeting smile passed over what once
had been her face.

1 April 1957
Leningrad

DEDICATION

Faced with this grief, mountains sink down,
The great river has to languish,
But the hasps of the prison are made of iron,
And behind them the 'concentration den'
And deadly anguish.
Cool winds are stroking someone's hair,
And the sun is shining on someone's head –
We don't know, we're the same everywhere,
The gnashing of keys is all we hear
And the soldiers' booted tread.
We get up as if there were priests to assist,
We cross the rebrutalized city squares,
More breathless than the dead, we come to the tryst,
The sun is lower and the Neva's all mist,
And far off, the song of hoping flares.
Sentence . . . And at once the tears will start,
How different from the others one's already grown,
It's as if they took the life out of the heart,
Like being thrown backwards on a jolting cart,

. . . She's coming . . . Staggering . . . Alone . . .
Where now are all the chance-met people,
Friends during those two years in hell?
Of which Siberian storms are they full?
What phantoms do they see in the lunar circle?
It's to them I am sending this farewell.

1940

INTRODUCTION

This happened when only the dead wore smiles –
They rejoiced at being safe from harm.
And Leningrad dangled from its jails
Like some unnecessary arm.
And when the hosts of those convicted,
Marched by – mad, tormented throngs,
And train whistles were restricted
To singing separation songs.
The stars of death stood overhead,
And guiltless Russia, that pariah,
Writhed under boots, all blood-bespattered,
And the wheels of many a black maria.

1935

*Source: Anna Akhmatova, Poems, selected and translated by Lyn Coffin,
Introduction by Joseph Brodsky (New York, W. W. Norton & Co., 1983),
pp. 82–4.*