

1937: Stalin's Year of Terror

Book by Vadim Rogovin now available on tape

16 July 1998

To the Editor:

Thanks to the generous efforts of volunteers from the Library for the Blind and Dyslexic, *1937: Stalin's Year of Terror* is being made available for people who are unable to read the printed book. Please tell your disabled readers who may be accessing your web site by an electronic voice reading program that this excellent book is being made available for them too. (Unfortunately the tapes are only available to those who are medically certified as blind or otherwise reading-disabled).

RFBD is a nonprofit organization whose volunteers record thousands of books every year. They record the kind of educational and scholarly books that students who are print-disabled require for their studies. For a small yearly fee, anyone who is certified as reading disabled because of blindness or dyslexia, or can't hold a book because of paralysis, arthritis, etc., can request that the books they need be recorded. If the title falls within the educational scope of the service and they can find readers and studio time, the book is accepted. Their entire catalog is on their web site at www.rfbd.org.

Since your web site administrators seem keen to keep the WSWS abreast of the latest technology, you should appreciate RFBD's recent efforts to make electronic books available to people with electronic text-to-voice readers. This makes researching easier by light years, because of the search capabilities of computer programs. This may be a novel convenience for regular researchers but it is almost necessary for certain types of research when it comes to the print-disabled.

The taping of Vadim Rogovin's book is scheduled to be completed by September. So far I have received the first half of the book. It is very comprehensive and

detailed.

While the mountain of evidence about the trials has been impressive, I have been particularly struck by the focus Professor Rogovin has put on explaining how such terrible events could have happened at all. He explains that behind the decision of lifelong revolutionaries to testify to crimes they did not commit or could not have committed were processes and forces of world historical force. He rejects simple explanations limited to assessing a particular individual's psychology. That does not prevent him for carefully considering each individual, however, and explaining why different individuals took different paths in the same apparent circumstances. He often relies on Trotsky's writing from that time, but seems to make Trotsky come alive.

For example, at the end of Chapter 10, Professor Rogovin explains the motives behind the actions of the defendants at the Trial of the Sixteen. He explains the actions of the former oppositionists who had recanted and had for a time returned to work in various important government posts. That did not stop Stalin from indicting them as criminals for supposed terrorist activity. Among them were Radek and Piatakov.

He says: "We must juxtapose these two currents of political life--the dynamic of far-reaching decisions and their real consequences for the development of society, and, let us say, the dynamic of the inner life of power structures, or of the inner struggle which flowed within them." On the next page, referring to cultural and economic achievements of the Soviet Union in the 1930s, he says, "a fundamental corrective must be factored into these indicators by calculating, as much as it is possible, the social and human cost of their increase, i.e., the toll it placed on millions of people,

their lives, their health and personal development. For it is precisely the social cost of economic growth that is the basic criterion by which people evaluate a regime.

"The greater the social cost of the transformations being carried out by a regime, the more powerfully the fear of paying for mistakes will weight upon its bearers and the more powerfully will grow the desire to shift this retribution onto others. In this we must search for the key to the conduct of the both the 'victors' and the 'vanquished' in the bureaucratic upper echelons of that period.

"Apropos of this observation, it would be useful to compare the political situation of the 1930s with today's political situation."

In the method of Professor Rogovin's explanation we can truly see the path via historical analysis to understanding the political situation in Russia today.

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