

1937: Stalin's Year of Terror By Vadim Z. Rogovin

# Chapter 1: Preparations for the First Show Trial

29 December 1998

Stalin fell far short of achieving his goals with the trials that followed Kirov's murder. The immediate organizers of the murder were declared to be a group of thirteen young "Zinovievists," shot in December 1934 during the case of the so-called "Leningrad Center." Zinoviev, Kamenev and other leaders of the former Leningrad Opposition, who had been convicted in January 1935 during the case of the "Moscow Center," were declared guilty of only the following: with their "counterrevolutionary" discussions they "objectively" contributed to inflaming terrorist moods among their Leningrad cothinkers.

The "post-Kirov" trials of 1934–35 were unable to establish ties leading from the "Zinovievists" to the "Trotskyists," let alone to Trotsky himself. Meanwhile Stalin needed at all costs to accuse Trotsky and the Trotskyists of terrorist activity. This version was outlined in Yezhov's manuscript, "From Fractional Activity to Open Counterrevolution," where he claimed: "There is no doubt that the Trotskyists were also informed about the terrorist side of the activity conducted by the Zinoviev organization. Moreover, from the testimony given by separate Zinovievists during the investigation of the murder of Comrade Kirov, and during the subsequent arrests of Zinovievists and Trotskyists, we have established that the latter had also embarked on the path of terrorist groups." [1]

Yezhov's "opus," which was presented to Stalin in May 1935 and edited by the latter, never saw the light of day. However, its basic conceptions turned into the fundamental points of directives issued to the organs of the NKVD. In the middle of 1935, Yezhov told the deputy Narkom of Internal Affairs, Agranov, that "in his opinion and in the opinion of the party's central committee, there existed in the Soviet Union an undisclosed center of Trotskyists," and "he sanctioned the carrying out of operations against Trotskyists in Moscow." According to Agranov, Molchanov, the head of the secret-political department of the NKVD, who had been entrusted with conducting this operation, acted without the operative effectiveness characteristic of the "organs," insofar as he felt that "there was no serious Trotskyist underground in Moscow." [2]

On 9 February, the deputy Narkom of Internal Affairs, Prokofiev, sent a directive to the local bodies of the NKVD which spoke of the "increased activity of the Trotsky-Zinoviev counterrevolutionary underground and the presence of underground terrorist formations among them." The directive demanded the "total liquidation of the entire Trotsky-Zinoviev underground" and the uncovering of "all organizational ties between the Trotskyists and Zinovievists." [3]

On 23 February, Stalin received a report from Prokofiev about a new series of arrests and about the seizure of Trotsky's archives from the 1927 period from one of those arrested. He then arranged by means of a Politburo resolution for Yezhov to be added to the investigation. As Yezhov declared at the February-March Plenum of the Central Committee in 1937, "the person responsible for opening the case (of the "Trotsky-Zinoviev Center") was essentially Comrade Stalin, who, upon receiving ...

the material, wrote in a resolution: 'This is an extremely important case; I propose handing over the Trotskyist archive to Yezhov. Second, to appoint Yezhov to supervise the investigation, so that the investigation be carried out by the Cheka and Yezhov.'" "I understood this directive in the following way," added Yezhov, "that I had to implement it no matter what, and to the extent that it was in my power, I applied pressure. And here I must say that I met not only loyal resistance [*sic*—V. R.], but sometimes open opposition." [4]

This "opposition" came most of all from Yagoda who was disturbed by the fact that Yezhov's efforts were directed at "proving" the existence of a Trotskyist conspiracy from the beginning of the 1930s, and, consequently, of "failures" in the work of Yagoda's apparatus. Understanding Yezhov's inclusion in the investigation to be an expression of Stalin's lack of confidence in the leadership of the NKVD, Yagoda sent a directive to the organs of state security about increasing the repression directed against "Trotskyists." At this time, however, Stalin's idea of organizing a trial of the "Trotsky-Zinoviev Center" apparently remained a secret not only for members of the Politburo, but for Yagoda as well.

The first to be arrested among the participants in the future trial was the political emigré Valentin Olberg. Unlike the other emigrés who were brought to trial, he actually did meet with Sedov and conduct a correspondence with Trotsky. The Harvard archives contain the correspondence between Trotsky, Sedov and Olberg, which discusses distributing the *Bulletin of the Opposition* in various countries, including the USSR, and deals with the activity of the German group of the Left Opposition. [5] However, by 1930 Trotsky had already rejected Olberg's proposal to come to Prinkipo in order to serve as his secretary. This occurred because Trotsky's friends in Berlin who knew Olberg well considered him "if not an agent of the GPU, then a candidate-agent." [6]

According to A. Orlov, at the end of the 1920s Olberg had been recruited by the OGPU and acted as an agent among foreign groups of the Left Opposition. Then he was recalled to the Soviet Union and in 1935 sent into the Gorky Pedagogical Institute, where "the organs" had found traces of an illegal circle studying the works of Lenin and Trotsky.

In 1937, the Paris Commission to Counter-Investigate the Moscow Trials received testimony from Olberg's mother. From her testimony it became clear that, besides V. Olberg, his brother Pavel had also emigrated to the USSR and was working as an engineer in Gorky. In his letters to his mother, P. Olberg enthusiastically told about receiving Soviet citizenship and relayed his impressions of the USSR. [7] On 5 January 1936 (on the same day as his brother) he was arrested, and in October shot along with a large group of "Trotskyists" from Moscow, Gorky and other cities (included in this group was Trotsky's son-in-law, Platon Volkov, who at the moment of his arrest was a worker in Omsk). [8]

Valentin Olberg, it was said at the February-March Plenum, "was known to the organs of the NKVD in 1931." Moreover, the "organs" had

at their disposal letters from Trotsky to Olberg which had been handed over in the same year by a foreign agent of the GPU. [9] Only one thing could explain the fact that after all this Olberg had not been arrested: the OGPU considered him to be an extremely valuable agent and hoped that he would penetrate more deeply into Trotsky's entourage.

After the first round of interrogations, V. Olberg sent a declaration to the investigator in which he wrote: "I can, it seems, slander myself and do everything if only to put an end to my suffering. But I clearly cannot cast aspersions on myself and state an obvious lie, i.e., that I am a Trotskyist, Trotsky's emissary, and so forth." [10] A month later, however, Olberg "confessed" that he had come from abroad on assignment from Trotsky, and that he had recruited into a terrorist organization many teachers and students at the Gorky Ped-Institute. All the people he named were brought to Moscow and shot on 3 October 1936.

At the February-March Plenum, Yezhov placed the date of the beginning of the investigation into the case of the "United Trotsky-Zinoviev center" in December 1935. In the beginning of 1936 this case "began gradually to expand, and then the first material was sent to the Central Committee (from the NKVD)." However Molchanov, who had been directly responsible for handling cases against Trotskyists, considered Olberg to be a "solitary emissary." He therefore intended to bring Olberg to trial and close the given case with his conviction. [11]

A bit later, Yagoda and Molchanov felt that it would be enough to "link" Olberg to I. N. Smirnov, who had been brought in April 1936 from a political isolator to the GPU's internal prison. According to Agranov, Molchanov wanted "to close the investigation in April 1936, showing that the uncovered terrorist group of Shemelev-Olberg-Safonova, with ties to I. N. Smirnov, was the All-Union Trotskyist Center, and that with the discovery of the center, all the active Trotskyists had already been liquidated. Yagoda, and then Molchanov, added that, without any doubt, Trotsky personally had no immediate ties with representatives of the Trotskyist Center in the USSR." [12]

When he learned of Molchanov's and Yagoda's position, Stalin "sensed that something wasn't right in this [case] and gave instructions to continue the investigation." To carry out these instructions, Yezhov arranged a meeting with Agranov which was conducted unbeknownst to Yagoda and Molchanov. ("I invited Agranov to my dacha on a day off, pretending that we would be going for a walk"). During this meeting, Yezhov gave Agranov "Comrade Stalin's indications of mistakes that had been made by the investigation into the case of the Trotskyists; he ordered him to take measures to uncover the actual Trotskyist Center, thoroughly exposing the still concealed terrorist band and Trotsky's personal role in the entire affair." Yezhov told Agranov the names of "Trotsky's direct cadres," placing emphasis on Dreitser most of all. "After a long conversation, which was rather concrete, we came to a decision—he [Agranov] went to the Moscow region [that is, to the UNKVD of the Moscow region—V. R.] and joined the Muscovites in arresting Dreitser, thereby making an immediate breakthrough." [13]

Dreitser was brought in May to the internal prison of the NKVD from the Cheliabinsk region where he worked as the deputy director of the factory "Magnezit." Then the former head of Zinoviev's secretariat, Pikel, was arrested. They were handed over to the investigator Radzivilovsky who would later say: "extraordinarily difficult work over the course of three weeks on Dreitser and Pikel resulted in the fact that they began to give testimony." [14] Yagoda, however, felt that their testimony was a complete fabrication. On the record of Dreitser's interrogations, which contained passages speaking of receiving terrorist directives from Trotsky, Yagoda wrote: "untrue," "nonsense," "rubbish," and "this cannot be." [15]

It was with these preconceptions that Yagoda proceeded in his report on the "Trotskyist conspiracy" at the June (1936) Plenum of the Central Committee, where he categorically denied any link between the "terrorist center" and Trotsky. When Stalin spoke at the plenum, however, he "filled

in" these "gaps" in Yagoda's report. When he recalled this speech at the February-March Plenum, Yezhov said: "I sensed that in the apparatus [of the NKVD] something was going on with Trotsky, but to Comrade Stalin this was as clear as day. With his speech Comrade Stalin directly posed the question that here was Trotsky's hand, and that we had to catch him by the hand." [16]

On 19 June Yagoda and Vyshinsky presented Stalin with a list of eighty-two Trotskyists who they felt could be brought to trial as participants in terrorist activity. However Stalin demanded that they unite the Trotskyists with the Zinovievists and prepare the corresponding open trial.

After this, the investigation into the Olberg case which had been finished in May was reopened; by now Olberg was giving testimony that he had links with the Gestapo. Analogous confessions were received from the four other political emigrants who had been arrested in June.

In the middle of July, Zinoviev and Kamenev were brought from a political isolator to Moscow for further investigation. By this time Zinoviev, who had spent a year and a half in prison, was in a state of deep depression and demoralization. Beginning with the spring of 1935, he had repeatedly sent letters to Stalin in which, among other things, he said: "My soul burns with one desire: to prove to you that I am no longer an enemy. There is no demand which I would not fulfill in order to prove this.... I have come to the point where I stare for long stretches at your portrait and those of the other members of the Politburo in the newspapers, and think to myself: my friends, look into my soul—can it possibly be that you fail to see that I am no longer your enemy, that I am yours body and soul, that I understand everything, that I am ready to do anything to be worthy of your forgiveness and leniency." On 10 July 1935 Zinoviev turned to the leadership of the NKVD with a request that he be transferred to a concentration camp "with the possibility of working and moving about," insofar as it seemed that only there he "would be able to last if only for a while."

Zinoviev's letter to Stalin, sent on 12 July 1936 from a Moscow prison, shows how little Zinoviev understood what was happening. In it he presented an "urgent request" to publish the book of memoirs he had written in the political isolator, and to help his family, especially his son, whom he called "a talented Marxist with a scholarly bent." [17]

Since 1935, Stalin had managed to sow mutual discord between Zinoviev and Kamenev. Kamenev's staunchly ill-disposed attitude toward Zinoviev can be seen in his correspondence with his wife, T. Glebova, who remained at liberty. In a letter written on 12 November 1935, Glebova, who had been expelled from the party for "loss of party vigilance," reproached her husband, who was located in a political isolator, for the fact that she had "been deceived before the party." Before the trial of the "Moscow Center" she had put "her party life and honor" on the line by vouching for Kamenev's "complete lack of participation" in any "political and anti-party ties with the Zinovievists." In this letter, which would undoubtedly be read by the authorities, Glebova included an indirect denunciation of Zinoviev. She expressed her regret that, "after hearing Zinoviev's whining in the summer of 1932 and even his counterrevolutionary statement about the ineptitude of the leadership of the kolkhoz movement, she had not acted in a party way [that is, she had not denounced Zinoviev—V. R.], but had expressed her indignation only to you." In her letter, Glebova told how their seven-year-old son happened upon a toy that Zinoviev had given him. "He literally began trembling and grew pale: 'I will throw it out, for I hate the man who gave it to me.' Yet during the summer he saw much more of them (Zinoviev and his wife) than us, and had always loved them."

In a reply letter, Kamenev wrote that Zinoviev and his wife "no longer exist for me; like Volik, I 'hate' them, and probably have good reasons to do so." [18]

In the course of the renewed investigation, Zinoviev and Kamenev were once again joined together by Stalin and forced to make joint decisions. At

first they firmly denied the charges made against them. Kamenev bore himself with particular courage. He declared to Mironov, the head of the economic department of the NKVD's GUGB [The Chief Directorate of State Security] who was interrogating him: "You are now observing Thermidor in a pure form. The French Revolution taught us a good lesson, but we weren't able to put it to use. We didn't know how to protect our revolution from Thermidor. That is our greatest mistake, and history will condemn us for it." When Kamenev was presented with testimony about a conspiratorial meeting with Reingold at his apartment, he declared that from the diary of the round-the-clock surveillance which was conducted outside his apartment, and from interrogation of the OGPU operative who was always present inside the apartment in the guise of a bodyguard, it would be easy to establish that Reingold had never once visited him. Finally, Kamenev threatened Mironov: if there were any further provocations he would demand that Medvedev and other former leaders of the Leningrad UNKVD be put on trial. He personally would ask them questions about the circumstances of Kirov's murder." [19]

It is understandable that reports about Kamenev's behavior during the investigation would have had to drive Stalin into a paroxysm of enraged cruelty. As Orlov recalled, "even the heads of the NKVD, who knew Stalin's insidious and merciless character, were struck by the savage hatred which he displayed with regard to the Old Bolsheviks, Kamenev, Zinoviev and Smirnov." Although Yagoda and his underlings had gone a long way in their own degeneration and had rich experience in persecuting Oppositionists, "the names of Zinoviev, Kamenev, Smirnov and especially Trotsky still retained their magical power over them." [20] They felt that Stalin would not dare to shoot the Old Bolsheviks and would limit himself to publicly disgracing them.

Prokofiev's wife told A. M. Larina in the camps that Stalin had said to Yagoda: "You work poorly, Genrikh Grigorievich. I already have reliable information that Kirov was killed on orders from Zinoviev and Kamenev, yet you still haven't been able to prove it! You have to torture them so that they finally tell the truth and reveal all their ties." When he recounted those words to Prokofiev, Yagoda began to sob. [21]

When he received information about Kamenev's and Zinoviev's "refusal to cooperate," Stalin ordered Yezhov to conduct their further interrogations, and the latter made it very clear to the accused that they would have to take part in a judicial frame-up. Yezhov explained to Zinoviev the political necessity of this step in the following way: Soviet intelligence had seized documents of the German general staff which showed the intentions of Germany and Japan to attack the Soviet Union the following spring. Therefore, what was now needed more than ever was the support of the international proletariat for the "fatherland of all laborers." Trotsky was impeding this support with his "anti-Soviet propaganda." Zinoviev must "help the party strike a shattering blow against Trotsky and his band, in order to drive the workers away from his counterrevolutionary organization under an artillery barrage." [22]

Following this, Yezhov told Zinoviev that the lives of thousands of former Oppositionists depended on his conduct at the trial. Repeating the same arguments to Kamenev, Yezhov issued an additional threat by announcing the possibility of dealing with the latter's oldest son, who had been in prison since March 1935. He showed Kamenev Reingold's testimony that he and Kamenev's son had conducted surveillance of automobiles containing Stalin and Voroshilov in order to organize terrorist acts against them. The promise to preserve the life of his oldest son was one of the main reasons which prompted Kamenev to "confess." Nevertheless, not only Kamenev's oldest son, but his middle son as well, the sixteen-year-old Yurii, was shot in 1938–39.

In his memoirs Orlov describes in detail the entire course of the investigation, its methods and mechanisms, but he doesn't mention the application of direct torture with regard to Kamenev and Zinoviev. In their case, the application of "methods of physical coercion" was limited to

placing them in a cell where the central heating was turned on during the hot summer days. The unbearable heat and humidity were particularly painful to Zinoviev, who suffered from severe asthma and attacks of colic in the liver; moreover the "treatment" which he received only increased his suffering.

Zinoviev was the first to indicate that he was ready to make a deal with Stalin. After an interrogation conducted by Yezhov and Molchanov which had lasted a whole night, Zinoviev asked them to arrange a meeting where he and Kamenev could be alone. In their conversation, which was of course monitored, Zinoviev convinced Kamenev to provide the testimony demanded at the trial, on the condition that the promise made by Yezhov in Stalin's name to preserve their lives and the lives of other oppositionists be confirmed by Stalin personally in the presence of all the members of the Politburo.

Soon after this meeting, Zinoviev and Kamenev were taken to the Kremlin where they were received by Stalin and Voroshilov. When Kamenev said that they had been promised a meeting with the full membership of the Politburo, Stalin replied that he and Voroshilov were a "commission" appointed by the Politburo to negotiate with them.

Zinoviev recalled that before the trial in 1935 Yezhov had spoken on Stalin's behalf in assuring them that this trial would be the last sacrifice which they would have to make "for the sake of the party." With tears in his eyes he tried to convince Stalin that a new trial would cast a permanent shadow on the Soviet Union and the Bolshevik Party: "You want to depict members of Lenin's Politburo and Lenin's personal friends to be unprincipled bandits, and present the party as a snake's nest of intrigue, treachery and murders" [the main defendants at the impending trial were the embodiment of Bolshevism in the eyes of world public opinion—V. R.]. To this Stalin replied that the upcoming trial was directed not against Zinoviev and Kamenev, but against Trotsky, "the sworn enemy of the party." "If we didn't shoot them," he continued, referring to Zinoviev and Kamenev in the third person, "when they actively fought against the Central Committee, then why should we shoot them after they have been helping the Central Committee in its struggle against Trotsky? The comrades also are forgetting that we Bolsheviks are the followers and disciples of Lenin, and that we don't want to spill the blood of old party members, no matter how serious the sins that can be attributed to them."

Mironov, who had been present during the negotiations, told Orlov that this performance, in which Stalin called Zinoviev and Kamenev comrades, was delivered with deep feeling and sounded both sincere and convincing. Even Mironov, who knew better than others about Stalin's fierce hatred for Zinoviev and Kamenev, believed after these words that Stalin would not allow their execution.

Having listened to Stalin, Kamenev said that they would agree to give testimony at the trial under the condition that none of the defendants would be shot, that their families would not be persecuted, and that no one would receive the death penalty for past oppositional activity. Stalin vowed that all this "goes without saying." [23]

Until recently, Orlov's memoirs were the only evidence about the meeting of the "Politburo commission" with Zinoviev and Kamenev. Only at the end of the 1980s was this fact confirmed by Kaganovich, who declared in a confidential conversation with the writer Chuyev: "I know that Zinoviev and Kamenev were received.... Stalin and Voroshilov were there. I wasn't at this reception. I know that Zinoviev and Kamenev asked for mercy. They had already been arrested.... Evidently, the conversation proceeded along the lines that they had to acknowledge their guilt...." [24]

After this "reception," Zinoviev and Kamenev were moved to comfortable cells. The authorities began to give them serious medical treatment, feed them well and allow them to read books, but not, of course, newspapers, where after the announcement of the upcoming trial, the editors began to publish "demands from the workers" that they receive the death penalty.

A more complicated task turned out to be the obtaining of confessions from Smirnov and Mrachkovsky, who were widely known throughout the party for their heroic biographies. Mrachkovsky had grown up in a family which belonged to Narodnaya Volya [The People's Will], and from his earliest years he took an active part in the revolutionary movement. I. N. Smirnov, a member of the party since it was founded, led the army which defeated Kolchak during the Civil War.

For several months Smirnov and Mrachkovsky stubbornly refused to make any confessions. According to Vyshinsky, Smirnov's entire interrogation on 20 May consisted of the words: "I deny this, I deny it once again, I deny it." [25]

Twice Mrachkovsky was taken to Stalin, who promised to send him to direct industry in the Urals if he behaved "properly" at the trial.\* Both times Mrachkovsky replied with a firm refusal. Then they appointed as the investigator in his case the head of the NKVD's foreign department, Slutsky, who soon told V. Krivitsky "about his experience as an inquisitor." According to Slutsky, he interrogated Mrachkovsky nonstop for ninety hours. During the interrogation, every two hours the phone rang from Stalin's secretary who asked him whether he had managed to "break" Mrachkovsky. [26]

Analogous information ("Interrogations for ninety hours. Slutsky's remarks about Mrachkovsky") is contained in Ignace Reiss's "Notes" (Cf. Chapter 40), which were published in the *Bulletin of the Opposition*. In the comments to these notes, the editors of the *Bulletin* referred to the way Reiss orally deciphered the material and then reported: "In order to break Mrachkovsky, the GPU subjected him to unbroken interrogations, lasting up to ninety hours straight! The same 'method' was applied to I. N. Smirnov, who offered greater resistance." [27]

At the beginning of the interrogation, Mrachkovsky told Slutsky: "You can tell Stalin that I hate him. He is a traitor. They took me to Molotov, who also wanted to buy me off. I spit in his face." During the remaining interrogation, which turned into a political dialogue between the arrested and the investigator, Slutsky showed Mrachkovsky the testimony given by others who had been accused in order to prove how "low they had fallen by being in opposition to the Soviet regime." Days and nights passed in debates on the political situation in the Soviet Union. In the end, Mrachkovsky agreed with Slutsky that great discontent existed in the land which could not be controlled from within the party and might therefore lead the Soviet regime to destruction; at the same time there was no party grouping strong enough to be able to change the regime which had developed and overthrow Stalin. "I led him to the point where he began to sob," Slutsky later told Krivitsky. "I sobbed with him when we came to the conclusion that everything was lost, that the only thing we could do was to make a desperate effort to prevent the doomed struggle of opposition leaders who were dissatisfied with their 'confessions.'"

After this session Mrachkovsky asked that he be allowed to meet with Smirnov, his close friend and comrade-in-arms on many fronts of the Civil War. During this meeting Mrachkovsky said: "Ivan Nikitich, let's give them what they want. We have to." After Smirnov sharply refused to make such a deal, Mrachkovsky "once again became angry and uncooperative. He began once more to call Stalin a traitor. However at the end of the fourth day he signed a full confession." Slutsky ended his account about Mrachkovsky's interrogation with the words: for a whole week after the interrogation "I couldn't work, and I felt that I couldn't go on living." [28]

Krivitsky's story finds a certain degree of confirmation in the material contained in Mrachkovsky's dossier, where there are seven protocols of the interrogation, of which six were prepared beforehand and typed up.\* Mrachkovsky signed all of these protocols without making any changes, with one exception. Opposite the sentence about ties with the foreign Trotskyist center he wrote: "Please show me your evidence concerning the existence of ties between our organization and L. Trotsky." [29] We can

assume that, although he had agreed to smear himself, Mrachkovsky continued for a long time to refuse to smear Trotsky with accusations about directing any terrorist activity.

Smirnov's former wife, Safonova, was used to put pressure on him. In face-to-face confrontations she begged him to save both their lives, "by bowing to the demands of the Politburo." Safonova continued to play the role of provocateur at the trial, too, where she served as a witness. As a result, she turned out to be the only person among dozens mentioned at the trial who not only avoided being shot, but was set free. At the end of the 1930s she worked in Grozny as a professor at the Chechen-Ingush Pedagogical Institute. There, according to A. Avtorkhanov, she continued to carry out assignments for the NKVD, providing, among other things, "scholarly expertise" with regard to books which supposedly contained "ideological sabotage." [30]

Unlike Safonova, many of the 160 people convicted of terrorist acts carried out on orders from the "center" who were shot after the trial never confessed to being guilty. According to Orlov, the young political emigrant, Z. Fridman, conducted himself with extraordinary courage. His name was mentioned at the trial among the "terrorists." He was shot in October 1936 along with several teachers from the Gorky Ped-Institute as part of the group case against the "terrorist organization." [31]

Judging from the numbers on the dossiers indicated in the court records, and the number of pages contained in them, the ones who most actively "collaborated" with the investigation were the five young emigrants being tried; the testimony of each one went on for hundreds of pages. The testimony of the main defendants, however—the Old Bolsheviks—was limited to a few pages and was obtained only at the end of July and the beginning of August.

On 7 August Vyshinsky presented Stalin with the first variant of the indictment, according to which twelve people were to be tried. Stalin added the names of M. I. Lurie and N. L. Lurie to this list, and crossed out from the text all references to the testimony of the Old Bolsheviks in which they evaluated the situation in the party and country which had prompted them to continue their oppositional activity.

Three days later, Stalin was presented with a new variant of the indictment which now named fourteen defendants. Stalin changed this text as well and once again extended the list of the accused—this time with the names of Yevdokimov and Ter-Vaganian. [32]

Stalin made a few additions to the defendants' testimony which they were supposed to give at the trial. He demanded that Reingold formulate the alleged terrorist instructions he received from Zinoviev in the following way: "It is not enough to cut down the oak tree [i.e., Stalin—V. R.], you have to cut down all the young oaks which grow around it." Another "imaginative" addition placed the following expression in Kamenev's mouth: "Stalin's leadership has become as solid as granite, and it would be foolish to hope that this granite will begin to crack. That means that we will have to shatter it." [33]

Before publishing any kind of announcement about the impending trial, Stalin decided to prepare the party. On 29 July a secret letter from the Central Committee "On the Terrorist Activity of the Trotsky-Zinoviev Counterrevolutionary Bloc" was sent to every party organization to be read aloud. To the draft of the letter which had been prepared by Yezhov, Stalin introduced many corrections and additions. On the first page he wrote that earlier "the role of the Trotskyists in the murder of Comrade Kirov had not been uncovered" and that now "it has been established that the Zinovievists carried out their terrorist practice in a direct bloc with Trotsky and the Trotskyists." To develop this thought the letter stated that after Kirov's murder and "the subsequent smashing of the Trotsky-Zinoviev Center, Trotsky took upon himself all direction of terrorist activity in the USSR." [34]

Whereas Yezhov reduced the "main and principal task of the 'center'" to the assassination of Stalin, Stalin formulated it as the "assassination of

Comrades Stalin, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Kirov, Ordzhonikidze, Zhdanov, Kosior and Postyshev." [35] We can assume that Stalin deliberately shifted the emphasis from himself personally to a whole group of party leaders which included those who enjoyed the genuine sympathy of the party and working-class masses.

The letter, which was intended to create an impression of the special trust with which the given information was transmitted only to members of the party, ended with the demand that "every Bolshevik" "recognize an enemy of the party no matter how well he may be disguised." [36]

After he had finished the trial's preparation, Stalin was so confident of its results that he left for vacation in Sochi before the trial opened. Control of the course of the trial was entrusted to Kaganovich, to whom Ulrich presented several variants of the sentence for approval. After Kaganovich had reviewed the last variant, he made the final corrections. In doing so, Kaganovich included his own name on one of the pages of text which contained a list of people against whom terrorist acts had been prepared. Even before the trial ended, Kaganovich sent the sentence to Stalin in Sochi for his information.

#### Notes

1. *Reabilitatsiia. Politicheskie protsessy 30–50–x godov*, (Moscow: 1991), p. 175. [return]
2. *Voprosy istorii*, no. 12 (1994), pp. 16–17. [return]
3. *Reabilitatsiia*, p. 176. [return]
4. *Voprosy istorii*, no. 2 (1995), p. 17. [return]
5. Trotsky Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard University, nos. 9437–9942, 3664–3674, 12881–12886. [return]
6. Trotskii, L. D., *Prestupleniia Stalina* [Stalin's Crimes] (Moscow: 1994), p. 145. [return]
7. Trotsky Archives, nos. 15204, 15205, 15199. [return]
8. *Rasstrel'nye spiski*, Issue. 1 (Moscow: 1993), pp. 27, 32. [return]
9. *Voprosy istorii*, no. 2 (1995), p. 17. [return]
10. *Reabilitatsiia*, p. 180. [return]
11. *Voprosy istorii*, no. 10 (1994), p. 26; no. 2 (1995), p. 18. [return]
12. *Voprosy istorii*, no. 12 (1994), p. 17. [return]
13. *Ibid.*, p. 18. [return]
14. *Reabilitatsiia*, p. 179. [return]
15. *Voprosy istorii*, no. 12 (1994), p. 18; *Reabilitatsiia*, p. 179. [return]
16. *Voprosy istorii*, no. 2 (1995), p. 18. [return]
17. *Reabilitatsiia*, pp. 184–185. [return]
18. *Izvestiia*, 21 March 1990. [return]
19. Orlov, A., *Tainaia istoriia stalinskikh prestuplenii* (Moscow: 1991), pp. 121, 129. [return]
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 124, 137. [return]
21. Larina, A. M., *Nezabyvaemoe* [This I Cannot Forget] (Moscow: 1989), p. 66. [return]
22. Orlov, *Tainaia istoriia stalinskikh prestuplenii*, pp. 126–127. [return]
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 135–136. [return]
24. Chuev, F., *Tak govoril Kaganovich. Ispoved' stalinskogo apostola* [Thus Spake Kaganovich. Confession of a Stalinist Apostle] (Moscow: 1992), p. 140. [return]
25. Vyshinskii, A. Ia., *Sudebnye rechi* [Trial Speeches] (Moscow: 1955), pp. 419. [return]
26. Krivitskii, V., *Ia byl agentom Stalina* (Moscow: 1991), p. 216. [return]
27. *Biulleten' oppozitsii*, no. 60–61 (1937), p. 13. [return]
28. Krivitskii, *Ia byl agentom Stalina*, pp. 217–219. [return]
29. *Reabilitatsiia*, p. 185. [return]
30. *Oktiabr'*, no. 8 (1992), p. 167. [return]
31. Orlov, *Tainaia istoriia stalinskikh prestuplenii*, p. 103; *Rasstrel'nye spiski* (Moscow: 1993), p. 26. [return]
32. *Reabilitatsiia*, p. 187. [return]

*Tainaia istoriia stalinskikh prestuplenii*, p. 8. Orlov, *Pravda*, August 1936. [return]

34. *Reabilitatsiia*, pp. 186, 201, 202, 205. [return]

35. *Ibid.*, p. 186. [return]

36. *Ibid.*, p. 210. [return]



To contact the WSW and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**