



[These Bitesize notes are from 2015 and have been taken down.]

Stalin - purges and praises

During the 1930s, Stalin set about purging Russia of anyone who he considered a threat or disloyal. What was life like for ordinary people in Stalin's Russia?

Political purges

In 1934, **Kirov**, the leader of the Leningrad Communist Party, was murdered, probably on Stalin's orders. Stalin used this episode to order massive purges by which anybody suspected of **disloyalty** was murdered, sent to prison camps, or put on public show trials at which they pleaded guilty to incredible crimes they could never have done.

The **Communist leadership was purged** - 93 of the 139 Central Committee members were put to death. The **armed forces were purged** - 81 of the 103 generals and admirals were executed. The **Communist Party was purged** - about a third of its 3 million members were killed. Photographs and history books were changed to eliminate even the memory of people who had been arrested.

Ordinary people

By the end of the 1930s, the **Great Terror** had spread to ordinary people - anybody who looked as though they had a will of their own. Some 20 million ordinary Russians were sent to the **gulag** - the system of labour camps mostly in Siberia - where perhaps half of them died. The Christian Church and the Muslim religion were forbidden. Ethnic groups were persecuted, and **Russification** - the acceptance of Russian language and customs - was enforced throughout the Soviet Union. People who had annoyed their neighbours were turned in to the **NKVD** (the secret police) and arrested, never to be seen again.

Praises

Everybody had to **praise Stalin**, all the time. Newspapers credited him with every success. Poets thanked him for bringing the harvest. People leapt to their feet to applaud every time his name was mentioned. His picture was everywhere parents taught their children to love Stalin more than themselves. They **dared not** do anything else.

Why did Stalin do it? He needed to create unity, and certainly strong control was needed to modernise Russia. He was also at least homicidally **paranoid**. However, by 1939, he had set up a personal **totalitarian dictatorship** where - on one word from him - the entire Soviet Union did exactly what he said.

1936 Constitution

You will also need to know about the **1936 Constitution** - also known as Stalin's Constitution:

- The 1936 Constitution changed the name of the Central Executive Committee to the Supreme Soviet.
- The Supreme Soviet was empowered to set up Commissions, which administered most of the government.
- The leader of the Presidium was declared to be the Head of State.
- The 1936 Constitution thus focussed power in Stalin's hands.
- It also gave everyone some good things such as rights to vote (but only for the Communist Party), to work, to rest and leisure, to health protection, to care in old age and sickness, to housing and education.