

## Why Does Joseph Stalin Matter?

1,028,107 views

Jun 7, 2018

0:00

Joseph Stalin's Soviet dictator creator of a great power and the destroyer of

0:05

tens of millions of lives with us today someone who knows more about the life of Joseph Stalin than Joseph Stalin knew

0:12

about the life of Joseph Stalin historian Stephen Kotkin on uncommon knowledge now welcome to uncommon

0:29

knowledge I'm Peter Robinson we're filming today in the auditorium in the trade tel building a new building of the

0:35

Hoover Institution here at Stanford University the son of a factory worker Stephen Kotkin grew up in Washington

0:42

Heights New York he graduated from the University of Rochester and then attended graduate school at the University of California at Berkeley

0:48

where he learned Russian became fascinated with Soviet history and earned a doctorate

0:54

dr. Kotkin is now a professor of history at Princeton and a fellow at the Hoover Institution here at Stanford in 2014 dr.

1:02

Kotkin published Stalin paradoxes of power 1878 to 1928 the first volume of

1:09

his projected three-volume biography of Stalin his life and times now he has published the second volume

1:16

Stalin waiting for Hitler 1929 to 1941 in the words of the Wall Street Journal

1:24

Stalin waiting for Hitler this book represents quote history on a grand

1:29

scale a book equal to the enormity of the events it describes close quote

1:36

Stephen cotton welcome so great to be back there we'll come to the substance

1:41

of this book in just a moment but first the basic question students who will

1:46

graduate from college this coming spring your students at Princeton students here at Stanford they will have met they

1:53

will have been born a full 5 years after the Soviet Union went out of existence

1:59

the country that Stalin built why does Joseph Stalin matter so Joseph

2:07

is what we would call the gold standard of dictatorship obviously we're not

2:13

talking about morality here we're talking about accumulating and exercising power if you're interested in

2:20

power where it comes from how it works and what are the consequences when

2:26

people exercise such power then Stalin is your guy there are very few people in

2:32

his category Hitler Wow and that's about

2:38

it Hitler was in power for just 12 years Stalin was in power for three decades

2:45

Mao was also in power for an extended period of time but didn't have the military-industrial complex superpower

2:53

that Stalin built so Stalin really stands out even in his peer group

3:00

collectivization the book the book is divided into well it deals with three

3:05

large categories of IVA three large events one of the first of which is collectivization collectivization you're

3:15

gonna correct me on this ties the peasants to collective farms forces them

3:21

to work on collective farms in effect reintroducing serfdom have I got that right

3:26

yes that's basically the story all right yeah and you right here that Stalin in

3:32

imposing collectivization enslaved a hundred million people again I got that

3:38

right all right why why was that necessary why was collectivization of such

3:45

importance to Stalin in the old days people argued that it was necessary because this is how you modernized a

3:52

peasant country right you modernized the peasant country through coercion you use

3:57

the state to force everybody to do what the state needed them to do and that's

4:03

how you built an industrial power out of a peasant country the kind of Stalin was

4:08

necessary argument which was quite prevalent for a long time there's nothing

necessary about killing

4:16

and enslaving this many people it's never necessary to do that you can

4:22

modernize a peasant country in all sorts of ways including through markets

4:28

property rights a banking system that gives loans to people who succeed or

4:34

have ideas that they think might succeed however in Marxism Leninism

4:41

collectivization was necessary that's what the book argues all right let's

4:48

take that a little bit farther I'm going over the basics here Stephen because I'm

4:53

conscious that actually I'm conscious of two things one is that we've got an audience of Millennials here the college

4:58

kids who went oh or yeah exactly maybe you and I can just go door-to-door doing this in dorms around here ah but

5:05

I'm also conscious you just said so it used to be taught that collectivization

5:10

was an essence that actually is what I learned when I went through college myself so you are reteaching the man

5:16

seated across from you Marxism Leninism and collectivization is necessary how come

Oh more in those

5:23

terms how come Marxism is about the transcendence of capitalism capitalism

5:30

is evil alienation exploitation war on a

5:36

mass unemployment and depressions so the Hat in order to get to a better place in

5:43

history Marx argued capitalism had to be transcended the Hegelian world as a fable  
5:50  
so Marx had a stages of history notion there was something called feudalism it  
5:57  
was supplanted by capitalism socialism would overcome capitalism and eventually  
6:02  
you'd get the final stage of history which was communism so first you built socialism  
and then you got to communism  
6:09  
that's why it was called the Communist Party and that's why they first built socialism  
building socialism as I said  
6:16  
meant eradicating capitalism so if capitalism had markets socialism would  
6:22  
have planning if capitalism had private property socialism would have collective  
6:28  
property or state property capitalism had laissez-faire Parliament's socialism would have  
people's power so  
6:35  
this is the idea in Marx and Marx also spoke about freedom and he thought that  
6:44  
not only would abundance follow from the transcendence of capitalism but freedom  
6:49  
will follow however of course that's not exactly what happened and so many people  
6:54  
think Marx is not responsible for what came next when you say that capitalism has to  
be  
7:02  
eliminated when you say you're going to get rid of markets and private property and  
checks and balances and all the rest  
7:08  
on power you're going to end up with the kind of regime that the Soviet Union got  
7:13  
now about collectivization so with the Revolution in 1917 and remember there  
7:20  
are two dimensions to it first this is the overthrow of the Tsar in February 1917 which is  
known as the February  
7:26  
Revolution and then there's this October coup which is what Lenin called it you  
7:31  
called it a coup whereby a small group known as the Bolsheviks came to power they  
would  
7:37  
eventually the next year change their name to communists so their notion was

7:44

that the state should own and manage the economy this was the case in the cities

7:50

they could take over industry they could quote nationalize industry and then

7:56

manage the nationalized industry moreover the regime was based in the cities so there was a socialism in the

8:03

cities almost from the beginning but the peasants revolted and the country

8:10

starved there was a tremendous famine 1921 - 23 so they made a concession this

8:17

Bolshevik regime which was self-consciously building socialism named Communist Party now made a

8:23

concession to the peasants they would allow the peasants de facto ownership of

8:29

the land and they would allow them kind of quasi market relations they could

8:34

trade what they grew as long as they paid a tax so there was a twofold system

8:39

of socialism in the city and capitalism in the countryside the regime felt

8:44

strained to grant this as a result the country recovered from the revolution

8:51

and civil war destruction of 1917 to 21 and by the end of the 1920s it had

8:58

reached more or less the level it was at before World War one the 1913-14 level

9:05

the rest of the world had grown and expanded and was richer and the Soviet

9:10

Union was back to the level it was at ten years before but now you have this

9:15

problem you have a self-styled communist regime building socialism with capitalism in the countryside everyone

9:23

in the regime believed that capitalism in the countryside also had to be

9:30

eradicated but how are you gonna do that the regime was small Communist Party

9:35

membership was small and the peasants were 120 million people across a sixth of the earth that should just stop you

9:42

there everyone in the regime believed that they had to eradicate capitalism in the countryside even though it was

9:48

working it was eating the people that is to say you see right away that they are putting this construct in their minds

9:56

Marxism Leninism they're giving that priority over the reality on the ground well is that fair yes it's very fair

10:03

they believe that capitalism was evil all right the point is I really really believed

10:08

they were true believing communists and so they had to get rid of capitalism somehow moreover as Marxist Leninist

10:16

they had the notion that the underlying social relations which the marxist

10:22

sometimes called the base the relations of production the mode of production the

10:28

underlying social relations eventually determine the political system so even

10:34

if the country was recuperating the capitalism in the countryside was a

10:40

permanent threat to the existence of the regime because the underlying social relations threatened regime at the top

10:48

so they don't agreed on this what they argued about was whether this could

10:54

actually be done for example who was gonna implant social in the countryside who was gonna take

11:00

all that land away from the peasants how was that gonna work wouldn't that be destabilizing wouldn't

11:06

that ruin the economic recovery and maybe destabilize the regime so they had an argument about the timing of this and

11:13

the methods of this but not the principle that they were committed to communism and therefore needed to

11:19

eradicate capitalism in the countryside to Stalin was the one did it yes this is

11:27

really remarkable one issue is what motivated him that's what we've been

11:34

discussing right another issue is how in the world he was able to do this because 100 million

11:41

peasants across a landmass that SAP represents a sixth of the yes of a land

11:47

on the planet yes and so could you won before the Internet could you imagine doing that let's remember that in 1928

11:55

which is where Volume one ended in 1928 one percent of the arable land had been

12:04

collectivized voluntarily one percent so

12:10

there was no voluntary collectivization it was either coercion or live with

12:15

capitalism in the countryside and from their point of view the eventual undermining of the political regime and

12:22

the loss of the revolution so was do or die and it had to be course but the

12:28

others resisted because they were fearful that it wouldn't be successful that it couldn't be successful and

12:34

Staller challenged them and said you don't have the courage of your convictions do you believe that

12:40

capitalism is evil yes do you believe we need to build socialism yes well then

12:46

what's your problem either we do this or we perish there was a geopolitical

12:51

dimension to this as well because it was the idea that they needed to finance

12:57

their industrialization now they had repudiated the debts incurred by

13:05

Imperial Russia and by the provisional government which was briefly in power between February 1917

13:12

in October 1970 the Soviet regime repudiated the international debts and so getting loans from the foreigners

13:20

without repaying those debts was really not in the cards and so they thought

13:26

that maybe they could internally generate the financing by getting a

13:32

bigger harvest and gaining greater control over the disposition of the

13:37

harvest and then selling a lot of that grain exporting it for hard currency and

13:43

then using the hard currency revenues to purchase the imported state-of-the-art technology and machinery that would be

13:51

part of their industrialization and then they could build a military - and they could withstand the quote imperialist

13:58

antagonism vis-a-vis the socialism how did he do briefly how did you do it what

14:05

was the coercive method that took you from 1% collectivization in 1928 to

14:11

substantial substantially complete collectivization within what five years six years yeah so let's remember that

14:17

one person decided this it's pretty astonishing he didn't for example have

14:24

to get a majority vote sure he eventually got majority vote on X or Y

14:31

but that was after he created the fate of complete after he just ordered the regime the minions under him to do the

14:38

stuff and then he would go and get approval in if he didn't get approval he would go back and do it anyway and

14:45

create these fait accompli and used the secret police and use all his levers of power so he imposed collectivization on

14:54

Eurasia and also on his own regime he

14:59

was able to do that in part because his argument was compelling on the merits to

15:07

them ideologically they were in agreement with him additionally he had a

15:13

lot of urban activists people who were young in many cases part of the regime

15:21

were wanted to be part of the regime and wanted to build a new world and more impatient that that new world should

15:27

happen as soon as possible so we sent a lot of these urban activists out to the countryside to become the kind of tip of

15:36

the spear as it were to force these issues the other thing he did was to instigate class warfare something called

15:45

a Kulak which is a derogatory term that they used for better-off peasants Stalin

15:52

introduced quotas for kulaks rich peasants in each village and those

15:59

kulaks would be subject either to execution on the spot summary execution

16:06

or deportation internally to frozen wastes now if there was a village of a

16:11

hundred people and Stalin would say we want 25 kulaks well what was a Kulak on

16:20

the ground and the answer was Oh what if you have two cows what if you have three

16:27

cows do you need to have four cows and they debated this but the answer was you

16:34

had 25 kulaks or you yourself could be subject to deportation so they had to find 25 no

16:41

matter how many cows they had and this was very divisive and people tried to

16:46

defend and protect their own families they didn't want to fall under the knife

16:51

under the deportation or the execution so they began to finger their neighbors

16:57

and others as the kulaks if you criticize the policy but had no cows you

17:04

were Apes Oh facto a Kulak henchmen or objectively in the pocket of the kulaks

17:10

so with the quotas and the instigated class warfare in the village he was able

17:17

to create this chaos and then benefit from the chaos by using that as the

17:24

instrument to force the collectivization of Agriculture what is collectivization what does that

17:29

actually mean in Russia not in all of Imperial Russia because the Baltic

17:36

states which were in the Russian Empire Ukraine for example the Western Borderlands didn't have the commune

17:43

but in Russia proper the majority of the peasantry they had something called the

17:48

commune and the commune was this instrument to redistribute the land

17:54

collective decision to redistribute the land so they would assign you strips of land to work based upon your family size

18:02

how many miles you had to feed but at the end of the year if you had a birth

18:07

or a death they could readjust how much land you were assigned and maybe give

18:13

some of your land to somebody else or take someone else's land to give it to you but in the meantime you worked it as

18:18

a private individual and the commune is like a collection of the village elders they get together to adjust land

18:24

holdings each year that's right but but the land is not collectively worked right they work it as individuals and as

18:31

households so there's a kind of private economy with an occasional

18:36

redistribution of the strips of land right so that's what they've got beforehand so there's de facto peasant

18:44

ownership of the land collectivization is collective ownership of the land and

18:50

collective working of the land so you're no longer a household farm that could

18:56

grow if you're more efficient you're part of a labor Brigade and the tools

19:01

are not yours and at the beginning the animals weren't theirs everything was collectivized eventually

19:08

the regime would make concessions and allow some things for the peasants to own and they would allow for household

19:14

plots they began to concede aspects of the market that they had taken away

19:19

coercively but that was after all the people died so this collectivization process forced imposed on the country

19:26

through instigated class warfare the secret police and the urban activists this is the method Stalin had those who

19:34

thought it couldn't happen even though they wanted it to happen predicted disaster they said to Stalin

19:42

you know this is gonna be it's gonna hurt the economy and maybe even destabilize

19:49

the regime it actually turned out much worse than the naysayers predicted the

19:56

figures that you provide in the book between there's a good harvest in nineteen twenty  
nineteen twenty nine

20:04

thirty it gets lucky yes mean is good the the conditions are good there's a first year  
collectivization there's a there's a

20:10

lucky harvest but then you get to three bad harvests is in in a row famine yes

20:17

five to seven million people starve to death yes another fifty to seventy

20:22

million are malnourished they starve but somehow survived yes in the Kazakh

20:28

region where the form of life had been nomadic yes now under collectivization

20:33

they're tied to the land if the of the population dies and in the

20:39

Ukraine again its village after village after village that simply starves to death yes and  
within the Poli Bureau

20:49

what's happening people are saying Comrade Stalin I told that we have a catastrophe  
here yes and Stalin does what how does he manage

20:55

to hold it together and work through this charnel-house that he's looking

21:01

into which he's turned to go this is also astonishing the famine is very substantial it's in  
more mosque in the

21:10

polar north it's in Georgia in the semi-tropical south it's in parts of

21:16

Siberia the ethnic Kazakh population about a third of the ethnic Kazakh

21:23

population perishes I mean that's just an astonishing number

21:28

the whole wheat belt which is the richest soil the best part of the

21:35

country's economy before this the whole wheat belt suffers mass starvation and

21:41

mass death we think of that as southern Russia Ukraine the coupon for example

21:47

the Don River it's really horrific and Stalin is

21:53

getting reports about this now he's making some concessions for example he

21:59

reduces the quotas the delivery quarters of how much grain each region is supposed to give to the state their

22:05

grudging concessions too little too late but he does concede he allows some food

22:13

aid to be reduced to be taken from the warehouses and spread to the famine

22:20

areas once again grudgingly too little too late but he knows the catastrophe is

22:26

happening he's got quite a lot of information about it he doesn't know the exact size of the harvest because the

22:34

officials are overestimating it so he actually thinks there's more grain in the country than there is this is

22:40

something that most of the historiography has missed but anyway a

22:45

bunch of officials begin to whisper that this guy Stalin is ruining the

22:53

revolution they weren't anti-communist they were communists but they feared for

22:59

communism fate and they whispered and they gathered and some of them actually wrote a treatise about the horrors of

23:07

Stalin's dictatorship the regime being what it was people informed behind the

23:13

backs of those who were whispering the whisperers were arrested and sentenced

23:21

for essentially political crimes for speaking the truth and Stalin survived

23:28

he survived because his inner circle closed ranks around him how big roughly

23:34

are we talking about a dozen people on this yes 100 dozen we're talking about a little bit around a dozen a little bit

23:41

fewer and they saw that despite the catastrophe that was unfolding that none

23:48

of them could lead the country they saw a Stalin was able to carry this regime

23:54

on his back deal with international relations yield with the culture deal

24:00

with secret police Stalin had tremendous aptitude in dictatorship and they

24:06

themselves were lesser figures moreover they were uncertain what might happen if

24:11

they retreated it was one of those things where you're in really deep and you're looking at and by now they're all

24:17

complicit everybody comes in yes everybody has blood on his hand and so they his inner circle if they had

24:24

abandoned him it would have been the end of his dictatorship but they stood by

24:29

him the whisper is as I said were outed and arrested but nonetheless this

24:35

episode of criticism got deep under Stalin's skin he became infuriated with people who had

24:45

the temerity to criticise him here he is doing what's historically necessary

24:50

eliminating capitalism in the countryside come what may whatever the cost might be paying the highest price

24:59

he had the nerve and the ability to do that and they had the nerve to criticize

25:04

him for it and it wrangled him for the rest of his life that's the

25:11

collectivization Elizabeth we have I just have to express my frustration we

25:17

have a book of 900 pages over a thousand if you include the notes and the richness of the book is in the detail

25:25

every page there's a detail that just illuminates we can't do that on television Steven I just apologized and

25:32

I I urged the readers to pick up this book the terror I'm quoting Stalin waiting for Hitler by the mid-1930s

25:39

so we're through the collectivization yes he's pulled it off you lucky harvest

25:45

in 1934 the peasants don't want to starve they want to survive those who

25:50

haven't been deported those who've been enslaved in the collective farms they plant the grain

25:56

they harvest the grain there's no drought there's no torrential rain for after the drought so they get lucky with

26:03

the weather again and the Stalin gets lucky the peasants that he's enslaved saves his they save his regime and they

26:11

save the contradicts the resistance they essentially begin to live for he's broken the resistance you're

26:16

absolutely right and those officials who had criticized him are now acclaiming

26:22

him because they're on the other side of the horror the famine is over and they've eradicated capitalism in the

26:29

countryside so he's a hero now in 1934 again by the mid-1930s the

26:34

revolution and Stalin's leadership were seen as having enabled a great country a great country to take its rightful place

26:41

among the powers Russia is off its back yes and a great country able to take his

26:49

place with Germany China Britain the United States and now here comes your

26:54

writing of the Year 1936 yeah there was no immediate threat social economic

27:00

political to the country or to the regime's legitimacy or stability no crisis yes but then suddenly there was

27:09

total crisis yes tell us about the terror so this this isn't the most

27:15

difficult thing to explain it's the more you know about it the less sense it

27:21

makes it's an episode that seems to defy rational explanation we've had many

27:28

people take a crack at this in fact thanks to Robert conquest who was a

27:34

fellow here at the Hoover we know the scale of it and he properly named it the

27:39

Great era her decades before the archives were open what could Stalin have been up to with

27:48

collectivization this was necessary for the regime survival

27:54

according to Marxism Lenin's you couldn't have socialism in the city and  
28:00  
capitalism in the countryside why they're thinking with the great terror  
28:06  
which is 1936 238 about eight hundred  
28:11  
and thirty thousand people are executed or died under interrogation there's a  
28:18  
very large number of people in just a few years to be killed and then a couple  
28:24  
of million are arrested once again largely for political crimes that are imaginary and then  
imprisoned  
28:32  
sent to the labor camps known as the gulag and these people are substantially drawn  
28:38  
from the government apparatus the party itself yes the military yes a whole  
28:44  
apparatus that he's been using to impose his will in the country yes now he turns  
28:50  
on the apparatus the loyal people we understand that authoritarian regimes  
28:55  
go after their enemies sometimes they stretch the enemy category it becomes  
29:01  
very elastic this is pretty typical for example Hitler went after the leftists  
29:07  
he went after the Jews and Gypsies and other categories we get that but let's  
29:14  
imagine for a second Hitler could he have murdered his officer corps 90% of  
29:23  
his top 300 or 400 officers could he have murdered his leading Nazi officials  
29:31  
the gala lighter who ruled the provinces his intelligence services his diplomatic  
29:37  
corps his industrial managers could he have murdered all of those people and in  
29:44  
the process accused them and gotten many of them to confess publicly that they  
29:50  
were working as enemy agents the whole time they were Nazis meaning that they  
29:57  
were working for Judeo Bolshevik communism not working as committed Nazi  
30:06  
Party officials or officers it's just beyond belief that Hitler could have done that and if he  
had tried that his  
30:13

regime would have survived so this is what Stalin does he murders his officer  
30:18  
corps his diplomatic corps his intelligence officials his party officials his state officials  
a good  
30:25  
swath of the intelligentsia those aren't the only people caught up in the terror  
30:30  
many ordinary people are caught up in the terror what's astonishing is as you  
30:37  
suggested that it's the elites and more their loyal people they're committed to the cause  
they were the ones who helped the  
30:45  
collectivization happen these are the ones who stuck with him yes and so this is a deep  
conundrum how to explain this  
30:53  
ultimately what I decided to do was to let Stalin speak just listen to him talk  
31:00  
during the terror to give as many quotes sometimes long passages what did he say  
31:07  
he was up to What did he say he was doing it may not  
31:13  
be a full explanation because this is an episode that as I said that defies explanation but  
we begin to see some of  
31:19  
how his mind was working during this episode we know the explanations that  
31:25  
don't work that he was targeting the communist officials those who were  
31:30  
joined pre 1917 in the underground days because they knew more about him and he  
31:36  
wanted to suppress that or they knew he wasn't very bright and he wanted to get  
31:42  
rid of them or whatever it might be well they did Communist Party officials joined before  
1917 died in the same  
31:51  
proportion as others in the term so there are many explanations like that  
31:57  
that don't work that we know don't work based upon the research of other  
32:02  
scholars so the explanation or let's say the story that I recreate goes as  
32:11  
follows one he clearly wanted to break the will psychologically of the rest of  
32:20  
his inner circle his inner circle his most loyal officials didn't think that

32:28

they were his replacements they didn't aspire to replace him but they acted as

32:34

if they had minds of their own and they could maybe even debate with him and

32:39

propose things and take initiatives he broke all of them a few of them

32:46

committed suicide and the rest of them became psychologically broken that was

32:51

clearly one of his motivations he was converting his dictatorship into a

32:57

despotism his officials his minions he enslaved them the way he had enslaved

33:05

the peasantry with collectivization now many dictators have this aspiration but

33:11

they don't have the wherewithal to pull it off so there are certain aspects of

33:17

communism that made this possible book explains the aspects of communism the

33:22

ideology the class warfare the closed borders the propaganda etc so we

33:28

shouldn't say that this was easy to do it was possible not necessary the way

33:34

collectivization was from a regime point of view but it was possible because of the nature of the regime so he breaks

33:39

the inner circle another thing is the Trotsky obsession this is really deep

33:47

and remarkable the ways in which Stalin got into Trotsky got into Stalin's brain

33:53

Leon Trotsky give us two sentences on who he was Trotsky was another great revolutionary

34:01

a tremendous personality along with Lenin and Stalin and some of the others

34:06

who played a huge role in the 1917 revolution the consolidation of the

34:11

regime he was the commissar of war during the Civil War

34:16

from 1918 to 21 and considered himself Lenin's heir considered himself the

34:24

brightest person in the regime he had some followers but not nearly as many as

34:30

we think he was in fact deeply unpopular inside the regime but he was a household

34:36

name as famous as Lenin and more famous than Stalin in the early days of the revolution Trotsky

34:45

was never in power there was no succession struggle to succeed Lenin as

34:50

I showed in the first volume because Stalin was already in power from the spring of 1922 when Lenin appointed him

34:59

general secretary of the party in April 1922 and then Lenin had a stroke in May

35:05

1922 and became semi incapacitated from that point on the succession of Lenin

35:11

was pretty clear unless they were able to remove Stalin from power Trotsky and

35:18

others attempted to do this but of course they failed Trotsky was

35:25

articulate he dictated more than he wrote but his published works were often

35:32

polemically excellent he called Stalin a lot of names that

35:38

stuck the outstanding mediocrity of the party for example the grave digger of

35:43

the Revolution for example these were great bomo as we say and he got under

35:50

Stalin's skin and what a crazy thing happened in 1936 in Spain Trotsky was

35:58

writing these books that's all he could do he was for the foreign exile Stalin had deported him externally first Turkey

36:06

Trotsky then to France back to ended up in Norway for a while there was

36:12

eventually Mexico there's an element also you trust he was unpopular within the regime but he was read in the West

36:18

yes that's very popular within the communist parties and communist sympathizers France Italy this country

36:24

yes he ends up in exile in Mexico Mexico he's invited by the Mexicans to come to Mexico City all right you're exactly

36:31

right and so he's writing these anti Stalin characterizations that are well

36:37

done and that have an audience and so Stalin of course is infuriated by this

36:43

and attempts to have Trotsky assassinated but the attempts fail again

36:48

and again in 1936 crazy thing happens there's a porch in

36:56

Spain there's a Spanish Republic it's a Popular Front or leftist Republic

37:04

it's anti-clerical Spain is a Catholic country a lot of people who book hold to

37:11

traditional values the military doesn't like the leftist coalition and they have

37:17

an uprising a push one of the principles is General Franco Francisco Franco who

37:23

will become the ruler the push fails and as a result there's a civil war between

37:29

the Franco nationalists traditionalists on the one hand and the Popular Front

37:37

the legitimately elected government on the other hand and part of that Popular

37:44

Front government which is fighting Franco and to the left Franco is called a fascist even though that's not an

37:50

accurate description he's more a traditional rightist an authoritarian but nonetheless a traditionalist in any

37:57

case they call him a fascist and Stalin is blamed by Trotsky for not

38:04

supporting world revolution so here it is the the revolution in Spain is under

38:10

attack by these rightists that they're calling fascists and moreover a group of

38:17

them are enamored of Trotsky in Spain and they invite him to the country so

38:25

can you imagine what's going through Stalin's head here possibly he's being

38:32

accused of failing to support world revolution and Trotsky may show up in

38:38

Spain and for all we know might come to power in a piece of Spain Barcelona

38:43

Catalonia to get today again in the news Trotsky might even come to power there

38:50

for all we know moreover Stalin has an agent in trotsky's inside circle who's delivering

38:58

the rough drafts of trotsky's writings to Stalin before they're even published

39:04

including this mammoth book called the revolution betrayed which will be

39:11

published on written by trot scheme will be published soon and it's all about

39:16

what we're talking about and Stalin receives a draft copy of this and so part of the motivation believe it

39:24

or not is the deep obsession with Trotsky and the fear of Trotsky's what

39:31

is really exaggerated power and influence because Trotsky is not gonna come to power in Spain

39:37

etc so Trotsky's obsession the Stalin's obsession with Trotsky is the second

39:43

piece after the breaking psychologically of the inner circle Steven one last question for time

39:49

reasons one last question about the terror and then we'll get to Hitler in part two of our discussion okay but

39:56

here's the last question for right now eight hundred and thirty thousand people executed here's the piece that III

40:02

myself have never understood yeah you can see as you mentioned in in the under

40:09

collectivization you can see the rationale arising from communism for the terror what you begin to feel as the

40:17

precedents are the Asian despots you can see Tamerlane in his mountain of skulls

40:22

or Genghis Khan or Ivan the Terrible within the Russian tradition all that I

40:28

can sort of get but the confessions yeah he insisted on having them confess it

40:35

was enough for Ivan the Terrible or Genghis or Tamerlane just to kill them yes Stalin wanted them to confess we

40:42

have who's the general Tukhachevsky is that that is right we have his confession and it's splattered in his own blood yes it is why the confessions

40:50

why was that important yeah I should say that the the third important piece in

40:56

the terror indirectly answers this question and that was Stalin's notion

41:02

that he could replace the elite with new young people more from the soil sons and

41:11

daughters of the peasantry in the working class promote them to positions of authority

41:17

train them in Marxism Leninism and they would carry the revolution forward and

41:23

so wholesale replacement of the elite was also something which factored into

41:30

his decision-making in the terror and the confessions are first of all people

41:37

are forced to confess to crimes they don't commit but that justifies their

41:43

arrests and execution it also names other people to ramp up the number of

41:49

arrests because everyone is forced to name their accomplices in these crimes

41:54

that they didn't commit and it's also a way to explain it to the public here it

42:01

is you doubt that these people are traitors listen to their confession which is

42:06

signed and many of them had to appear at public trials not just confess behind

42:11

the scenes but even behind the scenes when there is no public trial they extracted the confessions part of it is

42:19

the police doing their work the police have arrested as I said they need more

42:25

people to arrest the confessions produce additional names and then those

42:30

additional names produce additional names kind of like a pyramid scheme in a way but also Stalin is driving the

42:42

extraction of the confessions he wants them they send them to him and draft he

42:50

edits them adding information that should be in there or instructions to

42:55

extract that information and further confessions he takes the confessions

43:01

sometimes which he has ordered or edited he shows them to other members of the

43:07

inner circle and says see look I told you so-and-so was a German spy so-and-so

43:13

is a Japanese spy and you doubted it and so Stalin is driving this great terror

43:20

this is what Robert conquests argued he was absolutely right about this we now have the documentation that conquest

43:27

gladly would have read if they had allowed him into the archives but was secret during his lifetime we can see

43:35

that the great terror is a gratuitous episode from the Marxism Leninism

43:41

regime's point of view it's not a necessary thing like collectivization

43:47

it's something driven by Stalin his personality his obsessions his anger

43:53

over the criticism during collectivization Tukhachevsky you mentioned when they're in a room like

44:00

this moshevsky is a channel yeah that's right Marg officer cool he's actually he's actually even higher than a general

44:05

he's a marshal he's one of the five marshals three of whom are arrested in a

44:10

room like this the how like the hell auditorium there's a meeting of the military men those are not arrested to

44:18

read the confessions of Tukhachevsky and the seven others who had been arrested

44:23

and are executed behind the scenes not in a public trial and Stalin wants them

44:29

to read the confessions and then he makes a speech in front of them to justify the arrests and to explain why

44:35

Tukhachevsky was really a true they're most talented military man was working for the Nazis the whole time

44:41

it's a rambling speech we there's a lot of it in the book it's quoted it life

44:47

it's very incoherent it doesn't seem very persuasive it's kind of like Stalin

44:53

trying to persuade himself in some ways but in the middle of this rambling speech he all of a sudden shouts out

45:00

collectivization now what could collectivization have to do with the

45:06

arrest of the military men it's not about the military man it's about Stalin's own obsessions so once again

45:14

something about communism and the nature of this regime makes this Great Terror

45:19

possible but it's Stalin who does it and drives it collectivization is also only

45:28

possible because of Stalin I don't know any other man in that regime who could have done collectivization but the rest

45:35

of the people in the regime wanted it to be done the terror is something different it's

45:41

Stalin's imprint but it's not something that others were asking for that they

45:48

then congratulated him on doing and there we end part 1 of our discussion of

45:53

Stalin waiting for Hitler Steven Kotkin thank you for uncommon knowledge and the

45:59

Hoover Institution I'm Peter Robinson [Music]

46:12

you

AllStephen KotkinDebatesHistoryListenableRelatedFrom Hoover InstitutionRecently uploadedWatched

29:31NOW PLAYING