

Stalin's Great Terror – I

Lead: In the annals of state-sponsored terrorism, ranking close to the summit if not surpassing all was the Great Terror of Joseph Stalin.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The will to power, to dominate and rule one's fellow human beings is an ancient impulse. From the most primitive times certain persons have desired to enforce their will upon those around them. So fearful of this tendency were the ancient Greeks that Athenians limited the time an

individual general could control the army in times of crisis to a term of one day. Not until the demands of running an empire covering the entire known world made it essential, did the Romans permit power to fall into the hands of an emperor and only then with great reluctance.

Happily, through most of history this disposition toward mastery has been hobbled by custom, early death, distance, and primitive technology. Even if a ruler aspired to complete control they could not accomplish it. An oriental despot or an absolute monarch such as French King Louis XIV lacked the tools to impose his will on everyone, everywhere. Additionally, the most extravagant claims to power

were more often than not restrained by religious belief or custom. A King might assert his right to rule absolutely, but still believed himself accountable to God for his actions. People might be abused, cruelty might be the order of life, but circumstances and manners prevented power from laying like a wet blanket over the land. People could still get away. Not so in the twentieth century.

For the first time, improvements in technology, transportation and communication and a brand new political tool, the secular single-party state, placed in the hands of those with the will to power the means of complete domination. The man who defined this perverse development was

Joseph Stalin. Beginning with the death of his predecessor, Nikolai Lenin, Stalin first reached out to dominate the Communist Party, then under him the Party became absolute in the Soviet Union. Next time: Stalin's struggle for power and the Great Terror

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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