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The Politburo, 1924–1953

Edited by
E.A. Rees



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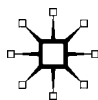
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Preface

This book is the outcome of a research project undertaken at the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Birmingham, and funded by the British Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (grant no. R 000 237388), 'The Soviet Politburo and Economic Decision-Making and Development in the Stalin Era'. As part of the project, a conference was organised at the European University Institute in Florence on 30–31 March 2000 on 'Stalin's Politburo', and a follow-up meeting of the Work Group was held at the University of Birmingham in August 2001. ESRC finance provided support for these meetings, as well as money for travel to Moscow, library purchases, funds for secretarial support, and financial support for a Russian and a Ukrainian collaborator.

The project drew on newly available archival materials from the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (APRF), the Russian State Archives of the Economy (RGAE), the State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF, formerly TsGAOR) and from the Russian State Archives of Social-Political History (RGASPI formerly RTsKhIDNI). It draws also on materials from several local archives: the Central State Archives of Social Organisations of Ukraine (TsDAGO), and the State Archives of Vinnitsa oblast (GAVO).

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Glossary of Russian Terms and Abbreviations Used in Text

Amtorg	Amerikansoe aktsionernoe torgovoe obshchestvo (American joint-stock trading company)
CC	Tsentral'nyi komitet (Central Committee of the Communist Party)
CCC	see TsKK
Cheka	Chrezvychainaya Komissiya (Extraordinary Commission, political police), later GPU or OGPU
Comintern	Communist International
CPSU(b)	Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)
'dekulakisation'	expropriation of 'kulaks'
Donbass	Donetskii ugol'nyi bassein (Donets coal basin)
GKO	Gosudarstvennyi Komitet Oborony (State Defence Committee)
gorkom	city party committee
Gosbank	Gosudarstvennyi Bank (State Bank)
Gosplan	Gosudarstvennaya Planovaya Komissiya (State Planning Commission)
GPU	see OGPU
Gulag	Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei (Main Administration of Labour Camps)
IKKI	Ispolnitelnyi Komitet Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala (Executive Committee of Comintern)
ispolkom	ispolnitel'nyi komitet (executive committee of the soviet)
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (Committee of State Security)
kolkhoz	kollektivnoe khozyaistvo (collective farm)
kolkhoznik	collective farm worker
KomIspol	Komissiya Ispolneniya (Commission of Implementation of Sovnarkom)
Komsomol	Kommunisticheskii Soyuz Molodezhi (Communist League of Youth)
KomZag	Komitet po zagotovkam sel'sko-khozyaistvennykh produktov (Committee for the Collection of Agricultural Products)

KPK	Komissiya Partiinnogo Kontrolya (Commission of Party Control)
krai	territory
kraikom	territorial party committee
KSK	Komissiya Sovetskogo Kontrolya (Commission of Soviet Control)
'kulak'	rich peasant
MGB	Ministerstvo Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (Ministry of State Security)
MTS	Mashino-traktornaya stantsiya (Machine-Tractor Station)
MVD	Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del (Ministry of Internal Affairs)
narkom	narodnyi komissar (people's commissar)
NEP	Novaya ekonomicheskaya politika (New Economic Policy)
NKAviaProm	Narodnyi Komissariat Aviatsionnoi Promyshlennosti (People's Commissariat of the Aviation Industry)
NKFin	Narodnyi Komissariat Finansov (People's Commissariat of Finance)
NKGB	Narodnyi Komissariat Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (People's Commissariat of State Security)
NKInDel/NarkomIndel	Narodnyi Komissariat po Inostrannym Delam (People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs)
NKLegprom	Narodnyi Komissariat Legkoi Promyshlennosti (People's Commissariat for Light Industry)
NKLes	Narodnyi Komissariat Lesnoi Promyshlennosti (People's Commissariat of the Timber Industry)
NKOboron	Narodnyi Komissariat Oborony (People's Commissariat of Defence)
NKObrazovaniya	People's Commissariat of Education
NKPishProm	Narodnyi Komissariat Pishchevoi Promyshlennosti (People's Commissariat of the Food Industry)
NKPros	Narodnyi Komissariat Prosveshcheniya (People's Commissariat of Education)

NKPS	Narodnyi Komissariat Putei Soobshcheniya (People's Commissariat of Ways of Communication, i.e. Transport)
NKPT	Narodnyi Komissariat Pocht i Telegrafov (People's Commissariat of Posts and Telegraphs)
NKRKI	Narodnyi Komissariat Raboche-Krest'yanskoi Inspektsii (People's Commissariat of Workers' and Peasants' Inspection also known by its acronym Rabkrin)
NKSnab	Narodnyi Komissariat Snabzheniya (People's Commissariat of Supply)
NKSovkhoz	Narodnyi Komissariat Zernovykh i Zhivotnovodcheskikh Sovkhozov (People's Commissariat of Grain and Lifestock-rearing State Farms)
NKSvyaz	Narodnyi Komissariat Svyazi (People's Commissariat of Communications)
NKTorg	Narodnyi Komissariat Vneshnei i Vnutrennoi Torgovli (People's Commissariat of External and Internal Trade)
NKTrud	Narodnyi Komissariat Truda (People's Commissariat of Labour)
NKTsvetMet	Narodnyi Komissariat Tsvetnoi Metallurgii (People's Commissariat of Non-Ferrous Metal)
NKTyazhprom	Narodnyi Komissariat Tyazheloi Promyshlennosti (People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry)
NKVD	Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs)
NKVMDel	Narodnyi Komissariat Voенno-Morskikh Del (People's Commissariat of Military and Naval Affairs)
NKVod	Narodnyi Komissariat Vodnogo Transporta (People's Commissariat of Water Transport)
NKYust	Narodnyi Komissariat Yustitsii (People's Commissariat of Justice)
NKZag	Narodnyi Komissariat Zagotovok (People's Commissariat of Procurements)
NKZem	Narodnyi Komissariat Zemledeliya (People's Commissariat of Agriculture)
nomenklatura	appointment list controlled directly or indirectly by the party
obkom	province party committee

oblast	province
OGPU (GPU)	Ob"edinennoe Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie (Unified State Political Administration, Political Police)
oprosum	procedure of approving decisions by polling members of the Politburo
Orgburo	Organisational Bureau of the Central Committee
ORPO	Central Committee's Department of Leading Party Organs
politotdely	politicheskije otdely (political departments)
puđ	measure of weight, equalling 36.1 British pounds
raikom	district party committee
raion	district, administrative unit
RSFSR	Rossiiskaya Sovetskaya Federativnaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic)
ruble	unit of currency
sovkhoz	sovetskoe khozjaistvo (state farm)
SovMin	Soviet Ministrov (Council of Ministers, successor to Sovnarkom)
Sovnarkom/SNK	Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov (Council of People's Commissars)
stazh	duration of membership (of Communist Party)
STO	Sovet Truda i Oborony (Council of Labour and Defence)
troika	committee or group of three persons
trudoden'	labour day, measure of work
Tsentrosoyuz	Vsesoyuznyi tsentral'nyi soyuz potrebitel'skikh obshchestv (All-Union Central Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies)
TsIK	Tsentral'nyi Iсполnitel'nyi Komitet (Central Executive Committee of the Soviets of the USSR)
TsK	see CC
TsKK	Tsentral'naya kontrol'naya komissiya (Central Control Commission of the party)
TsSU	Tsentral'noe Statisticheskoe Upravlenie (Central Statistical Administration)
TsUNKhU	Tsentral'noe upravlenie narodno-khozjaistvennogo ucheta (Central Administration of National Economic Records)
UkSSR	Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic

USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
valyuta	hard currency
Vesenkha/VSNKh	Vysshiĭ Sovet Narodnogo Khoziaistva (Supreme Council of the National Economy, succeeded by NKTyazhprom)
VKP(b)	see CPSU(b)
<i>vozhd'</i>	leader
VTsIK	Vserossiskii Tsentral'nyi Iсполnitel'nyi Komitet (All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets)
VTsSPS	Vsesoyuznyi Tsentral'nyi Soviet Professional'nykh soyuzov (All-Union Central Council of the Trade Unions)

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Introduction

The study of Soviet history in the Stalin era is connected inseparably to the study of the system of political leadership. At the heart of this system lay the Politburo, vaunted as the communist party's supreme decision-making body, and as such the supreme decision-making body in the country. But the precise role of the Politburo has long remained a matter buried in mystery, and the reality of the Politburo's power has always been a matter of contention. To what extent was it a real decision-making centre, and to what extent a mere façade that concealed the reality of a system based on Joseph Stalin's personal power? To what extent did this system of political leadership have a bearing on the decision-making process? This book sets out to explore these questions, drawing on the archival sources that have become available since the collapse of the system of communist rule in 1991.

Stalin as the party's General Secretary was seen as the leader of the Politburo, and the Politburo comprised the leading political figures in the USSR, representing the most powerful party and state institutions, and the most important regional and republican interests. All the major pronouncements were made in the Politburo's name. Each year, 2000–3000 decisions would be issued secretly in the Politburo's name. The thousands of decisions emanating from the Soviet governmental apparatus (Sovnarkom and the Central Executive Committee) were also seen as carrying the Politburo's sanction. The Politburo was presented as the supreme decision-making body in the country, as well as the highest court of appeal. There was no field of policy in which it could not involve itself, and there was no other institution, and no legal or constitutional law, that it could not overturn. The Politburo was the embodiment of the Bolshevik one-party state and of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

The Politburo's supremacy was underlined by the doctrine of 'democratic centralism', which held that all positions in the party were elected, that all higher party bodies were answerable to subordinate bodies, and that all decisions taken by the party had to be supported loyally by all. In 1921, the one-party state was consolidated, and in that year also the principle prohibiting factions in the party was established. Within the party at all levels the principle of collegiality was proclaimed as the basis of collective decision-making and collective responsibility. In reality, internal party democracy in the 1920s was compromised severely, with the defeat of successive opposition groupings, and by 1929 the party had embraced the doctrine of monolithic unity.

The Politburo's work was always shrouded in mystery. The party's power was hidden behind the façade of Soviet power at each level of the political hierarchy, from the local soviets to the Central Executive Committee (TsIK) of the All-Union Congress of Soviets. Alongside the Politburo, the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) was presented as a form of Cabinet that supposedly was answerable to TsIK, but in fact was answerable to the Politburo.

The problem of reconciling the notion of Politburo rule in the USSR with the notion of Stalin's personal power has always posed a problem of interpretation. Given the paucity of information regarding the actual functioning of the Politburo, various viewpoints were advanced. N. S. Khrushchev's notion of the 'cult of personality' pointed to the rise of a system of personal dictatorship in the 1930s in which the Politburo for much of the Stalin era was a relatively powerless institution. Others presented this as an attempt at self-exculpation for complicity in the crimes of the Stalin era. Historians in the past speculated on how far Stalin was constrained by his Politburo colleagues on how far he had to manoeuvre between different factions. The polar opposite to Khrushchev's assessment was the view of Stalin as a rather weak leader, who followed rather than created events, and who was pushed by the opinion of his colleagues and the pressures from powerful institutions.

The archival revelations since the early 1990s, the publication of the Politburo's protocols, and the Politburo's daily agenda, the publication of Stalin's appointment diaries, the availability of Stalin's correspondence with senior colleagues such as V. M. Molotov and L. M. Kaganovich all provide a basis for a more considered assessment of Stalin's actual power. The work undertaken by leading scholars in the field has clarified many of these questions.¹ The notion of Stalin as a weak leader is no longer tenable. Stalin was a dominating personality who exercised

unprecedented power over the direction of policy in the USSR from the time of V. I. Lenin's death in 1924 until his own death in 1953. Attempts to find evidence of a powerful Politburo that constrained Stalin, evidence of factional divisions within the Politburo between which Stalin had to manoeuvre, of cases where Stalin's will was thwarted, have largely failed.

Having said this, however, the question remains of what exactly was Stalin's position within the system of leadership in the USSR. How did he exercise his power? How did he relate to his colleagues? How did he manage this system of power to secure his own continuing dominance? How much power and influence did Stalin's colleagues wield? How far was his system of rule based on institutional power, and how far was it based on Stalin's own personal authority? On what matters of policy was his influence decisive, and which issues did he delegate to his subordinates? Did the system of rule change over time? How does our understanding of the system of rule at the political system's apex influence our understanding of major policy decisions – the collectivisation and industrialisation drives, the Great Terror, the indecision in the face of the threat of German invasion in 1941? How can we characterise this system of rule? How could personal dictatorship be reconciled with what was supposed to be a system of collective leadership?

The basis of the Stalinist system had been laid in no small part by Lenin. His scheme for party organisation in *What Is To Be Done?* of 1903 drew fierce criticism from other Marxists (Trotsky, Martov, Luxemburg, Plekhanov, Akimov) as an elitist scheme, which held the political awareness of the masses in contempt, and which would lead to a dictatorial party system over the working class. L. D. Trotsky, in *Our Political Tasks* (1904) famously predicted the outcome of such an approach to party organisation:

In the internal politics of the Party these methods lead... to the Party organisation 'substituting' itself for the Party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the Party organisation and finally the dictator substituting himself for the Central Committee.²

A. J. Polan argues that Lenin's very conception of Marxist ideology, with its emphasis on the correct line, its contempt for 'bourgeois' politics and 'parliamentarism', its rejection of 'bourgeois' conceptions of individual liberty and 'pluralism', involved a severe restriction, if not an outright denial, of politics as the free exchange of ideas, debate, bargaining and compromise.³ The culture of the Leninist party, its intolerance of other

viewpoints, its ideological zeal and self-righteousness, its hatred of those defined as class enemies, and its willing embrace of violence for political ends, imbued it with a strong propensity towards authoritarianism. The party from the October revolution claimed to embody the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and, as with all dictatorships, this was unconstrained by law.

Leonard Schapiro presents 1921 as a decisive turning point. Having established the one-party state, Lenin at the same time instituted a system of strict internal party discipline: the ban on factions; the repudiation of the 'anarcho-syndicalist deviation'; the granting of the power to the Central Committee to expel any of its own members; and the creation of the Central Control Commission as the body to enforce the ban and to police the party membership. Schapiro argues that, by 1921, the basis for a dictatorship within the party had been established, and the possibility of maintaining free debate within the party effectively undermined.⁴

Leninism was informed by an obsessive Jacobinical drive for centralisation and control that had its own inherent logic. The Bolsheviks' willingness to embrace repression and terror as a strategy of rule after October 1917 suggests that here there were strong lines of continuity with the Stalin era, even, if in terms of internal party democracy, there is much clearer evidence of a decisive break between Leninism and Stalinism, as Stephen Cohen has argued.⁵

Lenin's own position within the party was itself a subject of intense interest. Appeals by Maxim Gorky and N. A. Rozhkov to Lenin in 1919 that he establish a personal dictatorship to save the country from catastrophe were rebuffed.⁶ In March 1921, Lenin soundly rebuked Adolf Ioffe for characterising Lenin's role in the party 'the Central Committee – it is I' (*Tseka – eto ya*), a parody of Louis XIV's *'L'état ces moi!'*⁷ He insisted that at no time had he been in a position to dictate to the party, but had to persuade the party to adopt his policies. In October 1917, he threatened to resign from the party over the question of the seizure of power. In the spring of 1918 he had to use all his authority to get the party to approve the signing of the humiliating terms dictated by the Germans with the Brest-Litovsk treaty. In 1921–22 he was at the centre of the row over the trade unions, and had to fight tenaciously to get the party to accept the New Economic Policy.

The Soviet regime created in the wake of the October revolution rested on five basic pillars of power: (i) the Communist Party; (ii) the state bureaucracy; (iii) the Red Army; (iv) the Cheka/GPU; and (v) the institutions of mass organisation, including the soviets and the trade

unions. The nature of the state was determined to a large extent by the interrelationship and relative power of these institutions. In the early years of Soviet power, the supremacy of the party as the dominant authority was proclaimed. It supposedly provided the leading force organising the state bureaucracy, the military and internal security apparatus. These institutions were to be balanced by the institutions of mass democracy, themselves controlled by the ruling party, as representatives of popular sovereignty and as checks on the power of the bureaucratic party–state apparatus. The problem of maintaining the balance within and between these various institutions posed considerable problems for the Soviet regime.

In the years after October 1917, the Bolshevik party acquired as a coherent, organised structure. It sought to organise its activities on the basis of ‘democratic centralism’. With the ban on factions, centralised control over appointments and the huge expansion of the nomenklatura, the power of the central party bodies over the lower tiers was strengthened. Nevertheless, through the convening of annual party congresses and conferences in 1917–25, there was a determined effort to create structures of democratic procedure. Debate in the Central Committee was often very lively. The Politburo was the acknowledged authority, but it was accountable to the Central Committee that met on a regular basis. By 1923, the growing power of the central apparatus, the Secretariat headed by Stalin, was already drawing strong criticism for its domination of the party’s internal life, and control of appointments.

Lenin addressed these problems in his final writings – especially, ‘How we should reorganise the Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspectorate’ and ‘Better Fewer But Better’. In these two articles he sought to create the framework of a self-regulating party dictatorship. The plan was to make the Politburo answerable to an enlarged party forum, combining the members of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission (TsKK). This party Parliament was intended to have great authority (through the involvement of members of the TsKK in the work of the People’s Commissariat of Workers and Peasants Inspection – that would develop their expertise in the organisation of the work of the state and expertise in all policy areas). This dual body was intended as a check on the Politburo, and a check on the danger of the Politburo being riven by factional conflict.⁸

Lenin anticipated that organisational measures might be inadequate to contain the threat of dictatorship or the dangers of reckless policy adventures. He already feared the danger of a rift between Trotsky and Stalin. He sought to find a solution in the calibre of those who would

succeed him. This was the question he turned to in his final Testament. Within such a highly centralised system, the personal factor, he recognised, could become decisive. In his postscript to the Testament he famously called for Stalin's removal as party General Secretary, fearing that his abrasiveness, and his ruthless accumulation of power, might pose serious dangers for collective leadership in the future.

Lenin, noted as a factionalist before 1917, after October of that year embraced an inclusive style of leadership, and drew into the party's leadership people with whom he had previously clashed: Trotsky was brought into the leadership in 1917 after years of the most violent polemics between himself and Lenin; G. E. Zinoviev and L. B. Kamenev were retained within the leading circle despite the fact that they had opposed the October seizure of power and had publicised Lenin's plans in the press. Lenin believed that, after his death, the leadership of the party through the Politburo should continue as a collective enterprise.

A central concern of Lenin's final writings was the danger of an inexperienced party being unable to steer the machinery of state, and the fear that the regime might be overcome by cultural backwardness. The problem was very real, and applied at all levels of administration. At the very apex of the political system, the transition from the Lenin to the Stalin era undoubtedly meant a lowering of the intellectual and personal qualities of those guiding the state. At the lower levels, the quality of training, experience and general competence of officials was certainly much lower than in the tsarist period. This had profound implications for policy-making and policy implementation, and must in large measure account for the sheer crudity and wastefulness of the Stalinist state administration, and its predisposition for simplistic and dictatorial responses.

Lenin's plan to create a self-regulating dictatorship was almost certainly unworkable. The way in which it was put into operation exacerbated the problem. Notwithstanding Lenin's strictures, Stalin retained his post as party General Secretary. The TsKK-NKRKI was set up, but from the outset was placed in the charge of individuals loyal to Stalin (headed in turn by V. V. Kuibyshev, G. K. Ordzhonikidze, A. A. Andreev and Ya. E. Rudzutak). In the succession struggles after Lenin's death in January 1924, this apparatus worked in tandem with the apparatus of the Secretariat and Orgburo, headed by Molotov and Kaganovich, two of Stalin's leading aides. The strengthening of the central leadership's position brooked no opposition.

The centre set the direction and tone of policy to isolate and defeat Trotsky in 1924, and the Joint Opposition of Zinoviev, Kamenev and

Trotsky in 1926. In these struggles, Stalin relied on the support in the Politburo of the 'Rightists' – N. I. Bukharin, the party's leading ideologist, A. I. Rykov, chairman of Sovnarkom, and M. P. Tomsky, the head of the trade unions. In 1928–29, Stalin, using his base in the party apparatus and in the control organisations, turned on his erstwhile allies and secured sole control over the Politburo. His rivals were taken aback by the ruthlessness with which he pursued his drive for power. Bukharin famously described him to Kamenev as a 'Genghis Khan', who would kill them all.⁹

From 1921 to 1929 the party and the political system more generally underwent a huge transformation. The Bolsheviks established their monopoly of power in 1921 with the banning of other parties, the exile and imprisonment of their political leaders, and in 1922 the show trial of the leaders of the Socialist Revolutionary party. Within the Bolshevik party, the ban on factions did not prevent intense factional struggle in the 1920s, but it ensured that whoever controlled the party apparatus was bound to win. By 1929, the Stalin faction had triumphed. In the course of this period there was a dramatic restriction of internal debate within the party. The last really open debate involving the party rank and file concerned the discussion in 1923–24 on measures to deal with the scissors crisis. The debate indicated substantial support for Trotsky among student, military and worker cells in Moscow. The debate was promptly closed down.¹⁰

Robert Service has demonstrated how Stalin and his supporters rediscovered in 1923–24 Lenin's pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* and used it to justify their own restrictive interpretation of internal party democracy.¹¹ The influx of new party members in 1924–25, the famous Lenin enrolment, saw the imposition of tight central control over the selection, training, and ultimately expulsion, of those deemed unsuitable.¹² At the same time, the central party apparatus greatly enlarged its role in managing party affairs. This control was strengthened further by the fixing of agendas of congresses and plenums, the rigging of elections of delegates and officers, the control of discussion in the party, through the management of the education and admission of new members, and through periodic purges of the party's ranks. Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism*, dedicated to the new recruits of the Lenin enrolment, turned the dead leader's thought into a catechism.¹³ Kaganovich's handbook for new recruits on party organisation underlined the central importance of hierarchy and discipline, and downplayed democracy.¹⁴

While the Politburo was nominally accountable to the Central Committee and party congress, the party Secretariat and Orgburo,

headed by the General Secretary, came to exercise enormous weight in the party's decision-making. This constituted the core of the central party machine, staffed with its own officials and instructors who were empowered to investigate the work of lower party and state institutions, call their officials to account, and issue instructions on the interpretation and implementation of party policy. Molotov and Kaganovich played a key role in the development of this apparatus.¹⁵ These institutions were linked closely to the apparatus of party and state control – TsKK–NKRKI. This gave the General Secretary considerable power *vis-à-vis* other members of the Politburo.

While the 1920s saw a dramatic erosion of internal party democracy, the centralisation of power was constrained by the existence of other power centres. From the outset, the Politburo, as the main forum of party decision-making, operated alongside the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), which Lenin headed from 1917 to 1924. He was succeeded by Rykov, who held the post until December 1930. During the struggle with the Right Opposition in 1928–29, the governmental apparatus backed the 'Rightists'. The appointment of Molotov as chairman of Sovnarkom in December 1930 was intended to avoid such conflict emerging again.

In his drive for supremacy Stalin employed the tactics of factional manipulation but Stalin was also able to appeal to different constituents in the party and state apparatus on the basis of policy, which he adopted to changing circumstances. Stalin's embrace of the 'left turn' of 1928 mobilised support around the drive for industrialisation.

In the 1920s, other power centres were represented by economic institutions – the Commissariat of Finance and the Commissariat of Foreign Trade, and the trade unions (VTsSPS). With the 'revolution from above' these increasingly were eclipsed by Gosplan and Vesenkha (and its successor NKTyazhProm). Outside the economic sphere were the institutions responsible for defence (NKVMDel), internal security (Cheka, OGPU) and foreign policy (NKInDel). The other major institutional interests were represented by powerful city, republican and regional lobbies. The most important were the city authorities of Moscow and Leningrad, the Ukrainian SSR as the most important republican authority, and powerful regional lobbies, such as that of the Urals.

This created the need to integrate these various interests into the main party decision-making bodies. It gave rise to what R. V. Daniels named as the 'job-slot' system, whereby the most important party and state institutions were represented at the level of the Politburo and Central Committee. Important agencies that were not represented in

the Politburo (NKIndel and OGPU) nevertheless exercised great influence on policy in their specialised fields.

In the past, historians have speculated as to when Stalin achieved dictatorial powers in the USSR. Various turning points were identified. Stalin's appointment as General Secretary of the party in 1922 was seen as a major strengthening of his power. The celebration of his fiftieth birthday in 1929 was another turning point. Some saw it as being related to the events at the XVII party congress and the subsequent assassination of S. M. Kirov in 1934, while others saw it as the product of the Great Terror. And others questioned how far Stalin ever attained dictatorial power. This reflected lack of precise data and a lack of precision in defining what dictatorship meant.

The Soviet government as a revolutionary regime, but one lacking a broad base of social support, sought to guarantee its survival through institutionalised power. It never subjected itself to democratic election, but it did endeavour to win a degree of popular consent, or at least compliance. The attempt to rule the society during NEP through what Terry Martin has called 'soft line institutions' was replaced by a return to reliance on 'hardline' institutions, as the regime after 1928 reverted to a strategy of 'revolution from above', aimed at effecting a rapid transformation of the economy and society in accordance with its revolutionary goals.¹⁶

The 'revolution from above' weakened the party's role, transforming it from a political party and the main forum of policy debates into an institution largely given over to the management of the state apparatus. The state apparatus, with the enormous expansion of the government's role in planning and managing industry, agriculture and trade, grew enormously. This was associated also with a significant weakening of the republican and regional tiers of administration. The power of the internal security apparatus, allied to the growth of the Gulag forced-labour system, was expanded greatly. The power of the military grew in response to a deteriorating international climate. At the same time, the influence of mass organisations such as the soviets and trade unions was weakened significantly.

From 1928 to 1953, the Soviet leadership system, and of the Politburo in particular, changed in very significant ways from one period to another. The period of the Great Patriotic War, 1941–45, and the post-war years of 1945–53 are very different from the 1920s and 1930s. But through the 1920s and 1930s, the system evolved constantly, with quite different sub-periods having their own structures and procedures. How this system developed after 1928 is the basic subject of this book.

In analysing the operation of the leadership system, we need to be aware of the possibilities for comparative analysis, but also of the dangers of over-simplified comparisons, which fail to take into account the specificities of different systems. In Western presidential (USA and France) and prime-ministerial (UK) systems, the role of the Cabinet varies enormously. This reflects the difference between systems in which the leader is elected directly by the electorate compared to one in which the leader is elected by his/her party. It also reflects differences of style. Some incline towards a more collegial, and others a more personalised approach. In most Cabinets, decision-making tends to be concentrated in a small number of hands. In the case of the UK Cabinets, the Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Foreign Secretary and Minister of Defence have traditionally been the key players.

The way in which individual leaders manage their subordinates reveal certain striking similarities between systems: the importance of promotion and demotion; the building up of clients and the building up of rivals to check one another; the drawing in of personal advisers and alternative sources of information to counter the influence of over-powerful ministers and their departments; the extensive use of policy sub-committees to resolve problems; the building up of a private office as a counter to the civil service. This depends on the abilities of the leader to dominate subordinates, to carry an argument in Cabinet, or where necessary to appeal over the heads of Cabinet colleagues to supporters in the party and in Parliament. The leader's power is constrained by the power of colleagues, the support they can command in the inner councils and outside, and by their indispensability to the leader.

Cabinets are generally rather ineffective bodies for decision-making; they are too large and meet infrequently. This confers potential power on small, inner groups. But regular Cabinet meetings provide a structure and discipline within which such groups operate. It provides a forum in which policies have to be defended and justified. It provides the basis for policy appraisal and review. It offers the possibility of the decisions taken by the inner group being overturned. Individuals can resign and thus move outside the bonds of collective responsibility to air their criticisms in the party or Parliament. The Cabinet is the forum where votes of confidence in the leader or individual ministers can be taken. For individual leaders, their subordinates are both their colleagues and potentially their most dangerous enemies. Cabinets provide the framework within which this powerplay is worked out.¹⁷ In the absence of such mechanisms there is the danger not only of the enormous concentration of unaccountable power in the hands of one individual, but

also the obvious danger that the political struggle takes on a raw and unmediated form.

In democracies, the constraints on elected leaders are considerable. A cursory comparison between the Stalin leadership and periods of 'crisis government' in liberal states immediately brings out fundamental differences.¹⁸ Political theorists, from Niccolò Machiavelli to Carl Schmitt have drawn a fundamental distinction between temporary dictatorship, to deal with internal or external emergencies when normal constitutional rules are suspended, and permanent dictatorship established (for Machiavelli, this was the crucial distinction between justified and necessary dictatorship, and tyranny, which he reviled).¹⁹

In democratic systems, the constraints imposed by party, Parliament, constitution, rule of law, election, and public opinion greatly restrict the actions of leaders. During the Second World War, Winston Churchill was obliged to report regularly to his War Cabinet and to deal with outspoken criticisms of his policies in Parliament and in the press. In periods of radical transformation (for example, the years of government in Britain under Margaret Thatcher) the tendency is towards a highly personalised system of rule, with decisions taken within a small inner group. During the Falklands War of 1982, the normal functioning of the Cabinet was suspended, and decision-making was concentrated in a small War Cabinet, comprising the Prime Minister, with a handful of ministers, military chiefs and personal advisers. Nevertheless talk of 'prime-ministerial dictatorship' or 'elective dictatorship' in Britain in the 1980s was hyperbole. Ultimately, Mrs Thatcher was unable to persuade her party parliamentary colleagues to re-elect her as their leader. In the USA, the decision of President Johnson not to seek re-election in 1968, the decision by President Nixon to resign in 1974, and in France the decision of President de Gaulle to stand down in 1969, all offer testimony to the limits on personal power in democratic states.

Advocates of the totalitarian approach to Soviet politics placed the role of the dictator at the centre of their analysis. This reflected an 'intentionalist' view of Soviet history, where it was the political motive of the leader, shaped by the peculiar psychological formation of the leadership within a conspiratorial revolutionary organisation, the impact of revolutionary methods of organisation and intrigue, and the all-encompassing ideological aspiration for the transformation of society and mankind, which shaped the regime and its relations with society. Individual dictators might be driven by a mixture of motives – ideology, considerations of power maximisation, and self-glorification. The culture of the revolutionary party, its conception of its enemies, its moral self-righteousness

and its fanatical zeal provide an impetus towards authoritarian rule. In this approach, the cult of the leader and his core following within the totalitarian party provide the key for understanding the system of totalitarian dictatorship.

The totalitarian conception of politics adopted the model of despotic or tyrannical rule to the needs of the modern age – the age of mass parties, mass politics, modern ideologies, industrial economies and modernising regimes. Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski addressed in their work the interrelationship between totalitarianism and autocratic or dictatorial rule.²⁰ Other scholars have argued that the Soviet model was in many ways more primitive, more primordial, compared to, say, the totalitarian regime of Nazi Germany. In 1983, Carl A. Linden characterised the Soviet party-state, and other communist regimes, as an ‘ideocratic despotism’.²¹ The Stalinist system cannot be understood divorced from its ideological heritage,²² nor from the specific structures of party organisation and discipline of the Communist Party.²³ This is the biggest objection to attempts to place the Stalinist system within the definition of neo-patrimonial rule.²⁴

‘Structuralist’ interpretations of the Stalinist regime highlight the factors that shaped it, independent of the aims and intentions of the leaders themselves. The main determining forces might be identified as follows: the crisis of governance in a country that had experienced revolution and civil war; the problems of overcoming economic and social backwardness; the external constraints imposed by a hostile international climate; and the legacy of the country’s culture and tradition. From this perspective, the ideology of the Bolsheviks was transformed, and the composition of the party and its very psychology was changed over time. Trotsky, in *Revolution Betrayed*, offers a Marxist, structuralist interpretation of the Stalin regime.²⁵ In this, he was at pains to play down the importance of Bolshevik ideology, mind-set and practices in shaping the regime, and to minimise the role of Stalin as an individual.

Other historians have argued that the totalitarian approach pays insufficient attention to the peculiarities of different leadership systems. Ian Kershaw, in his comparison of the Nazi and Soviet leadership of Adolf Hitler and Stalin, brings out striking differences as well as similarities in terms of the structure of power and the style of leaders. In comparison to leaders in liberal democratic systems, Hitler and Stalin had a lot in common – both were dictators heading mass parties guided by a messianic ideology and unconstrained by the rule of law. Both regimes sought unprecedented control over the economy and society, and were

also guided by the aspiration to extend their domination beyond their own territories. At the same time, there remained important differences in the way they functioned and developed (see Chapter 7).²⁶

The work of scholars such as R. V. Daniels and T. H. Rigby cast important light on aspects of Soviet leadership system. Graeme Gill offered the most ambitious effort to conceptualise the Stalinist political system.²⁷ Attempts by John Löwenhardt and Niels Erik Rosenfelt to undertake more detailed analysis of the Politburo and Stalin's personal apparatus of power faced serious difficulties because of the paucity of data.²⁸

In the past, attempts to investigate the very secretive workings of the Soviet leadership system suffered from very limited sources. Apart from published Soviet documents, only the information of exiles or defectors – some of whom had been near to the centre of power (Trotsky, or Stalin's private secretary Boris Bazhanov) – and others who were more remote (G. Bessedovsky, Alexander Orlov, A. Avtorkhanov, Boris Nicolaevsky). It involved the piecing together of the testimony of individual witnesses (Roy Medvedev). A major source was provided by those first-hand observers of Stalin's leadership at work, notably N. S. Khrushchev and Milovan Djilas. Biographies of Stalin (by Deutscher, Souvarine, McNeal, Ulam, Tucker, Volkogonov, Radzinski) and other leaders, and works discussing 'Stalinism' as a concept offered their insights into the nature of this leadership system.

The information that is now available after the archives have been worked on over the 1990s is immense. We now know almost as much about the internal workings of the leadership under Stalin as we do of any major leader in a Western liberal state. We have the protocols of the Politburo (the huge files of working papers and special files – *osoby papki*), the agenda items of the Politburo recording the decisions taken, and the lists of people who attended meetings in Stalin's private office in the Kremlin. We have the accounts from Stalin's close colleagues – Molotov, Kaganovich and Georgi Dimitrov – by way of recorded memoirs, and diaries, as well as their correspondence with Stalin. We have the accounts of people closely involved in the work of government (N. K. Baibakov, Pavel Sudoplatov) and accounts of those close to Stalin's inner circle (Maria Svanidze).

This allows us to construct the operations of the leadership system in a way that previously was impossible. Yet delving into the secretive operations of the leadership remains difficult. The decisions that were taken informally, in private conversations and telephone calls, are not preserved. We know more about the operation of government in

1930–36 when Stalin was on vacation than when he was in Moscow. The operation of the regime in the period up to 1936 is easier to document than the period of the Terror after 1936 and the post-war years, which are shaped by a bizarre and often incomprehensible culture of conspiracy and intrigue.

When we return to the question of how the Soviet leadership might be characterised, and the approaches that are available for such a reappraisal, it is easier to start with the empirical data. This not only allows us to see the regularity of the meetings of the main party institutions of power, and to measure the way in which collective leadership might be superseded by personal dictatorship; it also allows us to measure the way in which the Politburo at times adjusted its work to take into account the growing burden of decision-making.

Different authors have characterised Stalin in different terms – *vozhd'* (leader) autocrat, dictator, despot and tyrant. Each term carries its own connotations. The terms 'autocrat' and 'dictator' carry somewhat less loaded meanings than 'despot' or 'tyrant'. Trotsky characterised Stalin's rule as a form of Bonapartism, but he also referred to him in an article in the magazine *Life* in 1939 as 'The super Borgia in the Kremlin'.²⁹ Khrushchev speaks of the 'cult of the individual', whereby Stalin acquired dictatorial powers from around 1934, but he characterises Stalin after 1937 as a 'despot'. Robert C. Tucker, Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov, for the period 1937–53, opt for the non-judgemental 'autocrat'.³⁰ Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov use the term 'tyrant'.³¹

Authoritarian rule embraces a wide range, and we need terms that reflect that range. The question of what these different terms mean is something that cannot be answered in any simple manner. The terminology itself needs to be refined in response to the detailed empirical research undertaken into the great authoritarian leaders of the twentieth century. That terminology can only be refined as part of a fuller comparative study that still remains to be undertaken.

The data now available allow us to place Stalin's leadership in its context, in terms of its relationship to the wider governing elite in the USSR, to explore in detail the nature of the leadership system, and to analyse the changing configuration of the political elite.³² We can now approach the question of the internal dynamics of this wider elite, their modes of operation, their value system and their codes of communication.³³ Stalin cannot be understood apart from the inner ruling circle in the USSR, nor apart from the wider circles of elites in the various branches of government (army, secret police, economic executives,

intellectuals and so on), and at the republican, city and regional level. Much remains to be done in this regard. The question of Stalin's relationship to mass opinion is only just being broached.³⁴

In considering the nature of authoritarian political leadership systems – whether the leader is designated as autocrat, dictator, despot, tyrant or whatever – the question of defining the features of such systems of rule remains. A simplistic definition which says that a dictator is one who decides everything, whose word is law, and who can act with total impunity, is inadequate. The processes of government – of policy formulation, resolution of policy options overseeing policy implementation – could never be performed by one individual, except in the simplest of societies. All rulers need subordinates through which they can govern; all are required to recognise limits to their powers and to act with regard to practicalities or prudence if they do not wish to bring about their own downfall. No ruler can ever decide everything alone. Some delegation of power is unavoidable. This is true of all the great dictators of the twentieth century – Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, Hitler, Benito Mussolini, General Francisco Franco and António Salazar.³⁵ The real question is the way in which such leaders manage their subordinates; the way that power is concentrated, without the leader being overburdened and overwhelmed with petty decisions; and without such over-centralisation crippling the functioning of the state.

In this volume, no attempt is made to arrive at any agreed position with regards to the nature of leadership politics under Stalin. The chapters represent the views of individual authors. Each chapter reflects a particular approach to the study of the topic, a particular way of conceptualising the nature of this leadership.

Evan Mawdsley concentrates on the nature of institutional representation within the Politburo and Central Committee; the 'job slot' principle, and examines the way in which the membership of these bodies changed over time. Stephen Wheatcroft looks at the informal processes of decision-making, examining the pattern of those attending the meetings in Stalin's private office from the 1920s up to 1952. He argues that these meetings were the real forum in which legislation was drafted. He emphasises the extent to which Stalin, almost to the end, operated as part of a collective group – Team-Stalin – although the composition of this group was largely determined by Stalin, until the last few years of his rule, when a more capricious and unpredictable element emerged in his leadership – when Stalin became a tyrant or adopted a more dictatorial style of rule.

R. W. Davies, Melanie Ilič and Oleg Khlevnyuk examine the extent to which Stalin involved himself in different fields of economic policy-making, and analyse the Stalin–Kaganovich correspondence to determine which issues Stalin dealt with and which he was content to leave to his subordinates. Derek Watson examines the formation of foreign policy in the 1930s, and the way Stalin played with various policy options, reflected in the rivalry between Litvinov and Molotov. Valery Vasil'ev examines the functioning of the Ukrainian Politburo and its relations to the all-union Politburo, as a way of understanding the way formal and informal relationships of power interacted.

E. A. Rees looks at the nature of the system of rule around Stalin, drawing on the data on meetings of the formal bodies of the party – Politburo, Secretariat and Orgburo – to demonstrate what he sees as the main shifts of power – the shift towards a system of personal dictatorship already by the early 1930s, and a shift to something qualitatively different after the Great Purges, which he equates with Khrushchev's definition of despotism. In both the dictatorial and despotic phases, Rees argues, Stalin remained dependent on his subordinates. This, he suggests, requires us to rethink the concepts of dictatorship and despotism, and to relate them to the realities of historical experience.

This work is intended as a contribution to the study of the decision-making process in the Stalinist era, and to the study of the evolution of the Soviet state. It complements two earlier volumes on decision-making within the central economic commissariats in the 1930s: E. A. Rees (ed.) *Decision-Making in the Stalinist Command Economy, 1932–1937* (Basingstoke/London and New York, 1997); and on decision-making at republican, city and regional level in E. A. Rees (ed.) *Centre–Local Relations in the Stalinist State, 1928–1941* (Basingstoke/London and New York, 2002).

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1

Stalin as Leader 1924–1937: From Oligarch to Dictator

E. A. Rees

Between Lenin's death in 1924 and the beginning of the Great Terror in 1936, the Soviet political system underwent a dramatic internal transformation. In this chapter we examine how the main institutions at the apex of the Communist Party and the Soviet government operated in this period, as reflected in the regularity of their meetings, the number of decrees and resolutions issued – and in terms of the personnel who headed them, and their interactions over time. The chapter explores the interrelationship between Stalin and his colleagues within the leading circles of power in the Soviet party–state structures. It focuses on the interaction of the informal and the formal structures of power. In this we seek to determine how Stalin ruled, the extent to which he exercised dictatorial power, and the way in which that power might have been constrained by the influence of subordinates and other institutional interests.

The party Politburo was in practice the supreme political authority. The governmental body, Sovnarkom, although constitutionally separate from the party, was in practice subordinate to the Politburo, although during Lenin's chairmanship it wielded considerable power in its own right.¹ But, from the outset, key institutions such as the secret policy apparatus of the Cheka, the Red Army and the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs reported directly to the Politburo.

Stalin rose to power in the years after Lenin's death through a series of power struggles by which he succeeded in gaining the support of one Politburo faction to defeat the other. In 1924, he succeeded in isolating Trotsky with his Left Oppositionist supporters in the Central Committee. In 1926/27, with the support of the Rightist in the Politburo, he defeated the Joint Opposition, in which Trotsky was now in alliance with Stalin's former allies, G. E. Zinoviev and L. B. Kamenev.

Finally, in 1928/29, Stalin, with the support of people whom he had advanced, turned against the Rightists – A. I. Rykov, N. I. Bukharin and M. P. Tomsky – and defeated them. These power struggles in the Politburo were also battles for the control of powerful party and state institutions.

Historians such as I. Deutscher, R. V. Daniels, T. H. Rigby and James Hughes emphasise Stalin's control over the central party Secretariat as the determining factor in creating a disciplined body of supporters in the power struggle following Lenin's death.² In this way, Stalin controlled the delegations which attended the party congresses, thereby controlling the debate, and more particularly the process of election of the Central Committee. This, strategy had already been deployed by Lenin in 1921–22 in the wake of the damaging trade union debate and the controversy over the New Economic Policy (NEP) to limit the number of delegates who supported Trotsky that were elected to the X and XI party congresses.³

But Stalin's rise to power depended not only on the control of institutions and cadres; it also involved a strategy of constructing a coalition of forces, in part around policy questions. In his 'left turn' of 1928 against the NEP, Stalin challenged directly the governmental apparatus itself, Sonarkom/STO headed by Rykov, and the commissariats of Finance and Trade that had been the dominant institutions under NEP. Stalin's supporters in the governmental apparatus included – the radical economic planners in the State Planning Commission – Gosplan (G. M. Krzhizhanovsky), the advocates of rapid industrialisation in the Supreme Council of the National Economy – Vesenkha (V. V. Kuibyshev), and agencies that might support him, such as the rail commissariat, but also key figures in the military establishment such as M. N. Tukhachevsky, who urged industrialisation as a defence priority. The shift from the NEP was achieved through the use of the joint agency of party and state control, the Central Control Commission and People's Commissariat of Workers' and Peasants' Inspection – TsKK-NKRKI (G. K. Ordzhonikidze), to lead the attack on those institutions most committed to its continuation, and to act as a policy think-tank generating alternative policy options and providing officials to staff the economic commissariats. The GPU's support in carrying through these policies was also essential.

The coalition was based on specific policy and ideological choices, as well as individual and institutional self-interest. The attack on N. A. Uglanov, first secretary of the Moscow party organisation in 1928, was a salutary warning to all party secretaries who might oppose the new line. Stalin also won over the mass organisations, successfully ousting

Tomsky as head of the trade union council – VTsSPS – and effecting a change in the leadership of the communist youth organisation, the Komsomol. Stalin combined ‘control from above’ with ‘control from below’,⁴ using the power of the central party–state apparatus from above and local initiative from below to attack entrenched institutional interests. The coalition was constructed around a series of campaigns – the ‘anti-kulak’ campaign of the winter of 1927–28; the Shakhty affair of 1928, and the campaign against the bourgeois specialists; the war scare of 1927; the Smolensk scandal and the attack on corruption in the regional party organisations; the self-criticism campaign and the drive to promote a new generation of specialists and proletarian cadres; and the drive to proletarianise the party’s ranks. These separate campaigns were co-ordinated into one unified campaign against the so-called ‘Right’ Opposition in 1928–29.

The Stalinist group’s power rested initially on the party apparatus itself. Stalin’s appointment as party General Secretary in 1922 was crucial to his success in the succession struggle after Lenin’s death. He controlled the central party institutions, the Orgburo and Secretariat, as well as the Department for Assignment (Orgraspred), which exercised great control over party appointments. These bodies were run for him effectively by V. M. Molotov until 1930, and thereafter by L. M. Kaganovich. In the period 1929–32, the enlarged meetings of the Politburo, Secretariat and Orgburo acted as councils of the Stalinist group, and of the coalition of institutional forces which it comprised.

The second major power base was the governmental apparatus. In December 1930, on Stalin’s insistence, Molotov became chairman of Sovnarkom and STO, in place of Rykov. This was to ensure close co-ordination between the Politburo and Sovnarkom, and to avoid the kinds of conflict that had arisen under the leadership of Rykov.⁵ The new joint Sovnarkom–Central Committee decrees issued after 1930 symbolised the new unity of party and state bodies. They were usually signed by Molotov and Stalin, with Molotov signing first as chairman of Sovnarkom. Notwithstanding the importance of these decisions, it was only on 5 June 1934 that the first of these decrees was presented to the Politburo for approval. In the second six months of 1934, nine were submitted for approval, and in 1935, 124.

The former Soviet ambassador, G. Bessedovsky, in his memoirs in 1930, spoke of the ruling circle as being dominated by a triumvirate of Stalin, Molotov and Kaganovich, with Stalin dominating these two very tough characters by sheer willpower, but also being highly dependent on them as aides and advisers. Both Molotov and Kaganovich were adept at

reading and anticipating Stalin's wishes.⁶ They were then seen as Stalin's most dependable agents, and as potential successors in case of necessity. They carried the huge burden of managing the twin engine of the party-government apparatus, relieving Stalin of much of the routine work. This triumvirate constituted the core members of the inner cabinet, to which others were added, often according to the issues under discussion.

Below these two central agencies of rule, the Stalinist group also controlled other powerful bodies. In the management of the economy they controlled Gosplan (headed by Kuibyshev), tied closely to Sovnarkom-STO, the major economic commissariat – Vesenka (headed by Ordzhonikidze) and the lesser economic commissariats – of transport NKPS (headed by A. A. Andreev), and of agriculture – NKZem (headed by Ya. A. Yakovlev). Control over these commissariats was exercised by various agencies, the most important being that of party-state control TsKK-NKRKI. The specialist non-economic commissariats – internal security (G. G. Yagoda), defence (K. E. Voroshilov) and foreign affairs (M. M. Litvinov) were connected directly to the Politburo. Below these central structures of power, the ruling group dominated the leading regional and republican authorities in the country – Moscow (Kaganovich), Leningrad (S. M. Kirov) and Ukraine (S. V. Kosior).

By 1929 and the defeat of the Right, Stalin had succeeded in putting his own followers into the Politburo. It was at this time that the ban on factions within the party, proclaimed in 1921, became a reality, with the proclamation of the new doctrine of 'monolithic' party unity, and strict adherence to the party's 'general line'. This effectively marked the death of internal party democracy. The core of leaders formed around Stalin was shaped in the struggles with the Trotskyists and the Rightists, and tempered in the upheavals of the revolution from above. Stalin's relations with these figures were very different from his relations with the now defeated figures (Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky), who could talk to him on terms of equality. The new leaders were dependent on him for their elevation, and their attitude to him was one of respect and awe, but they were tough, ideologically hardened characters schooled in the revolutionary movement, the civil war and the revolution from above.

The central party bodies

The Politburo

From its creation in 1919, the Politburo had established itself as the supreme decision-making body in the ruling Communist Party. The

Politburo was formally elected by the party Central Committee and was answerable to the Central Committee and party congress. In truth, new members of the Politburo (as all other leading party bodies) were co-opted by the existing leaders. The Politburo in the 1920s acquired immense power and status, but its work was shrouded in mystery. After 1922, leadership of the Politburo became associated with the post of party General Secretary. The membership of the Politburo following the Central Committee plenum of 4 February 1932 was as shown in Table 1.1.

The ten full members and three candidate members reflected a particular system of representation at the highest level of the party. The heads of the main party and government institutions were always represented: the General Secretary of the party; the chairman of Sovnarkom, who by tradition acted as chairman when the Politburo met;⁷ and the chairman of TsIK USSR. In addition to the representatives of the central party administration (*apparat*), there were those of key local party bodies (Moscow, Leningrad and the Ukraine), the head of Gosplan and the heads of the key commissariats – Defence, Heavy Industry and Rail Transport. The chairman of the Central Control Commission (TsKK) was required during his term of office formally to surrender his membership of the Politburo, but he attended its meetings. (This system of representation is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.)

Table 1.1 The composition of the Politburo, ‘elected’ in February 1932

Members:

I. V. Stalin	General Secretary
L. M. Kaganovich	Party Secretary, Secretary of Moscow party organisation
S. M. Kirov	Secretary of Leningrad party organisation
S. V. Kosior	Secretary of Ukrainian party organisation
V. M. Molotov	Chairman of Sovnarkom
V. V. Kuibyshev	Chairman of Gosplan
G. K. Ordzhonikidze	Narkom of NKTyazhProm
A. A. Andreev	Narkom of NKPS
K. E. Voroshilov	Narkom of NKVMDel
M. I. Kalinin	Chairman of TsIK USSR

Candidates:

A. I. Mikoyan	Narkom of NKSnab
V. Ya. Chubar’	Chairman of Sovnarkom Ukraine SSR
G. I. Petrovskii	Chairman of TsIK Ukraine SSR

Source: Institute zur Erforschung des Ud SSR, *Party and Government Officials of the Soviet Union 1917–1967* (Metuchen, 1969).

In the period up to the XVII party congress, those attending the formal meetings of the Politburo, besides Politburo members (full and candidate) but without voting rights, included members of the Central Committee and of the Presidium of the Central Control Commission (TsKK). A typical meeting on 28 March 1929 had in attendance 8 Politburo members, 3 Politburo candidate members, 22 Central Committee members, 11 Central Committee candidate members and 7 members of the presidium of TsKK.

The Politburo's protocols are not stenographic reports of the meetings (which apparently do not exist), and from them it is impossible to interpret the position taken by individuals in policy disputes. They list those attending, the agenda of the meeting, and decisions taken, often with the text of the resolutions appended at the end of the protocol. The protocols were signed by Stalin, and after 1930, in his absence, by Kaganovich as second secretary.

The Politburo concentrated on six main areas of policy: international affairs, defence, internal security, heavy industry, agriculture and transport. The protocols are least revealing regarding the first three, which tend to be dealt with in the secret files (*osobyie papki*). Politburo decisions might be issued either as Central Committee resolutions, as joint Central Committee–Sovnarkom or government (TsIK, Sovnarkom or STO) decrees, or even as orders (*prikazy*) of a particular commissariat. The protocols record the confirmation of many appointments, most of which had initially been processed by the Orgburo, and here the huge scale of *nomenklatura* becomes apparent.

Even regular meetings of the Politburo from 1924 to 1930 did not guarantee collective decision-making. Already, under Lenin, Molotov asserts, a leading group largely determined Politburo policy.⁸ Trotsky in 1923–25 complained that key decisions were taken prior to formal Politburo meetings, and that he was excluded from these deliberations.⁹ Boris Bazhanov, Stalin's secretary, recounts how in 1924/5 the Stalin, Zinoviev, Kamenev troika decided key issues on the Politburo's agenda in meetings in Stalin's office beforehand.¹⁰ Kamenev complained at the XIV party congress in 1925 that power was concentrated increasingly in Stalin's hands as General Secretary.¹¹ Again, in the struggle with the Joint Opposition in 1926–27, Stalin relied on a leading group to prepare the Politburo sessions in advance.¹² In 1928, the 'Right' opposition were out-manoeuvred in the Politburo by Stalin's ruse, as General Secretary, to accord casting votes to members of the presidium of the Central Control Commission (TsKK).¹³ S. I. Syrtsov, newly 'elected' as candidate member of the Politburo in June 1929, complained that the

Politburo as a collective decision-making body was a fiction, with certain members, including Kuibyshev, Ya. E. Rudzutak and M. I. Kalinin, regularly being excluded from its deliberations.¹⁴

In the period 1923 to 1927, the weakness of the Politburo, however, should not be exaggerated, it met on a very regular basis.¹⁵ The total number of formal sessions each year are listed below:

1923	80
1924	75
1925	55
1926	71
1927	75

From January 1928 until September 1929, the Politburo met every week, usually on a Thursday. Thereafter, the formal meetings became less

Table 1.2 Formal sessions of the Politburo, 1928–1940

Year	Central Committee plenums	Politburo meetings		
		Number of protocols	Number of meetings	Stalin's attendance
1928	3	53	53	51
1929	2	51	51	49
1930	1	39	40	27
1931	2	59	37	31
1932	1	46	30	24
1933	1	24	24	17
1934	2	20	18	14
1935	3	17	16	14
1936	2	9	9	7
1937	3	12	6	6
1938	1	11	4	4
1939	1	14	2	2
1940	2	14	2	2

Source: Protocols of the Politburo RGASPI, 17/3/667-1031. O. V. Khlevnyuk, A. V. Kvashonkin, L. P. Kosheleva, L. A. Rogovaya (eds), *Stalinskoe Politbyuro v 30-e gody: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow, 1995), which lists the sessions of the Politburo from 1930 to 1940.

Note: For 1931, *Stalinskoe Politbyuro* lists 61 formal Politburo sessions. This, however, is misleading, as 24 of those sessions were working sessions (of which Stalin attended 16). For 1932, it lists 47 sessions of the Politburo, but only 30 were formal sessions and 17 were working sessions (of which Stalin attended 11). *Stalinskoe Politbyuro* does not list any working sessions for 1930, but the list of working sessions can be constructed for the period 1928–1930 from *Politbyuro TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) Povestki dnya zasedanii: Tom I 1919–1929, Katalog* (Moscow, 2000) and *Politbyuro TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) Povestki dnya zasedanii: Tom II 1930–1939, Katalog* (Moscow, 2001). In 1933, the practice of convening working sessions of the Politburo, according to the listing given in *Stalinskoe Politbyuro*, stopped.

regular, with the dates of subsequent meetings being fixed by the Politburo. There was a notable decline of these formal meetings in 1930. The decline of formal meetings (as we shall see) was compensated by an increase in working sessions of the Politburo. The main change in the Politburo's power and status came in 1933.¹⁶

Through 1931, the Politburo met in formal session regularly on the 5th, 15th and 25th of each month. In 1933, the pattern changed with the Agenda (*povestki dnya*) listing just twenty-four formal sessions for the whole year; the pattern was most commonly for two sessions a month, usually on the 1st and 15th (see Table 1.2). A Politburo resolution of 23 April 1933 ruling that its sessions were to be held on the 5th, 15th and 25th of each month referred to past practice and was not implemented.¹⁷ From September 1934, the principle of monthly meetings was established, with occasional additional meetings. However, in 1936, no meetings were held in January, August or November.

In the period up to 1932, Stalin and other leaders devoted much time to the work of the formal and working sessions of the Politburo. After 1933 the Politburo was transformed into a consultative body, rather than a collective decision-making institution. Molotov, in his memoirs, justified this violation of democratic procedures, which he acknowledged might have produced more considered legislation, by the advantages of swift resolution of problems.¹⁸

Politburo decision-making

Here we shall explore the changes over time in the kinds of decisions taken in the Politburo's name as reflected in its daily agenda. The vast number of decisions taken reflected the highly centralised nature of the decision-making process. Assessing the relative significance of different decisions is difficult (many of them were of a routine, administrative nature, while substantive changes in domestic and foreign policy do not register as single decisions of the Politburo at all).

Here we offer a broad overview of the data. In this a distinction is drawn between three types of decision: (i) those approved at the Politburo's formal sessions; (ii) those taken by the Politburo (*reshenie Politburo*) either in working sessions or by specially empowered commissions; and (iii) those decisions taken by polling the Politburo members (*oprosom*). We shall examine the numbers of these three types of decision from the years 1923 to 1940 (see Table 1.3). This table illustrates graphically the Politburo's demise. If, in 1923, 88 per cent of all decisions taken by the Politburo were approved at a formal Politburo

Table 1.3 Politburo decisions, 1923–1940

	Decisions of sessions of the Politburo	Decisions of the Politburo	Decisions taken by <i>oprosom</i>	All decisions
1923	1487 (80 sess)	2	208	1697
1924	1407 (75 sess)	0	760	2167
1925	1149 (54 sess)	0	799	1948
1926	1359 (71 sess)	0	654	2013
1927	1110 (75 sess)	0	695	1805
1928	961 (53 sess)	141	782	1884
1929	1070 (51 sess)	558	648	2276
1930	1093 (40 sess)	972	826	2891
1931	1443 (51 sess)	810	1665	3918
1932	1446 (47sess)	154	2137	3737
1933	444 (24 sess)	32	2874	3350
1934	290 (17 sess)	102	3498	3890
1935	105 (16 sess)	7	3467	3579
1936	88 (9sess)	0	3212	3300
1937	23 (7 ses)	2236	1314	3573
1938	27 (4 ses)	2111	278	2401
1939	4 (2 sess)	2717	34	2755
1940	13 (2 ses)	3502	0	3515

Source: *Politbyuro TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) Povestki dnya zasedanii: Tom I 1919–1929, Katalog* (Moscow, 2000); *Politbyuro TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) Povestki dnya zasedanii: Tom II 1930–1939, Katalog* (Moscow, 2001); *Politbyuro TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) Povestki dnya zasedanii: Tom III 1940–1952, Katalog* (Moscow, 2001). See also the data given by Wheatcroft in Table 3.3, p. 88.

session, by 1932 this was down to 39 per cent, and then fell to 13 per cent in 1933. By 1937, only 0.6 per cent of all Politburo decisions were approved at formal Politburo sessions.

Table 1.3 allows us to identify four distinct phases in the Politburo's development. The first was up to August 1928, when the formal Politburo session was the main forum of decision-making. A substantial number of decisions was also taken by polling the members (*oprosom*) between sessions. The Politburo members invested an enormous amount of time and effort in the formal sessions of the Politburo, which met every four or five days. This, as noted, did not mean that on key political issues decisions might not also be taken prior to the session or behind the scenes by cabal. But these meetings were certainly not merely ceremonial.

The second phase, from 1928 to 1932, reveals new and unexpected aspects to the operation of the Politburo. In August 1928 an important innovation was introduced in the issuing of decisions (*resheniya*) of the Politburo. This practice was followed throughout 1929. In 1930, formal

Politburo meetings, with some irregularities, met on the 5th, 15th and 25th of each month. Between these formal Politburo meetings, working sessions of the Politburo were convened on the 10th, 20th and 30th of most months, when batches of Politburo decisions were issued (see Table 1.4). The number of such decisions issued on any single day could be as high as forty-seven, and was on average about twenty. A large number of decisions by *oprosom* were taken on the days of the formal and working meetings of the Politburo, either to clear up decisions in advance of the meeting, or to deal with matters it had not been possible to resolve at the meeting itself.

These closed working sessions were intended to expedite and process the growing work of the Politburo. The practice seems to have been similar to the formal sessions, in terms of the number and range of issues handled, as well as in terms of procedures, with proposals brought by individual members of the Politburo, high-ranking party secretaries or commissars for approval. The working sessions were attended by Politburo members and candidate members, a handful of Central Committee members and members of the presidium TsKK. In 1931, average attendance at these sessions was seventeen. Stalin always attended these working sessions when he was in Moscow. (see Table 4.1

Table 1.4 Formal and working sessions of the Politburo, 1927–1931

	Formal sessions	Working sessions	Formal and working sessions	Issuing of decisions
1927	75	0	75	1
1928	53	20	73	0
1929	51	54	105	0
1930	40	35	75	6
1931	37	36	73	16
1932	30	17	47	27
1933	24	0	24	10
1934	18	0	18	24

Source: O. V. Khlevnyuk, A. V. Kvashonkin, L. P. Kosheleva, L. A. Rogovaya (eds), *Stalinskoe Politbyuro v 30-e gody: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow, 1995); *Politbyuro TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) Povestki dnya zasedanii: Tom I 1919–1929, Katalog* (Moscow, 2000); *Politbyuro TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) Povestki dnya zasedanii: Tom II 1930–1939, Katalog* (Moscow, 2001).

Note: The calculation of the number of sessions is by no means straightforward. For 1931, *Stalinskoe Politbyuro* lists 43 formal sessions, but 4 of these were almost certainly working sessions. For 1931, *Povestki dnya zasedanii* shows that decisions of the Politburo were issued on 52 days. Of these, we estimate (by regularity of dates and numbers of decisions taken) that 36 were working sessions of the Politburo and that the remaining 16 (involving one or two decisions) were probably issued by Politburo commissions.

for numbers of working sessions). Most of the decisions of the Politburo (*resheniya Politburo*) during 1928–32 were taken in these working sessions of the Politburo.

In addition to the formal sessions and the working sessions of the Politburo there were the days on which decisions of the Politburo were issued. These decisions may have emanated from Politburo commissions, empowered as drafting commissions in advance by the Politburo. Some of these decisions almost certainly came from working sessions of the Politburo that are not listed in the protocols as given in *Stalinskoe Politbyuro*.¹⁹ The issuing of Politburo decisions was increased in June–August 1932, during the growing crisis in agriculture. From 1932 to 1935, the practice was followed sporadically, with often only single decisions being issued. By 1936, it had stopped completely.

The third phase was from 1933 to 1937. The working sessions of the Politburo ceased in 1932 and in 1933 there was a significant decline in the number of formal sessions of the Politburo. The big increase in the number of issues decided by *oprosom* partly reflects the greater number of decisions handled by Politburo standing and *ad hoc* commissions, and by the apparatus of the Orgburo and Secretariat. The increased use of Politburo commissions was an innovation associated with Kaganovich, who managed the Politburo for Stalin, and who personally played a very active role in these commissions. This, it might be argued, facilitated speed and more specialist involvement in policy-making but at the expense of the Politburo's collective identity.

The fourth phase was the period 1938 to 1940. This saw the final demise of formal meetings of the Politburo, with the establishment in 1937 of two commissions of the Politburo charged with taking decisions on domestic policy and foreign policy. Decisions were no longer referred to individual Politburo members by *oprosom* but were decided largely by this select inner group and simply reported as a 'decision of the Politburo'.

This pattern of decision-making raises profound questions with regard to the functioning of the Politburo. With reference to the formal sessions of the Politburo, we note a dramatic decline in their frequency. If we calculate the number of agenda items approved at formal Politburo sessions for set years, the decline is seen to be even more precipitous (see Table 1.5).

The vast numbers of questions taken by polling (*oprosom*), between 1000 and 3000 per annum, a very large proportion of which were trivial, raises questions as to how effective a part Politburo members, overburdened with departmental responsibilities, could play in decision-making.

Table 1.5 Number of Politburo formal sessions and number of agenda items approved, 1923–1939

Year	Formal sessions	Total number agenda items	Average per session
1923	80	1 487	18.5
1929	55	1 107	20.1
1934	18	285	15.8
1936	9	88	9.7
1939	2	6	3.0

Source: *Politbyuro TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) Povestki dnya zasedanii: Tom I 1919–1929, Katalog* (Moscow, 2000); *Politbyuro TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) Povestki dnya zasedanii: Tom II 1930–1939, Katalog* (Moscow, 2001).

This left little time for individuals to confer with one another. This was supposed to allow Politburo members to register their dissent about a course of policy proposed and to have the matter discussed in the Politburo. We do not know whether this was simply a token right, or whether members in fact used this power. It is difficult to avoid the inference that this reflected the substitution of politics by administration, and was a cover to conceal the great diminution of the real influence of Politburo members. What we see, as in other authoritarian institutions that seek to conceal their nature, is the well-known phenomenon of ‘pseudo-consultation’.

The frequency with which formal meetings of the Politburo were held declined sharply from the beginning of 1933. As a result, the volume of work to be completed at each session grew enormously, and the sessions themselves were able to get through only a small part of the agenda.

The Politburo’s decline is also marked by other indicative trends. In 1923–27, foreign policy matters were very often placed at the top of the Politburo’s agenda. In 1926, for example, there were 74 formal sessions of the Politburo, and at 46 of these sessions a special place on the agenda was reserved for questions by NKInDel (*Voprosy NKInDel*). But this practice had ceased as early as 1928 (see Chapter 6, p. 136).²⁰

The Orgburo and Secretariat

The Orgburo and Secretariat of the Communist Party were established in March 1919 as bodies of equal power with the Politburo.²¹ The Politburo quickly gained ascendancy over the Orgburo, regularly confirming Orgburo resolutions, and examining the protests against decisions of the Orgburo.²²

The Secretariat served as the executive arm of the Politburo and Orgburo, being responsible for preparing the sessions of the Politburo and Orgburo and overseeing the fulfilment of its resolutions. From March 1921, the Secretariat also acted in the capacity as the collegium secretariat of the Central Committee and resolved independently a number of questions (above all related to cadres).

Stalin, from his election as General Secretary in 1922, controlled the Orgburo and Secretariat, which provided him with his real power base in the central party apparatus. From 1929 onwards he ceased to attend the formal meetings of these bodies, delegating the task to his deputies. The Orgburo was led by the second secretary of the Central Committee (although formally such a post did not exist). In the 1920s, this role was performed by Molotov. On Molotov's appointment as chairman of Sovnarkom in December 1930, the function was taken over by Kaganovich.

From a situation in the 1920s when there were almost weekly meetings of both Secretariat and Orgburo, there was a significant decline from 1933 onwards. Formal sessions of the Secretariat practically ceased, but the Orgburo from 1933 to 1940, with the exception of 1937, continued to meet on average once a month (see Table 1.6). When formal sessions did not take place, protocols were still issued for both bodies, recording decisions that had been taken through polling (*oprosom*) of their members.²³ Formal sessions of both Orgburo and Secretariat were attended by the members of these bodies, and by members of the Politburo, the Central Committee and the party control bodies. An attendance of some forty members was normal, but in some cases as many as sixty-five are listed as having attended.

The Orgburo, which was elected in February 1934 after the XVII party congress, comprised the members as shown in Table 1.7. The Orgburo between 1930 and 1934 was led by Kaganovich, and during his absence A. A. Zhdanov deputised. With Kaganovich's appointment to head NKPS in February 1935 there were some changes in the organisation of the central party apparatus. Kaganovich retained his posts as party Secretary and continued to organise the Politburo's work, as shown by his correspondence with Stalin during the latter's extended vacations. But Andreev was transferred from NKPS to the party Secretariat and took over the Orgburo, Zhdanov took charge of culture and propaganda, and N. I. Ezhov retained responsibility for industry but was also appointed chairman of KPK a post previously held by Kaganovich. G. M. Malenkov was in charge of cadres at the CC's department of leading party organs (ORPO).

Table 1.6 Formal sessions of the Secretariat and Orgburo, 1928–40

Year	Number of protocols	Number of meetings: Orgburo	Number of meetings: Secretariat	Meetings attended by Stalin
1928	87	44	43	13
1929	85	44	41	1
1930	61	32	29	0
1931	59	29	28	0
1932	49	17	32	0
1933	23	12	7	0
1934	20	12	1	0
1935	23	12	1	1
1936	21	13	0	0
1937	13	6	0	0
1938	18	11	0	0
1939	32	14	0	0
1940	42	14	0	0

Source: Protocols of the Orgburo and Secretariat RGASPI, 17/113/600 to 17/114/40.

Table 1.7 Membership of the Orgburo, February 1934

Secretaries of CC	L. M. Kaganovich I. V. Stalin A. A. Zhdanov S. M. Kirov
Vice chairman of Sovnarkom	V. V. Kuibyshev
Head of the Political Dept of the Red Army	Ya. B. Garmnik
Section Heads CC	N. I. Ezhov A. I. Stetskii
Secretary of the Komsomol	A. V. Kosarev
Chairman VTsSPS	N. M. Shvernik

Source: *Party and Government Officials of the Soviet Union 1917–1967* (Metuchen, 1969).

The Orgburo concerned itself with the appointment of leading officials. It led internal party campaigns such as the exchange and checking of party documents, monitored the party membership, and ensured central control over local party bodies. The Central Committees of republican party bodies, obkoms, kraikoms, and gorkoms were required to report periodically to the Orgburo. In 1934–36 this was done rather spasmodically, with four to six sessions each year being in part taken up

with such reports. The Orgburo also focused on party organisational and propaganda work, monitoring the implementation of Central Committee resolutions on these matters. In some cases, investigations were triggered by reports from ORPO. In 1934 and 1935, the Politburo approved about 300 decisions of the Orgburo each year, rising in 1936 to almost 400.²⁴ The Orgburo, in effect, worked as a permanent acting commission of the Politburo.

The XVI party congress in 1930 elected a Secretariat of five members (K. Ya. Bauman, Kaganovich, Molotov, P. P. Postyshev and Stalin) and two candidates (I. M. Moskvina and N. M. Shvernik). Decisions of the Secretariat were rarely referred to the Politburo, but were approved by the Orgburo. The Secretariat on occasion prepared questions for examination by the Politburo, and was empowered to resolve a number of questions in the Politburo's name. The Secretariat's primary responsibility lay in overseeing cadres' appointments and in exercising oversight over local party organisations.²⁵ On 30 April 1931, at Stalin's proposal, the Secretariat was charged, jointly with Molotov (chairman of Sovnarkom USSR), 'henceforth to resolve current questions on the requests of the localities and only in cases of special importance to refer them to the Politburo'.²⁶

The Central Committee apparatus

The steady demise of the formal meetings of the Politburo, Orgburo and the Secretariat did not mean that the organisational apparatus of the central party machine ceased to function. On the contrary, these institutions continued to play a vital role within the system of administration: issuing instructions on policy implementation and monitoring policy performance. The Secretariat led the departments of the Central Committee directly. The structure and organisation of the departments changed over time. At the beginning of 1930, the following departments were created: culture and propaganda, organisation-instruction; assignment of administrative-economic and trade union cadres; and agitation and mass campaigns. The Lenin Institute also had the status of a department of the Central Committee.²⁷

In the middle of 1934, the Central Committee departments (*otdely*) were restructured, primarily with the aim of providing closer party supervision over the main economic commissariats, and over the republican and regional party bodies. The following departments were set up: culture and propaganda; industry; transport; agriculture; planning-finance-trade; political-administrative; and leading party organs. The departments concentrated mainly on cadres' questions

and control over policy implementation. The departments also prepared materials for the Politburo and initiated questions for its examination.

The Politburo on 10 March 1934 assigned responsibility for these departments as follows: Transport Sector – Kaganovich (with Zhdanov as deputy); Industrial Sector – Ezhov; Agricultural Sector – Zhdanov; Culture–Propaganda Sector – A. I. Stetskii; Leading Party Organs (responsible for oversight of the local party bodies) – D. A. Bulatov; the Special Sector – A. N. Poskrebyshev; and Administrative Affairs of the Central Committee – Ya. E. Brezanovskii.²⁸

On 4 June 1934, the Politburo approved the division of responsibility between the three party Secretaries: Stalin – Culture–Propaganda, the Special Sector, and the work of the Politburo; Kaganovich – Orgburo, the Industrial Sector, the Transport Sector, the Komsomol and Party Control; and Zhdanov – Secretariat, the Agricultural Sector, the Planning–Finance–Trade Sector, Political Administration, the Sector of Leading Party Organs and Administrative Affairs.²⁹

In periods of crisis, the commissariats were subject to close scrutiny by Politburo commissions and by the Central Committee departments. The power of these departments varied considerably. The Central Committee's sector for industry in no way competed with Vesenkha/NKTyazhProm which was the dominant voice in industry, with Ordzhonikidze its head, a leading figure in the Politburo. But Ezhov, head of the industrial sector, remained a thorn in the flesh of NKTyazhProm by exposing mismanagement in industry. M. A. Chernov, head of the agricultural sector, took over NKZem USSR in 1934 and its former head, Yakovlev, was transferred to head the agricultural sector. In 1935, Kaganovich, who as head of the transport sector had waged a campaign of criticism against NKPS, became head of NKPS.

The influence of these departments on policy-making is difficult to assess, as these archival files were destroyed in 1941. The Politburo's protocols provide no indication of what legislation or decisions emanated from advice offered by the Central Committee departments. Some indication of their influence can be gleaned from the preparatory materials to the resolutions of the Politburo. Most of these archival files are housed in the archives of the Politburo (the present Presidential Archive of the Russian Federation), which remain at the time of writing closed to researchers. The departments carried out investigations, worked with letters, prepared documents for the Politburo, and worked on the assignment of leading cadres.

The governmental apparatus

From 1917, the party effectively dominated the state institutions. The Central Executive Committee (TsIK) of the All-Union Congress of Soviets had a legislative function constitutionally. It was used to confer legitimacy on policy decisions that emanated from the party-governmental apparatus. The discussion of the budget through TsIK's Budget Commission offered a façade of consultation.

The main lines of authority, however, connected Sovnarkom with the Politburo. Sovnarkom concentrated on economic, and to a certain extent, social, administration. In addition, although there were commissars for foreign affairs, defence, and from 1934 internal affairs (including security), Sovnarkom was bypassed, and the Politburo dealt with these matters directly. Neither Litvinov, narkom of NKInDel, nor Yagoda, narkom of NKVD, were Politburo members, but they participated regularly in its sessions. The heads of the key economic commissariats (Kuibyshev, Ordzhonikidze, Mikoyan, and later Kaganovich) were leading members of the Politburo, demonstrating the primacy of economic affairs in politics for at least the first half of the 1930s.³⁰

The Politburo exercised tight control over Sovnarkom. Molotov, as chairman, would still seek approval for 'sensitive' agendas and items.³¹ The Sovnarkom approved by the VI Congress of Soviet on 18 March 1931 consisted of fifteen members including the chairman, deputy chairmen and commissars; as detailed in Table 1.8. The deputy chairmen played an important role, alongside the chairman; Andreev headed the control agency NKRKI, Kuibyshev headed Gosplan, while Rudzutak (without portfolio) provided support to Molotov.

The Politburo appointed the commissars, deputy commissars, members of the collegia, and their positions were confirmed by a decree of the presidium TsIK or Sovnarkom. The formal meetings of Sovnarkom were phased with those of the Politburo and Orgburo. The *protokoly* show that at the 34 meetings of Sovnarkom held in 1931³² the numbers attending varied between twenty-one and forty-six. Voting members might be supplemented by 'consultative' members with a right to speak, but not to vote.

Sovnarkom's chief concern with economic planning was in implementing the annual and quarterly plans. Gosplan drew up the details of the Second Five-Year Plan, within the framework laid down by the party, in consultation with the commissariats. Sovnarkom tended to become overloaded with petty business, and much was shunted off to *ad hoc* sub-committees and other bodies. The Politburo gave general policy

Table 1.8 Membership of Sovnarkom, March 1931

V. M. Molotov	Chairman
Ya. E. Rudzutak	Deputy chairman
A. A. Andreev	Narkom of NK RKI and <i>ex officio</i> deputy chair
N. K. Antipov	Narkom of NKPT
G. F. Grin'ko	Narkom of NKFin
V. V. Kuibyshev	Chairman of Gosplan and <i>ex officio</i> deputy chair
M. M. Litvinov	Narkom of NKInDel
A. I. Mikoyan	Narkom of NKSnab
G. K. Ordzhonikidze	Chairman of Vesenkha
A. P. Rozen'golts	Narkom of NKVneshTorg
M. L. Rukhimovich	Narkom of NKPS
A. M. Tsikhon	Narkom of NKTrud
K. E. Voroshilov	Narkom of NKVMDel
Ya. A. Yakovlev	Narkom of NKZem
N. M. Yanson	Narkom of NKVodTrans

Source: Sobranie zakonov i rasporyazhenie raboche-krest'yanskogo pravitel'stva SSSR, 1931, Part II, 5–59.

directives, but it was also a court of final appeal in inter-departmental disputes. Within Sovnarkom, under Molotov's leadership, the deputy chairmen were assigned responsibility for overseeing the work of different commissariats, and state commissions and committees. Molotov, in a letter to Mikoyan dated 13 May 1934, outlined the particular institutions for which his three deputies were to be responsible.³³ These were as follows:

- V. V. Kuibyshev: NKIndel, NKVMDel, OGPU, NKVneshtorg and the Currency Commission, NKSnab, Tsentrosoyuz, KomZag, NKZem and NK Sovkhoz.
- V. Ya. Chubar': NKTyazhProm, NKLegProm, NKLes, NKFin, Gosbank, NKPS, NKVodTrans, NKSVyaz and the Chief Administration for Cinema and Photographic Industry.
- V. I. Mezhlauk: Gosplan, cultural and social affairs (including NKPros RSFSR and NKZdrav RSFSR), the Standards Committee and the Radiofication Committee.

Kuibyshev's death in January 1935 created immediate problems in the running of Sovnarkom and deprived Molotov of a staunch ally. To overcome the difficulties, Chubar' succeeded Kuibyshev as first vice-chairman; N. K. Antipov succeeded Kuibyshev as chairman of the Commission of Soviet Control and as a vice-chairman; while Rudzutak continued as a vice-chairman without ministerial portfolio.³⁴

Table 1.9 Membership of STO, December 1930

V. M. Molotov	Chairman
A. A. Andreev	Deputy chairman (<i>ex officio</i> as Sovnarkom)
V. V. Kuibyshev	Deputy chairman (Chairman of Gosplan)
Ya. E. Rudzutak	Deputy chairman
G. F. Grin'ko	Narkom of NKFin
M. I. Kalmanovich	Chairman of State Bank
A. I. Mikoyan	Narkom of NKSnab
G. K. Ordzhonikidze	Chairman of Vesenkha
I. V. Stalin	Party General Secretary
K. E. Voroshilov	Narkom of NKVMDel
Ya. E. Yakovlev	Narkom of NKZem

Source: *Party and Government Officials of the Soviet Union 1917–1967* (Metuchen, 1969).

Alongside Sovnarkom there was STO. The membership of STO in December 1930 was as shown in Table 1.9. The leadership of Sovnarkom and STO were thus identical. Although Stalin was a member of STO he rarely attended its meetings. He attended a joint Sovnarkom–STO session in January 1931 concerned with the Five-Year Plan. In the mid-1930s, STO's position was eroded by Gosplan and the industrial commissariats. Sovnarkom and STO had their own commissions and committees. Gosplan and STO had special responsibility for co-ordinating the work of the economic commissariats.

One of the major committees of STO, and from 1933 of Sovnarkom, was the Committee for Agricultural Procurement (KomZag). It was headed initially by Kuibyshev and had responsibility for setting procurement targets for all the regions of the USSR. Stalin had a keen interest in this work, and revisions of the targets could not be made without his express approval. Adjustments to the targets at the behest of republican and oblast authorities had to receive Stalin's sanction.

Managing the party–state apparatus

Sovnarkom's Commission of Implementation (*Komissiya ispolneniya* or KomIspol), was set up on Stalin's initiative in December 1930; with Molotov as *ex officio* chair, and charged with enforcing policy implementation.³⁵ Sovnarkom's work in controlling the economic commissariats was assisted by Gosplan, the Commissariat of Finance (NKFin), the State Bank (Gosbank) and the statistical agency TsUNKhU, who all performed a control regulating function, through the levers of planning, finance and credit.

The XVII party congress abolished TsKK–NKRKI and Sovnarkom's Commission of Implementation; in their place it established a new Commission of Party Control (KPK), headed by Kaganovich and a new Commission of Soviet Control (KSK), headed by Kuibyshev. Members of the bureaux of KPK and KSK were granted the same rights as those previously enjoyed by members of TsKK's presidium. They were entitled 'without restriction' (*bez ogranicheniya*) to attend Politburo meetings, and ordinary members of both bodies were allowed to be present on matters relating directly to their areas of responsibility.³⁶ In 1935, Ezhov headed KPK, and N. K. Antipov headed KSK, both of these bodies being charged with policy enforcement.

Alongside these agencies were bodies with a more punitive role – especially the NKVD, the Procuracy and the Supreme Court. Certain sections of the economy, notably the commissariats of transport and water transport, were allocated their own Procuracy and Courts.³⁷

The Politburo, through the Orgburo's apparatus, monitored closely the fulfillment of its directives and orders.³⁸ The central party apparatus supervised the commissariats, and the republican and regional administrative bodies. They operated through their staff of instructors and inspectors, with powers to carry out investigations, request materials and documents, interview officials, issue instructions on how policy was to be implemented and interpreted, and submit reports to higher party organs.³⁹ The Orgburo and Secretariat controlled appointments of government officials through the *nomenklatura* system, and through contact with the party cells in the commissariats.

The party Secretariat's influence over the economic commissariats was strengthened with the creation in 1933 of Political Administrations in NKZem, NKSovkhoz, NKPS and NKVodTrans. These were responsible for administering the political departments (*politotdely*) in these fields. This provided a parallel line of authority within the commissariats to the line administrators. This system of administrative control was modelled on that developed during the civil war, and was directly analogous to the system of party control over the armed forces. The *politotdely* were staffed largely by officials drafted in from the Red Army and GPU. The Political Administrations answered directly to the Secretariat and Orgburo.

Politburo commissions and joint Politburo–Sovnarkom commissions played a key role in decision-making and in drafting legislation. In some cases, these were permanent bodies, such as the Defence Commission and, after August 1933, the Transport Commission. The Commission for Hard Currency (*valyuta*) played a key role in shaping the country's

foreign trade policy. There were also *ad hoc* commissions that were set up on a regular basis.

The commissars (narkoms) were responsible for their own departments and, through a system of ministerial responsibility, for regulating department work. The Soviet political system after 1928 was a control-dominated system. As always, excessive control produced a plethora of evasion strategies by subordinates, which inevitably produced still more controls.⁴⁰

Stalin: from oligarch to dictator

The 'cult' around Stalin as *vozhd'* which developed after 1929 conferred on him immunity from criticism, as witnessed by the retreat from collectivisation heralded by Stalin's article 'Dizzy with Success' and the handling of the famine in 1933. In each case, responsibility for policy failure was unloaded on to lower-level officials. Officials consequently sought assiduously to interpret Stalin's will, and to anticipate his orders. At party gatherings, Stalin's pronouncements tended to be very low-key; hints and suggestions were enough to produce the desired effect. At the XVII party congress in 1934, Stalin's apparent mild rebukes to Yakovlev (NKZem), Andreev (NKPS) and Yanson (NKVodTrans) unleashed a storm of denunciations from other delegates. This typified his method of leadership. The new authoritarian style of leadership was reflected in the 'cults' that developed around the other satellite leaders.

Stalin's personal dictatorship was consolidated in 1929–33. It developed in part in response to the stresses within the coalition of individual and institutional interests that made up the ruling Stalinist group. The forced retreat on collectivisation in 1930, heralded by 'Dizzy with Success', brought the first major strain within that coalition. Stalin's attempt to unload responsibility for the crisis on to republican, regional and local leaders was deeply resented. Lower-level officials tended to favour a more aggressive policy in enforcing collectivisation. The Syrtsov–Lominadze affair of 1930 offers further testimony of dissatisfaction within the Stalinist coalition, reflecting a more moderate tendency, which desired a more cautious, gradualist approach.⁴¹

The second major crisis within the ruling coalition came in 1932–33 with the famine. This was largely a product of the impact of collectivisation, 'dekulakisation', the reckless pursuit of high procurement targets for grain, and the failure to build up reserve stocks in anticipation of such harvest failure. The famine produced a major crisis in the regime's relations with the peasantry, but also with the urban population. Having

amassed unprecedented power, Stalin in 1932–33 was also held responsible for the catastrophe. Here we have an interesting paradox: while his power increased, his personal authority suffered a major blow. But whereas in the past criticism was openly voiced, now it was done covertly by secret platforms circulating in the party, notably the Eismont–Smirnov–Tolmachev and the Ryutin platforms. The latter denounced Stalin and his policies from a ‘Leninist’ perspective, condemning the new dictatorship and demanding Stalin’s removal.⁴² But by 1932 there was no effective constitutional mechanism by which Stalin could be brought to account.

The move towards a system of personal dictatorship was facilitated by the combination of internal crisis and external threat. The decline of formal meetings of the Politburo dates from January 1933, precisely when the scale of the famine crisis was becoming apparent. The situation was compounded by the dangers posed to the USSR externally, following the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in September 1931 and Hitler’s advent to power as Chancellor in Germany in January 1933.

The system of formal meetings of the Politburo, Secretariat and Orgburo were too large and unwieldy to exercise an effective decision-making role, and something more streamlined was required. In the early 1930s, as the number of decisions referred to the Politburo increased, efforts were made to restrict agenda items to a manageable number, to confine the time given to the presentation of individual items, and to pass routine decisions for resolution in the Secretariat.

But the way the system was changed involved a significant shift in the locus of power. The long-established practice of expounding and justifying policy before an extended party forum, a central feature of ‘democratic centralism’ from the Lenin era, was abandoned. The rude exclusion of senior party officials from such forums must have had a telling impact on the way these officials viewed their relations with Stalin. The political regime within the party was tightened up, and in 1933 a major purge of the party ranks was instituted.

The demise of the formal meetings of the Politburo, Secretariat and Orgburo, which had functioned as the inner councils of the ruling Stalinist coalition, meant an end to the system of oligarchic rule: the mechanisms of collective leadership and collective accountability were eroded, but the trapping of that system survived. There was no real forum in which policies could be challenged, whereby the leadership could be brought to account, censured or removed. The Central Committee had been emasculated by the late 1920s; it met infrequently and its debates were cursory. Its membership was subject to a high

turnover in 1934, and again in 1937. The conditions for a system of personal dictatorship had been established.

The hub of this system of personal dictatorship were the meetings held in Stalin's private office in the Kremlin. Such meetings dated back to the 1920s and had been convened alongside the formal weekly meetings of the Politburo, Orgburo and Secretariat. Through these private meetings Stalin was given much greater control over the political agenda, to determine which issues were to be aired, and which officials to be summoned.

We know little about the way in which these meetings were conducted, the procedures by which individuals were summoned, or how far briefings, position papers or draft resolutions were prepared in advance. The frequency of the meetings and the high standing of the officials who attended them, however, indicate an enormous simplification, even streamlining, of the decision-making process. It gave Stalin great oversight over the work of the party-state apparatus, with leading officials being required to report on and account for their activities, and it also gave him direct access to leading officials at different levels of the hierarchy, thus providing him with innumerable channels of communication.

The shift of power to Stalin's private office brought a fundamental change in the nature of the Soviet leadership system. The private office needed to be connected to the apparatus of the central party machinery – that of the Politburo, Orgburo, Secretariat and departments of the Central Committee and, of course, to other institutions – the GPU/NKVD, the Procuracy, the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and the military. Elements of the system of collective leadership, operating via the formal meetings of the Politburo, survived at a greatly diminished level until 1937. Decrees and pronouncements were still issued in the Politburo's name, and this continued right through the Stalin era, but the reality of how power was exercised was very different.

During Stalin's prolonged summer vacations in 1931–36, Kaganovich, as the number two Secretary, remained in charge of the Politburo. The Stalin–Kaganovich correspondence demonstrates that, throughout these absences, Stalin was kept informed in detail on all major developments: via letters, special couriers, telegrams, and from 1935 onwards, by telephone. Stalin received a constant stream of communications, including NKVD reports, as well as receiving visitors. His deputies in Moscow were extremely solicitous of his opinion on matters great and small, and quickly fell in line with his opinions. In the great majority of matters referred to him by his deputies, Stalin simply confirmed proposals, or left things up to his deputies to decide.

In these years, Molotov and Kaganovich occupied a position of enormous influence and trust. Stalin felt free to confide in them his scathing judgement of other senior political figures (Ordzhonikidze, Litvinov, Kosior, Chubar' and others). They acted as gatekeepers, ensuring that the *vozhd'* was not overwhelmed with petty issues, and they acted as a filter for advice, opinion and information. They were in a position to influence his thinking, and to push particular policy lines. But Stalin was very far from being fenced-in by this; he had access to other sources of information and advice. Both Molotov and Kaganovich acted as Stalin's agents, constantly sought his opinion on policy matters craved his approval, and were very quick to fall in line with his thoughts.

Even away from Moscow, Stalin intervened to shape policy and even drafted legislation on his own account. He could operate through Kaganovich or Molotov, or through other members of the Politburo, and was quick to slap them down if they stepped out of line. This delegation of powers was fully compatible with dictatorial power. First, Stalin possessed far greater authority than Molotov or Kaganovich; he was the sole survivor of Lenin's Politburo; he was the architect of the 'revolution from above', and he was the party's chief of ideology. Second, he had made the careers of Molotov and Kaganovich and most other Politburo members. Third, on a personal level, he was more ruthless than they, and his colleagues deferred to him and held him in awe. This was in no way a relationship of equals.

The connections between the meetings in Stalin's Kremlin office and the formal meetings of the Politburo remain to be disentangled. The boundaries between the one and other was vague. The individuals who attended these private meetings most frequently were the leading members of the Politburo (Molotov, Kaganovich, Malenkov, Voroshilov, Mikoyan, Zhdanov and Ordzhonikidze). The practice of *oprosom* secured the consent of Politburo members for particular initiatives without any real discussion. Much of the Politburo's work was handled by *ad hoc* and permanent commissions that were charged with carrying out inquiries, resolving problem issues and drafting specific pieces of legislation.

Decisions taken at the meetings in Stalin's office were no less important than those taken at formally constituted Politburo meetings. The data on those attending the meetings in Stalin's office, the protocols and agendas of the Politburo, the correspondence between Stalin and Molotov/Kaganovich leave little doubt as to Stalin's pervasive influence on decision-making. We still lack a full picture of his activity, however. We do not yet have a record of his correspondence with other senior figures. Account must also be taken of informal contacts, and communications that were never recorded on paper.

Stalin and his subordinates

Stalin played a decisive role in party management and policy-making from the time of Lenin's death onwards. The defeat of the Left and Right Oppositions consolidated his control over the Politburo, but from 1928 to 1932 the Politburo remained a force, although Stalin was certainly more than *primus inter pares* within the ruling oligarchy. Stalin's willingness to involve himself in the details of policy-making was well known. Policy declarations by Stalin himself were seen as having as much, if not more, authority than a decision by the Politburo collectively. Stalin's famous letter to the editors of *Proletarskaya revolyutsiya* in 1931, on the writing of party history, set the agenda with regard to censorship in all fields.⁴³ This was a central aspect of Stalin's *modus operandi*.

Stalin's correspondence with Molotov and Kaganovich reveals a leadership that was immersed in work, attentive to the detail of decision-making, and was having to respond constantly to demands, petitions from regions, commissariats, enterprises and individuals. Much of the work was of a routine administrative nature. While the leadership was responding constantly to unfolding events, unanticipated problems and crises, there is also a very clear sense of a leadership that was in charge. What the correspondence reveals also is that, on technical matters, they were able to discuss issues with considerable detachment; on questions touching security, the ideology of the party, and the question of internal and external enemies, the approach revealed a reversion to a fixed mind set.

Beyond this ruling triumvirate, other members of the Stalin leadership exercised great power in their own realms, in charge of powerful departments of state or controlling major city and republican party organisations. These deputies were often drawn into conflicts with one another, reflecting both clashes of departmental interests and clashes of personality. In 1931, Stalin confided to Kaganovich his concern regarding the deep personal animus between Ordzhonikidze, Molotov and Kuibyshev. In Kuibyshev's case, concerning his alcoholism, questioning his ability to perform his duties. But Stalin's main fear was that such disputes, if left unchecked, could split the ruling group:

The note of c. Kuibyshev and his conduct in general creates a bad impression. It seems that he flees from work. On the other side still worse is the conduct of c. Ordzhonikidze. The latter evidently does not take into account that his conduct (with sharpness against cs. Molotov and Kuibyshev) leads objectively to the undermining of our

leading group, which was formed historically in the struggle with all forms of opportunism – creates a danger of its destruction. Surely he does not think that on this course he can find any support from our side?⁴⁴

Stalin counted on Kaganovich to exercise some restraint on his close friend Ordzhonikidze.

In 1931–32, Stalin sought to preserve the Politburo's formal status as the supreme decision-making body. In September 1931, he voiced alarm that Ordzhonikidze, head of Vesenkha, in attempting to raise targets for the importation of steel, was appealing repeatedly over the head of Sovnarkom to the Politburo, and seeking also to revise earlier Politburo decisions. On 9 September 1931, Stalin warned Kaganovich that such behaviour 'turns the PB into an organ for rubber stamping the resolutions of Vesenkha, NKSnab, NKZem etc. It is impossible to tolerate these attempts to turn the CC from a leading organ into an organ subordinate to the particular needs of individual commissariats'.⁴⁵

Stalin was also anxious to ensure that people of proper calibre were retained in the central party organs, to ensure that their authority was not diminished. In October 1931 he objected to the suggestion that Postyshev be transferred from the Secretariat to Sovnarkom, since he was more necessary and more valuable in the Secretariat.⁴⁶ In the summer of 1932, Stalin dropped his proposal to reappoint Kaganovich as General Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party in place of Kosior because he feared that this would weaken seriously the party Secretariat.⁴⁷ At this time Stalin appears to have been anxious to preserve the proper functioning of the Politburo, Orgburo and Secretariat. In the course of 1932 his attitude appears to have shifted decisively.

Stalin had the main say in all key appointments. Kaganovich recounts in his memoirs that on his appointment as General Secretary of Ukraine in 1925, and as first secretary of Moscow in 1930, both on Stalin's personal authorisation, he had extensive discussions with Stalin where he outlined what the main priorities should be.

Stalin used his Politburo colleagues as his agents. Molotov and Kaganovich were sent to Ukraine in 1932 to enforce the grain procurement policy. Kaganovich and other senior figures were regularly used as troubleshooters, dispatched to different republics and regions to enforce the centre's policy, and reported directly to Stalin on the situation they encountered and the action taken.

On fundamental questions of policy, the ruling group showed remarkable unity. The Politburo shifted between hard line and moderate

positions as circumstances changed. Nevertheless there were in the Politburo clashes of institutional interests and clashes of personality. Sovnarkom and Gosplan were charged with controlling the high-spending economic commissariats. Consequently in the early 1930s relations between Ordzhonikidze (head of NKTyazhProm), Molotov (Sovnarkom) and Kuibyshev (Gosplan) were often accrimonious.

The relations between Molotov and Kaganovich, both rivals to succeed Stalin inevitably were often strained. Kaganovich, as head of NKPS, clashed with Molotov over investment in the railways. Molotov also took exception to the practice of Ordzhonikidze and Kaganovich of protesting decisions of Sovnarkom to the Politburo. Relations between Ordzhonikidze and Kaganovich were close, and both for a period headed the two most powerful economic commissariats, jealously defending them from outside encroachment. Relations between Ordzhonikidze, Kaganovich, Kirov and Voroshilov were good. Molotov's relations with Litvinov, head of NKInDel, were strained, with both involved in a protracted battle over foreign policy from 1933 to 1939. Relations between Ordzhonikidze and L. P. Beria appear to have been particularly bad, and this appears to have been a factor in Ordzhonikidze's 'suicide' in 1937.

Stalin's relations with his subordinates tended towards the formal. Kaganovich could never address him with the informal *ty* (thou), preferring to use the respectful *vy* (you). There were times when Stalin enjoyed particularly cordial relations with certain subordinates: Molotov, Ordzhonikidze, Kaganovich, Kirov, Ezhov and Zhdanov. Molotov was the one figure who until 1949 enjoyed a constant presence, and was effectively Stalin's right-hand man. Some prominent early figures within the Stalin ruling group departed prematurely – Kirov was assassinated in 1934, Kuibyshev died of a heart attack in 1935, and Ordzhonikidze by his own hand in 1937.

The extent to which a dictatorship operated in these years depends in part on the extent to which Stalin's will could be thwarted. The assertion that the Politburo in 1932 refused Stalin's demand for Ryutin's execution has found no confirmation in the archives. It is questionable whether politically Stalin could at that time have presented such a demand to his colleagues. There remains the unresolved matter of whether a large number of delegates at the XVII party congress deleted Stalin's name from the list of candidates for election to the Central Committee, and whether there were moves behind the scene to curb his power. Whether Stalin was responsible for the assassination of Kirov, as a potential rival, remains open. On balance, the weight of evidence

favours the view that he took advantage of the assassination, rather than that he had a direct role in initiating it.⁴⁸

Stalin was careful not to allow any of his subordinates to become too powerful or too indispensable. The sideways transfer of Kaganovich to head the railways commissariat, NKPS, in January 1935 was undoubtedly motivated partly by such considerations. Kaganovich lost control of KPK (taken over by Ezhov), the Moscow city and oblast party (taken over by Khrushchev) and the Secretariat (assumed by Andreev). From 1930 to 1934 Kaganovich had built up an enormously powerful position, and in the Moscow party organisation a strong cult developed around him. NKPS was an organisation in which other leaders – Rudzutak, M. L. Rukhimovich and Andreev – had come unstuck. At the time there was speculation that Stalin might not have viewed such a failure for Kaganovich without a certain equanimity. In the event, Kaganovich succeeded in turning the railways around.

Stalin's power, although dictatorial, was not absolute, nor was it exercised without regard to the power of other subordinates. The retention of Rykov as chairman of Sovnarkom until December 1930, when other members of the Right opposition had already been disgraced, suggests that Stalin's freedom of action may have been limited. He retained Kosior and Chubar' as leaders in Ukraine in 1933 because of the lack of alternatives. But there may also have been political difficulties: the support they enjoyed among the raikom and obkom officials in Ukraine, and also possibly among the members of the all-union Politburo. Kaganovich had been withdrawn from Ukraine in 1928 because he had so antagonised other Ukrainian leaders, and his reappointment may have caused too many problems. Stalin put up with Rudzutak as head of TsKK–NKRRKI but had him removed in 1934. He kept Yagoda on as head of NKVD until September 1936, then criticised the secret police for being four years behind in their work of eliminating counter-revolution. His purge of the military high command in June 1937 removed senior military figures, such as Tukhachevsky, with whom he had clashed earlier; even dictatorial power had to be exercised with a measure of prudence.

Stalin exercised great control over the levers of repression. He interested himself closely in such matters. He had privileged access to materials on such questions, and his colleagues did not query his judgement on these issues. The existence of limits to Stalin's powers does not prove the absence of dictatorship, however. The power of the dictator is never constant and never fixed once and for all; there is always a tension between his power and that of his subordinates. In periods of

crisis, as with the famine of 1933, there may well be a tendency for the power of the subordinates to be enhanced. Stalin, in the period up to 1937, had to manage his subordinates, convince them or carry them by force of personality. In this period, Stalin's subordinates did not fear him, but they certainly held him in awe and sought to avoid incurring his disapproval.

Stalin's personal power

In the period 1928 to 1934, Stalin in a sense stood apart from his younger, less experienced Politburo colleagues. This is reflected in the closer bonds of friendship among his subordinates, notwithstanding also bitter rivalries. Stalin socialised with his colleagues, but the latter may well have felt more at ease with one another than with 'the boss'.⁴⁹

In the past, historians such as Boris Nicolaevsky, Leonard Schapiro and Robert Conquest have argued that Stalin, between 1930 and 1936, occupied the position of arbiter between the hard-liners and moderates in the Politburo.⁵⁰ But attempts to identify these factions have proved elusive. What can be confidently asserted, however, is that, within the Politburo in 1928–34, Stalin was the most consistent and vociferous advocate of repression and the use of the death penalty. He did not bow to pressure from his colleagues on these questions; rather, his colleagues took their cue from him.

Stalin played the leading role initiating the great show trials of this period. These 'trials' were a travesty of justice, with the verdicts decided in advance by the Politburo. From 1926 onwards the Politburo had its own Commission on Political (Court) Cases.⁵¹ The Shakhty trial of 1928 launched the campaign against the bourgeois specialists, which continued until Stalin decided in 1931 to rein it in.⁵² Through the construction of these 'enemy syndromes' Stalin created a lever to influence policy matters, to shape the climate of opinion, to attack those opposed to his policy line, and to enforce discipline on his immediate subordinates. Voroshilov wrote to Tomsky in 1928 expressing dismay that the Shakhty affair was being blown up out of all proportion and turned into a political campaign.⁵³ Stalin used it consciously to force the split with the 'Rightists', to discredit Rykov, Bukharin and Tomsky, but also to pressurise Kalinin, whose loyalty was suspect.⁵⁴

This became one of Stalin's primary *modus operandi*. He promoted the trials of the former non-Bolshevik intellectuals – the Promparty trial,

the Menshevik Buro, and the case of the Labouring Peasants' Party. He was an enthusiastic advocate of the use of exemplary show trials. In August 1930, he instructed Molotov that action was to be taken against officials in the State Bank and the Commissariat of Finance, declaring that 'two or three dozen wreckers from the administration must be executed, including a dozen bookkeepers of various kinds', and that 'Kondratiev, Groman and another couple of scoundrels must certainly be executed'.⁵⁵ In September 1930, on Stalin's instructions, forty-eight 'food wreckers' were executed.⁵⁶

When we turn to other areas, a similar pattern is revealed. Stalin was the person who pushed for the sacking and demotion of Rukhimovich from NKPS in 1931 (against the advice of Molotov and Ordzhonikidze) and the transfer of G. I. Blagonravov, together with a large number of GPU officials, to the railways, which saw a huge increase in repression in this sector, including trials and executions.⁵⁷ In agriculture, in August 1932 Stalin himself drafted the draconian laws on the theft of collective farm property.

It was Stalin who was to the fore, pressing for punitive measures by the Ukrainian leadership to enforce grain procurement in 1932. But he was obliged to cut the targets for Ukrainian grain procurement. He failed in his plan to oust Kosior and Chubar' from the leadership of the Ukrainian party and government apparatus, but succeeded in having a new head of the Ukrainian GPU appointed (replacing S. F. Redens with V. A. Balitskii), and in parachuting Postyshev into the Ukrainian party leadership.

In 1933, Stalin berated Ordzhonikidze and Kaganovich for supporting a Politburo resolution which rebuked A. Ya. Vyshinskii, the State Procurator, for pursuing a policy of repression against officials responsible for the production of incomplete combine harvesters. He condemned Kaganovich roundly for this in a personal letter, and on Stalin's insistence the Politburo resolution was rescinded.⁵⁸ Following the assassination of Kirov it was Stalin who drafted the legislation for an intensification of repression against dissidents.

There is one other extremely significant aspect to Stalin's stance on repression. He was the Politburo member most inclined to see political cases (and indeed cases of economic disorder) as part of a wider international conspiracy involving foreign intelligence agencies, as is clear already with the Shakhty case in 1928. In 1932, he was anxious to link resistance in Ukraine to grain procurement to the influence of 'kulaks', 'nationalists', and foreign intelligence agencies. We see the same tendency in Stalin's response to the Nakhaev affair in 1934

(see Chapter 4, pp. 127–8).⁵⁹ A similar pattern is revealed in the response to the Kirov assassination.

Stalin respected officials with a background in the secret police, and promoted them into key positions. He appointed Beria as head of the Transcaucasian Federation, and made E. G. Evdokimov first secretary of the North Caucasus kraikom. Collectivisation and ‘dekulakisation’ gave the GPU a major role in the countryside. The development of the Gulag and its major construction projects served to accord the Chekists a position of enormous authority within the Stalinist state. Already by 1931, following the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, the Soviet Far East was under Red Army and GPU administration.

Nicolaevsky writes of a mood in the party for reconciliation, and for a move away from confrontation in 1933, after the famine. At the XVII party congress in 1934, Bukharin and Kamenev called for unity, and Kamenev offered a defence of Stalin’s personal dictatorship.⁶⁰ This is significant with regard to the partial relaxation in 1935–36. We see this trend in industry under Ordzhonikidze, and in rail transport (notwithstanding the attack on the ‘bourgeois’ specialists, the so-called ‘limiters’) under Kaganovich. Controls over agriculture were eased, with the abolition of the *politotdely* in the Machine-Tractor Stations and kolkhozy, the easing of legislation against ‘kulaks’ and against those charged with theft of state property, and concessions on the private plots. Stalin seems to have gone with this current.

The shift towards relaxation in 1935–36 requires further study. It was related undoubtedly to a general improvement in the economic climate. But it appears also to be connected to a certain shift in the balance of power between individuals and institutions. Part of this was an informal alliance between Ordzhonikidze (NKTyazhProm) and Kaganovich (NKPS) to protect their officials and workers from persecution by the Procuracy and OGPU. Their co-operation in 1933 to try and block Vyshinskii’s moves towards increased repression in industry was the first sign of such a common front. Ordzhonikidze and Kaganovich were close personal friends. They were also united in a common struggle against Molotov (Sovnarkom) and Gosplan, who sought to hold back investment in these two sectors.⁶¹

By the summer of 1936, with the compilation of evidence against an alleged ‘Trotskyist’ conspiracy against the Soviet leadership, and against the background of the Spanish civil war and a deteriorating international situation, the pretext for a renewed offensive against anti-Soviet elements was found. The two institutions that were placed in the firing line were NKTyazhProm and NKPS.

Stalin's secret chancellery

Niels Erik Rosenfeldt, in *Knowledge and Power*, asserts that the key to understanding the basis of the Stalin dictatorship is his secret chancellery. He argues that Stalin's secret apparatus of rule consisted of various structures: the Central Committee's Secret Department (*sekretnyi otdel TsK*), the Bureau of the Central Committee's Secretariat (*Byuro Sekretariata TsK*) and the Central Committee's Special Sector (*Osobyi sektor TsK*). This apparatus was headed from 1922 to 1930 by Stalin's assistants, A. M. Nazaretyan, I. P. Tovstukha and L. Z. Mekhlis. From 1930 until a few months before Stalin's death it was headed by A. N. Poskrebyshev.⁶²

Rosenfeldt's argument is based on the assumption that all highly personalised systems of rule require some apparatus through which that leader is able to operate. Such bodies provide the leader with a distinct advantage over other leaders, providing him or her with alternative sources of information, alternative sources of policy advice, thus allowing him/her to by-pass other, more formal, structures in the ministries, and to impose his/her will upon these bodies. Rosenfeldt's argument has considerable force, but the search for a secret chancellery may be misconceived. The secret department that he identifies as the key to Stalin's power was in effect a department concerned with technical operations: the handling of communications and the dispatch of instructions and decrees, the organisation of codes and ciphers, the servicing of the leading party bodies with materials, the organisation of the library and so on.

The key to Stalin's power rather lies in the combination of formal and informal decision-making procedures. The meetings in his Kremlin office were connected directly to the main structures of power, primarily, it seems, through personal contact. Kaganovich was responsible for the Orgburo/Secretariat until 1935. Molotov was in charge of Sovnarkom/STO. Both dealt with the whole range of policy issues. Other leaders had a more restrictive role, and tended to answer for the work of their departments. Stalin was constrained only partly by the power of entrenched interests, although he tended to interpret bureaucratic obstruction to the implementation of official policy as being maliciously motivated.

Stalin, unlike his subordinates, was not weighed down with departmental responsibilities, and could take a broad view of policy matters. His authority within the ruling group was such that his views after 1932 were almost never challenged openly. Such cases were exceptional. Litvinov, it is said, was one of the senior figures who did engage

in such confrontations. The fiery Ordzhonikidze was little constrained by the subtleties of rank in expressing his views. But Molotov, Kaganovich and others assiduously sought Stalin's opinion on matters great and small, they anticipated his thinking, and quickly adjusted their views to comply with his. Stalin could heed advice but he was often contemptuously dismissive of the opinions of even his closest colleagues.

The personalisation of decision-making in the 1930s was shaped partly by the need for speed in resolving urgent and highly sensitive policy matters. At the same time, control over information facilitated the strengthening of Stalin's dictatorship. In the mid-1920s, Politburo members and even some members of the Central Committee were provided with GPU reports about the internal situation in the country. This system seems to have been revised drastically by the early 1930s, so that by 1932 some sensitive GPU reports on the situation in the countryside appear to have been supplied only to Stalin, Molotov and Yakovlev (head of NKZem USSR). Stalin's Politburo colleagues were in no position to dispute his views regarding questions of sabotage, wrecking or conspiracy, because he alone was privy to the reports provided by the NKVD.⁶³

Control over information was vital in foreign policy and defence policy. D. H. Watson shows how on occasions officials reported directly to Stalin, by-passing NKInDel (see pp. 147–8), and military intelligence provided by the Red Army almost certainly reported directly to Stalin.

The Politburo's resolutions appear not have been drafted with the secret chancellery. Rather, it appears that they were drafted by the apparatus of the Orgburo, or by *ad hoc* commissions of the Politburo set up for the task. In other cases, the Politburo approved and amended resolutions that were submitted to it by other bodies, particularly from the commissariats.

Formal and informal structures of decision-making

From about 1930 onwards, the decision-making process in the USSR became increasingly fragmented, with policy-making in different fields being dominated by particular institutional interests and certain key political figures. This institutional fragmentation proceeded in step with the trend towards the personalisation of the policy-making process.

In economic policy, the co-ordinating role was played by Sovnarkom-STO, assisted by Gosplan, NKFin and Gosbank. Industrial policy was

dominated by Vesenkha and NKTyazhProm, and agricultural policy by NKZem and NKSovkhoz. On economic policy matters, Stalin's involvement and interest fluctuated considerably over time. In the period 1928–33 he was involved closely in the development and implementation of the First Five-Year Plan, with collectivisation and with the problems of the famine. From 1933 onwards, his involvement in the details of industrial policy declined, and here responsibility was left largely in the hands of Sovnarkom–STO–Gosplan. But the defence industries were a sector where Stalin remained very closely involved. On rail transport policy, he intervened intermittently; his influence in 1934–35 was crucial in changing the leadership of NKPS and effecting a major shift of investment into this sector.⁶⁴

In economic policy, Stalin concentrated on certain key indicators of performance: investment targets for the economy; output targets for industry; procurement targets for grain; and targets for foreign trade and expenditure of hard currency. He could on occasion show great realism in dealing with questions of economic management (notwithstanding the blunders that produced collectivisation and the famine), but (unlike some of his colleagues) he had no practical experience of running an economic commissariat, so his understanding of the functioning of the economic apparatus was consequently more simplistic, and he was more inclined to attribute problems not to structural failures but to malicious intent – the actions of enemies and wreckers.

Through the 1930s Stalin closely involved himself in agricultural policy. All major changes in agricultural policy, including revisions to procurement targets for individual oblasts, required Stalin's approval, and he changed targets as he thought fit (see Chapter 4). Agriculture was a particularly sensitive field, because of its highly charged political nature, and the problems of re-ordering the lives of the great majority of the population who lived under Soviet rule. But as well as these political and ideological considerations, there were also more practical considerations. Adjustments in the targets for one branch of industry carried repercussions for industry as a whole, and had to be done with care. Agriculture, by contrast, was a buffer, a reserve of raw materials. Here, adjustments to procurement targets depended crudely on the degree of pressure that was applied to the peasantry.

In organisational and personnel matters, the main co-ordinating role was performed by the party Secretariat, the Orgburo and ORPO. A key supervisory role was performed by the organs of party and state control. Stalin left most of the routine matters to his deputies. Already by 1928 the responsibility for managing the work of the Secretariat and Orgburo

had been delegated to Molotov, and later to Kaganovich. But Stalin showed a very close interest in key appointments.

In defence policy, the leading role was played by NKVMDel (later NKOboron), the Military High Command and the complex of operational bodies attached to it. The Politburo's Defence Commission played the chief directing and co-ordinating role. Stalin involved himself closely in this field. He clashed sharply with Tukhachevsky in 1930 over the latter's ambitious plans for mechanising the armed forces, but patched up relations with him in 1932, offering him an unprecedented apology for past differences. He followed developments in armaments production closely, including biological and chemical weapons.⁶⁵ Even a critical field such as defence policy decision-making could be very informal. Innokenty Khalepskii, head of the Red Army's mechanisation and motorisation unit, recounts a late-night meeting in November 1932 at Ordzhonikidze's Kremlin apartment, with Stalin, I. P. Pavlunovskii (in charge of defence industries in NKTyazhProm) and A. D. Pudalov (director of the Stalingrad tractor works) where the adaptation of the Stalingrad works to tank production was discussed.⁶⁶

In internal security, the leading role played by NKVD Stalin showed a very close interest in internal security matters, from the Shakhty trial right through to the Great Terror of 1936–38. Matters of internal security were supposedly his forte, and here his opinions were not to be questioned. The decision to expand the system of forced labour, the Gulag, after 1929 was taken quickly in response to the crisis of handling tens of thousands of dispossessed 'kulaks'. N. M. Yanson, narkom NKYust RSFSR, played an important role in promoting the initiative, although figures such as Yu. L. Pyatakov, already when vice-chairman of Vesenkha in November 1925, had spoken of the advantages of such measures. The scheme received Stalin's full backing.⁶⁷

In foreign policy, NKInDel played the leading role, with input from Comintern, the foreign trade commissariats, and military intelligence and counter-intelligence. Stalin took a very close interest, not only over the general question of strategy, but also over the details of policy, approving text of speeches and communiqués.

Stalin also played a leading role in other fields of policy-making. In questions of social policy he was active, playing the decisive role in the decision to abolish food rationing in 1935. In the field of cultural policy, his influence was also immense, an example being the convening of the Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, which adopted the principle of 'socialist realism'. The congress was supervised closely by Kaganovich on Stalin's behalf.

Stalin required subordinates in the party, state, economic and military bodies, and in the territorial administrative structures, who could be trusted to competently carry out his policies. In the main he was extremely successful in achieving this end. Where policy failed to correspond with his wishes, and where there were policy failures or breakdowns, there were mechanisms of investigation and means of calling officials to account. Notwithstanding the complex stratagems of concealment, family circles and mutual protection, the rule of the centre prevailed and, where it willed it, relentlessly so. Officials might be allowed latitude but they operated in a climate where the possibility of a day of reckoning might come.

Conclusion

Constitutionally, the Soviet regime was based on a theoretical separation of the structures and functions of party and state. In the early 1930s, this system underwent a significant change, as the institutions within the central party bodies which had provided the underpinning of a system of collective leadership were undermined. Between 1929 and 1933, the basis of a system of personal dictatorship was established. But, alongside the dictatorship, some elements of the old system of oligarchic rule survived, in which other satellite leaders continued to wield considerable power within their own domains and with the councils of the leader. This is one key reason why Stalin's subordinates failed to check the drift towards dictatorial rule. The leadership was held together by a broad consensus as to the policies to be pursued, and within this system Stalin delegated considerable power to his deputies. But Stalin's authority was unquestioned. The real centre of decision-making shifted from the Politburo to Stalin's Kremlin office, and decision-making became highly personalised. After 1933 there was no mechanism by which the General Secretary could be called to account.

Decision-making in the Soviet system of the 1930s involved a complex number of institutions, with a built-in tension between the party and governmental bodies, and between control agencies and operative institutions. The power of different commissariats, and different republican and regional authorities, shifted significantly over time. In decision-making, the relations between Stalin and the heads of operative agencies were often tense (the rift between Stalin and Tukhachevsky in 1930; the rift between Stalin and Chubar' and Kosior in 1933). Stalin could also shift from being offensively abrasive to being

emollient. Policy implementation often produced results that were unforeseen, and the centre was obliged to take into account major limits to what it could enforce or attain. Notwithstanding these qualifications, the system of political leadership was highly centralised and one in which Stalin's personal influence was immense.

Stalin's involvement in decision-making was constant and wide-ranging, but he did not (and could not) decide everything. He delegated decision-making powers to subordinates, expecting those subordinates to show initiative and to act within their own powers, but to be attentive to the signals regarding the leader's policy priorities. In this period, Stalin concentrated on issues of prime importance: internal security, defence, foreign policy, economic policy, organisational matters and personnel appointments. The party-state apparatus was intended to handle most of the routine matters of government, while Stalin's Kremlin office handled the most sensitive political issues. Through its links with the other structures of power in the party and state he was in a position to ensure that he retained control over the main issues of policy, and had the means to intervene as and when he chose.

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20. *Politbyuro TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) Povestki dnya zasedanii: Tom I 1919–1929, Katalog* (Moscow, 2000).
21. *KPSS v resolutsiyakh i resheniyakh* (Moscow, 1975) t. 2, pp. 104–5.
22. *Ibid.*, t. 3, p. 95.
23. E. A. Rees, 'Stalin, the Politburo and Rail Transport Policy', in Julian Cooper, Maureen Perrie, E. A. Rees (eds), *Soviet History 1917–1953: Essays in Honour of R. W. Davies*, pp. 107–9.
24. RGASPI, 17/3/961, 62.
25. RGASPI, 17/3/761, 12; RGASPI, 17/3/898, 8; RGASPI, 17/163/853, 3; 103–12. A similar formulation is found in other protocols of the period – RGASPI, 17/163/854, 855; RGASPI, 17/113/818, 10; 17/3/946, 20–1.
26. RGASPI, 17/3/823, 9. See also the Politburo's orders to the Secretariat to resolve matters concerning local party organs and their reports – RGASPI, 17/3/860, 5.
27. RGASPI, 17/113/818, 10.
28. RGASPI, 127/3/941, 55/35.
29. RGASPI, 17/3/946, 90/78.
30. For Soviet government institutions, see D. H. Watson, *Molotov and Soviet Government: Sovmarkom 1930–1941* (Basingstoke, 1996).
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 50.
32. GARF 5446/1/58–64.
33. RGAE, 8543/1/30, 85–6. No areas were allocated to Rudzutak, who was apparently on leave.
34. T. N. Kol'yak, *Vlas Yakoblevich Chubar': zhizn' i deyatel'nost'* (Kiev, 1981), pp. 242–3, 256.
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36. RGASPI, 17/3/939, 69/49.
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2

An Elite within an Elite: Politburo/Presidium Membership under Stalin, 1927–1953

Evan Mawdsley

This chapter deals with the membership of the Politburo/Presidium and is based on earlier research on a larger elite, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party.¹ Great power was accorded the Central Committee in the various party *Rules*, and the operational role of the Central Committee's administration (*apparat*) was great. Despite this, the Central Committee was arguably significant, not so much because it was an actual centre of policy making (as opposed to policy-approval), but because its members were a cross-section of the senior Soviet leadership, notably in the central and regional party administration, in the central people's commissariats (after 1946, ministries), and in the army high command.

The Politburo (or Presidium [*Prezidium*] as it was called in the last months of Stalin's lifetime and up to 1966) was in one sense simply the next layer up in the pyramid of the elite or, to put it another way, the Politburo/Presidium were the most senior members of the Central Committee, those who had been elected to the supreme executive organ of that committee. There was a qualitative difference, as for much of the period 1927 to 1953 the Politburo as a collective, or at least elements of its membership, did play an important part in policy-making. That side of things is not, however, the focus of the current enquiry.² The Politburo/Presidium is also, like the Central Committee, interesting as the subject of collective biography, primarily of the fifty-five individuals who were members of the Politburo during the period from the XV congress of the VKP(b) in December 1927 to the Central Committee plenum held in March 1953, immediately after Stalin's death.³ There will also, however, be some discussion of the situation from 1953 to 1957 (and of thirteen more individuals), as it can be argued that the personnel of the 'Stalinist' Politburo survived intact, albeit without Stalin himself, until 1957.

A starting point is to consider how the composition of the Politburo was determined. Here there is less clarity than in the Central Committee which, from an early stage, was based on a list circulated to party congress delegates from the central leadership.⁴ This list – as we shall see – was based largely on individuals who held particular and specific posts – job-slots – in the Soviet system. The composition of the Politburo (and other executive organs) was notionally determined by a free vote of the Central Committee, initially at the first Central Committee plenum after a party congress, but then at later plenums. With the lack of other documentary information, the assumption has to be made that the composition of the Politburo was predetermined effectively by the supreme leaders, latterly Stalin, although with some consultation with close associates. Nevertheless, the choice of Politburo members followed from certain earlier personnel decisions. (For example, if someone was to be appointed a Central Committee secretary they were more likely to be ‘elected’ to the Politburo.) This is discussed below in the section on the job-slot system.⁵

The Central Committee authorised only one early change in the Politburo, when Elena Stasova was co-opted on to it in July–September 1919. The next change to the Politburo carried out by the Central Committee (rather than by a party congress) would not come until the summer of 1926. Changes in the Politburo and other executive organs in the 1927–53 period were made mainly at the time of a congress, although the Orgburo was reconstituted at a plenum in 1946. ‘Elections’ to and removals from the Politburo were carried out in accordance with the party *Rules* at full Central Committee plenums in Moscow, although there were exceptions. The first was the removal on 1 December 1930 of S. I. Syrtsov from the Politburo by polling the members (*oprosom*) of the Central Committee, rather than by an actual vote at a formal plenum.⁶ Correspondence ballots were also used for the removal of Ya. E. Rudzutak from the Central Committee (and by implication from the Politburo) in May 1937, for the election of N. A. Bulganin and A. N. Kosygin to the Politburo in 1948, and for the removal of N. A. Voznesenskii in 1949 (and after Stalin’s death for the removal of L. G. Mel’nikov in June 1953). At the height of the Purges, even the nicety of a correspondence ballot was ignored. In June 1938, V. Ya. Chubar’ was expelled from the Politburo by a unilateral decision of the Politburo (*resheniem Politbyuro*), and there was apparently no formal expulsion at all of R. I. Eikhe or S. V. Kosior.⁷

'Turnover' is intended to be a simple indicator of 'stability – or instability – of cadres'. Over the period 1927 to 1953 turnover in the Politburo was generally lower than in the Central Committee (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2).⁸

Table 2.1 Turnover of Politburo/Presidium members, 1927–1957

Date	14 Dec. 1925	15 Dec. 1927	16 Jul. 1930	17 Jan. 1934	18 Mar. 1939	18 Feb.* 1941	Plen. Mar. 1946	19 Oct. 1952	Plen. Mar. 1953	20 Feb. 1956	Plen. Jun. 1957
Full members	9	9	10	10	9	9	11	25	10	11	15
Cand members	5	8	5	5	2	5	4	11	4	6	9
Total	14	17	15	15	11	14	15	36	14	17	24
In prev. col.	–	10	14	13	7	11	13	11	13	10	12
Not in prev. col.	–	7	1	2	4	3	2	25	1	7	12
In next col.	10	14	13	7	11	13	11	13	10	12	–
Not in next col.	4	3	2	8	0	1	4	23	4	5	–
Turnover (%)	–	28	17	7	53	0	7	27	64	29	29

Source: Soviet Elite Project database (Mawdsley/White, Department of History, University of Glasgow).

Notes: Turnover for a given point in time is measured as the percentage of all Politburo members and candidates counted in the *previous* column who were not re-elected.

*The 1941 column corresponds to a party conference, and the 1946, 1953, and 1957 columns to Central Committee plenums (col. – column).

Table 2.2 Turnover of Central Committee members, 1927–1956

Congress	14 Dec. 1925	15 Dec. 1927	16 Jul. 1930	17 Jan.–Feb. 1934	18 Mar. 1939	18 Feb.* 1941	Cf. Oct. 1952	19 Oct. 1952	20 Feb. 1956
Full members	63	71	71	71	71	71	125	133	
Candidate members	43	50	67	68	68	68	111	122	
Total	106	121	138	139	139	139	236	255	
In last CC	72	90	102	93	24	120	65	142	
Not in last CC	34	31	36	46	115	19	171	113	
In next CC	90	102	93	24	120	65	142	127	
Not in next CC	16	19	45	115	19	74	104	128	
Turnover (%)	17	15	16	33	83	14	53	44	

Source: Soviet Elite Project database (Mawdsley/White, Department of History, University of Glasgow).

Notes: Turnover for a given congress is measured as the percentage of all Central Committee members and candidates elected at the *previous* congress who were not re-elected.

*For 1939, the 'next CC' is the 1941 (XVIII) party conference. Turnover periods are not always the same as those for the Politburo, so a direct comparison with Table 2.1 is not possible in every case.

The exceptions to this rule were in 1927 and 1930 (the XV and XVI congresses), when Politburo turnover was 28 per cent and 17 per cent, compared to Central Committee turnover of 15 per cent and 16 per cent, respectively. It may well be that Politburo turnover anticipated that in the Central Committee: the early consolidation of the Stalin group, now dominant in the Politburo, culminated in the well-known exclusion, in the inter-leadership struggle of the late 1920s, of top-level opponents – N. I. Bukharin, M. P. Tomsky and N. A. Uglanov.

In contrast to 1927 and 1930, in 1934 Politburo turnover was only 7 per cent (reflecting the removal of Syrtsov and A. I. Rykov), nearly the lowest rate in our whole period. This contrasts with 33 per cent for the Central Committee, which was remarkably high, even given the three and a half years that had passed since the previous congress. One explanation of the high turnover in the Central Committee is that a number of elite members whom Stalin had approved in 1930 were found wanting in the great tests of the 1930–34 period – industrialisation, collectivisation, and in their response to the famine. Another factor is that Stalin felt no particular loyalty to elite members who were not within his close team.

The turnover in the Politburo between 1934 and 1939 deserves a fuller assessment, given that it reflects the impact of the Purges of 1937–38. On the one hand, turnover was, at 53 per cent, much higher than normal Politburo turnover; that is, more than half of the fifteen Politburo members elected immediately after the February 1934 congress were not elected after the 1939 congress. The personnel changes underlying this are well known to students of Soviet history. G. I. Petrovskii was simply not re-elected, but seven others elected to the Politburo in 1934 met dramatic ends: S. M. Kirov was assassinated in December 1934; Kuibyshev and G. K. Ordzhonikidze died (the latter, at least, in suspicious circumstances), and Chubar', Kosior, P. P. Postyshev and Rudzutak were arrested and executed. Eikhe and Ezhov were also purged, but they are not counted in the 1934–39 turnover figure as they were elected to the Politburo between those two dates.

On the other hand, the turnover rate in the Politburo in the Purge period was much less than that in the Central Committee, and if one looks at the survivors of the 1934 Central Committee, then one of the most significant features is that it was the Politburo members who survived (see Table 2.3).⁹ The turnover in the Central Committee was an extraordinary 83 per cent.¹⁰ The explanation for this differential rate of purge may lie in the explanation for the elite purge in general. T. H. Rigby saw a rational element. The object, as Al Capone said of Mussolini, was 'to keep the boys in line'. It followed from the potential

Table 2.3 1934 Central Committee: Members and candidates not repressed in the 1937–38 purge

CC Full Members in 1934:

Andreev, A. A.*	Politburo member
Badaev, A. E.	Bolshevik veteran (joined 1904), Duma deputy (died 1951)
Beria, L. P.*	Minister, NKVD
Evdokimov, E. G.	Chekist, Ezhov's deputy at NKVD (died 1940)
Ezhov, N. I.	Politburo candidate (died 1940)
Kaganovich, L. M.*	Politburo member
Kaganovich, M. M.*	Industrial minister, brother of L. M. Kaganovich
Kalinin, M. I.*	Politburo member
Khrushchev, N. S.*	Politburo candidate
Krzhizhanovskii, G. M.	Bolshevik veteran (joined 1893) (died 1959)
Litvinov, M. M.*	Bolshevik veteran (1898), Foreign Minister
Manuil'skii, D. Z.*	Bolshevik veteran (1903), Secretary of the Comintern
Mikoyan, A. I.*	Politburo candidate/member
Molotov, V. M.*	Politburo member
Nikolaeva, K. I.*	Soviet trade unionist, woman
Petrovskii, G. I.	Bolshevik veteran (1897); Politburo candidate (died 1958)
Shvernik, N. M.*	Orgburo member
Stalin, I. V.*	Politburo member
Voroshilov, K. E.*	Politburo member
Zhdanov, A. A.*	Politburo candidate

CC Candidate Members in 1934:

Bagirov, M. D.*	First secretary, Azerbaidzhan SSR; Beria associate
Broido, G. I.	Director, publishing house of CC (died 1956)
Budennyi, S. M.*	Civil war hero
Bulganin, N. A.*	Chairman, Moscow Soviet; PM RSFSR; dep. PM USSR
Yurkin, T. A.	Minister, agric. commissariat (back on CC in 1956)
Lozovskii, S. A.*	Gen. Sec., Profintern; Director Goslitizdat (shot 1949)
Makarov, I. G.*	Plant manager; posts in industrial ministries
Mekhlis, L. Z.*	Orgburo member; chief commissar of the army
Poskrebyshev, A. N.*	Head, Stalin's chancellery
Shvarts, I. I.	Bolshevik veteran (1899); economic work (died 1951)
Veinberg, G. D.*	Soviet trade unionist; minister RSFSR food industry
Zavenyagin, A. P.	Industrial ministry (back on CC in 1952)

Source: Soviet Elite Project database (Mawdsley/White, Department of History, University of Glasgow).

Note: Those marked with an asterisk were re-elected to the CC in 1939. A further three 1934 members (M. E. Chuvyrin, R. I. Eikhe and N. A. Filatov) were still alive but in prison; they were never released.

challenge that Stalin faced, paradoxically, after the defeat of the Left and Right Oppositions. Robert Conquest argued that the Purges could best be understood as ‘a statistical matter... rather than in terms of individuals’; one had only to persecute a ‘given proportion’ to achieve the desired effect.¹¹ But there was more here than the demonstration of the power to kill. Something like Hitler’s ‘Night of the Long Knives’ – or even the destruction of the Leningrad leaders in the late 1940s – made sense in these gangster-power terms. The killing of three-quarters of the 1934 Central Committee, the Stalinist elite – not to mention the mass purges at lower levels – did not. Rather than this enforcing of discipline, or a desire for generational change or elite renewal (as others have argued), a better key to understanding the breadth of the purge in the Central Committee was the cohesiveness of that body.

If the Soviet elite is taken to be the several hundred people who held Central Committee posts over the two decades after 1917 it is unjustified to talk of Stalinists replacing Leninists, careerists replacing revolutionaries, or ‘New Bolsheviks’ replacing Old Bolsheviks. What is remarkable is not the replacement of one elite group by another in the 1920s but the *continuity* over that period and the cohesiveness of a revolutionary elite that was still in place on the eve of 1937. That continuity, that cohesiveness, would be one source of the destruction of the whole elite; Stalin did not share this sense of historical cohesion, and it was becoming an obstacle to his achievement of absolute power. There was another source of cohesion – and of conflict with Stalin. This went beyond a common age and a common experience, and was something shared with other societies and polities. The Central Committee elite was a self-conscious bureaucracy, in the neutral sense of that word. Moshe Lewin is the historian who has laid out this side of developments most cogently.¹² The elite – especially after 1928–32 – wanted stability. The system, they thought, should be run in the interests of the top layers of the bureaucracy – and indeed it would end up being run this way under Brezhnev in the 1960s and 1970s.

The extraordinarily wide-reaching nature of the Purges even at Central Committee level, and the severity of their method – leaders were killed rather than retired – was symptomatic not only of the ferocity and political paranoia of Stalin and the NKVD, and the dynamics of the purge process. What mattered for Stalin was the preservation of his own personal power and the consolidation of what he perceived as the interests of the revolution; he, in fact, saw these two goals as being identical in every respect. The Central Committee were at risk to the extent that they appeared to be obstructing the achievement of the twin

goals. And if 'keeping the boys in line' was the objective, this could not, given elite cohesiveness, be achieved by removing a few dozen scapegoats. If the uncovering of more hidden enemies was the objective, that too could not be carried out convincingly on a small scale.

But to carry out such a sweeping change, Stalin had to have a reliable core of supporters within the political leadership, and that core took the form of the Politburo. The purge of the Stalinist elite was carried out by Stalin's 'team' in the Politburo against a large elite group in the form of the Central Committee membership.¹³ There was, as a result, greater security in the circle around Stalin. Various groupings of the elite, regional party leaders, republican leaders, peoples' commissars, soldiers, trade unionists and diplomats perished, nearly in their entirety. The only institutional characteristic that offered a degree of immunity was membership of the Politburo. T. H. Rigby has demonstrated that this group was *relatively* unaffected by the Purge, and that Stalin was not, in Rigby's words, altogether 'a disloyal patron'.¹⁴ It is also perhaps significant that only one of the ten *full* members of the 1934 Politburo – Kosior – was in fact purged; the other three direct purge victims (Chubar', Postyshev and Rudzutak) were elected in 1934 as candidates, and R. I. Eikhe and N. I. Ezhov were elected as candidates in 1935 and 1937; that is, they were in a sense on the periphery of the 'inner circle' of full members.

To stop at the purges, however, would be to give a misleading impression of the character of Politburo (and Central Committee) membership. Instability was not a feature of the system at the top under Stalin *after 1939*. There was no turnover in the Politburo between the 1939 congress and the XVIII party conference in February 1941, and a relatively low turnover (14 per cent) in the Central Committee. If one takes as another milestone the March 1946 Central Committee plenum, after all the momentous events of the 'Great Patriotic War', then Politburo turnover was still low, at 7 per cent. (In addition to turnover, two new candidates were elected to the Politburo by the plenum, and two candidates were promoted to full member status.) No leaders were found wanting during the war, at least as far as Politburo status is concerned; the turnover figure was accounted for by the natural death of A. S. Shcherbakov. It is not possible to make a simple comparison with Central Committee turnover here, as there was no Central Committee re-election in 1946 (indeed, there would not be until 1952). However, it was probably the case that in 1946 the great majority of the 1939 Central Committee members were in good health and occupying Central-Committee-level posts; that is, there had been limited

turnover.¹⁵ The position of the post-1939 membership of the Central Committee turned out to be much more secure than that of their predecessors, and this raises several questions about the nature of the Stalinist system. Against the backdrop of 1937–38, some observers suggested that ‘the Purge’, both at mass and elite levels, was an essential, indeed ‘permanent’, feature of communist systems.¹⁶ The limitations of that interpretation became clear, given the absence at least of elite terror under Stalin’s successors, but even now historians often stress 1953 as a turning point, an interpretation perhaps influenced by Khrushchev’s ‘Secret Speech’ of 1956. In fact, looking at the situation from the point of view of the Central Committee elite, and even more from the Politburo elite, across the Stalin era, the Ezhovshchina of 1937–38 was the aberration; physical security and even job security were more the norm.

The war may have been a factor in stabilising the position of the new elite, both at the level of the Politburo and of the Central Committee. Stalin referred directly to this in his famous 1946 ‘election speech’. Although the speech was part of a comprehensive effort to defend the achievements of the Soviet system for the benefit of the electors to the Supreme Soviet, arguably it embodied Stalin’s own point of view on the elite:

The war set something in the nature of an examination for our Soviet system, our government, our state, our Communist party, and summed up the results of their work as if telling us: here they are, your people and organisations, their deeds and days – look at them closely and reward them according to their deserts. This is one of the positive aspects of the war.

For us, for electors, this circumstance is of great significance because it helps us quickly and objectively to assess the work of the party and of its people and draw the correct conclusions. At another time it would have been necessary to study the speeches and reports of the Party’s representatives, to analyse them, to compare their words with their deeds, sum up results and so forth. This involves complex and difficult work, and there is no guarantee that no errors would be made. Matters are different now that the war is over, when the war itself has checked the work of our organisations and leaders and summed up its results. Now it is much easier for us to get at the truth and to arrive at the correct conclusions.¹⁷

The XIX congress in 1952 would see a striking change in the nature of the Politburo/Presidium resulting from an influx of new members, but

the turnover was 27 per cent, comparing 1952 with 1946, or 36 per cent, comparing 1952 with 1941. The turnover for the Politburo was thus considerably lower than that of the Central Committee (comparing 1952 with 1941), where it was 53 per cent. Moreover, only one change in the Politburo was a result of political repression – the removal and arrest of Voznesenskii in 1949 as part of the ‘Leningrad Affair’. The other departures had natural causes: the deaths of Kalinin and Zhdanov, and the ill-health of Andreev. Although we know from the account of Khrushchev and others that this was a very peculiar time for the Politburo/Presidium, this heavy mood of suspicion and ‘vigilance’ was not translated into actual repression at the level either of the Politburo or the Central Committee.

In turnover terms, the 1952 Presidium is a special case, in that the committee more than doubled in size, from 15 to 36. This matched a similar proportional increase in the size of the Central Committee. The growing complexity of the Soviet system was also probably the explanation for the rapid expansion of the Central Committee in 1952. The number of full members rose from 71 to 125, and the number of candidate members from 68 to 111, an increase overall of 70 per cent. This was, in percentage and absolute terms, much greater than the last general increase in Central Committee size, in 1927, when the number of full members increased from 63 to 71 and the number of candidates from 43 to 50. It was also a greater percentage increase than would ever happen again in the history of the Central Committee. The published reports at the congress contain no justification for the expansion of the Presidium/Politburo or the Central Committee, nor was the change in size specified in the new party *Rules*. It has been suggested that the expansion of the Presidium (and, by implication, of the Central Committee) was part of a planned purge by Stalin of his older comrades.¹⁸ But at the level of the Central Committee, given the job-slot system, it is hard to see how expansion would have facilitated a future purge. What in fact was happening was an extension of the job-slot principle – in other words, more posts were being made compatible with full (or candidate) membership of the Central Committee. The expansion of the job-slot system may well have been part of an ongoing party revival under the aegis of Khrushchev and others below Stalin. Other signs of such a revival were the 1952 congress itself, and the explicit provision in the new rules for more frequent plenums.¹⁹

When, in the immediate aftermath of Stalin’s death, the Presidium was reduced by two-thirds (from 36 to 14), there was naturally a very high turnover. Indeed, at 64 per cent, the turnover figure between the XIX

Congress in October 1952 and the March 1953 Central Committee plenum was considerably higher than during the Purges of 1937–38. However, if one compares the Politburo on the eve of the October 1952 congress (when there were 12 surviving Politburo members) with that elected at the March 1953 plenum – leaving out the surge of admissions at the 1952 congress – then there is substantial continuity. Turnover was 25 per cent. Stalin's death, Andreev's retirement and the non-re-election of Kosygin accounted for the changes. Only one person was added to the Presidium in March 1953 who had not been elected in October 1952 – Beria's ally, Bagirov. In terms of elite representation, this was a step backwards, and the Stalinist Old Guard dominated it. But, perhaps realistically, the Politburo had to be smaller to function effectively; it stayed at under 20 members for most of its existence, and at 14 to 17 members for most of the Stalin years.

Although this relates to a period after Stalin's death, turnover between the March 1953 plenum and the XX congress in February 1956 was not especially high, at 29 per cent. It was less than two-thirds the turnover of the Central Committee (which was 44 per cent). There was, however, another 29 per cent turnover between 1956 and 1957, following the fall of the so-called 'anti-party group'.²⁰ At the July 1953 Central Committee plenum, which was devoted mainly to discrediting Beria, speakers from both the Presidium and the rank-and-file leadership stressed the importance of the 'Leninist–Stalinist [*leninskii–stalinskii*] Central Committee'. In his opening speech, G. M. Malenkov, now Prime Minister, mentioned the need, first of all, 'immediately to put right the regular working of the plenum of the Central Committee'. He also said that 'in our Central Committee are represented the party's best people, who possess invaluable experience in all areas of the building of Communism'. 'You see, comrades,' he emphasised in his closing speech, 'that we in complete openness put before the plenum questions concerning the situation in the highest echelons of the party leadership.'²¹ In the end, however, there was a growing gulf between the March 1953 Presidium and the Central Committee, and the end result was the affair of the 'anti-party group' in 1957 and last stand of the Stalinist Politburo. A fuller renewal of the Presidium came only in that year.²²

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A number of other factors provide a background for the turnover figures. One of the features of the Soviet elite, both in the Central Committee and the Politburo, was the 'job-slot' system, which has

already been mentioned. This concept is often related to the process by which the Central Committee became an increasingly predictable collection of the occupants of key posts rather than of individuals who enjoyed political influence in their own right. One of the first to identify this process was Robert V. Daniels, who discerned an 'organic and automatic connection between [a] specific set of offices and the Central Committee status of their incumbents', and that the Central Committee could accordingly be seen as a 'well-defined and quite stable set of leading job slots whose occupants enjoyed the elite status conferred by Central Committee membership as long as and only as long as they occup[ied] their respective offices'.²³ For all the arbitrariness of Stalinism, the 'job-slot' system represented a high degree of rationality. By 1934, the 'job-slot' system within the Central Committee had reached maturity,²⁴ and there would be little change in the system until near the very end of the Soviet era. The paradox was that, just as this system reached maturity, the occupiers of the 'job slots' were wiped out, almost to a man.

To what extent was the 'job-slot' system also a feature of the Politburo? A higher degree of arbitrariness might have been expected, based on who personally was 'in' and 'out' of Stalin's favour. The situation is confused, too, by the fact that, at this level, leaders held more than one post at a time, and moved frequently from one post (and even sector) to another. The overall Soviet government and economic system was changing between 1927 and 1953. However, it is the case that, leaving aside for the moment 1952, there was consistency in the composition of the Politburo. A kind of *ex officio* membership of the Politburo/Presidium would include the General Secretary of the Central Committee (up to March 1953) and four or five of the most important Central Committee secretaries. In 1927, for example, secretaries Stalin, Kosior, Molotov and Uglanov were Politburo members, but not N. A. Kubyak or any of the three 'candidate members' of the Secretariat; on the eve of the October 1952 congress Stalin, Khrushchev and Malenkov were members, but not P. K. Ponomarenko or M. A. Suslov. Of the 31 members of the Politburo between 1927 and 1952 (that is, excluding the 1952 Presidium) some 13 were CPSU Central Committee secretaries at one time or another during this period: Stalin, Andreev, K. Ya. Bauman, Ezhov, Kaganovich, Kirov, Kosior, Molotov, Postyshev, Shcherbakov, Shvernik, Uglanov and Zhdanov. On the state side, the job slots represented on the Politburo included those of chairman of Sovnarkom (later the Council of Ministers) (Rykov, later Molotov and Stalin) and the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet

(Kalinin, later Shvernik). A number of the other Politburo members were deputy chairmen of Sovnarkom (Council of Ministers), responsible for different sectors of the economy or the administration (for example, Beria, Kosygin, Kuibyshev, Mikoyan, Voznesenskii, and, latterly, Voroshilov) or holders of key ministerial (*narkomat*) posts, including Defence (Voroshilov, later Stalin and Bulganin – but not Marshals S. K. Timoshenko or A. M. Vasil'evskii) and Internal Affairs (the NKVD) (Ezhov). In this period – but not later – the head of the Soviet trade union organisation (VTsSPS) was generally a member (Tomsky, later Shvernik, but not V. V. Kuznetsov, who became head in 1944). There was, in contrast to the Central Committee, little regional representation in the Politburo during most of Stalin's lifetime, although the General (First) Secretary in the Ukraine was a member (Kosior, Khrushchev, Kaganovich and Mel'nikov).

The expansion of the Politburo/Presidium in 1952 can also be seen as part of the job-slot system. The October 1952, 36-member Presidium was not an arbitrary selection of Stalin's favourites. Even the expansion of size was not necessarily extraordinary, as the expansion of the Politburo/Presidium coincided with the end of the Orgburo. The executive organs of the Central Committee after the March 1946 plenum had already totalled 23 individuals, comprising 12 in the Politburo and 15 in the Orgburo (Bulganin, Malenkov, Stalin and Zhdanov had been members of both committees). The new 36-person Presidium was generally representative in the job-slot system, halfway between the Central Committee and the old Politburo, including ten CPSU Central Committee Secretaries (among them Stalin), and six deputy chairmen of the Council of Ministers. There was also the head of the Commission of Party Control (KPK) (M. F. Shkiriakov). On the state side, the Politburo included the chairman of the Supreme Soviet (Shvernik), six heads of ministry-level bodies,²⁵ and a few regional posts (V. M. Andrianov, N. S. Patolichev and A. M. Puzanov from, respectively, Leningrad, Belorussia and the RSFSR; and Korotchenko and Mel'nikov from Ukraine). Only four posts were not obviously representative: those of D. I. Chesnokov, P. F. Yudin, O. V. Kuusinen and V. A. Malyshev.²⁶ The 1957 Presidium would also temporarily mark a return to a broader representation, with 24 members; one feature here would be the greater representation of the republics, with 'representatives' from the national republics of Ukraine, Belorussia, Uzbekistan and Georgia, and of the Urals regional centre of Sverdlovsk.

Our research on the Central Committee membership has stressed the importance of cohorts or 'generations'. We have made a simple division across the whole period of communist rule into four generations, born in successive periods of twenty years. This is not simply a mechanical and mathematical division, but takes into account qualitatively different life experiences. The 'first generation' members were born before 1901, and most after 1880; roughly speaking, they were the Old Bolsheviks, who had reached adulthood by 1917. They dominated Soviet affairs until they were devastated by Stalin's terror in 1937–38, and carried out not one but two revolutions: the October 1917 revolution and the social revolution of the late 1920s and 1930s. The 'second generation' members, born between 1901 and 1920, is sometimes known as the 'Brezhnev generation' but also as the 'class of '38'. This was the generation that received its secondary and higher education in the period of the Five-Year Plans and came into its own after the Purges of 1937–38. It was the generation that was numerically dominant at leading levels of the party until the 1970s, presiding over the dismantling of Stalinism but also over a gradual re-centralisation of power that had led, by the time of Brezhnev's death, to almost total immobilism. The third and fourth generation members who were born, respectively, between 1921 and 1940, and from 1941 onwards, naturally fall outside the scope of this chapter. Although one or two third-generation members entered the Central Committee in 1952 and 1956, they were not present in the Politburo/Presidium.²⁷

In the Central Committee, the change of predominance from the first to the second generation was a key event. If one year had to be chosen for this change it would be 1939, but it is perhaps better to take the years 1939 and 1952 together, and to compare the situation before 1939 with that from 1952 (see Table 2.4). Before 1939, the 'second generation' (born after 1900) played virtually no part in the Central Committee, but after 1939, and even more from October 1952 up until the 1970s, the leadership was dominated by the second generation – if not by the same individual members of that generation. On the other hand the old generation was not completely wiped out. It is true that of the Central Committee members who served in 1917–37, two-thirds died in the Purges (excluding those who had died of natural causes beforehand). But taking the 328 people who were elected to Stalin's Central Committees after the Purges (at the 1939 and 1952 party congresses, and the 1941 party conference), a third were still of the first generation, born before 1901. They were in the main new to the Central Committee, but they were party veterans. Even the late Stalinist elite

Table 2.4 Generational breakdown of Central Committee members, 1934–1957

Year of birth	17	%	18	%	19	%	20	%
	Jan. 1934		Mar. 1939		Oct. 1952		Feb. 1956	
Pre-1891	67		22		9		5	
1891–1895	48		16		18		13	
1896–1900	21		28		35		26	
First generation	136	97.8	66	50.8	62	26.3	44	17.2
1901–1905	3		52		77		76	
1906–1910	0		12		69		89	
1911–1920	0		0		20		36	
Second generation	3	2.2	64	49.2	166	70.3	201	78.8
1921–1940	0		0		1		2	
Third generation	0	0	0	0	1	0.4	2	0.8
Unknown	0	0	0	0	7	3.0	8	3.1
Total	139	100	130	100	236	100	255	100

Source: Soviet Elite Project database (Mawdsley/White, Department of History, University of Glasgow).

Note: First generation born before 1900, second generation born 1901–1920, third generation born 1921–1940. The 1934, 1939, and 1952 columns correspond to party congresses.

included a large number of leaders from the older generation, and reflected what Malenkov called in 1939 the ‘Stalinist line on the combining and uniting of old and young’; Pegov repeated this formulation at the XIX congress in 1952.²⁸

Turning again to the Politburo, under Stalin it had always had a relatively youthful membership, once he had sidetracked his own contemporaries from the original revolutionary leadership (see Table 2.5). In 1927, Kalinin was 52 (born 1875) and Petrovskii 49 (1878), but both were to a degree figureheads. Stalin’s closest favourites were in early middle age: Molotov at 37 (born 1890), Kaganovich and Kuibyshev at 39 (1888), Kirov and Ordzhonikidze at 41 (1886) (Voroshilov, at 46, was an anomaly). A decade later, Stalin was supplementing his original ‘team’ with men born too late to have had even a secondary role in the revolution or civil war. Khrushchev was born in 1895 and had been 22 at the time of the revolution; he was 43 when he entered the Politburo in 1938. Beria, born in 1899 and 18 at the time of the revolution, was 40 in 1939; Zhdanov, born in 1896, was 43. (Ezhov, born in 1895, was 42 when he entered the Politburo in 1937.) Later entrants into Stalin’s Politburo were even younger, and in fact members of the ‘second generation’. Malenkov and Shcherbakov were born in 1901, Voznesenskii in 1903, and Kosygin a year later. Some of them can be said

Table 2.5 Generational breakdown of Politburo/Presidium members, 1927–1957

Year of birth	15 Dec. 1927	16 Jul. 1930	17 Jan. 1934	18 Mar. 1939	18Cf. Feb. 1941	Plen. Mar. 1946	19 Oct. 1952	Plen. Mar. 1953	20th Feb. 1956	Plen. Jun. 1957
Pre-1891	14	11	12	6	6	6	8	4	4	3
1891–1895	3	4	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	5
1896–1900	–	–	–	2	2	2	5	2	2	2
First generation	17	15	15	11	11	12	17	10	9	10
1901–1905	–	–	–	–	3	3	13	3	3	7
1906–1910	–	–	–	–	–	–	6	1	4	5
1911–1920	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	2
Second generation	–	–	–	–	3	3	19	4	8	14
Total	17	15	15	11	14	15	36	14	17	24

Source: Soviet Elite Project database (Mawdsley/White, Department of History, University of Glasgow).

Note: First generation born before 1900, second generation born 1901–1920 (third generation born 1921–1940). The 1927, 1930, 1934, 1939, 1952 and 1956 columns correspond to party congresses. The 1941 column corresponds to a party conference, and the 1946, 1953, and 1957 columns to Central Committee plenums.

to have benefited, as did many of the post-1938 Central Committee, from the ‘cultural revolution’ of the First Five-Year Plan period.

The Politburo might still be expected to include more senior personnel than the Central Committee as a whole. Thus, when the 1939 Central Committee included 46 per cent second-generation officials, the 1939 Politburo was still composed 100 per cent of men from the first generation. In 1941 and 1946, the second-generation presence in the Politburo had risen to 24 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively, with the arrival of Kosygin (born 1904), Malenkov (1901), Shcherbakov (1901) and Voznesenskii (1903). The characteristics of the enlarged Politburo elected in 1952 can be interpreted in various ways, but they certainly reflected substantial rejuvenation. Overall, 53 per cent of the Politburo were now second-generation members, although the proportion in the Central Committee was higher still at 70 per cent. Of the 25 leaders who were added to the Politburo in 1952, 76 per cent were second-generation. This may have meant that Stalin felt by the early 1950s that his original comrades were not up to current tasks – men like Voroshilov (aged 69 in 1952), Kaganovich (64) and even Molotov (62). On the other hand, it is worth recalling that the only Politburo member to be purged in the 1940s was the second-youngest, Voznesenskii, who was 46 at the time of his arrest.

In any event, the changes effected in March 1953 meant a return to the old guard, with a Presidium composed of only 29 per cent second-generation, not much higher than the 1941 figure of over a decade earlier. Even in 1956, the Presidium was still only 47 per cent second-generation. The decisive change was to take place at the June 1957 Central Committee plenum, when second-generation membership again became a majority, at 58 per cent. The second generation would then dominate the Politburo, and Soviet politics, for the next quarter of a century.

* * *

One final point to consider is the ethnic mix of the Politburo. In the Politburo in the aftermath of Lenin's death (in mid-1924) Great Russians had actually been in the minority (46 per cent); the second largest group had been Jews, making up 31 per cent, and there were also a Georgian, a Latvian and a Pole. The 1927 Politburo, in contrast, was 65 per cent Great Russian, and in the 1930s the Great Russian proportion was always over 60 per cent, except in 1934.²⁹ In the 1940s, there was a definite trend for a rise in the proportion of Great Russians in the Politburo, with 71 per cent in 1941 and 73 per cent in 1946. Significantly, in the 1952 enlarged Presidium, the Great Russian percentage increased to 75 per cent, and Great Russians made up 80 per cent of the 25 new members.

This made the Politburo more consistent with the Central Committee and the party as a whole, which had been to a substantial degree 'Russianised' in the 1930s and 1940s. Among what might be termed the 'revolutionary elite', the 78 members of the Central Committee who served from 1917 to 1923, only 49 per cent were Great Russians. For those elected between 1923 and 1934, the Great Russian proportion was 58 per cent. Even at the end of this period, the Central Committee elected in 1934, Great Russians made up only 54 per cent.³⁰ The big jump came with those elected to the Central Committee in 1939, 1941 and 1952, where the proportion of Great Russians appears to have increased to about 75 per cent.³¹ Later on, the Great Russian proportion fell, but not back to pre-Purges level: the post-Stalin elite – those elected to the Central Committee between 1956 and 1981 – was to be 67 per cent Great Russian.³² In March 1953, the Great Russian proportion of the Politburo dropped to 64 per cent, in 1956 it increased to 71 per cent, and in 1957 it went down to 67 per cent. This was generally similar to the trend in the Central Committee.

* * *

Important similarities and differences existed between the two top layers of the political elite during the Stalinist period – the membership of the Politburo/Presidium and the broader membership of the Central Committee. The membership of the two bodies had much in common, which is not surprising, given that one was a sub-set of the other. On the other hand, perhaps the greatest contrast between the Central Committee and the Politburo was that the latter generally enjoyed Stalin's greater confidence from an earlier date; he had brought it under his reliable control a decade earlier. After 1938 (and not just after 1953), the membership of both the Politburo and the Central Committee was more stable. The Central Committee was rejuvenated, and by 1952 it was dominated by the second generation, a generation raised under Soviet power and hardened by successes of economic modernisation, state building, and military victory over Nazi Germany. But by the 1950s there was a growing sense of difference between the Politburo/Presidium and the Central Committee, which culminated in the events of 1957. The broader elite in the Central Committee was no longer prepared to accept passively absolute control from above, neither from a dictator nor from a small ruling clique in the Politburo. It became important (as it had been in the 1920s) for any politician hoping to dominate the Politburo/Presidium to cultivate the broader Central Committee membership. After 1957 and the expulsion of the 'anti-party group', the Presidium became more representative of the larger Central Committee. Paradoxically, Khrushchev was one of the few members of the Presidium who after that date was not representative of the Central Committee – because he was a member of the first generation rather than the second – and this partly explains his downfall in 1964.

Notes and references

1. Evan Mawdsley and Stephen White, *The Soviet Elite from Lenin to Stalin: The Central Committee and Its Members, 1917–1991* (Oxford, 2000). My co-researcher, Stephen White, and I are grateful to the United Kingdom Economic and Social Science Research Council (ESRC) who provided a generous award, R231491, for the creation of the large Soviet Elite Project (SEP) Database on the Central Committee of 1917–90.
2. The vital differences between the Politburo and the Central Committee (CC) were the relative size of the two organisations and the frequent meetings of the Politburo (for most of the Stalin period) compared to the infrequent plenums of the CC. The function of the Politburo in the early period is discussed in O. V. Khlevnyuk, A. V. Kvashonkin, L. P. Kosheleva and L. A. Rogovaya (eds), *Stalinskoe Politbyuro v 30-e gody: Sbornik dokumentov*

(Moscow, 1995), and O. V. Khlevnyuk, *Politbyuro: Mekhanizmy politicheskoi vlasti v 1930-e gody* (Moscow, 1996). On the post-1945 period, see: Yu. N. Zhukov, 'Bor'ba za vlast' v rukovodstve SSSR v 1945–1952 godakh', *Voprosy istorii*, no. 1, 1995, pp. 23–39; Yu. S. Aksenov, 'Apogei stalinizma: Poslevoennaya piramida vlasti', *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, no. 11, 1990, pp. 90–104; and R. G. Pikhoya, 'O vnutripoliticheskoi bor'be v Sovetskom rukovodstve. 1945–1958 gg.', *Novaya i noveishaya istoriya*, 1995, no. 6, pp. 3–14. For the fullest recent survey in English, see John Löwenhardt, J. R. Ozinga and E. Van Ree, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Politburo* (London, 1992).

3. Especially valuable as a source of biographical information was 'Sostav rukovodiashchikh organov Tsentral'nogo komiteta KPSS partii – Politbyuro (Prezidiuma), Orgbyuro, Sekretariata TsK (1919–1990 gg.)', *Izvestiya TsK KPSS*, no. 7, 1990, pp. 69–136; a corrected version was published as *Politbyuro, Orgbyuro, Sekretariat TsK RKP(b) – VKP(b) – KPSS: Spravochnik* (Moscow, 1990). See also A. Chernev, *229 kremlevskikh vozhdai. Politbyuro, Orgbyuro, Sekretariat TsK Kommunisticheskoi partii v litsakh i tsifrakh* (Moscow, 1996). Important for state officials is Vladimir Ivkin. 'Rukovoditeli Sovetskogo pravitel'stva (1923–1991): Istoriko-biograficheskaya spravka', *Istochnik*, 1996, no. 4, pp. 152–92; no. 5, pp. 135–60; and the appendix to T. P. Korzhikhina, *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i ego uchrezhdeniia: Noiabr' 1917 g. – dekabr' 1991 g.* (Moscow, 1994). Strictly speaking, a person was either a 'member' (*chlen*) or a 'candidate' (*kandidat v chleny*) of the Politburo; the terms 'full member' and 'candidate member' have been used in this chapter where the distinction is relevant, but otherwise the term 'member' is used to cover both categories.
4. This is discussed at some length in Mawdsley and White, *The Soviet Elite* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 4–5, 38–41.
5. It would be interesting to know whether the Central Committee was presented with a formal 'list' (*proekt sostava* or *spisok*) of a proposed Politburo for approval.
6. Correspondence ballots were also used to purge the Central Committee in 1937–1938, see Mawdsley and White, *The Soviet Elite* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 67, 70–4.
7. 'Sostav rukovodiashchikh organov', pp. 74–8.
8. Turnover for a given point in time is measured as the percentage of all Politburo/Presidium (or Central Committee) members and candidates counted in the *previous* election who were not re-elected. For turnover, this chapter uses a simple comparison between one point – usually a party congress – and the next. Changes between congresses are ignored. For example, in October 1937, Ezhov was elected to the Politburo, but he was not re-elected to it at the March 1939 congress, so he is not represented in the tables. Less dramatically, between 1927 and 1930 – in April 1929 – Bauman was elected a candidate member to the Politburo, but he was not re-elected to the Politburo in July 1930. Another case is that of Rudzutak, who was dropped as a full member of the Politburo in February 1932 but re-elected as a candidate member in February 1934. For details of changes in Politburo membership, see Appendix 1.
9. The most useful source on the fate of Central Committee members during the purges is 'O sud'be chlenov i kandidatov v chleny TsK VKP(b), izbrannogo XVII s'ezdom partii', *Izvestiya TsK KPSS*, no. 12, 1989, pp. 82–113.

10. The dynamic of the Central Committee purge are discussed more fully in Mawdsley and White, *The Soviet Elite* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 66–90. For one interpretation of the purge phenomenon in general, see Evan Mawdsley, *The Stalin Years: The Soviet Union, 1929–1953*, 2nd edn (Manchester, 2003), pp. 96–108.
11. T. H. Rigby, 'Was Stalin a Disloyal Patron?', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3, July 1986, pp. 314ff; Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York, 1991), p. 118. Conquest made a distinction at Politburo level between those promoted up to 1926 (for example, Molotov) and those promoted in 1926–37 (for example, Eikhe), and argued – not altogether convincingly – that the latter were expendable because they had no prestige (p. 439). It is possible that a limited exercise in 'keeping the boys in line' got out of control; see Robert Thurston for one possible mechanism – *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia, 1934–1941* (New Haven, Conn., 1996), p. 130.
12. Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System* (London, 1985), pp. 278, 281ff, 309; Moshe Lewin, *Russia/USSR/Russia: The Drive and Drift of a Superstate* (New York, 1994), pp. 73, 91, 182, 187. For the most recent version, see Lewin's 'Bureaucracy and the Stalinist State' in Ian Kershaw and M. Lewin (eds), *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 53–74.
13. For an example of this, see F. I. Chuev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym; Iz dnevnika F. Chueva* (Moscow, 1991), pp. 462ff.
14. T. H. Rigby, 'Was Stalin a Disloyal Patron?' pp. 311–24. Others from Stalin's inner circle were also spared: Mekhlis from the Orgburo, Poskrebyshv, who was Stalin's secretary, and Beria who purged the purgers.
15. On this point, see Mawdsley and White, *The Soviet Elite* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 93–8.
16. This case was made by Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Permanent Purge: Politics of Soviet Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956).
17. I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, vol. XVI (Stanford, 1967), pp. 4–5.
18. The sinister implications of the expansion of the Politburo/Presidium were noted by Khrushchev in his 1956 Secret Speech: 'O kul'te lichnosti. Doklad Pervogo sekretarya TsK KPSS N. S. Khrushcheva XX s'ezdu KPSS 25 fevralya 1956 g.', *Izvestiya TsK KPSS*, 1989, no. 3, p. 164. On the other hand, the expanded Presidium never actually functioned.
19. On the party revival, see Yoram Gorlizki, 'Party Revivalism and the Death of Stalin', *Slavic Review*, vol. 54, no. 1 (1995), pp. 1–22. It is also significant that the expansion of the Central Committee did not end after Stalin's death. The 1956 CC was to be larger even than the 1952 CC (6 per cent more full members and 10 per cent more candidates).
20. Kaganovich, Malenkov, Molotov and Shepilov were expelled explicitly from the Presidium, while Saburov was not re-elected when the Presidium was re-formed after the June 1957 plenum.
21. 'Delo Beria', *Izvestiya TsK KPSS*, 1991, no. 1, pp. 147, 149; no. 2, p. 195.
22. This falls outside the subject of the Politburo in the Stalin period. For details, see Mawdsley and White, *The Soviet Elite* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 157–66.
23. Robert V. Daniels, 'Office Holding and Elite Status: The Central Committee of the CPSU' in Paul Cocks, R. V. Daniels and Nancy Whittier Heer (eds), *The Dynamics of Soviet Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), p. 78.

24. For details see Mawdsley and White, *The Soviet Elite* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 41–50.
25. Ignat'ev, MGB; Kuznetsov, VTsSPS; Vyshinskii, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Zverev, Ministry of Finance; Kabanov, *Gossnab*.
26. Malyshev was Ministry of Shipbuilding, not normally a crucial portfolio, but this was a priority post during the big naval construction programme of the time; he, in any event, was one of the most important managers of the military–industrial complex. Chesnokov and Yudin were involved in ideological work and Kuusinen was an elder statesman who was chairman of the Karelian Supreme Soviet.
27. The last-born Presidium member under Stalin was the philosopher Chesnokov, born in 1910 and elected to the Presidium in 1952 at the age of 42. (Younger, but earlier-born, individuals entered the CC in the later 1920s – Mikoyan was 32 in 1927 (born in 1895).) The Uzbek leader Mukhitdinov, born in 1917, was elected to the Presidium in 1956
28. *XVIII s'ezd*, p. 149; *Pravda*, 9 October 1952, p. 6. Incidentally, in May 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev would say exactly the same thing about the combination of the old and new: 'The main thing is skilfully to combine – experienced and young cadres. That is the most reliable guarantee against, inertness and stagnation, and also against adventurism and voluntarism'; see M. S. Gorbachev, *Izbrannye rechi i stat'i*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1987), p. 222.
29. The Russian proportion in 1934 fell to 53 because of the departure of a Russian (Rykov) and the appointment of a Georgian (Ordzhonikidze).
30. The Great Russian fractions, based on those whose nationality is definitely known, are: 1917–23 – 38/78(78); 1923–1934 – 94/163(187); 1934 – 72/133(139). The figure in brackets after the actual denominator is the *ideal* denominator, the total size of the group in question, including unknowns.
31. There were 194 Great Russians among 265 Central Committee members elected in 1939, 1941 and 1952 whose nationality is known (out of a total of 328 elected). To some extent, the job-slot system determined the ethnic proportions. The 1939, 1941 and 1952 Central Committees had a number of representatives from the sub-republic level in the RSFSR, but very few from that level in the non-Russian republics. The higher representation of the army high command, which was largely Russian, also shifted the balance away from the minorities, as did the fact that central-government ministers and regional party leaders tended to be Russian, rather than members of one of the minorities.
32. Some 948 individuals were elected to the Central Committee in 1956, 1961, 1966, 1971, 1976 and 1981. The precise Russian proportion was 570/851(948).

3

From Team-Stalin to Degenerate Tyranny

Stephen G. Wheatcroft

This chapter analyses how the Stalin political leadership system worked and developed over time.¹ It presents data that show that for most of this period Stalin was quite collegial in the manner in which he made decisions, and interacted with his senior colleagues. But this changed over time as Stalin aged, and as the formal senior political elite around him also aged and became increasingly unrepresentative of the population, the party membership and the main elite groups. In his later years, this increasing alienation from the upper elite was compounded by a personal degeneration of Stalin's own mental capacities. This marked a transition from a collegial oligarchic approach, which I have dubbed 'Team-Stalin' to a degenerate tyranny.² The chapter analyses the scale and intensity of Stalin's interaction with other political figures, both on an informal basis in his Kremlin office, and in the formal elite decision-making bodies. The data on Stalin's private visitors that have been published are immense and rather daunting to use in their current form.³ With one notable exception,⁴ these data have mainly been used to check on individual contacts with Stalin. Some data on participation in elite decision-making institutions has also been published, and more data are available in the former party archives.⁵ An additional source of information on Stalin's relations with the political elite comes from the several volumes of Stalin's correspondence, with different figures at different times.⁶

The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the literature on Soviet political elites. It distinguishes between the formal ceremonial elite and the decision-making elite. There is a brief discussion of the different levels of the formal political elite and how they were involved in decision-making, in theory and in practice. The chapter then moves to consider the decision-making elite that was involved in the meetings in Stalin's office. The final section argues that, contrary to most accounts, the

upper formal elite was remarkably stable and static, and that it was the failure of this group to renew itself and become more representative of the larger elite that was the main problem, rather than the instability of the upper elite. It describes several key stages in the attempts to renew the upper elite and analyses the failure of each of them.

Different elites: formal and informal structures

In a sense, the whole of the membership of the Communist Party could be seen as a political elite. In his classical work on the history of CPSU membership, T. H. Rigby refers to the party as a formal 'representative elite',⁷ which he distinguished from what John Armstrong described as the 'bureaucratic elite'⁸ and what I will describe as the 'decision-making' elite. Sometimes the management and specialist elite is also referred to simply as the elite,⁹ but that elite has to be distinguished from the political elites.

It is important to be aware of the difference between these concepts of political elite, and to be aware of their interrelationship. The formal political elite was fairly fixed and static. The Central Committee (TsK) and other elite committees (the party and state control committees and revision committees) were elected at the irregularly convened party congresses. The Politburo, Secretariat, Orgburo, and, until 1934, the General Secretary were elected at the first Central Committee plenum after the congress, with minor changes thereafter at other plenums. By contrast, the decision-making elite would change from day to day, and from issue to issue. The formal political elite contained certain figures for representative or ceremonial purposes. The decision-making elite did not carry ceremonial passengers.

Of course, the 'decision-making' elite was likely to be related to the formal political elite. Those who held real decision-making power would normally expect to be given some formal recognition of their elite status, but formal recognition often came late. Once achieved, however, formal recognition proved to be a little uncertain, and often remained so, even when its members were dropped from the decision-making elite that had warranted their formal promotion.

The formal structures claimed a degree of equality in political status among their members at the full Politburo and full Central Committee member level. The names of the members of the full Central Committee elected at the party congresses were always given in alphabetical order. There were 71 of them elected at the XVII party congress in 1934, with Stalin listed 56th and V. M. Molotov 43rd. The Politburo was

normally listed alphabetically and formally had equal rank. But the Central Committee plenum of February 1934 broke with these traditions temporarily. It listed the 10 Politburo members, the 10 Orgburo members and the 4 members of the Secretariat in non-alphabetical order, and at the same time failed to list a separate election of a General Secretary. The Politburo order was: Stalin, Molotov, L. M. Kaganovich, K. E. Voroshilov, M. I. Kalinin, G. K. Ordzhonikidze, V. V. Kuibyshev, S. M. Kirov, A. A. Andreev and S. V. Kosior. The Secretariat order was: Stalin, Kaganovich, Kirov and A. A. Zhdanov; and the Orgburo order was: Stalin, Kaganovich, Kirov, Zhdanov, N. I. Ezhov, N. M. Shvernik, A. V. Kosarev, A. I. Stetskii, Ya. B. Gamarnik and Kuibyshev. The non-alphabetical listing presumably referred to some form of ranking.¹⁰ The primacy accorded to Stalin in these listings may have been intended to compensate for not listing him in a special position as General Secretary in 1934. In March 1939, following the XVIII party congress, the listing was again done alphabetically.¹¹ Of course, in practice, the relative importance of different members in the political decision-making elite had always been very different.

There were greater formal differences at the candidate levels, which were normally presented in rank order.¹² The order of the listing of the 68 candidate members of the Central Committee elected in 1934 showed V. P. Shubrikov, F. P. Gryadinskii and G. N. Kaminskii as the top 3 ranked candidates, with V. V. Osinskii listed 33rd, N. I. Bukharin 59th, A. I. Rykov 65th and M. P. Tomsy 67th. The 61 members of the Commission of Party Control (KPK) elected in 1934 were listed alphabetically after the first 8, who comprised the chair and presidium of KPK and were, in order: Kaganovich, Ezhov, M. F. Shkiryatov, E. M. Yaroslavskii, I. A. Akulov, Ya. K. Peters and D. A. Bulatov. The 70 Commission of State Control (KSK) members elected at this time were also listed alphabetically after the first 12, who were their chair and presidium, in order: Kuibyshev, N. K. Antipov, Z. M. Belen'kii, N. M. Antselovich, A. I. Gaister, G. E. Prokof'ev, G. I. Lomov, A. M. Tsikhon, R. S. Zemlyachka, I. M. Moskvina, B. A. Roizenman and N. A. Bogdanov. But the 22 Central Revision Commission members elected in 1934 all appear to have been listed in rank order, with V. F. Vladimirkii ranked first. The candidates elected by the first plenum to the Politburo, Secretariat and Orgburo were also normally presented in ranking order.

If we take the members of these party elite bodies that were elected at the party congresses to be the formal elite, for 1934 we would get a formal party elite of 292 (or 288 if we exclude the multiple membership of Kaganovich, Ezhov, Kuibyshev and Antipov). All members of the formal

elite are fairly well identified and they can be analysed regarding the length of their party membership (*stazh*), turnover and career movements.¹³ The remarkable thing about this formal political elite was the continued predominance of pre-1917 *stazh* in the upper formal elites of the 1930s, the 1940s, and even the early 1950s, despite the extreme unrepresentativeness of these groups in the party membership and middle elite groups (see Table 3.1).

The informal decision-making elite can be seen as all the individuals who participated in the drafting and discussion of draft decrees that were ultimately accepted by the Politburo. The main figures in this elite would attend the formal sessions of the Politburo and be involved in co-ordinating the work of the redrafting commissions, which would probably require meetings with Stalin in his office. But they were not necessarily members or candidate members of the Politburo, and need not have been members of the Central Committee. It is presumed that the lists of those attending the meetings in Stalin's office, and of those attending formal Politburo sessions, provide an insight into the actors involved in the formal and informal decision-making processes.

Graeme Gill, in his analysis of *The Origins of the Stalinist Political System*, demonstrated an awareness of these different types of elite and the complexity involved in trying to define them when he wrote: 'The boundaries of the elite were neither clearly defined nor impervious to influences from below. In institutional terms, the elite encompassed members of the leading organs of the party-state structure, Sovnarkom, the Politburo, CC and upper levels of the party apparatus and the control commission.'¹⁴

Table 3.1 The share of those with pre-1917 party membership (*stazh*) in the formal party elite bodies and in the party as a whole (percentages)

	Pb	Pbc	TsK	TsKc	TsKK/KPK/KSK	All party members
1927-30	100	100	100	82	60	1
1930-34	64	100	100	99	62	
1934-39	56	100	100	94	45	
1939-52	89	50	37	27	43	0.3
1952-56		33	0	10	1	

Sources: Party *stazh* of all office holders from the stenographic records of the party congresses. Party *stazh* of all party members 1927 from *Vsesoyuznaya Partiinaya Perepis' 1927goda*, vyp. 6 (Moscow 1927), pp. 10-11. And, for 1939, from RGASPI, 17/7/186 l. 23.

Note: Pb = full member of Politburo; Pbc = candidate member of Politburo; TsK = full member of Central Committee; TsKc = candidate member of Central Committee; TsKK/KPK/KSK = member of Central Control Commission prior to 1934, and then either a member of the Commission of Party Control or the Commission of State Control.

Other scholars have been less cautious and more categorical in their assessments of what constituted the political elite. John Löwenhardt equated the 130 individuals who held full or candidate membership of the Politburo from 1919 to 1991 as being the 'commanding height' and the ultimate decision-making group:

Politburo decisions both determined the country's direction and settled differences between powerful organisations such as the party apparatus, the military, or the KGB. Ultimately, it was the Politburo that decided *who got what, when and how* in the Soviet Union. It was the Politburo that decided on the most important personnel changes in all sectors of Soviet society, including the Communist Party.¹⁵

More recently, Evan Mawdsley and Stephen White have defined the Soviet elite as being the 1,932 individuals who over the period 1917–91 were members (full and candidate) of the Central Committee. They justify this decision in the following way:

the Central Committee was not [just] a collection of individuals; it was a collection of people holding the positions that the regime itself defined as the most important. The CC was, for this reason, a collection of the politically influential by virtue of the positions they occupied – the government ministers and regional first secretaries, the ambassadors, generals and policemen, the editors, the leaders of trade unions and the directors of the largest enterprises, the leaders of organized youth, the President of the Academy of Sciences and an occasional writer.¹⁶

Part of the rationale of the Mawdsley/White approach to the definition of the elite, is their acceptance of the 'job-slot' theory of Robert V. Daniels. They quote approvingly Daniels' statements that there was an 'organic and automatic connection between [a] specific set of offices and the Central Committee status of their incumbents', and agree with him that the Central Committee could be seen accordingly as a 'well-defined and quite stable set of leading job slots whose occupants enjoyed the elite status conferred by Central Committee membership as long as and only as long as they occup[ied] their respective offices.'¹⁷

Both the accounts of Löwenhardt and of Mawdsley/White are highly formal and static in terms of their definitions of political elite. They take the elite to be those who are recognized formally as being in the elite without any consideration as to whether there could be any difference

between the ceremonial elite and the political, decision-making elite. It is presumed that Politburo and Central Committee decisions were the result of a process in which only formal elite members of the Politburo and Central Committee members were involved, and that they had their full say at the formal meetings, before democratically resolving the issue. This may have been the theory of Soviet decision-making, but how did it work in practice?

The formal party elite and how the Politburo worked in practice

It is generally accepted that after, the mid-1930s, Stalin tended to ignore the formal party elite structures. Party congresses, Central Committee plenums and formal sessions of the Politburo, Orgburo and Secretariat became less regular, and Stalin tended not to attend many of the latter. The decline in frequency of party meetings over this period is evident from the data in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 The Frequency of party congresses, Central Committee plenums, sessions of the Politburo, Secretariat and Orgburo, 1919–1952

Year	Party Congress	TsK plenums	Politburo			Secretariat and Orgburo			
			Proto-cols	Meetings		Proto-cols	Meetings		
				All	Stalin*		Sec.	Org.	Stalin*
1919	8th Cg		51	51	13				
1920	9th Cg, Cf	17	71	75	33				
1921	10th Cg, Cf, 11th Cg	7	180	180	85	116			
1922	11th Cg, 12th Cf	7	80	80	79	122	69	53	94
1923	12th Cg		79	79	66	91	53	38	45
1924	13th Cf, Cg	6	76	76	59	87	50	37	32
1925	14th Cf, Cg	3	54	54	46	75	38	37	33
1926	15th Cf	5	75	75	53	81	41	40	10
1927	15th Cg	5	67	67	45	78	38	40	4
1928		3	53	53	51	87	43	44	13
1929	16th Cf	2	51	51	49	85	41	44	1
1930	16th Cg	1	39	38	30	61	29	32	0
1931		2	58	57	47	59	28	29	0
1932		1	45	43	30	49	32	17	0
1933		1	24	24	16	23	7	12	0
1934	17th Cg	2	20	18	14	20	1	12	0
1935		3	17	15	15	23	1	12	0

1936		2	9	9	7	21	0	13	0
1937		3	12	6	6	13	0	6	0
1938		1	10	4	4	18	0	11	0
1939	18th Cg	1	13	2	2	32	0	14	0
1940		2	14	2	2	42	0	14	0
1941		2	10	0	0				
1942			4	0	0				
1943			3	0	0				
1944			2	0	0				
1945			4	1	1	49			0
1946		1	8	6	6	44			0
1947		1	5	1	1	46			0
1948			5	0	0	70			0
1949		1	6	1	1	66			0
1950			7	0	0	68			0
1951			6	0	0	57			0
1952	19th Cg	1	5	0	0				
All			1163	1068		1583			232
Percentage		85				71.3			14.9

Sources: 1927–40 compiled from E. A. Rees, 'Stalin, the Politburo and Rail Transport Policy', in J. Cooper, M. Perrie, E. A. Rees, (eds), *Soviet History, 1917–1953: Essays in Honour of R. W. Davies* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 106–8; Other years from: RGASPI, 17/3/1–1096; G. M. Adibekov, K. M. Anderson, L. A. Rogovaya (eds), *Politburo TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b); povestki dnya zasedanii 1919–1952, Katalog v trekh tomakh* (Moscow, 2000–2001).

Notes: Cg = Party Congress; Cf = Party Conference. List of plenums is not complete.

*Stalin's attendance at meetings of the Politburo.

**Stalin's attendance at meetings of the Secretariat and Orgburo.

From 1917 to the mid-1920s, party congresses were held annually, plenums of the Central Committee were held almost every two months, formal meetings of the Politburo were held more than once a week, and formal meetings of the Orgburo and Secretariat after 1922 were held almost weekly. After 1922, Stalin attended most of the formal Politburo, Orgburo and Secretariat sessions. From the late 1920s through to the mid-1930s, the frequency of party congresses dropped to every three years, the frequency of Central Committee plenums dropped to every six months, and the frequency of formal meetings of the Politburo to every three weeks, with a similar frequency for formal meetings of the Orgburo, but with far fewer formal meetings of the Secretariat. Stalin continued to attend most Politburo meetings, but almost no formal meetings of the Orgburo and Secretariat. This pattern held through the late 1930s. But during the war years there were no party congresses, very few Central Committee plenums, and the Politburo virtually ceased to exist. There were attempts to revive formal Politburo meetings after the war, but there were few plenums and no more party congresses until the

XIX congress in October 1952. The final months following this congress saw the replacement of the Politburo by the larger Presidium, and a drastic last minute attempt to radically transform the system.

The literature on the decision-making elite, and on its decision-making role, is far less than for the formal elite and its formal role. Mawdsley and White have little to say about the role of their elite in decision-making. Löwenhardt did attempt to look into this, explaining that 'the Politburo used to make two different kinds of decision: decisions reached in sessions of the bureau (averaging about ten per session during the 1930s) and so called decisions by circulation or polling (*oprosoom*).' Löwenhardt suggests that the decisions taken at meetings 'presumably were the most important and controversial issues', and that taking just ten items per meeting 'allows for some discussion on each individual issue'.¹⁸ He further noted that: 'The policy was to reach decisions without having to put motions to the vote – that is, by consensus. Many draft decisions were prepared in the Secretariat under the supervision of the Secretary-General and the other secretaries, and discussed in a secretaries' meeting before they reached the Politburo agenda.'

Löwenhardt appears to have been guided by Bazhanov's account of his time as Politburo Secretary in the early 1920s, when the system was being established and when Bazhanov claimed that he was drafting most of the complex materials in the Secretariat.¹⁹ If this had been the case, then the Politburo would only have been rubber-stamping these decisions and then logically the Secretariat rather than the Politburo would have been the real decision-makers.

Thanks to the opening up of the party archives we now have a much better idea of how the Politburo worked, and it differs from the way that Löwenhardt describes in several respects: it was more complex than Löwenhardt had assumed, and it changed significantly over time.

The role of the formal Politburo meetings appears to have been much less than was often presumed. The formal Politburo sessions by the early 1930s were largely a switching and recording mechanism. No question would be considered by the Politburo in its formal sessions unless it was already accompanied by a draft resolution, and that draft resolution had to be supplied by those who presented the question to the Politburo.²⁰ Often this was a state agency, although it could be a senior political figure. It was not the task of the Central Committee Secretariat from the late 1920s and 1930s to prepare initial drafts of resolutions for discussion by the Politburo. The Secretariat normally took over when an initial draft had already been prepared. It was the Secretariat's role to

decide how to handle those questions and draft resolutions, which were handed in for consideration by the Politburo. They could either present them to the next formal session of the Politburo or circulate them to members for resolution. When the Politburo considered any question and draft resolution it generally had a limited number of choices: (a) it could accept the resolution; (b) it could reject the resolution and send it somewhere else for redrafting with resubmission to the Politburo (either in a formal session or by circular) or elsewhere; (c) it could reject the resolution outright, not bother with any redrafting and simply take the matter off the agenda; or (d) it could order the matter to be held over to another session (*otlozhen*).

The conventional view that formal Politburo sessions actually involved the drafting of Politburo decisions and resolutions rarely corresponded to reality already by the late 1920s. In a few cases, the General Secretary might have gone over the material quickly with his pencil, making minor changes before the meeting and a few more minor changes might be entered during the meeting, but most matters of substance would be left to a specially constituted redrafting commission. At the formal Politburo session there might be a brief discussion of what needed to be changed and who else consulted, and then the draft would go off with the instruction to redraft and return in five or so days.²¹ The returned draft might be discussed at another formal Politburo session, or it might simply be circulated for comments. If the draft was considered to be acceptable it would be approved (*prinyato*). The formal sessions of the Politburo therefore had two tasks: first to act as a switching device to route the redrafting if necessary of proposals, and second to accept formally and record those documents that had been approved earlier through the circulation mechanism.

Over time, and as the workload increased, the kinds of decisions taken in the Politburo's name changed. As Table 3.3 shows, there was a move away from decisions taken at formal Politburo sessions, with more decisions being taken by the semi-formal polling (*opros*) of its members, or in the informal meetings from which decisions (*reshenie*) emerged.

The size of the formal sessions (with as many as 60–70 people attending to discuss over 100 agenda items) indicates that these were less decision-making sessions and more ceremonial registration sessions. The Table 3.4 provides an indication of the large numbers of politicians who were involved in the formal Politburo ceremonies in the early and mid-1930s. The number of participants was to drop significantly in the late 1930s, and the role of the Politburo was effectively taken over by the

Table 3.3 Change in the types of decisions issued in the name of the Politburo, 1919–1952

Year	Politburo			Pb agenda items				Total cols 5&6
	proto- cols	Meetings		Resolved At sess	Other	Of which Reshen	Opros	
		All	Stalin					
1919	51	51	13	404				404
1920	71	75	33	1 037				1 037
1921	71	80	80	1 404	187		187	1 591
1922	80	80	79	1 295	299		299	1 593
1923	79	66	91	1 322	203		203	1 525
1924	76	76	59	1 284	582		582	1 866
1925	54	54	46	860	798		798	1 658
1926	75	75	53	995	662		662	1 657
1927	67	67	45	1 066	732		732	1 798
1928	53	53	51	982	876	141	735	1 858
1929	51	51	49	1 069	1 182	554	628	2 251
1930	39	38	30	1 089	1 775	966	809	2 866
1931	58	57	47	1 303	2 577	1 041	1 536	3 878
1932	45	43	30	1 446	2 259	149	2 110	3 705
1933	24	24	16	443	2 802	31	2 771	3 245
1934	20	18	14	309	3 627	100	3 527	3 945
1935	17	15	15	105	3 366	6	3 360	3 471
1936	9	9	7	88	3 279		3 279	3 367
1937	12	6	6	23	3 403	217	3 186	3 425
1938	10	4	4	19	2 016	165	1 851	2 185
1939	13	2	2	6	3 074	2 899	175	3 080
1940	14	2	2	8	3 293	3 293		3 301
1941	10	0	0		2 618	2 618		2 618
1942	4	0	0		1 211	1 211		1 211
1943	3	0	0		1 151	1 151		1 151
1944	2	0	0		908	908		908
1945	4	1	1	6	918	918		924
1946	8	6	6	21	1 084	1 084		1 105
1947	5	1	1	3	1 041	1 041		1 044
1948	5	0	0		1 137	1 137		1 137
1949	6	1	1	3	2 398	2 398		2 401
1950	7	0	0		2 811	2 811		2 811
1951	6	0	0		3 214	3 214		3 214
1952	5	0	0		1 785	1 785		1 785
All	1 054	955	781	16 590	57 268	29 838	27 430	74 015

Sources: RGASPI, 17/3/1–1096; G. M. Adibekov, K. M. Anderson, L. A. Rogovaya (eds), *Politburo TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b): povestki dnya zasedanii 1919–1952, Katalog v trekh tomakh* (Moscow, Rosspen), 2000–2001.

Notes: Cols. 5–8 all refer to Politburo agenda items.

Col. 5 are decisions resolved at sessions of the Politburo.

Col. 6 are decisions resolved other than at sessions of the Politburo (given in cols 7 and 8).

Col. 7 are decisions taken by ‘decisions’ (resheniya) of the Politburo.

Col. 8 are decisions taken by polling the Politburo members (opros).

Table 3.4 Participation in Politburo meetings: average numbers attending per session in each year, 1922–1949

Year	Pb	Pbc	TsK	TsKc	TsKK	Other	All	Pb as % of all*
1922	6	1	2	0	0	0	9	66.7
1923	5	3	3	0	2	0	13	38.5
1924	4	3	6	0	2	0	15	25.0
1925	5	4	7	2	4	1	23	21.7
1926	7	3	11	4	5		30	23.3
1927	5	3	7	3	4		22	22.7
1928	6	3	15	7	6		37	16.2
1929	7	3	16	10	6		42	16.6
1930	7	5	22	11	15		60	11.7
1931	8		20	18	12		58	13.8
1932	7	1	26	21	12		67	10.4
1933	8	1	24	25	11		69	11.6
1934	7	1	15	17	13		53	13.2
1935	8	2	20	18	18		66	12.1
1936	8	0	25	18	21		72	11.1
1937	9	2	21	6	21		59	15.3
1938	9	5	13	3	5		35	25.7
1939	7	2	3	1	2	37	52	13.5
1940	7	2	21	5			35	20.0
1945	8	4	4	1		2	19	42.1
1946	8	4	7	1		1	21	38.0
1947	9	3	6	2			20	45.0
1949	8	1	9	3			21	38.1

Sources: 1922–29 Calculated from data in RGASPI, 17/3/1–770.

1930–40: Calculated from data in O. V. Khlevnyuk, A. V. Kvashonkin, L. P. Kosheleva, L. A. Rogovaya (compilers), *Stalinskoe Politburo v 30-e gody: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow, 1995), pp. 183–255.

1945–52: O. V. Khlevnyuk, I. Gorlitskii, L. P. Kosheleva, A. I. Minyuk, M. Yu. Prozumenshchikov, L. A. Rogovaya, S. V. Somonova (eds), *Politburo TsK VKP(b) i Soviet Ministrov SSSR, 1945–1953* (Moscow, 2002), pp. 421–31.

Note: *Average number of full members of the Politburo attending each Politburo session.

State Defence Committee (GKO) in 1941, before a partial resurrection in the post-war period and the transformation into the Presidium in 1952. In Table 3.4 we see a substantial change over time in the officials who participated in the formal meetings of the Politburo, as between full and candidate members of the Politburo and Central Committee, members of TsKK (KSK and KPK) and other officials.

Following the acceptance of a draft resolution, parts of it (a '*pripiska*') would be sent by the Secretariat to whoever needed to receive it. It was sent by special service and the *pripiska* was to be returned. After the formal session, the protocols and resolutions would be listed and sent to all Central Committee members, again with instructions that they be returned to the Secretariat after perusal. Some resolutions would be published as Central Committee resolutions, some as joint Central Committee–Sovnarkom resolutions, and some would be published as Sovnarkom resolutions, with no indication that they had been redrafted by the Politburo. Many resolutions would not be published at all, and would be given different security classifications, from 'for official use only', to 'Secret', 'Completely Secret', and 'special file' (*osobaya papka*).²²

Clearly, the switching and confirmation work undertaken by the formal Politburo sessions was only part of the decision-making process, with the initial drafting being made mainly in state agencies, and the redrafting carried out in specially constituted redrafting commissions. There was a vast amount of work involved in this. Stalin needed to keep in touch in some way with all the work and redraftings that were constantly taking place. Many of his office meetings would be involved in briefing and being briefed by those who were involved centrally in this work. This would be the hub of real decision-making, and those involved in doing this would be the real decision-making elite rather than the formal elite.

The real decision-making elite: inside Stalin's office

The system was dominated by Stalin, but despite the popular image of the dictator imposing his will on others, the record of his private meetings indicate that in the 1930s and early 1940s, Stalin had a very broad circle of acquaintances, and he spent a considerable time meeting and working with others. The record of the private meetings is greatly at variance not only with this popular image of Stalin, but also with the observable fate of the formal institutions of political interaction – the formal sessions of the Politburo, Secretariat and Orgburo, the Central Committee plenums, conferences and congresses.

The findings of our research suggest that Stalin was for most of his active political life a party animal. He appears to have thrived on social interaction. His working style was as part of a working collective or editorial team, rather than as a 'loner'.²³ But this interaction was in relatively small working groups rather than in the larger sessions of the formal Politburo or the other party institutions, which, after all, had

been created by Lenin and not by him. Stalin was thus a very distinctive type of party animal, and for purposes of political decision-making, he would make his own working group, rather than be dominated by the pre-existing political institutions.

As we shall see below, the periods of reduced participation in Politburo meetings between 1936 and 1940, and between 1941 and 1945, were precisely the period when the business meetings in Stalin's office increased. It seems that what was desired was not less participation in elite decision-making, but more controlled participation.

In direct contrast to the tendency for decreased frequency of Stalin's interactions in formal Politburo sessions with the political elite, we can identify an increasing level of interaction with the informal political elite in Stalin's business meetings in his Kremlin office. This intensity of these meetings continued throughout the war, before reducing in the post-war period. As a rough guide to the chronological changes in the intensity of meetings we consider the time spent on these private business meetings and the number of people involved.

Time spent in business meetings in Stalin's Kremlin office

Between 1930 and 1953, Stalin devoted a considerable amount of his time in Moscow to seeing a large number of visitors in his office. It can be calculated that, for the entire period, he saw visitors on about 40 per cent of all days.²⁴ But for many of these years Stalin had rather long holidays; an average of 63 days per year for the entire twenty-five years from 1928–53, or as much as ninety-three days per year for the seventeen years in which summer holidays were taken. Consequently, it appears that Stalin saw visitors on almost a half of all his working days. Table 3.5 provides an indication of the changing number of days per year on which Stalin saw visitors, the lengths of his holidays and the share of visitor days to Moscow work days. The increase in his workdays between 1937 and 1945 is explained by the fact that in these years he did not take his customary lengthy summer vacation. The years of most intense activity, implied by Stalin's meetings with visitors, were 1937, 1939 and 1942.

We know that Stalin continued to be involved in politics, and to see and communicate with others, while he was on holiday. Unfortunately, we do not yet possess any detailed listings of Stalin's meetings with others while on holiday.²⁵ The records of the meetings in Stalin's Kremlin office represent only a fraction of the complex of political interactions in which Stalin was involved. These data are incomplete, but they still offer a far more complete picture of the nature of Stalin's political interactions, at specific times and over time, than is otherwise available.

Table 3.5 Number of days per year that Stalin received visitors, 1930–1953

	Visitor days	Holidays	Work days	Visitor days/ work days (%)	Ranking	
					Highest	Lowest
1930	103	83	282	36.5		4
1931	167	66	299	55.9	7	
1932	161	90	276	58.5	6	
1933	164	58	307	53.4	8	
1934	140	94	271	51.7		
1935	126	85	280	45.0		
1936	116	73	293	39.7		
1937	241	0	365	66.0	2	
1938	178	0	365	48.8		
1939	250	0	365	68.5	1	
1940	214	0	366	58.6	5	
1941	217	0	365	59.5	4	
1942	231	0	365	63.3	3	
1943	180	0	365	49.3		
1944	151	0	366	41.4		6
1945	145	70	295	49.2		
1946	102	104	261	39.1		5
1947	136	104	261	52.1		
1948	125	90	276	45.5		
1949	111	99	266	41.7		7
1950	62	143	222	27.9		3
1951	47	154	211	22.3		2
1952	37	101	265	14.0		1
1953	9	0				
All	3 413	1 414	6 987	48.9		

Source: Calculated from data in *Istoricheskii Arkhiv, 1994–1998*. See <http://www.history.unimelb.edu.au/Russia>.

In different years, both the length of holidays and the proportion of workdays on which Stalin received visitors changed. Generally, the relationship between Stalin's holidays and his office meetings both changed in the same direction: those years in which Stalin did not take a long summer holiday were also those in which he saw visitors on a maximum proportion of working days – that is, up to 69 per cent in 1939 – while those years in which he had the longest holidays were also those in which he received visitors on a minimal proportion of working days. In other words, there are no signs of any attempt to make up for lost time on long holidays by having an increasing share of visitor days on these lower number of working days. Similar factors appear to apply to the vacation period as to the work period.

In total, Stalin probably saw about 2,800 separate individuals in his office. The registers record about 30,000 separate entries of names with times, and so, on average, it can be calculated that each visitor attended about ten times. But in reality there were generally a small number of visitors who were seen very regularly, and a much larger number of less frequent visitors. On average, Stalin would normally see between forty and seventy individuals per month in the 10–20 days a month in which visitors were received. He received the lowest number of visitors in his final years. He received visitors on only 14 per cent of workdays in 1952, 22.3 per cent in 1951 and 27.9 per cent in 1950. The highest number of visitors was received in 1939 (68.5 per cent), followed by 1937 (66 per cent), 1942 (63.3 per cent), 1941 (59.5 per cent), 1940 (58.6 per cent), 1932 (58.5 per cent), 1931 (55.9 per cent) and 1933 (53.4 per cent).

Who were Stalin's visitors?

Most of the visitors were received in groups, and often several of Stalin's senior colleagues would be present. Most of Stalin's closest colleagues with regard to these business meetings were Politburo members, but the rank order of closeness (frequency and duration of visits) did not follow party rank strictly. The registers indicate that Stalin had meetings with about 2,800 individuals in his private office, for a total of about 10,800 hours. Some of these people only met Stalin once, but others met him far more frequently. We shall begin by considering the fifteen most frequent of Stalin's visitors.

The fifteen most frequent visitors

Table 3.6 presents the rank order of Stalin's closest colleagues in terms of business meetings throughout the entire period. It indicates the extent to which these meetings were held with full Politburo members. Molotov, who was by far Stalin's most frequent visitor, had meetings with Stalin 2,927 times, for a total of 8,169 hours, and was present for 76.5 per cent of all Stalin's official meetings. Molotov's position was, of course, exceptional. It was exceptional in both the large number of contacts hours with Stalin, as well as for the continuous nature of this close business relationship, which only began to break down in late 1952 and 1953.

Below Molotov come a group of individuals who also experienced long periods of close business contact with Stalin. These were Malenkov, Voroshilov, Kaganovich and Beria, with an overall rate of 29–33 per cent. But this table is somewhat misleading, as it privileges those who

Table 3.6 The top fifteen visitors according to contact hours in meetings with Stalin, 1930–1953

Name	All			Pb member		Notes
	Rank	Hours	% of all	Hours	Rank	
Molotov	1	8 169	76.6	8 169	1	
Malenkov	2	3 535	33.1	1 127	5	First meetings 1937
Voroshilov	3	3 484	32.7	3 484	2	
Kaganovich	4	3 329	31.2	3 329	3	
Beria	5	3 059	28.7	1 080	6	
Mikoyan	6	2 664	25.0	2 313	4	
Zhdanov	7	1 833	17.2	1 019	7	Died 1948
Bulganin	8	1 066	10.0	619	9	
Ezhov	9	1 062	10.0	0		Shot 1940
Ordzhonikidze	10	984	9.2	984	8	Died 1937
Vasil'evskii	11	822	7.7	0		d.hd Gen.Staff 1941–42
Voznesenskii	12	798	7.5	490	12	Shot 1949
Andreev	13	708	6.6	492	11	
Khrushchev	14	656	6.2	600	10	
Antonov	15	589	5.5	0		1st d.ch Gen.Staff 1942–43

Source: Project Data Base at Melbourne University. <http://www.history.unimelb.edu.au/Russia>.

Notes: Pb member hours refers to number of hours the individual met with Stalin while he held full Politburo rank.

d.hd Gen.Staff 1941–42 – deputy head of the General Staff 1941–42.

1st d.ch Gen.Staff 43–3 – first deputy chairman of the General Staff 1942–43.

had a long-term experience as visitors. Table 3.7 presents an indication of the ranking of the individuals who had the greatest number of hours of meetings with Stalin over a year-long period. Table 3.7(a) considers the number of cases with individuals appearing more than once, while Table 3.7(b) considers the individuals only. An indication of how these participation rates changed over time is provided in Table 3.8. These figures indicate that the presumption made by Löwenhardt, White and Mawdsley that importance in decision-making would be reflected in party rank, and that the members of the formal elite would lose this elite status once they stopped being important decision-makers, is manifestly false.

While Molotov's continued high decision-making profile from 1931 to 1952 corresponds to his senior Politburo ranking in these years, his fall from decision-making importance in 1953 was not reflected in his fall

Table 3.7 Top ten cases of the greatest number of contact hours in meetings with Stalin over a year-long period, as a percentage of all meeting times

Name	Rank	Year	Percentage of all hours	Number of hours and minutes
(a) Cases and individuals				
Malenkov	1	1951	97	91:30
Malenkov	2	1950	96	69:15
Malenkov	2	1952	96	115:10
Beria	4	1951	94	88:35
Molotov	5	1948	93	290:25
Molotov	6	1951	92	86:40
Malenkov	7	1949	90	205:50
Molotov	8	1938	89	502:35
Molotov	10	1937	87	721:26
Molotov	10	1950	87	104:15
(b) Separate individuals				
Malenkov	1	1951	97	91:30
Beria	2	1951	94	88:35
Molotov	3	1948	93	290:25
Bulganin	4	1949	84	192:05
Khrushchev	5	1951	80	76:00
Kaganovich	6	1933	76	447:55
Mikoyan	7	1948	74	231:45
Zhdanov	8	1948	67	208:10
Ezhov	9	1937	66	544:10
Voroshilov	10	1936	62	214:26

Source: Project Data Base at Melbourne University. <http://www.history.unimelb.edu.au/Russia>.

from the Politburo and the Central Committee. For some reason, Stalin preferred to abolish the Politburo and turn it into a larger assembly than to replace the main survivors of the original team: Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, Andreev and Mikoyan. Voroshilov and Kaganovich, who both underwent severe losses of decision-making importance respectively in 1945–48 and 1942–47, retained their Politburo status. Mikoyan was more important as a decision-maker in the famine years of 1933, when formally he was only a candidate member of the Politburo, than he was in the immediately following years of 1934–38 when he was a full member. Kalinin's importance in decision-making fell enormously after 1936, but he maintained full Politburo status until he died in 1944. Rudzutak was more important as a decision-maker in 1932–34, after he had been transferred to TsKK and lost his Politburo status in February 1932, than he was as a Politburo member in 1931.

Table 3.8 Annual changes in ranking of the top eight politicians according to contact hours with Stalin in his Kremlin office, per year, 1931–1953

	Total hours	1st rank (%)	2nd rank (%)	3rd rank (%)	4th rank (%)	5th rank (%)	6th rank (%)	7th rank (%)	8th rank (%)
1 The original Team-Stalin									
1931	407	Mol 54	Kag 40	Vor 15	Ord 15	And 10	Mik 8	Kui 8	Kal 5
1932	478	Mol 64	Kag 53	Ord 27	Kui 24	Vor 22	Mik 18	And 6	Kir 6
1933	589	Mol 82	Kag 76	Vor 30	Mik 23	Ord 21	Kui 17	And 12	Kal 10
1934	501	Mol 68	Kag 67	Zhd 56	Vor 48	Ord 38	Kui 31	Mik 20	Kal 16
1935	398	Mol 79	Kag 65	Ord 57	Vor 54	Ezh 23	Kal 19	Mik 18	And 18
1936	343	Mol 86	Vor 62	Ord 51	Kag 48	Ezh 23	Mik 19	Chu 19	And 16
2 The threat of the Ezhov ascendancy									
1937	828	Mol 87	Ezh 66	Vor 55	Kag 49	Zhd 18	And 17	Mik 16	Mal 10
1938	566	Mol 89	Ezh 53	Vor 46	Kag 38	Mik 17	Mal 16	And 12	
3 The fall of Ezhov									
1939	931	Mol 85	Vor 59	Mik 33	Kag 27	Zhd 26	Ber 19	Mal 9	And 9
1940	740	Mol 81	Vor 54	Zhd 25	Sha 26	Ber 25	Kul 23	Mik 20	Vas 16

4 The advance of Malenkov, Beria and the generals

1941	792	Mol 61	Mal 49	Ber 28	Vor 21	Mik 16	Tim 16	Shak 16	Zhu 15
1942	1 009	Mal 74	Mol 71	Ber 53	Vas 39	Vor 20	Zhu 19	Bok 18	Mik 12
1943	669	Mol 81	Mal 72	Ber 64	Ant 35	Vor 31	Shc 30	Sht 18	Zhu 17
1944	471	Mol 81	Mal 51	Ant 45	Ber 44	Shc 33	Sht 32	Mik 21	Vor 15
1945	441	Mol 69	Mal 45	Ber 42	Sht 30	Bul 29	Ant 28	Mik 20	Vor 9
1946	295	Mol 68	Ber 53	Mal 52	Mik 42	Zhd 38	Bul 18	Vos 10	Khr 6
1947	342	Mol 74	Vos 74	Ber 73	Mal 72	Mik 66	Zhd 59	Bul 18	Kos 17
1948	311	Mol 93	Ber 75	Mik 74	Mal 71	Voz 71	Zhd 67	Bul 61	Kag 59

5 The Malenkov ascendancy

1949	227	Mal 90	Bul 84	Ber 81	Mik 73	Mol 72	Kag 65	Voz 26	Vor 10
1950	120	Mal 96	Mol 87	Ber 82	Mik 73	Bul 73	Khr 66	Kag 65	Kos 55
1951	94	Mal 97	Ber 94	Mol 92	Khr 80	Kag 75	Bul 72	Mik 64	Vor 16
1952	73	Mal 94	Mol 75	Bul 75	Ber 70	Mik 60	Kag 57	Khr 55	
1953	26	Mal 40	Ber 19	Bul 19	Khr 17	Vas 10			

Source: <http://www.history.unimelb.edu.au/Russia>.

Notes: Total time of meetings in hours; ranking according to percentage of all time.

Key: A = Andreev; Ant = Antonov; Ber = Beria; Bok = Bokov; Bul = Bulganin; Chu = Chubar'; Ezh = Ezhov; Kag = Kaganovich; Kal = Kalinin; Khr = Khrushchev; Kir = Kirov; Kos = Kosygin; Kui = Kuibyshev; Kul = Kulik; Mal = Malenkov; Mik = Mikoyan; Mol = Molotov; Ord = Ordzhonikidze; Sha = Shaposhnikov; Shak = Shakhurin; Shc = Shcherbakov; Sht = Shtemenko; Tim = Timoshenko; Vas = Vasil'evskii; Vor = Voroshilov; Voz = Voznesenskii; Zhu = Zhukov; Zhd = Zhdanov.

Perhaps the most revealing case is that of Ezhov, who was attending up to 23 per cent of all of Stalin's meetings when he had no Politburo rank in 1935, and was to outstrip all of Stalin's other colleagues, apart from Molotov, in 1937, when he attended up to 66 per cent of all of Stalin's meetings (544 hours) with only candidate Politburo ranking. Of course, it could be argued that had he maintained that rate of decision-making importance, he could have expected to achieve full Politburo rank in the future, but, as was soon to become clear, he did not have a future. The failure of Ezhov to reach full Politburo rank should not lead us to think that he was lower in the real decision-making elite than such full Politburo members as Kalinin or Andreev.

Zhdanov, Malenkov and Beria were even more extreme cases. Zhdanov in 1934 was attending 56 per cent of the meetings in Stalin's Kremlin office when he was appointed to the Secretariat, but had no Politburo status, and Malenkov in 1942 and 1943 was attending over 70 per cent of Stalin's meetings when he had only been made a candidate member of the Politburo in 1941 and would not become a full member until 1946. Beria also rose to a level of attending 64 per cent of Stalin's office meetings in 1943, and only received Politburo status in 1946. The latter was to some extent accompanied by loss of direct control of part of the security apparatus, which is often seen as the beginning of the challenge to his authority, rather than as a confirmation of his power.

In most cases in the 1920s and 1930s, new formal Politburo status was given to the ranking candidate members who had been elected at the previous party congress, when new vacancies arose. The chair of the party's Central Control Commission (TsKK) before 1934 was an exceptional position; the post gave its incumbent the equivalent of Politburo rank, and required him to attend formal Politburo sessions, but did not formally give him Politburo status. However, once removed from the Control Commission position, the former incumbent would normally regain full Politburo rank.²⁶

The consolidation of decision-making elite status into formal elite status often took time, and membership of the formal elite was normally quite uncertain. Once formal elite status had been reached, it tended to cling. Professor Rigby was right in describing Stalin as generally a 'loyal patron' to those who had made it into the elite of Team-Stalin Politburo. There were, however, a few exceptions: Ezhov and Voznesenskii are the most striking ones, and their history will be discussed in more detail later. Let us now turn to consider the job profile of Stalin's visitors.

Job profiles of Stalin's visitors: Politburo, military, state security organs and the government (Sovnarkom/Council of Ministers)

When White and Mawdsley refer to the elite as simply a collection of job slots they are implying a very static model with an organic link between employment structure and the elite. There are very good reasons, in terms of promoting social stability, in projecting this image of a representative elite, but in terms of real decision-making power, we need to question whether such linkage is real, or whether it is simply part of the political show. Here I shall sketch out briefly the main patterns of involvement in decision-making by members of different groups. The next section will be concerned more directly with how these patterns changed over time, and what effects this had.

Many of the visitors, especially the most important ones, had more than one job. This applied particularly to Politburo members. We therefore need to be very careful, in assessing the shares of visitors, as to how we classify these dual positions. In Table 3.9, two versions have been calculated, with Molotov, Voroshilov and Beria included in one version and excluded in the other. The heavy representation of Politburo members in Sovnarkom presents additional problems, of which we need to be aware, but no attempt will be made in this table to exclude Politburo members from the Sovnarkom group, apart from Molotov. For the military, and particularly the security agencies, there is less of a problem. In Table 3.9, the meetings of Politburo members with Stalin have been given in total on the left, and exclude the participation of Molotov, Voroshilov, and Beria once he had become a Politburo member in 1946.

Prior to December 1930, Stalin and the party Secretariat did not have hands-on control of the central government apparatus, which had developed its own internal bureaucracy under Lenin and Rykov. But from December 1930, when Molotov replaced Rykov as chairman of Sovnarkom and STO, hands-on control shifted to the Stalin team.

From January to November 1930, before becoming head of Sovnarkom, Molotov was only present at 4 of the 88 private meetings in Stalin's Kremlin office. But in December 1930, Molotov was present for 11 of the 15 meetings (that is, 73 per cent), and this was to be roughly the average share of meetings that Molotov was to attend for the next twenty years.²⁷ This intense Stalin/Molotov consultative relationship was the major constant feature of the Stalinist decision-making interrelationship. As can be seen from Table 3.8 on pp. 96–7, this relationship changed only slightly during these twenty years. There was to be a far more dramatic change in the final five months of Stalin's life,

Table 3.9 Share of participation in meetings with Stalin by the major figures in the leading military, party, security and state agencies (preliminary figures in percentage)

	Pb		Military		State Security		Sovnarkom/SovMin	
	All	ex.MVB	ex.V		ex.B		ch & v.ch	ex.Mol
1931	43.9	28.5	6.3	1.2	6.4	6.4	32.8	20.9
1932	41.1	28.1	5.8	2.8	5.2	5.3	34.1	24.5
1933	40.8	26.0	6.9	2.4	6.8	6.7	36.2	26.1
1934	46.9	34.5	7.5	2.3	8.1	8.1	32.9	26.1
1935	43.1	29.7	8.1	2.5	9.3	9.3	30.6	22.7
1936	44.4	27.4	10.5	3.5	7.6	7.6	33.8	23.8
1937	62.4	40.6	12.4	3.7	13.3	13.3	41.5	28.4
1938	68.1	45.0	10.9	2.5	14.4	14.4	43.2	28.5
1939	56.4	32.5	22.7	13.2	7.8	7.8	46.2	31.8
1940	43.9	25.7	28.4	22.1	6.4	6.4	36.0	24.2
1941	36.0	25.7	32.3	30.0	7.9	7.9	28.0	20.1
1942	36.3	26.0	34.3	31.7	8.7	8.7	29.9	22.0
1943	40.0	27.3	35.3	31.9	10.7	10.7	27.2	17.9
1944	46.7	33.9	40.8	38.8	11.0	11.0	30.2	19.4
1945	49.0	37.9	23.0	21.8	10.6	10.6	37.3	27.3
1946	52.6	34.2	12.1	11.4	12.1	2.6	35.2	27.0
1947	62.9	45.0	5.9	4.9	12.3	3.3	44.5	36.6
1948	73.2	53.2	10.3	9.0	11.1	2.0	55.6	46.0
1949	72.5	52.4	14.1	12.5	12.9	2.7	59.8	51.6
1950	68.0	47.7	15.6	14.3	12.5	2.9	48.6	39.3
1951	71.8	50.5	13.6	11.9	12.1	1.7	49.1	39.9
1952	68.6	51.8	11.9	10.9	12.1	3.5	43.3	36.1
1953jf*	44.9	27.0	9.0	9.0	21.8	3.8	15.4	15.4
All	50.5	31.5	19.1	14.9	8.7	3.6	36.8	27.1

Source: Calculated from data in different issues of *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, 1994–8. See Project data bases. <http://www.history.unimelb.edu.au/Russia>.

Notes: ex. MVB = excluding Molotov, Voroshilov and Beria; ex.V = excluding Voroshilov; ex.B = excluding Beria; ch & v.ch, chairman and vice chairman; Ex Molotov excluding Molotov.

* 1953jf = 1953, January–February.

after October 1952, but for the preceding 240 months this relationship was the anchor of Stalinist politics.

If the transfer of Sovnarkom and STO decision-making to the Stalin team lay at the centre of the patterns of meetings between Stalin and Molotov, we might expect that changes in the roles of his deputy chairs in Sovnarkom and STO would also find a reflection in these meetings. And this is reflected in the Sovnarkom/Council of Ministers column in

Table 3.9. There was clearly a decline in importance of Sovnarkom/Council of Ministers meetings during the Second World War, when Stalin paid more attention to military matters, but the proportions then rose again to well over 50 per cent in the post-war period, apart from the uniquely different trend of Stalin's last months.

The dynamic of the meetings with the military leaders is very interesting. From levels of less than 10 per cent of meetings before 1935 (including Voroshilov) or 3 per cent (excluding Voroshilov), the level of meetings with the military grew sharply to over 30 per cent in 1941. Of course, there was some slight decline in 1938, but far less than might have been expected, given the magnitude of the military purges. And from 1939 to 1941 there was a very sharp increase in involvement, especially for the indicators excluding Voroshilov. The level of military participation in meetings grew to a peak of about 40 per cent in 1944, from where they fell very sharply to about 5 per cent in 1947, before recovering slightly to 10–15 per cent in Stalin's last years.

The dynamic of meetings with state security officials was very different from the military, with many more irregularities. There was an increased involvement from 6 per cent in 1931 to over 9 per cent in 1935. There was then a reversal to 8 per cent in 1939–42. From 1942 there was a sharp increase in the participation of security officials, reaching 12–13 per cent from 1946 to 1952 when the figures which include Beria are considered.²⁸ It should be noted that at the time of Beria's maximum influence in political decision-making in these years (1946–52) the state security share at under 13 per cent was still lower than the 13.3 per cent and 14.4 per cent achieved in 1937 and 1938, respectively. However, the January/February 1953 figures show a leap in security official involvement to 21.8 per cent. This is largely the result of Beria's meetings with Stalin, but it is significant that the security figures excluding Beria were also climbing.

The overall trend is for an increase in the dominance of the Politburo and Sovnarkom/Council of Ministers (the formal structures) over time, but with a major growth in the importance of state security officials in 1937–38 and a growth of the military from 1939 to 1945.

What do the data show about the changing nature of Stalinist decision-making?

The evidence of the mass of social interaction and the predominance of group meetings described above require us to move away from the traditional image of the lone dictator reserving for himself jealously all

decision-making functions. This view is supported by the testimony of Boris Bazhanov, one of Stalin's early secretaries, who defected in 1928. In a remarkable exchange with Jerzy Urban in the 1970s, Bazhanov was insistent on recording his own account of Stalin's work style, even though it contradicted the pattern that his interviewer was determined to keep.

Bazhanov explained that

Stalin had the good sense never to say anything before everyone else had his argument fully developed. He would sit there, watching the way the discussion was going. When everyone had spoken, he would say: Well comrades, I think the solution to the problem is such and such – and he would then repeat the conclusions towards which the majority had been drifting. And, as time passed, it came to be said of Stalin that...he had a fundamental wisdom of sorts which led him to propose the right answers to difficult problems.²⁹

Later, Bazhanov explained that he often had to press Stalin for an urgent response to some issue, and that Stalin would often ask him his opinion as to what should be done, and then he invariably accepted it. These statements from Bazhanov were so much at variance with the image of Stalin held by Urban that he could not help commenting: 'So Stalin the single-minded usurper of all decision-making was not yet evident at the time?' To which Bazhanov replied: 'Not at all.'

It is also clear that, after Stalin's death and his last-minute attempt to make drastic changes to the political elite, the oligarchs of Team-Stalin were keen to support Western images of an isolated dictator who excluded them from discussions and knowledge of what was happening, and thereby also from responsibility. Molotov, Kaganovich, Malenkov, and especially Khrushchev, were eager to spread this image. The new post-Stalin orthodoxy, as expressed by the former Stalinist, Khrushchev, denied the existence of Team-Stalin:

Stalin, who absolutely did not tolerate collegiality in leadership and in work, and who practiced brutal violence, not only toward everything which opposed him, but also toward that which seemed to his capricious and despotic character, contrary to his concepts.³⁰

If we maintain a sceptical position regarding this politically convenient orthodoxy of 'the lone dictator' and accept the evidence of considerable group participation, then the problems for Team-Stalin would appear to be not so much individuals challenging Stalin's authority, but of a

Team-Stalin that was reluctant to renew its own membership and become more representative of younger generations.

This is very different from the image presented by George Kennan, of Stalin the tyrant murdering his own supporters.³¹ Although some aspects of a tyrant did emerge in the latter, degenerate years, it is incorrect to claim that this was the norm for the entire Stalin period. Professor Rigby pointed out correctly many years ago that, in several respects, up to 1952 Stalin could be considered as being a loyal patron.³² Perhaps even *too* loyal a patron.

There were several periods when major changes to the senior leadership of Team-Stalin were initiated. These were associated with a failed attempt to bring Kirov into the team more centrally in 1934; the disastrous consequences of drastically advancing the role of Ezhov in the team in 1936–38; the more successful, but temporary, wartime ascendancy of new military groups in 1941–45; and the attempts to revive the team around Zhdanov and Voznesenskii in 1946–48. Each of the earlier moves to renew the upper elite had been halted dramatically. Kirov had been assassinated, Ezhov had been sacrificed when it was felt that the purges had gone too far, the military had been dismissed when the war was over and it was felt that they might pose a threat, and Zhdanov had died. Following the halting of all of the earlier attempts at change and renewal of the leadership, there had been a reversion to the old team of the four oligarchs (Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov and Mikoyan). But by the late 1940s even the old team realized that they needed some renewal, and that they would have to make space for some younger figures such as Malenkov, Beria, and even Khrushchev and Bulganin. After 1949, as Stalin's health deteriorated³³ there were signs of a new team being built around Malenkov. Beria was at first included in the new team, but by 1952, it was clear that he was losing influence and that his future was under threat.³⁴ Following the XIX party congress in October 1952, Stalin demonstrated that he had a far more radical plan in mind that would destabilize all the oligarchs and bring much younger generations of leaders into both the formal and informal leadership. Only then, twenty years after Trotsky had claimed that the party leadership was being swamped by new post-revolutionary generations of leaders, did the Old Bolsheviks, or pre-revolutionary *stazh*, stop being a majority of the formal elite.

Conclusions

The early Stalin decision-making system was more complex than has often been presumed. There was an important difference between the rather static formal political elite that continued to dominate the

Politburo, and the dynamic, decision-making elite that formed around Stalin. For most of this period, through to the end of the Second World War, Stalin had meetings with many people in consultative and even collegial-type decision-making processes. This early period may be represented as a sort of Team-Stalin period, with a consultative bureaucratic oligarchy; although one of the oligarchs was far more important than the others. This Team-Stalin period included the period of the Ezhovshchina, for which the whole Team needs to some extent to be held responsible. Ultimately, the Ezhovshchina and Ezhov's advance in the informal elite caused the other oligarchs to take action to persuade Stalin to abandon Ezhov. There are good reasons why the surviving Stalinist oligarchs should, after Stalin's death, want to present themselves as victims of rather than active participants in this system. But the evidence for the 1930s and early 1940s does not support these claims.

The political situation in the late 1940s and early 1950s clearly changed from the early period, and even from the wartime period when Stalin was still on top of matters, and anxious to hear the opinions of his colleagues and to use their input. In his last years, Stalin adopted far more classical dictatorial attitudes. The formal meetings of the Politburo ceased. He cut back drastically on his informal meetings. He had longer holidays and increasingly relied on Malenkov, Beria, Bulganin and the old-team to run matters in his absence. But at the same time, he grew increasingly unhappy with this dependency, and began to take erratic and tyrannical decisions. It was in these circumstances, and only at the end of a very long term of office, that Stalin finally decided to abandon Team-Stalin.

Notes and references

1. Work on this topic has been assisted by an Australian Research Council Large Research Grant No. A59930513, 'Decision-making and the Stalinist Political Elite, 1929–53'. I am grateful to Professor Oleg Khlevnyuk and Dr Larissa Rogovaya for their assistance and advice. I am also grateful to R. W. Davies, E. A. Rees, T. H. Rigby, G. Gill, R. Horvath and J. Elkner for their comments.
2. This was a transition that only occurred in Stalin's final years, although many of his colleagues (the oligarchs) subsequently found it to their advantage to claim that it had always been there.
3. *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, 1994, no. 6; 1995, nos 2, 3, 4, 5–6; 1996, nos 2, 3, 4, 5–6; 1997, no. 1; and a summary alphabetical index in 1998, no. 4.
4. Professor Oleg Khlevnyuk listed the number of visits and duration of visits between 1931 and 1939 in appendix 4 to his monograph on the Politburo: O. V. Khlevnyuk, *Politburo, mekhanizmy politicheskoi vlasti v 1930-e gody* (Moscow 1996), pp. 289–91.

5. See O. V. Khlevnyuk, A. V. Kvashonkin, L. P. Kosheleva and L. A. Rogovaya (compilers), *Stalinskoe Politburo v 30-e gody: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow 1995), pp. 183–255; O. V. Khlevnyuk, Y. Gorlitskii, L. P. Kosheleva, A. I. Minyuk, M. Yu. Prozumenshchikov, L. A. Rogovaya, S. V. Somonova (eds), *Politburo TsK VKP(b) i Sovet Ministrov SSSR, 1945–1953* (Moscow, 2002), pp. 421–31; and RGASPI, 17/3/ 1–770.
6. Parts of Stalin's correspondence with his wife, his mother and children are given in V. N. Denisov, (ed.), *Iosif Stalin v ob'yatiyakh sem'i: Iz lichnogo arkhiva* (Moscow, 1993). Extracts of Stalin's correspondence with Molotov from 1925–1936 have appeared in L. T. Lih, O. V. Naumov and O. V. Khlevnyuk, *Stalin's Letters to Molotov, 1925–1936* (New Haven, Conn. and London, 1995). A more comprehensive and informative listing of Stalin's correspondence with Kaganovich, 1931–36 has appeared as O. V. Khlevnyuk, R. W. Davies, L. P. Kosheleva, E. A. Rees, L. A. Rogovaya (eds), *Stalin i Kaganovich: perepiska, 1931–1936 gg.* (Moscow, 2001). Correspondence between Stalin and other members of the political elite has appeared in *Bol'shevistskoe Rukovodstvo. Perepiska. 1912–1927*, (Moscow, 1996) and *Sovetskoe Rukovodstvo. Perepiska. 1928–1941* (Moscow, 1999).
7. T. H. Rigby, *Communist Party Membership in the USSR, 1917–1967* (Princeton, NJ, 1968), ch. 14: 'A Representative Elite?'
8. *Ibid.*, p. 412. References to John Armstrong, *The Soviet Bureaucratic Elite: A Case Study of the Ukrainian Apparatus* (New York, 1959).
9. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Stalin and the Making of a New Elite, 1928–1939', *Slavic Review*, vol. 38, no. 3, 1979, pp. 377–402.
10. Note that Kuibyshev ranked above Kirov in the Politburo order, but below him in the Orgburo order.
11. See *Pravda*, 23 March 1939.
12. The rationale for this goes back to pre-revolutionary underground days, when it was expected that many of the full members of the TsK would be arrested and would need to be replaced by the reserve team, who were the candidate members. Replacements would occur automatically from the most senior candidate on the reserve list. Hence it was important for all members to know the rank order of the candidates.
13. Elite members were almost invariably delegates or candidate delegates to the party congress that elected them. Certain details including party *stazh* of delegates were always listed in the stenographic records of the party congresses.
14. Graeme Gill, *The Origins of the Stalinist Political System* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 51.
15. J. Löwenhardt, J. R. Ozinga and E. van Ree, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Politburo* (New York, 1992), p. xvi.
16. E. Mawdsley and S. White, *The Soviet Elite from Lenin to Gorbachev: The Central Committee and its Members, 1917–1991*, (Oxford, 2000), p. vii.
17. *Ibid.*, p. x, citing from Robert V. Daniels, 'Office Holding and Elite Status: The Central Committee of the CPSU', in Paul Cocks, R. V. Daniels and Nancy Whittier Heer (eds), *The Dynamics of Soviet Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), p. 76.
18. Löwenhardt *et al.*, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Politburo*, p. 116.

19. Boris Bazhanov, *Vospominaniya byvshego sekretarya Stalina* (St. Petersburg, 1990). This is a reprint of the 1960s revised version of a book originally published in Paris in 1930. Bazhanov died in 1982.
20. The formal decrees describing the form in which materials and draft proposals need to be submitted to the Politburo are given in O. V. Khlevnyuk, A. V. Kvashonkin, L. P. Kosheleva and L. A. Rogovaya (compilers), *Stalinskoe Politburo v 30-e gody: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow, 1995), pp. 23–5.
21. This system certainly bears some resemblance to the process that Bazhanov claimed to have introduced into Politburo procedures in the early 1920s, but in the later years as the Politburo workload had increased, the redrafting was entrusted to a series of *ad hoc* drafting commissions rather than to one secretary. See Bazhanov, *Vospominaniya...* (St. Petersburg, 1990), pp. 48–62.
22. Again, it is interesting to note that Bazhanov claims to have invented the *Osoby papki* system in November 1923. See Bazhanov, *ibid.*, p. 69. However, Bazhanov claims that during the civil war, when the future of the regime was unclear, there were even more secret decisions, such as the decision to store confiscated gems in the hands of especially trusted party members for their use should the regime fall. Bazhanov claims to have discovered accidentally that Yan Sverdlov's widow, Klavdiya Novgorodtseva, was one of these secret bearers. See Bazhanov, *ibid.*, p. 96. The first reference to *Osoby papki* in the Politburo protocols is on 31 May 1923.
23. This should not surprise us if we consider that, for Stalin and most of the Bolsheviks, editorial work was almost the only legal activity that they knew.
24. He received visitors on 3,437 of the 8,462 days between January 1930 and March 1953 – that is, on 40.6 per cent of the days.
25. We know that Voroshilov was a frequent visitor in the early 1930s, and that Zhdanov was there in 1936, as well as in the post-war years. Beria was also there in the 1940s.
26. Rudzutak was to some extent an exception. When he was removed from TsKK in March 1934 he only regained candidate Politburo status; however, at the same time, NKRRK/TsKK was reorganized and the new incumbent of KPK (Kaganovich) did keep his Politburo status.
27. See Table 3.6; between 1930 and 1953 Molotov had meetings with Stalin in his private office for 8,169 of the 10,668 hours that Stalin had meetings there – that is, 76.6 per cent.
28. Since Beria was made a candidate member of the Politburo in 1946, there could be an argument for deducting him from the security column and adding him to the Politburo column, but that would lead to a sharp decline in the security figures, which seems unwarranted.
29. Interview between Bazhanov and G. R. Urban in G. R. Urban (ed.), *Stalinism: Its Impact on Russia and the World* (Aldershot, 1982), p. 8.
30. Khrushchev, *The 'Secret' Speech* (Nottingham, 1976), p. 24.
31. George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin* (London, 1961), pp. 254–5, wrote one of the best known descriptions of Stalin as 'a man of incredible criminality...without pity or mercy: a man in whose entourage no one was ever safe: a man who...was most dangerous of all to those who were his closest collaborators in crime, because he liked to be the sole custodian of his own secrets'.

32. T. H. Rigby, 'Was Stalin a Disloyal Patron?', *Soviet Studies*, vol. xxxviii, no. 3, July 1986, pp. 311–24.
33. He was then 71 years old. Djilas provides us with one of the best accounts of Stalin's sudden deterioration in these years: '[In 1948] It was incomprehensible how much he had changed in two or three years. When I had last seen him, in 1945, he was still lively, quick-witted, and had a pointed sense of humour. But that was during the war, and it had been, it would seem, Stalin's last effort and limit. Now he laughed at inanities and shallow jokes. On one occasion he not only failed to get the political point of an anecdote I told him in which he outsmarted Churchill and Roosevelt, but I had the impression that he was offended, in the manner of all old men. I perceived an awkward astonishment on the faces of the rest of the party', Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (London, 1962) p. 138.
34. The arrest of Abakumov in July 1951 and the prosecution of the Mingrelian Affair were clear signs that Beria's future was under threat. Beria's meetings in Stalin's office fell from 94 per cent of all meetings in 1951 (ranking him second only to Malenkov) to 70 per cent in 1952, ranking him fourth behind Malenkov, Molotov and Bulganin. See Table 3.8.

4

The Politburo and Economic Policy-making

R. W. Davies, Melanie Ilič and Oleg Khlevnyuk

The *modus operandi* of the Politburo used to be shrouded in controversy and speculation, but it has been understood much more clearly since the opening of the archives in the early 1990s. Of course, long before this, most historians were agreed about major features of the central power structure – in particular that in the late 1920s and 1930s its control increased inexorably. Agriculture provides an obvious example. Between 1929 and 1932, the agricultural co-operatives were abolished, the administration of agriculture was centralised, and the Machine-Tractor Stations and collective farms were transferred from being semi-cooperative bodies to direct management by the state.¹

However, before the archives were opened, little was known about the internal mechanisms of the Politburo, and this often led to misunderstanding. It was widely assumed that until the mid-1930s, and possibly later, the members of the Politburo were often in conflict with each other about major directions of policy. Many historians believed that one group of Politburo members supported a more ‘moderate’ policy (including a more realistic rate of industrialisation and a limitation of repression) while a ‘radical’ group supported a more extreme policy in the economy and more generally. But the archives reveal no evidence of the existence of such divisions within the Politburo after the defeat of the Right Opposition in 1929. In the disagreements that took place, departmental interests tended to lead to differences in policy rather than the reverse. As A. I. Mikoyan explains in his memoirs:

Molotov as chair of Sovnarkom [the Council of People’s Commissars] felt responsible for preserving proportions in the economy and, in particular, was very concerned to maintain the stability of our currency, to reduce the losses of economic organisations and to seek

sources of profit. This was natural and arose out of his office. However, he often went too far...I remember that Ordzhonikidze [People's Commissar for Heavy Industry] and I quarrelled with him a great deal when he put a squeeze on investment in the construction of new industrial enterprises after the successful early completion of the First Five-Year Plan. He was under the strong influence of the People's Commissar for Finance [NKFin], G. F. Grin'ko. Grin'ko was an intelligent man, well-trained, and had a good grasp of questions relating to his commissariat. He particularly influenced Molotov about the reduction of expenditure.²

Before and even after the archives were opened, some historians believed that Stalin was not the unqualified master of the Politburo.³ However, it is now abundantly clear that the scope of Stalin's authority grew immensely over the course of the 1930s. L. M. Kaganovich wrote of Stalin:

He must be assessed differently according to the time, the period; there were various Stalins. The post-war Stalin was one Stalin, the pre-war Stalin was another, and Stalin between 1932 and the 1940s was yet another Stalin. Before 1932 he was entirely different. He changed. I saw at least five or six different Stalins.⁴

Even before 1932, Stalin could already enforce his will in the Politburo. Nevertheless, at this time a residual tradition of collective leadership remained in the party and in the Politburo. The Politburo met regularly and frequently, and in forcing through a decision unpopular with some of his Politburo colleagues, Stalin sought to calm things down by persuasion and compromise. Thus, on one occasion in 1931, he wrote to G. K. Ordzhonikidze rebuking him in a friendly manner: 'Don't reprimand me for being rude and, perhaps, too direct. Still, you can reprimand me as much as you want.'⁵ In the same year he warned against the danger of internal disputes within the Politburo 'undermining our leadership group, which historically evolved in a struggle against all types of opportunism'.⁶ But 1931 was the last year in which quite sharp conflicts took place between Stalin and his colleagues, accompanied by threats of resignation.

After the crisis of 1932 (see below) and the suicide of his wife in November, Stalin gathered the reins of power even more firmly into his own hands. In this period, Stalin's colleagues still tried to defend their interests, and exercised some independence in discussions and

decisions about important issues. Remnants of collective leadership remained. But Politburo members were increasingly cautious, and Stalin was increasingly categorical and decisive. No case has so far been found of even one of his decisions being challenged directly by another Politburo member after August 1932. At that time, a couple of Politburo members expressed cautious doubts about the notorious 7 August decree imposing the death penalty for the theft of collective farm property.⁷ But, by the autumn of 1933, Stalin felt able to accuse Ordzhonikidze, Kaganovich and even his close associate Molotov of supporting 'reactionary elements in the party' against the Central Committee.⁸ On Stalin's initiative, in 1935, A. S. Enukidze, one of the most influential high officials, and an old friend of Stalin and other members of the Politburo, was expelled from the party and removed from his posts in spite of the implicit opposition of several members of the Politburo.⁹ In 1936, and at the beginning of 1937, Ordzhonikidze was the only member of the Politburo who cautiously defended his staff from arrest and tried to persuade Stalin that the repression of economic managers would be harmful to industry.¹⁰

Paradoxically, in spite of the overwhelming dominance of Stalin, in these years the Politburo continued to retain its formal powers, particularly in relation to decisions about current administration. The number of full meetings of the Politburo became much more infrequent, but all important economic decisions were approved by the members of the Politburo by poll (*oprosom*). The formal powers of the Politburo clearly emerge in the decisions about investment plans. Both annual plans and the frequent subsequent modifications were submitted to the Politburo for its approval. The members of the Politburo as individuals also retained their functions in their branch of economic administration. Let us take agriculture as an example. Stalin as an individual, and the Politburo as a collective entity, were liable to intervene in all aspects of policy, and to authorise the dismissal, and even arrest, of agricultural specialists whose behaviour was unacceptable. However, they were quite unable to control many major agricultural processes, which never appeared on the Politburo agenda, and were administered within the Commissariat of Agriculture (NKZem), or left to the collective farms and the peasants. Although Stalin could impose his will on the Politburo, there were many important matters on its agenda to which he paid little attention. Whole spheres of economic activity – for example, heavy industry – were in practice largely delegated to Stalin's colleagues.

Against this background, in this chapter we examine some aspects of the operation of the Politburo, and various influences brought to bear on

its economic decisions, with particular attention to the role of Stalin. We first summarise the results of four studies we have undertaken of major economic decisions in the years 1931–36; and then present an analysis of the letters and telegrams sent by Stalin during his vacations in the same years to Kaganovich, his deputy in the Politburo.

These years witnessed the conclusion of the First Five-Year Plan (October 1928–32) and the second stage of the collectivisation of agriculture and of ‘dekulakisation’, followed by the launch of the Second Five-Year Plan (1933–37) and significant shifts in investment priorities. In 1931–33 a profound economic crisis and widespread famine were induced by the collectivisation and exploitation of agriculture, and by the vast expansion of capital investment. This was followed in 1934–36 by a period in which industry expanded rapidly, agriculture recovered, and the standard of living improved. In the world at large, these were years of profound economic crisis and the rise of aggressive militarism and fascism, first in Japan, and then in Italy and Germany.

Some major economic decisions

Against this background, we shall examine:

- (i) the introduction of the ‘neo-Nep’ reforms of the spring of 1932 and the policy consequences of their failure;
- (ii) investment policy in 1932–34;
- (iii) the end of food rationing, 1934–35; and
- (iv) the leap in the investment plan in 1935 and the introduction of Stakhanovism, July–December 1935.

Neo-Nep and its failure, 1932–33: the role of mass protest

In May 1932, together with other reforms, the onerous state grain collection plans for the 1932 harvest were reduced, and peasants were granted legal rights to trade their surpluses at ‘prices formed on the market’. These decisions were intended to improve agricultural performance and the food situation, and were unofficially known as ‘neo-Nep’. Strong circumstantial evidence indicates that they were introduced as a direct result of the widespread social tension in the country. Peasants left the collective farms in significant numbers, and mass disturbances took place in the countryside, including attacks on state food and grain stores.¹¹ But for the leadership, and for Stalin personally, the urban protests and demonstrations in the previous month against the reduction of food rations were far more important. In these protests, the

textile workers of the Ivanovo industrial region were prominent.¹² The Politburo archives include reports sent to Stalin about these events, with annotations by him which indicate that he had read them carefully.¹³

The crucial decisions in May 1932 were all adopted by the Politburo. The discussion about grain collections was introduced by Stalin personally at a full meeting of the Politburo; but the equally important decision about the peasant market was merely approved by poll (*oprosom*). It is noteworthy that, in public pronouncements about these reforms, the decisions about the peasant market were never attributed to Stalin personally. This was not the case with other important measures at the time (for example, the notorious decree of 7 August was ascribed specifically to the initiative of Stalin). Stalin's lack of interest in economic methods of dealing with the crisis was indicated by his indifference to proposals to introduce a kind of 'neo-Nep' in industry by permitting state enterprises to sell on the open market output in excess of the plan.¹⁴

'Neo-Nep' failed utterly to bring about a reconciliation between the state and the peasants. The grain collection plans, although reduced, proved extremely burdensome as a result of the poor harvest. The Politburo imposed extremely repressive measures on the peasants to obtain grain for the towns – and this led directly to the famine in the spring of 1933. But this is only part of the story. Regional and district party secretaries, themselves responding to the disaffection and hunger in the countryside, pressed the Politburo continuously for a reduction of the grain plans. In two Ukrainian regions alone, fifty district party committees opposed their grain plans as unrealistic.¹⁵ The Politburo – always endorsing Stalin's personal judgement – reduced the grain collection plans for the collective farms and the individual peasants, in a series of decisions between August 1932 and February 1933, from 18.1 to 14.9 million tons. The Ukrainian plan was reduced from 5.8 to 3.8 million tons. Moreover, although the Politburo insisted at the beginning of 1933 that no further issues of food grain or grain for seed would be made to the countryside, in practice between 7 February and 20 July it approved no fewer than thirty-five separate decisions to issue small amounts of food grain to the rural population, and a further thirteen decisions allocating much larger amounts of grain for seed.¹⁶

Investment policy, 1932–34: the conflict of the commissariats

In the disputes about capital investment, the general pattern we have discerned emerged particularly sharply. Ordzhonikidze, as head of heavy industry (NKTyazhProm), and the heads of the other spending commissariats, pressed consistently for more investment. This pressure

was resisted by Molotov, in charge of Sovnarkom, and V. V. Kuibyshev, head of Gosplan (the State Planning Commission) until 1934, and his successor V. I. Mezhlauk, together with Grin'ko, the People's Commissar for Finance, and the head of the State Bank (L. E. Mar'yasin in 1934–37). Most of the heads of the spending departments were not members of the Politburo, and nor were Mezhlauk, Grin'ko and Mar'yasin. However, they sought to influence decisions by memoranda to the Politburo, and to Molotov, Stalin and Kuibyshev personally, and at meetings set up by the Politburo or Sovnarkom.

Throughout these years, Stalin acted as arbiter in the major disputes about investment, and made the final decisions. Major changes in investment and production plans were a result of compromises between the interests of various government departments, supported by Stalin's authority. A clear example is provided by the adoption of more moderate plans for industrial development in 1932–34. This major shift in economic policy, which has long been of great interest to historians, was not the result of a single decision, but developed gradually.

The first stage was the approval of investment plans in July–September 1932.¹⁷ In June 1932, the economy was in crisis. On the one hand, the major sectors of the economy, including heavy industry, were desperate to achieve the Five-Year Plan, due for completion by the end of 1932. But inflation was mounting, resulting in extreme shortages of goods in state shops and escalating prices on the free market. In approving the investment plan for July–September 1932, the Politburo sought to restrict the further growth of investment. On 8 June, it resolved that the allocation in July–September should not exceed the April–June level – 6,800 million rubles. However, nine days later, on 17 June, it increased the July–September plan to 250 million rubles above the April–June allocation; 150 million of this was allocated to the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry. Stalin reacted swiftly in a dry postscript to a letter to Kaganovich. He complained: 'the PC [People's Commissariat] of Heavy Industry was given too much money for the third quarter. They should have been given less. They are drowning in money.'¹⁸ A few days later, on 24 June, he sent a special letter to Kaganovich, Molotov and Ordzhonikidze in which he insisted on the dangerous nature of the decision to increase investment. On 29 June, however, he agreed not to change the plan for July–September, as it had already been approved.

A few weeks later, however, a quite different decision was taken. Grin'ko, the People's Commissar of Finance, proposed that investment in the July–September quarter of 1932 should be reduced immediately

by as much as 1.5 billion rubles. Molotov and Kaganovich supported a cut, though smaller than that proposed by Grin'ko. On 17 July, Kaganovich sent the request to Stalin. On 20 July, over a month after the original decision to increase investment in the July–September quarter, Stalin replied, roughly in agreement with Molotov and Kaganovich, that capital investment in the quarter must be reduced by a minimum of 500 million to 700 million rubles. In spite of Ordzhonikidze's protests, a reduction of 700 million rubles was approved.

What seemed to have started as an attempt to restrain the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry escalated into a general reduction of investment, and marked the beginning of a shift from over-ambitious to more sober planning generally. The 1933 plan set investment for the year at 18 milliard rubles, the same level as in 1932. Actual investment in real terms in 1933 was lower than in 1932. The investment plans for 1934 and 1935 were also quite modest. In September 1933, Stalin accepted a proposal from Kuibyshev and Molotov that investment in 1934 should amount to 'no more than 21 milliard rubles', and the 1935 investment plan amounted to only 21.7 milliard rubles.¹⁹

The plans for industrial production adopted in 1933–34 were also relatively modest, but were the subject of fierce arguments. At the January 1933 plenum of the Central Committee, Stalin, while stressing the continuation of class struggle in the countryside, declared that 'for the Second Five-Year Plan we should adopt a less rapid rate of growth of industrial production, a minimum of 13–14 per cent a year'.²⁰ In the course of 1933, however, the anticipated annual rate of industrial growth for 1933–37 was increased to 19 per cent. At the XVII party congress in January–February 1934 Ordzhonikidze, in a famous intervention, secured its reduction to 16.5 per cent. But at the congress, Molotov, while acquiescing to this proposal, insisted that the 16.5 per cent must not be reduced 'even by one-tenth of a per cent', and that the rate of growth in 1934 must not be reduced below 19 per cent.²¹

In general, the commissariats concerned with managing branches of the economy sought higher levels of investment and relatively low rates of growth of production, while Sovnarkom sought to limit the level of investment and increase the rates of growth. In 1932–4, with Stalin's support, investment, and state expenditure in general, were kept under quite firm control.

*The abolition of bread rationing, 1934–35*²²

The decision to abolish bread rationing was taken unilaterally by Stalin. Away from his office on vacation from 30 July to 30 October 1934, he

wrote to Kaganovich on 22 October proposing 'a most serious reform': the complete abolition of bread rationing from January 1935. According to Stalin, bread rationing was 'recently still necessary and useful, but [is] now a fetter on the economy'. The letter summarised the main provisions of the future reform in a concise statement: 'By lowering comm[ercial] prices and increasing the ration price we will fix an average price for bread and flour, stabilise on it and vary it by areas. This will make it necessary to increase wages, and the prices paid for cotton, wool, flax, leather, tobacco, etc.' There is no record of any discussion of bread rationing in Stalin's correspondence from vacation. On 28 October, evidently the day on which Kaganovich received the letter, the Politburo, as always, agreed to Stalin's proposal. The decision was not included in the minutes (*bez protokola*), presumably in order to maintain a particularly strict level of secrecy.

Although Stalin suddenly parachuted his decision into the Politburo, it was preceded by a series of developments that laid the ground for the abolition of bread rationing, and made it feasible and necessary. By 1934, bread, sugar, butter and other foods were sold by the state at both low, rationed prices and much higher 'commercial' prices (prices near the market level). In the first months of 1934, rationed bread was not available in sufficient quantities, and the state was having some difficulty in raising enough revenue to balance the state budget. In March, the amount of bread sold at commercial prices was increased, and on 1 June the ration price of bread was doubled. In the following months, the problem of balancing the budget became more acute. On 1 July, the Politburo adopted the plan for July–September. This authorised the issue during the quarter of 600 million rubles in additional currency, even though the 1934 plan had assumed that there would be no net issue of currency during the year. Then, on 25 July, Grin'ko and Mar'yasin addressed a joint memorandum to Stalin and Molotov pointing out that currency issue was ahead of the plan, and proposing a series of measures to accelerate the supply of goods at 'commercial prices'. Most of these measures were approved by the Politburo on 27 July.

All these measures were decided in Stalin's presence and with Stalin's involvement. By the time he went on vacation at the end of July, experience had demonstrated convincingly that the way out of the financial difficulties was to increase the prices of rationed goods, and the amount of commercial trade at higher prices. It also showed that commercial prices could not continue at the high level approved when these supplies were small. Financial necessity increased the proportion of commercial trade, and drove the commercial price and the normal rationed price closer together.

The record of Stalin's correspondence and the memoranda he received on vacation do not show that he kept up with the further major financial problems that arose in August and September. It is probable, however, that he was already persuaded that bread rationing could, and should, be abolished long before his letter of 22 October. A series of memoranda he despatched to Kaganovich, beginning on 12 August, called for increased grain collections in most urgent terms; and his letter of 22 October made it clear that he regarded this extra grain as a *sine qua non* of the successful abolition of bread rationing. For this purpose, he wrote, 'it is necessary to have in the hand of the state 1400–1500 million puds [22.9–24.6 million tons] of grain'.

*The 1936 plan and the launching of the Stakhanov movement, July–September 1935: where was Stalin?*²³

By 1935, the economic situation was much more favourable. In 1933, 1934 and 1935 the growth of investment was limited to moderate levels. In the preparation of the plans for each of these years, Stalin accepted the more cautious viewpoint of Sovnarkom and Gosplan.²⁴ However, by 1935, it was clear that it would be extremely difficult to achieve the major economic goals of the Second Five-Year Plan to which the Politburo was committed: the continued expansion of the heavy industrial base, the rapid increase of defence and armaments expenditure in view of the threatening international situation, and the expansion of personal consumption and the social infrastructure. It was in this context that the Politburo accepted in the first six months of 1935 a considerable expansion in the 1935 investment plan. Investment in the railways was drastically increased, the allocation to defence was increased by 41 per cent, and an ambitious plan was approved for the construction of urban schools. Then, in the summer of 1935, in the course of preparing the 1936 plan, a further drastic shift in investment was agreed. An informal conference in Stalin's office on 21 July, followed by a Politburo meeting on 28 July, increased the initial plan proposed by Gosplan from 17.7 to 27.3 billion rubles.²⁵ In a conciliatory letter to Molotov, Stalin strongly supported these decisions:

22mld was not enough, and, as can be seen, could not be enough. The increase in school building (+760 mil), light industry, timber, food industry and local industry (+900 mln rub and more), in defence (+1mld 100mln), in health, on the Moscow canal project and other items (over 400 mil r) determined the physiognomy and size of the control figures for 1936. I do not complain, because

everything that increases the production of consumer goods for the mass market must be given more emphasis from year to year. Without this it is not possible to advance at present.²⁶

Molotov had no alternative but to accept this *fait accompli*. In the final letter of this sequence, written to Stalin on 2 August, he wrote grudgingly:

I would have preferred a smaller amount of capital construction, but I think that we shall cope if we put our shoulders to the wheel (*ponatuzhivshis*) even with the approved plan of 25 mld. r. The possibility of increasing industrial production by 23–22% favours this outcome.²⁷

Molotov thus repeated the approach he took in his public statement at the XVII party congress. He sought to limit capital investment, and insisted that its increase should be accompanied by increased production.

At this stage in the Second Five-Year Plan it was already obvious that, even with the increase proposed for the 1936 plan, capital investment would be insufficient to achieve the targets of the Second Five-Year Plan without an enormous improvement in productivity. In 1934, Ordzhonikidze campaigned successfully for the achievement of increased yields from capital equipment. In April 1935, Kaganovich, newly-appointed People's Commissar of Transport (NKPS), criticised strongly the engineers in the commissariat who purportedly insisted that a loading of 55,000–58,000 freight wagons a day was a maximum limit, with the existing state of track and rolling stock. These limits were soon referred to as 'the bourgeois theory of the "limit"', and the 'limiters' (*predel'shchiki*) were summarily dismissed.

In the spring of 1935, Stalin made his support for the intensification of production abundantly clear. An article attacking the anti-state theory of the limit, published in *Pravda* on 11 May, and signed 'Transportnik', is believed to have been written by Stalin.²⁸ Meanwhile, on 4 May, Stalin's famous speech to Red Army graduates, announcing that in future 'cadres decide everything', was in effect a call for the intensification of production. According to Stalin, when the new technology was mastered by people it could, and must, 'bring about miracles', which he quantified dramatically and unrealistically: 'If at our first-class works and factories, and in our state farms and collective farms, and in our Red Army, there were sufficient cadres who were capable of managing this technology, the country would receive a result double or treble what it has now.'²⁹

Such an extraordinary intensification of production could only be achieved if industry and other sectors of the economy made special efforts to increase the productivity of labour. The top leaders in industry put strong pressure on the managers of factories and mines to redouble their efforts. It was in this context that Stakhanov's record for mining coal was achieved in the night of 30–31 August 1935, and this soon received a great deal of enthusiastic publicity in the industrial and general press. The culmination of the first stage of the campaign came on 14–17 November, with the First All-Union Conference of Stakhanovite Working Men and Women.

Stalin was on vacation between 10 August and 1 November. For this period we have a full record of his correspondence with Kaganovich. Lists are also available of the documents he received while on vacation, as well as of the decisions made by the Politburo in Moscow during his absence. When we examined these records, we were surprised to find that neither the Politburo nor Stalin appears to have played any part in these initial stages of the campaign. The Stakhanov movement does not seem to have appeared on the Politburo agenda until the Stakhanovite conference of 14–17 November. Even then, the Politburo decisions were on rather minor aspects of the movement.³⁰ And Stalin did not commit himself publicly to support for the movement until his speech of 17 November at the conference. It was entirely normal for Stalin not to commit himself to a new initiative until he thought it had proved itself. Nevertheless, it is certainly remarkable that in the Stalin–Kaganovich letters and telegrams, the sole mention of the movement (without any reference to Stakhanov himself) was a paragraph in Kaganovich's telegram of 5 September 1935, in which he took the opportunity to inform Stalin about the success of locomotive drivers in speeding up the trains.³¹ Stalin apparently made no response.

The new campaign in industry that emerged in 1935 was thus not planned in advance in the Politburo or by the narrow ruling group, but was to a considerable extent the personal initiative of Ordzhonikidze. It is *possible* that Ordzhonikidze wrote enthusiastically to Stalin or telephoned him about the developments in heavy industry, but no record of this has so far been traced.³² The only letters by Ordzhonikidze recorded in the lists kept by Stalin's office, dated 23 and 28 September, concern the testing of a divisional gun and its shells. Stalin's only two references to Ordzhonikidze in his correspondence with Kaganovich merely expressed indignation about his friendly relations with Enukidze,³³ and insisted that, against Ordzhonikidze's wish, his vacation should be extended on health grounds.³⁴

At the conference on 17 November, Stalin proclaimed that 'the movement is breaking down old attitudes to technology, is breaking down the old technical norms, the old estimates of capacity, the old production plans', and insisted that not only production plans but also norms of output could be increased as a result of the increased productivity that Stakhanovism made possible (that is, the amount earned for a unit of output could be reduced). Nevertheless, in his speech and in his subsequent public appearances Stalin put less emphasis on the economic results of Stakhanovism and more on the importance of the movement in demonstrating the unity between the leadership and the ordinary man in the street. But once it became clear that the leap forward promised by Stakhanovism would not be achieved, his interest faded.³⁵

It is in the context of the failure of Stakhanovism and the increase in investment to achieve a revolutionary leap in production that, in the summer of 1936, the Politburo returned to policies of more balanced growth. The reasons for this shift remain to be investigated in detail. One important factor was certainly anxiety about financial stability. On 29 April 1936, the Politburo decided to save money by reducing the interest which it paid on mass loans to the population from 8–10 per cent to only 4 per cent, and to extend the length of the loans from ten to twenty years; all previous loans were to be converted to these less favourable terms. Stalin, by this time, shared the apprehensions of Molotov, Gosplan and NKFin. However, anxious about the indignation that these measures would arouse among the 50 million loan holders, he decided to report the matter to the Central Committee plenum before a public announcement. His brief statement to the plenum on 3 June was quite frank:

This is a serious matter, comrades, which cannot be postponed. It is a result of the need for money. As you are well aware, we spend an alarming amount of money on things that cannot be delayed. Expenditure is growing at a rapid rate. Much money has been spent, and is being spent, on such matters as building schools, teachers' pay, urban improvement, irrigation and afforestation of a number of parts of the country, and constructing canals.

Money is being spent on defence, and even more will be spent in future. Defence must be developed as required, both in quality and especially in quantity. We do not yet have a navy, and a new one must be established. This is a very serious and expensive matter.

Then it must be borne in mind that in 1937 we will begin a mass reduction of the prices of food products and consumer goods.

A commission is working under cde. Molotov... There is already a target of reducing prices by 10, 20 and in some cases 30%. This circumstance will also increase the tension on our state budget.

That is the situation, comrades.³⁶

In July, Gosplan despatched to Stalin and Molotov the draft plan directives for 1937. Gosplan proposed that the rate of growth of industrial production in 1937 should be only 20.1 per cent in comparison with the 34.4 per cent planned for 1936, while the productivity of labour would increase by 20 per cent. The volume of investment should be planned at 28.6 milliard rubles as compared with the planned 35.5 milliard in 1936.³⁷

In sharp contrast with the discussions of the 1936 plan in July 1935, on 19 July 1936, the Politburo simply accepted the Gosplan proposal for a reduction in capital investment. As for industrial production, it was to increase by a relatively modest 23 per cent, with light, food, timber and local industries growing more rapidly than heavy industry.³⁸

In these examples of major economic decisions in 1932–36 Stalin and the Politburo reacted (or did not react) to circumstances and pressures in a variety of ways, within the context of Stalin's personal power.

In 1932–33, Stalin, supported by Kaganovich and the rest of the Politburo, forced through the grain collections in spite of the resulting famine, but at the same time they adjusted policies in response to hostile reactions from the population. In the spring of 1932, the Politburo launched 'Neo-Nep', following urban protests against cuts in the food ration. Stalin appears to have accepted rather than initiated 'Neo-Nep'. Following the 1932 harvest, rural dissatisfaction, unrest and disorder were conveyed to Stalin and Kaganovich by the local party apparatus and the OGPU. In response, the Politburo approved reductions in the grain collections and the allocation of food and seed loans to the countryside, in spite of frequent declarations that no such modifications would be made. These modifications were all approved specifically by Stalin, and were sometimes initiated by him.

In investment policy, Stalin acted as arbiter between the spending commissariats and the more cautious 'balancing' departments. In July–September 1932, and in the plans for 1933, 1934, 1935 and 1937, he came down on the side of moderation. In the plan for 1936 he strongly supported the spending departments.

Stalin unilaterally decided to abolish bread rationing, effective from 1 January 1935, but this decision was taken in the context of financial

pressures towards increased state sales at market prices, and of active support for moves towards derationing from the People's Commissariats of Finance and Trade, and the State Bank. The way in which this decision was reached reflects an important feature of decision-making in these years. While those responsible for finance and trade raised the question of the abolition of rationing implicitly in their memoranda to the Soviet government, only Stalin himself could put this proposal firmly on the agenda. Using information and analysis from the commissariats and the bank, Stalin personally decided when bread rationing should be abolished, making no mention of his 'co-authors'.

The Stakhanov campaign was launched in a different manner. In its first stages (August–October 1935) Stalin played no part, and at this time he apparently expressed no interest in the campaign. However, before this, in the spring of 1935, he actively supported the drive to force up productivity on the railways, and to 'bring about miracles' throughout the economy by the mastering of technology. When he returned from vacation in November he placed himself, for a time, at the head of the Stakhanovite movement, which then involved the whole Politburo.

In general, the economic decision-making process in the 1930s may be seen as the interaction of several tendencies within and close to the Politburo. By virtue of their positions at the head of Sovnarkom, Molotov, together with Kuibyshev and later V. Ya. Chubar' (Molotov's deputies), supported a more moderate investment policy, but higher rates of growth of production. A moderate level of investment, and of state expenditure generally, was strongly advocated by the planning and financial departments also concerned with 'balancing' the economy, whose members did not belong to the Politburo (Mezhlauk, Grin'ko, Mar'yasin); Gosplan may also have tended to advocate higher rates of growth. On the other hand, members of the Politburo who were in charge of the main commissariats concerned with branches of the economy (Ordzhonikidze, Mikoyan and Kaganovich – in his capacity as head of transport), jointly with People's Commissars who did not belong to the Politburo (Ya. A. Yakovlev, S. S. Lobov and others), called for higher levels of investment, and resisted attempts to increase the production plans of their own commissariats. Stalin acted as an independent arbitrating force, supporting one group or another depending on circumstances. His authority in economic matters grew with the increase in his personal power.

Stalin's role in economic policy-making is a particularly intriguing problem for historians, given that the 'balancing' and 'economic' commissariats were a more-or-less stable element in decision-making. Stalin was guided both by his own political and economic convictions and prejudices, and by the specific circumstances, relying on the information that reached him. The state of the sources makes it extremely difficult, perhaps impossible, to reconstruct the logic of Stalin's actions in each particular case. The information and memoranda that Stalin received cannot be found in the archives in any systematic or complete form, and key documents that influenced Stalin are evidently missing. The story has to be pieced together from indirect as well as direct evidence. One of the most important sources in revealing Stalin's economic logic is the Stalin–Kaganovich correspondence (SKP) of 1931–36.

The Stalin–Kaganovich correspondence: the pattern of Stalin's interests

While Stalin was away from Moscow for long periods of annual leave in the early to mid-1930s, he was never far away from work. He was kept well informed about current events through almost daily telegrams and letters, mainly sent by his deputy in Moscow, Kaganovich, and he replied to these with corresponding regularity. We examine here those issues about which Stalin felt it necessary to respond to Kaganovich, and those on which Stalin initiated debate himself. We analyse some 350 telegrams and letters (commenting on over 650 issues) sent by Stalin to Kaganovich and his Politburo colleagues in Moscow during the six vacations from 1931 to 1936.³⁹ The pattern of Stalin's interests established by this numerical analysis is supplemented by considering those issues to which he devoted a large amount of space, or on which he demonstrated particular sensitivity.

We discuss three very broad areas of concern. Stalin spent roughly a third of his time on each:

- (i) the economy;
- (ii) domestic policy; and
- (iii) foreign policy and foreign trade.

These rather arbitrary divisions are not exclusive. There is considerable overlap in many of the issues raised. For example, the 7 August 1932 decree, which imposed harsh penalties on those found guilty of the theft of state property, was a domestic legislative initiative that had

implications for the Soviet economy and for security. Similarly, the dismissal of important political figures was often significant both for general domestic politics and for internal security, especially in the years immediately preceding the purges. The dismissal of Enukidze in 1935 provides an interesting example of this.

The economy

We identify the following areas of concern: agriculture, industry, the planning system, finance and investment policy, labour questions, internal trade, the use of foreign technology, and transport and communications. These issues, taken together, accounted for 32.7 per cent of Stalin's correspondence with Kaganovich (see Table 4.1).

What is clearly evident from an analysis of the SKP is the degree of attention Stalin paid to questions relating to agriculture in the early to mid-1930s. This is not surprising, given the turmoil experienced in the Soviet countryside in the wake of the collectivisation drives in 1930 and 1931, and the famine in a number of regions in 1932–33. In particular, Stalin monitored grain supplies closely, and was concerned about the establishment of a new form of organisational administration in the rural economy with the introduction of the Machine-Tractor Stations. Stalin's attention to the agricultural sector remained consistently high throughout the years 1931–36.

He devoted overwhelming attention to the grain collection campaigns. His belief that the grain collections were the key to success is displayed strikingly in the number of occasions on which he referred to them in his correspondence. Even more remarkable is the number of references to the collections in the lists of documents *received* by Stalin during his vacations.⁴⁰ He was sent statistical reports on the progress of the grain collections every five days, and was often sent three or four reports on each occasion. Thus, for example, he received such reports on twelve occasions in 1932 and thirteen in 1935. The 1933 lists also show the series G (top-secret) telegrams that were sent to Stalin while on vacation: fifteen of the seventeen were five-daily reports on the grain collections.⁴¹ He was sent reports on more general matters only on a couple of occasions – for example, the spring sowing (10 July 1932), and the winter sowing and ploughing-up of fallow (5 October 1933). He received no statistics about the harvest, even during the poor harvest of 1936. He also occasionally received statistics about the foreign trade balance (see below). Otherwise, the only statistics he received concerned monthly industrial production. These were received irregularly: on five occasions in both 1932 and 1933, and two in both 1934 and 1935; but

Table 4.1 Areas of policy-making considered in Stalin–Kaganovich correspondence, 1931–1936

	21 Aug.–5 Oct. 1931		4 Jun.–23 Aug. 1932		19 Aug.–2 Nov.* 1933		4 Aug.–22 Oct. 1934		15 Aug.–29 Oct. 1935		16 Aug.–17 Oct. 1936		Total no.	% no.
	No. ¹	Docs ²	No. ¹	Docs ²	No. ¹	Docs ²	No. ¹	Docs ²	No. ¹	Docs ²	No. ¹	Docs ²		
1 Economy														
Agriculture	14	11	37	30	15	13	17	14	14	14	8	7	105	16.1
Industry	8	7	18	14	7	6	3	3	1	1			37	5.7
Transport	7	6	7	6	11	8	1	1	1	1			27	4.1
Trade	6	5	2	1	1	1	1	1	6	6			16	2.4
Finance	5	5	3	3					2	2			10	1.5
Foreign technology	1	1	3	3	4	4							8	1.2
Labour	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1					6	0.9
Planning	1	1	2	2	1	1			1	1			5	0.8
2 Domestic policy														
Politics	20	14	25	18	22	18	14	13	11	9	11	11	103	15.7
Media	11	11	17	15	3	3	13	13	4	4	1	1	49	7.5
Other	10	10	12	11	10	8	3	2	9	9	1	1	45	6.9
Security	5	5	11	8	5	5	4	4	10	10	8	7	43	6.6
Military	2	2	5	3	4	4	4	4	6	6			21	3.2

3 Foreign policy and foreign trade														
Foreign policy	9	9	33	28	23	23	19	15	26	21	13	10	123	18.8
Foreign trade	26	17	15	15			5	5	6	5	4	4	56	8.6
Total nos.	127		191		108		85		97		46		654	100.0
Total docs		50		91		61		55		58		34	349	
Economy														32.7%
Domestic policy														39.9%
Foreign policy + trade														27.4%

Source: Calculated from the data in O. V. Khlevnyuk, R. W. Davies, L. P. Kosheleva, E. A. Rees and L. A. Rogovaya (eds), *Stalin i Kaganovich: perepiska, 1931–1936 gg.* (Moscow, 2001).

Notes: * In addition: 19 Feb., 19 Jun., 3 Aug.

1. No – the number of times a selected issue is mentioned.

2. Doc – the number of documents in which this issue is mentioned.

3. Total Docs – are the documents (telegrams) that Stalin himself sent, and does not include those that he received.

he was not sent the monthly statistics at all in 1931 and 1936. Stalin scrutinised economic statistics with tunnel vision.

In contrast to the agricultural sector, Stalin appears to have been little concerned with industrial policy whilst he was away from Moscow. Questions relating directly to individual industrial sectors, the overall planning system and investment policy received very little attention, especially outside the crisis year of 1932. Similarly, questions relating to labour (including wages and the trade unions), finance (the budget and foreign currency), the use of foreign technologies, and internal trade (including prices, rationing and organisational structure) were mentioned relatively rarely in the SKP, despite their central importance to Soviet economic policy in this period.

In the early years of the period under review, Stalin turned his attention to questions relating to transport and communications, particularly the railways and the development of new water communication routes, such as the Belomor canal and the Moscow–Volga canal, and attention was also given to the construction of the Moscow metro. Road and air transport received little attention, except for the persistent problem of the death of high-ranking officials in plane crashes.

Domestic policy

Stalin adjudicated a range of issues relating to Soviet domestic policy in the early to mid-1930s: internal politics, security issues, the press and media, and ‘other’ individual cases of interest. These issues, taken together, accounted for 39.9 per cent of Stalin’s correspondence with Kaganovich, including almost 7 per cent relating to ‘other’ matters (see Table 4.1).

Stalin’s key concerns in domestic policy in this period, as revealed by the SKP, were the appointment of leading officials in the Communist Party and a number of the economic commissariats, and the organisational structure of various government bodies. In his responses to Kaganovich, Stalin often supported or criticised decisions proposed by Politburo colleagues.

It is clear from the correspondence that Stalin strongly believed in the efficacy of organisational changes. His concentration on the routine activity of the machinery of party and state corresponded fully to his own belief in the power of the state and party machines, and of administrative measures. Such attempts to solve urgent problems by reorganising the administration are a characteristic of many administrators in many countries at various levels of administration. Stalin was a particularly strong advocate of this faith in administration. For example, in his

letters in the summer of 1932, when agriculture was undergoing a severe crisis, he devoted a great deal of attention to reorganising the People's Commissariat of Agriculture (NKZem). In a long letter dated 17 July he criticised the policy of NKZem and proposed to hive off the management of state farms into a special commissariat, leaving NKZem the responsibility for administering the Machine-Tractor Stations and the collective farms.⁴² On 5 August, he even claimed that 'the main shortcoming in the work of the leadership bodies (top and bottom) in agriculture (at this moment) has to do with organisational lapses'.⁴³

Matters of security were also in the forefront of Stalin's attention. These included the structure and organisation of OGPU/NKVD, arrests, deportations, special settlers and the Gulag, and issues relating to military and defence, particularly in the Far East.

It is evident from the SKP that Stalin was at the forefront of the growing repression. The most well-known example is provided by the notorious decree of 7 August 1932, which imposed the death penalty or a minimum of ten years' imprisonment for the theft of state and collective farm property.⁴⁴ The letters provide us with valuable information about the circumstances in which these decisions were adopted.⁴⁵ They show that the decree was initiated by Stalin personally. They also show that it met with opposition in the Politburo. Unfortunately, the rough draft of Kaganovich's letter omits the names of the members of the Politburo who expressed criticisms of the decree, and the Stalin files do not contain this letter. Stalin overrode any criticism unhesitatingly, though he later modified the operation of the decree when it emerged that it was unrealistically harsh.

The correspondence also provides striking examples of Stalin's eagerness to find sinister conspiracy in acts of insubordination. The reaction of Stalin to the 'Nakhaev affair' was a sinister manifestation of the suspicion and cruelty that was deeply rooted in his mentality, together with a conventional image of 'the sharpening of the class struggle,' and was supported or accepted by the other leaders. Nothing was known about this affair until the archives were declassified. On 5 August 1934, A. S. Nakhaev, the chief of staff of the artillery division of Osoaviakhim, the Society to Assist Defence, Aircraft and Chemical Development (the organisation responsible for defence against air and gas attack), took charge of a detachment of recruits who were undergoing military training in a camp located near Moscow. The detachment was brought on to the territory of the barracks of the 2nd Infantry Regiment of the Moscow Proletarian Infantry Division, located almost in the centre of Moscow. Nakhaev proceeded to address the soldiers. According to the

statements of eyewitnesses, he called for a new revolution and a new government.⁴⁶

The soldiers were not armed (trainees were not issued with weapons that were ready to be fired). Nakhaev ordered them to occupy the guard-house of the unit and seize the arms that were stored there. However, no one obeyed the order, and Nakhaev was arrested almost immediately. Kaganovich's first communication to Stalin on the matter was quite restrained.⁴⁷ Explaining that the results of the investigation were not yet available, he did not draw definite conclusions. He also told Stalin that, in K. E. Voroshilov's opinion, Nakhaev was a 'psychopath'. There were more than enough grounds for this conclusion. Nakhaev's actions looked senseless. The information assembled about Nakhaev portrayed a sick, isolated thirty-year-old, weighed down with numerous everyday problems and in a state of disarray in his military service. It also emerged that Nakhaev was preparing to commit suicide, but was arrested so quickly that he did not have time to drink the poisoned liquid in the bottle he had prepared.

Stalin, in contrast to Kaganovich's approach, pushed the affair in a different direction. When he received the first, very vague records of the interrogation of Nakhaev, Stalin insisted that Nakhaev should be made to confess that he was a member of a whole organisation and also a foreign spy, 'Polish-German or Japanese'. Stalin was not satisfied with the 'liberalism' of the Chekists (the OGPU interrogators), and insisted that Nakhaev must be treated with severity – 'he must be destroyed'. In response to Stalin's directives, the Chekists, with a great deal of effort, managed to fabricate a case about Nakhaev's links with his former colleague in the Moscow Institute of Physical Fitness, the former tsarist General Bykov, who was allegedly connected with the Estonian diplomatic mission in Moscow.⁴⁸ On 5 December 1934, the Politburo, in accordance with G. G. Yagoda's proposal in his memorandum, resolved to forward the Nakhaev case to a closed hearing in the military tribunal of the Supreme Court of the USSR.⁴⁹ Nakhaev was probably executed.

The methods used in fabricating the Nakhaev affair were characteristic of the Stalin period. Stalin behaved similarly towards Enukidze in 1935, and his attitude to Zinoviev and Kamenev in 1936 displays these tendencies even more starkly.

Stalin commented regularly on the ways in which events were reported in the media, particularly the daily newspapers, *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*. He was concerned here with the reporting of both domestic and foreign affairs, and showed an awareness also of issues being discussed in the overseas press.

'Other' individual areas of concern also attracted Stalin's attention. These included social-cultural issues, such as educational policy and public catering, the reconstruction of Moscow, including architectural designs and prices on the new metro system, anniversary celebrations, literature and the arts.

Foreign policy and foreign trade

Foreign policy alone attracted the greatest amount of Stalin's commentary. Almost a fifth (18.8 per cent) of his correspondence with Kaganovich, and on this matter also very often Molotov (and Voroshilov), was concerned with the Soviet Union's international relations, particularly in the Far East (with the Japanese invasion into Manchuria in 1931 and the crisis in the Chinese Eastern Railway), Western Europe and with the USA (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2). Despite the fact that he was on vacation, Stalin remained closely in touch with world events, and this was especially the case with the rise of European fascism by the mid-1930s. In the years 1933–36, foreign policy was the issue that received most of Stalin's attention in his correspondence with Kaganovich and other Politburo members, and in 1932 foreign policy took second place only to agriculture (see Table 4.3). By 1935 and 1936, foreign policy concerns were accounting for over a quarter of Stalin's correspondence.

Stalin also took considerable interest in issues relating to foreign trade, particularly the foreign trade balance, and the import and export markets with European trading partners and the United States of America. These accounted for a further 8.6 per cent of his correspondence in the SKP, though his interest in foreign trade issues appears to have declined considerably after 1932 (see Tables 4.1 and 4.3).

Stalin, as the figures in the tables indicate, paid close attention to Soviet relations with the outside world. Before the Politburo archives were opened, this feature of Stalin's interests was unexpected. Jonathan Haslam, perhaps the best-informed among Western historians regarding Soviet foreign policy, wrote that in the early 1930s 'Stalin himself appears, at least from the documents now available, to have only rarely taken a direct hand in the day-to-day running of diplomacy; it was simply not his forte.'⁵⁰ The Politburo protocols, and correspondence such as that between Stalin and Kaganovich, reveal, however, that even in the early 1930s, Stalin followed and took decisions on Soviet foreign relations, on matters both large and small.

These documents show that Stalin received quite precise and reliable information on the situation in the country, albeit being one-sided. He was, of course, unable to pay equal attention to all facts and events.

Table 4.2 Foreign policy issues discussed in the Stalin–Kaganovich correspondence, 1931–1936

	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	Total
Japan	2	12	7	8	5		34
Germany	1	6	3	2	3	2	17
USA	1	6	5		2		14
China		9		1	2		12
Chinese Eastern Railway	1	1	4	5			11
Comintern/Cominform		5	1	1	1	1	9
France		2	2		3	1	8
International conferences				1	3	4	8
Manchuria		2	1		4		7
Mongolia		3		1	3		7
League of Nations	1		1		2	2	6
Italy	1		1		2	1	5
Turkey			3	1			4
England			1		2		3
Poland	3						3
Abyssinia					2		2
Czechoslovakia					2		2
Norway						2	2
Persia			2				2
Romania		1			1		2
Switzerland				1	1		2
Afghanistan				1			1
Argentina	1						1
Greece			1				1
Iraq			1				1
Mexico						1	1
Portugal						1	1
Spain						1	1
Total	11	47	33	22	38	16	

Source: Calculated from the data in O. V. Khlevnyuk, R. W. Davies, L. P. Kosheleva, E. A. Rees and L. A. Rogovaya (eds), *Stalin i Kaganovich: perepiska, 1931–1936 gg.* (Moscow, 2001).

In some cases, his choice of issue was unexpected: he would sometimes devote his attention to secondary questions, while ignoring more important ones.

But as with many political and business leaders elsewhere in the world, Stalin's intermittent preoccupation with comparatively minor matters was an important element in his system of control. Soviet officials at every level, including the other members of the Politburo, could not know which questions would occupy Stalin's attention at any given moment, leading to commotion and upheavals, and the replacement or even arrest

Table 4.3 Percentage of the Stalin–Kaganovich correspondence devoted to economic, domestic and foreign matters, 1931–1936 (percentages)

	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936
1 Economy						
Agriculture	11.0	19.4	13.9	20	14.4	17.4
Finance	3.9	1.6			2.1	
Foreign technology	0.8	1.6	3.7			
Industry	6.3	9.4	6.5	3.5	1.0	
Labour	1.6	0.5	1.9	1.2		
Planning	0.8	1.0	0.9		1.0	
Trade	4.7	1.0	0.9	1.2	6.2	
Transport	5.5	3.7	10.2	1.2	1.0	
2 Domestic policy						
Media	8.7	8.9	2.8	15.3	4.1	2.2
Military	1.6	2.6	3.7	4.7	6.2	
Other	7.9	6.3	9.3	3.5	9.3	2.2
Politics	15.7	13.1	20.4	16.5	11.3	23.9
Security	3.9	5.8	4.6	4.7	10.3	17.4
3 Foreign policy and foreign trade						
Foreign policy	7.1	17.3	21.3	22.4	26.8	28.3
Foreign trade	20.5	7.9		5.9	6.2	8.7

Source: Calculated from the data in O. V. Khlevnyuk, R. W. Davies, L. P. Kosheleva, E. A. Rees and L. A. Rogovaya (eds) *Stalin i Kaganovich: perepiska, 1931–1936gg.* (Moscow, 2001).

of personnel. This kept the state machine in a state of tension, and created the illusion that the whole vast apparatus of state was under control.

The political principles upheld by the Stalin regime obviously exercised a considerable influence on particular decisions. Belief in the necessity of the centralisation of authority and the commanding role of the state acted against private initiatives and market relations. These principles were not simply a political ideology. The collectivisation of agriculture and forced industrialisation brought definite achievements as well as tragic consequences, and seemed to Stalin and his colleagues to justify the path they were following.

In this context, Stalin clearly tended to prefer administrative and repressive methods of controlling the economy, paying a great deal of attention to the elaboration of administrative reorganisations and repressive laws. In response to social tension or economic crisis, he would accept or advocate concessions and compromises. But on the whole he did so unwillingly, and was always liable to return to methods of administrative control. Both Stalin's insistence on centralised control and his pragmatic vacillations were a significant factor in Soviet economic policy.

Notes and references

1. See R. W. Davies and S. G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931–1933* (Basingstoke, 2003).
2. A. I. Mikoyan, *Tak eto bylo* (Moscow, 1999), p. 520. Mikoyan was in charge of internal trade.
3. See for example, the articles by Getty and Starkov in J. A. Getty and R. Manning (eds), *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1993).
4. F. Chuev, *Tak govoril Kaganovich* (Moscow, 1992), p. 154.
5. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no – politicheskoi istorii (henceforth RGASPI) 81/3/99, 27–8 (9 September).
6. RGASPI, 81/3/100, 101–2 (not dated, written after 11 August).
7. See O. Khlevnyuk, R. U. Devis [R. W. Davies], L. Kosheleva, E. A. Ris [Rees] and L. Rogovaya (eds) *Stalin i Kaganovich: perepiska, 1931–1936* (Moscow, 2001) (henceforth SKP), pp. 256–7.
8. SKP, pp. 302–4, 318–9, 323, 325, 333; *Pis'ma I. V. Stalina V. M. Molotovu* (Moscow, 1995), pp. 247–9.
9. SKP, pp. 557–8, 560, 580, 583.
10. SKP, pp. 621–2; O. Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's Shadow: The Career of 'Sergo' Ordzhonikidze* (New York and London, 1995), pp. 78–143.
11. See the OGPU reports on October 1931–March 1932 in *Tragediya sovetskoii derevni*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 2001), pp. 318–54.
12. See R. W. Davies, *Crisis and Progress in the Soviet Economy, 1931–1933* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 188–91; and J. J. Rossman, 'The Teikovo Cotton Workers' Strike of April 1932: Class, Gender and Identity Politics in Stalin's Russia', *Russian Review*, January 1997, vol. 56, pp. 44–69.
13. APRF (Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiskoi Federatsii), 3/22/39, 6–7.
14. SKP, pp. 189–90.
15. See Stalin's letter to Kaganovich dated 11 August 1932: SKP, p. 273.
16. See R. W. Davies and S. G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger* (Basingstoke, 2003).
17. For material in this section, see SKP, p. 132, and the accompanying correspondence.
18. SKP, pp. 186–7.
19. See R. W. Davies and O. Khlevnyuk, 'Gosplan', in E. A. Rees, (ed.), *Decision-making in the Soviet Command Economy, 1933–37* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 52–3.
20. I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniya*, vol. xiii (Moscow, 1951), p. 186.
21. *XVII s"ezd VKP(b): stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1934), pp. 435, 523.
22. For references to material in this section, see O. Khlevnyuk and R. W. Davies, 'The End of Rationing in the Soviet Union, 1934–1935', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 51, no. 4 (1999), pp. 557–609.
23. The Stakhanov movement is discussed further in a paper by R. W. Davies and Oleg Khlevnyuk, 'Stakhanovism and the Soviet Economy', in *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 54, no. 6, 2002, pp. 867–903.
24. See Davies and Khlevnyuk, 'Gosplan' (1997), pp. 52–5.
25. See *ibid.*, pp. 54–6.
26. *Pis'ma I. V. Stalina V. M. Molotovu* (Moscow, 1995), p. 251.
27. APRF, 45/1/769, 162–3.

28. See E. A. Rees, *Stalinism and Soviet Rail Transport, 1928–1941* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 114–18.
29. *Pravda*, 6 May 1935; Stalin, *Sochineniya*, vol. xiv (ed. Robert H. McNeal) (Stanford, 1967), p. 63. Note that the Russian word ‘*tekhnika*’, which we have inadequately translated here as ‘technology’ means not only technical methods but also productive capital, machinery.
30. On 27 November, the Politburo resolved that the materials of the conference should be published (RGASPI, 17/3/973, 4). On 29 November it authorised NKPishProm (the People’s Commissariat of the Food Industry) to convene a festival of Stakhanovites and shock workers in the dairy industry, and on 8 December it approved a decree of TsIK on rewards to the initiators of the Stakhanov movement (RGASPI, 17/3/973, 6, 20).
31. RGASPI, 558/11/743, 29–36.
32. Stalin was in Sochi, and Ordzhonikidze on the northern side of the mountains in Kislovodsk and Zheleznovodsk.
33. SKP, pp. 557–8 (telegram of 7 September, letter of 8 September).
34. SKP, p. 584 (telegram of 24 September).
35. For a further discussion of the very limited economic success of Stakhanovism, see R. W. Davies and O. Khlevnyuk, ‘Stakhanovism and the Soviet Economy’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 54, 2002, pp. 889–96.
36. RGASPI, 17/2/572, 34ob., 35.
37. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (henceforth RGAE) 4372/92/63, 210–25.
38. RGASPI, 17/3/979, 56–9. These proposals were embodied in a joint Central Committee and Sovnarkom decree: Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (henceforth GARF) 5446/57/42, 114–22 (art. 1282/236s). See also R. W. Davies and O. Khlevnyuk, ‘Gosplan’ (1997), pp. 57–8. It is probable that these proposals were discussed at a large gathering of the relevant political leaders and senior officials in Stalin’s office, which met from 14.25 to 15.50 on 17 July (see *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 4, 1995, pp. 30–1).
39. See SKP. We are grateful to Chris Joyce for constructing the database from which this analysis is drawn.
40. The lists of documents received by Stalin will be examined more fully in due course.
41. The other two reported the German refusal to admit Soviet journalists to the Reichstag trial and ‘the receipt of a greetings telegram’.
42. SKP, pp. 232–3.
43. SKP, p. 262.
44. *Sobranie zakonov*, 1932, arts. 360, 375.
45. SKP, pp. 235, 240–6, 256–7, 260–3.
46. APRE, 3/50/407, 5.
47. For the correspondence on this issue, see SKP, pp. 411–12, 421, 425, 429, 431–2, 437, 459–60.
48. *Akademia nauk v resheniyakh Politburo TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b), 1922–1952* (2000), pp. 195–6.
49. RGASPI, 17/162/17, 87.
50. J. Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930–33: The Impact of the Depression* (London and New York, 1983), p. 18.

5

The Politburo and Foreign Policy in the 1930s

Derek Watson

After 1917, the traditional foundations of Russian foreign policy: the quest for security, great power ambitions and the everyday need to conduct relationships with other states, were joined by new ideological factors: the Bolshevik commitment to spread communism and implacable hostility to the capitalist world. These ideological factors were dominant in foreign policy during the early years of the Soviet regime, with unsuccessful attempts to spread world revolution in Germany, Hungary and Poland between 1917 and 1921. They were sponsored particularly by the activities of the Communist International (Comintern), founded in Moscow in March 1919 with the aim of promoting the development of foreign communist parties and supporting trade unions in capitalist countries.

By 1921, the Bolshevik leadership recognised that, if the infant Soviet regime was to survive, an accommodation with the Western powers was essential to guarantee non-intervention. While not abandoning their fading hope of a proletarian revolution, there was a retreat to a policy of normalising diplomatic relations, securing recognition for the new regime and reviving foreign trade and investment. This was underlined by the Genoa conference in 1922. It was made particularly necessary by the adoption of NEP. Pressures here were both external and internal. They ranged from the needs of the leadership to respond to demands imposed by the outside world, such as isolation caused by Versailles forcing the country into an alliance with Germany at Rapallo in 1922, to such basic internal pressures as obtaining necessary imports.¹

These two strands, the ideological and the pragmatic, were responsible for the dualism of Soviet foreign policy during the first decade of the regime's existence, which E. H. Carr has argued was apparent as early as Brest-Litovsk in 1918.² It sought national security by developing

conventional diplomatic relations with the Western powers, while at the same time attempting to foment revolution in those countries when the opportunity arose. A Central Committee resolution of April 1919, less than a month after the founding of Comintern, transferring the funding of foreign communists from the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs (NKInDel, familiarly referred to as NarkomIndel) to Comintern, was basic in establishing this dualism.³ Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, however, neither strand was completely dominant and led to contradictions in policy, as support for the German revolution in 1923,⁴ less than a year after the signature of Rapallo, demonstrates.

The competing strands in Soviet foreign policy, 1921–1930

Until he was incapacitated, Lenin seems to have controlled the foreign-policy-making process personally, supervising the day-to-day activities of Commissar for Foreign Affairs, G. V. Chicherin, and often communicating directly with him.⁵ V. M. Molotov, as Central Committee secretary, received reports from Chicherin and relayed instructions from Lenin on these and on other foreign policy matters to the Politburo.⁶ In June 1921, on the question of troops going into Mongolia, Lenin noted: 'Molotov and I came to an agreement today and he promised to get it through the P[olit]/Buro by telephone.'⁷

The Politburo, as it became the ultimate authority in the Soviet regime, controlled foreign, defence and internal security policy, from which Sovnarkom, officially the government, was virtually excluded.⁸ Other agencies contributed to the making of foreign policy besides NKInDel and Comintern, Chicherin pointing out the need for the closest co-ordination between NKInDel, NKVneshTorg and Vesenkha.⁹ When it was necessary to negotiate trade agreements with foreign states, as in the case of Britain as early as 1920–21, the needs of the Commissariat of Foreign Trade clearly had an impact on foreign-policy formulation, and intelligence gathering by the Cheka's new foreign department was used to assist in the negotiation of the trade agreement.¹⁰ We know little, however, about the role of the OGPU, of whose interference in foreign policy Chicherin was very critical,¹¹ or of its successor, the NKVD. The significance of intelligence provided by these bodies in foreign policy, and military intelligence made available by the Red Army, also need further investigation.

Richard Debo has pointed out that, from the time Lenin became ill, it is not clear who assumed his foreign-policy role, or to whom Chicherin reported.¹² In 1924, Chicherin was writing to Molotov about the need

to strengthen the staff of the commissariat, and to Molotov and Stalin that the 'The Party's primacy over State activities... means paralysing State power', an indication of the growing power of the Politburo. By 1926, Chicherin was complaining bitterly about Stalin's interference in foreign policy.¹³

As Stalin gained power in the later 1920s, his views became increasingly important. He was sceptical of the revolutionary potential of Western communist parties and labour movements, regarding them mainly as allies of the Soviet state that would prevent further foreign intervention. He believed that communist revolutions were not the precondition for building a socialist society in Russia, but for guaranteeing its 'final victory,' and that a new war between the imperialist camp and the anti-imperialist camp led by Soviet Russia was inevitable. This made it vital to construct a militarily and industrially powerful state to safeguard the Soviet regime – the doctrine of 'socialism in one country'.¹⁴ These views led to changes in foreign policy. The need to export grain to pay for vital imported industrial goods demanded a conventional policy and integration in the European state system. Stalin's ideas were a complex interweaving of the pragmatic and the ideological: he believed that war might provide the opportunity for revolutionary advance. Because of the vital significance of foreign policy, it was an area he sought to dominate through the Politburo as he increasingly controlled that institution.

As early as 1924, foreign affairs were second only to economic matters in the number of issues discussed at the Politburo. From 25 April 1923 until 1 May 1924, at seventeen sessions of the Central Committee plenum and eighty-six sessions of the Politburo, 702 matters of business relating to NKInDel were discussed, 17.2 per cent of the total business.¹⁵ The Politburo *protokoly* show that, in the mid 1920s, foreign-policy items were a major, and perhaps *the* most important, matter of business.¹⁶ The item 'NKInDel Matters' (*Voprosy NKID*) often appeared as the first item on the agenda, sometimes listing as many issues as the rest of the agenda. It was not uncommon for as many as ten items to be tabled under this heading, relating to foreign-policy questions regarding different countries, with reports being submitted by leading officials of the commissariat. After 1928, this heading disappears from the agenda, although foreign-policy items continued to be tabled on a less regular basis.¹⁷ Drafts prepared by deputy commissars or members of the NKInDel *kollegiya*, and routine matters, were decided at the Little Sovnarkom, or one of the Sovnarkom standing commissions, once the Politburo had made clear the policy position.¹⁸ Molotov recorded that, even in this period:

NarkomIndel reported only to the Central Committee and to no one else. All the business of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs was forwarded only to the Politburo...Chicherin wrote an excessive number of abusive letters to the Central Committee. Every day he sent three or four letters about Ethiopia, France, America, about something or the other...He knew languages superbly and wrote letters about everything. All of them went directly to the Politburo. But there were no departments to deal with them. You had to know about international affairs and be able to read ciphered documents, nobody read them except me.¹⁹

It seems clear, however, that Molotov advised Stalin and his other Politburo colleagues of these reports.

Between 1925 and 1927, Chicherin had increasing difficulty in pushing his policy of good relations with Germany, and hostility to the Versailles powers. Maxim Litvinov, who had become deputy commissar for foreign affairs in 1921, and wanted disarmament and friendship with the Western powers to allow the USSR to develop internally, became increasingly influential as Stalin's power grew and Chicherin's health deteriorated. There was considerable friction between Chicherin and Litvinov. Although the latter's ability to change the direction of policy was checked when relations with Britain were bad, by late 1927, Litvinov had managed to secure the USSR's participation in the World Economic and General Disarmament Conferences, and in October 1928 the USSR's support of the Kellogg-Briand pact. Among those arrested in connection with the Shakhty affair in April 1928, were five German engineers, and this was an additional blow to the Commissar's policy, further undermined by a speech by K. E. Voroshilov on 1 May 1929, attacking Germany, about which Chicherin, resident there for health reasons, protested to the Politburo. Litvinov did not replace Chicherin officially until 1 July 1930, but in an interview he gave to *Izvestiya* shortly afterwards, he claimed that, in effect, he had run the commissariat for the past two years, while Chicherin was ill.²⁰

The organisation of decision-making in Soviet foreign policy, 1930–1934

When Stalin was away from Moscow for long periods of leave from 1925 to 1936, he relied on a deputy in the Central Committee Secretariat for information on political affairs, and to send his instructions to the Politburo and his colleagues. From 1925, until his appointment as

Sovnarkom chairman in December 1930, this had been Molotov's responsibility, and thereafter the task fell to L. M. Kaganovich.²¹ The Stalin–Kaganovich correspondence during Stalin's summer vacations from 1931 to 1936 indicates that the highest proportion of issues (18.8 per cent) concerned foreign policy.²² Stalin interested himself and commented on matters both important and unimportant. Whereas he might be expected to approve such significant matters as Soviet policy on, and Litvinov's reports to, the League of Nations regarding the Abyssinian crisis in 1935, some of which were sent to him by air, in 1934 he also approved, and amended personally, TASS communiqués.²³ On matters of foreign policy, Stalin generally addressed Molotov as well as Kaganovich, because of Molotov's position as Sovnarkom chairman from December 1930, and his background in foreign policy as a Central Committee secretary in the 1920s, but it also meant that he had two agents to represent his views at the Politburo. Molotov and Kaganovich, in turn, generally sought Stalin's opinion and quickly fell in line with his views.²⁴

The Stalin–Kaganovich correspondence from 1931 to 1936 confirms the evidence of the Politburo *protokoly* that, at least formally, the Politburo was the key decision-making body in foreign policy. A letter from Kaganovich to Stalin of 31 August 1931 reported that the Politburo had the previous day censured the 'incorrect' proceedings of NKInDel in not notifying the Politburo about a report published by TASS and an interview by Litvinov on discussions about a non-aggression pact with Poland. Kaganovich wrote, 'In any case they did not have the right to deal with this question without [the authorisation of] the Politburo', and then cited the Politburo resolution to this effect.²⁵

This correspondence also demonstrates that Stalin's views were central in Politburo decisions on foreign policy. For example, in September 1931, Kaganovich sent Stalin deputy commissar L. Karakhan's draft reply on the Japanese fisheries concession, accusing NKInDel of complicating matters, and saying that the question would not be decided at the Politburo until Stalin had given his verdict.²⁶ Since verbatim records of discussion were not kept, it is more difficult to document Stalin's dominance when he was present, but it is confirmed for the mid-1930s by the account of one observer of a Politburo meeting. Alexander Barmine wrote:

A thin appearance of collective work is still kept up at Politburo meetings. Stalin does not 'command', he merely 'suggests' or 'proposes'. The fiction of voting is retained. But the vote never fails to

uphold his 'suggestions'. The decision is signed by all ten members of the Politburo, with Stalin's signature among the rest. Yet everyone knows there is only one boss.²⁷

As chairman of Sovnarkom from December 1930, Molotov had a crucial role to play as a Politburo agent for foreign policy. For example, at a Politburo meeting on 15 March 1931, following discussion of the Japanese fisheries concession, when Litvinov and Karakhan were present for business on Turkey, Japan and England, Molotov was instructed to deal with the question of the Japanese fisheries concession in the concluding remarks to the debate following his speech to the Congress of Soviets,²⁸ in which he stressed the USSR's determination to uphold the terms of the Soviet-Japanese Fishery Convention.²⁹

The Sovnarkom chairman had the power to make authoritative statements on foreign policy and a supervisory responsibility for NKInDel, as for other commissariats. At first sight this does not seem important, as an analysis of Sovnarkom business during the 1930s shows that foreign policy was not discussed there and the commissar attended only seven out of thirty-four meetings in 1931.³⁰ As head of government, however, Molotov outranked Litvinov when it came to meeting leading ministers from foreign states visiting the USSR.³¹ In addition, the Sovnarkom chairman, by a tradition dating back to Lenin's time, chaired the Politburo.³² His authority was also strengthened by membership of the Politburo foreign affairs commission. The origins of this body seem to lie in a commission that comprised Stalin, Molotov and Kaganovich, approved by the Politburo on 23 November 1931. Ordzhonikidze, the chairman of Vesenkha, became a member shortly afterwards. The commission was charged with making preliminary proposals for 'a number of necessary measures resulting from the present international situation'.³³ E. A. Gnedin, who worked in NKInDel from 1922–31 and 1935–39, wrote that foreign policy

decisions were not taken in Sovnarkom, because these rightly were the concern of the Politburo. The [foreign commissariat] apparatus was aware that there was a Politburo commission responsible for foreign policy with a membership that varied. In the first half of the 1930s I happened to be present at one of its night-time sessions. Directives were issued concerning an important leading foreign policy article which I was charged to write for *Izvestiya*. The chief editor of *Pravda*, L. Z. Mekhlis was there too. Other matters were discussed first. The decisions were made by Molotov and Kaganovich,

the latter acting as chairman. Deputy commissars M. N. Krestinskii and B. S. Stomonyakov gave reports, and I was amazed that these two senior figures, both experts on the topics under discussion, should be there in the position of petitioners. Their requests – you could hardly call them arguments – were summarily agreed or rejected. It is worth noting that Kaganovich responded with sarcasm even to Molotov's remarks.³⁴

Molotov was to chair this body, or its successor, later in the decade. If the membership of the body varied in its early years, the chairmanship may not have been fixed, which may account for Kaganovich chairing the meeting Gnedin attended.

Gnedin's comments reflected the position of NKInDel. Because of the special nature of the commissariat's work, involving relations with foreign (capitalist) powers, its business often urgent – requiring immediate decisions – or technical and secret, Sovnarkom was by-passed, and its head reported directly to Stalin and the Politburo. Similarly, the channel for reporting for deputy commissars and ambassadors was to the commissar, and through him directly to Stalin and the Politburo, rather than through the commissariat's *kollegiya*.³⁵ The process was well-known among the diplomatic corps, a report to the British Foreign Office in 1929 stating that 'all matters which are not entirely of a routine character must be submitted to the political bureau of the Party by the Commissar for Foreign Affairs once a week'.³⁶ When asked how the commissar and his colleagues were able to influence the foreign policy of the country, Gnedin said:

I would say that this influence was of an 'expert' [*apparatnyi*] character. Responsible workers of NarkomIndel presented the commissar or his deputy with reports, frequently interesting. The commissar, it was understood would always submit them with his proposals and notes to the Politburo. In this way, the commissar influenced decisions, and even more by his participation in discussions. This can be said about M. M. Litvinov with confidence.³⁷

There was an example of this in August 1931 when the Japanese ambassador passed Karakhan, deputy commissar for foreign affairs, a statement on the fisheries question. Although preliminary work on the response was undertaken by NKInDel, when this was approved by the Politburo, a commission of Kaganovich, A. I. Mikoyan, Litvinov and Karakhan, appointed by the Politburo, was charged with the final

editing of the Soviet reply, with Stalin, on leave in Sochi, approving this decision.³⁸ In a number of cases, as well as in that of Japan in 1931, the Politburo established commissions, with membership including senior members of NKInDel, to work on issues.³⁹

Litvinov, although often summoned to, and consulted by, the Politburo, was not a member. Indeed, until January 1934 he was not even a Central Committee member.⁴⁰ In September 1935, Stalin, on leave, wrote a sweeping condemnation of Litvinov's vanity and 'personal pride' regarding his conduct at the League of Nations over Abyssinia. He concluded by criticising Litvinov's speech on Abyssinia at the League, accusing him of blurring the difference between the position of the USSR and that of Britain and France, and charging him with wishing 'to float along in England's wake'.⁴¹

The low esteem in which Litvinov was held is confirmed by the comparatively few occasions, even in his early years as head of NKInDel, that he attended the meetings in Stalin's office – as Table 5.1 shows. These meetings would play a key role in foreign-policy-making. The number of occasions when Molotov, Kaganovich and Voroshilov were present on these occasions, culminating in 1937, 1938, and 1939 when Molotov was present every time Litvinov saw Stalin, is also striking, indicating that even before he became commissar for foreign affairs, Molotov was playing a significant foreign-policy role.

Table 5.1 Attendance of Litvinov, Molotov, Kaganovich and Voroshilov in the meetings in Stalin's office, 1931–1939

Year	Litvinov	Molotov	Molotov with Litvion	Kagano- vich	Kagano- vich with Litvinov	Voroshilov	Voroshilov with Litvinov
1931	15	101	12	68	2	29	2
1932	29	122	23	109	14	43	9
1933	42	152	35	143	31	70	23
1934	21	98	18	104	13	79	19
1935	39	103	38	92	32	73	29
1936	29	106	28	66	21	75	26
1937	29	224	29	136	21	148	26
1938	24	171	24	98	15	97	17
1939	15*	282	15*	129	10*	187	8*

Source: 'Posetiteli kremlevskogo kabineta I. V. Stalina' (compiled by A. V. Korotkov and A. A. Chernobaev), *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, no. 6, 1994, pp. 5–44; no. 2, 1995, pp. 128–76; no. 3, 1995, pp. 119–77; no. 4, 1995, pp. 15–72; nos 5–6, 1995, pp. 5–64. Based on the computer database prepared by Professor Stephen Wheatcroft, University of Melbourne.

Note: *to 3 May – date of Litvinov's dismissal.

The meetings in Stalin's office allowed Stalin, with his close associates, particularly Molotov, to develop policy and to decide how it should be implemented: through the Politburo, through NKInDel, or through Comintern or another institution, and whether it should be communicated as a Politburo resolution, a Central Committee decision, a Sovnarkom decree, the order of a commissariat or a TASS communiqué.

With Stalin away from Moscow in the summers of 1931 and 1932, Kaganovich and Molotov reported regularly on Litvinov's activities, criticised his actions and relayed instructions the Politburo had issued to him, seeking Stalin's approval. When Molotov joined Stalin on leave they sought Litvinov's expert opinion through Kaganovich.⁴² The weakness of Litvinov's position was demonstrated when he told Ivan Maiskii, on his appointment as ambassador to Britain in 1932, that he would not be carrying out the personal instructions of the head of NKInDel, but those of 'higher agencies' (*organov*); that is, the Politburo.⁴³ Litvinov, who had especial sympathy for Britain, had, a recent biographer argues, a deep-seated suspicion of Germany that increased after Hitler's advent to power.⁴⁴ He also had a very low estimate of Molotov's ability. His daughter remembers him calling Molotov a fool (*durak*) during telephone conversations, and being prepared to express this opinion quite openly. These factors, and Molotov's superior position, had an impact on Soviet foreign-policy-making.⁴⁵

From late October 1931, Molotov was involved in formulating policy towards Japan at the Politburo.⁴⁶ This was of crucial importance: there was a very real expectation of war following the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in September.⁴⁷ Molotov's speech to TsIK in December 1931 focused on the Far East, specifying the Japanese threat and the emerging crisis in Manchuria as the most crucial problem for the Soviet Union. This, Molotov claimed, demanded increased vigilance. Repeating almost word for word Stalin's statement to the XVI party congress in June 1930, 'we emphasise anew our basic principle: we need no one else's land, but not one inch of our land will we cede to anyone else', he asserted that all provocations would be answered with a policy of peace.⁴⁸ This speech marked the beginning of a new policy of appeasement towards Japan, a Politburo commission being established on 23 December 'to develop measures to reduce the danger in the Far East' with Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov and Litvinov being the key members.⁴⁹ This was followed on 31 December 1931 by the offer of a non-aggression pact. With no response to this, and a growing crisis over the Chinese Eastern Railway, the Politburo decided to offer to sell it to the Japanese.⁵⁰ A few months later, on 16 May 1932, Molotov was

instructed by the Politburo to express official condolences to Japan on the death of the Japanese prime minister, but to restrict press reporting to 'purely formal material'. Molotov's official message, as chairman of Sovnarkom, appeared in the press the next day.⁵¹

The question of a neutrality pact with Japan arose again in June 1932. Kaganovich and Molotov corresponded with Stalin, again on leave, about it. The Politburo decision confirmed Stalin's advice to them that negotiations with China should not be broken off during conversations with Japan. Shortly afterwards, when Kaganovich and Molotov informed Stalin that A. A. Troyanovskii, the ambassador, was discussing the question of the Chinese Eastern Railway with the Japanese, but not with someone responsible, Stalin ordered him to be censured, and instructions from the Politburo followed on the lines suggested by Stalin. Kaganovich and Molotov continued to correspond with Stalin about Troyanovskii's negotiations in Japan and to receive his instructions.⁵²

By 1933, the increasing fear of a resurgent Germany, following Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, opened the door for two possible foreign-policy alternatives for the Soviet Union: 'collective security' – a defensive alliance against an aggressor, particularly Germany, with France and Britain as the chief partners – on the one hand; or a policy of conciliation and an attempt to reach an understanding with Germany – which had been the only real ally of the new communist regime during the early years of its existence – on the other.⁵³ Whichever was pursued as the main policy it was sensible to maintain friendship with all the states for as long as possible. Between 1933 and 1939, Stalin allowed the pro-Western Litvinov and NKInDel to take the lead in pursuing the first alternative, and Molotov, became particularly associated with the second.

On 11 March 1933, Herbert von Dirksen, the German ambassador, had a long interview with Litvinov and Krestinskii, but the ambassador deferred his request for a meeting with Molotov because of the unfavourable nature of German–Soviet relations.⁵⁴ These continued to be poor, with Alfred Hugenberg's anti-Soviet speech at the World Economic Conference, and the public appearance of Stalin and Molotov at the Moscow funeral of the veteran German communist, Clara Zetkin, on 22 June.⁵⁵ Molotov attempted to improve the situation on 4 August, at a meeting with Dirksen, who was about to return to Germany. He seems to have been more positive than on 15 July with the French ambassador, who was about to leave for Paris.⁵⁶ According to his record of the conversation, Molotov, repeating the position enunciated by Stalin at the XVI party congress 1930, emphasised that the fundamental principles of Soviet foreign policy were peace and

strengthening neighbourly relations with all countries, and that the USSR did not consider Rapallo 'inexpedient' or 'disadvantageous', nor did it give any grounds for Germany raising that question. He assured the ambassador that the Soviet attitude to Germany remained unchanged, despite recent hostile German acts and statements, that the aims of preserving peace and 'free national development of all peoples' determined the Soviet attitude towards the Versailles Treaty, and 'I can assure the ambassador... our future relations with Germany will depend exclusively on the position Germany assumes towards the USSR. If it maintains its previous policy then there will be no bases to change our line.' Molotov stressed that Dirksen grew emotional during the conversation, but that he remained calm and correct.⁵⁷ Dirksen concluded his report:

Molotov's statements, as those of one of the really authoritative men and closest co-workers of Stalin, undoubtedly deserve serious consideration. The anxiety expressed by him concerning the future attitude of German policy towards Russia seemed to be genuine... The conversation could... be used as the springboard for more exhaustive discussions on the clarification of German-Soviet relations.⁵⁸

In September 1933, Molotov and Kaganovich secured Stalin's approval for a protest to Germany, proposed by Litvinov, on the arrest of Soviet press correspondents, the protest then being rubber-stamped by the Politburo. In mid-October, however, Molotov and Kaganovich disagreed with Litvinov's opposition to sending Krestinskii to Berlin in an attempt to see Hitler. Stalin supported their view that Krestinskii should go, but questioned their change of mind with the sudden withdrawal of Germany from the League of Nations.⁵⁹

Molotov was now involved in attempts to maintain connections with Germany: he cancelled a visit to Turkey and saw Dirksen. If German diplomats were attempting to work behind the back of the pro-Western Litvinov, this does not seem to have been an intrigue by Stalin and Molotov, as Gnedin suggested,⁶⁰ as Litvinov, on a mission to secure diplomatic recognition by the United States, was instructed that it was 'expedient' to travel via Berlin, meeting Konstantin von Neurath (and Joachim von Ribbentrop if Hitler wished), and via Paris, to meet the French prime minister and M. Paul-Boncour, the foreign minister. He was also charged to return via Italy to see Mussolini.⁶¹ In fact, he saw von Neurath and resolved the question of the imprisoned Soviet press correspondents.⁶² He then saw M. Paul-Boncour, but failed to visit Italy.

Stalin, on leave in October 1933, sent Molotov and Kaganovich a telegram stating that Litvinov should be sent to the United States to

conduct negotiations with Roosevelt for diplomatic recognition of the USSR.⁶³ His instructions were reflected immediately in a Politburo resolution.⁶⁴ When Litvinov proposed to send Sokolnikov, because he himself was about to go to Turkey, Kaganovich and Molotov immediately wrote to Stalin about the necessity for Litvinov to go. Stalin ordered them to insist on Litvinov's going, and to send Karakhan to Turkey. Litvinov received detailed instructions, discussed by Molotov and Kaganovich with Stalin, who described as deficient their suggestion that Litvinov should talk about the USSR's peaceful policy if Roosevelt raised the issue of relations with Japan. He ordered Litvinov not to depart from the concrete, and respond favourably to a proposal from Roosevelt for a provisional alliance against Japan. The wording of the Politburo resolution taken the next day quoted Stalin's telegram almost word for word.⁶⁵

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that, in November, Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich and Krestinskii assumed responsibility for dealing with all the issues raised by Roosevelt.⁶⁶ Troyanovskii, who assisted Litvinov in the negotiations and became the new Soviet ambassador to the USA, accused of panicking by Molotov and Kaganovich in their correspondence during the negotiations, and by Stalin a year later,⁶⁷ made it clear from the beginning that he could communicate directly with Stalin, Molotov and the Politburo, and did so.⁶⁸

It would be consistent with Molotov's position that, as J. Haslam argues, he and Kaganovich were the least enthusiastic members of the Politburo about the resolution of 12 December, in favour of a collective security agreement and joining the League of Nations on certain conditions, confirmed in detailed proposals prepared by NKInDel and approved by the political leadership on 19 December.⁶⁹ At least in part, this seems to have been an attempt to guarantee the USSR's western frontiers when an attack from Japan was expected in the east, a fear that declined among the Soviet leadership in early 1934,⁷⁰ but the USSR also hoped to turn joining the League to its advantage, the last condition specified being: 'Insist on restoration of normal relations of USSR with all members, or at least statement that all consider them restored.'⁷¹

In his speech to TsIK on 28 December 1933, Molotov emphasised the theme of a coming war, but said little about the League of Nations and collective action, in marked contrast to Litvinov the following day.⁷² Molotov was prepared to talk of a 'reactionary Fascist camp', but he was not willing, like Litvinov, to speak of 'pacific' powers in the capitalist world. He, more strongly than Litvinov, still held out the possibility of reconciliation with Germany.⁷³

G. Hilger, who worked in the German embassy in Moscow, recalled that, at this time, Molotov, Litvinov and Krestinskii were trying to reassure German diplomatic staff that the USSR had no desire to re-orientate its foreign policy, and in late 1933 and early 1934, Rudolf Nadolny, the new German ambassador, believed that: 'Litvinov's thesis about the German danger had not yet been accepted by the Politburo. Stalin, Molotov, and many others, he thought, were only too willing to continue doing business with National Socialist Germany and were only waiting for tokens of good intentions.'⁷⁴ Stalin's major statement on foreign policy at the XVII party congress of January–February 1934 confirmed that Nadolny had made an accurate assessment of his views. At the end of the congress, Litvinov was elevated to the Central Committee. Stalin, whilst noting improvements in Soviet relations with France and Poland, denied that this meant that the policy of the USSR was now orientated towards those countries, saying that, although not enthusiastic about the nature of the regime in Germany, a fascist regime had not prevented the establishment of good relations with Italy.

By July 1934, the German *chargé d'affaires*, on the basis of a conversation with the Italian ambassador, and using a term which seems to reflect the group responsible for decision-making, reported that: 'there is no longer any pro-German tendency in leading Soviet circles...the Rapallo treaty had been completely written off by the Russians [*sic*]. Litvinov was at the height of his powers'.⁷⁵ In late August, Stalin was writing pessimistically to Kaganovich about relations with Germany, and in September, they decided on only limited negotiations regarding trade and financial credits. Soviet representatives were ordered to proceed slowly: 'haste in the present case is needed not by us but by the Germans, who by agreement with us want to muddle the cards in Europe, to smooth over the bad impression from their refusal of the eastern pact, to see mistrust arising towards us from the French and improve their internal position'.⁷⁶

The high water mark of 'collective security' 1934–1937

In September 1934, the USSR took its seat in the League of Nations Council. This gave structure to the strategy of 'collective security', of cultivating the liberal democracies as a means of isolating the more militaristic fascist states (Japan, Italy and Germany). In late February 1934, Georgi Dimitrov arrived in Moscow, and in April he joined the Comintern leadership at Stalin's invitation. From this time he was at its

head, although not appointed formally as Secretary General until the Seventh Congress in August 1935.⁷⁷ Stalin instructed the Politburo to approve a list of the Soviet members of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (IKKI) and the appointment of Dimitrov.⁷⁸ Comintern policy was now initiated and implemented by direct contact between Stalin and Dimitrov, and his deputy D. Z. Manuilskii. Dimitrov played a key role in persuading Stalin of the need to abandon the 'ultra Left' policy of the past and to pursue the strategy of 'popular front' with Left-wing and liberal parties to combat the fascist threat. From their correspondence, it is clear that Dimitrov saw close relations with Stalin as being vital to Comintern's work.⁷⁹ Stalin on occasion offered reassurance that Comintern had the Politburo's (that is, Stalin's) confidence.⁸⁰

It was consistent with this change of policy that, on 2 November, the Soviet leadership agreed to accept a mutual assistance pact excluding Germany and Poland, if France and Czechoslovakia agreed.⁸¹ Litvinov succeeded in bringing the tortuous discussions with France to a successful conclusion in mid-1935. Progress with France, however, was delayed by the assassination of foreign minister Louis Barthou in October. A protocol was agreed in December 1934, but this fell far short of the mutual assistance pact the USSR desired, and the talks dragged on until May 1935.⁸² The matter appeared spasmodically on the Politburo agenda until its final ratification early in 1936.⁸³

While manoeuvring for a mutual security pact with France, negotiations for financial credits from Germany continued. Eventually, in April 1935, David Kandelaki, the Soviet commercial and economic representatives in Germany, achieved an agreement (although, in June, Litvinov, pointing out the threat to the agreement with France, obtained the refusal of a further offer made to Kandelaki).⁸⁴ Attempts to strengthen relations with Germany continued, however, until 1937, with Stalin and Molotov using Kandelaki, S. A. Bessonov (the counsellor to the Soviet Embassy in Berlin), and possibly Gnedin, its press secretary, as well,⁸⁵ to probe, through commercial negotiations, the possibility of improving political relations, though with little result at that time. Gnedin wrote:

I was aware that Bessonov sometimes directed reports to Molotov personally, possibly he was helping Kandelaki carry out the secret mission of Molotov and Stalin... Kandelaki clearly gave us to understand that he had confidential instructions personally from Stalin and the right not to be limited to purely economic subjects in talks with the Germans. The trade representatives and embassy workers

were clear that Kandelaki was close to Stalin. And I found that everyone understood about Kandelaki's activities, that he had special powers and was actively attempting, irrespective of Litvinov and his colleagues, (or secretly from them) to 'build bridges' between the Soviet and Hitler governments.⁸⁶

Stalin and Molotov were bypassing NKInDel. The advantage of using Kandelaki was that, as deputy commissar for Foreign Trade, he did not report to Litvinov, who opposed actions he believed endangered the main lines of policy he was trying to pursue. At the same time, Litvinov, using more official channels, was also exploring the possibility of strengthening links with Germany through the Soviet ambassador in Berlin.⁸⁷

In September 1935, Stalin refused to be alarmed at the news from Molotov and Kaganovich of anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic speeches at the Nuremberg rally, and dismissed contemptuously in a phrase their call for a protest against Hitler's speech to the Reichstag, saying that he saw no basis for it.⁸⁸ Molotov's speech to TsIK on 10 January 1936, made against a background of poor relations with Germany since the autumn of 1935,⁸⁹ has been taken as evidence that he was always in favour of a rapprochement with Germany.⁹⁰ He said that the USSR desired better relations, but he recalled and repeated references to *Mein Kampf*, made by himself in 1935, claiming that by its silence on the matter, the German government had not disowned the policy of territorial conquest, and he emphasised the threat of the modern weaponry in Germany's possession. Yet he continued straightaway, having noted the credit agreement of 1935, that the Soviet government was considering seriously proposals from the German government for large credits over a ten-year period. The USSR, he continued, sought commercial and economic relations with all states irrespective of the 'political forces which are temporarily ruling those countries'. There was only a perfunctory reference to collective security, and, having announced increased expenditure on armaments, Molotov stressed that the USSR would pursue a policy of self-reliance to safeguard its own security.⁹¹

American diplomats believed that Molotov's speech signalled a change in foreign policy.⁹² Following it, Litvinov, who drew attention to the emphasis on increasing armaments in the speech, told the French ambassador 'he had to struggle against certain of his colleagues who desired that the Soviet government should demonstrate more clearly its desire for autarchy and take the initiative in renouncing the Franco-Soviet pact whose ratification had been awaited for nine months'.⁹³

On 1 March, Stalin gave an interview to Roy Howard in which he said:

Hitler [in his interview with a French newspaper] seems to have tried to say peaceful things, but he sprinkled his 'peacefulness' so plentifully with threats against both France and the Soviet Union that nothing remained of his 'peacefulness.' You see, even when Herr Hitler wants to speak of peace he cannot avoid offering threats.⁹⁴

Then, on 7 March 1936, Hitler occupied the Rhineland, thus for the first time violating a treaty which Germany had signed of its own free will. This led initially to a suspension of Kandelaki's commercial negotiations with Germany, and in April to the conclusion of a much more limited agreement than was discussed previously.⁹⁵ In an interview he gave to Shastenet, the correspondent of *Le Temps* on 19 March, Molotov claimed that, while the remilitarisation of the Rhineland was a danger to the countries to the east of Germany, it was 'in the first place' a threat to Germany's Western neighbours – France and Belgium; that is, it was more of a threat to the Locarno treaty of 1925, which guaranteed Germany's frontiers, and to which the Soviet Union was not party, than to Versailles, as suggested by Litvinov.⁹⁶ Later in the same interview, when asked if a rapprochement between Germany and the Soviet Union was possible in the present circumstances, he replied with a statement that was at odds with the policy being pursued at the time:

There is a tendency among certain sections of the Soviet public towards an attitude of thoroughgoing irreconcilability to the present rulers of Germany, particularly because of the ever-repeated hostile speeches of the German leaders against the Soviet Union. But the chief tendency, and the one determining the Soviet government's policy, thinks an improvement in Soviet-German relations possible. Of course, there are several ways in which this might happen. One of the best would be the re-entry of Germany into the League of Nations, provided of course, that Germany gave real proof of its respect for international treaties, that it showed, on its part, it would observe its international responsibilities in accordance with the real interests of peace in Europe and the interests of universal peace. With the fulfilment of these conditions the participation of Germany in the League of Nations would be in the interests of peace and would meet with a positive response on our part.

Shastenet. Even Hitler's Germany?

Molotov. Yes, even Hitler's Germany.⁹⁷

These statements are evidence of the way in which foreign policy was handled by Stalin and his Politburo colleagues. Molotov was admitting differences of opinion among the political leadership, and by references to the 'chief tendency', making Stalin's position clear, but also committing him to a specific policy and a pro-German one. His words were in marked contrast to Stalin's comments to Howard, to Litvinov's speech to the Council of the League of Nations, or Ambassador Maiskii's speech in London, warning the Western powers not to agree to new proposals by Hitler and calling for united action by the League of Nations.⁹⁸ They may have caused the breach with Stalin, which placed Molotov in considerable personal danger until September 1936.⁹⁹ This was demonstrated by the omission of his name, deleted, it has been suggested, at Stalin's wish, from the list of potential victims of the conspirators in the indictment of 'The Trotskyite-Zinovievite Centre' and in the subsequent trial in August 1936.¹⁰⁰ Because he was under a cloud during July and August 1936 and went on leave, he was not involved in the conduct of foreign policy during that time, as the correspondence between Stalin (also on leave) and Kaganovich demonstrates.¹⁰¹ Kandelaki and Bessonov were engaged in making soundings again in the summer of 1936, possibly in response to German initiatives, and Krestinskii, the deputy head of NKInDel, wrote on 4 August 1936 that while 'German affairs have not been discussed here [that is, in Moscow] for a relatively long time... the prospects for Soviet-German relations are viewed in the same way as earlier... [but] Germany does not conceal its definitely hostile attitude in relation to us.'¹⁰²

This was the period when German and Italian aid to Franco began. The Nuremberg Rally of September 1936 marked the launch of an anti-communist campaign, but on 20 September (with Molotov back from leave) Kaganovich was advising Stalin, still on vacation, that he and his Politburo colleagues were against a protest about Hitler's speech, as proposed by Litvinov. Litvinov's request was rejected: Yakov Surits, the Soviet ambassador to Germany, was allowed only to raise the matter in strong terms, and articles in the Soviet press attacked the speech.¹⁰³

With the deterioration of relations with Germany and the signing of the anti-Comintern pact in October, Surits sent despatches back to Moscow, making clear Germany's hostility, aimed at the international isolation of the USSR.¹⁰⁴ Molotov, in his speech to the Congress of Soviets in November, directed attacks at both the Japanese and German regimes, mentioning such issues as anti-Semitism and concentration camps.¹⁰⁵ But, in December, Surits was allowed to accept Goering's invitation for an exchange of views. The meeting, on 14 December,

according to Surits 'taking the form of a monologue [by Goering]'.¹⁰⁶ Then, on 23 December, Molotov had a first interview with F. W. von der Schulenburg, the German ambassador, with whom the initial moves in the 1939 pact were to be negotiated. The interview concerned the arrest of German citizens in the USSR. Schulenburg applied to see Molotov through NKInDel and received an invitation 'exceptionally quickly'. Litvinov, who accompanied Schulenburg, seemed to be relieved that the 'Minister President' was dealing with the 'outrages'. Schulenburg believed that Molotov 'was naturally in an awkward position and did not really know what to say about these matters', and summed him up as 'soothing but non-committal'.¹⁰⁷ The next day, Kandelaki signed the renewal of the commercial agreement with Germany, after which Hjalmar Schacht, the president of the Reichsbank, indicated to him that further development of trade relations between the two countries was dependent on a 'firm political gesture' from the USSR.¹⁰⁸

Towards the Nazi-Soviet pact, 1937–1939

The period 1937–39 marked a turning point for Molotov because, as Gnedin acknowledged, his influence on foreign policy grew. The international situation changed rapidly with the Spanish civil war and Hitler's growing power, as demonstrated in the Anschluss with Austria and the Czechoslovakian crisis. In addition, there was a growing confrontation with Japan in the Far East, raising the spectre of war on two fronts. The menacing international situation was clearly a factor in the Great Terror, directed against external and internal enemies, and aimed particularly at eliminating a potential 'fifth column' when the danger of war was increasing, as Molotov noted in his memoirs.¹⁰⁹ In these circumstances, Stalin, whose views were decisive, was increasingly active as issues became more critical, sometimes communicating directly with ambassadors, by-passing Litvinov and his deputies.¹¹⁰ Stalin's personal intervention also meant that he and his close associates exercised a much tighter control, especially through the Politburo's foreign policy commission. On 13 April 1937, a Politburo resolution, 'On the preparation of questions for the Politburo', created 'a standing commission [*pri*] of the Politburo consisting of Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, and Ezhov, for the purpose of preparing for the Politburo and in cases of especial urgency deciding, questions of a secret nature, including matters of foreign policy'.¹¹¹

This new standing commission, which had the power to 'decide', presumably replaced the previously existing Politburo foreign affairs

commission. Following established practice, the first name listed (Stalin) was the chairman of the commission and the remaining names were in order of seniority. The creation of the new body confirmed the demise of the Politburo as a collective decision-making institution. Foreign policy was now in the hands of Stalin and his closest associates, who consulted and used Litvinov and NKInDel, and Dimitrov and Comintern.

In 1939, Molotov was acting as chairman of the Politburo foreign affairs commission, the other members of which were at this time Mikoyan, responsible for foreign trade from November 1938, and Zhdanov, responsible for Comintern, and chairman of the Supreme Soviet's foreign affairs commission. A. A. Gromyko, who began to serve in NKInDel in 1939, stated that Stalin delegated certain areas of foreign policy to Molotov; and Zhukov claimed that, up to the war, Stalin considered Molotov, who was willing to stand his ground and oppose him, to be competent in matters of foreign policy.¹¹² On routine matters, where the course of action was clear, NKInDel did not find it necessary to consult Stalin and his colleagues. When a new situation arose that necessitated a policy change, the commissariat referred the matter immediately to Molotov, as chairman of the Foreign Policy Commission. If he felt unable to settle the question personally, he would refer the matter to Stalin and it might appear on the Politburo agenda. There were, however, only six Politburo meetings in 1937, four in 1938 and two in 1939. Litvinov could be consulted as an expert, and Politburo members had the advantage of being able to gain additional material, not available to NKInDel, from the Foreign Section of the Central Committee.¹¹³

In 1939, Molotov was regularly receiving copies of reports sent to Stalin by Litvinov. In the reports, often sent daily, Litvinov asked for decisions or approval of his proposals.¹¹⁴ With the decline in formal meetings he now had less opportunity to represent his views.¹¹⁵ It was, however, decided to secure his agreement, on 7 April 1937, to the appointment of three ambassadors, and V. P. Potemkin as first deputy commissar, requiring him to be in Moscow by 15 April. Potemkin, the former Soviet ambassador to France, was reputed to be a Molotov man and now took over NKInDel's western section, which had been Litvinov's preserve.¹¹⁶ NKInDel was also weakened by the Terror. T. J. Uldricks has calculated that 34 per cent of its 'responsible' staff was purged, certain departments experiencing three or four changes of command in twenty months. Among the top leadership of over 100 people – deputy commissars, members of the Soviet and ambassadors – 62 per cent were purged, with only 16 per cent remaining in their posts unscathed.¹¹⁷

By January 1937, the situation regarding Germany had changed again, Kandelaki had returned to Moscow to report, and Litvinov drafted a response on 8 January 1937 which was amended by Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich, Ordzhonikidze and Voroshilov. It read:

The Soviet government not only has never avoided political conversations with the German government, at one time it even made a definite political proposal. The Soviet government in no way thinks that its policy has to be directed against the interest of the German people. It therefore has no objection now to entering into talks with the German government in the interests of improving relations and universal peace. The Soviet government does not refuse direct negotiations through official diplomatic representatives: it agrees also to respect confidentiality and not to make public our recent conversations, or future talks, if the German government insists on this.¹¹⁸

Litvinov made clear to Surits that the talks Kandelaki was conducting were an addition made by Stalin to his scheme. When he returned to Berlin, Kandelaki read the statement to Schacht, saying that the proposal was 'made in the name of Stalin and Molotov.'¹¹⁹ But Litvinov remained critical of the Kandelaki talks; the Germans were not enthusiastic, and the conversations came to an end in March 1937.

Further evidence of the impact of the Terror on foreign relations was evident when, on 15 March 1937, a Politburo decision (possibly as the result of an NKVD initiative against foreigners) ordered NKInDel to reduce the number of German, Polish and Japanese consulates in the USSR. From July 1937, Soviet diplomats, including Potemkin, who was reckoned to be more moderate than some other Soviet representatives, pressed German officials on this matter. In November, Schulenburg was ordered to seek an interview with Molotov, who had discussed in detail with Litvinov the question of consulates, but Molotov was away.¹²⁰ At the first meeting of the new Supreme Soviet in January 1938, Zhdanov, chairman of the Soviet's foreign affairs commission, condemned NKInDel because of the large number of foreign consulates in the USSR, particularly in Leningrad, and claimed that many of the foreign officials were engaged in subversive activities. He went on to censure the commissariat's policy towards Japan and France, accusing these countries of hostile acts. Molotov replied, as chairman of Sovnarkom, rather than Litvinov, the commissar for foreign affairs. He pointed out that certain foreign consulates had already been closed and promised further action.¹²¹

The Terror was fierce in Comintern, with the whole organisation coming under suspicion in 1937, placing Dimitrov in a delicate position. Dimitrov recorded in his diary that Stalin remarked 'All you in Comintern are serving the enemy.' The Polish communist party suffered particularly, and was dissolved in 1937. Dimitrov sent Stalin the draft of the resolution to IKKI on disbandment for his approval. Stalin approved the draft, commenting acridly: 'The dissolution is about two years too late.'¹²²

Gnedin's attempt to discredit Molotov, following his fall from power under Khrushchev, included a suggestion that he attempted to initiate negotiations with Germany in June 1938. This, however, seems merely to be Gnedin himself, as NKInDel press secretary, possibly under Litvinov's direction, taking action to prevent the issue of a statement proposed by a foreign press correspondent, that the USSR would respond negatively to an approach by Germany.¹²³ In addition, while on 26 October Schulenburg noted his intention to approach Molotov 'in an attempt to reach a settlement of the questions disturbing German-Soviet relations',¹²⁴ there is no evidence that such a meeting took place.

The Munich settlement in September 1938, from which the USSR was excluded, administered the death blow to Litvinov's policy of collective security. The central concern of Stalin and his leading supporters, became the question of future relations with Britain and France: the impact of their policy of appeasement, and whether this would encourage German expansion eastwards. Initial conclusions were that colonial expansion was, in the short term, a higher priority for Germany than an attack in the east.¹²⁵ Stalin's speech to the XVIII party congress, in March 1939, is often taken as defining the new basis of Soviet foreign policy.¹²⁶ In it he made the famous statement that the USSR would not 'be drawn into conflict by warmongers who are accustomed to have others pull their chestnuts out of the fire for them',¹²⁷ and stated that the USSR wanted to maintain relations with all states, indicative of the reluctance of the USSR to be driven into war with Germany. Stalin was ready to pursue any option that presented itself. Volkogonov has argued that Stalin, forced to pay more attention to foreign policy issues in 1939 because of the international situation, came increasingly to rely on Molotov in foreign policy matters, and was heavily influenced by his ideas. Only Molotov had the right combination of flexibility and firmness, and with his help Stalin drafted his speech on foreign policy for the XVIII congress.¹²⁸ In addition, Molotov's opinions on the priority of defending Soviet interests, linked to his views on the nature of

capitalist states, were, from 1937, finding more favour in Comintern than those of Litvinov.¹²⁹ Such approval of his ideas strengthened Molotov's claim as Litvinov's successor.

Molotov was more active in the foreign policy arena prior to his official appointment. As early as June 1938, he was suggesting to Joseph Davies, the American ambassador, that Litvinov might be ignored in negotiations on the questions of the USSR's debts to the USA, incurred by the Kerensky government. The excuse for bypassing Litvinov was that the matter had originated in Amtorg, the Soviet trading organisation in the USA. But the real reason was that Stalin regarded it as a priority to secure credits from the USA, particularly for the purchase of armaments.¹³⁰ On 27 March 1939, with Mikoyan and Litvinov, Molotov met R. S. Hudson, the British Overseas Trade Secretary, Molotov acting both as the deputy for Stalin and as chairman of Sovnarkom. The British feared that Molotov might raise specific political questions. There was considerable concern in British foreign office and embassy circles when Soviet reports of the meeting mentioned 'an amicable exchange of opinions on international politics', as well as discussions on commercial matters.¹³¹ In fact, Potemkin's record of his conversation with Hudson on the same day indicates that Hudson took the initiative to explore the possibility of an agreement between Britain and the USSR, and that Potemkin was non-committal when pressed by Hudson on the USSR's apparent lack of enthusiasm for military co-operation.¹³² Next, in mid-April, Molotov, in his role as chairman of Sovnarkom, approached Turkey, to explore joint action against aggression in the Balkans and Black Sea areas.¹³³

Another indication of Molotov's growing power in foreign policy was staff changes in the commissariat. The appointment of Potemkin was the beginning of a process whereby an increasing number of staff owed loyalty to Molotov.¹³⁴ The selection of the young Gromyko as head of the American section in early 1939 was by a Politburo commission that included Molotov and Malenkov.¹³⁵ In addition, the swing towards a more nationalistic policy, and the desire to seek an understanding with Nazi Germany, involved purging Jews from NKInDel, many of whom had been appointed during Litvinov's tenure.¹³⁶ The NKVD's influence in the commissariat also increased, a turning point being the appointment of V. S. Korzhenko as 'director general' – head of personnel – in 1937.¹³⁷ He was replaced as deputy commissar by V. G. Dekanozov, a close associate of Beria, at the same time as Molotov's appointment.¹³⁸ In his closing months at NKInDel, Litvinov, who regarded Molotov as 'an accomplice' in the terror, was increasingly

under observation by the NKVD, commenting to the new French ambassador in March 'How can I conduct foreign policy with the Lubyanka across the way?'¹³⁹ The impact of the Terror in general, may have made Hitler less cautious, and France and Britain more wary, knowing that they were dealing with a weakened USSR.

In early 1939, the American *chargé d'affaires* reported a rumour that Litvinov was likely to be dismissed because his hostility to Nazi Germany militated against the development of relations with that country.¹⁴⁰ Litvinov was no longer consulted about staff appointments to the commissariat. Diplomats reported directly to Molotov, and articles on foreign policy from members of the commissariat, including Potemkin, appeared in the press without his knowledge. From mid-March Litvinov was involved in responding to British and French initiatives exploring the possibility of joint action to assist Poland and Romania, if they were attacked.¹⁴¹ There were frequent consultations with Stalin, Molotov and other members of the Politburo foreign affairs commission. These culminated in meetings in Stalin's office on 19 and 21 April, involving the Politburo foreign affairs commission, Litvinov and Potemkin. Maiskii (the ambassador to Britain), Surits (the ambassador to France), and A. Merekalov (the ambassador to Germany) were recalled for the meetings.¹⁴² On the second occasion there was radical criticism of Litvinov's policy of 'collective security', and Molotov emphasised alternatives including the possibility of strengthening relations with Germany.¹⁴³

The end of Litvinov's period of office was now approaching. Maiskii reported an interview on 27 April when Litvinov was summoned to the Kremlin, taking Maiskii with him, to see Stalin and Molotov: 'the atmosphere was about as tense as it could get. Although outwardly Stalin appeared at peace, puffing at his pipe, I felt that he was extremely ill-disposed towards Litvinov. And Molotov became violent, colliding with Litvinov incessantly, accusing him of every kind of mortal sin'.¹⁴⁴

Litvinov appeared near Stalin on the podium above the Lenin mausoleum at the May Day parade,¹⁴⁵ but late in the evening of 2 May, a group consisting of Molotov, Beria, Malenkov (a Central Committee secretary), and Dekanozov assembled in the commissariat to interrogate its high-ranking members. Litvinov was present, sitting dejectedly at the head of the table, as the panel probed for evidence of treasonous conspiracy, looking, it would seem, especially for evidence that would incriminate him personally. Gnedin recalls: 'Molotov had already replaced his earlier suppressed excitement and odd embarrassment with a haughty unfriendly attitude. When I made a "seditious" statement

about censorship he assumed a still more dissatisfied expression, simultaneously making a mark on his paper'.¹⁴⁶

Litvinov carried out his duties as normal, until about 4.00 pm on 3 May, seeing the British ambassador, and giving no hint that he was about to be replaced.¹⁴⁷ He was then summoned to the Kremlin, where the policy of collective security was discussed and criticised, during which time he remained passive, the protracted attempts to negotiate with England and France, apparently without result, having been the last straw for Stalin. Litvinov's reaction so infuriated Molotov that he screamed as Litvinov left the room, 'You think we are all fools.'¹⁴⁸ Politburo resolutions dated the same day relieved Litvinov of his position, ordered him to hand over to Molotov within three days, and appointed Dekanozov as a deputy commissar for foreign affairs.¹⁴⁹ Late on 3 May, the embassies in China and Prague received telegrams bearing the mysterious initial 'M'.¹⁵⁰ At 11.00 pm a message signed by Stalin was circulated to all ambassadors. It read:

In view of the serious conflict between Comrade Molotov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, and Comrade Litvinov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, over Comrade Litvinov's disloyal attitude to the Council of People's Commissars USSR, Comrade Litvinov has asked to be relieved of the duties of People's Commissar. The CPSU(b) Central Committee has complied with Comrade Litvinov's request and relieved him of the duties of People's Commissar. Comrade Molotov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars has been appointed to serve jointly as People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs¹⁵¹

Litvinov was later to accuse Molotov of removing, in his first few years at NKInDel, 'every important individual who had any experience of the outside world',¹⁵² and the huge turnover of staff is generally acknowledged.¹⁵³ Molotov, on his appointment as head of NKInDel, clearly had orders to purge the commissariat and bring it more closely under central control. In old age he admitted that, in 1939,

Stalin said to me 'Purge the ministry of Jews.' Thank god for these words! Jews formed an absolute majority in the leadership and among the ambassadors. It wasn't good. Latvians and Jews...and each one drew a crowd of his people along with him. Moreover, they regarded my arrival in office with condescension and jeered at the measures I began to implement.'¹⁵⁴

Ten years later, at a meeting of the commissariat, Molotov claimed:

the decision of the CPSU(b) Central Committee in May 1939 was prompted by the need to bring the Ministry of Foreign Affairs closer to the Central Committee and to make it a more direct agency of the Central Committee, in order to end the period when the Ministry was a refuge for the opposition and various kinds of dubious semi-party elements. Accordingly corrupt workers or those with any such entanglements were removed from the Ministry.¹⁵⁵

The NKVD purge of the commissariat, which had already been severe, reached a climax during the first years of Molotov's tenure of power,¹⁵⁶ and new appointments continued. On 6 July 1939, the American *chargé d'affaires* reported that

with very few exceptions almost the entire staff... has been changed since Molotov assumed the function of Commissar for foreign affairs... Their places without exception have been taken by unknown individuals who have had no experience of matters pertaining to foreign affairs, no knowledge of foreign languages, nor any contacts in general with foreigners or foreign countries... Among the minor officials... at least ninety per cent have been replaced.¹⁵⁷

In a crisis situation – the growing threat from Germany; the policy of 'appeasement' being pursued by the Western powers; and his fear of another Munich – Stalin decided to take personal control of foreign policy by appointing his right-hand man, Molotov, as Commissar for Foreign Affairs. He could now take direct action and respond quickly to any opportunity that presented itself. There were certainly tighter constraints from early 1939. Gnedin makes clear that the press section of NKInDel began to operate in a different way. Up to 1939 there were two sets of material: the 'white TASS' for the press, and the 'red TASS', a collection of telegrams that were not for publication. But from early 1939, many reports were not included in the 'red' collection, and NKInDel and the Central Committee apparatus were sent a list of members of the Politburo and government who could receive 'the daily collection of most interesting telegrams of foreign correspondents'. In this way, Gnedin stated, 'not all members of the Politburo or government received full information... leading diplomatic workers, up to the level of deputy head of department of NarkomIndel were deprived of elementary information'.¹⁵⁸ The power of the NKVD in NKInDel at the

time of Molotov's appointment and during his early months as commissar, and his activities as commissar for foreign affairs from the time of his appointment until the German attack in June 1941, and in particular his attitude towards the Baltic states, also suggest greater personal control by Stalin.¹⁵⁹

In April 1939, when Dimitrov raised with Stalin the proposals of Maurice Thorez, leader of the French communist party, for a more independent and critical line for the PCF in attacking the government and a stronger defence of 'collective security', Stalin's response, referring to his busy agenda, was to say 'Decide these questions by yourself.'¹⁶⁰ This was, however, precisely at the time when Litvinov and 'collective security' were under attack and radical new options were being explored.

The reasons for Molotov's appointment are therefore more complicated than the dismissal of Litvinov – a Jew with an English wife, and strongly committed to collective security – and his replacement by the pro-German Molotov as a preliminary to the negotiation of an alliance with Hitler.¹⁶¹ His behaviour in the Triple Alliance negotiations demonstrates that Britain and France had to make proposals for a firm military alliance if the negotiations were going to be successful,¹⁶² otherwise Stalin would use Molotov to pursue an alternative strategy as soon as the opportunity presented itself. His appointment was a change to a different policy, and not a more resolute pursuit of collective security than that undertaken by the disillusioned Litvinov.¹⁶³

Foreign affairs were considered to be in a state of crisis when Molotov took over. Purge was Stalin's reaction to crisis, and this was the formula he and his chief lieutenant applied to NKInDel.¹⁶⁴ There was also reorganisation, another typical Stalinist reaction to crisis. The third Western department was replaced by five territorial departments – for France and Belgium; Britain; Italy and Spain; the United States; and Latin America.¹⁶⁵ G. Kennan was later to note that, until Molotov's appointment, the commissariat was never responsible for the formulation of policy, and with Molotov's appointment, for the first time since 1918 a Politburo member was responsible.¹⁶⁶ V. N. Pavlov, an assistant to Molotov in 1939, when asked in 1972 about the role of NKInDel in the preparation of the 1939 Nazi–Soviet pact replied: 'Such documents were not prepared or discussed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A draft document was discussed in the Politburo. The initiative lay with Stalin.'¹⁶⁷ Indeed, according to Khrushchev, most other members of the Politburo were away duck-hunting while Stalin and Molotov negotiated with Ribbentrop.¹⁶⁸

During the 1930s, foreign policy was fashioned by Stalin and those closest to him, but in this Stalin's role was decisive. Policy was shaped by the available options, and the potential costs and benefits of those options and changes in the international situation were reflected in the changing power of different individuals and institutions in the foreign policy field. Symptomatic of this is the famous argument in the back of a car between Molotov and Litvinov, during Molotov's visit to the USA in 1942, when Molotov insisted that British and French pre-war policy aimed at pushing Hitler into war with the USSR, whilst Litvinov blamed the Western powers for not joining with the USSR to administer a strong rebuff to Germany.¹⁶⁹

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6

The Ukrainian Politburo, 1934–1937

Valery Vasil'ev

This chapter examines the activity of the Politburo of the Ukrainian Communist Party based on a comparison of its work in 1934 and 1937. It concentrates on the implementation of the political policies of the leadership of the USSR in Ukraine and the interrelationship of Moscow and the Ukrainian leadership. Particular attention is focused on economic policy, and especially on agricultural policy. The Ukrainian SSR had great economic significance for the USSR and the question of economic policy constituted the Ukrainian Politburo's main activity. Around these questions revolved the interrelationship between the Soviet and Ukrainian leaders. The Ukraine was the strongest and most important of the Soviet republics after the RSFSR. This study therefore serves to illustrate the wider principles governing relations between Moscow and the union republics in this period.

The Ukrainian Politburo's structure and membership

The Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine was established in 1918 and was included in the composition of the Russian Communist Party with the rights of an oblast organisation. With the establishment of the USSR in 1922, the Ukrainian Communist Party as a national, republican body was accorded at least a degree of independent power as part of the federal structure of power, but without control over foreign or defence policy. In July 1918, the Ukrainian Communist Party's first congress, which was held in Moscow, elected a Central Committee. The Ukrainian party was the only republican communist party that had its own Politburo. The Ukrainian Politburo realised the Kremlin's policy in Ukraine, and led the activities of all party and state bodies in the republic. The Orgburo was concerned with the selection and placement of

cadres, and managing party bodies in Ukraine. The Secretariat was concerned with the practical realisation of the decisions of the Politburo and Orgburo, and led current work.

In 1925, Stalin dispatched his deputy, L. M. Kaganovich, to become General Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, and to ensure its support in the power struggle after Lenin's death. However, in 1928, Stalin considered it prudent to withdraw Kaganovich from Ukraine because of the offence he had caused to the other Ukrainian leaders. He nominated S. V. Kosior as his replacement. Kosior remained party leader of Ukraine (the post was designated as First Secretary from January 1934) until January 1938. Notwithstanding his withdrawal in 1928, Kaganovich retained a special responsibility for Ukraine within the all-union Politburo; he was the man dispatched by Stalin to deal with problems in the republic as they arose, and the man that Ukrainian representatives tended to approach to influence policy in Moscow.

In January 1934, the XII congress of the Ukrainian Communist Party elected a Central Committee, which at its plenum set up a Politburo of twelve members and five candidates. Members were: Kosior (first secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee), V. A. Balitskii (head of the Ukrainian NKVD and chairman of the Ukrainian GPU), N. N. Demchenko (secretary of Kiev obkom), V. P. Zatonskii (People's Commissariat of Education of Ukraine), G. I. Petrovskii (chairman of the All Ukrainian Central Executive Committee), P. P. Postyshev (second secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee), S. A. Sarkisov (Sarkis) (first secretary of Stalinsk obkom), K. V. Sukhomlin (chairman of the Ukrainian TsKK-NKRKI), M. M. Khataevich (first secretary of Dnepropetrovsk obkom), V. Ya. Chubar' (chairman, of the Ukrainian Sovnarkom), M. Chuvyrin (chairman, All Ukrainian Council of Trade Unions) and I. Ye. Yakir (commander of the Ukrainian military district).

And the candidates were: E. I. Veger (first secretary of Odessa obkom), P. P. Lyubchenko (secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee, deputy chairman of the Ukrainian Sovnarkom), N. Popov (secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee), V. I. Chernyavskii (first secretary of Vinnitsa obkom) and A. G. Shlikhter (chairman of the Council for the Study of the Productive Forces of Ukraine).

The election of the Ukrainian Politburo by the Central Committee was, as was the election of the Central Committee by the congress, very much a formality and, in accordance with 'democratic centralism', was invariably approved in advance by Moscow. Appointments to key party and government positions in Ukraine, which carried with them membership of the Ukrainian Politburo and Central Committee, were approved

by the all-union Politburo, and all of the most important posts were approved by Stalin personally.

On 25 April 1934, the Ukrainian Central Committee plenum elected Lyubchenko, the new chairman of Sovnarkom Ukraine, as a full Politburo member, replacing Chubar', who was appointed deputy chairman of Sovnarkom USSR. I. Shelekhes (first deputy chairman of Sovnarkom Ukraine) was elected candidate member. In May 1936, Chuvyrin was relieved of his Politburo seat in connection with his assignment to work outside of Ukraine whilst N. Popov and Shelekhes were elected as Politburo members.

The Ukrainian Politburo examined and approved practically all resolutions of Sovnarkom Ukraine. Chubar', and then Lyubchenko, sent the draft resolutions of Sovnarkom Ukraine and the supporting materials to L. Akhmatov, head of the department of Administrative Affairs of Sovnarkom and the Economic Meetings of Sovnarkom Ukraine, and to V. Kanova, head of the Secret Section of the Ukrainian Central Committee, who reported to Kosior, Postyshev and other Politburo members. Sovnarkom USSR's Committee of Agricultural Procurement (KomZag) organised the grain collection campaigns. Many questions raised by I. Stepanskii, KomZag's plenipotentiary in the Ukraine, were submitted for resolution to the Ukrainian Politburo. The obkom secretaries posed a large number of questions at the sessions of the Politburo.

The Ukrainian Politburo was supposed to meet three times a month, but in reality meetings were held very irregularly. In 1934, there were just twenty-six Politburo sessions. Meetings were suspended during the spring sowing campaign in March and April, during the transfer of the capital to Kiev in June–July, and during the grain collection campaign in August–September. In these periods, decisions were adopted by polling the members (*oprosom*).

The Ukrainian Politburo's changing role, 1925–1933

Within the all-union Politburo, the Ukraine was granted privileged representation. In 1930, there were three Ukrainian representatives: Kosior, first secretary of the Ukrainian party, was a full member; while Chubar', chairman of the Ukrainian Sovnarkom, and Petrovskii, the veteran Ukrainian leader, were candidate members. This underlined the key political importance of Ukraine. However, the republican duties of these figures meant that their attendance at all-union Politburo sessions was rather intermittent. The Ukrainian party was also strongly represented in the all-union Central Committee. There

was also a significant representation of Ukrainians in key government positions. Chubar was appointed deputy chairman of Sovnarkom USSR in 1934, whilst G. F. Grin'ko was people's commissar (*narkom*) of finance (NKFin USSR).

The Ukrainian Politburo was at the height of its power in the 1920s. After 1925, it promoted vigorously the redevelopment of the southern metallurgical complex, in opposition to the demands of the Urals, and exerted a significant influence in shaping the First Five-Year Plan for industry. The Ukrainian leaders strongly supported the collectivisation drive and sought to outdo other regions, such as the North Caucasus, in attaining high rates of collectivisation. With the shift towards agricultural collectivisation and the adoption of the First Five-Year Plan in 1929, the Ukrainian Politburo's power was reduced significantly. In 1929, Vesenkha USSR assumed control over the management of all Ukraine's major industries. The creation of the People's Commissariat of Agriculture USSR (NKZem USSR) in 1929 reduced drastically the influence of the Ukrainian People's Commissariat of Agriculture. N. A. Skrypnik, and other Ukrainian spokesmen, strongly criticised this move for eroding the principle of Soviet federalism, and as a precedent that would be followed in other fields.¹

After 1929, power shifted to Sovnarkom USSR, Gosplan USSR and the all-union economic commissariats. The Ukrainian Gosplan and Politburo played no significant role in setting the targets for the Second Five-Year Plan. Despite the apparent strong representation of the Ukraine in the all-union Politburo, they were unable to counter the significant shift of investment to the RSFSR, and to the eastern parts of the country. In the 1930s, the Ukraine's standing, in both agriculture and industrial production as a proportion of total USSR production declined significantly. The Ukraine was increasingly integrated into the unitary Soviet state with its unified economy. As a vulnerable border region it occupied a key place in the government's defence and internal security policy.

The Ukrainian Politburo's powers were heavily circumscribed. Its role over heavy industry after 1929 was essentially supervisory and its influence over agriculture was limited by the dictates of central policy. Through KomZag, the Ukrainian Politburo effectively lost control even of the grain grown in the republic, it had a larger influence over light industry, trade, the urban economy, water transport, and social and cultural policy. The clamp-down on Ukrainian 'nationalism' after 1933 set further parameters within which official policy was to be developed. The power of executive decision-making lay neither in Kharkov nor

Kiev, but in Moscow, and Ukrainian leaders sought clearance from Moscow for even relatively minor policy matters. A constant flow of telegrams between Kharkov and Moscow sought authorisation for policy decisions.

The famine of 1932–33 created a crisis within the ruling Stalinist group, and affected profoundly the regime's relations with society, especially in Ukraine. In 1932, Stalin wanted to sack Kosior and Chubar', the first a full member and the second a candidate member of the all-union Politburo, complaining that their weakness and lack of resolve posed the danger that they would 'lose Ukraine'. However, both survived in senior positions until 1937–38. In 1932 Molotov and Kaganovich were sent to Ukraine in effect as Stalin's personal emissaries, to enforce central policy regarding grain collection.² The parachuting in of P. P. Postyshev (who had worked closely with Stalin and Kaganovich in the Secretariat) as second secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party in January 1933 underlined Stalin's determination to impose his will on the Ukrainian leaders. Postyshev retained his position as Secretary of the all-union Central Committee, and in February 1934 he became a candidate member of the all-union Politburo. In 1932–33, at the all-union Politburo's behest, the first secretaries of several Ukrainian obkoms were changed. On Stalin's initiative, Balitskii replaced S. F. Redens as head of the Ukrainian GPU, in a move intended to ensure central direction of the republic's security apparatus.

The Ukrainian Politburo supervised closely policy implementation in agriculture, overseeing the autumn and spring grain sowing campaign, the harvest campaign and the grain purchasing campaign; this involved much attention to the state of the tractor and combine parks. It also monitored official policy in industry, in 1933 enforcing the implementation of central party-government directives on dealing with problems of the Donbass coalfield and difficulties with the rail network in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Politburo until 1937 met in formal session relatively regularly, in contrast to the all-union Politburo. In contrast to the centre, collective leadership was preserved at the level of the Ukrainian republican leadership. Within the Ukrainian Politburo Kosior, Chubar' (then Lyubchenko), Postyshev and Petrovskii played the dominant roles, being required to carry out Moscow's 'general line'. Kosior's position as first secretary of Ukraine was in no way analogous to that of Stalin at the all-union level, with Ukrainian leaders under constant pressure to prove themselves.

The Ukrainian Politburo in Conditions of Relative Economic Stability, 1934

Problems of grain procurement and grain supply in the first half of 1934

The Ukraine was assigned a plan for grain collection from the harvest of 1933 of 6,127,384 tons. As early as 5 and 7 October 1933, Kosior reported to Kaganovich (Stalin was then on vacation in the south) that the harvest of 1933 had exceeded that of 1930 but that in various regions there were grave difficulties caused by bad weather and mismanagement. Kosior requested a new reduction for Ukraine for grain supply, with the transfer of the consequent shortfall from the *kolkhozy* to the harvest of 1934. On 18 October, the all-union Politburo reduced the plan for grain procurement for Ukraine by 41,492 tons.³

About a week later, Stalin, on his return from his vacation to Moscow via Ukraine, received Kosior and Postyshev in his railway carriage to report on the course of the grain collecting campaign. They persuaded him to lower the plan target to 5,612,506 tons. However, on 4 November, they requested that Stalin authorise a further reduction of the plan by 328,000 tons.⁴

But the reduction which was made was even greater than that requested by the Ukrainian Politburo. For the 1930s this was unprecedented. On 11 November 1933, the all-union Politburo approved a plan of grain purchasing for Ukraine of 4,888,000 tons. This allowed the Ukrainian Politburo to declare the year's plan fulfilled by 7 November 1933, and to claim that they had 'successfully liquidated the lag in agriculture' of which Stalin had accused them in 1932.⁵ The grain that was gathered after 7 November remained with the oblast leaders to be distributed to the weak *kolkhozy* and as aid to starving *kolkhozniki*.

In the period December 1933–January 1934, reports from Vinnitsa, Odessa, Chernigov and other oblasts again spoke of starvation, dystrophy and cannibalism in rural areas. Despite these warnings, the Moscow leadership attempted to collect from the Ukrainian *kolkhozy* 492,000 tons of grain. Of this, 49,000 tons were to be dispatched for grain supply in Ukraine.⁶ But this plan was not realised. On 3 January, the all-union Politburo rejected a request from Kosior and Chubar' for additional grain supplies for Ukraine in the first quarter. They were authorised only 'to borrow' from the republic's fund 5,000 tons, which they were obliged to repay.⁷ The next day, the Ukrainian Politburo prohibited *obkom* secretaries from submitting any further requests for the

provision of grain from centralised republican stocks to help the starving, while requiring them to eliminate food supply difficulties in various kolkhozy.⁸

But the republican authorities had only 16,400 tons of grain stocks at their disposal. In early February, Kosior presented proposals to increase the number of kolkhozy numbered in the republic fund, which the all-union Politburo promptly rejected.⁹ The new grain collection campaign encountered strong opposition. On 15 February, the Ukrainian Central Committee reported that the Ukrainian GPU in a short period had arrested 236 kulak elements for wrecking, and 1,730 were expelled from the kolkhozy and arrested.¹⁰

At the start of the spring sowing campaign there were severe food supply difficulties in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Politburo strove to reduce not only the sown areas but also the grain collections. The plan for winter sowing was not fulfilled. But the per-hectare plan of collection was strictly related to the plan of sowing. Therefore, on 20 February, the Ukrainian Politburo and Sovnarkom resolved that the already-sown area of 1933 must not be included in the plan of spring sowing.¹¹ Correspondingly, the plan for grain supply must be reduced.

This was the first indication that the Ukrainian leaders had received the green light to normalise economic policy within the kolkhoz system. A second sign was the Ukrainian Politburo's decision not to impose on the kolkhozniki and individual peasants plans of spring sowing of grain on their plots. A third indication was the letter of Kosior to Stalin of 20 February 1934, in which he openly spoke of the absence of seed funds which threatened the planned targets of grain collection for the 1934 harvest.¹²

The normalisation of economic policy

The CPSU's XVII congress (26 January–12 February 1934) marked a turn towards the normalisation of economic policy. The targets for the Second Five-Year Plan, which was discussed at the congress, reflected greater balance compared to the First Five-Year Plan: the growth tempo of industry was lowered, and greater priority was accorded to the development of branch 'B' industries.¹³

In their speeches to the congress, the Ukrainian leaders hailed Stalin's firm leadership in helping them overcome the crisis of collectivisation in the republic. However, Chubar' took up Stalin's criticisms of NKZem USSR, censuring its policy of extending the sown area in Ukraine without the adequate provision of agricultural implements. He also criticised

the planning of grain collection, which was calculated on the basis of the planned acreage of sowing. Kosior and Petrovskii noted the need to introduce correct crop rotation and proper land organisation in the kolkhozy, and to improve timely repairs of tractors and raise the quality of seed.¹⁴

Postyshev's report to the congress strongly attacked the past weakness of the leadership of the Ukrainian party. He criticised the over-hasty resort to repression, counter to the warning issued by Stalin in 1931, which had damaged and discredited the party.¹⁵ He denounced the influence of the now-deceased Skrypnik, and urged new efforts to extirpate the remnants of the nationalist counter-revolutionaries in the party and state apparatus, and in the cultural and educational institutions.¹⁶

Economic relaxation was combined with a continuing offensive against bourgeois nationalism. The Ukrainian Politburo resolved to transfer the capital of Ukraine to Kiev in the autumn of 1933. This was justified with reference to the need to strengthen control over the agricultural regions located on Right-Bank Ukraine, and by the needs of national-cultural construction.¹⁷ Kiev was the historic centre of the Ukrainian lands, and a stronghold of the Ukrainian nationalist intelligentsia. The move was highly symbolic in asserting the party's authority, and the decision coincided with the worst phase of the famine, which was then devastating the republic.

On 28 March 1934, Postyshev instructed Balitskii, head of the Ukrainian NKVD, that relatives of those charged as counter-revolutionaries were to be dismissed from their work and studies, expelled from their apartments and deported outside Ukraine to the North. This was to be done immediately, and was not to be constrained by niceties regarding evidence of anti-state activities. These orders, he noted, had the sanction of a higher authority: 'This is not just my personal opinion.'¹⁸

The spring sowing of 1934

In the spring of 1934, the Ukrainian Politburo was occupied with overseeing the sowing campaign. On 15 February it set up its Sowing Commission headed by Postyshev.¹⁹ On 20 February, having been informed by Kosior of the absence of seed stocks in Ukraine, it sent a letter to Stalin requesting that the republic be assigned 111,520 tons of food and seed loans.²⁰

On 5 March, the all-union Politburo approved increased supplies, but the loan assigned to the republic's sovkhhozy and the food aid granted to the kolkhozy was much less than requested.²¹ On 15 March, the

Ukrainian Politburo dispatched its members to the regions to oversee the sowing. Postyshev remained in Kharkov, distributing to the oblasts the tractors, ploughs, parts and fuel that the republic had received from the all-union bodies. He personally oversaw the sowing campaign and repeatedly sent threatening telegrams to the oblast leaders warning of the consequences of non-fulfilment of plan targets.

Stalin and Kaganovich followed the sowing campaign closely. They received regular reports from Postyshev and Kosior and examined their requests. Special control was exercised over the quality of the sowing.²² On 15 April, Kosior complained to Stalin about NKZem USSR's practice of constantly revising the targets for sown acreage, and proposed that a fixed plan be set in June–July each year.²³ In May–June the all-union Politburo issued a whole series of decisions assigning Ukraine seed and food loans.

As part of the softening of the state's policy in agriculture, on 3 April, the Ukrainian Central Committee, on a proposal submitted by Sarkisov, established commissions at raion level to review the sentences imposed on kolkhozniki since 1931. The decision was agreed with the all-union Central Committee, and on 16 April the All-Ukrainian TsIK issued a law to this effect (not published in the press).²⁴ On 26 April, the Ukrainian Politburo adopted an exemplary resolution censuring the leadership of Novo-Bug raion in Odessa oblast for violating the all-union Central Committee–Sovnarkom decree of 8 March 1933 which prohibited the mass resettlement of peasants. The raion leaders were dismissed and disciplined by the party. This was reinforced by an all-union Politburo resolution at the end of June 1934.²⁵

As a result of drought in the southern oblasts of Ukraine, large areas of sown winter wheat were lost. As a whole, the plan of spring sowing was fulfilled 104 per cent. The sowing campaign was accompanied by further pressure on the starving peasants to join the collective farms. In Ukraine in the first half of 1934, 151,700 households entered the kolkhozy.²⁶ Various measures were instituted to tighten discipline in the kolkhozy. On 9 June 1934, Postyshev reported to Kaganovich that the kolkhozy were violating the provisions of the 'Model Charter of the Rural Artel' by placing kolkhoz resources at the disposal of individual kolkhozniki. In reply, Kaganovich reported that the question would be examined after the harvest, or in time for the next all-union Central Committee plenum.²⁷

The Ukrainian leadership sought to resist any further transfer of its powers to the all-union commissariats. A Sovnarkom USSR proposal to grant NKZem USSR power to appoint and confirm the people's

commissars (*narkoms*) of agriculture of the union and autonomous republics, as well as the heads of the krai and oblast agricultural administration, provoked strong resistance. Postyshev and Lyubchenko objected, in a letter to Stalin and Kuibyshev, defending the existing order by which the narkom of the republics were nominated by the all-union Central Committee and confirmed by the Presidium TsIK of the relevant union republic.²⁸

Grain purchasing from the harvest of 1934

The harvest of 1934 was greater than that of 1933.²⁹ The Ukrainian Politburo oversaw closely the campaign of grain procurement, which began on 1 July 1934. NKZem USSR approved the plan of grain procurement on 17 July. At the meeting of the all-union Politburo, Kosior persuaded Stalin and his colleagues to lower the target for Ukraine, and it was reduced by 1,968,000 tons. As a result, the general figure of grain procurement for Ukraine from the 1934 harvest was set at 3,956,434 tons.³⁰

The Ukrainian Politburo, faced by the unwillingness of the kolkhozy and peasants to supply grain to the state, adopted a number of harsh measures. The raikoms and the Machine-Tractor Stations (MTS) were authorised to take from the kolkhozy grain as payment for work done by the MTS. Local leaders were warned that those guilty of withholding grain would be brought to court. The Procurator was charged to carry out the strictest oversight of land utilisation.³¹

In 1934, drought afflicted the Dnepropetrovsk oblast, and on 28 July the obkom first secretary, Khataevich, reported to Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich and Kosior a serious shortfall in the grain harvest. The same day, Kosior and Postyshev sent a telegram to Stalin warning that the situation in Dnepropetrovsk and parts of Odessa oblast was similar to that in 1928.³² On 7 August, Dnepropetrovsk oblast's grain procurement plan was reduced by 65,600 tons, but Kosior, Lyubchenko and Khataevich were warned that the new plan was final and they were required without deviation to fulfil it.³³

On 13 August, Postyshev and Lyubchenko reported to Molotov and Kaganovich that a number of kolkhozy in Odessa, Kharkov and Dnepropetrovsk oblasts, having met their obligations for grain procurement, were left without seed for winter sowing and with insufficient food stocks. In this situation the Ukrainian leaders proposed to the oblast officials not to set aside seed for the winter sowing but to fulfil the plan. On 22 August, Kosior and Lyubchenko censured the Dnepropetrovsk obkom for the disorder in grain purchasing and its

repeated attempts to engage in bargaining about further loans and aids. Two days later, Khataevich reported to Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich, Kosior, Postyshev and Lyubchenko on the punishments meted out to various officials. But low grain yields jeopardised the plan's fulfilment.

On 26 August, the Ukrainian Central Committee censured the Dnepropetrovsk obkom's failure to end the sabotage of grain purchasing by leaders of the raions and MTS. Such sabotage, it noted, had in the past compelled it to resort to measures of mass repression, against which Stalin had warned at the January 1933 Central Committee plenum. The defence of such kolkhozy workers and kolkhozniki from the state was deemed a 'kulak position'.³⁴ On 27 August, Kosior and Postyshev reported to Kaganovich on the measures taken to improve grain procurement in Dnepropetrovsk and Donetsk oblasts.³⁵

In the summer of 1934, the Ukrainian leadership encountered serious opposition to grain collection in all oblasts. I. Stepankii, KomZag's plenipotentiary in Ukraine, warned of deliberate attempts to reduce the harvest estimates. Z. Katsnelson, the deputy narkom of NKVnutTorg Ukraine, sent regular reports to Postyshev, Kosior and Lyubchenko about the theft of grain from the fields and from the transport system. On 31 August the all-union Politburo sent Kaganovich to Ukraine to speed up the grain procurements.³⁶ On 5–6 September he and Kosior visited Vinnitsa oblast, where they held two meetings with raion party and soviet officials, MTS and kolkhoz chairmen.³⁷ Kaganovich visited Taganrog, Moldavia, Odessa and Krivoi Rog. On 12 September he addressed the Ukrainian Politburo and a meeting of obkom secretaries, demanding strict fulfilment of the grain collection targets.³⁸

During this tour, Kaganovich sent almost daily reports to Stalin about the situation. In one of these, sent from Odessa, he supported the request of the Ukrainian leaders to reduce the grain purchasing targets for Ukraine because of the drought and harvest failure in the southern regions. He was put firmly in his place. On 12 September, Stalin wrote to Kaganovich complaining of the 'new discussions of the Ukrainians about reductions'. The following day, he upbraided Kaganovich, considering his proposal as a 'signal of pressure of local workers on Moscow, who certain people like c. Kaganovich are ready to accept'. He demanded more 'pressure' on the obkom first secretaries to fulfil the grain supply plan.³⁹ Evidently unaware of Stalin's note, however, Kosior and Postyshev wrote to Kaganovich on 13 September requesting that the all-union Politburo reduce Ukraine's grain purchasing target from 246,000 tons to no more than 164,000 tons because of the poor harvest in the steppe region.⁴⁰

On 14 September the Ukrainian Politburo ordered repressive measures against the 'most evil' individual peasants who withheld grain from the state. Trials of these individuals were to be processed in five days. But the directive also warned local party workers against excessive resort to repression.⁴¹ The drive to extract grain from individual peasants was accompanied by a new wave of collectivisation through compulsion and the threat of starvation.⁴²

Stalin, through Kaganovich, on 16 September ordered the Ukrainian leadership to fulfil the plans of grain supply and grain purchase.⁴³ Khataevich, on 26 September, with characteristic frankness, warned the Moscow and Ukrainian leaders of the hostile mood of the *kolkhozniki* and the development of near-famine conditions in Dnepropetrovsk oblast. He requested food aid, to provide for the public feeding of children, and seed grain for the autumn sowing campaign.⁴⁴

On 2 October, the Ukrainian Politburo overturned the Dnepropetrovsk obkom's ruling that grain could be purchased only from those *kolkhozy* that had more than 4 kilograms of grain as labour day payments for *kolkhozniki* (*trudoden*) and that had also created an insurance fodder stock. It accused the obkom buro and Khataevich personally of adopting a 'harmful and incorrect' stance, which contradicted the all-union Central Committee resolution on grain purchasing.⁴⁵ Five days later, Postyshev met members of the all-union Politburo in the Kremlin (Stalin was still on vacation) and reported on the campaign's progress in Ukraine. Kosior sent all information on this account to Postyshev through A. N. Poskrebyshv, head of the Special Department of the all-union Central Committee.⁴⁶ After this, the policies of the Ukrainian leadership became more repressive.

Strengthening the repressive tendency in policy

On 9 October 1934, the Ukrainian Politburo adopted a resolution on combating the theft of grain at receiving points, elevators and mills. Members of the raikom buros were assigned to these places to oversee the receipt of grain, and the NKVD was charged with organising checks.⁴⁷ On 17 October the Ukrainian Politburo resolved to deport 500 individual peasant families – 'evil non-suppliers of grain' – outside of the borders of Ukraine.⁴⁸ Three days later, Kosior sent Kaganovich a letter justifying these measures because of the 'sabotage of grain supply' in Vinnitsa, Chernigov, Kiev and Kharkov oblasts.

The Ukrainian Politburo on 28 October, in a report from Postyshev, launched a new attack on nationalist and Trotskyist influences in

education and culture. At this time, party officials accused of protecting people during the party purge were expelled. Yu. Kotsyubinskii, a former Trotskyist, was ousted as chairman of Gosplan Ukraine and expelled from the Ukrainian Central Committee. The staff of the Ukrainian Soviet Encyclopaedia (USE), which Skrypnyk had edited, was dissolved. Shortly afterwards the officials of USE were charged as leading figures in the 'counter-revolutionary Ukrainian underground'.⁴⁹ At the same time, measures were taken to intensify border security and tighten up the regime on the western border of the USSR.

Stalin used the murder of S. M. Kirov on 1 December as the pretext for intensifying political repression. On 13–14 December, the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court USSR in Kiev tried thirty-seven individuals charged with terrorist offences. All these individuals had been prominent political leaders or intellectuals. Twenty-eight were sentenced to death.⁵⁰ In January 1935, the Ukrainian NKVD charged Yu. Mazurenko (one of the leaders of the Ukrainian Communist Party in 1918–25), N. P. Lyubchenko (the Ukrainian prime minister's brother) and others with establishing a counter-revolutionary Borotbist organisation. At this time, however, these charges were not developed.⁵¹

In December 1934, the Ukrainian authorities began closing Polish village councils and schools in the border region. On 9 December, the Ukrainian Politburo received a telegram from the all-union Politburo for the deportation of Germans from the border regions, and on 27 December the all-union Politburo resolved to resettle 7,000–8,000 households of 'unreliable elements' from the Ukraine's western border regions to the eastern regions of the republic. Moreover, the NKVD was obliged to expel from the western border raion 2,000 'anti-soviet households'.⁵²

The social and economic situation in Ukraine at the end of 1934

The grain-purchasing plan was fulfilled in Ukraine in November 1934, but the delivery of grain to the state continued in Kiev, Vinnitsa and Kharkov oblast.⁵³ During October–December the all-union Politburo assigned food aid and seed loans to various oblasts of Ukraine. On 27 December it assigned 632,220 tons of grain as seed aid to the Ukrainian kolkhozy.⁵⁴ On 21 October, Kosior and Lyubchenko, in a letter to Stalin and Molotov, opposed categorically Sovnarkom USSR's plans to extract 1,400 tons of grain in October. Already, they noted, because of a poor harvest, the target had been reduced to 2,015 tons

and then to 1,000 tons. They requested that the all-union Politburo examine and reverse the decision of Sovnarkom USSR.⁵⁵

The Ukrainian Politburo paid relatively little attention to industry. In January 1934 it resolved to transfer some enterprises from the republican authorities to the oblast administration, to improve the utilisation of local resources and increase the production of goods of mass consumption.⁵⁶ On 20 January, it adopted measures for overcoming production difficulties at the Lugansk locomotive works, transferring to it hundreds of engineers and skilled workers from other enterprises, imposing strict organisation of work on auxiliary enterprises, and requiring the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry USSR (NKTyazhProm) to abolish the trend towards wage levelling, establish equal pay for men and women engaged in the same work, and improve workers' supplies and catering.⁵⁷

In 1934, the Ukrainian leaders interacted actively with various all-union commissariats, and with other republican and regional chiefs. Thus Postyshev resolved a number of questions with G. K. Ordzhonikidze (narkom of NKTyazhProm USSR), and with the secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaidzhan M. D. Bagirov. Kosior maintained contact with Kirov (first secretary of Leningrad obkom) and with A. I. Rykov (narkom of NKSvyaz USSR). The heads of Sovnarkom UkSSR – Chubar' and Lyubchenko – petitioned constantly Sovnarkom USSR and Molotov personally for raw material and equipment supplies for enterprises in Ukraine.⁵⁸

In 1934, the Ukrainian Politburo oversaw the construction work at the Krivoi Rog and Zaporozhe metallurgical works and heard reports from the Makeevka metallurgical work on the experiment in introducing profit and loss accounting (*khozraschet*) blast furnace brigades.⁵⁹

On 5 July, Kosior and Postyshev sent a telegram to Stalin requesting his support for their initiative to build an automatic machine-tools works in Kiev, as a move to raise the new capital's status. V. I. Mezhlauk, chairman of Gosplan USSR, opposed the scheme and proposed that the works be built in Taganorog. However, the Ukrainian leaders convinced Stalin and won the project for Kiev.⁶⁰ In 1934, industrial production in Ukraine recorded a big surge compared to 1933; see Table 6.1.

Thus, in 1934, the Ukrainian Politburo's relations with the all-union Politburo reflected certain contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, the Ukrainian leadership acted within the limits of the party's 'general line' regarding the normalisation of economic policy. But, during the grain collection, the use of repression, although less than in the preceding year, remained intense.

Table 6.1 Industrial production, Ukraine, 1933–1934

Branch of production	Percentage of plan fulfilment 1934	Percentage growth in comparison to 1933
Value of production of industry (million rubles in 1926/27 prices)	98.1	129.8
Electrical power	119.0	149.8
Coal	100.6	120.2
Coke	102.0	128.5
Iron ore	103.0	150.6
Pig iron	107.5	148.1
Steel	101.2	136.6
Rolled metal	105.5	138.4

Source: TsGAVOVU Ukrainy, 318/1/164, 1.

The Ukrainian Politburo in the conditions of the 'Great Terror', 1937

Preparing and implementing repression against the Ukrainian leadership

In 1936, Ukraine failed to fulfil the plan for the supply of grain, sugar beet and other agricultural produce to the state, and the output of coal, pig iron and steel did not exceed the output for 1935. This evoked Stalin's displeasure, and in the second half of 1936 he used the campaign struggle with 'sabotage' of the Stakhanovite movement as well as against 'counter-revolutionary' Trotskyism and Zinovievism, to intensify repression. At the end of 1936, Stalin, at a meeting with the Ukrainian leaders, complained of the arrogance of the Kharkov leadership, and the non-fulfilment of plans for the supply of grain and sugar beet.⁶¹

After the famous telegram sent by Stalin and Zhdanov of 25 September, the all-union Politburo removed G. G. Yagoda and appointed N. I. Ezhov as the narkom of NKVD USSR. Kaganovich, Ya. E. Rudzutak, Petrovskii and Postyshev were listed on the resolution as voting in favour.⁶² The names of other Politburo members are not given.

With Ezhov's appointment, repression was intensified in Ukraine, as elsewhere. In October–November 1936, a number of former 'Trotskyists' in Postyshev's circle were arrested. Kaganovich, in the presence of Ezhov at the time of the VIII Extraordinary Congress of Soviets (November 1936), denounced A. Khvyła, head of the administration of culture and art of Sovnarkom Ukraine for 'counter-revolutionary' activity.

P. P. Lyubchenko, sensing the threat to himself, obtained a meeting with Stalin, in the course of which he sought to persuade Stalin of Khvyla's innocence. However, according to Kosior at the XIII Ukrainian party congress (May–June 1937), Lyubchenko, by his actions, condemned himself.

Postyshev began to prepare a counter-blow to demonstrate his vigilance in the struggle with the 'enemies of the people'. In December 1936, F. Samutin, the head of the department of art of the oblast ispolkom in Chelyabinsk, was arrested. A former Borotbist, Samutin had earlier worked in Vinnitsa. He provided testimony regarding the existence of a counter-revolutionary organisation of Borotbists in Ukraine, headed by P. P. Lyubchenko. At the end of 1936, Postyshev and Balitskii travelled to Moscow with compromising material to authorise the arrest of A. Khvyla and A. L. Trilisskii (in 1932–37 chairman of Vinnitsa oblast ispolkom). At that time the matter was left open.

But the repression against the leading Ukrainian workers intensified. At the end of December 1936/beginning of January 1937, twenty-five candidates and members of the Ukrainian Central Committee were expelled from the party and arrested on charges of 'Trotskyism', 'Zinovievism' and Ukrainian 'nationalism'. At this time, the NKVD prepared material against Trilisskii as a member of a 'Ukrainian Military Organisation'.⁶³

On 13 January, Stalin delivered the first blow to the Ukrainian leadership. The all-union Central Committee adopted its resolution, criticising the 'unsatisfactory party leadership' of the Kiev obkom and the Ukrainian Central Committee, whose administration (*apparat*), it asserted, was 'infiltrated by enemies of the people'. Postyshev was accused of loss of 'Bolshevik vigilance' and of surrounding himself with 'enemies'.⁶⁴

Kaganovich travelled to Kiev to attend the session of the Ukrainian Politburo on 16 January.⁶⁵ There were eleven individuals present: Kaganovich, Kosior, Postyshev, Sukhomlin, Khataevich, I. Il'in, Yakir, Balitskii, P. P. Lyubchenko, N. Popov and I. Sapov. The meeting fully endorsed the all-union Politburo's resolution of 13 January, and censured Postyshev and the Ukrainian Politburo, including Kosior, for packing the Ukrainian Central Committee's administration, the Kiev and other obkom administrations, and the Ukrainian scientific-cultural organisations, with 'Trotskyists' elements. It approved S. A. Kudryavtsev's appointment as first secretary of the Kiev obkom.⁶⁶ The resolution, evidently dictated by Kaganovich, criticised Postyshev and Kosior, and the leaders of the obkoms and of the scientific-cultural organisations of Ukraine, for lack of vigilance in exposing 'enemies of the people'.

N. F. Gikalo (first secretary of the Belorussian Communist Party) replaced Demchenko (appointed deputy narkom of NKZem USSR) as first secretary of Kharkov obkom. Gikalo was appointed on the 'recommendation' of the all-union Politburo of 25 January. On 8 March, the all-union Politburo dismissed Postyshev as second secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee. He was then appointed as first secretary of Kuibyshev kraikom. Khataevich was made second secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee, and N. V. Margolin (second secretary of the Moscow obkom) was appointed secretary of the Dnepropetrovsk obkom. At the same time, F. Golub, second secretary of Odessa obkom, was ousted, and was soon accused of 'Trotskyism'.⁶⁷

From the first days of their arrival in Ukraine, Kudryatsev and Gikalo showed that they were despatched there with clear instructions from Stalin to lead a campaign of political accusations against the remaining Ukrainian leaders.

Preparing and implementing the spring sowing

The spring sowing campaign in Ukraine was hampered by inadequate seed funds. On 14 January 1937, the all-union Politburo granted the Ukrainian kolkhozy a loan of 73,600 tons of grain from KomZag for the spring sowing. The loan was to be repaid from the coming harvest with 10 per cent interest.⁶⁸ Other regions of the USSR submitted demands for similar treatment. On 20 January, Stalin and Molotov in a telegram forbade the kraikoms, kraispolkoms, Central Committees and Sovnarkoms of republics from referring to the all-union Central Committee and Sovnarkom any kind of request for seed, food or fodder loans.⁶⁹

After the poor harvest of 1936, the Ukrainian leaders were anxious to improve performance in 1937. At the end of 1936 the Ukrainian Politburo requested from NKZem USSR increased resources for the repair of tractors, and requested from NKTyazhProm USSR more spare parts for tractors. In January 1937, it confirmed proposals prepared by Sovnarkom Ukraine jointly with all-union commissariats, and the plan for the distribution to the oblasts and to Ukrainian commissariat of kerosene, benzine and flour. However, at the beginning of March, when the sowing campaign began, there remained a large deficit of all necessary resources.

In January–February 1937 the Ukrainian Politburo, jointly with NKZem USSR and Gosplan USSR's agricultural sector, agreed the plan of spring sowing for the oblasts. Then Gosplan USSR raised the target for sown area unilaterally by 100,000 hectares. Kosior and Lyubchenko

protested to Mezhlauk, head of Gosplan USSR, against the decision.⁷⁰ In the spring and early summer, Kosior and Lyubchenko repeatedly addressed requests to Stalin for food, fodder and seed loans.⁷¹ Some additional seed was provided, but strict control was enforced over its distribution and over the sowing campaign generally. Khataevich, as second party secretary, relayed these telegrams to all the Ukrainian oblasts. On 31 March, Kosior reported to Stalin that the Ukrainian Politburo had dispatched its members to the oblasts to oversee the sowing campaign.⁷² As part of the campaign, large numbers of raion and oblast officials were replaced.

The Ukrainian Politburo on 14 April, under pressure from the obkom secretaries, charged Lyubchenko with resolving the fuel crisis in Ukraine. On 25 April, after reports from Lyubchenko and Khataevich, it sent a telegram to Stalin and Molotov requesting an additional 12,000 tons of kerosene.⁷³ Some additional fuel was provided.

Problems of food supply

In view of low stocks, on 1 November 1936 strict limits were placed on the sale of flour in Ukraine.⁷⁴ This was the first time the Soviet government had been compelled to revert to such methods since the abolition of rationing in January 1935. In January and February 1937, the supply of bread, flour, groats and foodstuffs to the rural areas of Kiev oblast became acute.⁷⁵ On 16 February, Stalin and Molotov attempted to influence the situation by resolving, from 1 February, to assign to the localities 20 per cent of the grain gathered by Zagotzerno during the grain collection, for sale to the population. However, the measure met with no success.⁷⁶

On 20 February, Bogatyrev, the commissar of internal trade for Ukraine, petitioned the all-union commissariat of Internal Trade and KomZag for additional supplies of 5,000 tons of flour and 3,000 tons of groats. His appeal was rejected. Two days later, evidently with the support of Lyubchenko, he put the question to the Ukrainian Politburo.⁷⁷ In March, Khataevich and Lyubchenko sent a telegram to Stalin and Molotov noting the 'extremely difficult situation' regarding bread supplies. They requested an additional 8,000 tons of flour and were granted 5,000 tons. In April, acute livestock losses obliged the Soviet leadership to assign a loan of 800,000 puds of fodder to Ukraine, to be repaid, with 10 per cent interest, from the next harvest.⁷⁸

The shortages of food and other necessities caused serious discontent. An NKVD report from Odessa oblast recorded a demonstration by

2,000–3,000 people.⁷⁹ The rural localities of Kharkov, Vinnitsa, Chernigov and Odessa oblast were on the verge of a new famine. In several raions of Kharkov oblast, starving families were abandoning their children in children's homes. In the villages, rumours circulated that there was no bread in the country, that it was being sent to Spain, and that a rationing system would be introduced. In the towns, a strike mood strengthened, and parallels were drawn with the situation in 1921 and 1932–33.⁸⁰ The campaign against the 'enemies of the people' provided scapegoats for these popular frustrations and resentments.

In response to the difficulties in food supply, the Ukrainian leadership sought to strengthen its powers. On 27 May 1937, the Ukrainian Central Committee sent a note, signed by Khataevich, to I. Ya. Veitser, head of the People's Commissariat on Internal Trade USSR, complaining of the over-bureaucratised, over-centralised trade system, and the inability of the Ukrainian People's Commissariat of Internal Trade to fulfil its plan for goods. It proposed to organise in Ukraine a Chief Administration of Local Trade with economic functions, and it requested that Veitser put this matter to Sovnarkom USSR.⁸¹

This attempt, like other attempts by the Ukrainian leadership to decentralise decision-making powers from the all-union structures, failed. The 1937 harvest was excellent. On 16 September, Stalin instructed the Ukrainian leadership to remove from 1 September the limits on the sale of flour and for the supply of bread to rural areas. KomZag was ordered to ensure adequate supplies of flour to the trading networks and bakeries in Ukraine.⁸²

Problems of industry

At the end of 1936 and the beginning of 1937, serious difficulties arose in industry. Coal output of the Donbass in 1936 was lower than in 1935. At the end of 1936 output fell, and the situation worsened at the beginning of 1937.⁸³ On 17 March, the all-union Politburo discussed Gosplan's figures for the second quarter and set a daily output for coal for Donbass of 232,000 tons.⁸⁴ On 9 April, the Ukrainian Politburo dispatched a group of leading Ukrainian officials, headed by Sukhomlin, chairman of Gosplan Ukraine, to Donbass to investigate.⁸⁵

On 20 April, the all-union Politburo appointed Sarkisov first secretary of the Donetsk obkom, as head of the trust Donbassugol'. The aim was to ensure a boost in coal output. At this time a number of industrial managers were transferred to the Donbass. But Sarkisov could be in no doubt that his transfer reflected Stalin's dissatisfaction with the

situation in Donbass, and with him personally. On 10 May the all-union Politburo appointed E. K. Pramnek, first secretary of Gorky kraikom, as first secretary of Donetsk obkom in place of Sarkisov.⁸⁶

At the Ukrainian Communist Party's XIII congress, M. Dyukanov, one of the leading managers of the Donbass coal industry, reported that, on 21 April, Stalin had summoned to a session of the all-union Politburo certain Donbass officials. Members of the Politburo had questioned them on the problems of the coal industry. Stalin, listening attentively to their replies, noted: 'Labour discipline with you is completely unsatisfactory.' He charged the Ukrainian Central Committee of neglecting the coal industry, with various enterprises working on 'starvation rations'. Officials from the Donbass coalfield requested an extra assignment of 250 million rubles, 500 automatic machines, special clothing and additional food supplies. When the meeting concluded, Stalin declared: 'I hope that the Donbas Bolsheviks, the Donbas workers, correct the situation with coal.'⁸⁷

The all-union Politburo discussed the basic draft report on the Donbass coal industry, which was issued as a joint Central Committee-Sovnarkom USSR decree on 28 April and published in *Pravda* the next day. It criticised the economic and party organisations of Donbass for failing to adhere to the all-union Central Committee's and Sovnarkom's resolutions of 8 April and 21 May 1933. The wages of underground workers were lower than those of surface workers. Engineers and technicians were again returning from underground work into positions in the trust and mine administrations, while the wage structure in 1936 was again characterised by a proliferation of norms and grades. Capital and preparatory work in the mines was neglected.

The Soviet leaders blamed these faults on wreckers, spies and diversionists in the main coal administration and trust – Glavuglyya and Donbassuglyya. But the leading organs in Donbass were also accused of negligence. The resolution censured the economic, party and trade union bodies for their attitude towards workers – for allowing unwarranted repression, expulsion from the party and trade unions, and dismissal from work. At the same time, it criticised the practice of 'unwarranted accusation of managers, engineers and technicians'. The Donetsk obkom was required to render all support and help to 'the honourable working engineers, technicians and managers'.⁸⁸

On 13 May, the Ukrainian Central Committee adopted its own resolution on Donbass. It noted that, during 1936 in Donbass, over 1,000 individuals – specialists, engineers and leaders – had been investigated,

of whom 500 were prosecuted. It censured the Donetsk obkom and 'command staff' for their incorrect attitude, and required the legal organs in one month's time to re-examine all cases of the prosecution of leading officials since 1933. Nomenklatura personnel were not to be dismissed without Sarkisov's agreement. But Sarkisov himself was powerless to halt the continuing repression waged by the NKVD.

At the Ukrainian Communist Party's XIII congress, many of the Ukrainian party and economic leaders blamed defects in the economy on the influence of 'enemies of the people'. Kosior and Sarkisov hinted obliquely at their dissatisfaction with official policy. They did not criticise the repression directly, but spoke of the need to overcome the 'evil theory' that the Stakhanovite movement was the only means of overcoming the legacy of wrecking.⁸⁹ Khataevich, however, struck quite a different note. He was considered to be a Stalin loyalist, but was noted for his independent cast of mind. In an extraordinary and courageous speech he questioned the whole logic of the current policy of repression.

He criticised mass expulsions from the party, citing specific examples from the Stalin metallurgical works. On 31 January, at a shop discussion of the all-union Politburo's resolution that censured the Kiev obkom and Ukrainian Central Committee, one party member, Krasnikov, declared that the all-union Central Committee was itself not blameless. 'Here, says (Krasnikov) – Khataevich reported – alongside Ordzhonikidze sat Pyatakov, alongside Kaganovich sat Lifshits, yes and Stalin is also guilty – did he not see anything?'. Krasnikov was expelled from the party immediately.

Moreover, Khataevich argued that not all those who were 'Whites' in 1918 should be treated as enemies. They should avoid the 'hurrah' mood which labelled people indiscriminately as wreckers, and which fostered fear. He warned against the tendency to explain economic difficulties as a result of wrecking, citing the example of an Ukrainian Central Committee instructor Lozovoi, who, when his report on problems in the Krivoi Rog iron-ore basin was criticised by the Krivbass trust, promptly condemned the trust's officials as wreckers.

Krivbass's failures to meet its targets for iron ore production during the Second Five-Year Plan, Khataevich argued, was not the result of wrecking, but rather the consequence of NKTyazhProm's decision in 1936 to cut investment, close mines and lay off workers. This was done in the face of the advice given by Krivbass, and the Dnepropetrovsk obkom, which he (Khataevich) had at that time headed. While individual wreckers existed ('perhaps not a few') he rejected the notion of a widespread

wrecking conspiracy. Such accusations, he argued, had to be made with care. The coal industry's successes in 1935 had produced a mood of euphoria, but the shortfalls in 1936 had provoked panic, resulting in mass dismissals. This huge turnover of cadres, he argued, was 'one of the main reasons for the difficulties that we have in Donbass'.

Khataevich noted the growing tendency of party workers in industry to concentrate their criticisms on the managers. Popular opinion accepted the official view that 'enemies' were inflicting great damage to the country. Social discontent was heightened as wages were lowered where plans were not fulfilled. In this situation, the party leaders sought to deflect the fire of mass popular discontent from the party and on to the managers. Khataevich called on the party leaders to desist from this practice.⁹⁰

The congress delegates greeted Khataevich's speech with prolonged applause. However, after the congress he was ousted from the all-union Central Committee and arrested. He was accused, together with Demchenko and Chernyavskii, of creating an organisation of 'rightists' in Ukraine.

Sarkisov's arrest in early July triggered a new wave of repression in the party and economic agencies in Donbass. In August, the all-union Politburo assigned four people for work in the Donetsk obkom, and on 20 September tens of new managers to the coal trusts. On 4 October, the Politburo dispatched Kaganovich, newly appointed narkom of NKTyazhProm, to Donbass to enforce the implementation of these various measures and to address the rally of Stakhanovites of the coal industry.⁹¹ The crisis was blamed on the actions of 'enemies'. Following Kaganovich's visit, the NKVD arrested 140 party and economic leaders in the Donbass.⁹²

At the same time, the all-union Politburo had approved Kaganovich's proposal for a major reorganisation of the administration of the Donbass mining industry, together with a shake up of the party's role in the mines. Moreover, from 1 November, Donbass mine administrations began to include written individual labour agreements with miners.⁹³ Towards the end of 1937, the output of coal in Donbass began to rise. A similar situation was seen in other branches of industry.

Grain collection 1937

On 1 July 1937, the grain harvesting campaign began in Ukraine, and for the next few months the harvesting and procurement campaigns became the Ukrainian Politburo's prime concern. Stalin oversaw the harvest closely, and received reports every five days from the Ukrainian

leaders, and reports from the NKVD. On 11 July, Stalin and Molotov instructed the Ukrainian leaders to utilise all draught power (horses) to cart the grain from the fields. The same day, Stalin sent a telegram to all Ukrainian oblast leaders on completing the harvest. On 22 July, Stalin and Molotov sent new instructions about improving the utilisation of combine harvesters, and on the need to store the harvest properly. After several days, Kosior and Lyubchenko reported that these instructions had been transmitted to the raions and kolkhozy

On 29 July, the all-union Sovnarkom and Central Committee set a target of grain collection from the 1937 harvest of 9,965,196 tons. Ukraine was to provide the state with 5,453,525 tons – that is, 656,000 tons less than in 1936. But the plan was soon revised upwards. On 14 November, the target was raised to 5,737,294 tons, and in January 1938 raised again to 6,167,269 tons. Moreover, on 26 August 1937, a plan of grain purchase, in addition to the collections, was approved from the 1937 harvest for the USSR of 4,100,000 tons, and for Ukraine of 1,131,600 tons.

The grain collecting campaign saw increased repression in agriculture. On 3 August 1937, Stalin instructed the secretaries of the national communist parties, kraikoms and obkoms to exert all efforts to eradicate wreckers and ‘enemies of the people’, and to involve the kolkhozniki in this campaign. The all-union Central Committee instructed the obkoms, kraikoms and national communist parties to organise in each oblast 2–3 open trials of ‘enemies of the people’, mainly lower officials in the MTS and raion authorities.⁹⁴

The removal of I. M. Kleiner, chairman of the Committee of Agricultural Procurements (KomZag), and of M. A. Chernov, narkom of NKZem USSR, inaugurated a campaign against leading officials in agriculture. On 11 August, Stalin, in a note sent to the party organs, demanded a broadening of the campaign to eliminate wreckers within the procurement apparatus at lower levels. A Sovnarkom USSR–Central Committee resolution instructed the local soviet and party organisations to check the work of KomZag’s local representatives, especially the grain collecting trust ‘Zagotzerno’, and to punish any breaches strictly.⁹⁵ At the end of 1937, KomZag’s commissions for the harvest in Ukraine were dissolved. The commissions were staffed by raion officials and kolkhoz representatives. A good harvest and strict NKVD control over the situation in the countryside gave Stalin grounds to be confident that supplies would flow without too many difficulties.

In August, the all-union Politburo discussed attempts by certain kolkhozy to withhold grain from the state.⁹⁶ On 27 September, the

Table 6.2 Indicators of Ukrainian industrial production, 1937

Production	As percentage of 1937 plan	As percentage of 1936 output
Electrical power	88.9	106.0
Coal	85.7	100.4
Iron ore	87.7	93.6
Combines	81.1	105.0

Source: TsGAVOVU Ukrainy 318/1/780, 30–1, 33, 36; 318/1/1465, 93, 97, 139.

Ukrainian Politburo adopted a resolution on wrecking in kolkhoz construction in Vinnitsa and Kamenetsk-Podolsk oblasts which re-assigned thousands of acres of land and forest to the kolkhozy from private peasants. Its proposal that the decree be issued as a joint Sovnarkom USSR–Central Committee decree was rejected. The all-union Politburo on 5 October ruled that it be issued in the name of the Ukrainian organisations (it was published in Ukraine on 8 October). Congresses of hundreds of kolkhozniki were to be organised in both oblasts to discuss the resolution and to secure popular mobilisation in the struggle against ‘enemies of the people’.⁹⁷

But the tempo of grain collection and grain delivery remained low. On 29 December, the Ukrainian Politburo sent fifty leading workers to the oblasts. They, together with the obkom secretaries, were to be responsible for the plan’s fulfilment.⁹⁸ On 20 January 1938, it was reported that in Ukraine, 6,142,600 tons of grain (99.6 per cent of the plan) had been procured. State purchases were fulfilled at 80.2 per cent of the planned task (907,002 tons). Groats collection was equal to 237,700 tons (98.9 per cent of the plan).⁹⁹

The official economic indicators for Ukraine for 1937 are contradictory (see Table 6.2). The annual planned targets under many headings were not fulfilled. But in comparison with the results of 1936 there was a certain improvement in agriculture, manufactured goods and heavy industry. The performance of heavy industry, however, fell considerably below plan.

Aspects of repression in the Ukrainian Politburo

In March 1937, almost all the departmental heads of the Ukrainian Central Committee’ apparatus were removed and replaced by former raikom and gorkom secretaries, mainly from the Donbass. At the same

time, practically all the obkom second secretaries were accused of either Trotskyism or Ukrainian nationalism. They were repressed, creating the basis for the accusations by the obkom first secretaries. In May, Yakir, a member of the Ukrainian Politburo and head of the Ukrainian military district, and a former Trotskyist, together with M. N. Tukhachevsky and other members of the military high command, was arrested. He was executed by shooting on 12 June. His past and current associates within the Ukrainian leadership, including Kaganovich, immediately fell under suspicion.

The Central Committee, newly elected by the XIII congress of the Ukrainian Communist Party (27 May–3 June 1937), confirmed the Politburo's composition: members – Kosior, Gikalo, Zatonskii, Kudryavtsev, Lyubchenko, Petrovskii, N. Popov (third secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee), Pramnek (first secretary of the Donetsk obkom), Sukhomlin (deputy chairman of Sovnarkom Ukraine and chairman of Gosplan Ukraine), Khataevich (second secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee) and Shelekhes; candidates – Veger, Margolin (first secretary of Dnepropetrovsk obkom), Sarkisov (chairman of the combine 'Stalinugol'), V. Chernyavin and Shlikhter.

The congress coincided with a new stage of accusations. Sovnarkom Ukraine, Gosplan, the Ukrainian commissariats, the editorial board of the party journal, *Kommunist*, and the republican radio committee were purged heavily.

On 3–4 July 1937, the Ukrainian Central Committee plenum dismissed from the Politburo N. Popov, Sukhomlin and Shelekhes, and removed as candidates Veger and Shlikhter. It elected Margolin as a Politburo member. On 29–30 August 1937, the plenum removed from the composition of the Politburo Lyubchenko and Khataevich, and removed as candidates Sarkisov and Chernyavskii. M. Bondarenko (chairman of Sovnarkom Ukraine) was elected as a member of the Politburo, and D. Evtushenko (first secretary of Kiev obkom) was elected as a candidate member but was removed just a few weeks later.

At the same time, *Pravda* launched a vigorous assault on the failings of the Ukrainian leadership. In August, a mission headed by Molotov, accompanied by a substantial NKVD force, arrived in Ukraine to force through changes in the republic's leadership. Lyubchenko, accused of leading a 'counter-revolutionary' organisation of Borotbists in Ukraine, committed suicide with his wife on 30 August. Balitskii, head of the Ukrainian NKVD, was arrested and replaced by I. M. Leplevskii on 14 June. At the Bukharin trial, Balitskii was identified as a member of a 'Ukrainian National Fascist Organisation' headed by Lyubchenko.¹⁰⁰

In the second half of August, in many Ukrainian oblasts there were show trials of raion officials accused as 'enemies of the people'. Professor Sheila Fitzpatrick argues that the role of Moscow in initiating local trials should not be exaggerated.¹⁰¹ However, a joint Sovnarkom USSR–Central Committee decree of 11 September initiated directly the organising of local show trials. Kudryavtsev, first secretary of Kiev obkom, informed Stalin and Molotov on 16 September that, in accordance with this directive, they were preparing three trials of sixteen people, most of whom were employees of Zagotzerno, charged with wrecking. The Kiev obkom requested that the all-union Central Committee authorise show trials of former plenipotentiaries of KomZag for Kiev oblast and senior officials of Zagotzerno.¹⁰² In the text of this note, Kudryavtsev had written in pencil 'In favour (Za)- Molotov', 'St' (Stalin) and 'Kaganovich'. Similar requests were sent by other obkoms to Stalin and Molotov. Such show trials were sanctioned at the highest level of the Soviet leadership.

The struggle with 'enemies of the people' in agriculture reached its climax in September–October 1937, when all the obkom first secretaries who had been in post since 1932/33 were repressed. The sole exception was Pramnek, who was repressed some months later. There also took place a real decentralisation in the territorial system of administration. On 11 September, the all-union Politburo authorised the creation of four new Ukrainian oblasts: Poltava, Zhitomir, Nikolaev and Kamenetsk-Podolsk.¹⁰³ This served to weaken further the republican tier of administration.

In 1937, there were thirty-three sessions of the Ukrainian Politburo. On 5 April 1937, the Politburo resolved to hold its sessions on the 4th, 14th, and 25th day of each month. The Orgburo was to meet on the 1st, 10th and 21st of the month at 18.00. But the resolution was not realised. In 1934, there were twenty-eight protocols of the sessions of the Ukrainian Politburo, which contained 910 decisions. In 1937, there were twenty-four protocols, with 934 decisions. In 1937, there was a sharp increase in the number of questions resolved by the *opros* procedure, and, not surprisingly, a reduction in the number of those who attended the Politburo's sessions.

The situation in the Ukrainian Central Committee at this time is well characterised in the memoirs of A. Kosinov, one of Kosior's aides. In the second half of November 1937, one of the Chekists fired a bullet into Kosinov's office wall, narrowly missing his head. Next door was the office of Kosior himself. Kosior protested to Leplevskii, who claimed that it had all been an accident. A few days later, Stalin, in

conversation with Kosior, dismissed the whole incident, inquiring wryly why the Chekists could not find somewhere else to practice their shooting.¹⁰⁴

On 1 January 1938, the Ukrainian Communist Party had 284,152 members. In the Ukrainian Central Committee were the heads of the culture-propaganda, agricultural sector, industry and transport, Administrative affairs, and the special sector. In the sector leading the party organs, schools, science, trade, press and cultural-educational work were only deputy heads. There were substantial gaps in other staffing categories: among the Central Committee instructors; among obkom gorkom and raikom secretaries and section heads; among the chairmen of the oblast ispolkoms; and in the narkoms of the commissariats.¹⁰⁵

On 27 January, the Ukrainian Central Committee plenum relieved Kosior of his Politburo seat following his appointment as deputy chairman of Sovnarkom USSR. Bondarenko, Gikalo, Zatonskii, Kudryavtsev and Margolin were also removed from the Politburo. It elected as Politburo members N. S. Khrushchev (first secretary) and M. A. Burmistenko (second secretary).

As a result of these purges, the Ukrainian Politburo was destroyed. In the 'Great Terror' of 1937–38 Veger, Gikalo, Demchenko, Zatonskii, Kudryavtsev, Margolin, N. Popov, Postyshev, Pramnek, Sarkisov, Sukhomlin, Khataevich, Chernyavskii and Shelekhes were arrested and executed. The all-union Politburo on 24 January 1938 transferred Kosior from Ukraine. On Stalin's personal initiative he was replaced by Khrushchev as first secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee.¹⁰⁶ Kosior was in time arrested and executed, the one full member of the all-union Politburo to suffer this fate. Chubar', former head of the Ukrainian Sovnarkom, was also shot.

Stalin insisted that Khrushchev assume the joint posts of first secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party and first secretary of Kiev obkom and gorkom. He needed someone with experience of Ukraine, who spoke the language, and who commanded authority. He was briefed by Stalin before taking up his post, and was told to concentrate his attention on improving agriculture.¹⁰⁷ Burmistenko had joined the Cheka in 1919 when seventeen years old, and had a reputation for ruthlessness. He served as G. M. Malenkov's deputy in the Department of Leading Party Organs (ORPO) and played an important role in the purges and in creating the new administrative elite. Khrushchev provides the following account of the take-over of the Ukrainian leadership:

I asked Malenkov to assign some Ukrainians to assist me. Malenkov made one of his deputies, Burmistenko, my Second Secretary. I liked Burmistenko the moment I met him. We were cut from the same cloth. I told him to select ten or so people from the Moscow organization and the Central Committee apparatus.¹⁰⁸

Khrushchev, as first secretary of Ukraine, was in a position to exercise his powers untrammelled either by opposition from other local powerful leaders or by a strong Ukrainian Politburo. Because of this, his position was considerably stronger than that of the two previous incumbents in the post, Kaganovich and Kosior. But he was subject to tighter control from Moscow, and his room for manoeuvre was much more circumscribed. Like other republican and regional chiefs, his authority was derived clearly from his nomination to the post by Stalin himself.

Conclusion

The main change in the Ukrainian Politburo's powers occurred in 1929–33, with the transfer of major powers in industry and agriculture to the all-union economic commissariats. Its powers were further eroded during the famine crisis of 1932–33. Although the Ukrainian Politburo continued to meet relatively regularly, it lost its power as an independent decision-maker, and was transformed into what was essentially a subordinate executive agency, monitoring the implementation of the policies emanating from Moscow. The regularity of meetings of the Ukrainian Politburo served to enforce the principle of its members' 'collective responsibility' towards their superiors in Moscow, while enforcing collective discipline in their relations with their own subordinates in the gorkoms and raikoms, and the governmental apparatus in Ukraine.

The activities of the Ukrainian Politburo confirm the very different patterns of decision-making in industry and agriculture. The geographical dispersal and fragmentation of agriculture meant that direction and supervision had to be devolved to a considerable extent to republican, oblast and raion authorities. At the all-union level, Sovnarkom and Gosplan were responsible for industrial policy. The Politburo acted as a court of appeal but could involve itself in policies where it wished. Stalin paid particularly close attention to agricultural policy, especially the setting of grain procurement targets. The Ukrainian Politburo monitored the sowing, harvesting and procurement campaigns constantly.

Its monitoring role in industry was more intermittent, and responded to immediate crises in that sector. In this, as we have seen, the Ukrainian Politburo acted to modify policy in this sphere, in response to changing circumstances.

Although the Ukrainian Politburo had little freedom of manoeuvre, the necessity to devolve decision-making powers allowed it some room for influence, and it acted as a kind of buffer between the pressures from the centre in Moscow, and those from the oblasts and raions below. The pressures from below during periods of crisis, such as 1932–33, were very strong. Through these subordinate layers, the pressure of public opinion or public resistance to central policies was also registered.

The relative regularity of meetings of the Ukrainian Politburo does not contradict the view of a political system that was also in many ways highly personalised. Stalin controlled key appointments in Ukraine, and used his subordinates, notably Molotov and Kaganovich, as personal emissaries to impose policy goals on recalcitrant Ukrainian officials. In these years, Kaganovich acted as one of the main intermediaries between the Ukrainian leaders and Stalin. Stalin also used certain key appointees (Postyshev, Balitskii) to ensure a check on policy implementation. But by 1937, Stalin had lost confidence in these individuals.

The Ukrainian Politburo was turned into an agency of policy implementation and was no longer a policy initiator. Tensions between the leadership in Moscow and Kiev certainly existed, as reflected in disagreements concerning economic policy in industry and agriculture, over the respective powers of all-union and republican bodies, and over specific policies, such as the organisation of the Stakhanovite movement. There was also disagreement regarding the resort to repression and in assessments of the extent of wrecking. The purge of the Ukrainian leadership in 1937–38 demonstrated Stalin's ultimate power to effect a fundamental change in the composition of these institutions. But a highly personalised system of rule could not function without preserving a large measure of formalised structures and procedures.

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7

Stalin as Leader, 1937–1953: From Dictator to Despot

E. A. Rees

The year 1937 marks the effective death of the Politburo as a collective decision-making body. Scholars, in dealing with the period 1937 to 1953, should use the term, 'Politburo' with the greatest circumspection. The gap between what was decided by the Politburo and what was attributed to it was immense. Here we shall analyse the way in which the decision-making process developed in the last fifteen years of Stalin's life, looking at the changes in the role of different institutions, and the changes in the political leadership's composition. This has to be set against the background of the changes brought by the carnage that the Great Terror inflicted on the regime itself and on the wider society. In this chapter, we analyse Stalin's role in these processes, and the way in which the leadership system was shaped by the demise of institutional structures and the personalisation of power relations. In studying this period we are confronted with the question of how to characterise the nature of this leadership system, and here we shall explore parallels with the Nazi system of rule, the insights offered by N. S. Khrushchev into this system, and more recent attempts to categorise the nature of the system.

The Great Terror

In 1928–34, Stalin was the most resolute advocate within the Politburo of repression as an instrument of policy (see Chapter 1, pp. 47–8). The renewal of repression from July 1936 onwards came unexpectedly and took Stalin's colleagues by surprise. It was associated with a weakening of the position of these figures. V. M. Molotov was under a cloud in the summer of 1936.¹ G. K. Ordzhonikidze attempted to stem the tide of repression against his industrial officials, but his suicide in February 1937 indicated that the battle was lost.² L. M. Kaganovich, who had

criticised excessive repression on the railways as late as July 1936, embraced the new line, and oversaw the organisation of the trial of G. E. Zinoviev and L. B. Kamenev in August.³ Ordzhonikidze and Kaganovich were compromised by the charges lodged against their deputies, Yu. L. Pyatakov and Ya. A. Lifshits, both former Trotskyists who were tried and executed. Significantly, it was the commissariats of heavy industry and rail transport (NKTyazhProm and NKPS), headed by Ordzhonikidze and Kaganovich, which first felt the full impact of the purge, from September 1936 onwards.

With a debilitated Politburo and Central Committee, any resistance to this line, if it ever existed, could not be mobilised. The shadow that loomed over Stalin's colleagues, and the mounting campaign against wreckers and other anti-Soviet elements, destroyed any hope of resistance, the chances of which were, in any case, small. In the event, Stalin's colleagues fell in with the new line, and became full accomplices in Stalin's plan for a thorough purge of party, state and society. But there can be no doubt as to Stalin's central role in initiating and orchestrating the campaign. We see, as in 1928–34, a similar process of constructing an 'enemy syndrome', but in a more intense form. We also have Stalin's willingness at the Central Committee plenum in February–March 1937 to heed the accusations aimed at middle-ranking officials by ordinary party members.⁴

From July 1936 onwards, a number of unmistakable signals were issued from the centre as to what was expected. The Terror developed through a series of steps: the Central Committee's letter of July; the Kamenev–Zinoviev trial in August; Stalin and A. A. Zhdanov's note to Kaganovich and the Politburo in September insisting on the appointment of N. I. Ezhov as head of NKVD; the Kemerovo trial in November; the Central Committee plenum in December; the trial of the Zinovievist–Trotskyist bloc in January 1937; the Central Committee plenum of February–March 1937; the convening of the meetings of party cells in March–April 1937; and the trial of M. N. Tukhachevsky and the other military commanders in June. Stalin alone could have halted this mounting campaign, yet at every stage he lent his support to its intensification. Sometimes he feigned reluctance, allowing others to do the running. To argue that Stalin was caught up by this campaign, that he was persuaded by the waves of denunciation unleashed by the drive to intensify and extend the repression, is to see Stalin as a rather simple soul, who did not know what he was doing. Within the framework of central policy, local officials and institutions, of course, exercised their own initiatives.

The Great Terror of 1936–38 was organised as a campaign, and shares many similarities to the tactics and methods used by Stalin in consolidating his power and reorientating the party–state apparatus in 1928–32. Both periods manifest a return to ideological fundamentalism, combined with an appeal to Soviet patriotism. In both periods we have a number of interlocking campaigns orchestrated from the centre. Stalin could not simply shift policy direction at will; subordinates had to be persuaded or pushed into playing their parts, institutions had to be primed, and public opinion had to be prepared. The Terror combined elements of mass mobilisation, show trials, purges and mass promotions, and features of an anti-bureaucratic revolution that were akin to those of the ‘revolution from above’.⁵

In both periods Stalin utilized a combination of central directives with local initiatives in his attack on what he perceived as entrenched institutional interests. In 1937, he used reports on the composition of the party secretaries from the ORPO for his attack on the secretarial hierarchy. In this period we see two novel developments: the resort to arrest and execution by quota; and the routine use of torture to extract confessions.

J. Arch Getty’s analysis of the Terror as an uncontrolled eruption of forces, reflecting various individual and institutional conflicts that came to a head, now appears unconvincing.⁶ The evidence points, rather, to a deliberate policy that was orchestrated and prosecuted relentlessly. Robert Conquest depicted this as the unfolding of the ‘totalitarian’ logic inherent in the system from its inception.⁷ Oleg Khlevnyuk, in a detailed analysis of how Stalin controlled and directed internal security policy in all its key phases in 1937–38, has argued that it was part of a programme to purge society of a potential ‘fifth column’ in anticipation of war.⁸

The ‘fifth column’ thesis needs to be tested. We should be wary of accepting the pretext and justification given for the Great Terror as the true explanation for these events. The reality of this threatened ‘inevitable war’ and its use by Stalin in domestic politics has been questioned critically by Silvio Pons.⁹ A high proportion of the victims hardly fall into the category of a ‘fifth column’. The purge was in large measure an exercise in social cleansing, and was a continuation of the unfinished business of 1928–34. Stalin, as already noted, was consistently the most hardline advocate of repression in both periods. We need to explain the phase of ‘moderation’ of 1935–36 as well as the terror of 1936–38.

The Great Terror cannot be seen as something episodic or accidental in the Stalin regime’s development. It was the central and decisive event in its history, and in the experience of modern states it is without precedent.

The Terror was intended as a closure on earlier developments, a means of entrenching the regime and making the 'revolution from above' irreversible. It was shaped also by the international situation. Stalin declared at the XVIII party congress that the state would not wither away while capitalist encirclement persisted; and he underscored the importance to the socialist state of its 'military, penal and intelligence organs'.¹⁰

Getty and Naumov insist that the Terror reflected the actions of frightened, insecure men, threatened by the danger of war and of internal disorder, more to be pitied than condemned.¹¹ The evidence to the contrary indicates clearly that they were caught up in a hysteria that was both deliberately manufactured and self-induced. The Gestapo cleverly exploited this hysteria to fan Stalin's distrust of his own military high command. There was no immediate threat to the regime in 1936, notwithstanding a very poor harvest, transport difficulties and problems in the coal industry, certainly there was nothing comparable to the major crises of 1921, 1929 and 1933, for example. The purges undoubtedly weakened the state and economy, and brought the prospect of war much nearer. So much for Stalin's vaunted wisdom and foresight.

The Politburo's demise

On 14 April 1937, the Politburo, on Stalin's initiative, adopted a resolution that in future decisions requiring speedy resolution should be resolved in its name by two commissions. Foreign policy matters were to be resolved by a commission comprising Stalin, Molotov, K. E. Voroshilov, Kaganovich and Ezhov, and economic policy matters were to be resolved by a commission comprising Molotov, Stalin, V. Ya. Chubar', A. I. Mikoyan and Kaganovich.¹² This removed the formal obligation of gaining the assent of the members of the Politburo, although death sentences of colleagues often carried the signatures of Stalin and other Politburo members.

As is evident from this resolution, the skeleton of both commissions was comprised of the secretaries of the Central Committee who worked in Moscow – Stalin, Kaganovich and Ezhov. A note by Stalin, in A. N. Poskrebyshev's hand, with Stalin's corrections, provides the following explanation:

Questions of a secret character, including questions of foreign policy, must be prepared for the Politburo by the order (*po pravilu*) of the Secretariat of CC CPSU. Since the secretaries of the CC, with the exception of comrade Stalin, usually work outside Moscow

(Zhdanov), or in other departments, where they are seriously overloaded with work (Kaganovich, Ezhov) and the secretary of the CC c. Andreev is often of necessity on travel, whilst the number of secret questions continues to grow and grow, the Secretariat of the CC as a whole is not in a state to fulfil the above noted tasks. Moreover, it is self-evident that the preparation of secret questions, including questions of external policy, is absolutely impossible without taking account of c. Molotov and Voroshilov, who are not members of the Secretariat CC.¹³

From Stalin's note it transpires that the Secretariat had, in fact, ceased to perform the function of preparing materials for the Politburo. But if these secretaries were so preoccupied with their other responsibilities it might be asked how far they could devote time to the work of these two Politburo commissions. The note provides no real clue as to why Stalin decided to dispense with the Politburo. The formal meetings of the Politburo from 1937 onwards declined relentlessly (see Table 1.2, on p. 25).

With the demise of the Politburo, the meetings of senior figures in Stalin's Kremlin office became the major forum of policy-making. From the summer of 1937 onwards, Politburo decisions are listed in the protocols simply as 'decisions of the Politburo' (*reshenie Politbyuro*). Even the procedure of pseudo-consultation of all Politburo members by poll (*opros*) quickly fell into desuetude. Appointments dominated the Politburo's protocols for 1937–38, and the number of decisions taken fell sharply. Key decisions still carried the Politburo's imprimatur. On 24 November 1938, a Politburo resolution relieved Ezhov as head of NKVD. In 1939 and 1940 the protocols give the unmistakable impression of being 'padded out' for form's sake with documents of minor significance. In 1940, there were just two formal sessions of the Politburo, deciding eight and five issues respectively. From 1941 to 1945 there were no formal sessions.

This system allowed Stalin enormous freedom to intervene in policy areas at will. A kind of inner Cabinet, of indeterminate membership, replaced the Politburo, with Stalin setting the agenda and deciding who was invited and who excluded. The Politburo was supplanted by an inner circle of 'trusted' subordinates, a leading group (*rukovodyashaya gruppya*) of figures around Stalin. Their decisions could be presented as decisions of the Politburo, regardless of whether a formal session of the Politburo had been convened to approve the decision or not. The Politburo became a convenient fiction. This is not to say that individual

leaders were deprived of power. Other leaders, and even factions, inevitably and of necessity played an important role in the Stalin leadership up to his death in 1953.¹⁴

Stalin was increasingly reluctant to delegate authority to his immediate subordinates. After the summer of 1936 he did not again take an extended summer vacation until 1945, but remained in Moscow. His relations with his subordinates were marked by a new element of distrust and fear. The physical elimination of former rivals and supposed enemies, including existing Politburo members, the decimation of the Central Committee and of the ranks of the delegates who attended the XVII party congress of 1934, underlined this change. Stalin's control was further strengthened by the purge of the Soviet military high command in 1937, and the purging of the NKVD in various phases in 1936–39, and the dispatch of former indispensable figures such as G. G. Yagoda and Ezhov. This, as we shall see, did not mean that Stalin could dispense with the 'ruling group', or that other individuals were mere ciphers.

Changes in leadership

The Great Terror did not turn Stalin into a dictator. He wielded dictatorial power from 1933 – and arguably from 1930 – onwards, but this was not absolute power. With the Terror he moved from being a dictator to being something qualitatively different. Khrushchev uses the term 'despot'. The distinction between a dictator and a despot might simply be stated as a distinction between those who kill their immediate subordinates and those who do not. By this token, Mussolini was a dictator but never a despot. Hitler, with the Röhm purge, became a despot. On this criterion, in 1936/37 Stalin became a despot. Lenin, whatever judgement we make of him, was never a dictator, let alone a despot.

It is worth recounting the fate of those who had, together with Stalin, been members of the Politburo since the days of Lenin (see Appendix 2). Between 1936 and 1940, the ranks of former and current Politburo members were decimated. By 1940, Zinoviev, Kamenev, N. I. Bukharin and A. I. Rykov had been executed; Trotsky had been murdered; M. P. Tomsky and Ordzhonikidze had been driven to suicide; and S. I. Syrtsov and K. Ya. Bauman, candidate members of the Politburo in 1929–30, had been executed. Full members and candidates S. V. Kosior, Chubar, R. I. Eikhe, Ya. E. Rudzutak, P. P. Postyshev and Ezhov, all members of the ruling Stalin 'group' after 1929, had been executed. Postyshev and Ezhov had worked closely with Stalin and had appeared to be figures enjoying the highest trust. This is the small tip of a huge iceberg.

The terror transformed Stalin's relations with his subordinates. Ordzhonikidze shot himself in February 1937 after a bitter row with Stalin. Kaganovich's influence waned significantly after 1939: sacked as head of the Soviet railways in 1941, he was granted his request to serve as a commander on the North Caucasus front. From 1941 to 1947 he was in deep disfavour and was excluded from meetings in Stalin's Kremlin office. His standing within Stalin's inner councils never fully recovered. Kaganovich's brother, Mikhail, who had occupied positions of key importance as commissar of the defence industry, committed suicide in 1941, with Kaganovich evidently helpless to protect him. In May 1941, Molotov lost the chairmanship of Sovnarkom, but remaining as vice-chairman and retaining his post as foreign minister.

In assuming the post of chairman of Sovnarkom in May 1941, Stalin combined the leadership of party and state bodies, a position that made him unassailable. Khlevnyuk argues that Stalin operated increasingly through the governmental apparatus.¹⁵ But members of the party Secretariat were still prominent in the Politburo. Zhdanov and G. M. Malenkov, who were in charge of the Secretariat and Orgburo, respectively, continued to perform the role of oversight and control over personnel. Significant also was the rise of a new generation of younger Stalinists: Ezhov (until 1939), Beria, Zhdanov and Khrushchev; see Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 The composition of the Politburo 'elected' in March 1939

Full members	
I. V. Stalin	First party secretary CPSU
V. M. Molotov	Chairman of Sovnarkom
L. M. Kaganovich	People's Commissar of the Railways and of the Coal and Steel Industries
K. E. Voroshilov	People's Commissar of Defence
M. I. Kalinin	Chairman of the Supreme Soviet
A. A. Andreev	Party secretary CPSU
A. I. Mikoyan	People's Commissar of the Food Industries
A. A. Zhdanov	Party secretary CPSU and secretary of Leningrad party organisation
N. S. Khrushchev	First party secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party
Candidate members	
L. P. Beria	People's Commissar of Internal Affairs (NKVD)
N. M. Shvernik	Chairman of the Soviet trade unions (VTsSPS)

Source: *Institute zur Erfassung der UdSSR, Party and Government Officials of the Soviet Union, 1917–1967* (Metuchen, 1969).

At the Central Committee plenum on 21 February 1941, following the XVIII party conference, three younger Stalinists were elected (the term should be understood as co-opted) as new candidate members – N. A. Voznesenskii (Gosplan), Malenkov (Orgburo) and A. S. Shcherbakov (Moscow party organisation).

There is no doubt that after 1939 the Soviet leadership became more stable. But if arrests and executions became rare, the Great Terror's impact was lasting. But a certain core of supporters survived from the mid-1920s.¹⁶ T. H. Rigby's designation of Stalin as a 'loyal patron' is difficult to square with the evidence we have of Stalin as a 'homicidal colleague' (see Appendix 2), which is suggestive more of a system of despotic or tyrannical rule. Those who survived by a simple *post hoc* rationalisation were those to whom Stalin was a loyal patron. Stalin's relations with colleagues were highly instrumental. He could be brutal, callous and sadistic, and became increasingly capricious and paranoid. Up to 1936, the leading group was held together largely by shared convictions in a shared project, but after 1937 the nature of the group changed. The Great Terror had a brutalizing effect, and thereafter individual leaders were preoccupied with securing their very survival, fighting off rivals and retaining Stalin's confidence.

Changes in the regime

In considering the nature of the Soviet regime we distinguish here between 'Stalinism' in the period 1928 to 1937, and 'high Stalinism' from 1937 to 1953. The purges changed fundamentally the regime's relations with society. The attack on cadres was combined with an attack on specific social groups ('kulaks', minority nationalities, 'anti-Soviet' elements and criminals) that went further than 'dekulakisation' and the attack on Nepmen and bourgeois specialists in 1928–32, but was a development of the kind of 'mass campaigns' developed since that time. A new generation of officials was ready to be promoted.¹⁷ The 'Soviet intelligentsia' was now designated as the regime's real base of support, as underlined by Zhdanov's speech to the XVIII party congress.¹⁸

We can identify several major shifts in policy from 1937 onwards. First, NKVD control and surveillance was entrenched as a permanent and extensive feature of the system of rule. Second, the Gulag was extended as an omnipresent component of the state and economic system. Third, the development of a 'state of siege', the development of a draconian system of legislation, including labour law, brought in a new

regulative rigidity. Fourth, the priority placed on rearmament shaped economic and social policy profoundly. From 1937, coercion and repression was routinised into the ‘normal’ day-to-day management of state–society relations, where the state’s actions were bound by no law and were often capricious and unpredictable. It was a society in which the cult of the leader loomed large, and in which the fear of both internal and external enemies shaped the popular consciousness. The NKVD in 1937 assumed a position of virtual control over provincial party organisations and its influence grew in the commissariats. In 1938/39 this trend was partly reversed and the authority of provincial party committees was reasserted.¹⁹

But there were other changes that were also highly significant. From 1938, a rapid sub-division of the commissariats of heavy, light, and engineering industries began, and by 1941 there were twenty-two branch industrial commissariats.²⁰ The once mighty NKTyazhprom ceased to exist. The rise of a separate military industrial commissariat introduced a major new player in the decision-making process, headed for a time by M. M. Kaganovich who, in the period 1937–39 enjoyed a very close relationship with Stalin.²¹ The second development was the reorganisation of territorial administrative units – the krais and republics – into smaller oblast units.²² Both of these steps were intended to weaken the power of these institutions, and to centralise decision-making and control. Sovnarkom’s responsibilities in managing and co-ordinating the economic commissariats and economic policy in the republics and regions were increased enormously.

In April 1937, STO was abolished, to be replaced by Sovnarkom’s new Economic Council (*Ekonomicheskii Sovet*) in January 1938.²³ In April 1940, the Economic Council established five specialised councils for different branches of industry: engineering (chairman, V. A. Malyshev); defence industries (chairman, N. A. Voznesenskii); consumer goods (chairman, A. N. Kosygin); metallurgy and chemicals (chairman, N. A. Bulganin); fuel and electricity (chairman, M. G. Pervukhin).²⁴ This was the structure which, in modified form, was to re-emerge after 1945 under the Council of Ministers.

From 1937, the institutions that remained of importance in policy-making were the party apparatus (Orbguro, Secretariat, Commission of Party Control), government (Sovnarkom), the internal security apparatus (NKVD and NKGB), the military apparatus (NKOboron) and the foreign policy apparatus. Relations between these powerful institutions were often strained.

Stalin's personality

Given the dominating position Stalin now occupied in the Soviet political system, something needs to be said of this singular personality. Hitler is said to have regarded Stalin's unleashing of the great purges as an act of madness. Churchill's assessment was that 'Stalin is an unnatural man'.²⁵ Khrushchev noted that Stalin was not entirely normal, declaring 'in my opinion it was during the war that Stalin started to be not quite right in the head'.²⁶

There was a dual aspect to Stalin's make-up. He was intelligent, possessed a powerful memory, was shrewd, hard-working and capable of great foresight. He was skilled in formulating ideas and presenting them concisely. He also had an extraordinarily powerful will that brooked no opposition. The dark side of his personality – his suspiciousness, paranoia and viciousness – requires no elaboration. A key aspect of this personality, however, does need a little further explanation. The key to it is provided by the 'enemy syndrome', which he deployed during the Great Terror as a method of imposing his will on his subordinates.

In the Great Terror, Stalin used the 'enemy syndrome' against alleged internal enemies. He was a past master of organisational manipulation. Stalin's will was turned into flesh in the form of resolutions, decrees and court verdicts; it became the practice of powerful institutions. This invested him with authority, and conferred on him a degree of protection and immunity. The phantasmagoric conspiracies against Stalin and his state during this period were emanations of his fevered imagination, but they had also a very clear rationale. In 1936–38 he compelled his subordinates to accept his paranoid conception of reality as being reality itself. He required his victims to confess to their 'crimes'; he required his subordinates to purge their own people as the ultimate test of their loyalty; and he sought to get the entire society to accept these conceptions. That Stalin was able to achieve this is an extraordinary testimony to his dominating power.

Stalin used the 'enemy syndrome' consciously as a *modus operandi* in bolstering his power. In internal security matters his authority was unquestioned. The threat of war lent credence to such visions of conspiracy, which found a deep resonance. Whether Stalin believed these conspiracy theories is unclear. He equated dissent with treachery, disagreement over policy with disloyalty to him personally, and saw outsiders and dissidents as the base for present and future conspiracies that had to be neutralised. The struggle between socialism and capitalism,

domestically and internationally, was a war to the death in which all means were legitimate. These methods came to dominate the life of the state in the post-war years. Significantly, during the war, when there was a real enemy to fight, Stalin did not resort to these methods to enforce his dominance.

Stalin's deputies knew that the charges in most cases during the great purges were unfounded. They had been compelled to play a part in a play scripted by Stalin. They could not admit that they had acted counter to what they knew to be the truth, and counter, perhaps, in some cases, to their own moral sense. Hence the resort by both Molotov and Kaganovich to the 'fifth column' thesis to justify their actions in these years has a hollow ring, and their claim that the purges, though necessary, had produced excesses that even Stalin would acknowledge, are lame.²⁷ Dimitrov's diaries contain hints of Stalin's fear of a military coup in the summer of 1937, but it is the great silences in his writings with regard to the Terror that are most revealing.²⁸

Khrushchev, whose accounts of events are more truthful and self-critical, never used the 'fifth column' or the military conspiracy argument as self-justification. His account of the leadership's response to the campaign against internal enemies in 1937–38 speaks volumes:

We blamed ourselves for being blind to the presence of enemies all around us. We thought we lacked Stalin's deep understanding of the political struggle and were therefore unable to discern enemies in our midst in the way Stalin could²⁹... I exalted him for being unafraid to purge the Party and thereby to unify it.³⁰

By the great purges, Stalin bound his colleagues to him through their collective guilt, as had the revolutionary conspirator Nechaev attempted in 1871. One silences one's potential rivals by implicating them in one's crimes. The transgression of moral thresholds was now elevated as an act of far-reaching wisdom and courage in the defence of state interests. The decision to shoot 20,000 Polish officers in the winter of 1939 at Katyn was taken by four individuals – Stalin, Voroshilov, Molotov and Mikoyan, with the signatures of M. I. Kalinin and Kaganovich added later.³¹ At the Tehran conference in 1943, Stalin 'joked', in an obvious reference to Katyn, which by then was public knowledge (but attributed by the Soviets to the Nazis), to Churchill's outrage, that at the end of the war 50,000 German officers should be shot.³²

The Great Patriotic War 1941–1945

Stalin's inner circle from 1932 onwards operated in ways not unlike crisis government or war cabinets in democratic states, but with the crucial proviso that this was without the constraints imposed by constitution, law, election, party, legislature or public opinion. The Winter War against Finland (30 November 1939 to March 1940) was run largely from Stalin's office, with meetings been summoned often late in the night to deal with particular emergencies.³³ Khrushchev recounted the gross mismanagement of this war, which cost the lives of 130,000, prompting heated exchanges and mutual accusations between Voroshilov and Stalin.³⁴

The Soviet debacle in June 1941 was the most dramatic case of catastrophic policy failure in the Stalin era. We have a great body of evidence that underlines Stalin's refusal to contemplate the likelihood of a German invasion in 1941.³⁵ Khrushchev explains his failure to respond to the evidence of an invasion 'because the leadership was conditioned against such information, such data was dispatched with fear and assessed with reservation'.³⁶ The debacle may have weakened Stalin's position temporarily. Khrushchev recounts how, after the invasion, members of the Politburo went to him to encourage him to take up the reins of power.³⁷ Notwithstanding the disaster that had befallen the country, Stalin's colleagues acknowledged him as the only figure within the ruling group capable of assuming the role of leader.

The Great Patriotic War of 1941–45 changed the way in which the Soviet leadership system operated under Stalin. Power was concentrated in the State Defence Committee (GKO) set up in June 1941 and headed by Stalin, who was also commander-in-chief, minister of defence and chairman of Sovnarkom. During the war, Stalin issued many Orders of the Day in his capacity as minister of defence, supreme commander-in-Chief, marshal and then generalissimo of the Soviet Union. In operational matters, after the catastrophic reverses of 1941/42 Stalin delegated more power to his military commanders, with Marshal G. K. Zhukov playing the decisive role in operational matters. The other Politburo members were assigned their own areas of responsibility during the war. Through the almost daily meetings in his private office, Stalin was kept in touch with developments and continued to exercise a dominating influence on policy-making.

Khrushchev's criticisms of Stalin's role in the war are well-known. He accused Stalin of serious errors; his insistence on frontal attacks; his failure to heed advice – which led to the loss of 200,000 men in the

Kharkov encirclement; his capricious attitude in the choice of commanders; and his interference in the decisions of commanders at the Front. Khrushchev adds, 'He would stop at nothing to avoid taking responsibility for something that had gone wrong.'³⁸

These years saw the consolidation of a powerful military defence establishment, particularly associated with the development of the Soviet atom bomb. The main decisions were taken in the GKO's name: the decree of 20 September 1941, instructing the Academy of Sciences to develop research into atomic energy; the resolution of 27 November 1941, on the mining of uranium by NKTsvetMet; the resolution of 20 August 1945, establishing a GKO Special Committee, chaired by Beria, to manage the uranium project; and the resolution of 4 September 1945 for developing heavy water.³⁹ All these decisions, it seems, emanated from the private meetings in Stalin's office. Beria was the organising force behind the atom project, but was kept under constant pressure by Stalin.⁴⁰ A GKO decree on 18 February 1944 established the jet propulsion research unit in NKAviaprom. With the end of the war, many of the administrative agencies attached to the GKO were transferred to the Council of Ministers, such as the Technical Committee of the Special Committee for the uranium project, and the Liquidation Committee, charged with destroying obsolete and ineffective weaponry.

The nature of Soviet leadership during the war deserves a special study of its own. Here we can offer only a few preliminary observations. The meetings in Stalin's private office acted as the GKO's central hub. Stalin was the power, but that power needed to be dressed suitably in the trappings of legitimate authority. The frequency of meetings in Stalin's office throughout the war years, and of the prominent role of military commanders and security people, and those concerned with military production, indicates that this was the real decision-making centre. What might be added is that the system of leadership with Stalin as undisputed leader allowed him to fight the kind of war that no other war leader (Hitler included) could have countenanced. The GKO was disbanded in September 1945.

The party–state apparatus

The Politburo as confirmed after the XVIII party conference in 1941 had nine full members (Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, Kalinin, Andreev, Mikoyan, Zhdanov and Khrushchev) and five candidate members (Beria, Shvernik, Voznesenskii, Malenkov and Shcherbakov), and

remained in existence theoretically at the end of the war. Shcherbakov died in June 1945. The Central Committee plenum in March 1946 added Beria and Malenkov as full Politburo members, and made N. A. Bulganin and A. N. Kosygin candidate members. Voznesenskii became a full member of the Politburo on 28 February 1947; Kalinin died in June 1946; Zhdanov in 1948; and Voznesenskii was arrested and executed in 1949. In February 1949, Bulganin and Kosygin became full Politburo members. At this date there were nine full members and three candidate members.

On 29 December 1945, in the first move to revive the Politburo, it was resolved, at Stalin's proposal, that it should meet every Tuesday.⁴¹ In 1946, formal sessions of the Politburo were held on 19 January, 4 March, 13 April, 4 May, 2 September, 6 September and 3 October. These sessions dealt with 9, 1, 3, 5, 2 and 2 issues respectively. There were formal sessions of the Politburo on 13 December 1947 and 17 June 1949. It is difficult to interpret the meaning of this half-hearted attempt to revive the Politburo, which seems a gesture in the direction of reviving collective leadership and consultation. Plenums of the Central Committee were occasionally summoned (but not always) to observe the constitutional niceties of the co-option and removal of Politburo and Central Committee members.

Khrushchev noted how the Politburo's work was 'disorganised' by Stalin's practice of using commissions, whose membership he also determined – the so-called 'quintets', 'sextets', 'septets' and 'novaries' – to decide policy. In August 1945, a quintet was set up comprising Stalin, Molotov, Mikoyan, Malenkov and Beria. This was the so-called 'Commission of External Affairs of the Politburo', reminiscent of the Politburo's commissions designated in April 1937. In December 1945, it became a sextet after the addition of Zhdanov.

By a Politburo resolution of 3 October 1946, submitted by Stalin, the 'sextet' was authorised to concern itself in future with 'matters of internal construction and domestic policy' as well as foreign policy. It was to be renamed the 'septet' with the inclusion of Voznesenskii, the leading figure in shaping economic policy.⁴² In September 1947 it became a novary, with Bulganin and A. A. Kuznetsov added. With the death of Zhdanov, the execution of Voznesenskii, and the disgrace of Molotov and Mikoyan, in 1949 it was reduced again to a quintet. This practice, Khrushchev noted, 'was against the principle of collective leadership', with members of the Politburo excluded and individuals who were not Politburo members included. Individuals such as Voroshilov, were excluded and denied documents for years.

While the Politburo again lapsed into dormancy, the Central Committee's apparatus continued to function. In March 1946 it was reorganised and strengthened under the leadership of Kuznetsov, Malenkov and Zhdanov.⁴³ The Politburo resolution on 2 August 1946 designated the Secretariat as 'a permanent acting working organ of the CC' whose task was 'to prepare questions, which are to be examined by the Orgburo and to check the implementation of the resolution of the Politburo and Orgburo CC'. The Secretariat was to fix the Orgburo's daily agenda and to undertake the preliminary examination of questions introduced to the Orgburo. The Secretariat was to organise the Central Committee's departments and to lead the work of assigning cadres to party, soviet and economic bodies. The Secretariat was to have no regular sessions but was to meet when necessary.⁴⁴ The Orgburo was to meet weekly. The Politburo, even in the post-war period, approved the greater number of Orgburo resolutions.

In the period 1940 to 1953, we see a quite different pattern of decision-making. The total number of decisions is given in Table 7.2, all as decisions of the Politburo (*reshenie Politburo*). From 1942 to 1948, the number of Politburo resolutions was less than a third of the number of those passed in 1940, providing a crude measure of its decline. How these decisions during the war period were distinguished from decisions of the GKO and Sovnarkom remains to be analysed. The sharp increase in the number of Politburo decrees in 1949–51 provides an indication of a determined effort in these years to re-establish the authority of the party structures *vis-à-vis* the government apparatus.

Table 7.2 Decisions of the Politburo, 1940–1952

1940	3592
1941	2612
1942	1201
1943	1158
1944	903
1945	931
1946	1094
1947	1026
1948	1135
1949	2430
1950	2996
1951	3265
1952	1786 (up to 14 October 1952)

Source: *Politbyuro TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b) Povestki dnya zasedanii: Tom III 1940–1952, Katalog* (Moscow, 2001).

Stalin was chairman of Sovnarkom from 1941 until his death, but in the post-war period he absented himself increasingly from its meetings. Sovnarkom was renamed the Council of Ministers in March 1946, and the commissariats renamed ministries. As the Politburo declined, the Council of Ministers became the regular forum for resolving key decisions on economic and social policy. The meetings of the Council of Ministers were held regularly, unlike those at the Politburo, and it was freed to some extent from Stalin's interference in its affairs. The Council of Ministers, through its branch bureaux, and in co-operation with Gosplan and the economic ministries, was the central apparatus for economic decision-making. It was shadowed by the party apparatus, but the real expertise was in the governmental machine, which in the economic sphere emerged increasingly as a power in its own right. As a result, decision-making in this field tended to follow a fairly predictable pattern, not much shaped by outside political interference.⁴⁵ This developed a trend that was already evident in the mid-1930s.

This is not to suggest that it was independent. Stalin intervened in policy matters at will and controlled the Council of Ministers through his deputies. To this end, the Council of Ministers' leadership was constantly being changed. The Council by September 1945 was headed by 2 bureaux that met weekly, chaired by Molotov and Beria. They were merged into one on 20 March 1946, under the chairmanship of Beria. This bureau was reorganised in February 1947, with Molotov appointed as chairman. Eight new sectoral bureaux were established to oversee different branches of the economy. Seven of them were headed by Politburo members: agriculture (Malenkov), metallurgy and chemicals (Voznesenskii), machine construction (M. Z. Saburov), fuel and electric power stations (Beria), food industry (Mikoyan), transport and communication (Kaganovich), trade and light industry (Kosygin), and culture and health (Voroshilov).⁴⁶

Thus, by February 1947, seven out of eleven full members of the Politburo were employed on the work of the Council of Ministers. The four others were Stalin, who was nominally still head of the Council of Ministers; Andreev and Zhdanov, who were party secretaries; and Khrushchev, who was first secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party. One of the three candidate members of the Politburo – Kosygin – was also employed on the Council of Ministers. Saburov was not a member of the Politburo. This provides an important indication of the relative importance of the Politburo and the Council of Ministers that met weekly, and the bureaux, that also met weekly.

On 29 March 1948, a trio of Beria, Voznesenskii and Malenkov, who were to rotate as chairmen, replaced Molotov as chairman of the Council of Ministers' bureau. With the fall of Voznesenskii, on 1 September 1949 the chairmanship of the bureau passed to five deputy chairmen – Beria, Bulganin, Malenkov, Kaganovich and Saburov – who were to chair sessions in turn. The number of deputy premiers of the Council of Ministers increased from eight to fourteen by 1950. It became the body that effectively ran the country. Stalin, fearing an alliance of Malenkov and Beria, had Bulganin appointed as chair of the Presidium bureau in 1950. But, on 16 February 1951, it was decided that the chairmanship be rotated between Bulganin, Beria and Malenkov.

At the same time, steps were taken to build up the party apparatus as a counter to the government apparatus. In July 1948, Malenkov was appointed as party secretary and reorganised the Central Committee apparatus on a production branch basis to facilitate closer oversight over the economic ministries. This placed an emphasis on efficiency, and marked a shift away from the preoccupation with political/ideological control that had been the hallmark of the Secretariat's supervision of the economic ministries under Zhdanov. On 18 October 1951, Molotov, Mikoyan and Kaganovich were freed from duties at the Council of Ministers and assigned to new commissions established at the party Presidium.

In the post-war period, as for a large part of the 1930s, Stalin involved himself relatively little in the complexities of managing the economy. He was content to leave this work to the Council of Ministers. The areas where he retained close control over policy were as in the 1930s – foreign and defence policy, internal security, general organisational questions, personnel appointments and ideology. These were areas in which Stalin controlled policy in conjunction with other individuals entrusted with particular responsibility in these fields.

In defence policy, a particular position was assumed by Bulganin, who was appointed Minister of Defence in 1945. He had served as a political commissar during the war and was promoted to full general and made a member of the GKO in 1944. At the end of the war he succeeded Stalin as Minister of the Armed Forces and became a marshal of the Soviet Union. He thus assumed the key role of the link between Stalin and the armed forces, similar to that performed earlier by Voroshilov. Bulganin, significantly, was one of the few senior figures within the inner circle retaining Stalin's confidence until the end.

Molotov remained the dominating influence in foreign policy until sacked unceremoniously from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1949.

In the field of internal security, Stalin managed the main institutions of control carefully. In 1941, the NKVD (headed by Beria) was split with the creation of the NKGB (headed by V. N. Merkulov). In 1945, the leadership of the MVD (former NKVD) was transferred to Beria's deputy, S. N. Kruglov, while V. S. Abakumov took over the MGB (former NKGB). While the MVD managed the Gulag, the MGB, which remained always directly accountable to Stalin, was responsible for surveillance and political repression. In party organisational matters and appointments, Stalin relied on Zhdanov, and later Malenkov, in the Secretariat/Orgburo. Zhdanov also for a time acted as Stalin's surrogate in the field of ideology.

Scholars in the past have speculated with regard to factional struggles in the leadership over the direction of Soviet foreign policy after 1945.⁴⁷ Stalin, in his dealings with foreign statesmen, played on the notion that he had to satisfy his own people. Certainly, different foreign policy options were considered, as we now know, regarding the work of the Litvinov commission in 1945 into the possibility of continuing the war-time alliance.⁴⁸ Stalin was not simply a victim of circumstances; he also helped to shape circumstances. The Cold War was not simply a product of Western anti-Soviet paranoia on the part of Churchill or Truman – it was also shaped by Soviet policies in Eastern Europe, and Stalin's calculation of the costs and benefits of the various options available to him.

The Politburo's demise greatly weakened the position of its members in their dealings with Stalin. But membership of the Politburo, and indeed membership of the Central Committee, within the Soviet political system remained a mark of great status. The great power and status of a Politburo member in relation to his subordinates compensated in some measure for the loss of power in relation to Stalin, although even here there might be an erosion of authority. P. Sudoplatov recounts the relations between senior officials in the Council of Ministers' Special State Committee on Problem Number One (the development of the atom bomb), chaired by Beria:

A member of the Politburo was always beyond criticism, at least by a person in a lower rank. It was not so in the special committee, where Politburo members and key ministers behaved almost as equals. It also startled me that [M.G.] Pervukhin was Beria's deputy in this committee, in which Voznesensky and Malenkov, members of the Politburo and far outranking Pervukhin, were ordinary members.⁴⁹

Decision-making without the Politburo

The system of decision-making which evolved under Stalin had certain strengths, which accounts for its longevity and its survival in extraordinary difficult circumstances. It was a permanent system of crisis management. Officials could be summoned at any time, day or night. The system relied not on election but on Stalin's decision to summon whoever was required, to offer advice, an opinion, or provide information, to be charged with a task or to answer for what had been done. The system of decision-making among various circles of decision-makers, with some of these circles overlapping one another, allowed for considerable flexibility, and for Stalin to control it as he willed. It gave the leader considerable freedom to develop policy initiatives, and allowed for a quick response. Once a policy line was chosen there was no prevarication. It placed the onus on the lower tiers of the administrative hierarchy to respond as diligent and enthusiastic executors of the centre's will.

The obverse side of this was the weaknesses of a system that was overly centralised and overly dependent on one figure: Stalin's faults became the system's faults. Processes of consultation and the taking of advice depended on his willingness to heed the opinions of others. The costs of policies (economic and human) were not a primary concern. Often policy failures were perpetuated and not corrected. As his faculties failed in the final years, policy issues were allowed to accumulate and new thinking was inhibited. His capriciousness exaggerated the deep factional and murderous rivalries for precedence among his subordinates. Systems of accountability of this inner Cabinet had completely atrophied, and in all major policy disputes Stalin was the ultimate arbiter.

Stalin's highly personalised system of rule coexisted, and indeed depended, on what remained a highly formalised and bureaucratised system at the level of the operative institutions, the party and government apparatus, the ministries, and the republican and regional administrations. Stalin continued to dominate the political scene. His predilection for working at night was imposed on his immediate subordinates and the higher officialdom. The enormous strains placed on individuals and the great workload they were expected to carry had a serious impact on their health.

Rationality and decision-making

Here a comparison with Nazi Germany is instructive. Ian Kershaw rightly notes that the Stalinist regime in terms of its relations to its own

ruling elite was far more violent than the Nazi regime. The Röhm purge of 1934, an action that Stalin seemingly greatly admired, is a minor event compared to the Great Terror.⁵⁰ The Soviet system was more monocratic than the Nazi regime, where conflict between institutional interests (the party, the state, the security apparatus, and those inherited from the old regime – the army and big business) were institutionalised. The Soviet regime was more reliant on coercion, rather than manipulation through propaganda, to control society. The Soviet system, like the Nazi system, relied on a combination of directives from the centre and initiatives from below.⁵¹ Often Stalin had to rein in his local officials before campaigns initiated from the centre got out of hand. The Soviet system shared with the Nazi regime what Michael Mann describes as the ‘contradictions of continuous revolution’ – the tensions between a revolutionary regime and the requirements of running an orderly state administration.⁵² The Terror of 1936–38 was the last of the revolutionary upheavals, the last ‘revolution from above’, leading the way to a more highly bureaucratised state system of administration.

A further point of comparison between the Nazi and Soviet systems is what Hans Mommsen refers to as the trend towards ‘cumulative radicalisation’ and ‘progressive self-destruction’ as structural determinants of the Nazi dictatorship.⁵³ In the Stalinist state it might be argued that the revolution from above of 1928–31 and the Terror of 1936–38 represented two waves of radicalisation. In each case they were eventually reined in. In the same way, the radical wave of ‘war communism’ was reined in during 1921, and the crisis of that year appears to have had a lasting, educative impact. This suggests a certain realism on the part of the Soviet leadership, and a capacity to recognise where policies might, if not adjusted, threaten the regime’s long-term survival. In foreign and defence policy, the Soviet leadership was compelled by weakness to embrace sober realism. After the debacle of the projected German revolution of 1923 they rarely indulged in revolutionary daydreams. Policy was controlled tightly from above.

Stalin was much more intimately involved in managing the affairs of state on a day-to-day basis than was Hitler, at least until the war. The Stalin cult was not intrinsic to the communist system of power, but was a later accretion; nevertheless it was central to the Stalinist regime. The Stalin dictatorship and the Stalin despotism in their creation involved the progressive dismantling of structures of collective leadership. It required the creation of more fluid relations, which freed Stalin to intervene in policy matters as and when he desired. But the party–state apparatus could not function as a whole on this basis. The apparatus

needed structure, order, stability and predictability. As a result, the Stalinist system constituted itself as a system combining apparently contradictory principles of organisation: arbitrariness and fluidity versus organisational order.

The enormously complex work of managing the planned economy, the day-to-day problems of production, supply, finance and so on were left increasingly to the ministries and to Sovnarkom/the Council of Ministers. Decision-making in these fields became more predictable and freer of political interference. Within the lower republican and regional tiers of administration after the terror of 1936–38 a similar kind of demarcation of responsibility between them and the central authorities also emerged.

A model of rational policy formulation posits a number of criteria, which need to be fulfilled: that the problem confronting the decision-maker be properly identified; that the various alternative solutions be identified; and that the costs of these various solutions be appraised. It requires also that, in the implementation process, the efficacy of the policy for attaining the original goal, and its costs, including incidental costs, is evaluated. Even in the most favourable conditions, decision-making is often influenced by considerations of ideology, expediency and practicalities that militate against a rational processing of decisions. There are always tensions between the short-, medium- and long-term objectives of policy. But there are degrees to which political systems can approximate to that goal.⁵⁴ Within democratic systems, rationality in policy-making can be distorted by excessive preoccupation with ideology, the predominant influence of generalists over experts, the distortion of information and advice, and the preoccupation with the short term. Within a highly centralised, one-party state, driven by a revolutionary ideology, these characteristics were bound to have a deeper impact.

How far do Stalin's policies meet the criteria of rationality? Did collectivisation assist in the industrialisation of the USSR? Did the Gulag advance the security and economic interests of the state? Did Stakhanovism promote economic efficiency? Did the great purges eliminate a conspiracy to destroy the USSR? Did the Nazi–Soviet pact of 1939 strengthen the USSR's international security? Why did the Soviet leadership fail to respond in time to the German invasion in June 1941? How successful was the Soviet war effort in the light of the figures we now have of the Soviet casualties? Zubok and Pleshakov identify a number of crucial decisions taken in the post-war period on Stalin's own initiative: Soviet policy in Eastern Europe, the expulsion of Yugoslavia

from Cominform, the imposition of the Berlin blockade, and the authorising of the North Korean communist leadership to invade South Korea.⁵⁵ In each case, the wisdom of the decision taken, in relation to the consequent costs incurred by the USSR, might be questioned.

To pose such questions is to raise the matter of policy alternatives. In this it is also impossible to divorce an assessment of policy-making from the question of the regime's ideology. In terms of ideology, the collectivisation of agriculture was rational, overriding considerations of economic, social and political costs. But 'dekulakisation' inevitably meant the creation of the Gulag. Moreover, we cannot avoid posing the question of whether the ideology distorted reality, created a one-sided consideration of policy options, and inclined the regime to adopt policies with high collateral costs. It might also be argued that the ideology possessed its own self-fulfilling, self-confirming logic (the Soviet conception of the hostile capitalist world, and its conception of hostile anti-socialist classes in the USSR was made real by the actions and behaviour of the Soviet government itself).

At the same time, the management of the Soviet economy became more rational and predictable: they learnt from their mistakes in 1928–33. Similar arguments might be made regarding policies in other fields. The success of the war-time industrial economy, the speed of the post-war economic recovery and the success of the atomic programme suggest that in these priority areas the regime was capable of spectacular advances.

Factional in-fighting

The war left Stalin physically and mentally exhausted, but placed him in a position that was unassailable. He remained dependent on his subordinates, and in the latter years this dependency increased greatly. But he continued to dominate the political sphere and to control the policy agenda. He did this through direct intervention, but increasingly through the management of his subordinates. In the post-war period, Stalin's paranoia and suspiciousness became more acute. The rivalries between individuals became more intense: the ongoing feud between Zhdanov, on the one hand, and Malenkov and Beria, on the other, ended only with Zhdanov's death in 1948. Purges were more localised, and were not comparable to the Terror of 1937–38. The war saw a certain easing of political control over society, which continued briefly after the war had ended. With the onset of the Cold War, the atmosphere changed.

Stalin, like all leaders, was highly dependent on his subordinates, but they were also the people from whom he had the most to fear. Fear and intrigue became a central element in the management of subordinates. The loyalty of subordinates was tested to the utmost, with members of families being imprisoned as virtual hostages. Stalin's control was strengthened by compromising events in people's past lives: Beria's association with the Mussavet intelligence agency during the civil war, Khrushchev's adherence to the Trotskyists opposition in 1923/24, and A. Ya. Vyshinskii's Menshevik past. Stalin undoubtedly kept track of his people through surveillance and informers. This may well have been a factor in the destruction of the military high command already in 1937. Khrushchev refers in his memoirs to the care taken to conduct sensitive conversations with other leaders where they might not be overheard.

But Stalin also controlled his colleagues in more subtle ways, by his intervention in policy-making, and his management of officials. While they retained Stalin's confidence, relations with his subordinates could be amicable, with the appearance of 'normality'. Stalin appointed the key officials and decided who should be brought into the Politburo. Khrushchev recounts in his memoirs that on his appointment as first secretary of the Ukrainian communist party in 1939, Stalin instructed him on his responsibilities.⁵⁶ N. K. Baibakov, on being appointed people's commissar of the oil industry in 1941, reports a similar briefing session with Stalin.⁵⁷ But Stalin on vacation managed his colleagues back in Moscow in much the same way as he had in the 1930s.

In the celebrated case of Marshal Zhukov we see the way in which Stalin used organisational means to demote him, and to damage his reputation and prestige. Zhukov, who had been indispensable during the war, could be removed once the war was over. He was too important and too prestigious to be attacked head on, however. The order of the Ministry of the Armed Forces of 9 June 1946 criticising Zhukov was drafted by Stalin, with Marshals Bulganin and A. M. Vasil'evskii. It criticised Zhukov's glorification of his role in the war, and belittling of the role of Marshals I. S. Konev and K. K. Rokossovskii in the capture of Berlin. The Military Council on 1 June 1946 removed him from the post of chief commander of the armed forces, a decision then confirmed by the Council of Ministers two days later. He was appointed commander of the Odessa military district. The Central Committee plenum of February 1947 expelled him from its ranks and from his post as commander of the Odessa military district.⁵⁸

After 1945, the leading role in policy-making was taken by an alliance of Zhdanov and Voznesenskii. Zhdanov was the last prominent party

figure to enjoy the standing of Stalin's favourite. He was effectively the number two party secretary, and head of ideology. He led the attack on the intelligentsia with the Central Committee resolutions attacking the literary journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*.⁵⁹ His close ally, Voznesenskii, another product of the Leningrad administration, as head of Gosplan and as deputy vice-chairman of the Council of Ministers had a dominating influence on economic policy, and masterminded the abolition of the rationing system and the major monetary reform.

The Zhdanov–Voznesenskii group was engaged in a bitter struggle with the Malenkov–Beria group. Malenkov had played a major role in the purges and headed the cadres administration of the Central Committee from 1938 to 1946, but his fortunes very quickly took a tumble in 1946. He was severely censured for mismanagement of the aircraft industry during the war. Senior officials in the aircraft industry were accused of faulty aircraft production that led to large number of losses during the war. Stalin regularly reported to the Politburo and Secretariat during the course of the investigation in 1946. A. I. Shakhurin, minister of the aviation industry, and a number of officials were arrested and imprisoned.⁶⁰

Zhdanov died in August 1948, but the group around him continued to dominate the sphere of policy-making. A. A. Kuznetsov, a member of the Secretariat and Orgburo, took charge of party work, and Voznesenskii (vice-chairman of the Council of Ministers) retained his place in economic policy-making.⁶¹ With the death of Zhdanov, the Malenkov–Beria grouping sought to oust their rivals from the key positions of power. Malenkov raised in the Politburo the question of the anti-party activities of Kuznetsov and others. Malenkov, through M. F. Shkiryatov, chairman of KPK, moved to have Voznesenskii expelled from the party. In March 1949 the Central Committee approved by poll (*oprosom*) Voznesenskii's expulsion from the Politburo, and on 27 October the Politburo members approved by poll his expulsion from the party. He was then arrested and executed.⁶² Stalin must have authorised the move against Voznesenskii. His execution was the prologue to the 'Leningrad Affair', in which hundreds of leading officials and executives from Leningrad were arrested, many executed and a great number sent into internal exile.

Stalin moved to check the growing influence of the Malenkov–Beria faction. In February and September 1948, Bulganin and Kosygin were made full members of the Politburo by a poll of the Central Committee members. In 1949, Khrushchev was recalled to Moscow from Ukraine. Khrushchev says it was Stalin's intention to build up a group to

counter-balance the Malenkov–Beria group.⁶³ Khrushchev was appointed to the party Secretariat, possibly as a counter-weight to Malenkov but retained oversight of Ukraine.⁶⁴ But this was also a move against the existing Moscow leader, G. M. Popov. On Stalin's initiative, a Politburo commission (Malenkov, Beria, Kaganovich and M. A. Suslov) set up to investigate Popov accused him of excessive interference in the work of the economic ministries. A Moscow city and oblast party committee plenum, on 13–16 December, approved his removal. Khrushchev was appointed in his place.⁶⁵

A sudden shift in the leadership ranks occurred in March 1949. Molotov was dismissed as foreign minister and replaced by Vyshinskii. Molotov's fall appears to be related to the arrest and imprisonment of his wife, Polina Zemchuzhina, accused of support for Zionists in the USSR. Molotov's demise was especially significant. He had acted since the 1920s effectively as Stalin's right-hand man. He had served as a kind of foil to Stalin in policy matters – he was the more sober and calculating of the two, balancing Stalin's more mercurial personality. At a Central Committee plenum, Molotov abstained in the vote for Zemchuzhina to be expelled from its ranks. Also in 1949, Mikoyan was sacked as minister of foreign trade.

Abakumov, appointed head of the MGB in 1945 on Stalin's initiative, also fell from favour.⁶⁶ On 4 June 1951, a Politburo resolution created a four-man commission, comprising Malenkov, Beria, Shkiryatov and S. D. Ignat'ev, to examine the accusations of M. D. Ryumin, an official of the MGB, against Abakumov. They found Abakumov guilty of a lack of vigilance. On 11 July, a Politburo resolution censured the unsatisfactory work of the MGB. Abakumov was dismissed and replaced by Ignat'ev, who led a purge of Abakumov's people in the MGB. This case was managed by Malenkov and Stalin.⁶⁷

Within these bizarre internal intrigues there developed the so-called Doctors' Plot. Directed initially at Kremlin doctors, but part of a developing anti-Semitic campaign, it sought also to ascertain the existence of a conspiracy against other Soviet leaders, and was turned into an attack on the MGB for lack of vigilance. It seems to have been part of a campaign aimed at discrediting Beria. Individuals considered to be close to Beria had already been purged as part of the Mingrelian Affair.⁶⁸ One of the chief figures behind this campaign was Ignat'ev. Stalin was closely involved in the campaign, and Khrushchev was almost certainly involved. With the death of Stalin, the whole campaign was dropped and the conspiracy denounced as a fabrication.

The 'enemy syndrome' as a *modus operandi*

In 1945–53, Stalin did not revert to the use of terror and mass purging as he had in 1937–38. The regime was well entrenched and bolstered by a successful war. What was done in 1937–38 did not need to be repeated after 1945. The capital built up as great war leader could not be squandered. In these post-war years, however, Stalin still used the 'enemy syndrome' as a crude but extremely effective means of dominating his colleagues, and modulating policy. The elastic concept of 'enemy of the people' gave him carte blanche. One cannot avoid the impression that Stalin derived some sadistic pleasure in toying with his victims, which inflicted enormous psychological pressure even on the strongest.

But Stalin's subordinates were not simply hapless victims. They were hardened political operators who had learnt the lessons of 1937–38 very well; and they had learnt how to use the 'enemy syndrome' to further their own factional interests. The containment of the potential damage of the 'Leningrad Affair', the Mingrelian Affair and the Doctors' Plot suggest that they had understood the way Stalin played this game, and the way it might be thwarted. These counter-strategies and containment strategies by Stalin's deputies remain to be analysed more fully. The alliances between Stalin's deputies suggest a strategy of mutual insurance, based on as close reading of the *vozhd's* intentions.

The 'enemy syndrome' was deployed against a host of lower-level targets: the repression and deportation of the nationalities after 1943 that were accused of collaborating with the Germans; the anti-cosmopolitan campaign directed at the cultural intelligentsia waged by Zhdanov; the Leningrad Affair of 1948; the Zionist conspiracy and the attack on the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee; the Mingrelian Affair; and the Doctors' Plot. What is striking is the way the work of government was dominated by these campaigns from 1943 to 1953. They were shaped not by reasons of state but by Stalin's own psychological need to create and develop an 'enemy syndrome' by which he could dominate and manipulate party and state.

Stalin's subordinates could not be indifferent to the climate created by these campaigns. Factional rivalries in part revolved around the question of vigilance and loyalty to the *vozhd*. Conflicts between the MVD and the MGB were fuelled by these campaigns,⁶⁹ and Stalin's subordinates themselves initiated new campaigns of vigilance and repression. The Supreme Soviet's law of 2 June 1948 relating to the deportation of peasants accused of infringement of work discipline and social parasitism was promoted by Khrushchev, drafted by Khrushchev, Malenkov,

Zhdanov, Beria, Suslov and Kruglov, and approved by Stalin with the instruction that it should not be published in the press.⁷⁰

While terror was clearly less pronounced in the post-war years than in 1937–38, the regime was at its most repressive in this period, with the Gulag population reaching its peak in 1952. But it was also part of Stalin's growing detachment from reality, reflected in the cult and his adoption of the role as philosopher king with his pronouncements on linguistics and the economic problems of socialism in the USSR, with both interventions seemingly aimed at opening up debate in these two fields. High Stalinism was characterised by the megalomaniacal Gulag construction schemes, the plans for the transformation of nature, by anti-Westernism', and attacks on the cultural intelligentsia', by the sponsoring of bogus experts such as Lysenko, by the xenophobia and the rising tide of official anti-Semitism.

The Nineteenth Party Congress

The XIX party congress met in October 1952, the first since 1939. A new Central Committee was formed (see Table 7.3). Khrushchev gives the following account of the new plenum:

Stalin himself opened the first Central Committee Plenum after the Congress and proposed the creation of a Presidium of twenty-five members. He took some paper out of his pocket and read the list of names to us – the new membership. The proposal and the nominations were accepted without discussion.⁷¹

Stalin then immediately proposed to the plenum the creation of a smaller Bureau to expedite the Presidium's work, a proposal quite new,

Table 7.3 Composition of the Presidium 'elected' in October 1952

Full members

V. M. Adrianov, A. B. Aristov, Beria, Bulganin, Voroshilov, Ignat'ev, Kaganovich, Korotchenko, V. V. Kuznetsov, O. V. Kuusinen, Malenkov, V. A. Malyshev, Mel'nikov, Mikoyan, N. A. Mikhailov, Molotov, Pervukhin, P. K. Ponomarenko, Saburov, Stalin, Suslov, Khrushchev, D. I. Chesnokov, Shvernik, Shkiryatov

Candidate members

L. I. Brezhnev, Vyshinskii, A. G. Zverev, N. G. Ignatov, I. G. Kabanov, Kosygin, N. S. Patolichev, N. M. Pegov, A. M. Puzanov, I. V. Tevosyan, P. F. Yudin

Source: R. G. Pikhoya, *Sovetskii Soyuz: Istoriya Vlasti 1945–1991* (Moscow, 1998), pp. 7, 8.

of which nothing had been suggested at the congress. According to Khrushchev: 'He proposed a Bureau of nine men and straightaway appointed the staff: himself, Malenkov, Beria, Khrushchev, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Saburov, Pervukhin and Bulganin. Molotov and Mikoyan were left out, but Voroshilov was included.'⁷²

The Presidium was never convened, and real power was vested in a group of five that met regularly: Stalin, Malenkov, Beria, Bulganin and Khrushchev. He rarely invited Kaganovich and Voroshilov, and absolutely never invited Molotov or Mikoyan. This Bureau decided all questions.⁷³

Khrushchev implies that the creation of this enlarged Presidium was a first step to purging the leadership: 'Stalin evidently had plans to finish off the old members of the Political Bureau. He often stated that Political Bureau members should be replaced by new ones.'⁷⁴ Against the background of the 'Leningrad Affair' (the execution of Voznesenskii), the disgrace of Molotov and Mikoyan, the Doctors' Plot, the show trials in Eastern Europe (which were ordered directly by Stalin) this is a not an unlikely proposition. Yoram Gorlizki's assertion that it was an innocent and creditable effort to 'democratise' and 'modernise' the party takes some believing.⁷⁵ Khrushchev writes:

Those last years with Stalin were hard times. The government virtually ceased to function. Stalin selected a small group which he kept close to him at all times, and then there was always another group of people whom he didn't invite for an indefinite period in order to punish them.⁷⁶

The Bureau's members would be summoned by the party Secretariat and would meet either in Stalin's Kremlin study or more often at the Kremlin cinema, where they discussed business between reels.⁷⁷ The sessions might continue at Stalin's dacha. Khrushchev adds: 'sometimes State and Party questions were decided but we spent only a fraction of our time on those'.⁷⁸ These gatherings, Khrushchev asserts, provided the basis of government from 1945 until 1953: 'Neither the Central Committee, nor the Politbureau, nor the Presidium Bureau worked regularly. But Stalin's regular sessions with his inner circle went along like clockwork.'⁷⁹

In his final years, Stalin, with his powers in decline, became increasingly dependent on his subordinates, and more capricious and mistrustful. Policy-making in these years assumed more bizarre and fantastic forms, suggesting a growing detachment from reality. The

meetings in Stalin's Kremlin office provide some measure of his declining involvement in the work of government. In 1940 he met some 2000 visitors, in 1950 only about 700, in 1951 and 1952 less than 500 each year. For months he met no one. For five months in 1950 he had no visitors – from 2 August to 22 December, and the same from 9 August 1951 to 12 February 1952.⁸⁰

Re-establishing the Politburo/Presidium

When Stalin was absent, there was a natural tendency for his subordinates to revert to a system of collective leadership to resolve matters among themselves. This was not always easy, given the strong distrust that prevailed among them. With Stalin's death, formal sessions of the Politburo were re-established immediately as the major forum of policy-making. This was done by the inner core of leaders who had constituted the Politburo before the enlargement of the Presidium at the XIX party congress. No individual was capable of assuming the dominating role that Stalin had occupied over the preceding twenty years.

On Stalin's death on 5 March 1953 the membership of the Presidium was as follows: full members – Malenkov, Beria, Molotov, Voroshilov, Khrushchev, Bulganin, Kaganovich, Mikoyan, Saburov and Pervukhin; candidates – Shvernik, Ponomarenko, Mel'nikov and M. D. Bagirov.

The reassertion of the Politburo/Presidium's leading role involved major changes within the party itself, the convening of regular sessions of the Central Committee and party congress, and the establishment of some measure of accountability of the Politburo before the Central Committee. In March 1953, Malenkov was compelled to decide whether to take the post of First Secretary of the party, or chairman of the Council of Ministers; he chose the latter. All these moves were intended to prevent the re-establishment of the 'cult of personality', and to re-establish norms of internal party 'democracy', but also to establish a new framework within which decision-making could operate. In this, decisions were to be subjected to more open debate and scrutiny, with policies determined on an assessment of their efficacy. The ending of terror, the relaxation of censorship, the convening of conferences of experts to discuss policy issues, were all intended to overcome what were seen as errors in the management of the policy process in the Stalin era. But these devices after 1953 by no means guaranteed success.

The changes in the party's internal operations were associated with a protracted struggle to reassert the party's dominance over other institutions, and to demarcate relations between these institutions and their

relative powers. The first major change was the downgrading of the internal security apparatus, the transformation of the MGB into the KGB, and its effective subordination to the Presidium (the purge of Beria and his men in 1953). The second phase was the assertion of the Presidium's ascendancy over the Council of Ministers that reached its climax in the struggle against the so-called 'anti-party group' in 1957. The third was the securing of party supremacy over the military apparatus, with the sacking of Zhukov as Minister of Defence in 1957.

The main changes in policy initiated immediately after Stalin's death were in areas where he had in his final years exercised a *de facto* veto on policy debate. From March 1953 onwards, the post-Stalin Presidium set about the urgent task of policy redirection: reducing the regime's reliance on repression and terror; curbing the influence of the MVD and MGB; shifting investment towards light industry and agriculture; relaxing the internal regimes in the communist states of Eastern Europe; and improving relations with the West. The rationality of the Gulag on purely economic grounds had always been questionable. The Politburo, no longer constrained by Stalin's veto, recognised by 1953 that it had become a political and social liability.

Khrushchev on the nature of the Stalin leadership

Khrushchev's commentaries on Stalin's leadership are well-known. Although they sanitise his own role under Stalin, they nevertheless provide the most penetrating analysis by a participant of how the leadership system worked. Party democracy and revolutionary legality, he asserted, were violated, with 'the accumulation of immense and limitless powers in the hands of one person'.⁸¹ The principle of 'collegiality', which Lenin had upheld in the most difficult circumstances, was cast aside.⁸² Stalin, with his 'despotic character', could not tolerate any opposition to himself personally, or to his concepts. In place of persuasion he relied on 'administrative violence, mass repression and terror'.⁸³ In time, the cult turned Stalin into a kind of god, an omniscient and infallible being.

While acting 'in the name of the Central Committee' Stalin perpetrated grave abuses, without even consulting or informing the Politburo.⁸⁴ This, Khrushchev argued, was especially the case after 1937/38. Following the XVII party congress, Stalin ceased to heed the opinion of the Central Committee or the Politburo: 'Stalin thought that now he could decide all things alone and all he needed were

statisticians; he treated all others in such a way that they could only listen to him and praise him.'

Stalin's inner circle was shaped by crude political manipulators: Beria – a master of intrigue, Shcherbakov – a 'poisonous snake', and the scheming Mekhlis. Its behaviour became coarser, with decisions taken at long, drunken dinner parties. His subordinates sought to curry favour with Stalin, by reporting on each other to him. Others, like Kaganovich, outdid their colleagues in toadying to the *vozhd*. Khrushchev noted 'Stalin's arbitrary rule and the absolute absence of any restraints on his authority'.⁸⁵

In highlighting Stalin's dominance, this is not to suggest that there were great hidden differences of opinion over policy. On most fundamental issues the Stalinist leadership was marked by a high degree of unanimity. Many of the leaders had backed Stalin actively 'because Stalin was one of the strongest Marxists and his logic, his strength and his will greatly influenced the cadres and party work'.⁸⁶ Most of his colleagues deferred willingly to his judgement. Khrushchev said that he accepted the Nazi–Soviet pact as 'historically inevitable' and regarded the Winter War with Finland in 1939 as being justified. This is true of most fundamental issues of domestic and foreign policy. Only in the later Stalin years did dissatisfaction with the direction of policy really emerge, and then it was not voiced openly.

The Soviet leadership's options in domestic and foreign policy were limited, a change of line in one field had far-reaching repercussions elsewhere. But this did not mean that options did not exist. The leadership shared the same ideological perceptions and the same values. They were also held together by a pervasive insecurity and by the group's self-imposed discipline: 'All of us around Stalin were temporary people. As long as he trusted us to a certain degree, we were allowed to go on living and working';⁸⁷ 'After the war, Stalin separated himself from the collective even more.'⁸⁸ Referring to Stalin's wilfulness and his mania for greatness, Khrushchev declared, 'He had completely lost consciousness of reality.'⁸⁹

Stalin dominated his colleagues by force of personality. Khrushchev noted that 'Both Stalin's temper and his self-control were developed to an advanced degree. He was, in short, an overpowering personality.'⁹⁰ He was able to formulate his conception in a persuasive manner, and to the end expressed himself 'clearly and concisely'.⁹¹ He could also bludgeon and bully his colleagues into accepting his views: 'Stalin's character was brutish and his temper was harsh, but his brutishness didn't always imply malice towards people to whom he acted so rudely.'⁹² Stalin could be reasoned with, he could be persuaded in some

instances to change his mind. But this was dangerous, and required calculation. Advice was often spurned contemptuously.⁹³

Khrushchev highlights the way in which Stalin employed the 'enemy syndrome' to control his subordinates. With the Politburo's demise it was difficult for lone individuals to take a stand: 'many decisions were taken either by one person or in a roundabout way, without collective discussion'.⁹⁴ If Stalin declared people to be enemies, that was enough: 'We had long since become accustomed to the practice that if you weren't told something, you didn't ask'; 'Information was carefully selected, limited and weighed by Stalin before it was passed on to the Politburo'; 'He valued his own abilities and views much more than those of anyone else.'⁹⁵ Stalin signed sentencing orders and passed them on to his colleagues to sign. In the case of the Doctors' Plot the Politburo members saw only the confessions.

Khrushchev offered a quite nuanced assessment of Stalin's leadership. Stalin did not rule in his own name but in the name of the party. He retained the trappings of collegiality but subverted its essence. He remained in a sense a revolutionary, though the ultimate goals of the revolution were much modified over time. He did not rule alone, and needed others around him – he controlled and intimidated his subordinates, but could not dispense with them. His colleagues held him in awe. He was capricious but shrewdly calculating. He was capable of a 'conscientious and statesmanlike approach to problems'; 'He was a great man, a great organiser and a leader. But he was also a despot.'⁹⁶ Khrushchev summed up with this assessment of Stalin: 'We cannot say that these were the deeds of a giddy despot. He considered that this should be done in the interests of the party, of the working masses, in the name of the defence of the revolution's gains. In this lies the whole tragedy!'⁹⁷

Khrushchev's testimony, for all its evasions, is a far more serious account than those offered by Kaganovich or Molotov. He was the member of Stalin's Politburo who came closest to acknowledging the enormity of the crimes they had committed under Stalin. After Stalin's death, at a meeting of the Presidium on 10 March 1953, Khrushchev addressed his colleagues: 'I, Khrushchev, you, Klim [Voroshilov], you, Lazar [Kaganovich], you, Vyacheslav Mikhailovich [Molotov] – we should all offer repentance to the people for 1937.'⁹⁸ Not surprisingly, Kaganovich and Molotov, in seeking to redeem Stalin's reputation, were anxious to disparage the veracity of Khrushchev's testimony.

Djilas provides the other main witness to the gatherings in Stalin's dacha. The picture that emerges is of a kind of tyrant's court, although Djilas also notes Stalin other features; his 'lively, almost restless

temperament'; 'He always questioned – himself and others; and he argued – with himself and others'; his witticisms and humour was 'predominantly intellectual and, as such, cynical'.⁹⁹ Others, such as Matyas Rakosi, the Hungarian communist leader, were dismayed at the way the Soviet leadership conducted itself.¹⁰⁰

Conceptualising the Stalin leadership

In contrast to the views of Khrushchev and Djilas, some recent researchers have detected subtleties and nuances in Stalin's leadership style that completely eluded his contemporaries. Yoram Gorlizki, in his analysis of Stalin's cabinet in the post-war years, argues that in this period there existed 'a variety of distinct "politburos"'.¹⁰¹ He identifies three: the formal meetings of the Politburo; the meetings of the ruling group or inner circle in Stalin's office or dacha (very different in composition from the formal Politburo, but described as a '*de facto* Politburo'); meetings of members of the Politburo without Stalin, convened while Stalin was on vacation and increasingly after the XIX party congress when Stalin was absent because of ill-health.¹⁰²

This approach dignifies any meeting of leading figures in the USSR which took decisions as 'the Politburo'. The elementary distinction between what was decided by the Politburo and what was ascribed to the Politburo is blurred. Elsewhere Gorlizki admits that the leadership system had 'given way to small, loose knit, kitchen cabinets which were at Stalin's beck and call' and 'a tractable committee of Stalin's friends and accessories'.¹⁰³ 'For much of the post-war period Politburo meetings assumed the form of small gatherings in Stalin's office or at his dacha', with a great many decisions taken by 'minute caucuses' or by Stalin personally.¹⁰⁴

In his article on the Council of Ministers under Stalin after 1945, Gorlizki emphasises the Politburo's weakness and insignificance. But in his article on the Politburo he contradicts himself flatly, perversely insisting on its importance: 'Obtaining Stalin's consent was at all times the main obstacle to getting a Politburo resolution passed', while 'The Politburo thus became indispensable as a tool for controlling the leadership'.¹⁰⁵ Key appointments 'all came before the Politburo and were issued as Politburo resolutions', and the Politburo was an 'important counterweight to an energetic Council of Ministers apparatus'.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, 'For the most part the relative formlessness and procedural indeterminacy of decision-making [in the Politburo–EAR] was compensated by the need for one indispensable ingredient: Stalin's consent'.¹⁰⁷ The word 'compensated' here opens up a host of questions. Moreover,

'even at the height of Stalin's dictatorship the Politburo continued to perform a distinct organisational role' and carried out 'a discrete set of institutional responsibilities which included control of foreign affairs, security matters and organisational issues. For the duration of Stalin's rule these questions remained firmly within the Politburo's domain'. The Politburo was also responsible for 'high order party matters'.¹⁰⁸ Here we have a terrible confusion of formal powers and real powers, of image and substance.

Gorlizki speculates as to why Stalin should have retained the trappings of the Politburo, and why he did not adopt a 'purely dictatorial system of executive rule', governing in his name and dispensing with the Politburo altogether.¹⁰⁹ Stalin, we are told, still held to some notion of party democracy, and he needed the Politburo to bind his colleagues 'into a system of collective responsibility'.¹¹⁰ Evidently Stalin's commitment to party democracy was more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Collective responsibility without collective decision-making granted the leader almost unlimited license.

Gorlizki attempts to find in this some limits to Stalin's powers: 'The system of rule, however, never descended into a pure dictatorship where Stalin pursued policies in his own name, by-passing the Politburo altogether. In fact, Stalin approached the Politburo with a measure of caution and reserve', and 'Stalinism had never become an unalloyed personal dictatorship'.¹¹¹ But to add to the confusion, elsewhere in the same article we have references to Stalin's dictatorship, and even to Stalin as a 'tyrant'.¹¹² In reality, the Politburo was a convenient fiction that not only concealed Stalin's real powers and a fiction by which he could dominate his subordinates. One reads with surprise the judgement: 'Despite frequently being excluded and manipulated by the leader, members of the Politburo under Stalin were treated relatively leniently', and 'Stalin himself sought continuity in the Politburo's membership'.¹¹³ Everything is, of course, relative, but these judgements make sense only in comparison to the carnage of 1936–39.

Gorlizki discerns unexpected virtues in what he depicts as a brisk, business-like system of rule. These various Politburos functioned as a Cabinet, as a 'responsive and flexible instrument of rule', staffed with colleagues who were 'skilled at reading the dictator's mind and implementing his wishes with a minimum of fuss' and 'freed from the schedules and procedures which hamstrung the official or de jure cabinet'.¹¹⁴ They depended on the 'personal chemistry between Stalin and its members'.¹¹⁵ A major element in that mixture, it should be added, was cold fear. Counter to Gorlizki's argument we might assert that this system

produced a crippling paralysis of decision-making, and fostered the Byzantine intrigues that were the hallmark of this era.

Gorlizki is effusive in discussing the way that meetings of the Presidium Bureau in the months before Stalin's death provided the basis for a return to collective leadership after his death; giving members of the Presidium knowledge of the working of machinery of government, knowledge of policy issues and experience of 'working together and operating as a collective', while 'The speed with which this Stalin-less cabinet swung into action on hearing of Stalin's illness... indicates a level of common understanding and initiatives among the leaders.'¹¹⁶ This offers an idealised vision of events that ignores the arrest and execution of Beria and the bitter infighting that characterised the post-Stalin era, and the problem of managing the terrible legacy bequeathed by him. They knew that reform was urgently required, but that it had been blocked by Stalin. Short of the creation of another Stalin-type dictator, the only option available was a return to some system of collective leadership.

In discussing the leadership system in this period, great care is needed in using the very term Politburo. Where decisions were taken by an inner group around Stalin, we can say no more than this. To talk of '*de facto* politburos' simply muddies the water and whitewashes the realities of Stalin's personal power. We need to avoid simplistic assumptions that dictatorship means individuals who rule in their own name, who rule exclusively without reference to any other institutions, or without reference to any ideological or belief system.

Conclusion

How we characterise the Stalin leadership must be considered apart from the question of the achievements of the Soviet system and the question of the degree of support it enjoyed among its people. Khrushchev was at pains to distinguish the achievements of the system from both the achievements and failing of Stalin as leader. While Stalin acquired despotic power he could never dispense with his subordinates. He needed them as assistants, advisers, counsellors, as foils in developing policy initiatives, as accomplices, and for psychological support. Above all, he needed them as executives to run the great institutions. In their own spheres, they continued to exercise great power, and around these satellite leaders lesser cults were developed. Stalin always purported to rule in the name of the party or the state, which was quite different from other systems of personal rule based on family, clan, ethnic, national or religious grouping. The collective provided him with

a degree of immunity, by spreading responsibility for policy. It was also a mechanism for controlling subordinates, who were not only his aides but also potentially his greatest rivals. The Communist Party was the basis of Stalin's unique personal authority in the USSR, and in the international communist movement it was the guarantee that his legacy would survive, and that the succession could be organised in an orderly way. It was the ideology and the movement that would vindicate him historically. In this, Stalin shared much with other great ideocratic dictators and despots of the twentieth century.

The core group of leaders that formed around Stalin in the 1920s was supplemented by a younger generation of leaders after 1938. But the manner of Stalin's interaction with these subordinates also changed. Stalin preferred to work as part of a group, drawing on their ideas and suggestions, but where his authority was unquestioned. From 1937, Stalin exercised despotic power, shaping all major policy changes, and a great many of the very minor ones as well. It required people of strong will and nerve to stand up to him in policy disputes. It was a situation stacked in Stalin's favour. Despotic power, as always, is both tempered and heightened by the fear of a palace coup and assassination. Even despotic power, we discover, is never absolute.

The transition to a dictatorial and despotic rule was always conditional. The tension between the single ruler and his subordinates can never be eliminated. Catastrophic policy failure casts aspersions on the leader's judgement. When Stalin was absent, the tendency was to seek, either through factional alliances or through collective action, mechanisms to influence policy. Stalin's response was to play faction off against faction, or to use various strategies to dissolve any possibility of collective action. He used the 'enemy syndrome' to control his subordinates and assert his influence over policy-making. But Stalin's subordinates also came to understand his stratagems, the way in which this game was played, and the way it could be blocked. The coexistence of informal and formal methods of rule, and the personalised system of power alongside bureaucratic, institutionalised power provided the basis for restoring some measure of collective leadership after his death.

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102. *Ibid.*, p. 293.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 291.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 294.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 297.
106. *Ibid.*, pp. 298–9.
107. *Ibid.*, p. 296.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 291.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 291.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
111. *Ibid.*, pp. 303–4.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 294.
113. *Ibid.*, p. 303.
114. *Ibid.*, p. 295.
115. *Ibid.*, p. 296.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 295.

Appendix 1

Changes in the Membership of the Politburo/Presidium, 1927–1957¹

Compiled by E. Mawdsley

1927, December, Plenum of the CC elected at the XV Congress of the CPSU

Members: N. I. Bukharin, M. I. Kalinin, V. V. Kuibyshev, V. M. Molotov, A. I. Rykov, Ya. E. Rudzutak, I. V. Stalin, M. P. Tomsky, K. E. Voroshilov.

Candidates: A. A. Andreev, V. Ya. Chubar', L.M. Kaganovich. S. M. Kirov, S. V. Kosior, A. I. Mikoyan, G. I. Petrovskii, N. A. Uglanov.

April 1929 CC Plenum: Uglanov relieved (*Plenum...osvobodil ot obiazannosti kandidata*), K. Ya. Bauman elected candidate.

June 1929 CC Plenum: S. I. Syrtsov elected candidate.

November 1929 CC Plenum: Bukharin dismissed (*Plenum...vyvel iz sostava*).

1930, July, Plenum of the CC elected at the XVI Congress of the CPSU

Members: Kaganovich, Kalinin, Kirov, Kosior, Kuibyshev, Molotov, Rudzutak, Rykov, Stalin, Voroshilov.

Candidates: Andreev, Mikoyan, Petrovskii, Syrtsov, Chubar'.

December 1930 (CC correspondence ballot – *oprosom*): Syrtsov dismissed.

December 1930 CC Plenum: Rykov and Andreev relieved, G. K. Ordzhonikidze elected member.

February 1932 CC Plenum: Rudzutak dismissed, Andreev elected full member.

1934, February, Plenum of the CC elected at the XVII Congress of the CPSU

Members: Andreev, Kaganovich, Kalinin, Kirov, Kosior, Kuibyshev, Molotov, Ordzhonikidze, Stalin, Voroshilov.

Candidates: Chubar', Mikoyan, Petrovskii, P. P. Postyshev, Rudzutak.

December 1934: Kirov assassinated.

January 1935: Death of Kuibyshev.

February 1935 CC Plenum: Mikoyan, Chubar' promoted to full member.

A. A. Zhdanov, R. I. Eikhe elected candidates.

February 1937: Death of Ordzhonikidze.

May 1937 (CC correspondence ballot): Rudzutak dismissed from CC (and Politburo).

October 1937 CC Plenum: N. I. Ezhov elected as candidate.

January 1938 CC Plenum: Postyshev relieved. N. S. Khrushchev elected candidate.

June 1938 (Politburo decision): Chubar' dismissed.

February 1939: Kosior shot.

1939, March, Plenum of the CC elected at the XVIII Congress of the CPSU

Members: Andreev, Kaganovich, Kalinin, Khrushchev, Mikoyan, Molotov, Stalin, Voroshilov, Zhdanov.

Candidates: L. P. Beria, N. M. Shvernik.

February 1941 CC Plenum: N. A. Voznesenskii, G. M. Malenkov, A. S. Shcherbakov elected candidates.

May 1945: Death of Shcherbakov.

March 1946 CC Plenum: Beria, Malenkov promoted to full members. N. A. Bulganin, A. N. Kosygin elected candidates.

June 1946: Death of Kalinin.

February 1947 CC Plenum: Voznesenskii promoted to full member.

February 1948 CC correspondence ballot (*oprosom*): Bulganin promoted to full member.

September 1948 CC correspondence ballot: Kosygin promoted to full member.

August 1948: Death of Zhdanov.

March 1949 CC correspondence ballot: Voznesenskii dismissed.

1952, October, Plenum of the CC elected at the XIX Congress of CPSU

Members (of Presidium of CC): V. M. Andrianov, A. B. Aristov, Beria, Bulganin, D. I. Chesnokov, S. D. Ignat'ev, Kaganovich, Khrushchev, D. S. Korotchenko, O. V. Kuusinen, V. V. Kuznetsov, Malenkov, V. A. Malyshev, L. G. Mel'nikov, Mikoyan, N. A. Mikhailov, Molotov, M. G. Pervukhin, P. K. Ponomarenko, M. Z. Saburov, Shkiriato, Shvernik, Stalin, M. A. Suslov, M. F. Voroshilov.

Candidates: L. I. Brezhnev, N. G. Ignatov, P. F. Yudin, I. G. Kabanov, Kosygin, N. S. Patolichev, N. M. Pegov, A. M. Puzanov, I. F. Tevos'yan, A. Ya. Vyshinskii, N. G. Zverev.

March 1953: Death of Stalin.

1953, March 6, CC Plenum

Members: Beria, Bulganin, Kaganovich, Khrushchev, Malenkov, Mikoyan, Molotov, Pervukhin, Saburov, Voroshilov.

Candidates: M. D. Bagirov, Mel'nikov, Ponomarenko, Shvernik.

June 1953 CC correspondence ballot: Mel'nikov removed.

July 1953 CC Plenum: Beria and Bagirov relieved, A. I. Kirichenko elected candidate.

July 1955 CC Plenum: Kirichenko promoted to full member, Suslov elected full member.

1956, February, Plenum of the CC elected at the XX Congress of the CPSU

Members: Bulganin, Kaganovich, Khrushchev, Kirichenko, Malenkov, Mikoyan, Molotov, Pervukhin, Saburov, Suslov, Voroshilov.

Candidates: Brezhnev, G. K. Zhukov, N. A. Mukhitdinov, E. A. Furtseva, Shvernik, D. T. Shepilov.

February 1957 CC Plenum: F. R. Kozlov elected candidate.

June 1957 CC Plenum: Kaganovich, Malenkov, Molotov and Shepilov dismissed from CC.

1957, June 29, CC Plenum

Members: Aristov, N. I. Belyaev, Brezhnev, Bulganin, Furtseva, Ignatov, Khrushchev, Kirichenko, Kozlov, Kuusinen, Mikoyan, Shvernik, Suslov, Voroshilov, Zhukov.

Candidates: Ya. E. Kalnberzin, A. P. Kirilenko, Korotchenko, Kosygin, K. T. Mazurov, V. P. Mzhavanadze, Mukhitdinov, Pervukhin, P. N. Pospelov.

Note: Members of the Politburo who were subsequently arrested and executed were Bauman (candidate member Politburo 1929–30), Bukharin, Rykov,

Rudzutak, Chubar', Kosior, Uglanov, Syrtsov, Postyshev, Ezhov and Voznesenskii. Tomsky and Ordzhonikidze committed suicide.

Note

1. Based on 'Sostav rukovodiashchikh organov Tsentral'nogo komiteta KPSS partii – Politbyuro (Prezidiuma), Orgbyuro, Sekretariata TsK (1919–1990 gg.)', *Izvestiya TsK KPSS*, no. 7, 1990, pp. 69–136; a corrected version was published as *Politbyuro, Orgbyuro, Sekretariat TsK RKP(b)–VKP(b)–KPSS: Spravochnik* (Moscow, 1990).

Appendix 2

The Fate of Members and Candidate Members of the Politburo, June 1924–October 1952

Compiled by E. A. Rees

From June 1924 to October 1952 there were a total of 36 members of the Politburo (27 full members (fm) and 9 candidates (cm)). Those listed as having survived are those who remained alive at the time of Stalin's death in March 1953. Stalin himself is omitted from these calculations.

A. A. Andreev (fm)	Survived
K. Ya. Bauman (cm)	Arrested and executed, 1937
L. P. Beria (fm)	Survived (arrested and executed, December 1953)
N. I. Bukharin (fm)	Arrested and executed, 1938
N. A. Bulganin (fm)	Survived
V. Ya. Chubar' (cm)	Arrested and executed, 1939
F. E. Dzerzhinskii (fm)	Died of natural causes, 1926
R. I. Eikhe (cm)	Arrested and executed, 1940
N. I. Ezhov (cm)	Arrested and executed, 1940
M. V. Frunze (fm)	Died undergoing medical surgery, 1925
L. M. Kaganovich (fm)	Survived
M. I. Kalinin (fm)	Died of natural causes, June 1946
L. B. Kamenev (fm)	Arrested and executed, 1936
N. S. Khrushchev (fm)	Survived
S. M. Kirov (fm)	Assassinated, December 1934
S. V. Kosior (fm)	Arrested and executed, 1938
A. N. Kosygin (fm)	Survived
V. V. Kuibyshev (fm)	Died of natural causes, 1935
G. M. Malenkov (fm)	Survived
A. I. Mikoyan (fm)	Survived
V. M. Molotov (fm)	Survived
G. K. Ordzhonikidze (fm)	Committed suicide, February 1937
G. I. Petrovskii (cm)	Survived
P. P. Postyshev (cm)	Arrested and executed, 1939
A. I. Rykov (fm)	Arrested and executed, 1938
Ya. E. Rudzutak (fm)	Arrested and executed, 1938
A. S. Shcherbakov (cm)	Died of natural causes, 1945
N. M. Shvernik (cm)	Survived

S. I. Syrtsov (cm)	Arrested and executed, 1937
M. P. Tomsky (fm)	Committed suicide, 1936
L. D. Trotsky (fm)	Assassinated by Soviet agents, 1940
N. A. Uglanov (fm)	Arrested and executed, 1937
K. E. Voroshilov (fm)	Survived
N. A. Voznesenskii (fm)	Arrested and executed, 1949
A. A. Zhdanov (fm)	Died of natural causes, 1947
G. E. Zinoviev (fm)	Arrested and executed, 1936

Natural deaths: Dzerzhinskii, Kalinin, Kuibyshev, Shcherbakov and Zhdanov. In the cases of at least four (excluding Kalinin), early death was undoubtedly brought on by the huge work load placed upon them.

Suicide: Tomsky committed suicide in 1936 under the threat of arrest and trial. Ordzhonikidze committed suicide in February 1937 after a heated row with Stalin and may have anticipated his own demise.

Death in suspicious circumstances: Frunze died undergoing medical operation; Kirov assassinated.

Arrested and executed: Bauman, Bukharin, Chubar', Ezhov, Kamenev, Kosior, Postyshev, Rudzutak, Rykov, Syrtsov, Uglanov, Voznesenskii and Zinoviev.

Assassinated by Soviet agent: Trotsky.

Survivors: Within the group of survivors were several people who at one time or another incurred Stalin's displeasure: Kaganovich (1941), Malenkov (1946), Kosygin (1948), Molotov and Mikoyan (1949) and Beria (1952). The individuals who appear never to have been threatened were those whom Stalin did not see as challengers: Andreev, Bulganin, Khrushchev, Petrovskii, Shvernik and Voroshilov.

	Full members	Candidate members	Full and Candidate members	Percentages
Died of natural causes	4	1	5	13.9
Suicide	2	0	2	5.5
Death in suspicious circumstances	2	0	2	5.5
Arrest and execution	8	6	14	38.9
Assassinated	1	0	1	2.8
Survivors	10	2	12	33.3
Total	27	9	36	100.0

In each of the fourteen executions, the two suicides, and the one assassination Stalin had a direct role. In the case of these seventeen members and candidates of the Politburo 1924–52, that is 46 per cent of all members and candidates, Stalin was directly implicated. This is to leave aside the delicate cases of Frunze and Kirov. Not surprisingly, the casualty rate among the candidate members was substantially higher than among the full members.

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APRF	Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii)
GARF	State Archives of the Russian Federation (Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii)
GAVO	State Archives of Vinnitsa oblast (Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Vinnitskoi oblasti)
RGAE	Russian State Archives of the Economy (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki)
RGASPI	Russian State Archives of Social-Political History (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskii Istorii) (formerly RTsKhIDNI)
TsDAGO	Central State Archives of Social Organisation of Ukraine (Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv gromad''kykh ob'iednan' Ukraini)
TsGAVOVU	Central State Archives of the Highest Bodies of Government and Administration of the Ukraine (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv vysshikh organov vlasti i upravleniya Ukrainy)

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