

Guest Lecture

Stephen Kotkin

Stalin's Great Terror (1936-1938): A Mystery?

Professor Kotkin has been teaching in the department of history at the Princeton University since 1989. He holds a joint appointment in the Woodrow Wilson School for Public and International Affairs at Princeton. He is also a Research Scholar at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. His research interests include authoritarianism, geopolitics, global political economy, empire, and modernism in the arts and politics.

Scholars remain without a consensus explanation for the bloody episode when the Soviet secret police would internally report 1,575,259 arrests, 87 percent of them for political offenses, and 681,692 executions. (The total who perished directly at the hands of the Soviet secret police was likely closer to 830,000.) Stalin's central role is undeniable, but what could he have been thinking? And how was such annihilation even possible? In Nazi Germany, Hitler went after Jews, Communists, and Social Democrats - those identified as enemies - but in the USSR Stalin called his own loyal elites enemies and savaged them. To be sure, the greater number of victims in the Great Terror were ordinary Soviet people, but what regime liquidates colossal numbers of loyal officials? Could Hitler - had he been so inclined - have compelled the imprisonment or execution of huge swaths of Nazi factory and farm bosses, as well as almost all Nazi provincial Gauleiters and their staffs, several times over? Could he have executed the personnel of Nazi central ministries, thousands of his Wehrmacht officers - including almost his entire high command - as well as the Reich's diplomatic corps and its espionage agents, its celebrated cultural figures, and the leadership of Nazi parties throughout the world (had such parties existed)? Could Hitler also have decimated the Gestapo or SS even while they were carrying out such a mass bloodletting? And could the German people have been told, and would the German people have found plausible, that almost everyone who had come to power with the Nazi revolution turned out to be a foreign agent and saboteur? Even among ideological dictatorships, Communism stands out. How can we explain what happened and why?



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The lecture will be followed by a small reception.

Thursday, 27 April 2017, 6 pm
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
IGK Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History
Georgenstraße 23, 6th Floor, 10117 Berlin

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