

# **The Supreme Court Of The Soviet Union**

## **Prosecution Vs Genrikh Yagoda**

- *Overview*
- *Timeline*
- *Guiding Questions*

## *Overview:*

Genrikh Yagoda was a key figure in the Soviet Union during a time that was very politically charged and chaotic, from 1934 to 1936 he served as the People's commissar for Internal Affairs and he led the NKVD, which was a powerful governmental agency that was responsible for state security, intelligence, political policing and law enforcement, Genrikh Yagoda was responsible for enforcing the Soviet government's policies at the highest level and the NKVD expanded its influence across the Soviet society under his leadership. Yagoda also oversaw the arrest and detention of thousands who were accused of counter-revolutionary activities, which are basically actions that aim to overthrow a government.

Tactics such as secret surveillance and coercive interrogations were used in those detentions, in addition to that his actions had human cost since he managed large state projects that relied heavily on forced labor. By 1936, Yagoda's power began to decline. Joseph Stalin removed him from his position, his reasons being that Yagoda failed to uncover hidden "enemies of the people", these suspicions at that time later turned into formal accusations, in early 1937, Yagoda was arrested and charged with serious crimes such as treason, espionage, conspiracy with anti-Soviet elements, deliberate sabotage of state projects, and personal corruption, he was portrayed as a man who abused his power for personal gain, undermined the government he had served, and obstructed justice.

This was due to his direct involvement in the expansion of the secret police apparatus, the fact that he oversaw the first major trials and ordered mass arrests of "enemies of the people", he also supervised massive projects that required forced labor and lead to

many fatalities, his involvement in these risky aspects made him prone to accusations especially in such a sensitive time.

Yagoda's trial before this esteemed court of the Soviet Union is more than just a trial against one man, it looks at the balance between personal accountability and the security of the state, it raises questions about loyalty, power and how it's used, and if those who enforce a government's policies should they be judged by what they enforce.

# ***Timeline:***

## ***1930 – Acting as the head of the OGPU***

- *Expansion of the gulag system as a tool of economic exploitation and he begins taking control of the Soviet secret police.*

## ***1932-1933 – White Sea-Baltic Canal Project***

- *Yagoda supervised the canal's construction, where 100,000+ prisoners were forced to work and at least 25.000 died from the cold, starvation and exhaustion.*

## ***1934 – Appointed Head of the NKVD***

- *He becomes the people's commissar for internal affairs, he consolidates internal security, censorship, surveillance, and prisoners are under his control.*

## ***1934 -1936 – Early Great Purge***

- *Yagoda during this time directs arrests, investigations, and the execution of political opponents, he also observes the first ever Moscow Show Trials, he also expands the gulags population drastically.*

## ***1935 -1936 – Assassination & Poisoning Allegations***

- *Yagoda is implicated in the suspicious deaths of Maxim Gorky and Gorky's son, the use of NKVD resources for covert killings of perceived opponents.*

## ***1936 – Yagodas Removal From the Nkvd***

- *In September of 1936 Yagoda got dismissed and was replaced by Nikolai Yezhov, the official reason was due to ineffectiveness in uncovering enemies, in reality Stalin wanted a harsher purge chief.*

## ***Charges:***

- ***Charge No.1: Unprecedented Persecution***
  - *This charge is applicable when the accused, fully aware of the situation and of sound mind, deliberately called for or was complicit in mass persecution, that of which was arbitrary, conducted for political agenda or any other reason the supreme court may deem illegitimate.*
- ***Charge No.2: Espionage***
  - *This charge is applicable when the accused, without approval of the appropriate bodies in the respective SSR, spied on certain subjects for reasons that do not serve the absolute safety and security of the state and USSR.*
- ***Charge No.3: Conspiracy with Anti-Soviet elements***
  - *This charge is applicable when the accused, fully aware of the situation and of sound mind, deliberately called for or was complicit in actions relating to entities or elements that are enemies of the USSR or that seek its destruction.*

## ***Guiding Questions:***

*1- Was Yagoda responsible for the crimes committed under his leadership or was he a loyal servant of Stalin's regime?*

*2- Should the deaths in projects like the White Sea-Baltic Canal be seen as negligence or deliberate state violence?*

*3- Is Yagoda a victim of the system he helped create or was he a perpetrator?*

*4- Should forced labor under deadly and harsh conditions be seen as a form of genocide or just exploitation.*