

Stalin's Last Crime – The Doctors' Plot
by Jonathan Brent and Vladimir P. Naumov.
John Murray, 2003.

In the years that have elapsed since the Second World War, and particularly since his denunciation by Nikita Krushchev, the world has realised that Josef Stalin ranks with Hitler as one of the most evil human beings of the twentieth century, indeed, his genocidal tally and general brutalisation of his own citizens puts even Hitler in the shade.

Stalin's Last Crime, based on the latest information to be gleaned from hitherto closed archives in the former Soviet Union, is a dense and meticulously detailed description of a supposed 'conspiracy' against the Soviet leadership that came to light in January 1953 and which, had he not died suddenly less than two months later, might have led to Stalin purging the Soviet Union of its Jews and completing the task that Hitler had started with Operation Barbarossa in June 1941, and possibly of a Third World War.

The authors trace the story of the plot, its genesis in the fevered brain of Stalin, the paranoia and fear that stalked the communist leadership and the dehumanising brutality that was such a hallmark of the Soviet Union under Communism. The suffering that was caused to individuals by Stalin in connection with the doctors was mirrored by that caused to countless millions by the regime that he led. The main difference between the doctors and others charged for a wide variety of imaginary offences is that the doctors were freed after Stalin's death and exonerated.

This powerful work leaves the reader with several lasting impressions: the paradox of the way Soviet Jews were liberated by the Revolution to achieve unimaginable power and influence in the early decades of Communist rule; their susceptibility to an equally dramatic disintegration in their fortunes; the ability of the system pioneered by Stalin and his cohorts to survive for nearly a century before collapsing in on itself; and above all, the vast and malevolent shadow cast by Stalin himself. That for me at least, is the lasting, chilling impression I take away from this excellent work.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh