

GERALD FITZMAURICE (1865–1939)

As we move into the twentieth century the style of Western diplomacy and behind the scenes fixing becomes more subtle. In this next study, there is less bloodletting, more state craft, and more reliance on word of mouth and the ability to manoeuvre, sometimes in hostile situations, without resorting to force of arms, poison or murder. Diplomacy is no less cunning and the ends continue to justify the means – monetary inducements play their part. Diplomats are still honest men sent abroad to do whatever it takes to preserve the interests of their country – even lie.

Gerald Fitzmaurice was the archetypal English diplomatist skilfully navigating the fiendishly complex Turkish political world. In a review of David Barchard's book, *Out of the Shadows*, a critic wrote: Gerald Fitzmaurice, senior dragoman, or Turkish-speaking consular officer at the British Embassy from 1907 to 1914, is unique in Anglo-Turkish diplomatic history. Though well down the embassy pecking order, his reputation, both in his own lifetime and subsequently, cast a much longer shadow than those of the ambassadors he served. Gertrude Bell, visiting Turkey in 1907, found him 'the most interesting man' in Istanbul. His one-time embassy colleague, Aubrey Herbert, the writer and politician, thought he was cunning as a weasel and as savage. The historian Harold Temperley called him an unrivalled authority.

As we shall see he was one of the second level of British diplomats who, as one commentator put it, took the risks while the ambassadors slept. Despite his relative lowliness which clearly rankled as his promotions were slow in coming, his influence is never doubted.

So who was this obscure man and what made his reputation? He was born in the fishing village of Howth, near Dublin and attended what is

now called Blackrock College. The school was new having been founded in 1860 by Père Jules Leman of the French Catholic Order, the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and of the Immaculate Conception, specifically with the aim of training young men for missionary work in the Third World. Indeed it was assumed that the young Fitzmaurice himself would enter the priesthood although interestingly as the school's own website puts it: "In response to changing circumstances, a highly successful civil service training department and university college were established." This was the path of public service that Fitzmaurice was eventually to follow and it was not long before he was distinguishing himself as a gifted linguist.

Discretion being his watchword throughout life he never wrote his memoirs so we have to rely on others' observations, private letters and biographies to fill in the gaps. We do at least know something of his striking appearance: ginger hair, piercing eyes and in later life a full handlebar moustache.

Having received his B.A. from the Royal University of Ireland in 1887, the following year he passed an entrance examination and became Student Interpreter in the Levant Consular Service in Constantinople, where his fluency in Turkish, Arabic and Persian singled him out as a leading 'dragoman'. This was the title given to interpreters in the region but the best of them were more than mere translators; they were also trusted interpreters of nuance and behaviour in the Ottoman Empire where Muslim leaders either refused to learn or claimed not to understand any language other than their own. Their influence therefore could be considerable and the opportunity for conspiracies was abundant. The first Ottoman Grand Dragoman was a Greek called Panavotis Nicosias and Napoleon's own 'favourite Orientalist' was Amédée Jaubert.

The city of Constantinople, which would not formally change its name to Istanbul until the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, was still a major European and Asian crossroads straddling the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea with rail networks into the Middle East and European capitals. At the time Fitzmaurice found himself in post its strategic position was unquestioned and had been recognised as such for centuries with Britain appointing her first ambassador as far back as 1583 when Elizabeth I was queen.

Fitzmaurice's first provincial postings took him to Asiatic Turkey and in time he was appointed political consul then vice consul before returning to the embassy. During this time he witnessed with alarm increasing pressure

on the Armenian Christians. As a Roman Catholic Fitzmaurice may not have been entirely impartial.

By late 1895 the massacres of Armenians had increased; many were being forced to convert to Islam and churches were being turned into mosques. The sultan, Abdul Hamid II, was not impervious to criticism from Europe and invited the British embassy to assist in a palace commission of inquiry into the attacks. Fitzmaurice was given the task and, despite fears that his role was doomed to failure and might result in his death, he survived and penned his report which stated bluntly that the conversions had been forced and that the palace itself was behind the massacre of the Armenian Christians. A new commission was ordered and, even though Fitzmaurice's report had been published for all to see in a Blue Book laid before Parliament shortly before his departure, he was assigned to the new inquiry. Despite the obvious dangers, his behind the scenes negotiations led to the reconversion of many of the Armenians and the mosques being re-consecrated as churches.

Fitzmaurice's efforts and skill in difficult if not dangerous negotiations was recognised and he was made CMG – Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George – in June 1887 but he was still officially third dragoman in the Embassy which must have annoyed him as he stood in line behind Adam Block, second dragoman and an infinitely inferior operator. Apart from anything else the work was tedious and Fitzmaurice continually pressed for more challenging assignments.

After a number of short term provincial postings his request was granted by the ambassador, Sir Nicholas O'Connor, but perhaps not as he would have wished.

In 1902 he was sent to apply his knowledge of Turkish politics to assist the floundering negotiations of the Aden Boundary Commission⁵⁵ which had been set up by the British and Turkish governments to agree the border between the Turkish province of Yemen and the British Protectorate of Aden. In short the negotiators needed more intellectual muscle and above all wanted to avoid being tricked by mistranslations as had happened before.⁵⁶ The task was simple as far as O'Connor was concerned: resolve the situation as quickly as possible but preserve the British position on the border between the Ottoman *vilayets*, or provinces, of Yemen and the Aden protectorate which was part of British India. It is apparent that Fitzmaurice did sterling work but it was a long haul before he was eventually allowed to leave in 1905 with his health suffering having spent so long under

canvas. He was given a CB – Companion of the Order of the Bath – by the Foreign Office although he had hoped for more, even a knighthood. But the whole affair had taken much longer to resolve than was hoped and, as Professor Geoffrey Berridge recounts in his biography, Fitzmaurice's own promotion had apparently stalled when he had been passed over for the Chief Dragoman slot on Block's departure.

Finally in 1905 he was made a Junior Consul and effectively second dragoman in Constantinople, a post he took up after a year in England. But Fitzmaurice was not a happy man regarding his appointment to return to the "Byzantine dung heap" and hoped for a more challenging role than the dragomanate had to offer interpreting and guiding for others in the embassy. Even when he became Chief Dragoman in October 1907 he was still dissatisfied, nevertheless, an unmarried man without other distractions, he stuck to the task like the workaholic he was becoming and was made First Secretary the following year.

This marked the breakthrough of Fitzmaurice's real influence in local affairs because in March 1908, O'Connor died and was replaced by Sir Gerard Lowther. This was soon after the so called Young Turks, a secularist nationalist reform party, led a rebellion in July that year against Abdul Hamid II, the last effective ruler of the Ottoman Empire, forcing him to restore the Constitution which he did on 24 July. Abdul Hamid was succeeded in 1909 by Mehmed V who was largely a figurehead.

At first everyone was glad to see the back of Abdul Hamid who was regarded as being too close to Germany but it was not long before "the children", as Fitzmaurice disparagingly referred to the Young Turks in their newly formed Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in some of his private letters, started making trouble. Above all Fitzmaurice feared they were controlled by Jews, *dÖmnes* – or crypto-Jews⁵⁷ – and Freemasons.

If there is criticism of Fitzmaurice's diplomacy some say it was clouded by this antipathy towards the Jewish people in particular. Writing to B.H. Liddell Hart, the military historian, T.E. Lawrence said: "The Ambassadors were Lowther (an utter dud) and Louis Mallet who was pretty good and gave fair warning of the trend of feeling. I blame much of our ineffectiveness upon Fitzmaurice, the Dragoman, an eagle-mind and a personality of iron vigour. Fitzmaurice had lived half a lifetime and was the Embassy's official go-between and native authority. He knew everything and was feared from end to end of Turkey. Unfortunately, he was a rabid R.C. and hated Freemasons and Jews with a religious hatred. The Young Turk movement

was fifty per cent crypto-Jew and ninety-five per cent Freemason. So he regarded it as the devil and threw the whole influence of England over to the unfashionable Sultan and his effete palace clique. Fitzmaurice was really rabid and his prejudices completely blinded his judgment. His prestige, however, was enormous and our Ambassadors and the F.O. staff went down before him like nine-pins. Thanks to him, we rebuffed every friendly advance the Young Turks made.”

Whether or not this was true, the CUP became convinced that Fitzmaurice, backed by his ambassador, was against them and this sense of grievance was exacerbated when the British embassy appeared to support a counter revolution which failed. Whatever the real nature of Fitzmaurice’s position, it was decided that he could best serve his country elsewhere.

In December 1911 he was sent to the Ottoman province of Tripoli as acting consul general to solve a new crisis following the invasion by Italian forces. The task was made more difficult by the fact that his immediate boss, Justin Alvarez, was vehemently anti-Italian. Nevertheless Fitzmaurice succeeded in smoothing things over with the Italians before returning once again to Constantinople where another challenge awaited him – the outbreak of the First Balkan War in October 1912.

The Balkans had been in a state of crisis since the early part of the century and it was not until the establishment of the Balkan League, an alliance between Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro and Serbia at the prompting of Russia and directed against the Ottoman Empire, that they were able to win back almost all of the European Ottoman territories. However old differences re-emerged and by June 1913 Bulgaria began attacking her former allies marking the start of the Second Balkan War.

Fitzmaurice’s negotiating skills were required in the negotiations between Turkey and the Balkan League in the early part of 1913 but Berridge writes that the CUP began “a discreet campaign for his recall” to London which happened in February 1914. In London he continued his work opposing the policies of the Young Turks and tried in vain to talk up the stock of the Ottoman court and which opponents regarded as merely an attempt “to sustain its cruel, corrupt and capricious ruler.”⁵⁸

Meanwhile the outbreak of World War I was looming. The Allies comprised initially the United Kingdom, France and Russia, and the Central Powers, made up of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Ultimately these alliances expanded when Italy, Japan and the United States joined

the Allies, and the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria sided with the Central Powers.

In 1915 Fitzmaurice joined Hugh O’Bieme, a senior British diplomat, in a mission to try and bribe Bulgaria into siding with the Allies. The mission failed because Britain could not offer what Bulgaria demanded, namely the return of Macedonia which had been seized by Serbia during the Second Balkan War. This deal on the other hand was something Germany persuaded them they could supply as Serbia was its enemy. With their agreement secured Bulgaria immediately declared war on Britain forcing O’Bieme and Fitzmaurice to depart empty-handed.

Fitzmaurice was now seconded to the Intelligence Division of the Admiralty Office in London where his and other minds became increasingly exercised by the importance of world Jewry in securing peace. To that end Fitzmaurice we are told advised that Palestine should be offered to the Jews of Constantinople in return for withdrawing their support from the Ottoman rulers.⁵⁹ Memoranda at the time suggest this would also have gone down well with the Jewish community in America. Fitzmaurice’s knowledge was now highly regarded once again. Lord Fisher, the First Sea Lord, said he was “the most important person in the Eastern Theatre of the War.”⁶⁰

But it seems that Fitzmaurice’s style, his guile or maybe just his perceived biases brought an early end to his career. Prof Berridge describes this period in these words: “For various reasons, however, he became a nearly man: nearly the negotiator in Switzerland of the formal abdication of the Egyptian khedive (1916); nearly a further recruit to the Arab Bureau in Cairo (later in 1916); nearly consul-general in Moscow following the Bolshevik revolution (1918); and nearly political adviser to General Bridges in Bulgaria (later in 1918). What he did do—prompted not just by the realpolitik of the time but by a long-held attachment to secular Zionism—was to help his old friend Sir Mark Sykes prepare the ground for the Balfour declaration of November 1917, and then to scupper the idea of a separate peace between Britain and Turkey.”

It was acknowledged even then that the demands of Arab and Jew over Palestine was a difficult problem which would require the most delicate handling. O’Bieme wrote: “It is evident that the Jewish colonization of Palestine must conflict to some extent with Arab interests. All we can do, if and when the time comes to discuss details, is to try to devise a settlement which will involve as little hardship as possible to the Arab population. We

shall then, of course, have to consult experts...I would suggest that we might consult Mr Fitzmaurice.”⁶¹

His idea was never pursued because on 5 June 1916 O’Bierne and all his advisers died when the boat they were sailing on to Russia, HMS *Hampshire*, hit a German mine and sank.

With the end of the war and an armistice between Turkey and Britain Fitzmaurice, ‘the Wizard of Istanbul’, was nearing the end of his time in public office. He returned to the Foreign Office from the Admiralty in 1919. No longer wanted particularly by the Turks in Constantinople, he served out his remaining time in the news and political intelligence department which was itself closed down. At the age of just 55 he retired to live out the last years of his life in discreet obscurity. He died from a cerebral thrombosis at his home on 23 March 1939.

Fitzmaurice was without doubt an intriguer and a plotter but always with the best interests of Great Britain at heart. He was hard working sometimes to the point of exhaustion, a manipulator and without question a master of his brief when it came to Anglo-Turkish affairs. He undoubtedly earned the ‘title’ of Fitzmaurice of Constantinople. Was he blinded by prejudice? There are conflicting points of view but all agree that Fitzmaurice was an expert without equal on the complexities of Turkey. Writing his obituary in *The Times*,⁶² Professor Harold Temperley said: “The late Mr G. H. Fitzmaurice was a man of the most penetrating insight into the affairs of Near and Middle East and of most remarkable influence. His power of inspiring awe was most remarkable.”

Historians and scholars will be able to pore over his many letters to Lloyd George and others but without a definitive personal account one can only speculate about the innermost thoughts of this highly intelligent and dedicated public servant. He undoubtedly operated in the shadows and was prepared to do whatever it took to achieve his masters’ ends but never for personal enrichment, although he surely would have liked to receive greater honours. He worked tirelessly in a theatre which today is proving as complex as he feared. He foresaw potential conflict between Jew and Arab and he struggled in vain to seek peaceful settlement throughout Europe; whether his approach would have helped or hindered had he been permitted or been well enough to pursue it is impossible to tell. They still remain the greatest diplomatic issues facing the world today.

SERGEI KIROV (1886–1934)

It was in his death rather than in life that Sergei Kirov had the greatest and bloodiest impact on Soviet politics. It might be said that none of our characters enjoyed such brutal loyalty from their master even if the master may have had a hand in that death. It just so happened that he was to become probably the closest friend to the one of the most ruthless leaders the world has known.



Life in the Kremlin at the time was both a relaxed and dangerous experience. In his biography of Joseph Stalin, Simon Sebag Montefiore describes an almost collegiate atmosphere with Stalin and his closest associates dropping in on one another much as one drops in on a neighbour to ask for a cup of sugar. They seemed to live in one another's pockets, their children played together and they dined together enjoying the best that the Soviet Union could offer while the peasants in the countryside starved.

Stalin had succeeded Lenin as de facto leader of the country in 1924 and had introduced a centralised command economy aimed at turning Russia from an agrarian society into a powerful industrial nation. Under his Five Year Plans it was the state which would decide what should be produced and where it should be produced. Of course it created tremendous upheaval as peasants found themselves operating unfamiliar machinery which

constantly broke down and then lay idle as spare parts were in short supply. The countryside was devastated, crops failed and famine followed. Failure to reach production targets was deemed to indicate a lack of loyalty and severely.

Within the walls of the Kremlin loyalty and friendships were also fragile. Everyone wanted to be in Stalin's good books but he was a difficult man and difficult father to all his children with the exception of his daughter, Svetlana. All that really mattered to him was Bolshevism. When one of his sons, Yakov, apparently tried to shoot himself but only succeeded in grazing his chest, Stalin reportedly said, "Couldn't even shoot straight."⁶³

The children would also have received little sympathy or warmth from Stalin's second wife, Nadya Alliluyeva, who suffered from mental illness, possibly manic depression, bipolar disorder or a form of schizophrenia. She loved Stalin but also seemed to nag him constantly possibly trying to vie for his attentions with all the other young women who caught his eye or wrote adoring fan letters to him enclosing their photographs. In his own way Stalin did love her but he was ill equipped to cope with her mood swings and nothing was to be allowed to get in the way of his political ambitions.

In the end Nadya's demons drove her to take her own life with a Mauser pistol given to her as a gift by her brother, Pavel. There were also suggestions that the gun was found lying next to the hand she didn't use and that Stalin himself may have been responsible. Her face was bruised suggesting she had sustained blows and the official cause of death for many years was recorded as appendicitis adding to suspicions of a cover-up.

Whatever the truth about Nadya's death, Stalin expressed his grief openly and an elaborate funeral was arranged with horse drawn carriage, honour guard and military bands. It was into this void that the charismatic Sergei Mironich Kirov, the First Secretary of Leningrad (modern day St Petersburg) and a Politburo member stepped. Maria Svanidze⁶⁴ wrote: "Kirov was the closest person who managed to approach Joseph intimately and simply, to give him that missing warmth and cosiness."

Kirov was full of joy, constantly singing arias from the operas he loved and at ease with everyone, men and women alike. He too was keen on the ladies particularly ballerinas from the Mariinsky Ballet, which was later renamed the Kirov Ballet in his honour following his death.

Born in 1886, Sergei Mironovich Kostrikov was orphaned as a child. He was brought up by his grandmother before being sent to an orphanage at the age of seven and then to the Kazan Industrial School. But instead of going

to university, come the 1905 Revolution, he joined the Social Democratic Party. He was arrested and jailed several times, charged with printing illegal literature. After another year in jail he moved to the North Caucasus, changed his name to Kirov because it was easier to remember and remained there until the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II. He rapidly climbed the Party ladder readily ordering the deaths of thousands of *bourgeois* who failed to follow the Party line in some way. By 1921 he had seized control of Georgia and become manager of the Azerbaijan Party. His loyalty to Stalin would be rewarded in 1926 with the position of head of the Leningrad Party.

Kirov was an outdoor fanatic, accomplished mountaineer and swimmer, curiously in marked contrast to Stalin himself who was generally a sickly person. He suffered from psoriasis and as a result of an accident with a horse-drawn carriage had a slightly shorter left arm which he covered up by constantly puffing on his pipe as he sat and watched his close friend at play. It was an attraction of opposites one might say.

By now Kirov, 'my Kirich', was firmly established as part of Stalin's intimate circle holidaying with him and his family, enjoying health-giving baths at Sochi. How relaxing these occasions were for anyone other than Stalin it is difficult to gauge as no-one dared let their guard down being unsure how Stalin would treat them. He was well aware that many were merely sycophants and he was not averse to using the columns of *Pravda* to criticise even his dear friend. However Stalin's affection for Kirov cannot be doubted; when he visited Moscow Stalin insisted that he should stay in his apartment with his family. The children certainly loved him and put on little doll shows to entertain him.

However, constant plotting, real or perceived, seemed to bubble beneath the surface. On one occasion when Stalin and his entourage were sailing in the Black Sea on a motor yacht, the *Red Star*, shots were fired at the boat from the shore; it might have been an assassination attempt or just a ploy organised by Lavrentiy Beria, Stalin's head of secret police, to undermine Nestor Lakoba who was in charge of security in the region. Nothing was ever what it seemed. Beria launched an investigation and it appeared that the guards opened fire apparently thinking it was an enemy boat. What is clear however is that Stalin also knew that there were always others plotting against him and he would even suspect those very friends standing at his side.

There was no doubt that some did not like the way Stalin was leading the country. A group of regional leaders complaining for example about

the famine in the Ukraine or merely that they had not been recognised and promoted in the Party as they felt they deserved gathered to consider who might succeed Stalin. One name emerged: Sergei Kirov.

In what seems like an extraordinarily foolish move Grigory Ordzhonikidze, known as Sergo, invited Kirov to his apartment in the heart of the Kremlin and asked him if he agreed to the plan. Kirov faced an impossible choice: the potential of becoming leader of the country or staying loyal to his friend and mentor, Stalin. He opted for the latter and immediately relayed the information to Stalin himself probably thinking he had made the wiser choice.

The problem for Kirov however was that Stalin, quite apart from feeling betrayed by his old Bolshevik comrades living just yards from him, was now concerned that they thought his dear brother Kirov was his potential successor. Stalin thanked him for his loyalty but at the same time must have considered how he could best avert this latest threat to his authority.

At the time, January 1934, nearly 2,000 delegates were gathering for the Seventeenth Congress which ostensibly elected the Central Committee to run the country for the next four years. Kirov gave a speech praising Stalin as “the great strategist of liberation of the working people” and received his standing ovation. One can only surmise what was going through Stalin’s mind as he watched what he may have suspected to be plotters heaping praise on him. Stalin regarded himself as standing alone fighting the cause. No-one could be trusted apart from himself. Even when his own son, Vasily, sought to benefit from the family name, his father shouted: “You’re not Stalin and I’m not Stalin. Stalin is Soviet Power.”⁶⁵ He regarded himself as being somehow separate from the force he had created; he had even changed his name from Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhughashvili to Stalin, meaning Man of Steel, as he thought it made him appear more imposing.

Although Kirov was as nervous as everyone else who came into Stalin’s orbit he presumably thought he was safe. He had exposed the plotters and declared his loyalty to his master but that was to misjudge Stalin. No-one and nothing was more important than the cause he was pursuing; he was prepared to sacrifice millions of starving peasants in his fight to deliver a strong, industrialised Soviet Union and it obviously became clear to him that he had to sacrifice the only true friend he thought he had left.

In a carefully choreographed plan he first ordered Kirov to return from his powerbase in Leningrad to be close to him in the Kremlin promoting him to one of the four Secretaries. At first Kirov resisted but he couldn’t

protest too much because that would also suggest disloyalty putting personal preference ahead of his duty to the Party. Stalin also insisted that Kirov should join him for a summer holiday at his dacha in Sochi. Kirov had no wish to attend but needless to say he could not refuse. It was as though Stalin desperately wanted to keep close to his friend while at the same time not knowing if he could be trusted; nevertheless he was given tasks such as sending him to Kazakhstan to report on the harvest. One minute Kirov was in favour the next he was being publicly bawled out by Stalin.

On 28 November, ominously perhaps, Stalin personally escorted Kirov to the Red Army train taking him back to Leningrad and embraced him warmly on the platform – a Judas kiss as it was to turn out. Three days later Kirov walked into the Smolny Institute accompanied by his personal bodyguard, Borisov, who strangely dropped further behind as they made their way to his third floor office. Was Borisov just getting old and tired or was he deliberately delayed by the guards. Either way Kirov was alone as he passed Leonid Nikolaev who then pulled out his revolver and shot Kirov in the back of the head. Before Nikolaev was able to turn the gun on himself he was knocked to the ground.

At first Stalin is reported to have been shocked by the news – the man reacting normally at the loss of a friend – but then Stalin the leader took control. He insisted on starting the investigation into the murder himself setting up his headquarters in Kirov's office even though he must have known all the facts not least why so many of the guards at the Institute had been stood down and why Kirov, a senior member of the Politburo was protected by only one aging bodyguard.

Nikolaev was dragged before Stalin when he promptly accused Vani Zaporozhets, the deputy NKVD boss in Leningrad and Stalin's man in the city, to his face of ordering him to carry out the assassination. Nikolaev, a former junior functionary who had been expelled from the Party, was unemployed and reportedly bore a grudge against the Party leadership expressing a desire to kill those responsible for his plight. He was the patsy in the crime and paid with his life.

Nikolaev's widow, Milda Draul, claimed her husband must have lost his mind when he discovered she was having an affair with Kirov – an unlikely story as she was plain and Kirov was more attracted to the beauties of the ballet. She was executed three months later while Nikolaev's mother, brother, sisters, cousin and others close to him were arrested and either killed or sent

to labour camps. His infant son, Marx, was put in an orphanage and was officially rehabilitated in 2005.

It was also odd that Nikolaev had twice been stopped by guards loitering around the Institute in the previous weeks in what was possibly an earlier attempt on Kirov's life and had been released without charge even though he was found to be carrying a revolver. Lastly Kirov's bodyguard was driven to the Institute by Stalin's NKVD guards to give his explanation as to why he was not with Kirov at the time of the shooting – was he just unfit or was it all part of a plot? By coincidence, Borisov, died on the way in a mysterious crash falling from the truck before he could give his evidence. His widow was committed to an insane asylum.

With undue haste it was announced that Kirov's assassin had been supported by Grigory Zinoviev, the former leader of Leningrad. A law was passed that night ordering the arrest, trial and execution without appeal of all those implicated in the plot against the Party.

The conclusion of Stalin's personal investigation was formally announced at a meeting of the Moscow District of the Communist Party: "Comrade Stalin personally directed the investigation of Kirov's assassination. He questioned Nikolayev at length. The leaders of the Opposition placed the gun in Nikolaev's hand!"⁶⁶ Thus started the slaughter or deportation of three million people.

The truth of what happened will never be known although Nikita Khrushchev, who was to succeed Stalin, claimed years later that his predecessor admitted to being responsible. In 1955 he stated: "It must be asserted that to this day the circumstances surrounding Kirov's murder hide many things which are inexplicable and mysterious and demand a most careful examination. There are reasons for the suspicion that the killer of Kirov, Nikolaev, was assisted by someone from among the people whose duty it was to protect the person of Kirov."⁶⁷

It seems clear enough that Stalin loved Kirov declaring that he had been left an orphan by his death, but he was almost certainly also jealous of his popularity, of what he might become and above all the possibility that he might oust him. Nicolai Bukharin's ⁶⁸widow is quoted as saying that Stalin could love and hate the same person "...because love and hate born of envy... fought with each other in the same breast."⁶⁹

Kirov's body, minus his brain which was preserved for scientific research, was taken to Moscow for another highly elaborate funeral just as had been staged for Stalin's wife. As the lid of the coffin was being lowered, Stalin

stepped forward kissed Kirov's brow saying: "Goodbye dear friend we will avenge you." After the cremation, the following day Stalin placed the urn of ashes in the Kremlin Wall to the sound of trumpet blasts.

As Stalin allowed his avenging net to spread ever wider no-one could escape; everyone with the remotest connection to Nikolaev was implicated. Elizabeth Lemolo, once a great beauty in pre-Revolutionary days, but at the time a penniless widow taking what amounted to handouts from Nikolaev's aunt, was arrested, tortured and executed.

Looking back at the Seventeenth Congress where Kirov and others had heaped praise on the achievements of Stalin, within three years 56% of the 1,996 delegates would be executed or detained. Stalin remembered that when it had come to the vote 300 anonymous ballot papers had shown votes against him and only three against Kirov.

If the consequences of Kirov's friendship had not been so terrifying it might have been possible to find some good in his brief moment in the spotlight. While being responsible himself for the misery and death of thousands, Kirov had belatedly tried in Congress to temper some of the excesses of the Stalinist authority, mistakenly thinking either that his own star was now in the ascendant or that his close relationship with Stalin himself somehow protected him and possibly even carried some weight. He was wrong on all counts. The Marxist scholar Boris Nikolaevsky summed all the plotting and manoeuvring up in this phrase, "One thing is certain: the only man who profited by the Kirov assassination was Stalin."