

*Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn*

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*Also by Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn*

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# THE GULAG ARCHIPELAGO

1918-1956

*An Experiment in Literary Investigation*

V-VII

(Vol. III)

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## Chapter 1

### The Doomed

Revolution is often rash in its generosity. It is in such a hurry to disown so much. Take the word *katorga*, \* for instance. Now, *katorga* is a good word, a word with some weight in it, nothing like the runtyish abortion DOPR or the pipsqueak ITL. \* *Katorga* descends from the judicial bench like the blade of a guillotine, stops short of beheading the prisoner but breaks his spine, shatters all hope there and then in the courtroom. The word *katorzhane* holds such terror that other prisoners think to themselves: "These must be the real cutthroats!" (It is a cowardly but comfortable human failing to see yourself as not the worst of men, nor in the worst position. *Katorzhane* wear numbers! They are obviously beyond redemption! Nobody would pin a number on you or me! ... They will, though—you'll see!)

Stalin was very fond of old words; he never forgot that they can cement a state together for centuries. It was not to meet some proletarian need that he grafted on again words too hastily lopped off: "officer," "general," "director," "supreme."\* And twenty-six years after the February Revolution had abolished "*katorga*," Stalin reintroduced it. This was in April, 1943, when he began to feel that he was no longer sliding downhill. For the home front the first fruits of the people's victory at Stalingrad were the decree on the militarization of the railroads (providing for trial of women and little boys by court-martial) and, on the following day (April 17), the decree introducing the *katorga* and the gallows. (The gallows is another fine old institution, much superior to a short

\*See Notes, page 530.

sharp pistol shot: it makes death a leisurely process, which can be exhibited in detail to a large crowd of people.) Each subsequent victory drove fresh contingents of the doomed into *katorga* or to the gallows—first from the Kuban and the Don, then from the left-bank Ukraine and the Kursk, Orel, and Smolensk regions. On the heels of the army came the tribunals, publicly hanging some people on the spot, dispatching others to the newly created *katorga* forced-labor camps.

The first of them, of course, was Mine No. 17 at Vorkuta (those at Norilsk and Dzhezkazgan came soon after). Little attempt was made to conceal their purpose: the *katorzhane* were to be done to death. These were, undisguisedly, murder camps: but in the Gulag tradition murder was protracted, so that the doomed would suffer longer and put a little work in before they died.

They were housed in "tents," seven meters by twenty, of the kind common in the north. Surrounded with boards and sprinkled with sawdust, the tent became a sort of flimsy hut. It was meant to hold eighty people, if they were on bunk beds, or one hundred on sleeping platforms. But *katorzhane* were put into them two hundred at a time.

Yet there was no reduction of average living space—just a rational utilization of accommodation. The *katorzhane* were put on a twelve-hour working day with two shifts, and no rest days, so that there were always one hundred at work and one hundred in the hut.

At work they were cordoned off by guards with dogs, beaten whenever anybody felt like it, urged on to greater efforts by Tommy guns. On their way back to the living area their ranks might be raked with Tommy-gun fire for no good reason, and the soldiers would not have to answer for the casualties. Even at a distance a column of exhausted *katorzhane* was easily identified—no ordinary prisoners dragged themselves so hopelessly, so painfully along.

Their twelve working hours were measured out in full to the last tedious minute.

Those quarrying stone for roadmaking in the polar blizzards of Norilsk were allowed ten minutes for a warm-up once in the course of a twelve-hour shift. And then their twelve-hour rest was wasted in the silliest way imaginable. Part of these twelve hours went into moving them from one camp area to another, parading them, searching them. Once in the living area, they were immedi-

ately taken into a "tent" which was never ventilated—a windowless hut—and locked in. In winter a foul sour stench hung so heavy in the damp air that no one unused to it could endure it for two minutes. The living area was even less accessible to the *katorzhane* than the camp work area. They were never allowed to go to the latrine, nor to the mess hut, nor to the Medical Section. All their needs were served by the latrine bucket and the feeding hatch. Such was Stalin's *katorga* as it took shape in 1943–1944: a combination of all that was worst in the camps with all that was worst in the prisons.<sup>1</sup>

Their twelve hours of rest also included inspections, morn-ing and evening—no mere counting of heads, as with ordinary zeks,\* but a full and formal roll call at which each of a hundred *katorzhane* twice in every twenty-four hours had to reel off smartly his number, his abhorrent surname, forename, and patronymic, where and in what year he was born, under which article of the Criminal Code he was convicted and by whom, the length of his sentence and when it would expire: while the other ninety-nine, twice daily, listened to all this and suffered torments. Then again, food was distributed twice in the course of these twelve hours: mess tins were passed through the feeding hatch, and through the feeding hatch they were collected again. No *katorzhanin* was permitted to work in the kitchens, nor to take around the food pails. All the serving was done by the thieves—and the more brazenly, the more ruthlessly they cheated the accursed *katorzhane*, the better they lived themselves and the more the camp bosses liked it, as always when the 58's (politicals) were footing the bill, the interests of the NKVD and of the thieves coincided.

According to the camp records, which were not meant to preserve for history the fact that political prisoners were also starved to death, they were entitled to supplementary "miner's rations" and "bonus dishes," which were miserable enough even before three lots of thieves got at them. This was another lengthy procedure conducted through the feeding hatch—names were called

1. We have Chekhov's word for it that the Tataris *katorga* was much less inventive. The *katorzhane* in the jail at Aleksandrovskaya (Sakhalin) could not only go out into the yard or to the latrine at all hours of the day and night (latrine buckets were not in use there at all), but at any time during the day could go into the town! Stalin, then, was the first to understand the word *katorga* in its original sense—a galley in which the rowers are shackled to their oars.

out one by one, and dishes exchanged for coupons. And when at last you were about to collapse onto the sleeping platform and fall asleep, the hatch would drop again, once again names were called, and they would start reissuing the same coupons for use the next day. (Ordinary zeks had none of this bother with coupons—the foreman took charge of them and handed them in to the kitchen.) So that out of twelve leisure hours in the cell, barely four remained for undisturbed sleep.

Then again, *katorzhane* were of course paid no money, nor had they any right to receive parcels or letters (the memory of their former freedom must fade in their muddled, dully aching heads, till there was nothing left in the inscrutable polar night but work and barracks).

The *katorzhane* responded nicely to this treatment and quickly died.

The first *alphabet* at Vorkuta—twenty-eight letters,\* with numbers from 1 to 1000 attached to each of them—the first 28,000 prisoners in Vorkuta all passed under the earth within a year.

We can only be surprised that it was not in a single month.<sup>2</sup>

A train was sent to Cobalt Mine No. 25 at Norilsk to pick up ore, and some *katorzhane* lay down in front of the locomotive to end it all quickly. A couple of dozen prisoners fled into the tundra in desperation. They were located by planes, shot, and their bodies stacked where the men lined up for work assignment would see them.

At No. 2 Mine, Vorkuta, there was a Women's Camp Division. The women wore numbers on their backs and on their head scarves. They were employed on all underground jobs, and—yes—they even overfulfilled the plan!...

But I can already hear angry cries from my compatriots and contemporaries. Stop! *Who* are these people of whom you dare to speak? Yes! They were there to be destroyed—and rightly so! Why, these were traitors, Politzei,\* burgomasters! They got what they asked for! Surely you are not sorry for them? (If you are, of

2. When Chekhov was there, the whole convict population of Sakhalin was—how many would you think?—5,905. Six letters of the alphabet would have been enough for all of them. Ekhshtur as we knew it was roughly as big, and Spassk very much bigger. The name Sakhalin strikes terror, yet it was really just one Camp Division! In Steplag alone there were twelve complexes as big as that of Sakhalin, and there were ten camps like Steplag. You can calculate how many Sakhalins we had.

3. On Sakhalin there was no hard labor for women (Chekhov).

course, further criticism is outside the competence of literature, and must be left to the *Organs*.\*) And the women there were German bedstraw, I hear women's voices crying. (Am I exaggerating? It was our women who called other women "German bedstraw," wasn't it?)

I could most easily answer in what is now the conventional fashion—by *denouncing the cult*. I could talk about a few untypical cases of people sent to *katorga*. (The three Komsomol girl volunteers, for instance, who went up in a fighter bomber but were afraid to drop their bombs on the target, jetisoned them in open country, returned to base safely and reported that they had carried out their mission. Later on, her Komsomol conscience began troubling one of them, and she told the Komsomol organizer of her air squadron, also a girl, who of course went straight to the Special Section. The three girls collected twenty years of *katorga* each.) I could cry shame: to think that honest Soviet people like these were punished like criminals at the despot Stalin's whim! And I could wax indignant not so much at Stalin's high-handedness as about the fateful errors in the treatment of Komsomols and Communists, now happily corrected.

It would, however, be improper not to examine the question in depth.

First, a few words about our women, who, as everybody knows, are now emancipated. Not from working twice as hard, it's true, but from religious marriage, from the yoke of social contempt, and from cruel mothers-in-law. Just think, though—have we not wished upon them something worse than Kabanikha\* if women who behave as though their bodies and their personal feelings are indeed their own are to be condemned as criminals and traitors? Did not the whole of world literature (before Stalin) rapturously proclaim that love could not be contained by national boundaries? By the will of generals and diplomats? But once again we have adopted Stalin's yardstick: except as decreed by the Supreme Soviet, thou shalt not mate! Your body is, first and foremost, the property of the Fatherland.

Before we go any further, how old were these women when they closed with the enemy in bed instead of in battle? Certainly under thirty, and often no more than twenty-five. Which means that from their first childhood impression onward they had been educated *after* the October Revolution, been brought up in Soviet

schools and on Soviet ideology! So that our anger was for the work of our own hands? Some of these girls had taken to heart what we had tirelessly drilled into them for fifteen years on end—that there is no such thing as one's own country, that the Fatherland is a reactionary fiction. Others had grown a little bored with our puritanical Lenten fare of meetings, conferences, and demonstrations, of films without kisses and dancing at arm's length. Yet others were won by politeness, by gallantry, by male attention to the niceties of dress and appearance and to the ritual of courtship, in which no one had trained the young men of our Five-Year Plan epoch, or the officers of Frunze's army. Others again were simply hungry—yes, hungry in the most primitive sense: they had nothing to put in their bellies. And perhaps there was a fifth group, who saw no other way of saving themselves and their relatives, of avoiding separation from their families.

In the town of Starodub, in Bryansk Province, where I arrived hot on the heels of the retreating enemy, I was told that a Hungarian garrison had been stationed there for a long time, to protect the town from partisan raids. Orders came transferring them elsewhere, and dozens of local women, abandoning all shame, went to the station and wept as they said goodbye to the occupying troops—wept more loudly, added a sarcastic shoemaker, than “when they had seen their own husbands off to the war.”

The military tribunal reached Starodub some days later. It would hardly fail to act on information received. It doubtless sent some of the weeping women of Starodub to Mine No. 2 at Vorkuta.

But who is really to blame for all this? Who? I ask you. Those women? Or—fellow countrymen, contemporaries—we ourselves, all of us? What was it in us that made the occupying troops much more attractive to our women? Was this not one of the innumerable penalties which we are continually paying, and will be paying for a long time yet, for the path we so hastily chose and have so stumblingly followed, with never a look back at our losses, never a cautious look ahead?

Perhaps all these women and girls deserved moral censure (though they, too, should have been given a hearing), perhaps they deserved searing ridicule—but to be sent to *katorga*? to the polar death house?

“Well, it was Stalin who sent them there! And Beria!”

I'm sorry, but it wasn't! Those who sent them there, kept them

there, did them to death, now sit with other pensioners on social service councils, looking out for any lowering of moral standards. And the rest of us? We hear the words “German bedstraw” and nod in agreement. The fact that to this day we consider all these women guilty is much more dangerous for us than that they were once inside.

“All right, then, but the men at least were in for good reasons? They were traitors to their country, and to their class.”

Here, too, we could prevaricate. We might recall (it would be quite true) that the worst criminals did not of course sit still and wait for our tribunals and the gallows. They made for the West as fast as they could, and many of them got away. While our punitive organs reached their target figures by including people innocent as lambs (denunciations by neighbors were a great help here). So-and-so had Germans billeted in his apartment—what made them take a liking to him? Somebody else carried hay for the Germans on his sledge—a straightforward case of collaboration with the enemy.<sup>4</sup>

We could then play the thing down, put all the blame on the *Stalin cult* again: there were excesses, now they have been corrected. All quite normal.

But since we have begun, let us go on.

What about the schoolteachers? Those whom our army in its panicky recoil abandoned with their schools, and pupils, for a year. For two years, or even for three. The quartermasters had been stupid, the generals no good—so what must the teachers do now? Teach their children or not teach them? And what were the kids to do—not kids of fifteen, who could earn a wage, or join the partisans, but the little kids? Learn their lessons, or live like sheep for two or three years to atone for the Supreme Commander's mistakes? If daddy doesn't give you a cap you let your ears freeze—is that it?

For some reason no such question ever arose either in Denmark or in Norway or in Belgium or in France. In those countries it was not felt that a people placed under German rule by its own foolish government or by force of overwhelming circumstances must thereupon stop living altogether. In those countries schools went on working, as did railways and local government.

4. To be fair, we should not forget that from 1946 such people were sometimes regraded and their twenty years of *katorga* commuted to ten years of corrective labor.

Somebody's brains (theirs, of course) are 180 degrees out of true. Because in our country teachers received anonymous letters from the partisans: "Don't dare teach! You will be made to pay for it!" Working on the railways also became collaboration with the enemy. As for participation in local administration—that was treason, unprecedented in its enormity.

Everybody knows that a child who once drops out of school may never return to it. Just because the greatest strategic genius of all times and all nations had made a blooper, was the grass to wither till he righted it or could it keep growing? Should children be taught in the meantime, or shouldn't they?

Of course, a price would have to be paid. Pictures of the big mustache would have to be taken out of school, and pictures of the little mustache perhaps brought in. The children would gather round the tree at Christmas instead of New Year's, and at this ceremony (as also on some imperial anniversary substituted for that of the October Revolution) the headmaster would have to deliver a speech in praise of the splendid new life, however bad things really were. But similar speeches had been made in the past—and life had been just as bad then.

Or rather, you had to be more of a hypocrite before, had to tell the children many more lies—because the lies had had time to mature, and to permeate the syllabus in versions painstakingly elaborated by experts on teaching technique and by school inspectors. In every lesson, whether it was pertinent or not, whether you were studying the anatomy of worms or the use of conjunctions in complex sentences, you were required to take a kick at God (even if you yourself believed in Him); you could not omit singing the praises of our boundless freedom (even if you had lain awake expecting a knock in the night); whether you were reading Turgenyev to the class or tracing the course of the Dnieper with your ruler, you had to anathematize the poverty-stricken past and hymn our present plenty (though long before the war you and the children had watched whole villages dying of hunger, and in the towns a child's ration had been 300 grams).

None of this was considered a sin against the truth, against the soul of the child, or against the Holy Ghost.

Whereas now, under the temporary and still unsettled occupation regime, far fewer lies had to be told—but they stood the old ones on their heads, that was the trouble! So it was that the voice of the Fatherland, and the pencil of the underground Party Com-

mittee, forbade you to teach children their native language, geography, arithmetic, and science. Twenty years of *katorga* for work of that sort!

Fellow countrymen, nod your heads in agreement! There they go, guards with dogs alongside, marching to the barracks with their night pails. Stone them—they taught your children.

But my fellow countrymen (particularly former members of specially privileged government departments, retired on pension at forty-five) advance on me with raised fists: Who is it that I am defending? Those who served the Germans as burgomasters? As village headmen? As Polizei? As interpreters? All kinds of filth and scum?

Well, let us go a little deeper. We have done far too much damage by looking at people as entries in a table. Whether we like it or not, the future will force us to reflect on the reasons for their behavior.

When they started playing and singing "Let Noble Rage"—what spine did not tingle? Our natural patriotism, long banned, howled down, under fire, anathematized, was suddenly permitted, encouraged, praised as *sacred*—what Russian heart did not leap up, swell with grateful longing for unity. How could we, with our natural magnanimity, help forgiving in spite of everything the native butchers as the foreign butchers drew near? Later, the need to drown half-conscious misgivings about our impulsive generosity made us all the more unanimous and violent in cursing the traitors—people plainly worse than ourselves, people incapable of forgiveness.

Russia has stood for eleven centuries, known many foes, waged many wars. But—have there been many traitors in Russia? Did traitors ever leave the country in *crowds*? I think not. I do not think that even their foes ever accused the Russians of being traitors, turncoats, renegades, though they lived under a regime inimical to ordinary working people.

Then came the most righteous war in our history, to a country with a supremely just social order—and tens and hundreds of thousands of our people stood revealed as traitors.

Where did they all come from? And why?

Perhaps the unextinguished embers of the Civil War had flared up again? Perhaps these were Whites who had not escaped extermination? No! I have mentioned before that many White émigrés (including the thrice-accurSED Denikin) took sides with the Soviet

Union and against Hitler. They had freedom of choice—and that is what they chose.<sup>5</sup>

These tens and hundreds of thousands—Polizei and executioners, headmen and interpreters—were all ordinary Soviet citizens. And there were many young people among them, who had grown up since the Revolution.

What made them do it? . . . What sort of people were they?

For the most part, people who had fallen, themselves and their families, under the caterpillar tracks of the twenties and thirties. People who had lost parents, relatives, loved ones in the turbid streams of our sewage system. Or who themselves had time and again sunk and struggled to the surface in camps and places of banishment. People who knew well enough what it was to stand with feet numb and frostbitten in the queue at the parcels window. People who in those cruel decades had found themselves severed, brutally cut off from the most precious thing on earth, the land itself—though it had been promised to them, incidentally, by the great Decree of 1917, and though they had been called upon to shed their blood for it in the Civil War. (Quite another matter are the country residences bought and bequeathed by Soviet officers, the fenced-in manorial domains outside Moscow: that's ours, so it's all right.) Then some people had been seized for snipping ears of wheat or rye. And some deprived of the right to live where they wished. Or the right to follow a long-practiced and well-loved trade (no one now remembers how fanatically we persecuted craftsmen).

All such people are spoken of nowadays (especially by professional agitators and the proletarian vigilantes of *Oktyabr*\*) with a contemptuous compression of the lips: "people with a grudge against the Soviet state," "formerly repressed persons," "sons of the former kulak class," "people secretly harboring black resentment of the Soviet power."

One says it—and another nods his head. As though it explained anything. As though the people's state had the right to offend its citizens. As though this were the essential defect, the root of the evil: "people with a grudge," "secretly resentful" . . .

And no one cries out: How can you! Damn your insolence! Do

5. They had not sipped with us the bitter cup of the thirties, and from a distance, from Europe, it was easy for them to be enthralled by the great patriotic feat of the Russian people, and overlook the twelve years of internal genocide.

you or do you not hold that being determines consciousness? Or only when it suits you? And when it doesn't suit you does it cease to be true?

Then again, some of us are very good at saying—and a shadow flits over our faces—"Well, yes, certain errors were committed." Always the same disingenuously innocent, impersonal form: "we committed"—only nobody knows by whom. You might almost think that it was by ordinary workers, by men who shift heavy loads, by collective farmers. Nobody has the courage to say: "The Party committed them! Our irremovable and irresponsible leaders committed them!" Yet by whom, except those who had power, could such errors be "committed"? Lump all the blame on Stalin? Have you no sense of humor? If Stalin committed all these errors—where were you at the time, you ruling millions?

In any case, even these mistakes have faded in our eyes to a dim, shapeless blur, and they are no longer regarded as the result of stupidity, fanaticism, and malice; they are all subsumed in the only mistake acknowledged—that Communists jailed Communists. If 15 to 17 million peasants were ruined, sent off for destruction, scattered about the country without the right to remember their parents or mention them by name—that was apparently no mistake. And all the tributary streams of the sewage system surveyed at the beginning of this book were also, it seems, no mistake. That they were utterly unprepared for war with Hitler, empty vainglorious, that they retreated shamefully, changing their slogans as they ran, that only Ivan fighting for Holy Russia halted the Germans on the Volga—all this turns out to be not a silly blunder, but possibly Stalin's greatest achievement.

In the space of two months we abandoned very nearly one-third of our population to the enemy—including all those incompletely destroyed families; including camps with several thousand inmates, who scattered as soon as their guards ran for it; including prisons in the Ukraine and the Baltic States, where smoke still hung in the air after the mass shooting of political prisoners.

As long as we were strong, we smothered these unfortunates, hounded them, denied them work, drove them from their homes, hurried them into their graves. When our weakness was revealed, we immediately demanded that they should forget all the harm done them, forget the parents and children who had died of hunger in the tundra, forget the executions, forget how we ruined them, forget our ingratitude to them, forget interrogation and

torture at the hands of the NKVD, forget the starvation camps—and immediately join the partisans, go underground to defend the Homeland, with no thought for their lives. (There was no need for us to change! And no one held out the hope that when we came back we should treat them any differently, no longer hounding, harassing, jailing, and shooting them.)

Given this state of affairs, should we be surprised that too many people welcomed the arrival of the Germans? Or surprised that there were so few who did? (The Germans could sometimes be the instrument of justice: remember what happened to people who had served in Soviet times as informers, the shooting of the deacon at the Naberezhno-Nikolskaya Church in Kiev, for instance—and there were scores of similar cases.)

And the believers? For twenty years on end, religious belief was persecuted and churches closed down. The Germans came—and churches began to open their doors. (Our masters lacked the nerve to shut them again immediately after the German withdrawal.) In Rostov-on-the-Don, for instance, the ceremonial opening of the churches was an occasion for mass rejoicing and great crowds gathered. Were they nonetheless supposed to curse the Germans for this?

In Rostov again, in the first days of the war, Aleksandr Petrovich M—, an engineer, was arrested and died in a cell under interrogation. For several anxious months his wife expected to be arrested herself. Only when the Germans came could she go to bed with a quiet mind. "Now at least I can get some sleep!" Should she instead have prayed for the return of her tormentors?

In May, 1943, while the Germans were in Vinnitsa, men digging in an orchard on Podlesnaya Street (which the city soviet had surrounded with a high fence early in 1939 and declared a "restricted area under the People's Commissariat of Defense") found themselves uncovering graves which had previously escaped notice because they were overgrown with luxuriant grass. They found thirty-nine mass graves, 3.5 meters deep, 3 meters wide, 4 meters long. In each grave they found first a layer of outer garments belonging to the deceased, then bodies laid alternately head first or feet first. The hands of all of them were tied with rope, and they had all been shot by small-bore pistols in the back of the head. They had evidently been executed in prison and carted out for burial by night. Documents which had not decayed made it possible to identify people who had been sentenced to "20 years without

the right to correspond" in 1938. Plate No. 1 is one picture of the excavation site: inhabitants of Vinnitsa have come to view the bodies or identify their relatives. There was more to come. In June they began digging near the Orthodox cemetery, outside the Pirogov Hospital, and discovered another forty-two graves. Next the Gorky Park of Culture and Rest—where, under the swings and carrousel, the "funhouse," the games area, and the dance floor, fourteen more mass graves were found. Altogether, 9,439 corpses in ninety-five graves. This was in Vinnitsa alone, and the discoveries were accidental. How many lie successfully hidden in other towns? After viewing these corpses, were the population supposed to rush off and join the partisans?

Perhaps in fairness we should at least admit that if you and I suffer when we and all we hold dear are trodden underfoot, those we tread on feel no less pain. Perhaps in fairness we should at last admit that those whom we seek to destroy have a right to hate us. Or have they no such right? Are they supposed to die gratefully?

We attribute deep-seated if not indeed congenital malice to these Polizei, these burgomasters—but we ourselves planted their malice in them, they were "waste products" of our making. How does Krylenko's dictum go? "In our eyes every crime is the product of a particular social system!"<sup>6</sup> In this case—of your system, comrades! Don't forget your own doctrine!

Let us not forget either that among those of our fellow countrymen who took up the sword against us or attacked us in words, some were completely disinterested. No property had been taken from them (they had had none to begin with), they had never been imprisoned in the camps (nor yet had any of their kin), but they had long ago been sickened by our whole system: its contempt for the fate of the individual; the persecution of people for their beliefs; that cynical song "There's no land where men can breathe so freely"; the kowtowing of the devout to the Leader; the nervous twitching of pencils as everyone hurries to sign up for the state loan; the obligatory applause rising to an ovation! Cannot we realize that these perfectly normal people could not breathe our fetid air? (Father Fyodor Florya's accusers asked him how he had dared talk about Stalin's foul deeds when the Rumanians were on the spot. "How could I say anything different about you?" he answered. "I only told them what I knew. I only told them what

6. Krylenko, *Za Piat Let* (1918–1922), p. 337.



had happened." What we ask is something different: lie, go against your conscience, perish—just so long as it helps us! But this, unless I'm mistaken, is hardly materialism.)

In September, 1941, before I went into the army, my wife and I, young schoolteachers who had just started work in the settlement of Morozovsk (captured by the Germans in the following year), happened to rent lodgings on the same little yard as a childless couple, the Bronevitskys. Nikolai Gerasimovich Bronevitsky, a sixty-year-old engineer, was an intellectual of Chekhovian appearance, very likable, quiet, and clever. When I try now to recall his long face I imagine him with pince-nez, though he may not have worn them at all. His wife was even quieter and gentler than he was—a faded woman with flaxen hair close to her head, twenty-five years younger than her husband, but not at all young in her behavior. We were fond of them, and they probably liked us, particularly in contrast to our grasping landlord and his greedy family.

In the evenings the four of us would sit on the steps of the porch. They were quiet, warm, moonlit evenings, not as yet rent by the rumble of planes and by exploding bombs, but anxiety about the German advance was stealing over us like the invisible clouds stealing over the milky way to smother the small and defenseless moon. Every day new trainloads of refugees stopped at the station, on their way to Stalingrad. Refugees filled the marketplace of the settlement with rumors, terrors, 100-ruble notes that seemed to burn holes in their pockets, then they continued their journey. They named towns which had surrendered, about which the Information Bureau, afraid to tell people the truth, would keep silent for a long time to come. (Bronevitsky spoke of these towns not as having "surrendered" but as having been "taken.")

We were sitting on the steps and talking. We younger people were full of ourselves, of anxiety for the future, but we really had nothing more intelligent to say about it than what was written in the newspapers. We were at ease with the Bronevitskys: we said whatever we thought without noticing the discrepancies between our way of looking at things and theirs.

For their part, they probably saw in us two surprising examples of naively enthusiastic youth. We had just lived through the thirties—and we might as well not have been alive in that decade at all. They asked what we remembered best about 1938 and 1939. What do you think we said? The university library, examinations,

the fun we had on sporting trips, dances, amateur concerts, and of course love affairs—we were at the age for love. But hadn't any of our professors been put away at that time? Yes, we supposed that two or three of them had been. Their places were taken by senior lecturers. What about students—had any of them gone inside? We remembered that some senior students had indeed been jailed. And what did you make of it? Nothing: we carried on dancing. And no one near to you was—er—touched? No; no one.

It is a terrible thing, and I want to recall it with absolute precision. It is all the more terrible because I was not one of the young sporting and dancing set, nor one of those obsessive people buried in books and formulae. I was keenly interested in politics from the age of ten, even as a callow adolescent I did not believe Vyshinsky and was staggered by the fraudulence of the famous trials—but nothing led me to draw the line connecting those minute Moscow trials (which seemed so tremendous at the time) with the huge crushing wheel rolling through the land (the number of its victims somehow escaped notice). I had spent my childhood in queues—for bread, for milk, for meat (meat was a thing unknown at that time)—but I could not make the connection between the lack of bread and the ruin of the countryside, or understand why it had happened. We were provided with another formula: "Temporary difficulties." Every night, in the large town where we lived, hour after hour after hour people were being hauled off to jail—but I did not walk the streets at night. And in the daytime the families of those arrested hung out no black flags, nor did my classmates say a word about their fathers being taken away.

According to the newspapers there wasn't a cloud in the sky. And young men are so eager to believe that all is well.

I understand now how dangerous it was for the Bronevitskys to tell us anything. But he gave us just a peep into his past, this old engineer who had got in the way of one of the OGPU's cruelest blows. He had lost his health in prison, been pulled in a time or two, got to know quite a few camps, but he talked with blazing passion only about Dzhzhzhkazan in its early days—about the water poisoned by copper; about the poisoned air; about the murders; about the futility of complaints to Moscow. The very word Dzhzhzhkazan made your flesh creep—like steel wool rubbed on the skin, or like the tales of its pitiless ways. (And yet . . . did this Dzhzhzhkazan have the slightest effect on our way of looking at the world? Of course not. It was not very near. It was

not happening to us. You have to experience it for yourself. It is better not to think about it. Better to forget.)

There in Dzhetskazgan, when Bronevitsky was allowed outside the guarded area, his present wife, then a mere girl, had come to him, and they had been married with the barbed wire for witness. When war broke out they were, by some miracle, at liberty in Morozovsk, with black marks in their passports, of course. He was working in some wretched construction agency, and she was a bookkeeper.

I went off to the army, and my wife left Morozovsk. The settlement came under German occupation. Then it was liberated. And one day my wife wrote to me at the front: "Can you imagine it—they say that Bronevitsky acted as burgomaster for the Germans while they were in Morozovsk. How disgusting!" I was just as shocked. "Filthy thing to do!" I thought.

But a few more years went by. Lying on the sleeping platform in some dark jail and turning things over in my mind, I remembered Bronevitsky. And I was no longer so schoolboyishly self-righteous. They had unjustly taken his job from him, given him work that was beneath him, locked him up, tortured him, beaten him, starved him, spat in his face—what was he supposed to do? He was supposed to believe that all this was the price of progress, and that his own life, physical and spiritual, the lives of those dear to him, the anguished lives of our whole people, were of no significance.

Through the smoke screen of the personality cult, thin and ineffectual as it is, through the intervening layers of time in which we have changed, each of which has its own sharp angle of refraction, we see neither ourselves nor the thirtees in true perspective and true shape. Idolization of Stalin, boundless and unquestioning faith, were not characteristic of the whole people, but only of the Party and the Komsomol; of urban youth in schools and universities; of ersatz intellectuals (a straggler for those who had been destroyed or dispersed); and to some extent of the urban petty bourgeoisie (the working class)—their loudspeakers were never switched off from the morning chimes of the Spassky belfry to the playing of the Internationale at midnight, and for them the voice of the radio announcer Levitan\* became the voice of conscience.

7. It was in the thirties that the working class merged completely with the petty bourgeoisie, and became its main constituent part.

(I say "to some extent" because labor legislation like the "twenty minutes late" decree and the tying of the workers to their factories enlisted no supporters.) All the same, there was an urban minority, and not such a small one, numbering at the least several millions, who pulled out the radio plug in disgust whenever they dared. On every page of every newspaper they saw merely a spreading stain of lies, and polling day for these millions was a day of suffering and humiliation. For this minority the dictatorship existing in our country was neither proletarian nor national in character, nor yet (for those who recalled the original sense of the word) Soviet, but the dictatorship of another minority, a usurping minority, which was very far from being a spiritual elite.

Mankind is almost incapable of dispassionate, unemotional thinking. In something which he has recognized as evil man can seldom force himself to see also what is good. Not everything in our lives was foul, not every word in the papers was false, but the minority, downtrodden, bullied, beset by stool pigeons, saw life in our country as an abomination from top to bottom, saw every page in the newspapers as one long lie. Let us recall that in those days there were no Western broadcasts in Russian (and the number of private radio sets was inconsiderable), so that a citizen could obtain information *only* from our newspapers and the official radio, in which Bronevitsky and his like expected from experience to find only cowardly suppression of facts or a vexatious tangle of lies. Everything that was written about other countries, about the inevitable collapse of the West in 1930, about the treachery of Western socialists, about the passionate hostility of all Spain to Franco (or in 1942 about Nehru's treasonable aspiration to freedom in India—which of course weakened our ally the British Empire), all this proved to be nothing but lies. The maddeningly monotonous, hate-filled propaganda conducted on the principle that "he who is not for us is against us" had never drawn distinctions between the attitudes of Mariya Spiridonova and Nicholas II, those of Léon Blum and Hitler, those of the British Parliament and the German Reichstag. So when Bronevitsky read apparently fantastic stories about bonfires of books in German squares, and the resurrection of some sort of ancient Teutonic savagery (we must not forget that Tsarist propaganda during the First World War had also told a few fibs about Teuton savagery), how could he be expected to distinguish them from all the rest, single them out as true, recognize in German Nazism (reviled in almost the

same—inordinate—terms as Poincaré, Piłsudski, and the British conservatives earlier) a quadruped as dangerous as that which in reality and in the flesh had for a quarter of a century past been squeezing the life out of him, poisoning his existence, clawing him till he bled, and with him the whole Archipelago, the Russian town, the Russian village? Then the newspapers were forever changing their minds about the Hitlerites: at first it was friendly encounters between nice sentries in nasty Poland, and the newspapers were awash with sympathy for the valiant warriors standing up to French and English bankers, and Hitler's speeches, verbatim, filled a page of *Pravda* at a time; then one morning (the second morning of the war) an explosion of headlines—all Europe was piteously groaning under the Nazi heel. This only confirmed that newspaper lies changed as the wind shifted, and could do nothing to persuade Bronevitsky that other butchers on this earth were a match for ours, about whom he knew the truth. If someone had tried to convince him by putting BBC bulletins before him daily, he might at most have been made to believe that Hitler was a secondary danger to Russia but certainly not, while Stalin lived, the greatest. As it was, the BBC provided no bulletins; the Soviet Information Bureau from the day it was born commanded no more credit than Tass; the rumors carried by evacuees were not firsthand information (from Germany or from the occupied areas no living witness had yet appeared). What he did know at first hand was the camp at Dzhelkazzgan, and 1937, and the famine of 1932, and "dekulakization," and the destruction of the churches. So that as the German army approached, Bronevitsky (and tens of thousands of lonely individuals like him) felt that their hour was drawing near—the hour which they had ceased to hope for twenty years ago, which is given to a man only once, then lost forever, since our lives are so short measured against the slow pace of historical change—the hour in which he can repudiate what has befallen, what has been visited upon, flogged, and trampled into his people, serve in some way still obscure his agonized country, help to revive some sort of public life in Russia. Yes, Bronevitsky had remembered everything and forgiven nothing. He could never accept as his own a regime which had thrashed Russia unmercifully, brought it to collectivized beggary, to moral degeneracy, and now to a stunning military defeat. He choked with anger as he looked at naïve creatures like me, like us, for it was beyond his power to convert us. He was waiting for *someone*, anyone, to take

power in place of Stalin! (The well-known psychological phenomenon of reaction to extremes: anything rather than the nauseous reality we know! Can we imagine, anywhere in the world, anyone worse than our rulers? Incidentally, this was in the Don region—where half the population were just as eagerly awaiting the Germans.) So then Bronevitsky, who had been an apolitical being all his life, resolved in his seventh decade to make a political move.

He consented to head the Morozovsk municipal authority. . . .

There, I think, he must quickly have seen what a silly situation he had landed himself in, seen that for the new arrivals Russia was even more insignificant and detestable than for those who had gone away—that the vampire needed only Russia's vital fluids, and that the body could wither and perish. The new burgomaster's task was to be in charge not of public-spirited Russians, but of auxiliaries to the German police. But he was fastened to the axle and now, like it or not, he could only spin. Having freed himself from one lot of butchers, he must help another. The patriotic idea, which he had thought of as diametrically opposed to the Soviet idea, he suddenly saw fused with it: in some incomprehensible fashion patriotism had slipped away like water through a sieve from the minority who had preserved it, and passed to the majority; it was forgotten how people had been shot for patriotism, how it had been ridiculed, and now it was the main stem of someone else's tree.

He, and others like him, must have felt trapped and terrified: the crack had narrowed and the only way out led to death or to *katorga*.

Of course, they were not all Bronevitskys. Of course, many birds of prey greedy for power and blood had flocked to that brief feast in time of plague. But their like will flock wherever there are pickings. They were very much at home in the NKVD, too. Such a one was Mamulov, or Antonov at Dudinsk, or Poisu-Shapka—can anyone imagine fouler butchers? (See Volume II.) Yet they lorded it for decades and bled the people dry a hundred times over. We shall shortly meet Warden Tkach—one of those who managed to fit into both contexts.

We have been talking about the towns, but we should not forget the countryside. Liberals nowadays commonly reproach the village with its political obtuseness and conservatism. But before the war the village to a man, or overwhelmingly, was sober, much

more sober than the town: it took no part at all in the deification of Daddy Stalin (and needless to say had no time for world revolution either). The village was, quite simply, sane and remembered clearly how it had been promised land, then robbed of it; how it had lived, eaten, and dressed before and after collectivization; how calves, ewes, and even hens had been taken away from the peasant's yard; how churches had been desecrated and defiled. Even in 1941 the radio's nasal bray was not yet heard in peasant huts, and not every village had even one person able to read the newspapers, so that to the Russian countryside all those Chang Tso-lins, MacDonalds, and Hitlers were indistinguishably strange and meaningless lay figures.

In a village in Ryazan Province on July 3, 1941, peasants gathered near the smithy were listening to Stalin's speech relayed by a loudspeaker. The man of iron, hitherto unmoved by the tears of Russian peasants, was now a bewildered old gaffer almost in tears himself, and as soon as he blurted out his humbugging "Brothers and Sisters," one of the peasants answered the black paper mouthpiece. "This is what you want, you bastard," and he made in the direction of the loudspeaker a rude gesture much favored by Russians: one hand grips the opposite elbow, and the forearm rises and falls in a pumping motion.

The peasants all roared with laughter.

If we questioned eyewitnesses in every village, we should learn of ten thousand such incidents, some still more pungent.

Such was the mood of the Russian village at the beginning of the war—the mood, then, of the reservists drinking the last half-liter and dancing in the dust with their kinsmen while they waited at some wayside halt for a train. On top of all this came a defeat without precedent in Russian memories, as vast rural areas stretching to the outskirts of both capitals and to the Volga, as many millions of peasants, slipped from under kolchoz rule, and—why go on lying and prettifying history?—it turned out that the republics only wanted independence, the village only wanted freedom from the kolchoz! The workers freedom from feudal decrees! If the newcomers had not been so hopelessly arrogant and stupid, if they had not preserved the bureaucratic kolchoz administration for Great Germany's convenience, if they had not conceived the obscene idea of turning Russia into a colony, the patriotic cause would not have devolved on those who had always tried to smother it, and we should hardly have been called upon to cele-

brate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Russian Communism. (Somebody, someday, will have to tell us how the peasants in occupied areas never joined the partisan movement of their own free will, and how to begin with they took up arms against the partisans rather than hand over their grain and cattle.)

Do you remember the great exodus from the Northern Caucasus in January, 1943—and can you think of any analogy in world history? A civilian population, and a peasant population at that, leaving with a defeated enemy, with an alien army, rather than stay behind with the victors, their fellow countrymen—the wagon trains rolling as far as the eye could see through the fierce, icy January winds!

Here, too, lie the social roots of those hundreds of thousands of volunteers who, monster though Hitler was, were desperate enough to don enemy uniform. The time has come for us to give our views on the Vlasov movement\* once again. In the first part of this book the reader was not yet prepared for the whole truth (nor am I in possession of the whole truth; special studies will be written on the subject, which is for me of secondary importance). There at the beginning, before the reader had traveled the high-roads and byroads of the camp world with me, he was merely alerted, invited to think. Now, after all those prison transports, transit jails, lumber gangs, and camp middens, perhaps the reader will be a little more open to persuasion. In Part I, I spoke of those Vlasovites who took up arms in desperation, because they were starving in camps, because their position seemed hopeless. (Yet even here there is room for reflection: the Germans began by using Russian prisoners of war only for nonmilitary tasks in the rear, in support of their own troops, and this, you might think, was the best solution for those who only wanted to save their skins—so why did they take up arms and confront the Red Army head on?) But now, since further postponement is impossible, should I not also talk about those who even before 1941 had only one dream—to take up arms and blaze away at those Red commissars, Chekists,\* and collectivizers? Remember Lenin's words: "An oppressed class which did not aspire to possess arms and learn how to handle them would deserve only to be treated as slaves" (Fourth Edition, Volume 23, page 85). There is, then, reason to be proud if the Soviet-German war showed that we are not such slaves as all those studies by liberal historians contemptuously make us out to be. There was nothing slavish about those who

reached for their sabers to cut off ~~Daddy Stalin's~~ head (nor about those on the other side, who straightened their backs for the first time when they put on Red Army greatcoats—in a strange brief interval of freedom which no student of society could have foreseen).

These people, who had experienced on their own hides twenty-four years of Communist happiness, knew by 1941 what as yet no one else in the world knew: that nowhere on the planet, nowhere in history, was there a regime more vicious, more bloodthirsty, and at the same time more cunning and ingenious than the Bolshevik, the self-styled Soviet regime. That no other regime on earth could compare with it either in the number of those it had done to death, in hardness, in the range of its ambitions, in its thoroughgoing and unmitigated totalitarianism—no, not even the regime of its pupil Hitler, which at that time blinded Western eyes to all else. Came the time when weapons were put in the hands of these people, should they have curbed their passions, allowed Bolshevism to outlive itself, steeled themselves to cruel oppression again—and only then begun the struggle with it (a struggle which has still hardly started anywhere in the world)? No, the natural thing was to copy the methods of Bolshevism itself: it had eaten into the body of a Russia sapped by the First World War, and it must be defeated at a similar moment in the Second.

Our unwillingness to fight had already shown itself in the Soviet-Finnish war of 1939. V. G. Bazhanov, formerly Secretary of the Politburo and Orgburo of the CPSU(b)\* and Stalin's close assistant, tried to exploit this mood: to turn captured Red Army men against the Soviet lines under the command of Russian émigré officers—not to fight their compatriots but to convert them. The attempt was abruptly terminated by the sudden capitulation of Finland.

When the Soviet-German war began, ten years after the slaughterous collectivization, eight years after the great Ukrainian famine (six million dead, unnoticed by neighboring Europe), four years after the devil's dance of the NKVD, one year after the workers were shackled to the new labor laws—and all this when there were 15 million in camps about the country, and while the older generation all clearly remembered what life was like before the Revolution—the natural impulse of the people was to take a deep breath and liberate itself, its natural feeling one of loathing for its rulers. "Caught us unawares", "numerical superiority in

aircraft and tanks" (in fact, all-round numerical superiority was enjoyed by the Red Army)—it was not this that enabled the enemy to close so easily those disastrous salients, taking 300,000 armed men at a time (Bialystok, Smolensk), or 650,000 (Bryansk, Kiev); not this that caused whole fronts to cave in, and rolled our armies back farther and faster than anything Russia had seen in all its one thousand years, or, probably, any other country in any other war—not this, but the instant paralysis of a paltry regime whose subjects recoiled from it as from a hanging corpse. (The rakoms and gorkoms\* were blown away in five minutes, and Stalin was gasping for breath.) In 1941 this upheaval might have run its full course (by December, 60 million Soviet people out of a population of 150 millions were no longer in Stalin's power). The alarmist note in Stalin's Order No. 0019, July 16, 1941, was justified. "On all [!] fronts there are numerous [!] elements who even run to meet the enemy [!], and throw down their arms at the first contact with him." (In the Bialystok salient in July, 1941, among 340,000 prisoners there were 20,000 deserters.) Stalin thought the situation so desperate that in October, 1941, he sent a telegram to Churchill suggesting that twenty-five to thirty British divisions be landed on Soviet territory. What Communist has ever suffered a more complete moral collapse! This was the mood of the time: on August 22, 1941, the commanding officer of the 436th Light Infantry Regiment, Major Kononov, told his regiment to their faces that he was going over to the Germans, to join the "Liberation Army" for the overthrow of Stalin, and invited all who wished to go with him. Not only did he meet with no opposition—the whole regiment followed him! Only three weeks later Kononov had created a regiment of Cossack volunteers behind the enemy lines (he was a Don Cossack himself). When he arrived at the prisoner-of-war camp near Mogilev to enlist volunteers, 4,000 of the 5,000 prisoners there declared their readiness to join him, but he could not take them all. In the same year, half the Soviet prisoners of war in the camp near Türist—12,000 men—signed a declaration that the time had come to convert the war into a civil war. We have not forgotten how the whole population of Lokot-Bryansk, before the arrival of the Germans and independently of them, joined in the creation of an autonomous Russian local administration over a large and flourishing province, with eight districts, and more than a million inhabitants. The demands of the Lokot-Bryansk community were quite precise: a Russian national government to be

established, Russians to administer themselves in all the occupied provinces, Russia to be declared independent within its 1938 frontiers, a "Liberation Army" to be formed under Russian command. Or again, a group of young people in Leningrad numbering more than 1,000 (led by the student Rutchenko) went out in the woods near Gatchina to await the Germans and fight against the Stalin regime. (The Germans, however, sent them behind the lines to work as drivers and kitchen orderlies.) The Germans were met with bread and salt in the villages on the Don. The pre-1941 population of the Soviet Union naturally imagined that the coming of a foreign army meant the overthrow of the Communist regime—otherwise it could have no meaning for us at all. People expected a political program which would liberate them from Bolshevism.

From where we were, separated from them by the wilderness of Soviet propaganda, by the dense mass of Hitler's army—how could we readily believe that the Western allies had entered this war not for the sake of freedom in general, but for their own Western European freedom, only against Nazism, intending to take full advantage of the Soviet armies and leave it at that? Was it not more natural for us to believe that our allies were true to the very *principle* of freedom and that they would not abandon us to a worse tyranny? ... True, these were the same allies for whom Russians had died in the First World War, and who then, too, had abandoned our army in the moment of collapse, hastening back to their comforts. But this was a lesson too cruel for the heart to learn.

Having rightly taught ourselves to disbelieve Soviet propaganda, whatever it said, we naturally did not believe tall stories about the Nazis' wishing to make Russia a colony and ourselves German slaves; who would expect to find such foolishness in twentieth-century heads, unless he had experienced its effects for himself? Even in 1942 the Russian formation in Osintorf attracted more volunteers than a unit still not fully deployed could absorb, while in the Smolensk region and Byelorussia, a volunteer "people's militia" 100,000 strong was formed for purposes of self-defense against the partisans directed from Moscow (the Germans took fright and banned it). As late as spring, 1943, on his two propaganda tours in the Smolensk and Pskov regions, Vlasov was greeted with enthusiasm wherever he went. Even then, the population was still waiting and wondering when we should have our

own independent government and our own army. I have testimony from the Pzhrevitsky district of the Pskov oblast about the friendly attitude of the peasant population to the Vlasov unit there—which refrained from looting and brawling, wore the old Russian uniform, helped with the harvest, and was regarded as a Russian organ of authority opposed to kolkhozes. Volunteers from among the civilian population came to sign on (just as they did in Lokot-Bryansky with Voskoboynikov's unit)—and we are bound to wonder what made them do so. It was not as though they were getting out of a POW camp. In fact, the Germans several times forbade Vlasovites to take in reinforcements (let them sign on with the Police). As late as March, 1943, prisoners of war in a camp near Khar'kov read leaflets about the Vlasov movement (so called) and 730 officers signed an application to join the "Russian Liberation Army": they had the experience of two years of war behind them, many were heroes of the battle for Stalingrad, their number included divisional commanders and regimental commissars—moreover, the camp was very well fed, and it was not the desperation of hunger that induced them to sign. (The Germans, however, behaved with typical stupidity; of the 730 who signed, 722 had still not been released from the camp and given a chance to act when the war ended.) Even in 1943 tens of thousands of refugees from the Soviet provinces trailed along behind the retreating German army—anything was better than remaining under Communism.

I will go so far as to say that our folk would have been worth nothing at all, a nation of abject slaves, if it had gone through that war without brandishing a rifle at Stalin's government even from afar, if it had missed its chance to shake its fist and fling a ripe oath at the *Father of the Peoples*. The Germans had their generals' plot—but what did we have? Our generals were (and remain to this day) nonentities, corrupted by Party ideology and greed, and have not preserved in their own persons the spirit of the nation, as happens in other countries. So that those who raised their hands and struck were almost to a man from the lowest levels of society—the number of former gentry émigrés, former members of the wealthier strata, and intellectuals taking part was microscopically small. If this movement had been allowed to develop unhindered, to flow with the same force as in the first weeks of the war, it would have been like a second Pugachev rising\*—resembling the first in the numbers and social level of those swept in its train, in the

weight of popular support, in the part played by the Cossacks, in spirit (its determination to settle accounts with evildoers in high places), in the contrast between its elemental force and the weakness of its leadership. However this may be, it was very much more a movement of the people, the *common people*, than the whole "liberation movement" of the intelligentsia from the beginning of the twentieth century right up to February, 1917, with its pseudo-popular aims and its harvest in October. It was not, however, destined to run its course, but to perish ignominiously, stigmatized as "treason to our holy Motherland!"

We have lost the taste for social analysis of events—because such explanations are juggled around to suit the need of the moment. But what of our friendship pact with Ribbentrop and Hitler? The braggadocio of Molotov and Voroshilov before the war? And then, the staggering incompetence, the unpreparedness, the fumbling (and the craven flight of the government from Moscow), the armies abandoned, half a million at a time, in the salients—was this not betrayal of the Motherland? With more serious consequences? Why do we cherish *these* traitors so tenderly in their apartments on Granovsky Street?

Oh, the length of it! The length of the prisoners' bench with seats for *all* those who tormented and betrayed our people, if we could bring them all, from first to last, to account.

Awkward questions get no answers in our country. They are passed over in silence. Instead, this is the sort of thing they yell at us:

"It's the *principle*! The very principle of the thing! Does any Russian, to achieve his own political ends, however just they appear to him, have the right to lean on the strong right arm of German imperialism? . . . And that at the moment of war to the death?"

True enough, this is the crucial question: Ought you, for what seem to you noble ends, to avail yourself of the support of German imperialists at war with Russia?

Today, everyone will join in a unanimous cry of "No!"

What, then, of the sealed German carriage from Switzerland to Sweden, calling on the way (as we have now learned) at Berlin? The whole Russian press, from the Mensheviks to the Cadets,\* also cried "No!" but the Bolsheviks explained that it was permissible, that it was indeed ridiculous to reproach them with it. But this is not the only train journey worth mentioning. How many rail-

road cars did the Bolsheviks rush out of Russia in summer, 1918, some carrying foodstuffs, others gold—all of them into Wilhelm's capacious maw! Convert the war into a civil war! This was Lenin's proposal before the Vlasovites thought of it.

—Yes, but his aims! Remember what his aims were!

Well, what were they? And what has become of them, those aims?

—Yes, but really—that was Wilhelm! The Kaiser! The little Emperor! A bit different from Hitler! And anyway, was there really any government in Russia at the time? The Provisional Government doesn't count. . . .

Well, there was a time when, inflamed with martial ardor, we never mentioned the Kaiser in print without the words "ferocious" or "bloodthirsty," and incautiously accused the Kaiser's soldiers of smashing the heads of babes against stones. But let's agree—the Kaiser was different from Hitler. The Provisional Government, though, was also different: it had no Cheka, shot no one in the back of the head, imprisoned no one in camps, herded no one into collective farms, poisoned no one's life: the Provisional Government was not Stalin's government.

We must keep things in proportion.

It was not that someone took fright as *katorga* killed off one "alphabet" after another, but simply that with the war drawing to an end there was no need for such a savage deterrent: no new Polizei units could be formed, working hands were needed, and in *katorga* people were dying off uselessly. So as early as 1945 huts in *katorga* ceased to be prison cells; doors were opened to let in the daylight, slop buckets were carried out to the latrines, prisoners were allowed to make their own way to the Medical Section and were trotted to the mess hall at the double to keep their spirits up. The thieves who used to flich other prisoners' rations were removed, and mess orderlies appointed from among the polites themselves. Later on, prisoners were allowed to receive letters, two a year.

The line between *katorga* and the ordinary camps became blurred in the years 1946–1947. Unfastidious managing engineers did not let political distinctions stand in the way of plan fulfillment



The thieves never forgot it, and threatened Boronyuk many times afterward. "*You smell like a dead man already!* We'll take you with us!" But they never attacked him again.

Soon afterward our cell also clashed with the bitches. \* We were out in the yard to stretch our legs, and relieve ourselves while we were at it, when a woman prison officer sent a trusty to chase some of us out of the latrine. His arrogance (to the "politicals") outraged Volodya Gershuni, a high-strung youngish man, recently sentenced. Volodya pulled the trusty up short, and the trusty felled the lad with a blow. Previously the 58's would simply have swallowed this, but now Maxim the Azerbaijani (who had killed the chairman of his kolkhhoz) threw a stone at the trusty, while Boronyuk laid one on his jaw. He slashed Boronyuk with his knife (the warders' assistants went around with knives; there was nothing unusual in this), and ran to the warders for protection, with Boronyuk chasing him. They quickly herded us all into the cell, and senior prison officers arrived to discover who was to blame and threaten us with additional sentences for gang fighting (the MVD man's heart always bleeds for his nearest and dearest, his trusties). Boronyuk's blood was up, and he stepped forward of his own accord. "I beat those bastards, and I'll go on beating them as long as I live!" The "godfather"\* warned us that we Counter-Revolutionaries couldn't afford to put on airs and that it would be safer for us to hold our tongues. At this up jumped Volodya Gershuni. He was hardly more than a boy, a first-year university student when he was arrested, and not just a namesake but the nephew of that Gershuni who once commanded the SR\* terrorist squad. He screamed at the godfather, as shrill as a fighting cock. "Don't dare call us Counter-Revolutionaries! That's all in the past. We're re-vol-ution-aries again now! Against the Soviet state this time!"

How we enjoyed ourselves! This was the day we'd lived for! And the godfather just frowned and scowled and swallowed it all. Nobody was taken off to the lockup, and the prison officers beat an inglorious retreat. Was *this* how life in prison would be from now on? Could we then fight? Turn on our tormentors? Say out loud just what we thought? Ah! that time we had endured it all like idiots! It's fun beating people who weep easily. We wept—so they beat us.

Now, in the legendary new camps to which they were taking us, where men wore number patches as in the Nazi camps, but where

there would at last be only political prisoners, cleansed of the slimy criminal scum, perhaps the new life would begin. Volodya Gershuni, with his dark eyes and his peaked, dead-white face, said hopefully: "Once we get to the camp we shall soon know with whom we belong!" Silly lad! Did he seriously expect to find there a vigorous political life, with parties of many different shades feverishly contending, discussions, programs, underground meetings? "With whom we belong?" As though the choice had been left to us! As though those who drew up the target figures for arrests in each republic, and the bills of lading for camp-transport trains, had not decided it for us.

In our very long cell—once a stable, with two lines of two-tiered platforms where the two rows of mangers used to stand, with pillars made of crooked tree trunks along the aisle propping up a decrepit roof, with typical slaked windows in the long wall, shaped so that the hay could be forked straight into the mangers (and made narrower by “muzzles”\*)—in our cell there were 120 men, of all sorts and conditions. More than half of them were from the Baltic States, uneducated people, simple peasants: the second purge was under way in that area, and all who would not voluntarily join collective farms, or who were suspected in advance of reluctance to join, were being imprisoned or deported. Then there were quite a few Western Ukrainians—members of the OUN,<sup>1</sup> together with anyone who had once given them a night’s rest or a meal. Then there were prisoners from the Russian Soviet Federation—with fewer new boys among them, most of them “repeaters.” And, of course, a certain number of foreigners.

We were all being taken to the same camp complex (we found out from the records clerk that it was the Stepiag group). I looked carefully at those with whom fate had brought me together, and tried to see into their minds.

I found the Estonians and Lithuanians particularly congenial. Although I was no better off than they were, they made me feel ashamed, as though I were the one who had put them inside. Unspoiled, hard-working, true to their word, unassuming—what had they done to be ground in the same mill as ourselves? They had harmed no one, lived a quiet, orderly life, and a more moral life than ours—and now they were to blame because we were

## 1. Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists.



hungry, because they lived cheek by jowl with us and stood in our path to the sea.

"I am ashamed to be Russian!" cried Herzen when we were choking the life out of Poland. I felt doubly ashamed in the presence of these inoffensive and defenseless people.

My attitude to the Latvians was more complicated. There was a fatality in their plight. They had sown the seed themselves.\*

And the Ukrainians? We have long ago stopped saying "Ukrainian nationalists"; we speak only of "Banderists," and this has become such a dirty word that no one thinks of inquiring into the reality. (We also call them "bandits," following our established rule that anyone, anywhere, who kills *for us* is a "partisan," whereas those who kill us are always "bandits," beginning with the Tambov peasants\* in 1921.)

The reality is that although long ago in the Kiev period we and the Ukrainians constituted a single people, we have since then been torn asunder and our lives, our customs, our languages for centuries past have taken widely different paths. The so-called "re-union" was a very awkward though perhaps in some minds a sincere attempt to restore our former brotherhood. But we have not made good use of the three centuries since. No statesman in Russia ever gave much thought to the problem of binding the Ukrainians and Russians together in kinship, of smoothing out the lumpy seam. (Had the join been neater, the first Ukrainian Com-mittees would not have been formed in spring, 1917, nor the Rada later on.)

The Bolsheviks before they came to power found the problem uncomplicated. In *Pravda* for June 7, 1917, Lenin wrote as follows: "We regard the Ukraine and other regions not inhabited by Great Russians as territories annexed by the Tsar and the capitalists." He wrote this when the Central Rada was already in existence. Then on November 2, 1917, the "Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia" was adopted. Was it just meant as a joke? Was it just a trick when they declared that the peoples of Russia did indeed have the right of self-determination, up to and including secession? Six months later the Soviet government requested the good offices of the Kaiser's Germany in helping Soviet Russia to conclude peace and define its boundaries with the Ukraine, and Lenin signed a treaty to this effect with Hetman Skoropadsky on June 14, 1918. By doing so he showed himself fully reconciled to the

detachment of the Ukraine—even if it became a monarchy as a result!

But strangely enough, as soon as the Germans were defeated by the Entente (which could not affect in the least the principles governing our relations with the Ukraine), as soon as the Hetman had fallen, together with his patrons, as soon as we proved stronger than Petyura (there's another word of abuse, "Petyurovite"; but these were merely Ukrainian townsfolk and peasants, who wanted to order their lives without our interference), we immediately crossed the border which we had recognized and imposed our rule on our blood brothers. True, for fifteen to twenty years afterward we made great play with the Ukrainian language, pushed it perhaps too hard, and impressed it on our brothers that they were completely independent and could break away whenever they pleased. Yet when they tried to do so at the end of the war we denounced them as "Banderists," and started hunting them down, torturing them, executing them, or dispatching them to the camps. (But "Banderists," like "Petyurovites," are just Ukrainians who do not want to be ruled by others; once they discovered that Hitler would not bring them the freedom they had been promised, they fought against the Germans, as well as ourselves, throughout the war, but we kept quiet about this, since like the Warsaw rising of 1944 it shows us in an unfavorable light.)

Why are we so exasperated by Ukrainian nationalism, by the desire of our brothers to speak, educate their children, and write their shop signs in their own language? Even Mikhail Bulgakov (in *The White Guard*) let himself be misled on this subject. Given that we have not succeeded in fusing completely; that we are still different in some respects (and it is sufficient that *they*, the smaller nation, feel the difference); that however sad it may be, we have missed chance after chance, especially in the thirties and forties; that the problem became most acute not under the Tsar, but after the Tsar—why does their desire to secede annoy us so much? Can't we part with the Odessa beaches? Or the fruit of Circassia? For me this is a painful subject. Russia and the Ukraine are united in my blood, my heart, my thoughts. But from friendly contact with Ukrainians in the camps over a long period I have learned how sore they feel. Our generation cannot avoid paying for the mistakes of generations before it.

Nothing is easier than stamping your foot and shouting: "That's mine!" It is immeasurably harder to proclaim: "You may live as

you please." We cannot, in the latter end of the twentieth century, live in the imaginary world in which our last, not very bright Emperor came to grief. Surprising though it may be, the prophecy of our Vanguard Doctrine\* that nationalism would fade has not come true. In the age of the atom and of cybernetics, it has for some reason blossomed afresh. Like it or not, the time is at hand when we must pay out on all our promissory notes guaranteeing self-determination and independence—pay up of our own accord, and not wait to be burned at the stake, drowned in rivers, or beheaded. We must prove our greatness as a nation not by the vastness of our territory, not by the number of peoples under our tutelage, but by the grandeur of our actions. And by the depth of our tilth in the lands that remain when those who do not wish to live with us are gone.

The Ukraine will be an extremely painful problem. But we must realize that the feelings of the whole people are now at white heat. Since the two peoples have not succeeded over the centuries in living harmoniously, it is up to us to show sense. We must leave the decision to the Ukrainians themselves—let federalists and separatists try their persuasions. Not to give way would be foolhardy and cruel. And the gentler, the more tolerant, the more careful to explain ourselves we are now, the more hope there will be of restoring unity in the future.

Let them live their own lives, let them see how it works. They will soon find that not all problems are solved by secession.<sup>2</sup>

For some reason the cell in the converted stables was our home for a long time, and I looked as though they would never send us on to Steplag. Not that we were in any hurry; we enjoyed life where we were, and the next place could only be worse.

We were not left without news—they brought us daily a sort of half-sized newspaper. I sometimes had the task of reading it aloud to the whole cell, and I read it with expression, for there were things there which demanded it.

The tenth anniversary of the "liberation" of Estonia, Latvia,

2. The fact that the ratio between those who consider themselves Russian and those who consider themselves Ukrainian varies from province to province of the Ukraine will cause many complications. A plebiscite in each province, and afterward a helpful and considerate attitude to those who wish to move, may be necessary. Not all of the Ukraine in its present official Soviet borders is really Ukrainian. Some of the left-hand provinces undoubtedly feel drawn to Russia.

and Lithuania came around just at this time. Some of those who understood Russian translated for the rest (I paused for them to do so), and what can only be called a howl went up from the bed platforms as they heard about the freedom and prosperity introduced into their countries for the first time in history. Each of these Bats (and a good third of all those in the transit prison were Bats) had left behind a ruined home, and was lucky if his family was still there and not on its way to Siberia with another batch of prisoners.

But what of course most excited the transit prison were the reports from Korea. Stalin's blitzkrieg had miscarried. The United Nations volunteers had by now been assembled. We saw in Korea the precursor, the Spain, of the Third World War. (And Stalin probably intended it as a rehearsal.) Those U.N. soldiers were a special inspiration to us. What a flag to fight under! Whom would it not unite? Here was a prototype of the united mankind of the future!

We were wretched, and we could not rise above our wretchedness. Should this have been our dream—to perish so that those who looked unmoved on our destruction might survive? We could not accept it. No, we longed for the storm!

Some will be surprised—What a desperate, what a cynical state of mind. Had you no thought for the hardships war would bring to those outside?—Well, the free never spared us a thought!—You mean, then, that you were capable of wishing for a world war?—When all those people were given sentences in 1950 lasting till the mid-1970s, what hope were they left with except that of world war?

I am appalled myself when I remember now the false and baneful hopes we cherished at the time. General nuclear destruction was no way out for anyone. And leaving aside the nuclear danger, a state of war only serves as an excuse for domestic tyranny and reinforces it. But my story will be distorted if I do not tell the truth about our feelings that summer.

Romain Rolland's generation in their youth were depressed by the constant expectation of war, but our generation of prisoners was depressed by its absence—and not to say so would be to tell less than the truth about the spirit of the Special Political Camps. This was what they had driven us to. World war might bring us either a speedier death (they might open fire from the watchtowers, poison our bread, or infect us with germs, German fashion),

## Chapter 5

# Poetry Under a Tombstone, Truth Under a Stone

At the beginning of my camp career I was very anxious to avoid general duties, but did not know how. When I arrived at Ekbastuz in the sixth year of my imprisonment I had changed completely, and set out at once to cleanse my mind of the camp prejudices, intrigues, and schemes, which leave it no time for deeper matters. So that instead of resigning myself to the grueling existence of a general laborer until I was lucky enough to become a trusty, as educated people usually have to, I resolved to acquire a skill, there and then, in *katorga*. When we joined Boronyuk's team (Oleg Ivanov and I), a suitable trade (that of bricklayer) came our way. Later my fortunes took a different turn and I was for some time a smelter.

I was anxious and unsure of myself to begin with. Could I keep it up? We were unhandy cerebral creatures, and the same amount of work was harder for us than for our teammates. But the day when I deliberately let myself sink to the bottom and felt it firm under my feet—the hard, rocky bottom which is the same for all—was the beginning of the most important years in my life, the years which put the finishing touches to my character. From then onward there seem to have been no upheavals in my life, and I have been faithful to the views and habits acquired at that time.

I needed an unmundled mind because I had been trying to write a poem for two years past. This was very rewarding, in that it helped me not to notice what was being done with my body. Sometimes in a sullen work party with Tommy-gunners barking

about me, lines and images crowded in so urgently that I felt myself borne through the air, overleaping the column in my hurry to reach the work site and find a corner to write. At such moments I was both free and happy.<sup>1</sup>

But how could I write in a Special Camp? Korolenko tells us that he wrote in jail—but how different his conditions were! He wrote in pencil (why didn't they feel the seams of his clothes and take it away from him?), which he had carried in among his curls (and why wasn't his hair cropped?), wrote among all the noise (he ought to have been thankful that there was room to sit down and stretch his legs). Indeed, he was so privileged that he could keep manuscripts or send them out (and that is hardest of all for our contemporaries to understand!).

You can't write like that nowadays, even in the camps! (Even saving names for a future novel was dangerous—the membership list of some organization, perhaps? I used to jot down only the etymological root, in the form of a common noun or an adjectival derivative.) Memory was the only hidey-hole in which you could keep what you had written and carry it through all the searches and journeys under escort. In the early days I had little confidence in the powers of memory and decided therefore to write in verse. It was of course an abuse of the genre. I discovered later that prose, too, can be quite satisfactorily tamped down into the deep hidden layers of what we carry in our head. No longer burdened with frivolous and superfluous knowledge, a prisoner's memory is astonishingly capacious, and can expand indefinitely. We have too little faith in memory!

But before you commit something to memory you feel a need to write it down and improve it on paper. In the camps you are allowed to have a pencil and clean paper but may not keep anything *in writing* (unless it is a poem about Stalin).<sup>2</sup> And unless you get a trusty's job in the Medical Section or sponge on the Culture and Education Section, you have to go through the morning and

1. Everything is relative! We read of Vasily Karachkin that the nine years of his life after *Iskra* was closed down were "years of real agony"; he was left without a press organ of his own! We who dare not even dream of an organ of our own find him incomprehensible: he had a room, quiet, a desk, ink, paper, there were no body searches, and nobody confiscated what he had written—why, then, the agony?

2. Dyakov describes one instance of such "artistic activity." Dmitrievsky and Chetverikov outlined a projected novel to the authorities and obtained their approval. The security officer saw to it that they were not put on general duties! Later on they were secretly taken out of the camp area ("in case the Bandetrists tore them to pieces") to continue their work. More poetry under the gravestone. But where is the novel?

evening searches at the guardhouse. I decided to write snatches of twelve to twenty lines at a time, polish them, learn them by heart, and burn them. I made it a firm rule not to content myself with tearing up the paper.

In prisons the composition and polishing of verses had to be done in my head. Then I started breaking matches into little pieces and arranging them on my cigarette case in two rows (of ten each, one representing units and the other tens). As I recited the verses to myself, I displaced one bit of broken match from the units row for every line. When I had shifted ten units I displaced one of the "tens." (Even this work had to be done circumspectly; such innocent match games, accompanied by whispering movements of the lips or an unusual facial expression, would have aroused the suspicion of stool pigeons. I tried to look as if I was switching the matches around quite absent-mindedly.) Every fiftieth and every hundredth line I memorized with special care, to help me keep count. Once a month I recited all that I had written. If the wrong line came out in place of one of the hundreds or fifties, I went over it all again and again until I caught the slippery fugitives.

In the Kuibyshev Transit Prison I saw Catholics (Lithuanians) busy making themselves rosaries for prison use. They made them by soaking bread, kneading beads from it, coloring them (black ones with burnt rubber, white ones with tooth powder, red ones with red germinicide), stringing them while still moist on several strands of thread twisted together and thoroughly soaped, and letting them dry on the window ledge. I joined them and said that I, too, wanted to say my prayers with a rosary but that in my particular religion I needed one hundred beads in a ring (later, when I realized that twenty would suffice, and indeed be more convenient, I made them myself from cork), that every tenth bead must be cubic, not spherical, and that the fiftieth and the hundredth beads must be distinguishable at a touch. The Lithuanians were amazed by my religious zeal (the most devout among them had no more than forty beads), but with true brotherly love helped me to put together a rosary such as I had described, making the hundredth bead in the form of a dark red heart. I never afterward parted with this marvelous present of theirs; I fingered and counted my beads inside my wide mittens—at work line-up, on the march to and from work, at all waiting times; I could do it standing up, and freezing cold was no hindrance. I carried it safely through the search points, in the padding of my mittens, where

it could not be felt. The warders found it on various occasions, but supposed that it was for praying and let me keep it. Until the end of my sentence (by which time I had accumulated 12,000 lines) and after that in my place of banishment, this necklace helped me to write and remember.

Even so, things were not so simple. The more you have written, the more days in each month are consumed by recitation. And the particularly harmful thing about these recitals is that you cease to see clearly what you have written, cease to notice the strong and weak points. The first draft, which in any case you approve in a hurry, so that you can burn it, remains the only one. You cannot allow yourself the luxury of putting it aside for years, forgetting it and then looking at it with a fresh critical eye. For this reason, you can never write really well.

Nor can you hang on to unburned scraps of paper for long. Three times I was caught, and was saved only because I never wrote the most dangerous names in full, but put dashes in their place. Once I was lying on the grass away from everyone else, too near the boundary wire (it was quieter there), and writing, concealing my scrap of paper in a book. Senior Warden Tatarin crept up behind me very quietly and saw that I was not reading, but writing.

"Right, let's have it!" I rose, in a cold sweat, and handed it over. These lines were written on it:

All we have lost will be made good—  
None of our claims will be denied us.  
The Osterode-Brodnitsy route  
Was five weary days and nights on foot  
With an [escort] of K[azaks] and T[atars] beside us. . . .

If the words "escort" and "Tatars" had been written in full, Tatarin would have hauled me before the security officer and they would have found me out. But the blanks told him nothing.

With an ——— of K—— and T—— beside us. . . .

Our minds were running on different lines. I was afraid for the poem, and he had thought that I was making a sketch of the camp area and plotting escape. Still, even what he did find he read with a frown. Certain words seemed to him suggestive. But what really set his brain working furiously was the phrase "five weary days." I had overlooked its possible associations! "Five days" was a set

formula in the camp, when prisoners were consigned to the hole. "Who gets five days? Who's this all about?" he asked, looking black.

I barely managed to convince him (by pointing to the names Osterode and Brodnitsy) that I was trying to remember an army song someone had written, but couldn't recall all the words.

"Why do you want to do that? You aren't here to remember things!" was his surly warning. "If I catch you lying here again, you're in for it!"

When I talk about this incident now, it sounds trivial. But at the time, for a wretched slave like myself, it was an enormous event: I could never again lie on the grass away from all the noise, and if Tatarin caught me with any more verses, they might easily open a new file on me and put me under close surveillance.

But I could not stop writing now!

On another occasion I broke my usual rule. At the work site I wrote down sixty lines of a play<sup>1</sup> at one go, and failed to conceal this piece of paper at the camp entrance. True, I had again left a number of discreet blanks. The warder, a simple, flat-nosed young fellow, examined his catch with some surprise.

"A letter?" he asked.

(A letter taken to the work site had a whiff of the black hole about it. But it would seem a mighty strange letter if they passed it on to the security officer!)

"It's for a concert," I said, brazening it out. "I'm trying to write down a sketch from memory. Come and see it when we put it on."

The young man stared and stared at the paper, and at me, then said:

"You're a bigger fool than you look!"

And he ripped my page into two, four, eight pieces. I was terrified that he would throw the scraps, which were still large, on the ground there in front of the guardhouse, where they might catch the eye of a more vigilant staff member. Chief Disciplinary Officer Machekovsky himself was only a few steps away, looking on while we were searched. But they evidently had orders not to leave litter by the guardhouse, or they would have to tidy it up themselves, and the warder put the torn-up pieces into my hand as though it were a refuse bin. I went through the gates and made haste to throw them into the stove.

3. *Pr Pochetshelst (Feast of the Victors).*

On a third occasion, while I still had a sizable piece of a poem unburned, I was working on the Disciplinary Barracks and the temptation to put "The Mason" on paper was too strong for me. At that time we never left the camp area, so that we did not undergo daily personal searches. When "The Mason" was three days old, I went out in the dark, before evening inspection, to go over it for the last time and then burn it at once. I was looking for a quiet, lonely spot, which meant somewhere toward the boundary fence, and I forgot entirely that I was near the place where Tanno had recently gone under the wire. A warder who had evidently been lying in ambush grabbed me immediately by the scruff of my neck and marched me through the darkness to the black hole. I took advantage of the darkness to crumple "The Mason" surreptitiously and toss it at random behind me. A breeze was beginning to blow and the warder did not hear the paper cracking and rustling.

I had quite forgotten that I still had another fragment of a poem on me. They found it when they searched me in the Disciplinary Barracks, fortunately it contained almost nothing that could incriminate me (it was a descriptive section from *Prussian Nights*).

The duty officer, a perfectly literate senior sergeant, read it through.

"What's this?"

"Tvardovsky," I answered unhesitatingly. *Vasily Tyorkin*. \*

(This was where Tvardovsky's path and mine first crossed!)

"Tvardovsky!" said the sergeant, nodding his head respectfully. "And what do you want it for?"

"Well, there aren't any books. I write down what I can remember and read it sometimes."

They took my weapon—half a razor blade—from me, but returned the poem, and they would have let me go (I wanted to run and find "The Mason"). But by then evening inspection was over and no one was allowed to move about the camp. The warder took me back to the hut and locked me in himself.

I slept badly that night. A gale-force wind had sprung up outside. Where would it carry the little ball of paper with "The Mason" on it? In spite of all the blanks, the sense of the poem remained obvious. And it was clear from the text that its author was in the team building the Disciplinary Barracks. Among all those Western Ukrainians it wouldn't be hard to find me.

So that the work of many years—that already done, and that I was planning—was a scrap of crumpled paper blown helplessly about the camp or over the steppe. I could only pray. When things are bad, we are not ashamed of our God. We are only ashamed of Him when things go well.

At five in the morning, as soon as we rose, I went to the spot, gasping for breath in the wind. It was so strong that it swept up small stones and hurled them in your face. It was a waste of time even looking! From where I was, the wind was blowing in the direction of the staff barracks, then the punishment cells (this place, too, was infested with warders, and there was a lot of tangled barbed wire), then beyond the camp limits, on to the street of the settlement. I prowled around, bent double, for an hour before dawn, and found nothing. By now I was in despair. Then when it got light . . . I saw something white three steps from the place where I had thrown it! The wind had rolled the ball of paper to one side and it had lodged among a pile of boards.

I still consider it a miracle.

So I went on writing. In winter in the warming-up shack, in spring and summer on the scaffolding at the building site: in the interval between two barrowloads of mortar I would put my bit of paper on the bricks and (without letting my neighbors see what I was doing) write down with a pencil scrub the verses which had rushed into my head while I was slapping on the fast hodful. I lived in a dream, sat in the mess hall over the ritual gruel sometimes not even noticing its taste, deaf to those around me—feeling my way about my verses and trimming them to fit like bricks in a wall. I was searched, and counted, and herded over the steppe—and all the time I saw the sets for my play, the color of the curtains, the placing of the furniture, the spotlights, every movement of the actors across the stage.

Some of the lads broke through the wire in a lorry, others crawled under it, others walked up a snowdrift and over it—but for me the wire might not have existed; all this time I was making my own long and distant escape journey, and this was something the warders could not discover when they counted heads.

I realized that I was not the only one, that I was party to a great secret, a secret maturing in other lonely breasts like mine on the scattered islands of the Archipelago, to reveal itself in years to come, perhaps when we were dead, and to merge into the Russian literature of the future.

(In 1956 I read the first small collection of Varlam Shalamov's poems in samizdat, which existed even then, and trembled as though I had met a long-lost brother. Here he declares his willingness to die like Archimedes during the siege of Syracuse:

I know, none better, this is not a game—  
Or else a deadly game. But like the sage  
I'll welcome death rather than drop my pen,  
Rather than crumple my half-written page.

He, too, wrote in a camp. Keeping his secret from all around, like me expecting no answer to his lonely cry in the dark:

A long, long row of lonely graves  
Are all I remember now.  
And I should have laid myself there,  
Laid my bare body down there,  
Had I not taken a vow:  
To sing and to weep to the very end  
And never to heed the pain,  
As though in the heart of a dead man  
Life yet could begin again.

How many of us were there? Many more, I think, than have come to the surface in the intervening years. Not all of them were to survive. Some buried manuscripts in bottles, without telling anyone where. Some put their work in careless or, on the contrary, in excessively cautious hands for safekeeping. Some could not write their work down in time.

Even on the isle of Ekibastuz, could we really get to know each other? encourage each other? support each other? Like wolves, we hid from everyone, and that meant from each other, too. Yet even so I was to discover a few others in Ekibastuz.

Meeting the religious poet Anatoly Vasilyevich Silin was a surprise which I owed to the Baptists. He was then over forty. There was nothing at all remarkable about his face. A reddish fuzz had grown in place of his cropped hair and beard, and his eyebrows were also reddish. Day in and day out he was meek and gentle with everyone, but reserved. Only when we began talking to each other freely, and strolling about the camp for hours at a stretch on our Sundays off, while he recited his very long religious poems to me (like me, he had written them right there in the camp), I was startled not for the first time or the last to realize what far

## Chapter 2

### The Peasant Plague

This chapter will deal with a small matter. Fifteen million souls. Fifteen million lives.

They weren't educated people, of course. They couldn't play the violin. They didn't know who Meyerhold was, or how interesting it is to be a nuclear physicist.

In the First World War we lost in all three million killed. In the Second we lost twenty million (so Khrushchev said; according to Stalin it was only seven million. Was Nikita being too generous? Or couldn't Iosif keep track of his capital?). All those odes! All those obelisks and eternal flames! Those novels and poems! For a quarter of a century all Soviet literature has been drunk on that blood!

But about the silent, treacherous Plague which starved fifteen million of our peasants to death, choosing its victims carefully and destroying the backbone and mainstay of the Russian people—about that Plague there are no books. No bugles bid our hearts beat faster for them. Not even the traditional three stones mark the crossroads where they went in creaking carts to their doom. Our finest humanists, so sensitive to today's injustices, in those years only nodded approvingly: Quite right, too! Just what they deserve!

It was all kept so dark, every stain so carefully scratched out, every whisper so swiftly choked, that whereas I now have to refuse kind offers of material on the camps—"No more, my friends, I have masses of such stories, I don't know where to put them!"—nobody brings me a thing about the deported peasants. Who is the person that could tell us about them? Where is he?

I know, all too well, that what is wanted here is not a chapter, nor even a book by one single man. And I cannot document even one chapter thoroughly.

All the same, I shall make a beginning. Set my chapter down as a marker, like those first stones—simply to mark the place where the new Temple of Christ the Saviour will someday be raised.

Where did it all start? With the dogma that the peasantry is *petit bourgeois*? (And who in the eyes of these people is not *petit bourgeois*? In their wonderfully clear-cut scheme, apart from factory workers [not the skilled workers, though] and big-shot businessmen, all the rest, the whole people—peasants, office workers, actors, airmen, professors, students, doctors—are nothing but the "petite bourgeoisie.") Or did it start with a criminal scheme in high places to rob some and terrorize the rest?

From the last letters which Korolenko wrote to Gorky in 1921, just before the former died and the latter emigrated, we learn that this villainous assault on the peasantry had begun even then, and was taking almost the same form as in 1930.

But as yet their strength did not equal their impudence, and they backed down.

The plan, however, remained in their heads, and all through the twenties they bullied and prodded and taunted: "Kulak! Kulak! Kulak!" The thought that it was impossible to live in the same world as the kulak was gradually built up in the minds of townspeople.

The devastating peasant Plague began, as far as we can judge, in 1929—the compilation of murder lists, the confiscations, the deportations. But only at the beginning of 1930 (after rehearsals were complete, and necessary adjustments made) was the public allowed to learn what was happening—in the decision of the Central Committee of the Party dated January 5. (The Party is "justified in shifting from a policy of restricting the exploiting tendencies of the kulaks to a policy of liquidating the kulaks as a class." And the admission of kulaks to the *kolkhoz* was immediately . . . prohibited. Would anyone like to attempt a coherent explanation?)

The dutifully concurring Central Executive Committee of the Soviets and the Council of People's Commissars were not far behind the Central Committee, and on February 1, 1930, they

gave legislative form to the will of the Party. Provincial Executive Committees were required to "use all necessary methods in the struggle with the kulaks, up to and including [in reality no other method was used] complete confiscation of the property of kulaks and their removal to points beyond the boundaries of certain regions and provinces."

Only in those last words was the Butcher overcome with shame. He specified *from which* boundaries. But he did not say *to which*. If you were inattentive enough you could take it to mean thirty versts away, in the same neighborhood.

In the Vanguard Doctrine, as far as I know, there was no such person as the *henchman* of kulaks. But as soon as the Party put its hand to the mowing machine, there was obviously no doing without him. We have seen already what the word is worth. A "sack collection" was announced. Young Pioneers went from hut to hut collecting from the peasants on behalf of the indigent state, you wouldn't give up your sack because it was like parting with your lifeblood (there were none in the shops, of course), and there you were, a "henchman of the kulaks." Ripe for deportation.

Names like this rampaged through a Soviet Russia with the bloody exhalations of the Civil War still warm in its nostrils. Words were put into circulation, and although they meant nothing they were easily remembered, they simplified matters, they made thought completely unnecessary. The savage law of the Civil War (Ten for every one! A hundred for every one!) was reinforced—to my mind an un-Russian law: where will you find anything like it in Russian history? For every activist (which usually meant big-mouthed loafer: A. Y. Olenyev is not the only one to recall that thieves and drunkards were in charge of "dekulakization")—for every *activist* killed in self-defense, hundreds of the most industrious, enterprising, and level-headed peasants, those who should keep the Russian nation on an even keel, were eliminated.

Yells of indignation! What's that? What do you say? What about the *bloodsuckers*? Those who squeezed their neighbors dry? "Take your loan—and pay me back with your hide?"

I suppose that bloodsuckers were a small part of the whole number (but were all the bloodsuckers there among them?). And were they bloodsuckers born? we may ask. Bloodsuckers through and through? Or was it just that all wealth—and all power—corrupts human beings? If only the "cleansing" of mankind, or of a social estate, were so simple! But if they had "cleansed" the

peasantry of heartless bloodsuckers with their fine-toothed iron comb, cheerfully sacrificing fifteen millions for the purpose—whence all those vicious, fat-bellied rednecks who preside over collectivized villages (and District Party Committees) today? Those pitiless oppressors of lonely old women and all defenseless people? How was the root of this predatory weed missed during dekulakization? Surely, heaven help us, they can't have sprung from the *activists*?

He who grew up robbing banks could not think about the peasantry either as a brother or as a husbandman. He could only whistle like Nightingale the Robber, and millions of toiling peasants were dragged off to the taiga, horny-handed tillers of the soil, the very same who had set up the Soviet power simply to get land, and having obtained it, quickly tightened their grip on it. ("The land belongs to those who work it.")

The word "bloodsuckers" loses all resonance—the tongue that uses it is a clapper in a wooden bell—when we remember what a *clean sweep* they made of some villages in the Kuban, Uryupskaya for instance: they deported every soul in it, from babes in arms to aged men (and resettled it with demobilized soldiers). Here we see clearly what the "class principle" really meant. (Let us remember that the Kuban gave hardly any support to the Whites in the Civil War, began of its own accord to wreck Denikin's supply lines, and sought agreement with the Reds. Then, suddenly, there they were—"the saboteurs of the Kuban.") The village of Dolinka, renowned throughout the Archipelago as a prosperous agricultural center—where did it come from? *All* its inhabitants were Germans, "dekulakized" and deported in 1929. Who had been exploiting whom is a mystery.

The principle underlying dekulakization can also be clearly seen in the fate of the children. Take Shurka Dmitriyev, from the village of Masleno (Seishchenskoe Kazarmy, near the Volkhov). He was thirteen when his father, Fyodor, died in 1925, and the only son in a family of girls. Who was to manage his father's holding? Shurka took it on. The girls and his mother accepted him as head of the family. A working peasant and an adult now, he exchanged bows with other adults in the street. He was a worthy successor to his hard-working father, and when 1929 came his bins were full of grain. Obviously a kulak! The whole family was driven out!

Adamova-Silozberg has a moving story about meeting a girl



called Motya, who was jailed in 1936 for leaving her place of banishment without permission to go to her native village, Svetlovodovo near Tarussa, *two thousand kilometers on foot!* Sportsmen are given medals for that sort of thing. She had been exiled with her parents in 1929 when she was a little schoolgirl, and deprived of schooling forever. Her teacher's pet name for her was "Motya, our little Edison"; the child was not only an excellent pupil, but had an inventive turn of mind, had rigged up a sort of turbine worked by a stream, and invented other things for the school. After seven years she felt an urge to look just once more at the log walls of her unattainable school—and for that "little Edison" went to prison and then to a camp.

Did any child suffer such a fate in the nineteenth century?

Every miller was automatically a candidate for dekulakization—and what were millers and blacksmiths but the Russian village's best technicians? Take the miller Prokop Ivanovich Lakyunkin from the Ryazan region. No sooner was he dekulakized than they ground the millstones together too hard and burned the mill down. After the war he was pardoned and returned to his native village, but he could not reconcile himself to the fact that there was no mill. Lakyunkin obtained permission, cast the grinders himself, and set up a mill on the same spot (it had to be the same spot), not for his own profit, but for the kolhoz, or rather because the neighborhood was incomplete and less beautiful without it.

Now let us look at that other kulak, the village blacksmith. In fact, we'll start with his father, as Personnel Departments like to do. His father, Gorden Vasilyevich, served for twenty-five years in the Warsaw garrison, and earned enough silver to make a tin button: this soldier with twenty-five years' service was devoted a plot of land. He had married a soldier's daughter while he was in the garrison, and after his discharge he went to his wife's native place, the village of Barsuki in the Krasnensky district. The village got him tipsy, and he paid off its tax arrears with half of his savings. With the other half he leased a mill from a landowner, but quickly lost the rest of his money in this venture. He spent his long old age as a herdsman and watchman. He had six daughters, all of whom he gave in marriage to poor men, and an only son, Trifon (their family name was Tvardovsky). The boy was sent away to serve in a haberdasher's shop, but fled back to Barsuki and found employment with the Molchanovs, who had the forge. After a year as an unpaid laborer, and four years as an apprentice,

he became a smith himself, built a wooden house in the village of Zagorye, and married. Seven children were born (among them Aleksandr, the poet), and no one is likely to get rich from a forge. The oldest son, Konstantin, helped his father. If they smelted and hammered from one dawn to the next they could make five excellent steel axes, but the smiths of Roslavl, with their presses and their hired workmen, undercut their price. In 1929 their forge was still wood-built, they had only one horse, sometimes they had a cow and a calf, sometimes neither cow nor calf, and besides all this they had eight apple trees—you can see what bloodsuckers they were. . . . The Peasant Land Bank used to sell mortgaged estates on deferred payments. Trifon Tvardovsky had taken eleven desyatins of wasteland, all overgrown with bushes, and the year of the Plague found them still sweating and straining to clear it: they had brought five desyatins into cultivation, and the rest they abandoned to the bushes. The collectivizers marked them down for dekulakization—there were only fifteen households in the village and somebody had to be found. They assessed the income from the forge at a fantastic figure, imposed a tax beyond the family's means, and when it was not paid on time: Get ready to move, you damned kulaks, you!

If a man had a brick house in a row of log cabins, or two stories in a row of one-story houses—there was your kulak: Get ready, you bastard, you've got sixty minutes! There aren't supposed to be any brick houses in the Russian village, there aren't supposed to be two-story houses! Back to the cave! You don't need a chimney for your fire! This is our great plan for transforming the country: history has never seen the like of it.

But we still have not reached the innermost secret. The better off were sometimes left where they were, provided they joined the kolhoz quickly, while the obstinate poor peasant who failed to apply was deported.

This is very important, the most important thing. The point of it all was not to dekulakize, but to force the peasants into the kolhoz. Without frightening them to death there was no way of taking back the land which the Revolution had given them, and planting them on that same land as serfs.

It was a second Civil War—this time against the peasants. It was indeed the Great Turning Point, or as the phrase had it, the Great Break. Only we are never told what it was that broke. It was the backbone of Russia.

No, we have been unfair to socialist realist writers: they have described the dekulakization, described it very fluently, too, and with great feeling for its heroes, as though they were hunters of snarling wolves.

But there are no descriptions of the long village street with every house in the row boarded up. Or of how you could walk through a village and see on the steps of a peasant house a dead woman with a dead child in her lap. Or an old man sitting under a fence, who asked you for bread—and when you walked back he had collapsed and died.

Nor shall we read in their works scenes like this: The chairman of the village soviet, taking the schoolteacher as a witness, goes into a hut where an old man and an old woman are lying on the sleeping bench. (The old man used to keep a teahouse—obviously a bloodsucker: who says wayfarers are glad of hot tea?) He brandishes his revolver. "Get down, you Tambov wolf!" The old woman starts howling, and the chairman fires at the ceiling, to intimidate them still more (a gun makes a very loud noise in a peasant hut). Both these old people died on their journey.

Still less will you read about this method of dekulakization: All the Cossacks (we are in a village on the Don) were summoned to a "meeting"—and there surrounded with machine guns, arrested, and driven away. Deporting their women later on was simplicity itself.

We can find described in books, or even see in films, barns and pits in the ground, full of grain hoarded by bloodsuckers. What they won't show us is the handful of belongings earned in a lifetime of toil: the livestock, the utensils—things as close to the owner as her own skin—which a weeping peasant woman is ordered to leave forever. (If some of the family survive, and are clever and persistent enough to persuade Moscow to rehabilitate them as "middle peasants," they will not find a stick of their "medium" property left when they return. It will have been pilaged by the *activists* and their women.)

What they will not show us are the little bundles with which the family are allowed onto the state's cart. We shall not learn that in the Tvardovsky house, when the evil moment came there was neither suet nor bread; their neighbor Kuzma saved them: he had several children and was far from rich himself,

but brought them food for the journey.

Those who were quick enough fled from that Plague to the towns, sometimes with a horse—but there were no customers for horses in those times: that peasant horse, sure sign of a kulak, became as bad as the Plague itself. Its master would tie it to a hitching rail at the horse market, give it one last pat on the muzzle, and go away before anyone noticed.

The years 1929–1930 are generally regarded as the years of the Plague. But its deathly stink hung over the countryside long afterward. In the Kuban in 1932, all the wheat and rye to the very last grain was taken straight from the threshing machine to the state procurement point, and when the collective farmers, who had been given nothing to eat except their harvesters' and threshers' rations, found that hot dinners ended with the threshing, and that there was not a grain to come for their labor—how could the mobs of howling women be silenced? "*How many kulaks are there left in this place?*" Who should be deported? (Skripnikova's testimony enables us to judge the condition of the kulak-free countryside in the early days of the kolhoz: she remembers some peasant women in 1930 sending parcels of dried crusts home to their native village from Solovki!)

Here is the story of Timofey Pavlovich Ovchinnikov, born in 1886, from the village of Kishkino in the Mikhnevsko area (not far from Leningrad, near the great highroad). He fought in the German war, he fought in the Civil War. When he had finished fighting, he returned to land given by the Decree, and married. He was clever, literate, experienced, an excellent worker. He had also acquired, self-taught, some skill in veterinary medicine, and gave a helping hand to the whole district. By tireless work he built himself a good house, planted an orchard, and reared a colt to become a fine horse. But the NEP confused him, and Timofey Pavlovich was rash enough to believe in it as he had believed in the Land Decree. In partnership with another peasant he started a little business making cheap sausages. (Now that the village has been without sausage for forty years, you may scratch your head and wonder what was so bad about that.) They made the sausage themselves, used no hired labor, and indeed sold their products through a cooperative. When they had worked at it for just two years, 1925–1927, crippling tax demands were made on them, since they allegedly earned large sums (these were dreamed up by tax inspectors in the line of duty, but envious drones in the

village, incapable of making anything of themselves except activists, also blew into the taxman's ear). So the partners closed down. In 1929 Timofey was one of the first to join the kolkhoz, taking with him his good horse, his cow, and all his implements. He worked hard in the common fields, and also reared two steers for the kolkhoz. The kolkhoz began to collapse, and many walked or ran away from it, but Timofey had five children, and was stuck. Since the tax inspector couldn't forget old scores, and Timofey was still thought to be well off (partly because of the veterinary help he had given people), even now that he was in the kolkhoz they pursued him with tax demands, which he could not meet. When he had no money to pay, they started coming to his house and seizing bits of clothing: once his eleven-year-old son managed to drive their last three ewes off and hide them from the inventory takers, but on another occasion they, too, were taken. When they came yet again to list his belongings, the impoverished family had nothing else left, so the shameless tax inspectors put down the rubber plants and their tubs. This was more than Timofey could stand, and he hacked the plants to pieces before their very eyes. Now just consider the significance of his action. (1) He had destroyed property no longer belonging to him but to the state. (2) He had made use of an ax in a demonstration against the Soviet state. (3) He had sought to discredit the kolkhoz system.

Just then the kolkhoz system in the village of Kishkino was going to pieces fast. Nobody had any faith in it or wanted to work, half the peasants had left, and it was time to make an example of somebody. The hardened Nepman Timofey Ovchinnikov, who had wormed his way into the kolkhoz to wreck it, was now expelled as a kulak by decision of Shokolov, chairman of the village soviet. This was 1932, and mass deportation was over, so his wife and six children (one at the breast) were not deported, but only turned out of house and home. (A year later they made their way to Timofey in Archangel at their own expense. All the Ovchinnikovs had lived to be eighty, but after a life like this Timofey folded up at fifty-three.)<sup>1</sup>

1. What follows is not relevant to our immediate theme, but tells us a lot about our epoch. After a time, Timofey found a job in Archangel—in another "closed" sausage factory—where he was again one of two skilled men, this time with a manager over them. His own sausage factory had been closed as a menace to the working classes, whereas this other was "closed" so that the workers would not know of it. They privately supplied the rulers of that northern clime with a variety of expensive sausages. Timofey himself was sometimes sent to deliver their wares to the home of the regional Party secretary, Comrade Austin

Even in 1935, drunken kolkhoz bosses went around the poverty-stricken village at Easter demanding money for vodka from those peasants who still farmed their own holdings. Give, or "We'll dekulakize you. We'll deport you." They could, too. If you farmed by yourself. This was what the Great Break was all about.

The journey itself, the peasant's *Via Crucis*, is something which our socialist realists do not describe at all. Get them aboard, pack them off—and that's the end of the story. Episode concluded. Three asterisks, please.

They were loaded onto carts . . . if they were lucky enough to be taken in the warm months, but it might be onto sledges in a cruel frost, with children of all ages, babes in arms as well. In February, 1931, when hard frosts were interrupted only by blizzards, the strings of carts rolled endlessly through the village of Kochenevo (Novosibirsk oblast), flanked by convoy troops, emerging from the snowbound steppe and vanishing into the snowbound steppe again. Even going into a peasant hut for a warm-up required special permission from the convoy, which was given only for a few minutes, so as not to hold up the cart train. (Those GPU convoy troops—they're still alive, they're pensioners now! I daresay they remember it all! Or perhaps . . . they can't remember.) They all shuffled into the Naryn marshes—and in those insatiable quagmires they all remained. Many of the children had already died a wretched death on the cruel journey.

This was the nub of the plan: the peasant's seed must perish together with the adults. Since Herod was no more, only the Vanguard Doctrine has shown us how to destroy utterly—down to the very babes. Hitler was a mere disciple, but he had all the luck: his murder camps have made him famous, whereas no one has any interest in ours at all.

The peasants knew what was in store for them. And if it was their good fortune to be transported through inhabited places, when they halted they would slip small children not too small to climb through windows. Kind people may help you! Beg your way in the world! It's better than dying with us.

(In Archangel in the famine years of 1932–1933, the destitute children of resettled peasants were not given free school lunches

—a detached one-story house behind a high fence where Liebknecht Street meets Chumbarov-Luchinsky Street—and to the NKVD chief in the oblast, Comrade Shetron.

and clothing vouchers, as were others in need.)

In that convoy of Don Cossacks, when the men arrested at the "meeting" were carried separately from their women, one woman gave birth to a child on the journey. Their rations were one glass of water a day, and 300 grams of bread not every day. Was there a medical attendant? Need you ask? The mother had no milk, and the child died on the way. Where were they to bury it? Two soldiers climbed in for a short trip between two stations, opened the door while the train was moving, and threw the tiny body out. (This transport was driven to the great Magnitogorsk building operation.\* Their husbands were brought to join them. Dig away, house yourselves! From Magnitogorsk on, our bards have done their duty and *reflected* . . . reality?)

The Tyardovsky family were carted only as far as Yelnya, and luckily it was April. There they were loaded into boxcars. The boxcars were locked, and there were no pails, or holes in the floor, for them to relieve themselves. Risking punishment, perhaps even imprisonment, for attempted escape, Konstantin Trifonovich cut a hole in the floor with a kitchen knife, while the train was moving and there was a lot of noise. The feeding arrangements were simple: once every three days pails of soup were brought along at main stations. True, they were only traveling for ten days (to a station called Lyalya in the Northern Urals). It was still winter there, and the transport was met by hundreds of sledges, which carried them up the frozen river into the forest. There they found a hut for twenty loggers, but more than five hundred people had been brought, and it was evening. The Komsomol in charge of the place, a Permian called Sorokin, showed them where to knock pegs into the ground: there'll be a street here, there'll be houses there. This was how the settlement of Parcha was founded.

It is hard to believe in such cruelty: on a winter evening out in the taiga they were told: You've arrived! Can human beings really behave like this? Well, they're moved by day so they arrive at nightfall—that's all there is to it. Hundreds and hundreds of thousands were carried into the wilds and dumped down like this, old men, women, children, and all. On the Kola Peninsula (Appatity) people lived through the dark polar winter in thin tents under the snow. But was it so very much more merciful to take trainloads of Volga Germans in summer (summer, 1931, not 1941—don't confuse the dates!) to waterless places in the Karaganda steppe, ration their water, and order them to make themselves

earth houses? There, too, winter would come soon enough (by the spring of 1932 the children and the old had all died of dysentery and malnutrition). In Karaganda itself, and in Magnitogorsk, they built long, low communal buildings of earth like vegetable storehouses. On the White Sea Canal the new arrivals were housed in huts vacated by prisoners. Those who were sent to work on the Volga Canal, even just beyond Khimki, were unloaded *before* there was a camp, tipped out on the ground as soon as the hydrographic survey was completed, and told to start swinging picks and wheeling barrows. (The papers reported the "delivery of machinery for the canal.") There was no bread. They had to build their earth houses in their spare time. (Nowadays pleasure boats carry Moscow sightseers over this spot. There are bones on the bottom, bones in the ground, bones in the concrete.)

As the Plague approached in 1929, all the churches in Archangel were closed: they were due to be closed anyway, but the very real need for somewhere to put the dekulakized hurried things along. Great streams of deported peasants poured through Archangel, and for a time the whole town became one big transit prison. Many-tiered sleeping platforms were put up in the churches, but there was no heat. Consignment after consignment of human cattle was unloaded at the station, and with dogs barking around them, the bast-shod went sullenly to church and a bed of planks. (S., then a boy, would never forget one peasant walking along with a shaft bow around his neck: he had been hurried away before he could decide what would be most useful. Another man carried a gramophone with a horn. Cameramen—there's work for you in this! . . .) In the Church of the Presentation, an eight-tiered bed platform which was not fastened to the wall collapsed in the night and several families were crushed. Their cries brought troops rushing to the church.

This was how they lived in that plague-stricken winter. They could not wash. Their bodies were covered with festering sores. Spotted fever developed. People were dying. Strict orders were given to the people of Archangel not to help the *special resettlers* (as the deported peasants were now called)! Dying peasants roamed the town, but no one could take a single one of them into his home, feed him, or carry tea out to him: the militia seized local inhabitants who tried to do so and took away their passports. A starving man would stagger along the street, stumble, fall—and die. But even the dead could not be picked up (besides the militia,

plainclothesmen went around on the lookout for acts of kindness). At the same time market gardeners and livestock breeders from areas near big towns were also being expelled, whole villages at a time (once again—what about the theory that they were supposed to arrest exploiters only?), and the residents of Archangel themselves dreaded deportation. They were afraid even to stop and look down at a dead body. (There was one lying near GPU headquarters, which no one would remove.)

They were buried in an *organized* fashion: by the sanitation department. Without coffins, of course, in common graves, next to the old city cemetery on Vologda Street—out in open country. No memorials were erected.

And this was while the tillers were still only in transit. There was also a great camp for them beyond the village of Talagi, where some of them were given jobs loading timber. But one man contrived to write a letter abroad on a log (see what happens if you teach peasants to read and write!), and they were all taken off the job. Their path was still a long one—to Onega, Pinega, and up the river Dvina.

We had a joke in the camp: "They can't send you farther than the sun." But these peasants were sent farther, to a place where there would long be no shelter for a tallow dip.

The plight of these peasants differed from that of all previous and subsequent Soviet exiles in that they were banished not to a center of population, a place made habitable, but to the haunt of wild beasts, into the wilderness, to man's primitive condition. No, worse: even in their primeval state our forebears at least chose places near water for their settlements. For as long as mankind has existed no one has ever made his home elsewhere. But for the *special settlements* the Cheka (not the peasants themselves—they had no right of choice) chose places on stony hillsides (100 meters up above the river Pinega, where it was impossible to dig down to water, and nothing would grow in the soil). Three or four kilometers off there might be convenient water meadows—but no, according to instructions no one was supposed to settle there. So the hayfields were dozens of kilometers away from the settlement, and the hay had to be brought in by boat. Sometimes settlers were bluntly *forbidden to sow grain crops*. (What they should grow was also determined by the Cheka!) Yet another thing we town folk do not understand—what it means to have lived from time immemorial with animals. A peasant's life is nothing without ani-

mals—and here he was condemned for many years never to hear neighing or lowing or bleating; never to saddle, never to milk, never to fill a trough.

On the river Chulym in Siberia, the special settlement of Kuban Cossacks was encircled with barbed wire and towers were put up, as though it were a prison camp.

Everything necessary seemed to have been done to ensure that these odious work fiends should die off quickly and rid our country of themselves and of bread. Indeed, many such special settlements died off to a man. Where they once stood, chance wayfarers are gradually burning what is left of the huts, and kicking the skulls out of sight.

No Genghis Khan ever destroyed so many peasants as our glorious Organs, under the leadership of the Party.

Take, for instance, the Vasyugan tragedy. In 1930, 10,000 families (60,000–70,000 people, as families then went) passed through Tomsk and from there were driven farther, at first on foot, down the Tom although it was winter, then along the Ob, then upstream along the Vasyugan—still over the ice. (The inhabitants of villages on the route were ordered out afterward to pick up the bodies of adults and children.) In the upper reaches of the Vasyugan and the Tara they were marooned on patches of firm ground in the marshes. *No food or tools were left for them.* The roads were impassable, and there was no way through to the world outside, except for two brushwood paths, one toward Tobolsk and one toward the Ob. Machine-gunners manned barriers on both paths and let no one through from the death camp. They started dying like flies. Desperate people came out to the barriers begging to be let through, and were shot on the spot. Rather late in the day, when the rivers unfroze, barges carrying flour and salt were sent from the Tomsk *Integralsoyuz* (Producers' and Consumers' Cooperative), but they could not get up the Vasyugan. (Stanislavov was the *Integralsoyuz* agent in charge of the shipment, and it is from him that we know this.)

They died off—every one of them.

We are told that there was at least an inquiry into this business, and even that one man was shot. I am not much inclined to believe it. But even if it is so—the ratio is an acceptable one! The ratio with which we are familiar from the Civil War. For one of ours—a thousand of yours! For sixty thousand of yours—one of ours! There's no other way to build the New Society.

And yet—exiles survived! Under their conditions it seems incredible—but live they did.

On the settlement at Parcha the day was started by foremen (Korni-Zyrians) with sticks. All their lives these peasants had begun their day themselves, but now they were driven out with sticks to fell and raft timber. By giving them no chance to get dry for months on end, by cutting down the flour ration, the masters exacted their stint from them—and in the evenings they could get on with homemaking. Their clothes fell to pieces on their bodies, and they wore sacks like skirts, or else stitched trousers from them.

If they had all died off, a number of towns we know today would not exist. Igarka, for instance. The building of Igarka, from 1929 on, was carried out and completed by—whom? The Northern and Polar Timber Trust? I wonder. Or was it perhaps dekulakized peasants? They lived in tents at 70 degrees below—but they made possible the first timber exports from the area as early as 1930.

The former kulaks lived in their special settlements like zeks in maximum punishment camps. Although there was no boundary fence, there was usually a man with a rifle living in the settlement, and he alone said yea and nay—he had the right, on his own authority and with no beating about the bush, to shoot anyone deemed unruly.

The civic category to which the special settlements belonged, their blood ties with the Archipelago, will quickly become clearer if you remember the law governing a fluid in interconnected receptacles. If a shortage of labor was felt at Vorkuta, special settlers were transferred (without retrial without rebelieving) from their settlements to the camps. And they lived behind the wire as meekly as you could wish, went to work behind more wire, ate dishwater soup, only they paid for it (and for their guards, and for their huts) out of their wages. And no one saw anything surprising in this.

The special settlers were also torn from their families, and shifted from settlement to settlement, just as zeks were shifted from camp to camp.

In one of those strange vagaries to which our legislation is subject, the U.S.S.R. Central Executive Committee promulgated a decision on July 3, 1931, permitting the restoration of civil rights

to former kulaks after five years, if—in a settlement under police control, mind you!—"if they have engaged in socially useful work and shown their loyalty to the Soviet regime" (by, let us say, helping the rifleman, the settlement manager, or the security officer at his tasks). But this was mere foolishness, the whim of a moment. And anyway, as the five years were ending, so the Archipelago was hardening.

There seemed to be never a year in which it was possible to make conditions easier: first there was the time after Kirov's assassination; then 1937-1938; then from 1939 there was war in Europe; and in 1941 our own war began. So that a safer way was found: from 1937 on, many of these same hapless alleged kulaks and their sons were plucked out of the special settlements, labeled with a clause from Article 58, and shoved into the camps.

True, when during the war there was a shortage of reckless Russian fighting power at the front, they turned among others to the "kulaks": they must surely be Russians first and kulaks second! They were invited to leave the special settlements and the camps for the front to defend their sacred fatherland.

And—they went . . .

Not all of them, however. N. Kh—v, a "kulak's" son—whose early years I used for Tyurin,\* but whose subsequent biography I could not bring myself to recount—was given the chance, denied to Trotskyite and Communist prisoners, however much they yearned to go, of defending his fatherland. Without a moment's hesitation, Kh—v snapped back at the head of the Prisoner Registration and Distribution Section: "It's your fatherland—you defend it, you dung-eaters! *The proletariat has no fatherland!*"

Marx's exact words, I believe, and certainly any camp dweller was still poorer, still lower, still less privileged than any proletarian—but the camp disciplinary board had not mastered this fact, and it sentenced Kh—v to be shot. He sat in jail two weeks with a *topper* hanging over him, hating them too much to appeal for clemency. It was they who made a move, and commuted his sentence to a further *tenner*.

It sometimes happened that they transported ex-"kulaks" out into the tundra or the taiga, let them loose, and forgot about them. Why keep count when you'd taken them there to die? They didn't even leave a rifleman—the place was too remote, too inaccessible. Now that the mysteriously wise leaders had dismissed them—

without horses, without plows, without fishing tackle, without guns—this hard-working and stubborn race of men, armed perhaps with a few axes and shovels, began the hopeless fight for life in conditions scarcely easier than in the Stone Age. And in defiance of the economic laws of socialism, some of these settlements not only survived, but became rich and vigorous!

In one such settlement, somewhere on the Ob, but on a backwater, nowhere near the navigation channel, Burov had landed as a boy, and there he grew up. He tells the story that one day before the war a passing launch noticed them and stopped. The people in the launch turned out to be the district bosses. They interrogated the Burovs—where had they come from and how long ago? The bosses were amazed at their wealth and well-being, the like of which they'd never seen in their collectivized region. They went away. A few days later plenipotentiaries arrived with NKVD troops, and once again, as in the year of the Plague, they were ordered to abandon within an hour all that they had earned for themselves, all the warmth and comfort of their settlement, and dispatched with nothing but a few bundles deeper into the tundra. Perhaps this story is enough in itself to explain the true meaning of "kulak" and of "dekulakization"?

The things that could have been done with such people if they had been allowed to live and develop freely!!!

The Old Believers—eternally persecuted, eternal exiles—they are the ones who three centuries earlier divined the ruthlessness at the heart of Authority! In 1950 a plane was flying over the vast basin of the Podkamennaya Tunguska. The training of airmen had improved greatly since the war, and the zealous aviator spotted something that no one before him had seen in twenty years: an unknown dwelling place in the taiga. He worked out its position. He reported it. It was far put in the wilds, but to the MVD all things are possible, and half a year later they had struggled through to it. What they had found were the Yaryeyev Old Believers. When the great and longed-for Plague began—I mean collectivization—they had fled from this blessing into the depths of the taiga, a whole village of them. And they lived there without ever poking their noses out, allowing only their headman to go to Yaryeyev for salt, metal fishing and hunting gear, and bits of iron for tools. Everything else they made themselves, and in lieu of money the headman no doubt came provided with pets. When he had completed his business he would sink away from the market-

place like a hunted criminal. In this way the Yaryeyev Old Believers had won themselves twenty years of life! Twenty years of life as free human beings among the wild beasts, instead of twenty years of kolhoz misery. They were all wearing homespun garments and homemade knee boots, and they were all exceptionally sturdy.

Well, these despicable deserters from the kolhoz front were now all arrested, and the charge pinned on them was . . . guess what? Links with the international bourgeoisie? Sabotage? No, Articles 58-10, on Anti-Soviet Agitation (?), and 58-11, on hostile organizations. (Many of them landed later on in the Dzhezkazgan group of Steplag, which is how I know about them.)

In 1946 some other Old Believers were stormed in a forgotten monastery somewhere in the backwoods by our valiant troops, dislodged (with the help of mortars, and the skills acquired in the Fatherland War) and floated on rafts down the Yenisei. Prisoners still, and still indomitable—the same under Stalin as they had been under Peter!—they jumped from the rafts into the waters of the Yenisei, where our Tommy-gunners finished them off.

Warriors of the Soviet Army! Tirelessly consolidate your combat training!

No, the doomed race did not all die out! In exile more children were born to them—and they, too, were attached by inheritance to the same special settlements. ("The son does not answer for the father"—remember?) If a girl from outside married a special settler, she passed into the serf class, and lost her rights as a citizen. If a man married one of those, he became an exile himself. If a daughter came to visit her father, they corrected their error in missing her before, and added her to the list of special settlers. These additions made good the deficit as settlers were transferred to the camps.

Special settlers were very conspicuous in Karaganda and round about. There were a lot of them there. They were attached *in perpetuity* to the mines of Karaganda, as their ancestors had been to the factories of the Urals and the Altai. The "mine owner" was free to work them as hard and pay them as little as he liked. We are told that they greatly envied prisoners in agricultural Camp Divisions.

Until the fifties, and in some places until the death of Stalin, special settlers had no passports. Only with the war did the Igarka



exiles begin receiving the polar wage rate.

But now that they have survived twenty years of plague and exile, now that they are free at last from police supervision, now that they hold their proud Soviet passports—who and what are they, in their hearts and in their behavior? Why, what else but Soviet citizens, guaranteed in good reputation! Exactly the same as those reared simultaneously by the workers' settlements, trade union meetings, and service in the Soviet Army! They, too, can muster the courage to slam down their dominos almost boldly. They, too, nod agreement to every shadowy presence on the television screen. When required, they, too, will angrily stigmatize the Republic of South Africa, or collect their kopecks for the benefit of Cuba.

So let us lower our eyes in awe before the Great Butcher, bend our heads and bow our shoulders in the face of the intellectual puzzle he sets us: was he right after all, that reader of men's hearts, to stir up that frightening mixture of blood and mud, and to go on churning year in and year out?

He was right, morally. No one bears him a grudge! In his day, so ordinary folk say, it was "better than under Khrushchev". Why, on April Fool's Day, year in and year out, cigarettes went down a kopeck and fancy goods ten. Eulogies and hymns rang in his ears till the day of his death, and even today we are not allowed to denounce him. Not only will any censor stay your pen, but anyone standing in a shop or sitting in a train will hasten to check the blasphemy on your lips.

We honor Great Evildoers. We venerate Great Murderers.

And he was even more right politically. This bloody mix was the cement for obedient kolchozes. No matter that within a quarter of a century the village would be a desert and the people spiritually extinct. No matter; our rockets would be flying into space, and the enlightened West fawning on us, cringing before our achievements and our might.

## Chapter 3

### *The Ranks of Exile Thicken*

Only the peasants were deported so ferociously, no such desolate places, with such frankly murderous intent: no one had been exiled in this way before, and no one would be in the future. Yet in another sense and in its own steady way, the world of exiles grew denser and darker from year to year: more were banished, they were settled more thickly, the rules became more severe.

We could offer the following rough time scheme. In the twenties, exile was a sort of preparatory stage, a way station before imprisonment in a camp. For very few did it all end with exile; nearly all were later raked into the camps.

From the mid-thirties and especially from Beria's time, perhaps because the world of exile became so populous (think how many Leningrad alone contributed), it acquired a completely independent significance as a totally satisfactory form of restriction and isolation. In the war and postwar years, the exile system steadily grew in capacity and importance together with the camps. It required no expenditure on the construction of huts and boundary fences, on guards and warders, and there was room in its capacities embrace for big batches, especially those including women and children. (At all major transit prisons cells were kept permanently available for women and children, and they were never empty.)<sup>1</sup> Exile made possible a speedy, reliable, and irreversible cleansing of any important region in the "mainland." The exile

1. Husbands who were also being deported did not travel with their wives: there was a standing order that members of condemned families should be sent to different places. Thus, when the Kishinev lawyer I. K. Gornik was exiled as a Zionist to the Krasnoyarsk region, his family were sent to Salekhard.



Exile in our day has left behind none of those rather jolly group photographs—you know the sort: third from the left Ulyanov, second on the right Krzhizhanovsky. All well fed, all neatly dressed, knowing neither toil nor want, every last beard tidily trimmed, every single cap of good fur.

Those, my children, were very dark times. . . .

## Chapter 4

### *Nations in Exile*

Historians may correct us, but no instance from the nineteenth century, or the eighteenth, or the seventeenth, of forcible resettlement of whole peoples has lodged in the average man's memory. There were colonial conquests—on the South Sea Islands, in Africa, in Asia, in the Caucasus, the conquerors obtained power over the indigenous population—but somehow it did not enter the immature minds of the colonizers to sever the natives from the land which had been theirs of old, from their ancestral homes. Only the export of Negroes to the American plantations gives us perhaps some semblance, some anticipation of it, but there was no developed state system at work here: only individual Christian slave traders, in whose breasts the sudden revelation of huge gains lit a roaring fire of greed, so that they rushed to hunt down, to inveigle, to buy Negroes, singly or by the dozen, each on his own account.

Only when the twentieth century—on which all civilized mankind had put its hopes—arrived, only when the National Question had reached the summit of its development thanks to the One and Only True Doctrine, could the supreme authority on that Question patent the wholesale extirpation of peoples by banishment within forty-eight hours, within twenty-four hours, or even within an hour and a half.

Even to *Him*, of course, the answer did not become clear quite so suddenly. He once even committed himself to the incautious view that "there never has been and never can be an instance of anyone in the U.S.S.R. becoming an object of persecution because

of his national origin."<sup>1</sup> In the twenties all those minority languages were encouraged; it was endlessly dinned into the Crimea that it was Tatar, Tatar, and nothing but Tatar; it even had the Arabic alphabet, and all the signs were in Tatar.

Then it turned out that this was . . . all a mistake.

Even when he had finished compressing the exiled peasant mass, the Great Helmsman did not immediately realize how conveniently this method could be applied to nations. His sovereign brother Hitler's experiment in the extirpation of Jews and Gypsies came late, when the Second World War had already begun, but Father Stalin had given thought to the problem earlier.

After the peasant Plague, and until the banishment of peoples, the land of exile could not begin to compare with the camps, although it handled hundreds of thousands, it was not so glorious and populous that the highroad of history lay through it. There were *exile settlers* (sentenced by the courts) and there were *administrative exiles* (untried), but both these groups consisted of persons individually registered, each with his own name, year of birth, articles of indictment, photographs full face and in profile, and only the Organs with their miraculous patience and their readiness for anything could weave a rope from these particles of sand, build a monolithic colony in each of their districts from the wreckage of so many families.

The business of banishment was immeasurably improved and speeded up when they drove the first *special settlers* into exile. The two earlier terms (exile settler and administrative exile) were from the Tsar's times, but *spetspereselenets* (special settler) was Soviet, our very own. *Spets*—so many of our favorite, our most precious words begin with this little prefix (special section, special assignment, special communications system, special rations, special sanatorium). In the year of the Great Break they designated the dekulakized as "special settlers"—and this made for much greater flexibility and efficiency; it left no grounds for appeal since it was not only kulaks who were dekulakized. Call them "special settlers," and no one can wriggle free.

Then the Great Father gave orders that this word be applied to banished nations.

Even *He* was slow to realize the value of his discovery. His first experiment was very cautious. In 1937 some tens of thousands of

1. Stalin, *Sochineniya* (Works), Moscow, 1951, Vol. 13, p. 238.

those suspicious Koreans—with Khalkhin-Gol in mind, face to face with Japanese imperialism, who could trust those slant-eyed heathens?—from palsied old men to puling infants, with some portion of their beggarly belongings, were swiftly and quietly transferred from the Far East to Kazakhstan. So swiftly that they spent the first winter in mud-brick houses without windows (where would all that glass have come from!) And so quietly that nobody except the neighboring Kazakhs learned of this resentment, no one who counted let slip a word about it, no foreign correspondent uttered a squeak. (Now you see why the whole press must be in the hands of the proletariat.)

He liked it. He remembered it. And in 1940 the same method was applied on the outskirts of Leningrad, cradle of the Revolution. But this time the banished were not taken at night and at bayonet point. Instead, it was called a "triumphal send-off" to the (newly conquered) Karelo-Finnish Republic. At high noon, with red flags flapping and brass bands braying, the Leningrad Finns and Estonians were dispatched to settle their new native soil. When they had been taken a bit farther from civilization (V.A.M. tells us what befell a party of some six hundred people), they were all relieved of their passports, put under guard, and carried forward, first in red prison boxcars, then by barge. At the harbor of their destination deep in Karelia, they were broken up into small groups and sent to "reinforce the collective farms." And these completely free citizens, fresh from their triumphal send-off . . . submitted. Only twenty-six rebels, our narrator among them, refused to go, and what is more, would not surrender their passports! A representative of Soviet power—in this case, the Council of People's Commissars of the Karelo-Finnish Republic—had also arrived and he warned them: "There will be casualties." "Will you turn machine guns on us?" they shouted back. Silly fellows—why machine guns? There they were, surrounded by guards, all in a bunch, a single barrel would have been enough for them (and nobody would have written poems about those twenty-six Finns). \* But a strange spinelessness, sluggishness, or reluctance to take responsibility prevented the carrying out of this sensible measure. In an attempt to separate them, they were told to report to the security officer singly—but all twenty-six answered the summons together. And their senseless obstinacy and courage prevailed! They were allowed to keep their passports and the cordons were removed. In this way they resisted falling to the level