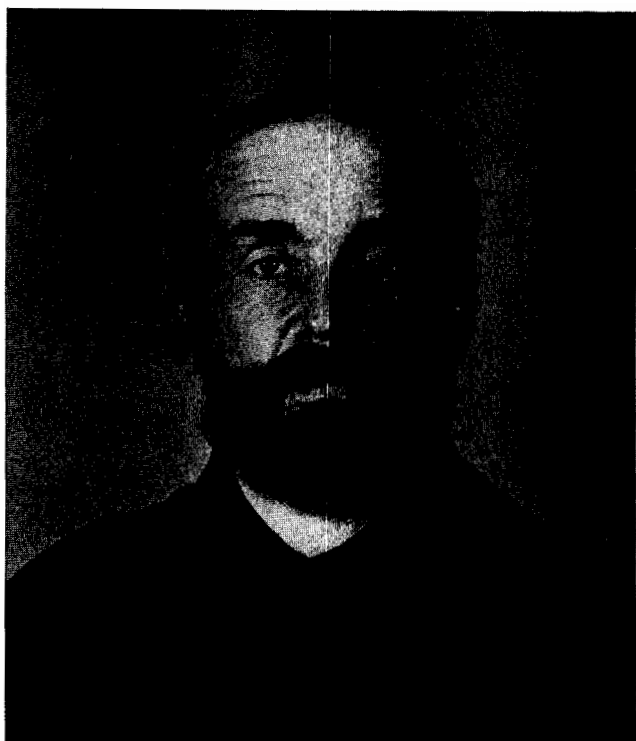


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I SPEAK FOR THE SILENT

*Prisoners of the Soviets*

*Report*



VLADIMIR V. TCHERNAVIN

*“My sentence—  
five years of  
forced labor”*

From a photograph of the author taken in Finland immediately after his escape from the U. S. S. R.

VLADIMIR V. TCHERNAVIN

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I SPEAK  
FOR THE SILENT  
PRISONERS OF THE SOVIETS

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY  
NICHOLAS M. OUSHAKOFF

ILLUSTRATED



BOSTON H C F NEW YORK

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## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

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**T**HE *story of Professor Tchernavin's escape into Finland with his wife and son who had been visiting him in the Soviet prison camp, where he was serving a sentence, has been dramatically told in Madame Tchernavin's book, "Escape from the Soviets."* When her book was published the reproduction of photographs of either Professor Tchernavin or his wife was considered unwise, as it might enable the GPU agents in Finland to trace them. We are fortunate to have obtained the author's permission now to reproduce photographs of himself, of his wife and of their son Andrey.

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PART ONE

*WE ARE WORKERS AT MURMANSK*

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## TO THE READER

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**I** TELL my own story because I believe that only in this way can I discharge the moral obligation which a kindly Fate imposed upon me in helping me to escape from the Soviet Terror—the duty to speak for those whose voices cannot be heard.

In silence they are sent away as convicts to the concentration camps; in silence they suffer torture and go to meet their death from Soviet bullets.

Nothing is invented in this book and I stand back of every statement I have made. In a few instances—to protect others—I have been compelled to conceal the identity of certain people, but I have indicated that fact in each specific case. All those whom I describe are real persons and everything is true to the minutest detail.

This is a narrative of what befell a Russian scientist under the Soviet régime. More than that, it is the story of many, if not most, people of education in the U.S.S.R. today.

As you read, please remember that I speak of myself only because it enables me to tell the story of others. Remember, also, that, in the Soviet Union, innocent people are still being tried for “wrecking” and that intelligent men are still being forced by torture to “confess” to crimes which they never committed.

Remember, too, that thousands of Russian men and women of education are still languishing in the filthy cells of the GPU prisons and in the cold barracks of the concentration camps, poorly clad and starving, breaking with exhaustion under the hardships of inhuman slavery.

VLADIMIR V. TCHERNAVIN

December, 1934

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## CHAPTER I

### “OPEN! THIS IS THE GPU”

I COULD not sleep. It was a night at the end of March in Murmansk, far up beyond the Arctic Circle. The wind howled outside my lodgings—one room and a tiny kitchen—and a frozen rope, put up to hang the wash on, banged against the wooden wall of the house. The Northern Lights played in the sky and, as if in answer, the electric wires sounded, now with only a quiet hum, now with the roar of a steamboat siren. My wife and little son were at our home in Leningrad and as usual I had been spending the evening alone in my room. It was not a gay apartment; two tables, three chairs, a bookshelf and a sofa comprised all of its furnishings.

On the sofa which was my bed I had been trying to sleep. Suddenly I heard a noise in the house, and loud footsteps. Something must have happened at the wharf, I thought, and the sailors have come to get the assistant manager of the trawler fleet. The poor man never had any peace, day or night. I listened. Yes, the knocking was at his door.

It ceased. Two hours passed. Then came a loud knocking at my own door. I hated to get up—it must be a mistake, I thought. Perhaps some drunken sailor has come to the wrong door. The knocking continued. I got up from my sofa, and without putting anything on over my night-clothes went to the door.

“Who’s there?” I asked.

“Open!” a voice commanded.

---

"Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Open!"

"What is this nonsense? Trying to get into a strange apartment at two o'clock in the morning! Who are you and what do you want?"

"Open at once! This is the GPU."<sup>1</sup>

"Oh! Well, — please come in. If you had said so at first, I wouldn't have kept you waiting."

Three men came in, two in the military uniform of the GPU and carrying revolvers, the third a Red guard with a rifle. I stood before them in my night shirt and bed slippers.

"Have you firearms?" they asked.

"No."

I could not help smiling — how could I hide firearms under a night shirt!

I let them search me, then dressed and sat down on a chair in the middle of the room. The Red guard stood leaning against the door, while the GPU men began to go through my things. I watched them. What could they be looking for? They turned over everything on my table, which was littered with manuscripts and notes which they could not have understood. They put these back, however, with some care; it seemed that my papers did not interest them. Then they searched through my wearing apparel

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<sup>1</sup> GPU are the initials of the Russian words meaning State Political Administration, a Soviet organization of secret political police which succeeded the Cheka. Although similar in some respects to the secret service of other European nations, the GPU has functions of a far wider scope both as to authority and administration of power in the U.S.S.R. GPU (or Gay-Pay-Oo) is an abbreviated form of the official title, OGPU, or Central State Political Administration, and although commonly used in referring to the OGPU, it is the correct title of the branches of this organization in the provinces, which branches often act as quite independent units. OGPU refers to the headquarters of this organization in Moscow and is used in all formal orders and announcements coming from there and in speeches when a note of authority is desired. — TRANSLATOR.

and raked all the ashes out of the stove. I wondered what they expected to find hidden in a stove that was still warm.

They ransacked my bed; they looked into every book. On my shelf were several little bags of grits and sugar from the coöperative store. These they carefully emptied and looked through the contents.

What *were* they looking for? They had now been at it for hours, searching one small room with scarcely anything in it, and they had not even read my papers. It was beginning to get tiresome and I stopped watching them. I was thinking that if they arrested me now and began dragging me from prison to prison, I should not be able to let my wife know what had happened to me and she would be distressed and anxious. At last one of the men turned to me and asked if I had an axe.

“ What for? ”

“ We must tear up the floor,” he said in a businesslike manner.

This puzzled me. It seemed strange to enter the house of a scientist in the middle of the night, search for something in little bags of sugar, rake hot ashes out of his stove and as a climax wreck the floor of a building which belonged to the government.

“ I can find an axe,” said I, and brought it from the kitchen myself.

But now, to my surprise, their energy seemed to leave them. After consulting for a few minutes, they decided to let the floor alone. This was the end of the show. They wrote out a statement to the effect that nothing incriminating had been found during the search and then departed. They had not arrested me after all. I was completely at a loss as to the meaning of the whole procedure.

It was now six o'clock in the morning. What ought I to do? Now that they had gone I became nervous and angry.

" Idiots! " I cried aloud. Whatever did they want? What a stupid comedy!

I was not sleepy now, but I was shivering from a sleepless night. I felt that I needed a drink. I looked on the shelf, but there was no vodka, so I lit my camp stove to make some tea. As I was doing this my next-door neighbor knocked lightly.

" You are not sleeping? May I come in? "

" Yes, indeed! Come in! Glad to see you. I was just making some tea. I'm almost frozen and have no vodka. "

" Let me bring you some. I'd like a drink, too. I haven't slept all night. "

He came back with a pint bottle. " I'm sorry, but there isn't much in it for two, " he said.

" It will do. You will have to excuse me, I've nothing to go with it. "

" We need nothing — we shall drink it in the Murmansk way with ' salt tongue ' for an appetizer. "

In Murmansk provisions were very scarce and hard to get, and when they had nothing else, the inhabitants would put a pinch of salt on their tongues after drinking and jokingly say they were eating salt tongue with their vodka.

After we had finished our vodka and hot tea we grew warm and calmer.

" I had visitors to-night, " said my neighbor looking at me significantly.

" I had some, too, " I replied. " They stayed about four hours and have just gone. You see the disorder. "

" They visited everybody in the house except Daniloff; they must have left him alone because he is a Communist. You know my room — there is nothing in it except a bed and a stool, so they tore up the floor. They took my silver watch that I bought in 1910 in Norway. They took Vasily Ivanovitch's old sweater and a pair of stockings from his wife, saying these things were contraband. He was too

frightened to protest, but his wife tried to argue, saying that the things were not contraband — that she had bought the stockings a year ago at an auction in the custom house and that the sweater had been given her husband three years ago by the Trust. Still, they took the things. I was given a receipt for my watch. What do you think — will I get into trouble over it? Everyone here knows I had it before the War.”

This story made me feel better; perhaps after all they were only looking for contraband. Of course it was stupid and provoking, but we were living near a port where foreign ships came in, bringing coal and salt, so that smuggling was possible. And the raid was so strange; they did not take a single paper and had only glanced at the manuscripts on my desk. Oh, this everlasting Soviet suspicion!

Alas! Within a few hours I knew that my optimism was groundless. Scherbakoff, who had actually created the enterprise which had come to be designated as the North State Fishing Trust, and Krotoff, a member of its board of directors and manager of the fleet of trawlers — both of them my close associates here at Murmansk — had been arrested during the night. The houses of all the non-Communist employees of the Trust, regardless of the length of their service, had been searched and in most cases the GPU men had been very rough; in two places they had torn up the floor.

It was clear that the Murmansk GPU was staging a big “ case.” The thoroughness of the search and the tearing up of floors was meant to show that the GPU had strong evidence against those whose apartments had been searched. The large number of raids indicated that our whole organization was to be involved. The arrest of the heads of the Trust proved that the GPU was out for something big. In the U.S.S.R. everyone knows that he may be put in prison even though he is not guilty; therefore, we all lived

with the same thought in mind — when would our own turn come? This attitude very naturally tended to lessen the efficiency of our work. We had a faint hope, or rather deluded ourselves into hoping, that these raids and arrests were being carried out by the Murmansk GPU on its own initiative and that, when the case came to the attention of Moscow, it would be ordered dropped so that it would not cause a disruption in the work of the fishing industry.

In the meantime, however, the GPU was very busy. All the employees of our Trust — the North State Fishing Trust, of which I was Director of Research — were questioned in turn and, in spite of the signed pledge of secrecy that was required of them and the threat that any disclosure of the subject of the inquiries would lead to one's commitment to the convict concentration camp at Solovki, the news spread quickly.

Within only a few days everybody knew that the GPU was looking for proof of "wrecking" activity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Wrecking" is an official Soviet expression used to describe any activity undertaken for political reasons with intent to damage the industry.  
— TRANSLATOR.



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## CHAPTER II

### FISHERIES IN THE FAR NORTH

**A**ND now, before I go on to tell what happened after this strange midnight search and the arrest of my two friends, Scherbakoff and Krotoff, in Murmansk, let me explain as simply as I can how both I and those working with me came to be stationed in such a remote outpost of civilization, and how that very work to which we were giving our conscientious and untiring efforts ultimately, though for no fault of our own, was to bring only misery and distress to ourselves and to our families.

Technically and according to the many questionnaires which I had to fill in during my life in the U.S.S.R. I belong to the nobility. To the Soviet Government this means that I am a class enemy, but, as is often the case among the Russian nobility, neither my parents nor I possessed any money or property which we had not acquired by our own honest efforts and work. I was fifteen years old when my father died. I had an elder sister and four younger brothers, the youngest a child of three. A life of hardship and uncertainty lay ahead of us.

As a boy I succeeded in joining the expedition of the well-known explorer of Altai and Mongolia, V. V. Sapojnikoff, in the capacity of collector-zoölogist. With him I first saw nature in the wild, often visiting places not yet shown on maps; one summer we travelled through roadless territory for more than 2,000 kilometers on horseback. This was the beginning of my work of exploration, which

I later carried on independently. For a while I acted as a zoölogist for such expeditions and then became the leader in a series of scientific expeditions to the Altai and Sayanskii Mountains, to Mongolia, to the Tian-Shan Mountains, the Amur, the Ussurisk region on the Siberian-Manchurian border and to Lapland.

I believed that regular study was unnecessary and that I could succeed without it. Already earning my living at an early age, I was engaged in various activities such as preparing scientific materials and drawing anatomic charts. The necessity of earning more money gave me the thought of studying ichthyology—the science of fish—a subject which I felt had a wide practical application. I, therefore, undertook to get a knowledge of the sea and became proficient in the use of oars and sails. But I finally realized that the specialized work in which I wished to be engaged demanded a technical training and so I entered the university. The War interrupted my studies there and when I returned again to private life I was crippled. At first it seemed as though I should never regain my health, but within a year I was able to discard my crutches and, although still lame, go on a scientific expedition to the Amur.

Later I did receive a university diploma and was offered a steady position, but it was not long before the Revolution broke the normal course of my life and the institution where I worked was closed by the Bolsheviki. But I lost nothing in the Revolution, for like many others I had nothing to lose.

During the general disorganization which followed this upheaval in Russia, when hunger and cold had to be combatted not only for myself, but also for my wife and for the third and newest member of our family who required warmth and milk, I obtained several jobs, each of which in the “capitalistic” world would have been considered of

high standing and would have enabled my family to live in comfort. But in the U.S.S.R. the only job that was allowing me a reasonable income was a course I was giving at the Agricultural Institute. This particular work I had sought out because it entitled me to a bottle of milk a day and sometimes a few beets and a little oats and mash which the professors of the Institute were allowed to have from the rations of the cattle which belonged to it.

In spite of the hunger and cold, I succeeded during that winter in finishing my thesis and receiving a degree. And my scholastic work having thus been terminated, I agreed to take part in an expedition to Lapland, an expedition organized by the "wealthy" Supreme Council of People's Economy. Before starting I tried to get one *poud* (36 lbs.) of salt instead of the million paper roubles which were due me for the three months that the expedition was to last. This salt would have served my family as a means of exchange in the villages for potatoes and milk. My request was rejected and I was told that salt in such a "large quantity" was not available, but I nevertheless went on the expedition because it interested me.

The journey to our destination, a distance of 1,100 kilometers, was made in freezing weather in an unheated box car packed full of people and baggage and took fourteen days. Death among passengers in such cars was a usual occurrence. The conditions of our expedition were most difficult, but we still went on with our work with as much zeal and energy as we had given before the Revolution when we were never subjected to such trying situations. There was every reason why the Bolsheviki should have become convinced that the Russian intellectuals were working conscientiously and honestly. New discoveries of great importance and about which the Bolsheviki boast continually were made by Russian scientists under the most difficult conditions, but during the actual work of research not

one of the Communist "party" men ever helped; they came forward only when and where it promised to be of advantage to their career.

When in 1921 Lenin declared a respite — the NEP (New Economic Policy) — life changed with fantastic rapidity. The country began to prosper. Food and clothing became more available. One could then buy wood for fuel as well as for repairing. Electric light service was resumed as well as street car and taxi services. Life was returning to the "bourgeois" aspect under the leadership of the Bolsheviks themselves. They came out with a new motto: "A Communist must be an industrialist and a trader."

What did the intellectuals and scientists gain in this change? Their general living conditions improved, but as compared to the advance in the standard of living of other classes of the population they were left far behind. The campaign of economy affected first and hardest all scientific and educational institutions. The funds appropriated for them were so miserly that any typist in a commercial and industrial enterprise was receiving more pay than professors and scientific experts. At the same time, due to continually advancing prices for rent, street-car and railway transportation and postage, as well as for everyday necessities, life for scientists not connected with any industrial organization was becoming exceedingly hard.

In spite of these material hardships Russian scientists continued to work as before. At this time, however, the Bolsheviks, having gained strength through the NEP, began an active persecution of any theoretical work which, according to their judgment, did not agree with the Marxist theories. I realized that my own scientific and theoretical work was at an end. I felt that I was up against an impassable wall. Life was hard. The career I had chosen for myself from the time of my youth, that career which I had stubbornly and persistently followed, could not go on. I

must give up purely scientific work — for a time at least — and turn to something more practical.

Early in 1925, at the time when the NEP was particularly flourishing, I was offered the post of Director of Production and Research Work of the North State Fishing Trust, the State-owned industry which had been set up to deal with the fishing business of the region on the Arctic Ocean. I accepted this offer in the hope that it would give me an opportunity to return to research work. And after a time, indeed, I *was* able to leave the production side and to organize in Murmansk a scientific biological and technological laboratory.

The North State Fishing Trust's work was carried on in that part of the Arctic Ocean which is called the Sea of Barents, the shores of which are for the most part Russian territory: the Murman coast of the Kola Peninsula, the Kanin Peninsula and the Lapland coast of the continent. Russian fisheries had existed here since the sixteenth century, but the conditions of life were so hard that only about five hundred families had settled on the Murman coast as colonists, with other fishermen going there only for the summer fishing season.

The Murman coast is exceptionally austere, its granite cliffs descending in steep steps and abrupt declines straight into the ocean. There is scarcely any vegetation; only those slopes sheltered from the wind are sparsely covered with grass and a few low-growing polar willows and birches. Elsewhere the only growth is moss and rock creepers. Patches of snow remain on the beach throughout the summer. The ocean, however, never freezes and at temperatures of fifty degrees or more below zero the black water and floating ice are covered by a dense white fog. In winter the sun does not rise above the horizon. The settlements of the "colonists" are hidden from the winds in deep inlets or built like birds' nests in the cliffs above the level of

the tide which sometimes rises to a height of five meters. Some of these dwellings can be reached only by wooden ladders, one end resting on floating boats, the other reaching to the doorstep of the rain and wind-battered huts.

The colonists earned their living by fishing and they, as well as the men who came only for the summer fishing season, used the primitive methods of their ancestors three or four centuries ago—the same deckless, clumsy open rowboats, trawl-lines (long lines with several thousand hooks baited with small fish to attract the cod), or the hand-line with its sinker, hook and metal bait-fish. Obviously with such equipment, fishing could take place only near shore and depended entirely on the weather and the approach of fish from the deeper waters.

Attempts to change to more modern methods and to go farther out into the open ocean had been made in pre-war times but they were unsuccessful because of insufficient capital. In the Barents Sea before the War only four Russian trawlers were at work.

After the Revolution and before the Reds came to Archangel, a fishing company had been formed by the industrialist Bezzubikoff with the participation of the *Centrosouse* (Central Union). Twelve trawlers were procured from the government and remodeled for fishing purposes, but this company's activity was scarcely begun when it was stopped by the arrival of the Reds. These trawlers and their shore base near Archangel then became the foundation of the Soviet State fishery organization in the North.

In spite of the fact that they began working with a concern that was already organized, there were great difficulties during the first years of this State enterprise. The Murmansk and Archangel Soviets were in a state of nearly open warfare against each other, a situation which meant a great deal because of the then prevalent "power of local government." As the trawlers' base was in Archangel (a

port that is frozen seven months of the year), the entire concern was looked upon as belonging to Archangel and the Murmansk authorities would not allow the trawlers to enter their ports which were open the year around. Therefore the trawlers could work only five months in the year. No orders, threats or arguments from the "Centre" were of any avail. It was not until 1924 that the warring factions were brought together by the organization of a new concern, the North State Fishing Trust, of "All-Union importance," with both the Archangel and Murmansk Soviets as "shareholders" and with the trawling base transferred to the ice-free port of Murmansk.

Murmansk, the chief town of the province, had been founded in 1916 to serve as the terminus of the new, hastily erected railroad, built to bring to St. Petersburg military supplies furnished by the Allies. The town is on the Kola bay, sixty kilometers from the ocean, at a point where the bay narrows down to one and a half kilometers and rather resembles a wide river than an oceanic bay. Only the tide, which rises more than four meters, and the smell of salt water show that this is a part of the Arctic Ocean. High, rocky shores here bank in the bay and the town is built on a small and steep plateau. During the World War there was some construction here — landing places, repair shops, a temporary electric power station, a primitive system for bringing water down from a mountain lake above the town, and only the most indispensable buildings, built like barracks. There were no real houses in the town, only some so-called "trunks," dwellings made out of sheets of corrugated iron bent to form a half-cylinder, the base of which was boarded in. There were no streets or sidewalks, no horses or automobiles; in winter the Laplanders drove in on reindeer. Twice a week the mail came in by train. Winter lasted not less than eight months, more than two months of which were complete night.

The authorities of the town — members of the GPU, the executive committee and other indispensable Soviet organizations — were Communists, banished to this desolate spot as punishment for theft or drunkenness. And all their energies were spent in trying to be recalled.

Those of us who went to Murmansk in 1925, to take our several special parts in the organizing and carrying on of this new State industry, did so of our own volitions, for at that time there was no compulsory assignment of experts to such work, and we could all have found employment elsewhere. But the newness and the scope — the very challenge — of the enterprise, which was planned on an unprecedented scale, beckoned to us. This was to be the first great Russian trawling development. We, like the English and the Germans, would now go out into the open ocean. We would be laying the foundations of a tremendous industry.

From the very beginning of our work, the business began to develop with remarkable success. The experts of the North State Fishing Trust, by systematizing the data they were receiving, learned to know the Sea of Barents and its fish life as did none of the other scientific organizations working in that region.

We did not expect any praise or even recognition of our work — in Sovietland this is not the custom — but we could not fail to love it, in spite of the terrible conditions under which we had to live. To the yearly catch of the local fishermen, which remained at its former figure of about 9,000 tons, we added a rapidly increasing catch which in 1929 reached 40,000 tons. This result was attained not only by the addition of several new trawlers, but chiefly by basic improvements in the work — year-round fishing, the speeding up of each trawler's turnover and the improvement of fishing technique.

The methods of curing fish were also radically changed.



Instead of stinking cod unfit to bring into the house, we produced white and clean fish, not inferior to that of Astrakhan. And for the first time, the Trust succeeded in delivering fresh sea fish to the Leningrad and Moscow markets and was at last even successful in exporting fish to the English market. Our success had not been equalled by any other fishing trust of the U.S.S.R.

The whole enterprise was reorganized and with it the town of Murmansk itself. A large and excellently equipped harbor was built; a huge reinforced concrete warehouse of 5,000 tons capacity with concrete tanks for salting fish; a three-story reinforced concrete refining factory for the manufacture of cod-liver oil; a by-product factory for the production of fodder flour out of fish waste — all this in the course of four years. A refrigerating plant and a barrel factory were under way; a branch railroad was extended to the harbor; a water system installed for the use of the plant, a repair shop for ships and a temporary electric power station, since the city station was unable to give us as much electricity as we needed. Electric cranes were installed for unloading trawlers.

Murmansk began to grow upon the solid foundation of a developing industry. Houses put up by the North State Fishing Trust were located with a certain order and so formed the first real streets in the town. Its population was increasing. From a town of barely fifty families it grew about as follows: in 1926 it had 4,000 inhabitants; in 1927 — 7,000; in 1928 — 12,000; and in 1929 — 15,000.

The greatest difficulties encountered were in the building of or otherwise obtaining new ships. The limit of our dreams was to have seventeen new trawlers, as seventeen of our old ones, taken over from the navy and rebuilt, were going out of commission on account of their age. However, Russian factories were not building them. To order them abroad foreign exchange was necessary and to obtain the

authorization for such expenditure was extremely difficult. Orders must be placed through the Commissariat of Trade, which did not enjoy a reputation for honesty, and a Communist who knew nothing about the trade had to be sent abroad for the drawing up of contracts with the various firms. That a Communist, finding himself in "rotten, demoralized" Europe, begins himself to get pleasantly demoralized is a well-known fact, and our Communist was no exception to this rule. However, our North State Fishing Trust succeeded during these five years in purchasing one trawler abroad and building four, so that together with the old ones we finally had a total of twenty-two units.

During these years the fishing industry throughout the U.S.S.R., like all the other Soviet industries, was required to plan production, and considering the hazards of our work, one can well understand that many difficulties might be encountered. To be able to foretell a year or more in advance just how much fish would be caught in a certain region, how much equipment would be necessary, as well as predetermining both the cost and the selling price of the finished product presented no small problem. The quota requirements were increased from year to year, but, in spite of the severity of the conditions under which our trawlers had to work and the difficult conditions of life in the Murmansk region, the North State Fishing Trust succeeded in fulfilling each year these plans. During these years of its development up to 1929 it was making a real profit, so exceptional an occurrence in the Soviet fishing industry that our Trust received the nickname of "White Crow."

Our success was due to a number of causes. One was the fact that the enterprise was a new one, well organized, applying new methods and striving all the time to improve its work. And no little credit was due to the small but highly efficient staff of non-party experts and the excep-

tionally fine contingent of sea captains — natural seamen, accustomed from childhood to the rugged conditions of Arctic navigation. With a few exceptions all of these men had worked for the State fishing industry in the North from its very foundation in 1920. Such a stable staff of employees was a rare exception in a Soviet enterprise, where the usual rate of turnover of employees was at least once a year. It was necessary to be a strong man to withstand the hardships of work under Arctic conditions and this work could retain only those who were truly loyal to it. In addition to these reasons, the change to year-round fishing, the finding of new fish banks, improvements in the loading and unloading of trawlers, — all gave us increasing production for several years in succession, so that we were able to keep pace with the ever-increasing planned requirements.

We clearly realized that such a happy state of things could not last forever and that a year would come when, because of senseless orders from above, we would not be able to make such increase in the catch as would be necessary to fulfill that year's plan.

Up to 1929 we had been left to work in peace, relatively speaking — as much so as is possible in the U.S.S.R. None of our experts had been either thrown into prison or executed by the Soviet Government. Then our Trust attracted the attention of the Government and this was the beginning of the failure and ruin of the whole business.

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## CHAPTER III

### FIVE-YEAR PLANS FOR FISH

**F**OR a better understanding of the Soviet regimentation of industry in Russia and the resulting effect upon the North State Fishing Trust and all those connected with it, let me here explain the general procedure of Soviet planning. As I have already said, in the earlier years plans had been called for on a yearly basis, setting a goal that in some branches of industry could not be reached. Due to the extreme instability of the economic and political programs of the government — it was rare for a year to pass without radical changes being made in the preparations which had been planned — there was disaster in many of the industries, with considerable losses.

How can one speak seriously of a planned economy in a state where everything is governed by the day, where those in power fling themselves from one extreme to the other, where all the factors controlling industry are unceasingly undergoing the most drastic changes and where the slogan of the moment is of more importance than any plan?

It was under such conditions that in 1924 some organizations had received orders to draw up, in addition to their usual yearly plan, a five year plan of their work. The following year all industries were ordered to draw up a five year plan for the period 1925-1930. Some industries were required to make plans for ten and even fifty years ahead. During the period from October 1, 1925 to October 1, 1928 a five year plan had been drawn up anew every year,

for, owing to drastic changes in political and economic conditions, the plan as originally drawn up could not be continued into the next year. So it was, that in addition to the first or trial five year plan of 1924 four new five year plans were drawn up during a period of four years. The last of these, that of 1928-1933, became world famous as *the* Five Year Plan — the *Piatiletka*. Rigid and detailed instructions were given to all industries for drawing up their new five year plan and mention of any previous plan was held to be counter-revolutionary. Jokes concerning how many years the first year of the *Piatiletka* was going to last became popular. According to directions received from above the work was to be undertaken in a “new way.” The “indices of production” called for unexampled growth of all industries. Enormous sums in *chervontzi* — the greatly devaluated Soviet currency — were appropriated as well as a restricted amount of foreign currency. From the speeches of leaders and from the press it was clear that the Five Year Plan would turn into a political slogan rather than an industrial plan, a slogan which would serve to mark and at the same time mask a turn to the left and a return to the pre-NEP Communistic experiment.

For us who had to deal with the practical problems of production under this Five Year Plan, the plan consisted of a multitude of sheets of tabulations which, due to their large size, we called “bed sheets.” Figures compiled by expert statisticians for five years hence were supposed to represent future work and achievements in strict accordance with the instructions received. Material requirements had to be completed for every year of the five though preliminary projects could not be prepared before the plan was approved. It had been possible to prepare the yearly plans with some degree of accuracy because those in charge of the various enterprises had had experience. The Five Year Plan, however, demanded a development which no

producer could actually visualize, and to reach the "control figures" required estimating by pure imagination.

Each unit or department of an industry drew up its own five year plan with great care. These plans were then combined by the management of the industry and sent to the "Centre" in Moscow. There the plans were again combined into larger units until a whole industry in each Commissariat was combined, and lastly, these plans from all the Commissariats were sent to the State Planning Commission and incorporated into a final general plan. The results were multitudes of tabulations by which it was possible, for instance, to see where and how much roofing iron, shoes, caviar, horseshoe nails, tractors, wheat, pork, eggs, milk, butter, fish and so on would be produced and also how they would be used at any given moment of the Five Year Plan. These tables also showed how much any article produced in each year of the five would cost, the quantity and quality of man power necessary at a given moment in any branch of industry, the wages for every category of labor, the housing requirements, in fact, every conceivable detail. Such was the plan sternly decreed for the next five years. In the face of the ever increasing shortage of food and other necessities, the need of sacrifice for the first two or three years of the working of the plan was stressed, but future benefits were widely advertised and promises made that ultimately the plan would bring higher wages and an ample supply of food and clothing.

Soon the government press — there is no other in the U.S.S.R. — began spreading the news that some concerns had decided to accomplish their part of the Five Year Plan in four, three or even two years, praising this as the highest degree of enthusiasm on the part of the workers. And it appeared that within a comparatively short time some had already not only fulfilled their plan, but were exceeding it. If, however, the Five Year Plan had been a really workable

plan, any deviation, whether over-fulfillment or the opposite in any given industry, would necessarily cause general disruption. If, for instance, our Fishing Trust had caught twice as much fish as the plan called for, twice the salt would have immediately been needed, twice the packing material, transportation facilities and labor. If the shipbuilding trust had fulfilled its quota of trawlers in advance of the fixed time, harbor facilities would not have been available and the capacity of the fishing industry would not have been in a position to put them to use.

So it was that, instead of the working out of an orderly plan, chaos prevailed. There was a catastrophic shortage of building materials, and many State enterprises sent special agents and representatives to various towns of the U.S.S.R. where, by personal contact and enterprise, they strove to divert materials already assigned to other industries. Often substitutes of inferior quality had to be used. Many buildings remained without roofs or window glass. Some factories were without machines, and in the case of others machinery lay in barns because the factory buildings were not ready. There was a shortage of qualified labor and in many places inferior labor had to be employed.

Before long the Political Bureau of the government began to interfere directly in the work of the different branches of industry and even with separate units and, as will be seen in the case of the fishing industry, to raise their Plan quotas even in the middle of a year, so that by the end of the first year of the *Piatiletka* it was evident that nothing remained of the so-called Five Year Plan devised only the year before and both industry and government were working and building at random.

In our North State Fishing Trust before the introduction of the Five Year Plan we had, like other enterprises, been endeavoring to develop our business, to obtain larger appropriations, to increase our production and to speed up

the building of ships and new plants. In those days we were continually being held back by the "Centre" and had had to struggle hard for every facility granted us. Now it was exactly the reverse, for categorical instructions were being received from the "Centre" to "expand" at a rate which corresponded neither to the supply of materials to be had nor to the available labor.

Thus, for instance, in the early part of 1928, after two years of effort, we had at last obtained authorization to purchase ten trawlers abroad. This license, however, was revoked before our representative, who had already left for Germany, had had time to give the order, and we had begun to doubt whether our seventeen antiquated trawlers could be replaced before they were worn out or wrecked. Now, however, everything was suddenly changed, and in the latter part of the year, after the inauguration of the *Piatiletka*, we were ordered to consider, in planning our operations for the next five years, the construction of seventy new trawlers and an increase of catch to 175,000 tons per year. This meant developing an enormous enterprise. Our trawling base, built in 1926-27, could not handle at the most more than one third of this amount and our pier was barely large enough to service the number of trawlers we then had. Extensive construction work must be undertaken under extremely hard conditions and at any cost.

In the summer of 1929, when conditions, especially in Murmansk, had become so difficult that the question arose more than once whether any construction work whatever could be continued, when workmen were fleeing because of insufficient food rations, when in spite of all efforts production was lagging behind the plan by ten or fifteen per cent, the North State Fishing Trust received the following laconic telegraphic instructions from Moscow: *Change the Five Year Plan, basing the new figures on 150 new trawlers*



*and a catch per ship of 3,000 tons per year, instead of the previously estimated 2,500.* Three consecutive telegrams further increased the assignment, bringing the number of trawlers up to 500 and the yearly catch up to 1,500,000 tons! <sup>1</sup>

The order was unaccompanied by any directions or explanations, its form was categorical and without appeal.

If one takes into consideration that the whole of pre-war Russia, which in the fishing industry competed for first place in the world, had in all its fisheries taken together — Caspian, Azof and Black Seas, Siberia and the Far East — produced only 1,000,000 tons of fish a year, and that fisheries were numbered in the thousands and the labor employed by them in hundreds of thousands, it will become clear how unreal and impractical were the figures of the new Plan for a fishing trust which had been founded only a few years before and, furthermore, was situated beyond the Arctic Circle in a town of only 15,000 inhabitants.

What happened? The President of the Board of Directors at once decided that he must go to Moscow, leaving the difficult and unpleasant task of solving the problem to others. A brief description of this man will perhaps explain how a man holding such an important position could behave in such a cowardly manner. T. A. Mourasheff who was, of course, a Communist, had been clever enough to pick up a few superficial ideas of the fishing business; he could talk glibly enough of the affairs of the Trust and he produced on the uninitiated the impression that he was a man of business experience. Formerly a roofer, he had been deported to Kem in 1905 for participation in the activities of the Socialist Party. There he had married a

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<sup>1</sup> Shortly after this it was announced that, due to exceptional progress, the Five Year Plan was to be completed in four years, namely, by the first of January, 1932. In the course of three years we were, therefore, required to increase our normal yearly catch of 40,000 tons to 1,500,000 tons — that is to say, multiply it by nearly forty.

school teacher who seems to have supported him until the Bolshevik Revolution broke out. At that time he became a Communist, left Kem and his wife and went to Leningrad to make a career. There he immediately obtained the important position of superintendent of the water supply and sewer system, but made some slip and was sent to Murmansk to direct the fishing industry. When the North State Fishing Trust was formed he was made its president. He did not know and did not like the business, believing that for such a great man it could serve only as a stepping-stone to a more responsible position in the "Centre." As life in Murmansk was hard and dull, he spent most of his time in supposed business trips to Moscow and Petrograd, at health resorts taking reducing treatments, but chiefly abroad, where he spent months at a time.

Here is a little scene typical of this man. His new wife — I don't know whether it was his third or fourth — a stenographer of the Berlin "*Torgpred*" (Soviet Trade Organization), was coming direct from Germany on the newly built trawler, *Bolshevik*. All the Murmansk authorities and the workmen of the fisheries, with a band, assembled at the wharf to meet the new trawler. When the boat arrived, Mourasheff, as President of the Trust, ascended the captain's bridge and delivered a speech, boasting of the fact that the Bolsheviks had been able to force the Germans to write the name "Bolshevik" on the trawler built for the U.S.S.R. and of the awe-inspiring meaning of this word to Europe.

For the great occasion Mourasheff had changed the foreign-made suit and rich fur coat he usually wore for an old, worn overcoat, but the foreign typist standing on the deck gave him away completely by her greeting.

"Whom did we come to welcome," joked the workmen, "— the new trawler or the fourth wife?"

"It's only the third one, I tell you!"

“ No, it’s the fourth. As if we didn’t have enough women here already! ”

But such shortcomings were not his only defects. He was ready at any moment to denounce the best workers, of whose honesty he had no doubt, just as he would betray the interests of the business if this could benefit him in any way or save him from harm.

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## CHAPTER IV

### “ONE AND A HALF MILLION TONS”

**A**FTER the President of the Board of Directors, Mourasheff, went to Moscow his assistant, the Vice-President, a canny peasant, in order to shift the responsibility from his own shoulders, called an “enlarged conference” of the Board, summoning to it all the “non-party” experts and department managers. The Vice-President, like his immediate predecessor, was a peasant from the Archangel district who had joined the party after the Revolution, an illiterate drunkard who had served in the GPU and, being a representative of the Archangel Executive Committee, was ready to bring about the ruin of the fishing business in Murmansk. He and his Communist associates knew nothing about the fishing business nor did they even try to learn; they knew well that they could obtain anything they desired through the GPU and that the chief thing in business was to avoid responsibility. One of the vice-presidents during this period became quite proficient in that respect. He learned to write on reports “Refer to So-and-So for resolution.” A report can probably be found even now in the files of the North State Fishing Trust on which at the Leningrad office of the fisheries this vice-president made the notation “Refer to the Murmansk office,” and a few days later, having returned to Murmansk and finding that the report had not yet been taken care of, he wrote underneath his previous notation the words: “Refer to the Leningrad office” and sent it back.

The Vice-President opened the “enlarged conference” solemnly by reading a telegram which the president had sent after reaching Moscow. In the telegram he repeated the requirements and stated that they were definite: 500 trawlers and 1,500,000 tons of fish per year by January 1st, 1933 — and he called upon the entire staff to strain every effort and fulfill this plan.

Then came the Vice-President’s speech. The real reason for the terrifically large assignment now came to light. It was plain, from his talk, that this assignment had come directly from the Political Bureau itself, and not from the Moscow organizations in charge of the fishing industry. The affair had deep roots. Peasants driven by force into Collectives (Communal farms) had destroyed their cattle and other live stock so thoroughly that the country was left without meat, butter, milk or poultry, and there was no hope of obtaining these products for the next few years. It was first decided to raise pigs, which multiply quickly, but that project had not succeeded. Then it was remembered that in 1919 and 1920 fish had saved the urban population from starvation. Fish are plentiful in the sea, do not require to be raised, watched or fed, — they need only be caught. Fish, therefore, must help the population to live through the period of “disorganization and growth” and thereby help to establish the foundation of Socialism. Thus fishing had become no longer simply an economic problem; it was now a political problem. So it was that the total amount of fish which had to be caught was figured out by the “Centre” and then allocated to the various districts, the share of the North State Fishing Trust coming to 1,500,000 tons. Each trawler must catch 3,000 tons per year and, therefore, the number of trawlers must be increased to 500. The money necessary for this expansion was assigned, or rather was promised.

From his two hour speech it was impossible to under-

stand the Vice-President's own attitude towards the new demand. He announced the figures with exaltation: "One and a half million tons! Almost one hundred million *pouds*! That's no joke! These scientists here (nodding at me) say that England has been developing its fishing industry for many centuries, has many ports and harbors and 2,000 trawlers — and her catch is only half a million tons a year, but we, in three years, will catch in our Trust alone one and a half million tons! One trust — three times more than all of England! "

At this point he evidently remembered that we actually had nothing, that seventeen of our twenty-two trawlers were obsolete, that the new ones built in Germany were unreliable, and that we had no harbor to accommodate the large number of proposed ships. Energetically scratching his head and other parts of his body, he then continued: "Well, it is necessary, in a word, to make a great effort. . . . It is necessary, in a word, comrades, to try and . . . and . . . brace up, and in the meantime, in a word, it is necessary to talk it over because the problem is very serious, very serious. Well, who wishes to speak, to talk it over, in a word? "

For us "to talk it over" was no easy task. The Vice-President and the other party men understood as well as we did that the assignment was impossible to fulfill and that it would unavoidably result in the ruin of the enterprise — and probably of the whole Russian trawling business. But what did they care about the enterprise and the Russian fishing industry! Yesterday this very vice-president had been in the lumber industry, had ruined it and given his experts away to the GPU; now he was about to take part in the wrecking of the fishing industry and would doubtless give us away; and so he would pass on to some other business. A "party" ticket, together with submission to the "general line," guaranteed him full immunity from

responsibility. The “party” men knew perfectly well that we were the ones who would be held responsible. They were now waiting for us to speak, no doubt inwardly jeering, “What are you going to say now? Are you in a hole? Experts, scientists, how are you going to get out of it?”

They knew very well, that if one of us dared to express the thought each of us had in his mind — that the assignment could not be fulfilled — he would immediately be accused of sabotage, of “wrecking” the work of the North State Fishing Trust. Such views on our part would be called a “bold attack on the part of the class enemy” and then would come the GPU — prison — Solovki — or death. On the other hand, if we now remained silent, then in a year, or at the utmost in two, when the plan fell through, we would be blamed for not having objected to it, and the plan itself would be attributed to us as a “wrecking plan,” and then — the GPU — prison — Solovki — or death.

To keep silent would at least defer the day of reckoning, but in spite of this we all spoke up and, without using the dangerous words “impossible” and “unfulfillable,” conscientiously pointed out all the obstacles: that the Five Year Plan adopted in 1928, under which work had been already carried on for a year, together with the projects of new constructions actually under way would be cancelled by the new plan. All construction work would have to be stopped and a new plan and new projects in conformity with the new assignments would have to be drawn up. It would be fruitless to continue building a barrel factory and a refrigeration plant for a 175,000 ton catch when the assignment had now been changed to 1,500,000 tons. New construction plans, with all their preliminary drawings and specifications, would have to be drawn up. The new projects would necessarily be so complicated, varied and enormous that we would have to enlarge our offices to

take care of it all. Moreover, such a huge construction would necessitate an extensive prospecting of the shore zone of the gulf and the adjacent region, and the cost of this new work would amount to approximately a thousand million roubles.

Under the most favorable conditions it would be possible to begin working on the preliminary projects in January 1930. One year would be needed to complete them; it would, therefore, be not until January 1931 that they, together with the new plan, would be presented for approval. They then would have to pass, according to the established routine, through a number of administrative organizations: The Fishing Directorate, the Construction Directorate, the Scientific Technical Committee, and receive their final approval by the People's Commissariat. Many of the projects would have to pass through additional stages: the Refrigeration Committee, the Port Committee, Public Health Commissariat, War and Navy Commissariat, and many others. If everything went smoothly and no project was turned down, this routine procedure would take a half a year, so that the preliminary projects would be finally approved in July 1932 and only then work on final plans, working drawings and specifications could be started. They would be completed in 1933. But the Five Year Plan, as every one of us was only too well aware, had to be fulfilled by January 1, 1933. So by January 1, 1932 we were required to have in use 300 trawlers and increase our catch up to 1,000,000 tons per year, at which time even the preliminary projects would not yet be ready. How could such difficulties be overcome?

Attention was drawn to the fact that the Murmansk single-track railway, even as things were, found it difficult to handle the available freight, and the projected expansion would require the daily movement of two hundred cars of fish alone, not to mention the other freight. A sec-



ond track would have to be built, — no easy job — 1,500 kilometers over hills and through swamps.

And the labor problem! Murmansk had a population of only 12,000 to 15,000 and already living quarters were greatly over-crowded. With the projected expansion the number of workmen would have to be increased at least to 50,000 men who, with their families, would bring the total population up to 200,000 people. For such an increase it would be necessary to build not only houses, but also bath-houses, schools, stores, canalization, an electric power station, and so on, and this building development, in its turn, would lead to a further increase of the population. The building of a new town and a railroad could not be undertaken by a fishing enterprise, yet without this construction the fishing plan could not be fulfilled.

The training of ships' crews would also present considerable difficulties; 25,000 men would be needed for the servicing of the 500 trawlers, including 2,000 pilots and as many mechanics, and 300 skippers and 300 mechanics would be required yearly for filling vacancies. Furthermore, the skippers would have to be specially trained to know not only navigation, but also how to hunt for fish banks, how to catch the fish and how to handle it. Already, with only twenty-two ships we were having difficulties in keeping a full staff of captains and mechanics. Now, in the remaining three years of the Five Year Plan we would have to build up a whole fleet. How could it be done? A skipper's diploma, or that of a mechanic, required graduation from a high school, and a special four years' course at the marine school of technology. Only the Archangel Technology prepared skippers for navigation in northern seas and it graduated every year only twenty-five skippers and twenty-five mechanics. To have a sufficient supply of captains we would need eighty such technologies, with buildings, instructors, school supplies and so on, not to mention

the four thousand healthy young men with a high school education, who would be willing to give their lives to navigation on the rugged Arctic Ocean in small, dirty fishing vessels. Furthermore, we would have to have radio operators, specialists in trawling, salting, and many other secondary specialists and technicians.

All this, we pointed out, should be brought immediately to the attention of the Government, for we had no right to conceal the true situation. We knew very well that in spite of convincing arguments, in spite of all the evident absurdity of the Plan, nobody would listen to us, but we were doing our duty.

One of the representatives of the "workers-ownership" replied to us. He was just a boy, a real Communist and a "confirmed Marxist." He sat with his cap on, his face dull and cruel. What he said was well known to everyone and could serve for every occasion, chiefly quotations from editorials of provincial "*Pravdas*" published in every town from Vladivostok to Murmansk.<sup>1</sup>

"Comrades! Our party and government positively under the leadership of our leader, Comrade Stalin, are certainly making unheard-of strides in the development of our industry as such. They certainly are realizing the motto 'overtake and outstrip' the capitalistic countries struggling in the clutches of a world crisis which, due to the joined efforts of the proletariat, is becoming a real fact.

"It is necessary, comrades, to strain every effort and as correctly pointed out by Comrade President — in a word — to brace up. Unquestionably the assignment of the party and government must be fulfilled and exceeded, accomplishing the *Piatiletka* as such in a minimum of four years." (Words like minimum and maximum were always being wrongly used by such orators.)

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<sup>1</sup> *Pravda* is the Russian word for "truth." This newspaper is the official organ of the Communist Party. — TRANSLATOR.

“ Here we have listened to various references and various facts. Of what use are they? Bourgeois parasites insert themselves into the ranks of the proletariat by means of sallies of the class enemy; this is of no use either.

“ Comrades, we must unite into a steel wall and fight with all our proletarian determination and healthy self-criticism. We must strike a hard blow against those who deserve it. We must engage in a pitiless fight against Leftist deviations as well as against Rightist leanings which represent the chief danger in the given stage of development whatever side they come from. Certainly we all, as one man, will defend the plan and the ‘ general line ’ of workers’ enthusiasm as such. ‘ Shock work ’ and ‘ Socialistic competition ’ should, certainly, be carried out without forgetting for a minute leadership and workers’ initiative and inventiveness. We unquestionably must, comrades, not only fulfill . . . ”

“ Shut up, Kolka, stop agitating,” interrupted his neighbor, also of the same species of the “ self-conscious.” “ We have been sitting here for four hours and I have two more meetings to attend to-day. Keep closer to business, present the workers’ resolution.”

“ All right, comrades. As it is getting late, unquestionably, I offer concretely not only to fulfill but, of course, even to exceed by 120 per cent the government’s assignment; also to decisively disregard the objections raised by the opponents and to accomplish the *Piatiletka* as such in a minimum of two and a half years.” So saying, he sat down.

The workers’ resolution was not discussed. The Board, however, decided to send a report to the Moscow Fishing Directorate pointing out all the difficulties which lay in the way of fulfillment of the assignment and asking for instructions.

The meeting adjourned. The Vice-President, with a

worried expression on his face, went up to the "representative" who had spoken at the meeting; one could hear that he was scolding him.

"What's all this nonsense you were talking? We don't know what to do. This isn't the time to antagonize these experts — it's exactly the time we need them."

The representative gave the following as his defense: "In the true Bolshevik spirit of not dodging an issue, Comrade President, I must recognize my mistake, but all this is unquestionably the result of my having a headache. I was drunk yesterday."

And so the meeting ended.

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## CHAPTER V

### FORCED LABOR

WE came away from the meeting thoroughly discouraged, and we spoke freely to each other. "It is senseless to work any longer for the Trust." — "Yes, within a year their plan will fail and they'll begin to look around for the 'guilty'; try to prove your innocence then!" — "But they can't send us to any place worse than Murmansk."

Another cautioned us, "Never forget the Soviet saying: 'Whoever is not in prison — will be there; whoever was in prison — will return there.'" And, finally, still another added: "I handed in my resignation to the president after that first telegram about the 150 new trawlers, but he wrote 'refused' on it and added that he did not 'advise' my making such an 'attempt.'"

Nevertheless, when later I made a trip to Moscow, I asked to be transferred to some other place or to be discharged. The Chief Director of the Fisheries, a Communist, answered literally as follows: "We consider your work at the North State Fishing Trust so valuable that we cannot allow you to leave and, if necessary, *we will find, with the help of the GPU, a way to make you work.*"

Possibly it may seem, to persons tainted with a "rotten liberalism," that since we could neither resign nor obtain transfer to another post, all of us at the Trust were actually working under compulsion and were not free men. I will not discuss that question here, but it leads me to speak of

that unmistakable slavery — forced labor — which I first met at Murmansk in 1928 and observed in the years that followed, until my own turn came.

That autumn (1928), under the pressing requirements of the Five Year Plan, the North State Fishing Trust had been faced with the problem of finding highly qualified specialists, such as engineers and ship-builders, willing to go to Murmansk with its vile climate and wretched living conditions, when they could easily find occupation in Leningrad, Moscow or some southern town.

All the efforts of the Trust were in vain. The situation seemed hopeless. The labor exchange offered to enlist, under a contract, first-year students from various special technical schools, giving them scholarships for four to five years until they graduated. But the *Piatiletka* had to be completed by the time these young men could finish their education. Construction work had to be started at once. The Trust needed engineers who were already experienced; it had no time to train new men.

Finally, one of the Communist workers had the brilliant idea of applying to the GPU. We had heard a rumor that the GPU traded in experts, with a large number of engineers of every specialty at its disposal, but we somehow could not believe it. The Communist Bagdanoff, the manager of our Trust, was asked to make inquiries. The rumor was confirmed and he set out for Kem, the administration center for the famous Solovetzki concentration camp, with instructions to purchase a whole squad.

Within a few days he had returned, his mission successfully accomplished, but the Kem impressions were too strong for even a Communist to keep to himself and he could not refrain from talking about them even to us non-party men.

“Can you imagine that there (the administration of the Solovetzki camp) the following expressions are freely

used: 'We sell!' — 'We discount for quantity!' — 'First class merchandise!' — 'The city of Archangel offers 800 roubles a month for X. and you offer only 600! . . . What merchandise! He gave a course in a university, is the author of a number of scientific works, was director of a large factory, in pre-war time was considered an outstanding engineer; now he's serving a ten-year sentence at hard labor for "wrecking"; that means that he'll do any kind of work required of him, and yet you quibble over 200 roubles!' Nevertheless, I bargained and they finally agreed to reduce the price, because we purchased at wholesale fifteen engineers. I picked out wonderful men! Look at the list: K., shipbuilding engineer, one of the best in the U.S.S.R. — he used to get rations of the 3rd category as a scientist; P., electrical engineer, has been director of the electrical industry in Moscow; K. and E. are architects with wide experience. And all of them are sentenced for 'wrecking' — that means they will do conscientious work."

"What are the terms of this purchase?" I asked, unconsciously lowering my voice, so monstrous did the question sound.

"The men we buy are entirely at our disposal," replied the manager; "we may detail them to any kind of work and to any responsible position. The GPU guarantees them and they are under the surveillance of the local GPU. We aren't held liable in case they escape. The GPU, however, is sure they won't escape, because they all have wives and children, living in other towns, who are actually hostages.

"We pay the GPU monthly 90% of the agreed rental and the remaining 10% we give to the prisoner according to his work. As we pay a much higher price for them than the established tariff, they are ranked as experts in respect to work and no time limit applies to them. If we wish we can make them work twenty-four hours a day. The GPU

attorney laughed when he said that we wouldn't be transgressing the labor laws if we disregarded the provisions about working hours, because the prisoners are sold as specialist-experts and have to work as such.

"What scoundrels!" he added, after a moment of silence, remembering the scene of the purchase.

"Did you actually sign a written agreement?"

"Of course! Is it possible to trust the GPU without a contract?"

"And all this is stated in the contract?"

"Certainly. The lawyer approved the deal and the Chief of the camp, as well as the head of the department, signed. Everything was according to form."

"And did you see 'them?'" we asked.

"No, I didn't look them over; it was a little embarrassing. They offered to show them to me, but I bought them according to their papers."

"Will they come to Murmansk soon?"

"As soon as we send in our first payment. It's done very simply; they say that if they get our message even one hour before the train leaves they will immediately send out the whole group. Talk is short with prisoners there."

"And if they refuse to work or do not fit the job?"

"That's also taken care of. In case of a complaint on our part the purchased man is immediately removed from the job and sent back to the concentration camp, where he is disciplined. In his place another man of the same specialty and qualifications is sent out."

"And if they do not have any? These are really exceptional men."

"Not have any? What are you talking about? They can get anyone they want. Besides, they have a good supply of 'ready ones.' Some of the best engineers and professors are now working in lumber camps as woodcutters under conditions that are horrifying even to hear about. It's good



luck for them to be sold, for they will be working at their own professions and, although at miserly pay, will at least be paid something."

"But how are they going to live? We are getting five hundred to six hundred roubles and can barely make both ends meet, and they will be receiving 10% — only fifty to sixty roubles a month."

"Certainly it isn't much. But the Trust is required to furnish living accommodations and the money will suffice to buy the food rations. Do you think they live in better conditions at the camp? They manage to live there and will find a way of existing here."

Meantime the bookkeeper was figuring how much the GPU was making on such sales. "Fifteen men at an average hire of 400 roubles a month — 72,000 roubles a year, less 10% paid to the prisoners = 64,800 roubles net per year."

"Fifteen men, that's only for us," corrected the manager; "you must remember that the GPU sells at least 1,000 men a year."

The bookkeeper continued his calculations. "At 4,800 roubles a year — that would be a total of 4,800,000 roubles. Let us deduct 800,000 roubles to cover the 10% and administration expenses — and we get four millions. Four millions! And our Trust makes a profit of one million at the most. And think of the capital outlay we need and the risks involved in cases of a bad catch! They certainly have a good business there! No worries, never a poor catch, no taxes to pay — just take in the money. That's a real business!"

This "purchase" made a deep impression on the employees of the Trust. We were afraid to talk about it openly, but in secret it was much discussed.

The new engineers, arriving as they did at a time when the number of employees was being greatly increased,

passed almost unnoticed among the many new faces. Two of them were appointed to executive positions as chiefs of the technical and rationalization departments respectively. The new head of the technical department was the engineer K., a man already advanced in years but still exceptionally energetic. He had the responsible post of directing all repairs of the fleet, the work of the machine shops, foundries and the power station. He was also in charge of the drawing up of projects for the enormous construction. Not only our Trust but practically all the other institutions and concerns in Murmansk were continually calling for his services as consultant. His expert advice was often sought by captains of foreign ships in need of repair, when they came to Murmansk to load lumber delivered from the forced-labor lumber camps of Solovki. Surely the foreigners who dealt with this man of authority did not realize that he was a convict, serving a ten-year sentence!

The Planning Bureau of the Trust was also composed of purchased engineers. These "purchased men" lived in the new houses built by the Trust — two or three men in each small room. A few boards laid on a trestle served as beds, a few stools and a board table as furnishings. They worked from early morning until late at night and they never talked of themselves or their former life in the concentration camps. No one questioned them. It was known, however, that they had families in dire need, whom they could not help, and that some had suffered confiscation of all their property at home.

How many more years were they destined to live like this? It was a frightful thought. Nevertheless, theirs was the lightest form of forced labor. The other, which I also came in contact with while working in the North State Fishing Trust, that at Cape Zeleny, was much more horrible. As a part of the Five Year Plan, construction on a large scale was to be undertaken in Murmansk. A special

wharf was to be built where the trawlers could take on coal, at some distance from the trawler base, to avoid the penetration of coal dust into the warehouses used for fishing products designed for export to England. The site selected was several kilometers north of the town, on the eastern side of the bay, near Cape Zeleny, where the land was high above the water and had to be dynamited and leveled. The Trust decided to employ a contractor for the excavation and dirt removal but, there being no private contractors in the U.S.S.R., did not resort to open bids, but sent specifications to several State construction concerns, requesting them to name their prices.

Quite unexpectedly, among the few competitors, the GPU intervened with a statement that it could do the work at a figure 10% below the lowest bid and in a shorter period than the specifications required. The Trust *had* to accept this offer of the GPU. One of the functions of the GPU was to watch over the economic activities of all enterprises. Had its bid not been accepted, it would certainly have prosecuted the Trust for "wasting the people's money." The Trust, therefore signed a contract with the GPU for the job at Cape Zeleny, involving the expenditure of several hundred thousand roubles.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Besides the contract at the North State Fishing Trust, the GPU obtained several other contracts in Murmansk and was also erecting buildings for the needs of its own administration and employees, all this in only one relatively small section of the north-western region.

Up to 1931 the GPU was the largest producer of export lumber in Karelia, besides building roads from the White Sea to the borders of Finland and engaging in extensive land reclamation work. In 1931, when, under pressure from abroad, the GPU was forced to discontinue its lumber operations in Karelia, it turned to supplying wood for fuel to Moscow and Leningrad, to constructing the canal joining the White Sea with the Baltic, and it entered the fishing industry. From 1931 the GPU was the only organization successfully preparing salmon for the English market. In other sections of the U.S.S.R. the economic and construction activities of the GPU were still greater. I will not describe them as it would lead me too far afield.

The reason for the low cost of the GPU work and production was no mystery — they used convict labor alone: peasants as well as men of higher education, many of whom had university degrees. The engineering and technical personnel was also composed of prisoners.

Labor and the supervisory personnel were brought to Murmansk from the Solovetzki camp, where they were serving sentences of from three to ten years for “counter-revolution” and “wrecking.” They were not paid for their work; there were no fixed working hours; those who did not fulfill their quotas, figured on a sixteen hour basis, had to stay at their jobs until their assignments *were* completed and, in addition, they were deprived of bread rations and dinner and were not allowed to return to their camps for the night. It goes without saying that the GPU did not pay any premiums into the social insurance fund, which premiums, for other organizations, amount to as much as 22% of the total payroll. Neither did the GPU issue any clothing, as other concerns were required to do; the laborers were dressed in the clothes they had on when arrested — many of them were barefooted and half-naked. For those working on the Cape Zeleny construction temporary wooden barracks were erected. The uniformed “guard” — composed of prisoners (criminals, bandits, Chekists and party-men who were under sentence for theft or other crimes) — had better living quarters and larger food rations. Only a few of them were free employees on salary.

The work was done in a most primitive manner, by hand, with spades, picks and crowbars. When an unlimited free supply of labor is available mechanization is superfluous. The only item of expense was food for the prisoners and even that was not large — one kilogram of black bread (baked by the prisoners themselves from flour furnished at a minimum price by State organizations) and a “dinner” of two courses, “soup,” *i.e.*, water with a small amount of grits, and “cereal,” *i.e.*, grits with a large

amount of water. Under such a system as this, it can readily be seen that nearly all the money received by the GPU on their contracts was clear profit.

The townspeople of Murmansk knew very little about the life of these prisoners. It was forbidden to talk to them or approach their barracks. At first their starved appearance, swollen or emaciated faces, their ragged clothing and bare feet excited horror, but later the people became accustomed to the sight — the sensitiveness of Soviet citizens has become dulled. The workmen and the peasants of Murmansk established a clandestine business intercourse with the wretched prisoners, some of whom contrived to do small repair jobs on household utensils which, due to a complete lack of such articles on the market, could not be replaced or repaired elsewhere. The method of procedure was this: when the prisoners were being led to work, the article in need of repair would be shown to them from a distance and then dropped into an old barrel that was nearby. Next morning the repaired utensil would be returned with a slip of paper stating the price of the work, which was always amazingly small. On the following day money in payment would be deposited in the barrel. How the prisoners ever succeeded in accomplishing this work, sometimes quite complicated, at night and with great secrecy, is a mystery. It could be done only by men of long prison experience and driven by dire need. (My description of this secret cannot hurt anyone in Murmansk now. Since the protests which appeared in the European press against forced labor, the GPU has discontinued its activities in the districts visited by *foreign* ships and has transferred its prisoners from Murmansk to enterprises in other sections of the country.)

Isolated though they were, the most striking incidents in the life of these GPU prisoners were known in the town. The first was an epidemic of typhus at Cape Zeleny which, in the filth and crowded condition of the barracks, spread

with amazing rapidity. A few cases appeared in the town itself and there was a panic. To localize the epidemic the GPU isolated the sick in special barracks, where they were left to die without any help or medical attention. The second incident was an attempt to escape — in fact, two attempts. Only despair could have forced anyone to such an act. The country round Murmansk is most unfavorable: there are hills and great rocks piled up in such disorder that it is almost impossible to find one's bearings; the lowlands are covered with impassable swamps. Nevertheless, two bands of four men each obtained row-boats, crossed to the western side of the Kola Bay and set out towards the Finnish frontier. One band was rounded up by natives who were promised a bag of flour for their capture; the other four men perished from hunger and exposure. The captured men were shot.

A third incident was the execution of the engineer Trester, who had supervised the building of GPU houses and had enjoyed considerable freedom of action. It was rumored that when the construction was completed Trester was taken under heavy guard back to Kem. There, according to the rumor, he was accused of "wrecking" and was shot because the construction had been finished two weeks behind schedule. Later I found out that this story was not quite exact; for the delay in construction Trester was sentenced to one year's solitary confinement at the Solovetzki camp and the GPU official who was taking him to his cell shot him on the way. I don't remember the name of this official but he was widely known for his exceptional cruelty and for frequently murdering prisoners without cause. Such cases were usually reported as "shot in an attempt to escape."

These were the only things the population of Murmansk knew about the life of the GPU slaves by whose hands the Five Year Plan was being carried out.

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## CHAPTER VI

### FACE TO FACE WITH THE GPU

**T**O resume my narrative: we, the "non-party" men, were discouraged and apprehensive as the winter months of 1930 wore on. The working force of the Trust was enormously increased. Two new members of the Board of Directors appeared — Communists, of course. They had no comprehension of our work, acknowledging freely that before their appointment to the Fishing Trust they knew fish only as an appetizer to go with vodka. Now one of them was the head of the rationalization and mechanization of the whole enterprise, while the other was to direct the construction of the trawling base which, according to the *Piatiletkha*, was to be the largest and most up-to-date fish trading harbor in the world. Both brought with them from Leningrad their own staffs complete, from engineers to typists, and went strutting about the base giving orders and loudly criticizing everything.

Our station, which had been successfully accomplishing its practical work, was now to feel the effect of purely fantastic plans. The aim of the new administrators was not the development of the fishing enterprise; their interest was only in construction. How could they now use our refinery for medicinal oil, if its output was only 1,000 tons a year, when the new plan called for a factory with a 15,000-ton output? The newspapers reported every day similar ambitious increases in the plans of other industries. The program of the rubber trust was being increased tenfold;

the output of the tractor center eightfold, and so on. News writers and the "directors" of the industries cited these as tremendous achievements, but we knew that it meant only the wrecking of what had already been accomplished. The *Piatiletka* was becoming the destroyer of all industry.

It was sad to see our refrigeration plant, which we had begun to build after dreaming of it for so many years, demolished because its capacity planned a year and a half before was now considered too small. The foundations of the barrel factory were abandoned, because the plans were being changed. The wharves under construction, badly needed to serve the increasing number of trawlers, stood unfinished, awaiting new and more grandiose plans. It was heartbreaking to see the chaos. I tried to avoid, so far as I could, the scenes of destructive construction. My days, from eight in the morning to eleven at night, I spent entirely in my laboratory and, as I said at the beginning, my late evenings alone in my room.

After the March night when the search of my little apartment occurred, as I have already related, the rumors that were being whispered everywhere made all of us "non-party" men feel that our position was fast becoming dangerous. The speed of the work inaugurated under the new Plan was being scrutinized; clearly something sinister was in the wind. The more impossible our task the more clearly we would be marked as the victims of those who set the task. Communists, too, were being questioned; this was their opportunity to even up old scores, to get rid of any possible rivals and by destroying us to improve their own chances of promotion. It was no secret, and soon everyone knew that they were "helping the GPU discover the wreckers."

The system of questioning was quite obvious:

"Do you think that 'wrecking activities' are possible in our Trust?"



Generally the Communist witness thought them quite possible.

"Is it possible that the specialists have an anti-proletarian or anti-Soviet psychology and could, therefore, be 'wreckers'?"

"Undoubtedly, Comrade, the psychology of the specialists is anti-proletarian, and they could certainly be 'wreckers.'"

These general ideas having been entered in the statement, the examining official would adopt a threatening tone.

"You know the punishment for false testimony? Belonging to the Communist party cannot save you. Your words are down in the deposition. Perhaps you can substantiate your accusations with facts?"

The poor witness would willingly accuse the specialists of anything, but he was afraid of being held responsible. The examiner, seeing then that he was ready to sign anything, would help him with leading questions which he was expected to answer in the affirmative.

"Were not the wrecking activities of Krotoff responsible for the poor catch at the fisheries last year?"

"Quite right, Comrade," the witness would answer with relief.

"Did he not hold the trawlers in the harbor intentionally?"

"Yes, Comrade, he undoubtedly did."

And thus the witness and the examiner arrived at a complete accord.

The GPU could and did procure any amount of such "testimony," not only from Communists, but also from some of the non-party men frightened by threats of immediate arrest. I heard, for instance, that one of the old captains, S., gave his testimony in just such a way. This was of great value to the GPU, because the evidence supplied

by Communists was rated rather cheaply even by the GPU itself, while S. was an old non-party worker, a specialist of many years' standing. Poor man! He was mentally unbalanced. Twice he had suffered attacks of insanity at sea and both times the ship was brought into harbor by his mate. He could not be placed in a hospital for they were overcrowded; in consideration of his past services he was given a job on shore. He did not believe that he was sick; he still wanted to go to sea and considered he had a grievance. He was terribly afraid of the GPU. I was told that one of his comrades, also an old captain, asked him if he were not ashamed of his testimony.

"But what could I do, if the GPU gave me orders? I didn't want to be shot. Besides, it serves them right for pushing an old man out of his job!"

The situation was made still more hopeless by the fact that "witnesses" were not required to give concrete facts, but rather a psychological explanation whereby any simple act might be interpreted as intended to harm industry. Furthermore, if a "witness" did not categorically deny the possibility of wrecking intentions, the GPU assumed that the intentions had existed.

My turn came at last. One morning I received a notice requiring me to be at the GPU office at six o'clock that evening. I notified the president of the Trust and as many of my co-workers as I could, hoping that, in case of my disappearance, the news would reach my wife. How many people in the U.S.S.R. left home after such a summons and never returned! I found an opportunity also to send a short note to Leningrad, telling my wife about the search and the numerous arrests, so that she would be prepared for any emergency.

Slowly I approached the long building of the GPU. Like most houses in Murmansk it was not fenced in. The dirt

around it was as bad as everywhere else; in front of it pigs wallowed in filthy garbage holes.

The anteroom, or room for the orderlies, was divided by a low partition, behind which were two men in Red Army uniforms. One was turning the handle of an ancient telephone. The other one was yawning as he looked me over.

“Who do you want?”

I handed him the summons without a word.

“You will have to wait.”

I sat on the bench, gloomily watching the hands of the clock that moved so slowly. The men were talking of what could be had in the coöperative store. At last a Red soldier came up to me.

“Come!”

He walked behind me down a corridor. Was I under arrest already, I wondered.

The corridor was wide, dirty and dark. On the right a row of padlocked doors—the cells where Scherbakoff and Krotoff, perhaps the most respected men in the Trust, must be. At the end of the corridor the guard told me to wait. Then he knocked lightly at one of the doors and led me into an office, with dirty wooden partitions, an unpainted floor, two tables, three chairs. At one of the tables sat a woman—a stenographer, I thought. When she spoke I was astonished, for I could not imagine that the GPU official would be a woman.

“Sit down, Comrade Tchernavin—we have quite a lot to talk about.”

She pointed to the chair in front of her table. The lamp-light was shining on my face, the woman sat in shadow. She was small, thin, and pale, about thirty years old, with a dark complexion, harsh features and a big, unpleasant mouth. In front of her were two opened packages of cheap “*Poushka*” cigarettes, which she smoked incessantly, throwing the stubs on the floor. Her hands were shaking.

It was my first real encounter with the GPU. The conduct of my examiner seemed to me ridiculous, although apparently she was taking great pains when questioning me. At times she spoke in a friendly and sincere way, then suddenly she would search my face with a piercing look. In turn she was threatening and indignant, then kind and almost tender. Afterwards I learned that this is the accepted method of questioning used by the GPU agents. At the time, however, her behavior reminded me of a second-rate tragedienne on the provincial stage. It would have been very amusing if I had not known that I was completely at the mercy of this unbalanced woman and her confederate, a tall Lett in a military uniform, who seemed dull and slow.

The examination continued for six hours and the two examiners twice relieved each other. Four of the six hours of questioning were spent over one sentence: "*So much the worse for them; it's all an absurdity, and let them take the consequences.*"

Who said it? When? In what circumstances? I did not remember ever hearing this sentence and even now I do not know where they got it.

"How do you explain this sentence?" asked the woman. "Don't you see 'wrecking' in it?"

"Wrecking?" I replied, puzzled.

"Of course, wrecking; how can you explain it otherwise? I am very curious to hear your explanation." This was said threateningly.

"I don't understand this sentence," I answered. "It has no meaning to me: I don't know what it is about, or who said it, in what circumstances or on what occasion."

"It's no use, Comrade Tchernavin, trying to evade answering the question."

"I can't answer questions I do not understand."

"You understand perfectly that the person—I won't

name him yet — who said it, referred to the *Piatiletka* as the ‘absurdity’ imagined by the Soviet Government.”

“How could I know it?” said I, trying painfully to remember whether I had ever uttered those words. No, I could not have said them; but then, who could? It might have been Mourasheff, the Communist president of the Trust; at one time he had not minced his words about the Five Year Plan.

“Now you can admit that it *is* wrecking,” insisted the woman.

“Excuse me, why is this wrecking?”

“So you think it is all right?”

“I did not say so.”

“Then it is wrong? Answer me! Is it right or wrong?” she insisted, getting angry. “Well —?”

“To say that the *Piatiletka* is an absurdity is wrong.”

“Only wrong? I think it is criminal.”

I remained silent.

“So you don’t see wrecking in this sentence,” she persisted.

“I don’t understand how one can see wrecking in a sentence. I understand by wrecking an action that harms a business and not a sentence taken at random from a conversation of an unknown person in unknown circumstances.”

“How well you know what wrecking is!” she exclaimed. “But we shall come to ‘actions’ later. So you see no elements of wrecking in this sentence?”

“No.”

“Comrade Tchernavin,” said the woman, suddenly changing her threatening attitude to a friendly one, “we value you very highly as a specialist, and we sincerely wish you well. I advise you not to be stubborn. You see” — she pointed to a fat envelope on the table — “this is the ‘case’ of your wife. If you tell the truth now and help us

sincerely, we shall destroy it, but if you continue as you began to-day, we shall act on it and then you will have only yourself to blame."

"What nonsense," thought I; "there can be no 'case' in Murmansk against my wife. She has been here only once for ten days about a year ago, she knows nobody here and she couldn't be accused of anything, yet that envelope contains at least a hundred sheets."

In answer to this threat, I shrugged my shoulders.

"I am hiding nothing and I have nothing to hide. I am telling the truth."

Now the man took up the inquisition. He began to enumerate methodically all the mistakes, real or fancied, made by the North State Fishing Trust during the ten years of operations. Most of them occurred before the foundation of the Trust: in 1920 a whaling schooner had been caught in ice fields; in 1921 someone had bought a harpoon schooner in Norway and, in the opinion of the GPU, had paid too much for it. In 1925 the catch of herring had been smaller, he said, than it was supposed to be; in 1927 one of the electric cranes had been out of order for some time. In January, 1929, the trawlers had fished for cod in the Gulf Stream region, when, according to the GPU, they ought to have gone to the region of the Bear Islands. And so on.

He spoke slowly, going into many details, often consulting notes in front of him — evidently accusations or testimony of various people. He seemed to expect to annihilate me with each of these accusations.

"You see what a lot of evidence we have? Of course, we understand that some mistakes could naturally take place in production, but here they seem to be systematic. It is clearly a case of wrecking."

The woman agent came back and they continued the inquiry together.

"But consider," I could not help exclaiming, "the gen-

eral results of the work of the fisheries! Don't they prove conclusively that there couldn't have been any wrecking activities? The work of the Trust is expanding all the time, the size of catches is increasing, the length of time the trawlers stand idle in the harbor is diminishing. The Trust yields a profit which is turned in to the State. And this enormous enterprise has grown where once there was nothing. How can there be any question of wrecking? For instance, you say that in 1929 fishing was intentionally carried on in the wrong place. To do that the captains and the crews of the trawlers must have been in league with the 'wreckers' in the administration of the Trust; otherwise the crews would never have risked the loss of the premiums awarded them for good catches. Who would believe it?"

"Comrade Tchernavin, we are speaking only about strictly proven facts and in this case we have the testimony of a very competent comrade," said the GPU woman, reprovingly.

"I know of no person more competent than our captains in knowing where to find the fish!" I answered, beginning to get irritated.

"I can name them to you. They are the experts of the Oceanographic Institute working under Professor Mesiatzeff. I have here their testimony proving that the ships were wilfully directed to the wrong fishing regions."

"That's absurd! I remember perfectly that in January the results of the trawling were very good. We knew from British trade papers that there were fish near the Bear Islands, even without the help of the Institute, and our captains had been notified. They did not go there because there was plenty of fish much nearer."

I knew of Professor Mesiatzeff. His relations with the GPU were not a secret. His professional success was based on his party affiliations and not on scientific ability.

"Perhaps you could find time to give us a written state-

ment of your considerations regarding the work of the Oceanographic Institute?" politely suggested the examiner. "What do you think, for instance, of their estimate of the fish reserves in the Sea of Barents?"

"I am not acquainted with the work of the Institute in this direction," I parried, having no intention of falling into the trap and being caught as a "denouncer."

"And you, personally — what do you think about the possibility of finding in the Barents Sea the quantity of fish required by the Plan?"

This was the main point of the inquiry, I realized at once, and it had been left to the last. Evidently they meant to accuse me of not believing in the *Piatiletka*. The basis for this accusation might well be an opinion I had given to the Board of Directors that it would be wise to estimate the probable supply of fish in the Barents Sea before beginning to build three hundred or five hundred new trawlers for operations there. . . . Finally, after requiring a written answer to this last question, they solemnly admonished me: "We are astonished at your obstinacy, your obvious wish to shield somebody instead of helping us to expose the shortcomings of the Trust. We are not accusing you of anything, but you must prove to us by your acts your sincerity and loyalty to the Soviet Government. We must be convinced that you are not in sympathy with the wreckers. We expect you to give us important information and to give it of your own free will. We are giving you time to think. You can call us by telephone and we will hear you any day at any time. We don't want to interfere with your work."

They made me sign a promise not to talk about this interview, and then they let me go out into the frosty night. Only then did I realize how tired I was — and how helpless.



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## CHAPTER VII

### ON TO MOSCOW

**N**EXT morning, when I entered the office of the president of the Trust, Communist Mourasheff, he was savagely ringing the telephone bell and shouting:

“Hello! I can’t speak! Every time you tap the line to listen in you disconnect it! . . . Do you hear, Comrade? . . . Why don’t you answer? . . . I know you are there! . . . If the GPU has no electrician capable of fixing your line so you can listen in, I’ll send you one from the Trust! . . . No—it’s hopeless!” He threw down the receiver and turned to me.

“Hell! Since the last arrests I can’t use the telephone. When they tap my line I can’t hear a thing. . . . Good morning. You have been to confession; tell me all about it; nobody will hear us.”

“I signed a pledge not to speak of it.”

“What nonsense! With me it will go no farther! What did they ask? Did they mention my name?”

“They wanted to know details about the shipbuilding and about your journey abroad.” I knew that was his weak spot.

“The cads! I’d like to see these scoundrels do any real constructive work. I’ll have to go to Leningrad. No one here can think of anything but arrests and grillings. Nobody is doing any work. Damnation! And you will have to go to Moscow. You’re wanted by the United Fisheries to confer with them about the Plan.”

“The GPU will not let me go.”

“We can arrange with the GPU.”

In spite of this assurance I was still afraid that the GPU would prevent me from leaving Murmansk. Two more cross-examinations followed in which they threatened me because of my “insincerity,” as they termed it, meaning my refusal to make false accusations against my friends and co-workers. Nevertheless, a few days later they did let me go, although I did not feel sure, even aboard the train, that I would not be arrested before it left the station — for that was a common practice of the GPU. But at last I heard the whistle and the train began to move. Through the window I could see the miserable buildings of the town. Approaching the GPU barracks the train slowed down to allow one of their agents to jump off the mail car where he had been sorting out letters for the censor. That was my last impression of Murmansk. The train took on speed and I could settle down in peace.

The first stage of the journey would carry me to Leningrad; this would take two days and during that time at any rate I would surely be free from arrest. Nor did I think I would be arrested upon my arrival. I could see my wife and boy again. The Soviet citizen is not exacting! For the moment I was almost happy.

I still cherished the vague hope, shared by all my fellow workers, that in Moscow we would find protection from the stupid tyranny of the Murmansk GPU, that the Communists at the head of the United Fisheries — the central department of the whole country's fishing industry — having known the accused men and their work for so many years, could not suspect us of wrecking activities. Besides, I was sure they would understand how these arrests were upsetting the entire industry.

Fortunately for me our train was fifteen hours late, so that I missed connection with the train for Moscow that

evening and was able to spend a whole night and day at home. But the news I heard there was not cheerful. From my wife I learned of the senseless and cruel mass arrests of the intelligentsia both in Leningrad and Moscow. Young and old alike were being swept into prison; those who were well-known before the Revolution and those just out of Soviet universities. No distinction seemed to be made between those who had refrained from politics and those who had been active in the Bolshevik campaigns, nor between the men engaged in pure science and those working as scientists in industries. Among the arrested were historians of world-wide reputations, many museum workers, engineers of every specialty, doctors and, as always, many former army officers and members of the clergy. These victims had one thing in common — they were all intellectuals. Without the slightest doubt it was a campaign against the educated. Two years before, the world had heard of the “liquidations of the *kulaks* as a class”; now it was the turn of the intelligentsia. Our position was in a way even worse than that of the *kulak*. The prosperous peasant could leave his house and land, go to a town or another district, become a proletarian and lose himself in the mass. We could not. Our capital and property was our knowledge, our training, our education — and it was just this that made us envied and hated by the Bolsheviks no matter where we were or what we did. Only death could deprive us of this property, and so we were made to suffer more cruelly than the *kulaks*.

My home in Leningrad had not been searched. The GPU are never logical; in Murmansk they had investigated my supply of sugar and flour and had raked out the ashes of my stove; in Leningrad they paid no attention to my real home. I knew, however, that sooner or later they would come, so I carefully looked over everything I had — old letters, photographs, manuscripts. I saw nothing that could

possibly be incriminating, but I burned everything, even the photographs of my boy, to prevent their falling into the hands of the GPU.

I went on to Moscow without difficulty. Three trains left every evening and arrived in Moscow the next morning, equipped with many upholstered cars and a few international sleeping cars. On the train one could get bed linen, and tea with rusks, articles which had long disappeared from the general market. Most of the passengers were government officials but there was a scattering of foreigners. It was chiefly for their benefit that the station was kept in order — sometimes, when some important foreigner was passing through, the station was temporarily decorated with palms and laurel trees to give an effect of prosperity.

Two or three years before, on your arrival in Moscow you would have been met at the station by a double line of hotel agents vying for your patronage; and outside the station there had stood a long line of taxis. But in 1930 all these had disappeared. It was nearly impossible to find a hotel room and nobody dreamed of looking for a taxi. Everyone struggled for a foothold on the street cars, and the only way to spend a night was with friends, if only in a chair or on a chest.

Moscow always affected me by its special, quite individual, atmosphere; this the Bolsheviks could not destroy, however hard they tried. The Red Gates were standing at this time, though marked for removal. The Miasnitskaya was still the same, although nearer the center of the city the crowd was so big that the sidewalks could not hold it and pedestrians overflowed into the middle of the street. The street cars were filled to the utmost and many were always left waiting at every stop. There was little other traffic; occasionally an old, decrepit horse-drawn carriage or an official automobile speeding by with loud blasts from

its horn. In spite of all the Bolshevik boasts about the motorization of Russia, there were very few busses even in Moscow. Taxis could never be found at their stands, for they were always being used by government organizations.

The old and the new buildings of the GPU stood as monuments of Socialistic construction in the large space between the Lubianka and the Miasnitskaya. Never before had such a prominent site been chosen, or so much money spent, to house the secret police. The old Butyrki prison, accommodating 15,000 had proved quite insufficient for the purposes of the GPU and so they built the immense "Inside Prison" within the square formed by their other buildings. Here, close to headquarters, prisoners could be examined with the most up-to-date technique. No foreigner would ever guess that this place of terror flourished there, right in the heart of the old city.

From the windows of the street cars the inhabitants of Moscow watched with interest the long lines in front of some shops.

"What are they giving out today?" one would ask.

"Vodka. See the people standing with bottles—one must bring one's own."

"It would be better if they sold some food," said another gloomily.

The Iverskaya chapel was demolished, but the inscription on the former town hall opposite it still remained: "Religion is opium for the people." A bright French correspondent at one time glibly rendered this: "Religion is the opinion of the people," and quoted it as proof of the Bolshevik broad-minded view in religious matters.

The gates of the Kremlin were closed and guarded by strong detachments of soldiers, and when they were opened for the passage of a government automobile one got a glimpse of the empty and lifeless Kremlin Square. Behind the strong walls and bayonets hid the "People's Govern-

ment" by whose will and behest many of the worthiest people of the country were put behind other strong walls where they too were guarded by sentinels and bayonets.

The University and the Rumiantseff Museum were untouched and in good repair, especially outside, to show the respect in which culture is held. The Church of the Saviour was still standing at the time of my visit, but was already doomed. Behind it, on the other bank of the Moskva River, an immense building was being erected — the "House of the Government." While still under construction its purpose had been changed several times. The architect and several firemen had been shot because of a fire which started once in the scaffolding. In front of the "House of the Government" a new stone bridge was being built. The embankment was piled with marble slabs procured in Moscow cemeteries, on some of which one could still see parts of inscriptions such as "Here rests," "buried," "loving memory." It was said that these slabs were to be used to beautify the square.

On the Prechistenka in the house of F. B. Chelnakoff was the famous Tolstoy Museum, and in Morosoff's house the museum of new French paintings to which had been added the Schukin Collection. Some of the pictures had been sold, and the people of Moscow were sure that these collections would soon share the fate of the many others which had been liquidated. Already gone were the museum of rare china, the museum of furniture in Nescoutchnoe, the museum of the "forties" on the Sabatchi Place and many others. The era of Soviet liberalism and regard for the Fine Arts had ended.

When I went to Moscow I always stayed with V. K. Tolstoy, a great friend of mine who lived on Zuboff Square. We had grown up together from childhood and had been brought still more closely together by our interest and work in the same field of science.

Tolstoy came from a poor family not belonging to the nobility. His father was a physician and had no other income than that which he earned by his modest practice. He had had five children and it was all he could do to provide for their education. They had lived very plainly and even the furnishings of their house consisted of nothing but beds and just the indispensable number of chairs and tables.

While still a student at the University, Tolstoy became interested in ichthyology and after graduation made it his specialty. He became well known for his serious and scientific research work. After the Revolution he gave himself with the same enthusiasm to practical work on a large scale and for eight years was director of the State fishing industry of both the Azof-Black Sea and Northern regions. During this time he published numerous articles on questions of fishing activity which showed that he had not entirely given up research; he also lectured from time to time on fishing at the Petrovsky Agricultural Academy. In 1929, when the direction of the fishing industry was transferred from the Fishing Union to the Political Bureau, a change which was decidedly leading the industry to its ruin, Tolstoy succeeded, after great difficulty, in being transferred from the Fishing Union to the Scientific Institute of Fishing Economy, where he engaged in purely theoretical work.

Tolstoy was not capable of simulating or of adapting himself to the requirements of the moment. With great persistence, intelligence and knowledge he approached the problem of planning for the fishing industry, patiently and insistently striving to introduce reason and sensible restrictions into the wild experiments of the Bolsheviki. He was in despair every time Party directives tended to destroy that which had been built up with such effort, threatening by their unfulfillable requirements to ruin the whole work. He would then go to the chiefs and insist on prov-

ing to them the folly of their orders and the injury they might cause the business, without ever stopping to consider the effect his persistence might have on his own position.

When the Bolsheviki preplanned the 1,500,000-ton catch for our North State Fishing Trust, Tolstoy undertook, by assignment from the Scientific Institute, an enormous and highly interesting research study on the basis of which he proved the inefficiency of using more than 125 trawlers in the restricted region of the Sea of Barents. When Tolstoy read the report on the results of his research at the Scientific Institute and later before the Technical Council of the Fishing Union none of the Communists present raised any objections. How much courage was needed to present such a report can be seen from the fact that many of the Communists were afraid even to go to the meeting, and those who could not avoid going remained silent, although they clearly understood that the Government assignments were unfulfillable and perhaps they even hoped that Tolstoy's report would cause these to be modified. Not one criticized the report, but neither did anyone uphold its author.

Tolstoy lived alone and very poorly. Even during the period of the NEP he never had money enough to be properly dressed even by Soviet standards, and would joke good-naturedly about the holes in his boots.

Upon my arrival in Moscow, I was very glad to find him at home. I immediately asked him what steps were being taken in Moscow to obtain the release of Scherbakoff and Krotoff, my associates in Murmansk, and what were the general conditions.

"My dear friend," said Tolstoy, "we have done everything we could, but we understand nothing. We have had a vague sort of promise that the GPU would set Scherbakoff and Krotoff free, but arrests are going on everywhere



and no one feels safe. Here in Moscow Patrikeeff of the Fishing Union has been arrested, probably because he once served in the army. Frumkin has just returned from the Far East where he found everything in good order; but, in spite of this, arrests are taking place there; yet he, the chief, does not interfere with them. Something incomprehensible is going on. And it's fearful to think what will happen at the end of the year, for in all the regions, the same as in yours, impossible assignments have been given. In the Far East, for instance, they've included in the program the construction of two hundred trawlers, where now they have only one boat, and that from Germany. They don't know even where to look for the fish or what kinds to catch. They don't know whether they should fish in the Japan Sea, the Bering Sea or the Sea of Okhotsk. They seem to be in a worse position than your Trust. Neither the Japanese nor the Americans have ever used trawlers in that region, and now we are going to build two hundred. There are no men, no wharves, no base — but the order is to build at any cost."

Tolstoy shook his head in despair and then continued: "The general assignment for this year for the whole industry is 1,900,000 tons of fish; we shall be lucky if sixty per cent of this is filled. That means more arrests! Next year the order is to catch 2,200,000 tons. Pure madness! I'm so glad I gave up work in the industry and have nothing more to do with planning. It's enough to drive anyone crazy! Scientific work is much more peaceful."

As soon as he had finished talking I told him in detail about how things stood in Murmansk, how our Vice-President, Gasheff, had decided that we could increase production by 25% and so attempt to fulfill the plan by salting the cod with their heads on, and what arrests had been made. I also informed him about the perquisitions and cross-examinations. We seemed able to talk only of

unpleasant and terrible things, in spite of the fact that we had rejoiced at meeting one another again.

The following day I accompanied Tolstoy to the Fishing Union where Kryshoff, the senior director of the Fishing Industry, offered me the position of President of the Commission developing the plan for the Northern Fishing Region. Knowing, as I did, that the plan could not possibly be finished in the time allowed I refused this offer, but as I had no desire to return to Murmansk, I agreed to remain in Moscow as a consultant.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BLACK CROWS MOVE

THE summer of 1930 was full of disquiet. The effects of the unsuccessful *Piatiletka* experiment were felt everywhere. Food was becoming scarce. One by one the necessities of life were disappearing from the market — galoshes, soap, cigarettes and even paper. In Moscow, where I was staying, expensive, decorated cakes were on display in the show windows of State confectionery stores, but bakeries had no bread. It was quite impossible to buy underwear or shoes, but one could get a silk tie and a hat. Food stores carried only caviar, champagne and expensive wines.

Hungry citizens spoke openly and sarcastically about the results of the "Plan." Who was at fault? Some explanation of this state of affairs had to be given immediately.

The official answer was naïve: the shortage of foodstuffs and items of general necessity was caused by the growth in purchasing power of the masses and the rise in the cultural level of the workman and peasant! This was repeated over and over again in the official press. The slogan was "Difficulties of Growth."

According to the Soviet reports the fulfillment of the *Piatiletka* was proceeding much faster even than anticipated, production in all branches of industry was increasing with marvellous rapidity and it was this very success which furnished more "difficulties of growth." Such explanations might have seemed quite convincing to visiting

foreigners or to foreign readers of Soviet newspapers — but to no one else.

Government reports announced that the 1930 production of cotton and sugar-beets was twice that of pre-war days — yet there was no cotton cloth for sale and sugar was a great luxury. A notable increase in the production of all earthly blessings was being promised for 1930-31.

The same newspapers, however, with their boastful articles, published the gloomiest reports of “breaches” on all fronts: the coal front, the metallurgical, the lumber, rubber, chemical, footwear, and others. These failures were attributed to the “wrecking activity” of individual experts, to campaigns carried on by foreign elements and to the bureaucracy of old-régime state functionaries.

Lines which stretched along whole blocks formed wherever anything was being sold. They were becoming a sore spot. In the attempt to find scapegoats the GPU spread the rumor, immediately taken up by the press, that there was fraud on a large scale in the distribution of food cards. The acute shortage of meat was explained by failure to follow the “directives of the XVI Party Congress,” and by the “wrecking activity” of veterinaries who, it was said, gave poisoned injections to pigs. Daily articles appeared with ostentatious captions: “*Vegetables perish by fault of producers,*” “*Who interferes with the supply of vegetables?*” “*Call to answer for the unsanitary storage and handling of vegetables and foodstuffs.*” There was a shortage of vegetables in August when all truck gardens should have been full. The papers, however, failed to mention that in the spring of that year all the larger vegetable gardens had been taken away from private owners, and the cooperative work groups and other new fiat organizations could not cope with the job.

The situation in the fishing industry was disastrous. Men, fishing tools, ships and materials were lacking. But

in spite of such conditions the authorities continued to increase the plans for the industry, thereby rendering utterly impossible any satisfactory fulfillment of the assignment.

The methods offered for correction of the hopeless situation were of truly Bolshevik character. On August 7, 1930 there was published the resolution of the Council of People's Commissars regarding the steps to be taken to increase the fish supply.

"Point one: All work to be carried out in 'shock tempo' and in the autumn to cover the deficiency of the spring catch."

Then followed seventeen points of the same nature, of which the seventeenth was the most extraordinary. "*Within two months work out instructions for deep sea fishing and the improvement of processing fish; take measures for the amelioration and the breeding of fish. Signed — Rikoff.*"

The editorials of all papers recommended applying the following most important measures under all circumstances: "Fight for the extreme development of counter-plans," "stimulate social competition and shock work," "form shock brigades, planning groups, rationalization brigades," "organize light cavalry attacks" and so on, without end.

Under all these measures, offered by the government and by alert reporters, actually lay the same idea of "shock work" — overtime work of hungry and exhausted people.

"Counter-plan" meant an irresponsible increase of already impossible assignments. "Brigades," "cavalry" and so forth were similar evidence of interference in the business by completely ignorant but extremely self-assured "*Komsomoltsi*," who did no work themselves, but engaged in "self-criticism," which was directed to those who really worked under insuperable difficulties.

Then came the arrests of specialists of all ranks and

classes, in all branches of industry, in the provinces and at the "Centre" — arrests carried out at such a pace that the GPU appeared to be accomplishing *its own Piatiletka* at "shock" speed and to the full capacity of the prisons. The papers seldom wrote about the arrests, but everyone knew that under the headings "*Who interferes with the supply of vegetables?*" "*Why is prosecution inactive?*" were concealed arrests of scores and hundreds of people. Electrical engineers, chemists, experts of any prominence in rubber, agronomy and geology, all were being arrested. In August almost all the staff of the *Gosplan* (State Planning Commission) were arrested, and at the head of the list was the first vice-president, Professor Ossadchim, who at the "mine trial" had been the public prosecutor.

In this way, by the fall of 1930, the end of the second year of the *Piatiletka*, the country had been reduced to such a shortage in consumers' goods, man power and the necessities of life, that not only the development of construction activity was unthinkable, but it was becoming impossible to live or work normally. Everyone felt that the impossible pace adopted would bring ruin. The Government, however, instead of realizing this and calling a halt to try to find some reasonable way out of the situation, strove with hysterical outbursts and relentless obstinacy to increase the pace still more, hiding behind knowingly false figures of fictitious "attainments" and "victories." Its wrath, fanned by the consciousness of its own helplessness and defeat, was directed against the peasantry and those experts who were working most actively. The shortages and all other failures were laid at their door by the authorities in an effort to incite the workmen against them. But the workmen remained indifferent to this campaign. The country, to the victorious cries of "fulfillment" and "overfulfillment," was plunging into complete poverty and disastrous famine.

Everywhere the approach of something ominous was being felt. Communists and experts close to Communists who held positions of importance in the fishing industry were hurriedly leaving Moscow. They sensed something, or rather knew something, about the impending destruction of their comrades, and somebody's benevolent hand led them away from the place which was destined to be shelled.

Kryshoff, a Communist and senior director of the fishing industry since the beginning of the Revolution, found time before his departure to publish an interview in the "*Izvestia*" of August 2, 1930, obviously meant for the enlightenment of the GPU. In this interview, without mentioning him by name, he clearly pointed to Michael Alexandrovitch Kazakoff, accusing him of favoring the idea of privately owned fisheries and, by the measures he put through for fish preservation, of intentionally interfering with the development of the State fishing industry. It had been Kazakoff, one of the leaders in the fishing industry, whose offer that I take charge of the planning division had resulted in my being engaged in the work at Murmansk. Kryshoff knew well that under Soviet conditions it was impossible for Kazakoff to refute such a libel as his. It is quite possible that this denunciation of Kazakoff was in its way a bribe which Kryshoff gave the GPU, in order to be allowed to leave the business which he himself had headed for so many years and for which he should have been the first to be held responsible.

Kazakoff was an outstanding man. Long before the Revolution he had worked for the preservation of the natural fish resources of the country. He was the chief factor in all the fishing conventions drawn up with other countries. To his brains and energy alone was due the arrangement that the Bolsheviks succeeded in making with Japan in regard to fishing rights — and this in spite of the impossible

behavior of the Bolshevik diplomats. He was an expert on fishing law and had lectured on the subject in the Petrovsky Agricultural Institute in Moscow. It was my good fortune to be his closest assistant and to work with him in those conferences on the fishing industry to which he was called.

The Communist rulers needed someone on whom to blame the growing shortage of food and so they accused Kazakoff of being the leader of "wreckers" in the fishing industry. They could, of course, give no proofs of these alleged wrecking activities and, therefore, had to resort to the favorite GPU method of "voluntary confession of the accused." No one with the slightest knowledge of the facts believed this confession, but the desired result was obtained — an honest and incorruptible man, devoted to his work and his country, was removed from the path of those in whose way he stood.

On September 11th I met him. He asked me: "Aren't you afraid for yourself? Almost all the prominent experts of the fishing industry are being arrested and, you know, you are very much disliked by the Communists." Just a few hours before his own arrest, it did not enter his mind that he also might be in danger.

In the same issue of "*Izvestia*,"<sup>1</sup> August 2, 1930, the Red professor, Communist T. Mesiatseff, tried to prove on the ground of scientific investigation that the *Piatiletka* drawn up for the northern fishing industry was entirely possible and that up to that time the trawlers had been bringing in only 5% of the potential catch. Moreover, he telegraphed the Fishing Union that fifteen million tons of fish were available in the fishing region of the Barents Sea alone. These "discoveries" gave the GPU ample material to consider as "wreckers" all those who spoke of the im-

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<sup>1</sup> *Izvestia* is the Russian word for "news." This newspaper is the official organ of the Soviet Government. — TRANSLATOR.



possibility of fulfilling the *Piatiletka* in the north. This blow was directed chiefly against my friend, V. K. Tolstoy.

Then began a series of arrests of members of the Fishing Union and the Scientific Institute of Fishing Economy. The first one in the latter organization was that of seventy-year old T. G. Farmanoff, a scientist and expert of the Institute and professor of the Agricultural Academy.

His arrest happened as this kind of thing always happens in the U.S.S.R. — One day the expert does not turn up at his office, and the more apprehensive of his co-workers immediately begin to worry. The optimists are reassuring: "What of it? Perhaps he's only sick." His home is called on the telephone, and the answer comes in ambiguous terms: "He can't come." Then it is clear — he has been arrested. After that everyone refers to him with a certain wariness and avoids his unoccupied desk, which alone serves as a reminder that the man is still living and as yet not even dropped from the list of employees. His wife or mother waits in vain at the closed door of some influential Communist in the naïve hope of finding in him a protector for the husband or son arrested by the GPU. — "He knew my husband so well; he visited us. It's impossible that he will do nothing. . . ." <sup>2</sup>

Then followed, one after the other, the arrests of many more. Rumors were circulating of the complete havoc caused in all regional fishing trusts.

In the Scientific Institute one of the first to be arrested was the scientist P. M. Fishson, a prominent expert in fish-

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<sup>2</sup> After the arrest of T. G. Farmanoff, in the summer of 1930, I heard nothing of him until the summer of 1931, when at the Solovetzki concentration camp I found out that he was there on Popoff Island serving a sentence of ten years in connection with the case of the "48." His name had never been mentioned either in the newspapers or in the text of the arraignment and sentence. During his first days in prison he had been stricken by paralysis and lost the use of his legs; he was not present at his own "trial," and was sentenced to ten years' hard labor without any charge having been made against him.

ing economy. Calm, controlled and loyal to his work, he had kept entirely away from politics, avoiding even the most ordinary conversations on political subjects. A few days later his brother, G. M. Fishson, one of the foremost workers in the Fishing Union, was also arrested. In contrast to his brother, G. M. Fishson was full of life and energy; he worked with flaming enthusiasm and never spared himself, in spite of being ill with tuberculosis. I met him on the eve of his arrest. He was depressed by his brother's arrest, was thinking only of him and had given no thought to the danger with which he himself might be threatened.

And still the arrests continued. As soon as night fell the "black crows" (large closed GPU automobiles) would rush roaring through the streets in all parts of Moscow. But later, in order to be less conspicuous to the terrorized population, the GPU devised a new system of procedure whereby at nightfall the "black crows" would be sent to the various district police stations and there hidden in back yards. The GPU agents would then go out in groups, pick up their victims and bring them one by one to the station. When a party of about thirty prisoners was thus collected, they would be packed into the automobile and the "black crow" would rush them to the Lubyanka or Butyrki prison, unload the spoil and hurry back for its next load of victims.

Strangely enough, those who had not been arrested were allowed unbelievable freedom of movement in the U.S.S.R. Thus, in August 1930, my good friend Tolstoy left on a business trip for Baku, whence, if he had so wished, he might easily have escaped to Persia. During his absence the GPU visited his apartment, not knowing that he was away. Evidently they had not been watching the movements of this "state criminal connected with the international bourgeoisie," were not worried about his possible escape, and were in no hurry to detain him after his return to Moscow,

where he continued to work in the Scientific Institute up to the very day of his arrest, September 12th. And even during his last days of freedom, Frumkin, the chief of the Fishing Union, was constantly calling on him for advice. At that very time the GPU had already prepared "testimonies" dated September 9th which "exposed" Tolstoy as the initiator and leader of "wrecking activities" in the Northern and Azof-Black Sea regions.

S. D. Shaposhnikoff, engineer and expert of the Scientific Institute, the foremost authority in the U.S.S.R. on refrigeration for the fishing industry, was about to leave for America to study the refrigeration business there. The GPU gave him a permit to leave and then arrested him at the railway station.

Arrested during these same days was Professor M. T. Nazarevski,<sup>3</sup> and a little later A. A. Klykoff, a well-known expert in the field of marketing.

So many arrests were being made in the fishing industry that by the middle of September there was nobody left to do any work. In the Fishing Union the experts were replaced by workmen; in the Scientific Institute the desks were left unoccupied and there were some offices left without a single occupant. Those who remained wandered around aimlessly, expecting to be arrested at any minute.

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<sup>3</sup> Professor Nazarevski was deported for a term of ten years to the Solovetzki concentration camp.

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## CHAPTER IX

### 48 — TO BE SHOT

I HAVE no power to describe what I felt after the arrests of my fellow-workers. I knew that I was standing over an abyss and that there was nothing I could do. The fact that I was still free was pure chance and could only be explained by inefficiency on the part of the GPU, which did not have my name on its lists merely because I had just recently arrived in Moscow from the provinces.

Not knowing which way to turn in the midst of this confusion, I demanded a leave of absence. Evidently the Communist chiefs must have been affected by the general confusion and have let their natural suspicions lapse, for I was granted this leave and went at once to Leningrad to rejoin my family.

I had no hope for a favorable outcome of the cases of my associates and co-workers in the fishing industry, for I knew that the GPU, in depriving the country of indispensable specialists, was acting according to instructions received from the Political Bureau. Nevertheless, it was a shock to me when I saw in the morning paper on the 22nd of September the following headlines printed in huge letters:

**“THE DISCLOSURE OF A COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION OF WRECKERS OF THE WORKMEN'S FOOD SUPPLY SYSTEM.”**

And below in smaller, but sufficiently prominent type:

*“ The GPU has disclosed a counter-revolutionary, wrecking and spying organization within the system supplying the population with the most essential food products (meat, fish, canned foods, vegetables), which had for its aim the producing of famine in the country and the causing of dissatisfaction among the workers — thereby attempting to precipitate the downfall of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The following institutions were contaminated by this wrecking activity: the Meat Union, Fishing Union, Canning Union, Vegetable Union and the corresponding branches of the Commissariat of Trade.*

*“ The counter-revolutionary organization was headed by Professor Riazantseff, former land-owner and Major-General, and Professor Karatigin, before the Revolution chief editor of the ‘ Trade and Industrial Paper ’ and the ‘ Financial News. ’ The members of the counter-revolutionary organizations in their majority belong to the nobility, are former Tsarist officers and supply corps men, former fishing industrialists, manufacturers and Socialists-Mensheviki.*

*“ This counter-revolutionary wrecking organization was in close contact with the White emigration and representatives of foreign capital, receiving from them financial aid and directions. This organization is now completely exposed.*

*“ The case has been handed over to the GPU. ”*

Below this announcement followed the “ confessions ” and “ testimony ” of the accused men, in which the most prominent professors, scientists and specialists of the country told in an incoherent and contradictory manner of the “ wrecking ” activity, of their attempt to produce famine

in the country, of receiving for their "wrecking work" money from abroad in mysterious and incomprehensible ways. These statements were simply incredible. From the point of view of evidence they were absurd.

In that part of the "incriminating" material, presented by the GPU, which dealt with the leaders of the "organization" there was not a single document proving the stated "facts"; everything was based on "voluntary confessions," but these not only did not confirm the "facts," but on the contrary contradicted them as well as each other. At the same time one could not find in any of the "confessions" an indication of the slightest desire on the part of the "guilty" to reduce the extent of their "crime" or to shift it to others; on the contrary, every one of them sought to emphasize that he had played an important, leading and active rôle in this "wrecking" organization. Each one, apparently, endeavored to do everything possible to further his own conviction and execution and made no attempt to shield others—they all named many persons and gave many "facts."

It is difficult to say by what means such "confessions" and "testimony" were obtained. Although the true picture of this terrible case will probably never be revealed, one thing is clear — that all the information published by the GPU bore the unmistakable sign of careless and cynical falsification. The "testimony" of the rank and file members of the "organization" is of such chaotic nature, that not only is it hard to analyze, but in many instances it is incomprehensible. Evidently, its main purpose was to show concretely what "wrecking" was and to explain the reason why the country suffered famine when the *Piatiletka* was supposed to be progressing so successfully.

Deprived even of a chance of defending themselves in a Soviet court these scientists had been blamed and arrested because of the very apparent failure of the Five Year Plan

in the food industries. After the publishing of the incoherent and contradictory materials everybody expected a summing up by the prosecution and a report from the GPU which might throw more light on the whole case. But events moved too swiftly. The very same day that the "materials" appeared in the papers, workmen and employees of all enterprises and institutions of the U.S.S.R. were ordered to attend meetings at which they were forced to vote for resolutions calling for the execution of "all the wreckers."

At such meetings not only the voicing of a protest against possible injustice in the accusation or the expressing of a doubt as to the fairness of GPU procedure, but the merest question which might seem suspicious or the failure to vote for the resolution submitted invariably led to loss of work and often to imprisonment and deportation.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the resolutions concerning the "wrecking organization" were unanimously approved, although it must be said, to the honor of Leningrad workmen, that all the meetings did not proceed smoothly. I later met one of these workmen who was serving a prison term because his behavior at such a meeting had been judged unreliable by the authorities.

On September 23rd and 24th the newspapers were filled with the resolutions so heartily approved at the meetings, as well as with disgusting articles, rhymes and cartoons all demanding the death penalty. Obviously the GPU was preparing for an execution.

On September 25th appeared the announcement from the GPU:

*"The Council of the GPU having by order of the U.S.S.R. Government investigated the case of the counter-*

<sup>1</sup> The word "deportation," as used by the author, does not mean the act of sending a person out of the country, but rather commitment to a concentration camp, or exile to some remote district of the U.S.S.R. — TRANSLATOR.

*revolutionary wrecking organization in the field of public supply of food products, the materials on which case have been published in the 'Pravda' on September 22, 1930, condemns (then followed a list of the names of forty-eight professors, scientists and experts). . . . TO BE SHOT.*

*"The sentence has been carried out.*

*"President of the OGPU — Menzhinsky."*

Such a monstrous slaughter was beyond belief — forty-eight of Russia's foremost scientists had been shot without trial. The most pessimistically inclined could not have imagined anything so horrible.

All those who had been executed were without exception "non-party" experts of the food industries, holding positions of responsibility in the central institutions in Moscow and those who had been directing the activity of Trusts and other big enterprises in the provinces. It was a list of administrative posts rather than of private individuals. Those in high positions who were spared were Communists. If a certain important position was being held by a Communist, the "non-party" expert who had held it previously was executed. If the post had been occupied by a Communist for a long time, he had been replaced just before this case came up by a "non-party" man who became one of the "48."

A large number of those executed I knew personally, others I knew by reputation. Among my friends and co-workers prominently associated with the fishing industry and shot as members of the "48" were the following:

*V. K. Tolstoy* — The former director of the Northern and the Azof-Black Seas regions, whose story I have already given.<sup>2</sup>

*M. A. Kazakoff* — An outstanding leader in the fishing

<sup>2</sup> The Communist who held this position at the time of the arrests was spared.



industry whose record and achievements I have already stated. He was accused of being the "leader of the wreckers in the fishing industry."

*P. M. Fishson* — Inspector of the State Fishing Industry.<sup>3</sup>

*G. M. Fishson* — One of the foremost workers in the Fishing Union.

*N. A. Ergomyshoff* — A prominent expert and director of the Far-Eastern Region.

*M. P. Artsiboosheff* — An expert who was made director of the Volga-Caspian Region just before his arrest.

*P. I. Karpoff* — The foremost Russian expert in the manufacture of fishing equipment, who for many years had directed the manufacture of fishing nets for the whole of the U.S.S.R. and was the technical director of the *Setesnast* (Fishing Equipment Trust). Although his name was not mentioned in the "materials" published on September 22nd, he was executed as one of the "48" seemingly because of his past.

*S. D. Shaposhnikoff* — The most prominent refrigeration specialist in the Russian fishing industry. His name was not inserted in the "arraignment," and in the official list of those executed, instead of a statement of his crime, the following short announcement was made: "Engineer, former owner of a refrigeration enterprise." In sentencing such prominent experts to death the GPU did not even deem it necessary to mention a reason for their execution.

*S. V. Scherbakoff* — The creator of the northern trawling enterprise and leader of the men working in the North State Fishing Trust. He had been arrested in March at the time when my quarters in Murmansk were searched.<sup>4</sup> I

<sup>3</sup> The senior director in the production department of the Fishing Union, the Communist G. A. Kryshoff, whose work Fishson had often done, was spared.

<sup>4</sup> Krotoff, who had been arrested with Scherbakoff in Murmansk in the spring of 1930, could never have been guilty of any crime. A more honest and conscientious man was not to be found and he never concerned him-

cannot think of him without emotion. No one who worked with Scherbakoff can ever forget him. Here is his story:

Of peasant origin from the Astrakhan district, Simeon Vassilievitch Scherbakoff learned to read and write in a village school and at the age of ten got a job as "boy" in one of the fisheries owned by the big firm of Bezzubikoff. There he rose to the position of manager of the northern section of the firm. Calmly and confidently he conducted this large fishing business, no part of which belonged to him and from which he received only a very modest salary. He accepted the Revolution as calmly as he met everything else in life. He had begun life too early and had seen too much of it to be moved by anything that could happen. After the Revolution he accepted new work without loss of time, because work in the fisheries was his only interest.

Industrious and endowed with exceptional ability, he was a man of the highest character in every way. He had no personal ambitions or interests; at home and in his office he lived exclusively for his work. Although he had received no education, he was able to solve in his head the most complicated problems; he understood perfectly the intricacies of bookkeeping; he kept up-to-date in his reading of specialized literature, sensed by extraordinary intuition what of it was valuable and then boldly introduced it into his own enterprise. While directing the whole business and

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self with questions of general policy. However, as he was the second in command in the North State Fishing Trust, he had to be removed to strengthen the accusation of "wrecking activity." After the execution of the "48," he was held for another half year in prison and subjected to the most cruel tortures in an attempt to force him to denounce those of his fellow-workers who were still alive. He became very sick with scurvy, suffered from hallucinations and was almost insane. I was told that under the strain of terrible suffering, completely exhausted and yearning for death he finally wrote the fatal words: "I admit myself guilty." The cross-examiners could not force him to denounce others. He was shot in April 1931.

rebuilding it, he never lost touch with the production end and knew the current life of the entire enterprise down to the last detail.

He was the only one who was able to go on working with two Communists continually on his neck — the president of the Trust and his assistant — with incessant interference into his business matters by the GPU, and with every disgruntled workman using libel and false accusation against him as weapons of revenge. All this he was able to regard coolly as unavoidable difficulties of the trade, like the bad weather and storms which forced the trawlers to remain in the harbor. It must be said that the Bolsheviki forgave those of us for our education received in a formal way much more easily than they did him. It was unpleasant for many of them to come into contact with his sound mind and clean conscience; therefore, he was one of the first to perish at their hands, although he could in no way be ranked as a “class enemy.”

In every section of the industry one non-party expert, the most prominent, had been shot and, in the published list of the executed, after each name, stood the notation: “Leader of wrecking activity in such and such a Trust. . . .” This left the way open for a further “uncovering” of their “followers.” But there were twelve experts who, in the testimony, had figured as participants in the wrecking organization, whose names did not appear in the fatal list of the “48.” Concerning these the GPU made no comment; they did not feel obliged to explain in any way why these men, previously accused of being “wreckers,” had been replaced by others at the time of execution.

By the execution of the “48” the Soviet Government demonstrated to the whole world that there is no justice in the U.S.S.R., that whenever it finds it suited to its wishes it can send anyone to death and that the citizens of the

U.S.S.R. not only will not dare to raise their voices in protest, but at a word of command will give their votes of approval of such slaughter and of their gratitude to the GPU.

The day after the executions I met one of the technical experts of the fishing business. He was very depressed. As nobody could overhear us we spoke openly of what lay on our minds.

"Whose turn is it now? I feel it will be mine. Well, let them go ahead — I'm only sorry for the children," he said, as he looked at his watch. "I must be going now."

"Where to?" I asked.

"General meeting — to express contempt for the executed, to voice disapproval of wrecking activities and to vote that the GPU be awarded the 'Order of Lenin' for its good work! You'd better come, too."

I expressed my thoughts with a glance and shrugged my shoulders.

"I advise you to go," he said seriously. "Why be quixotic? Believe me, your absence will be noticed."

We parted. I never saw him again.

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## CHAPTER X

### REAL WRECKERS OF RUSSIA

**D**ESPAIR and panic ensued. No one thought of work; everyone feared for his own life, expecting at any moment to be seized and to see his friends and relatives arrested. The Communist chiefs recommended calmness, assuring us all that those left free were safe, but their efforts were in vain. Nobody believed them. It was too well known that the termination of a trial, the announcement of a sentence and even the fearful words "carried out" do not mean, in the U.S.S.R., the end of arrests, but are only preludes to more repressions and executions.

The sentence itself contained clear indications that it was only the beginning. In the announcement of the execution of many of the "48" the GPU had stated: "leader of a group of wreckers in such and such a trust," "initiator of wrecking activity in such and such a region." It was clear that now they would go after the participants of these "groups" and "organizations" which they had "discovered." Realizing, as we did, that no such groups or organizations had ever existed, we did not feel secure from arrest simply in the knowledge of our own innocence.

Subsequent events quickly proved that the case was being carried on further, that the Political Bureau and the GPU were not satisfied with the number of victims they had already sent to their deaths. A second "weeding out" process in all those institutions mentioned in connection with the case of the "48" was announced, in spite of the fact

that, in the summer of 1930, *before* the arrest of the "48," a drastic "weeding out," with the active participation of the GPU, had already been effected. At that time they had found the very ones who were later shot in connection with the case of the "48" to be loyal workers. The new "weeding out" was to serve the special purpose of exposing the "concealed accomplices of the wreckers." At meetings held for this purpose the GPU not only gained new victims but also collected more evidence against those already detained in prisons. It was a great temptation to those still at liberty, for by actively coming forward at these meetings to denounce their fellow-workers they could thus gain a reputation for reliability in the eyes of the GPU. There were some who basely succumbed to this temptation, while others, fearing for their skins, went even further. Thus Professor F. I. Baranoff came out with a base and libelous article in the magazine "Bulletin of Fishing Economy," under the title of "Lessons of Wrecking" wherein he attempted to prove that "as he now understands" it the work of those executed had been of a "wrecking nature" and that those who had opposed his scientific work had done so with only one purpose — "wrecking."<sup>1</sup>

It was not long before new arrests were made in all the institutions and enterprises of the food industry in Moscow as well as in the provinces. In the Institute of Fishing Economy Professor N. N. Alexandroff, A. F. Nevraeff and a number of other employees were arrested; in the Directorate of Fisheries, the well-known experts, S. A. Tikhenko and S. I. Parakhin; while in the Fishing Union there remained not one of the old employees. And similar arrests,

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<sup>1</sup> As I was later to discover, Professor Baranoff had originally been one of the chief suspects in the case of "wrecking" in the Institute of Fishing Economy, but by his subsequent activity and his false condemnation of his fellow-workers he succeeded in saving his life and winning a "pardon" from the GPU. When last I heard of him he was still carrying on his professorial work in safety.

all of more or less prominent specialists and employees, were taking place in the provinces.

By the autumn of 1930 the disruption of the fishing industry in all its branches — scientific, administrative, production and distribution — was complete. Of the old staff of experts there were left only units and these made up mostly of men who had carefully avoided taking part in practical work, of a few good practical workers spared by chance because they held secondary positions and, finally, of individuals connected with the GPU.

Such Communists as had succeeded since the Revolution in acquiring some education and some knowledge of the fishing business, due to their work in contact with specialists, were also being removed and transferred to other positions. Such were the cases of Frumkin, Kryshoff, Babkin and many others. The entire industry was handed over into "proletarian" hands, that is, into the hands of men who knew nothing about the business. The results were what might have been expected and were felt almost immediately.

I cannot here give a complete statement of the havoc wrought in the fishing industry — some future historian will, no doubt, be able to do it much better than I could. I can only say that during the short period of 1930-31, out of the scientists and highly qualified specialists in the fishing industry whom I knew personally or of whose fate I have been definitely informed, twenty-six were shot and thirty-four deported to concentration camps. Many more whom I did not know were either killed or deported at this same time. In the Far East alone five were shot and sixty sentenced to hard labor.

Without any doubt the systematic destruction of the remaining specialists and men of culture is even now being continued in the U.S.S.R. No disaster, no epidemic, no war could destroy with such selection the cream of experi-

enced and active workers in the industries which the GPU attacked. This wholesale destruction of specialists could not fail to have fatal results for the fishing business. In spite of the large sums of money spent by the Bolsheviks and the enormous efforts exerted to develop the industry, it was broken down at the root by this mass destruction of specialists in 1930-31, and all endeavors later to revive it were defeated because of the absence of men with a knowledge of the business.

The same conditions prevailed, in general, in all the industries of the U.S.S.R. I specifically mention the fishing industry of the north only because I know it so well, but it presents no exception and was only in line with the other industries in all parts of the country.

The Bolsheviks for the second time were leading a rich and prosperous country into terrible poverty and dreadful famine. "Wrecking" did, indeed, exist, but it was wrecking of unbelievable proportions, preplanned by the organization headed by Stalin, the Political Bureau and the GPU, together with their thousands of branches, called nuclei, of the Communist Party.

A time will come when these real wreckers will have judgment passed upon them by a true court of justice.



**PART TWO**

***WE ARE PRISONERS IN LENINGRAD***

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## CHAPTER XI

### ARREST

**A**FTER the execution of the "48" I knew that sooner or later I too would be arrested. In the order for their execution V. K. Tolstoy, my best friend, was designated as the "leader of wrecking activities in the North Region," while S. V. Scherbakoff, the man closest to me among the workers of the Trust, was described as "the head of the counter-revolutionary organization in the North State Fishing Trust." And now that these accused "leaders" had been done away with, the "organization" itself must somewhere be found. Since it did not exist, the most likely people in the opinion of the GPU would be accused. Besides Scherbakoff, the only arrest yet made in the North State Fishing Trust had been that of K. I. Krotoff who had been in prison now for more than half a year — but this was evidently not enough for an "organization." There remained four specialists holding executive positions: Scriabin, the engineers K. and P., and myself. Scriabin might possibly be spared since his father, a peasant, had once been exiled by the Tsarist Government. The engineers K. and P. did not quite fit the rôle of members of the "organization" as they were already serving a sentence of hard labor, having been sold to the Trust by the GPU. And since the GPU was receiving income for their work, it would have been foolish to lose it by accusing them for a second time.

It was therefore clear that I would be the next victim. I would either be sent to Solovki or executed — there

could be no other alternative. Life was finished for me. What would happen to my wife and my boy — eleven years old — for whom there had been tragedy enough already?

Bewildered and not knowing what I should do, I decided definitely not to go back to Murmansk. What had I to lose? I might look for work in the provinces, take my family with me and try to escape across the border. In applying for such work I must, if possible, make it appear that I did not want to be assigned to a frontier region; otherwise the GPU would never permit me to work in such a place. I discussed this with my wife. It seemed the only way out. But the accomplishing of such a scheme took time and dismal days of waiting followed.

I shunned mankind. Any contact with a man in my position might prove dangerous. If by chance I met acquaintances, they passed me by in a panic. The few who did stop to assure me of their sympathy stressed the fact that in spite of everything they were not avoiding me.

Each evening, when the boy was in bed, my wife and I would sit together for a long time — waiting. We never spoke of it, but we both knew for what we were waiting and that these might be our last hours together. Nearly a month had elapsed since the executions. Many people had been imprisoned. Why was I being spared? Sometimes I even felt ashamed that I had not yet been arrested. How had I earned the mercy of the executioners, I who had not taken part in a single meeting at which the so-called “wreckers” had been denounced?

It happened at last, and very simply.

I was at home alone. My son had gone to the “movies” — he, too, was restless and nervous. My wife had not yet come home from work.

The bell rang. I opened the door and saw the house



TATIANA TCHERNAVIN

THE AUTHOR'S WIFE

*“We determined  
to escape together”*

superintendent with a stranger in civilian dress. I understood.

The stranger handed me a paper — the order for search and arrest.

I let him in.

He entered the room which served as both bedroom and study and began the search. It was a very superficial one, only a formality. From the mass of papers and manuscripts in my desk he took only one notebook lying on top.

When my wife came home the search was finished and I was preparing for my "journey": two changes of underwear, a pillow, a blanket, a few pieces of sugar and several apples — there was no other food in the house. I changed my clothes.

"I am ready," I said to the GPU agent, thinking to myself, "ready for death."

It was a long time before they took me away. The prison vans were so busy.

I will not attempt to describe those last minutes — I cannot, even now.

In the prison van I was alone, though ten or twelve people could easily have been placed in it. I must be an important criminal. Through the small barred window in front I could see the backs of the chauffeur and the guard and catch glimpses of familiar houses and streets which I was seeing for the last time.

Here is the Palace Bridge. Now comes the decisive moment — where am I being taken — to the prison on the Gorokhovaya or to the Shpalernaya? We stop. The van doors are opened. Now I will be dragged out! The street is empty. At the gateway stand two men in leather jackets; their loud voices echo down the street. The air is warm and damp — a light breeze coming from the sea. We halt for some time. We must have stopped for another passenger. He is hustled in and we start again. The new one sits op-

posite me all hunched up, holding his belongings in his lap. His face is drawn and frightened.

We are taken along the Millionnaya, the quay. We turn to the Shpalernaya and stop in front of the "House of Preliminary Detention." The gates are open; the guards interrupt their rough talk to order us out.

"Get along!"

We climbed out and up some stairs. The office of the prison was dirty and reeked of tobacco. I waited while my companion filled out his questionnaire. The GPU clerk put the questions lazily and indifferently; my companion answered in the manner of a diligent pupil — loudly and with great readiness, looking his inquisitor straight in the eyes. From his tone it was clear to me that he was sure of his innocence and convinced that his arrest was a misunderstanding.

"How many times have you been arrested?" growled the clerk.

"This is the first time."

"Have you been in court before?"

"No, no, of course not!"

He sounded excited, nearly joyous, as though he thought he could never be held after such good answers.

He was led away. No attention was paid to me and I waited a long time. At last they gave me a questionnaire to fill in by myself. This is better than answering oral questions — one has time to think. I was especially glad of this because I had on my mind one sin against the Soviet authority — I had concealed the fact of having seen military service. I must not give myself away.

"Did you serve in the Old Army?" "No."

"Have you served in the Red Army?" "No."

In answering the first question I lied, as I *had* served during the War. I signed under the statement that I knew

the penalties for false testimony. What did it matter? Things could not be worse and I must fight to the end.

I was taken upstairs to the fourth floor and on the landing they searched me and took away my necktie, braces, garters and shoe-strings — to prevent suicide. It was disagreeable to be left in such an untidy state. After all, one can hang himself with trousers more easily than with a necktie.

One of the men who searched me was good-natured and treated me with some sympathy. He saw the apples I had brought.

“ These aren't allowed, but, well, keep them. How about your bag? Well, take it, and get into your cell quickly! ”

The other warden returned.

“ Take him to No. 22.”

The clock in the corridor showed 3 A.M. It would soon be morning.

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## CHAPTER XII

### CELL 22

**I**T was almost dark in the cell. At the noise of the opening door a man in underclothes got up from a nearby cot and, without paying any attention to me, spoke reproachfully to the warden.

"Comrade, you promised not to give us any more; I have nowhere to put them. There are less than a hundred men in No. 20, and here we have a hundred and eight."

"We are also adding to No. 20," replied the warden indifferently, turning the key in the enormous lock.

The man in the underclothes turned to me. "Take off your things, Comrade, and hang your coat over there," he said, pointing to a nail near the door, already overloaded with coats and jackets.

I took off my overcoat and threw it in a corner near the grill.

As soon as my eyes became accustomed to the darkness I looked about the cell. It was a large, almost square room with a floor area of some seventy square meters. The ceiling, slightly arched, was supported in the middle by two thin, metal columns. Opposite the entrance were two grilled windows.

A platform raised about forty centimeters from the floor covered the entire cell. On this platform lay sleeping figures: along the side walls two rows with heads to walls and feet inward, in the middle two rows with heads to the center. Between every two rows was a narrow passage, but in places



where tall men lay there was no way of getting by. At right angles to these a fifth row lined the wall adjoining the corridor. No passageway whatever was left here.

Some of the men raised themselves and stared at me with curiosity.

"In this passage, to the left, under the boarding, the third place is unoccupied. Lie down there," said the man in the underclothes. "If they won't let you in, insist. There's room enough."

"What do you mean, *under* the boarding?" I asked him.

"Why yes, on the floor under the boarding," he repeated.

I took a few steps forward to the spot pointed out to me and was amazed to find that on the floor there was a lower layer of sleeping bodies. To squeeze myself into it seemed impossible; I decided to return to the door.

"What's the matter, Comrade?"

"If you permit I will stay here till morning. It's too crowded there and I don't want to disturb the sleeping men."

"Well, we must think up some arrangement for you. Have you just come from freedom? It shows. I've been here nine months already. Engineer L——," he introduced himself.

I also gave my name.

"By the way, I'll enter you in the book," he said, "I had thought I'd wait till morning. I'm the foreman of this cell and I've kept this book for four months. See how many names! Thousands have passed through the cell."

"A curious document," I remarked, "a good memorial for posterity."

"Remember your number, you are 109th, and now come, I will show you a place, but it's near the toilet. And please be quiet. Not even whispering's allowed at night. Rules

are posted on the column, read them to-morrow or you may be fined."

We squeezed our way along the rows of men to the very wall. In the corner, next to the toilet were two cots, close together, occupied by two sleeping men.

"Lie down here," said the foreman, "it's a good place; the toilet is near, but the windows are open all night."

With difficulty I crawled underneath the cots, arranged my pillow on the floor between them and stretched myself on my back. The two cots above almost touched each other; it was possible to pass one's head between them but not the shoulders. To sit up was impossible. A heavy, disgusting smell was spreading along the floor from the toilet seat which was not more than a yard from my head; a pile of stinking sawdust almost touched my pillow. Several men stood in line in front of the toilet.

I felt very badly, a degrading helplessness was overcoming me. It was impossible to sleep, impossible either to get up or sit up, and there was nowhere to move as the whole floor was taken up by sleeping bodies. To save my pillow I pulled it down onto my knees, stuck my head out between the cots and leaned my shoulders against the wall. Dark, crawling dots were moving over the pillow in all directions.

So began my prison education. For a novice it was quite enough.

Morning came at last. The cell began to wake up. Those who occupied the twenty-two cots were getting up cautiously and approaching the lavatory in a line. All the others remained in their places, although apparently the majority of them were awake. Evidently everything was being done according to a strict routine.

A command resounded from some distance along the corridor.

"Get up! Get up! Time to get up!" And as it was repeated, it came nearer.

The foreman got up and in a dry voice commanded: "Get up! Smoke!"

The cell became alive with motion and noise: talk, laughter, quarrelling. Smoke from hand-rolled cigarettes — no others were permitted — rose on every side. Long lines were formed in front of the toilet and lavatory. Now I could see how such a quantity of people had found room there during the night. It certainly was a clever arrangement.

The whole cell, except where the twenty-two folding cots were disposed at opposite walls, was covered by wooden boarding, the ends of which rested on low supports. On the top boarding slept the upper layer, under it, on the floor, a similar layer. All had straw mattresses — a luxury in prison. It was impossible for those lying underneath to turn over, much less to sit up. Only after the top row had risen and the boarding had been removed could those beneath begin to move about and stretch their cramped bodies.

When morning came the boards and mattresses were taken up and stacked. Then the general confusion became such that it seemed utterly impossible that order could ever be restored. The boards and mattresses were taken out for the day into an empty pasageway adjoining the cells. This was done by the prisoners themselves with extraordinary efficiency and speed. Once these were removed the chaos subsided somewhat; there remained, however, 109 men in a cell seventy meters square, part of which was taken up by the toilet, lavatory, cupboard for metal mugs and soup bowls and the personal belongings of the prisoners.

I attempted to approach the washstand, but was told that I must wash last in accordance with the order of entry into the cell. Evidently everything here required special training and exact determination of rights and duties, but before I had time to learn and understand the rules of the cell I was summoned to my first examination.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### “YOU WILL BE THE 49TH”

**T**CHERNAVIN!”

My name was called loudly from the other side of the grill. A passage-way was made for me and as I walked through the cell the eyes of my companions followed me with curiosity — a newcomer. At the door stood a prison guard, a Red Army soldier. He repeated my name.

“Tchernavin?”

“Yes.”

“First name and father’s name?”

“Vladimir Vyacheslavovich,” I replied.

“Get going! — to the examining officer!”

One of the prisoners stopped me and whispered hurriedly, “You are being taken to examination. Take some food with you, and remember one thing — never believe the examining officer.”

I went back and put an apple in my pocket.

“Well, get going!” hurried the guard.

Out into the corridor I went.

Again — along stairways, through grilled partitions in each story, with clanging bolts and grinding doors which guards shut noisily behind me. The second floor — the lunch-room for examining officers and on the counter imported cigarettes, cakes, sandwiches and fruit. Such a lunch-room could be found nowhere in the U.S.S.R. except in the GPU and Kremlin offices. Through another grilled corridor which led from the lunch-room we marched, the

guard following at my heels until he stopped me before a door and knocked. An indistinct answer came from within.

“Get going,” the guard commanded.<sup>1</sup>

I opened the door and entered the office. It was a small room, the size of a solitary cell — plain painted walls, a small office desk in the middle with a chair on either side. On the desk was an electric lamp with a strong light directed toward the chair to be occupied by the prisoner. It was morning, but inside the room the dawn could not yet be felt.

“Good morning,” the examining officer greeted me, calling me by name. “Sit down.” He was a young man of about thirty, fair, pink-cheeked, well-groomed and well-fed.

“Well, let’s talk,” he began. “Why do you think you were arrested?”

“I don’t know.”

“How is it you don’t know? Don’t you even have an idea?”

“I have no idea.”

“Think well. Is it possible that you never even thought you would be arrested? No? Try to remember.”

“No.”

I was looking straight and firmly into his eyes. I was thinking — no, my friend, you will not catch me on this, it’s too simple.

“No,” I repeated again. “I haven’t the slightest idea. I had hoped that you would give me some explanation.”

“In good time. Meanwhile, remember that we are in no hurry; we have no reason for hurrying. An investigation

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<sup>1</sup> In the terse prison language “Get going” has many different meanings, depending upon the words with which it is qualified. “Get going” is often used as a command to go out for exercise; “Get going, with overcoat, but without things” means being taken to certain torture; while “Get going, with things” means execution, or, in extremely rare cases, freedom.

rarely lasts less than six months, usually nine months, very often a year. You'll have plenty of time to think things over. — And so, you will not tell me that you were expecting your arrest? ”

“ No, I didn't expect it.”

In this fashion we argued for a long time, still with the same result.

“ Well, maybe later you will become more compliant. Let's get on to the questionnaire.”

He went over all the questions that I had answered the night before and I replied firmly without contradicting what I had written — he would not trap me here.

“ Well! well! a hereditary nobleman — and I, the man questioning you, am a hereditary proletarian,” he drawled, accentuating these words with a ridiculous emphasis as he lolled in his chair.

I was looking at him and thinking: “ probably the son of a merchant; the face — smooth, hands — well kept, not those of a working man; you have never seen work in your life, and I have had to work with both my head and hands since I was sixteen.”

“ Your attitude towards the Soviet Government? ”

“ Sympathetic.”

He laughed.

“ Why not tell the truth? You might better say ‘ loyal,’ — this is false.”

“ I say — sympathetic.”

“ No, I won't enter it on the questionnaire, it's too absurd. Listen, this is a little thing, has no importance. I am asking this question only in order to verify your sincerity. Tell me the truth and I will deal with you in the future with full frankness. Believe me, I sympathize with you sincerely. We value and take care of specialists, but you do harm to yourself from the very beginning . . .” he was speaking in the light tone of a man of society.

I have heard all this already at the cross-examinations in Murmansk — I thought — and repeated with insistence; “Sympathetic. On what grounds don’t you believe me?”

“I could refuse to answer your question, but to prove my sincere good will towards you, I will answer. You are a nobleman, the Soviet Government has deprived you of all privileges; this alone is sufficient to make you a class enemy, even disregarding your convictions which are well known to us in every detail.”

“You are wrong. I have never had a chance to make use of any privileges of the nobility. I lived on what I earned myself; my scientific career was not interrupted by the Revolution. I want to remind you that this same nobility, his rank of a General and a high position, did not prevent my own uncle from becoming a loyal servant of the Revolution and a member of the Revolutionary War Council. You must have heard of him.”

The examining officer kept silent, not knowing how to parry this unexpected move. He waited a few minutes, then filled in the questionnaire, “Is in sympathy.”

Here at least was one small victory for me.

I understood why he was insisting. If it could be established that I belonged to the nobility and was not in sympathy with the Soviet Government, “wrecking activity” would be a logical deduction.

He made another attempt.

“But you *have* criticized the actions of the Soviet Government!”

“No.”

“Again you don’t want to be frank, even in a small matter like this. I will not conceal from you that your situation is very serious, the evidence against you is very strong, you are in danger of being shot, but I am sorry for you. Be frank and I will endeavor to come to terms

with you. Is it possible that you can assert that you never criticized the actions of the Soviet Government?"

"Yes, I can."

"What are you doing this for? We Communists, we the GPU workers, don't we criticize the actions of the Soviet Government?"

"I don't know. But I never did."

"Let's take an example: didn't the bread lines ever arouse your indignation?"

"I believed the bread lines were not 'actions of the Soviet Government.'"

"All right. Let it be as you please." He picked up his pen. "No, we will not put this down."

"As you see fit."

And here again his way of procedure was quite clear to me. If I had admitted that I had "criticized" he would have forced me to say that it had happened more than once, would have questioned me regarding when and with whom I had carried on such conversations, and this would give material for a "frank confession" which would have been classed according to Article 58, Paragraph 10 as "counter-revolutionary agitation" punishable by three to ten years in a concentration camp. The persons I might have mentioned would become the "counter-revolutionary organization," to which would be added the names of those at whose homes we could have been meeting, and this in its turn would be interpreted, according to Article 58, Paragraph 11 as "counter-revolutionary propaganda"; the two points combined would call for the death penalty.

He thought for a while and decided to make one last attack in the same direction.

"Is it also possible that you never told any anti-Soviet jokes?"

"No, I don't like jokes."

"And you never heard any?"



“No, I never listened to them.”

The face of the examining officer was becoming cruel and cold. He was looking straight into my eyes, watching every movement I made.

“And do you know that one should not lie at a cross-examination?”

“I know. I didn’t tell and didn’t listen to anti-Soviet jokes.”

We looked at each other suspiciously.

This time my lie was quite apparent: there is not a single man in Sovietland, high or low, who does not tell such jokes. It is the only bit of freedom of speech left in the U.S.S.R., something that cannot be throttled by any censorship or any terror, in spite of the fact that the spreading of such anecdotes is punishable as counter-revolutionary agitation by sentences of ten years in a concentration camp.

“Very well. Your character and your ‘sincerity’ are clear to me. We will take it into account during the further conduct of the investigation. But —” he suddenly again changed his threatening tone to an expression of friendly and frank advice — “I advise you to give good thought to the way you behaved at this cross-examination. You are bringing about your own destruction. You belong to the nobility. We are not persecuting for social origin, but it is clear to us that you are our class enemy if only on account of your parentage. We need proofs of your sincere desire to go with us and not against us,” recited the examining officer repeating words he had probably said hundreds of times before.

I replied coldly and with reserve that I was guilty of no crime, that I was quite certain that it was all a misunderstanding which would soon be cleared up and that I would be released.

“The GPU,” he said, “never makes an arrest without sufficient grounds, especially in the case of an important

specialist working on production. It was only after the evidence had been thoroughly checked and all the facts against you well appraised that I received authority from the Council for the search and your arrest."

It was true. My arrest was at least a month late.

"I am not going to submit these facts to you now, because I want to give you the opportunity to sincerely repent and yourself give us all the information in detail. Only under this condition will your life be spared, but in any case you get ten years in a concentration camp — this has already been decided. You see, I conceal nothing from you, I give you time to think it over. It's hard to act more humanely."

I kept silent.

He also stopped talking; then, looking me straight in the eye, he said harshly:

*"You will be the 49th."*

Evidently the first part of the program was completed. The examining officer looked at his watch. I had completely lost track of time: the gloomy autumn day was well advanced. I did not feel hungry, only tired, although I had had nothing to eat or drink for twenty-four hours.

"Unfortunately I have to leave now. Sign your deposition."

I carefully read over the scant information entered on the official questionnaire, drew lines through all the empty spaces and signed my name directly after the last word of my testimony. I knew that empty spaces in lines could easily be filled in.

He folded the sheet I had signed and put it in his briefcase.

"I will be back soon. In the meantime prepare a report on the privileges and duties you had at the institution where you worked. Then state the most important works you have recently completed in your laboratories."

He put on his coat and went out, and his place was taken by his assistant, who had directed the search in my apartment and conducted me to the prison. He read a paper, while I picked up a pen and enumerated my former privileges and duties. This was only a pretext to keep me longer and subdue me by exhaustion. Obviously the initial stage of the examination was over. They had not bothered to obtain exact information about me. That was clear. For some reason they needed my “testimony” and “confessions”; they would endeavor to force these from me, but would not forge them. This also was of importance.

The short autumn day was over long ago. Lights were turned on again, but I was still sitting in the same chair I had taken in the early morning.

At last my first inquisitor reappeared.

“Well, have you finished?”

“I have written down the privileges and duties; I have not made out, however, the list of my works, because I published an article in a technical magazine a month ago where such a list was given. I have nothing to add; it’s difficult to reproduce it exactly from memory — I might make a mistake. You may get my article and add it to the case, if that is necessary.”

For some reason this did not please him.

“Remember once and for all,” he said in a voice of sharp reprimand, “we don’t believe in any printed material. You might have written anything there.”

“The article is signed by me and I am responsible for it. I can’t write anything different.”

“Then you must write it down again.”

I was obliged to pick up the pen and write, although I was beginning to feel very tired.

He kept me for about two hours more and then told me I could go back to my cell.

“I advise you to remember what I have told you and to

think it over carefully. Behavior like yours today will lead to nothing good.”

My mind was incapable of realizing anything but the fact that at last I was permitted to go.

Again the lighted GPU lunch-room, where examining officers in military uniforms were eating at small tables, and with them girl employees in short skirts and with painted lips. Beyond — the now familiar staircase with grills, and the cell. I already knew where to go; the guard marched indifferently behind. In the cells lights were dimmed. Everything was ready for the night, so it must have been after nine — I had been summoned shortly after seven in the morning.

My first examination had lasted fourteen hours.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### BANDITS HAVE RIGHTS

**A**LTHOUGH the cell was supposedly settled for the night, no one was sleeping. The foreman was standing by his cot in heated argument with two prisoners at the opposite end of the cell near the window. By the door stood a man in a fur coat holding his things — evidently a newcomer. He seemed completely bewildered; here he was in prison and there was no room for him. He was the 110th occupant of a cell meant for twenty-two prisoners.

I stood and waited, listening to a fellow-prisoner who explained what was going on.

“Those two are criminals — bandits. Their places on the floor next to the window and lavatory are a little wider than those under the boarding, but cold because the window is open all night long. The foreman told them to take in this newcomer, but they refused, claiming that he has no right to put anyone in a place already occupied. He’s a little at fault; he ordered instead of requesting them and this made them angry. They’re not bad fellows, although real bandits, store robbers. The shorter one is Pavel Sokol, Sokoff, or Smirnoff — he’s the active leader. The second one, Vania Efimoff, is from his gang. There are nine of them in prison: two here, six in adjoining cells and one works in the kitchen and sleeps in the workmen’s cell. The examining officer deprived them of the privilege of exercise in the yard so that they couldn’t talk to each other, but just the same they talk through the grill. They’re quite

reckless. You'll see, even the cripple will come. He's in the opposite cell, No. 21. His two legs are cut off above the knees. He was their scout and receiver of loot — their spiritual leader. In the cell they behave excellently although they were put in here with us purposely. Attempts are made to incite them against us by telling them that we report their conversations. But they can't be taken in by such nonsense: they understand men better than the examining officers."

"Examining officers have no need of understanding," commented some one. "They sentence you to be shot — and that's all."

"Yes, it's certain they will be shot; it's a pity though, they're good fellows, not like petty thieves."

While we were talking the quarrel was still going on. Sokol's voice carried loudly and clearly across the cell.

"Comrades, you are wasting time. We have as much right to our two places as you have to yours. It's true that we are bandits, plain people, uneducated and you are professors and engineers; but we also are able to stand up for our rights. We won't give in. The foreman has no right to order us. I'm going to call a general meeting of the cell to discuss his action. I'm going to insist on his removal. In the meantime you'd better find another place for this newcomer."

I decided to intervene, feeling that I could come to some understanding with these bandits. I asked the foreman in a low voice whether he had any objections.

"You can try, but I doubt if you succeed — you can see for yourself how stubborn they are."

I made my way to the window and in the same low tone said to Sokol, "Let me in with you. My place is next to the toilet; I can't sleep there. I've spent all day at a cross-examination and had no sleep last night. We'll give my place to the 'novice.'"

“ Well — all right. Vania, shall we let him in? ”

Vania growled sulkily: “ Oh, let him in.”

Then in a somewhat milder tone, he said to me, “ It’s cold here, you’ll catch cold. The window is open all night. We’re hardened to it.”

“ I’m also hardened,” I replied and, gathering up my belongings, moved over to my new place.

“ Lie down in the middle,” invited Pavel. “ It will be warmer and in the morning, when they come to wash, it won’t be so wet.”

I thanked them and lay down. This was the beginning of a real friendship with the bandits whose attitude towards me was deeply touching.

One of the prisoners brought me some cold soup and some cereal hardened into a gluey mass. I could not eat it. I drew out of my pocket the forgotten apple — to the surprise of my neighbors.

“ An apple? Raw? How did you manage to get it through? It is strictly forbidden.”

“ I don’t know; they let it pass. I have some more, do you want one? ”

“ Why of course we do,” Pavel replied, with excited eagerness in his voice. “ We’re terribly in need of something green. Here we are given nothing raw. That’s to produce scurvy. Vania is getting it already.” Pavel nodded at his companion. “ We get no fats either and that’s why we have ulcers; sometimes they’re simply terrible, especially on the stomach and back. Vania — show your back! See! ”

Vania turned up his shirt. All his back was covered with dark purple circles the size of a pre-war five kopek piece.

“ Have you been long in prison? ” I asked.

“ Oh, some time.”

The wind was blowing straight on us from the window and was drawn along the floor to the barred wall opposite.

There was no smell from the toilet here. I rolled myself in my blanket and fell asleep.

I was awakened by my neighbor raising himself up and calling:

“Pavel Constantinovitch.”

At the bars stood a guard. It was still night.

“Come on, to cross-examination!”

Pavel began to dress leisurely.

“Vania, you’ll be called out too. Remember what we agreed — not a word. Let them talk themselves.” And he added something in thieves’ argot unintelligible to me.

The guard spoke to him impatiently.

“All right, there’s plenty of time, it’s not a fire alarm,” Pavel replied and continued to dress carefully.

He was about thirty-five, of medium height, well-built, broad-chested. His features were regular, his face very pale, with a black, curly beard and small mustache which did not hide the outline of his upper lip. His black, soft, curly hair was carefully combed and trimmed — a thing very rare in prison. With his dark eyes and shapely eyebrows he would have been quite handsome except for his apparent short-sightedness and his lips which were too soft and full. His whole appearance was that of a stage villain. And to my surprise he even dressed to fit the rôle: black, well-pressed pants, good shoes and a dark red satin shirt.

He combed his hair, pulled down his shirt, tightened his belt and made his way lightly to the door.

Vania was of a more ordinary type: very tall, extremely broad in the shoulders, a youngster who had become emaciated and pale from prison life. He also was smoothly shaven and dressed with some elegance.

I had scarcely time to fall asleep again — not more than ten minutes having elapsed — when Pavel returned, undressed quickly and lay down beside me.



“ Well, how did it go? ”

“ All right.”

“ Why did they let you go so soon? I was questioned for fourteen hours! ”

“ Yes, it surprised us. Apparently they're taking your case seriously. But why question us? I refused to answer questions. Let them tell what they know — then I will speak.”

“ And how was the examining officer? ”

“ He? — well, he asked: ‘ Who are you? ’ ‘ I am so and so: Sokol and Sokoff and Smirnoff.’ ‘ What have you to say for yourself,’ he says. ‘ Not a damn thing — nothing.’ Then of course he says, ‘ Don't be a fool, tell what you know about such and such a case.’ ‘ Nothing, not a damn thing!’ He gets mad and says, ‘ I need to make an entry on the record and I can't put down that kind of answer.’ ‘ What you have to do is no worry of mine. I also need a lot, but I'm not asking you for it.’ ‘ Formulate your answer so that it can be entered into the record.’ ‘ Well,’ I said, ‘ you're paid money for it, formulate it yourself.’ ”

“ What did he say to that? ”

“ Nothing. He laughed, picked up the sheet of paper and wrote: ‘ Refuses to testify,’ and handed it to me to sign. ‘ You see,’ says I, ‘ you've formulated it; if you'd done it long ago, there'd been no need of talking.’ I signed. ‘ Go back to the cell,’ he says. That's all. They seldom try to frighten us; they know it won't go over.”

“ And whom do they try to frighten? ”

“ Those who've had no prison experience: workmen and peasants are always treated that way. They also try it out on intellectuals, if they see the man is scared and that he can be impressed by shouting and swearing. Some are badly beaten, too. But our kind will never let them get away with this, we're ready to do some swearing ourselves and we won't allow them to beat us up — so they don't try. If the

person's scared, however, they certainly abuse him, especially if it's a woman. With some they can do whatever they please at cross-examinations, however learned and educated they may be, but with us" — he laughed — "they know we understand all their dirty tricks."

"In spite of all this I'm surely going to be shot," he added dreamily, "and he will be shot too," nodding towards Efimoff.

"What for?"

"We're being accused as bandits, that's why we were transferred to the Shpalerka, to the GPU. At first we were in the criminal prison. We robbed Coöperatives; broke into the buildings and carried away goods. That's only theft, punishable according to the Code by not more than five years at a concentration camp, but they want us sent to the 'left' (to death), and so they transferred us here to be dealt with directly by the GPU, without trial: Article 59, Paragraph 3 and it's done — banditry, armed robbery. We're not bandits; we never went armed, it's not our specialty. You know, everyone has his job. We worked in stores. I have been working at this for a long time; I got used to it and can't stop it. How many times I have wanted to stop, but I can't! There's a gamble in it: a chance comes along — it's hard to pass it up, especially if one has had a drink."

"Did they catch you at work?"

"No, they aren't bright enough. They were looking for me for a long time and never would have caught me but for my wife. They arrested her and tried to scare her, but it didn't work. Our women aren't easily scared, you know. Then they showed her pictures of different women and my letters to them and said, 'Here you are suffering for him and he's unfaithful to you.' This worked: from jealousy she gave away my hideouts and our storage place. She was released. How she cried later, but it was too late, nothing

could be done. Many were arrested, and finally I was taken. If they don't shoot me, I will yet enjoy life. I'll escape, I won't be a prisoner, no matter what the sentence may be — five or ten years in concentration camp."

"But if they keep you in prison or send you to Solovki?"

"All the same I will escape. A man can't be kept in prison if he's determined to get away. Perhaps if in a fortress or chained to a wall, but from an ordinary prison you can always escape. If it's deportation, there's a way to do it during transportation. From the concentration camp it isn't difficult. We've had some experience."

"Why don't you escape from here, once you are threatened with execution?"

"It's difficult to do it from the Shpalerka, almost impossible, unless some opportunity turns up. From Kresti it is possible. Vania led three condemned criminals out of it. His specialty is locks, but he also understands plumbing. Did you ever notice the grilled sewer pipes which come out into the Neva? Well, such a pipe leads from Kresti. A man can easily crawl through it and the sewage flow is small; one would not drown. It's only difficult to reach it because it's necessary to open and close several locks in order to destroy all traces. Vania did everything perfectly: he led them out and stayed behind. The locks weren't broken — the escape wasn't discovered for some time; later, he himself escaped."

"It was a fine job," he added. "If my life is spared I'm not going to stay and rot in prison."

Over and over again I repeated to myself, "If my life is spared I'm not going to stay and rot in prison," — and so fell asleep.

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## CHAPTER XV

### SECOND INQUISITION

IT was my second day in prison — my second cross-examination. I was called before the tea ration was given out and had only time to eat an apple.

“How do you do?” the examining officer asked, scanning me attentively to see if I showed signs of a sleepless night.

“All right.”

“It isn't so good in your cell. You are in 22?”

“A cell like any other.”

“Well, did you do any thinking? Are you going to tell the truth *today*?”

“Yesterday I told only the truth.”

He laughed. “What will it be today — not the truth?”

Then he returned to the subject of the cell.

“I tried to chose a better cell for you, but we are so crowded. I hope we will come to an understanding and that I will not be forced to change the régime I have ordered for you. The third category is the mildest: exercise in the yard, permission to receive food parcels from outside, a newspaper and books. The first two categories are much stricter. Remember, however, that it depends entirely on me; any minute you may be deprived of everything and transferred to solitary confinement. Or rather, this depends not on me but on your own behavior, your sincerity. The more frank your testimony, the better will be the conditions of your imprisonment.”

He lighted an imported cigarette and passed the box to me.

“Do you care for a smoke?”

“No, I just had one.”

“I placed you in a common cell so that you can get familiar with our regulations. This is possible only in a common cell; it initiates you right away into the whole organization. You acquaint yourself, so to say, at first hand with our methods, and I believe . . . that you will become more compliant. We have discarded mediaeval methods; we don't hang up by the legs or cut off strips of skin from the back, but we have other means, no less effective, and we know how to force out the truth. Remember this now, and you will hear in the cell that this is no mere threat.”

He spoke slowly, looking me straight in the eye, emphasizing his words with evident pleasure and relish, watching for their effect.

“Did you know Scherbakoff? He was a strong man, but I broke him and forced him to confess.”

With great difficulty I controlled myself before replying.

“I don't doubt for a minute that you use torture, and if you believe that this assists in discovering the truth and speeding up the investigation, and since Soviet laws permit its use, I would suggest that you don't give up mediaeval methods: a little fire is a wonderful measure. Try it! I am not afraid of you. Even with that you can't get anything out of me.”

“Well, we will see about that later. Now let's get down to business. Let's talk about your acquaintances. Did you know V. K. Tolstoy, the wrecker, executed in connection with the case of the '48'?”

“Yes, I knew him. How could I not know him when he was the director of the fishing industry in the north?” I replied in frank astonishment. “We both worked in it for more than twenty years.”

"And did you know him well?"

"Very well."

"How long did you know him?"

"From childhood."

His manner changed completely; he hurriedly picked up a statement sheet and placed it in front of me.

"Write down your confession."

"What confession?"

"That you knew Tolstoy, that you were in friendly relation with him from such and such a time. I see that we will come to an understanding with you, your frankness will be appreciated. Write."

He evidently was in a hurry, did not quite know what he was saying, afraid that I might reverse my statements.

I took the sheet and wrote down what I had said.

"Excellent. Let's continue."

Then followed a barrage of questions about Tolstoy, about Scherbakoff and other people that I had known. He did not find me quite so tractable and we launched into a battle of wits that kept up hour after hour. He questioned me with insistence and in great detail, trying without success to make me give dates.

"You'll not succeed in outwitting me," he snapped sharply. "I advise you not to try. I am going home to dinner now and you will stay here till evening. This examination will continue — not for a day or two, but for months and, if necessary, for years. Your strength is not equal to mine. I will force you to tell us what we need."

After threatening me still further he handed me some sheets of paper.

"You are going to state in writing your opinion regarding the building of a utilization factory in Murmansk, its equipment and work in the future. I'll soon be back; when I return, your comments on these questions must be completed."

He put on his overcoat and left. His assistant took his place, and I busied myself with my writing. It was three or four hours before he returned, already evening.

Although I had eaten almost nothing for three days, I was still in good fighting form. He questioned me about the buying of a ship from abroad, trying to make me say that here was "wrecking," because the price had been exorbitant and the ship itself had proved unsatisfactory. It was most confusing and his questions far-fetched. We talked and we argued, but I would not give the answers he wanted.

He began on another tack.

"Well, and the wrecking in the filter factory? Didn't you notice that?"

"No. I had nothing to do with its work, but as far as I know, the factory functioned normally."

I certainly did not understand what he was driving at until he finally exclaimed:

"Well, and do you also think that the floor at the factory was normally laid? Did nothing happen to it? Wasn't it necessary to rebuild it in half a year?"

At last he had disclosed his secret. The circumstances were as follows: the floor in the cold room of the factory, where the filter-press stood, was covered with "linolite" — a special composition material used in the U. S. S. R. because they could get nothing better. One night, owing to the negligence of the manager of the factory, a Communist, the tank with cod liver oil was overfilled and many gallons ran out onto the floor. The "linolite" warped and had to be replaced. The new flooring had cost 20 roubles — the spilt oil more than one thousand.

I tried to explain to the examining officer what actually happened.

"Well, and in this case, you maintain, there was no 'wrecking'?"

“On whose part?” I asked. “On the part of the man who spilt the oil?”

“Certainly not. On the part of the engineer who intentionally covered the floor with a material which deteriorates from oil?”

My patience was getting exhausted. “May I ask you,” I said, “what I have got to do with all this? What connection have I with the vessel you questioned me about, or with this floor, oil and factory? Is it because my laboratory was located there?”

“I need your opinion about these facts and your willingness to help us. And so you don’t see any ‘wrecking’ in it?”

“No. I don’t.”

“All right,” he said. “And what is your attitude regarding the subject of the fish supply in the Sea of Barents in connection with the construction of trawlers as provided for by the Five Year Plan?”

Now he had broached a subject with which I *could* have a direct connection. The evening was already changing into night, but I was still sitting in the same chair. I was becoming unconscious of time; was it my second day in prison or my tenth? In spite of the depressing weariness, mental and physical, which was taking hold of me, I told him that I thought the fresh fish supply should be minutely and thoroughly investigated. I tried to make him see the hazards of the fishing industry in Murmansk and the enormous equipment that would be necessary to meet the proposals of the Five Year Plan.

“And thus you confess that you doubted the practicability of the Five Year Plan?” he said with a smile of smug satisfaction.

What could one say? I believed, as did everybody, that the plan was absurd, that it could not be fulfilled. For exactly such statements — no, for only a suspicion of having such thoughts — forty-eight men had been shot.



"No," I quickly replied, "I only point out the necessity of investigating the fish supply of the Barents Sea. I fail to understand why *you* think that such an investigation would lead to a curtailment of the Plan and not to the contrary?"

"Make a written statement of your conclusions regarding this subject. I have to go now," he said with importance.

He left me with his assistant and again I wrote.

When he reappeared, I had finished. He picked up the sheets.

"Think over carefully everything we talked about today. Tomorrow I'll send for you early in the morning. Go back to your cell."

It was late at night. Everybody in the cell was asleep. Sokol awoke and insistently advised me to eat something, but I dropped on my straw mattress, asleep as soon as my head touched the pillow.

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## CHAPTER XVI

### DAILY LIFE IN PRISON

I WAS not sent for the next morning, and day after day passed without my being summoned to another cross-examination. So it was that my acquaintance with prison life really began on the third day of my imprisonment. The first two had been passed in the examiner's office. I knew only that in a cell meant for twenty-two prisoners were herded one hundred and nine men, and this number soon increased to one hundred and fourteen.

There was insufficient air; a dense cloud of tobacco smoke hung over the room so that windows had to be kept open, and a strong draft blew continually between the windows and the grilled door which opened into the corridor. Many suffered from colds, and quarrels about the opening and closing of windows never ceased.

When people are compelled to live together for a long time they usually irritate each other and hatred follows. In common cells strangers were forced to live together for months, sometimes even for years, in conditions so crowded that for each person there was only about one-half square meter of floor space. Only the high general level of culture of the prisoners in our cell and the strict regulations devised and enforced by them made life at all possible. They had regulated everything: the order of getting up, washing, using the toilet, walking in the cell, opening of windows, cleaning of the cell, keeping of clothing, bedding and food, order during dinner and tea and the use of newspapers and books from the library.

In command of the cell were a foreman and his assistant, elected by the prisoners. These men maintained general order and enforced the established rules; offenders were punished by being detailed out of turn to clean the cell, or wash the floor. The foreman kept a list of prisoners and had to know at all times the number of inmates present in the cell, taken out to cross-examination, punitive cells, hospital and so on. He chose men for the various details: kitchen work, cleaning potatoes, stuffing mattresses and the carrying out of other prison chores. He was the intermediary between the prisoners and the administration and the arbitrator in disputes among the inmates. The foreman and his assistant were privileged to sleep on cots, sit at the table, wash and use the toilet out of turn. Their duties were varied and most unpleasant, their privileges insignificant.

Seniority is of great importance; the novice gets the worst place, he eats standing and is the last to wash. In every cell one is supposed to begin one's "career" from the bottom and, therefore, those who had already spent several months in one cell, when transferred to another, have to crawl for the night under the boarding and suffer the disadvantages of a newcomer. The examining officers know this rule and, when wishing to make conditions worse for the prisoner, transfer him without any reason from one cell to another. In our cell the question had been brought up several times of changing this regulation so as to have the length of the entire stay in prison and not that in the given cell taken into account. Every time, however, the suggestion was voted down because of the advantage such a change would give to those transferred to other cells for disorderly conduct and to the "spies" who are continually being moved from one cell to another.

Two or three of these spies are always placed in each common cell — sometimes they are prisoners themselves. They listen to conversations and pass them on to examin-

ing officers, but usually they do not stop there. Simulating sympathy they strive to find out various details relative to the case, family and personal circumstances and other useful information; and they urge the inmates to "confess." But a spy is very soon discovered and then he goes to another cell where he finds himself again in the least privileged position.

The day in the cell began at seven o'clock when the monotonous command of the guards "Time to get up! Get up! Get up!" resounded in the corridors. Before seven o'clock, but not earlier than six, the twenty-two senior prisoners were allowed to get up. Each had thus three minutes for washing — a great privilege. The remaining ninety prisoners must wash during the one hour, from seven to eight, before "tea time."

As soon as the order to get up was given, noise, talk, coughing, loud yawns and the creaking of lifted boardings filled the cell. Cigarette smoke rose from every side. The air became thick with dust from the dirty straw mattresses which were being folded. Long lines at once formed to the toilet and lavatory.

After the mattresses and boarding had been taken out and the cots folded up, preparations for "tea" were begun. The foreman detailed four men for bread and two for hot water. The bread, of poor quality similar to that found everywhere in the U.S.S.R., was brought to the cell cut into rations of four hundred grams each. Those who were receiving food remittances from outside did not always eat their ration; for the others it was insufficient, especially for the workmen and peasants who were used to eating much bread.

"Tea," or rather hot water, was brought in two large copper kettles — remnants of the luxury of Tsarist days. Tea and sugar were not supplied to the prisoners, only to

those who were ranked by the Bolsheviks as "political prisoners," that is those who belonged to the Communist Party and were detained for "deviations" and "leanings."

Everybody would then rush to the cupboard where, in twenty-two slots, utensils for more than a hundred men were stowed away. Each of us had a tin bowl, a mug and a wooden spoon, but one was fortunate if at meal time he could find his own. Finally everybody would get settled at the tables in strict order of seniority and from ten to twenty would be left standing. Those who received food parcels would drop into their mugs a small pinch of tea, a luxury even outside the prison. "Tea" drinking lasted until nine.

Then came the call for general cleaning and the resulting confusion. Tables, benches, personal belongings, everything would be moved to one side; and with them, all but three men. The cleared side of the cell was cleaned by the man appointed to this duty and his two assistants. The floor was sprinkled with sawdust and swept, and twice a week it was washed. When one side was done everything would be moved over there and the other side cleaned.

The general cleaning lasted until eleven. During the period from eleven to one the prisoners from the common cells were led out into the yard for exercise scheduled to last half an hour for each group. Subtracting the time spent for roll-calls and passing through corridors it actually lasted only fifteen or twenty minutes, and took place in the inner yard surrounded on all four sides by the walls of the prison building. On account of the overcrowded condition of the prison the inmates of three common cells — about three hundred men — were simultaneously led out together, producing a great congestion in the limited space. But exercise meant a great deal to us; even fifteen minutes in the fresh air was refreshing after the terrible stuffiness of cells; moreover, we were permitted to talk at this time with prisoners from other cells. Examining officers realized how

much prisoners valued even this short period and, therefore, as a means of coercion, exercised their power of permitting and forbidding exercise.

About twelve o'clock newspapers and magazines were brought to the common cells; those in solitary confinement usually being deprived of them. One of the prison superintendents acted as distributor of papers and he made a fair profit on the job. Formerly newspapers could be bought in any quantity, but now, with the acute paper shortage, they were scarce even "outside" and for the prison the number of copies was extremely limited. Speculation arose among the prison guards who began buying up old, discarded magazines and papers and reselling them to prisoners at the regular price. We bought these back numbers because we were willing to read anything to make life less monotonous, and we were badly in need of paper of any kind. Newspapers were, of course, always a cause of great excitement and were read through from top to bottom, including all the advertisements.

About one o'clock preparations for dinner began. This meal consisted of soup and cereal. There were two kinds of soup: sauerkraut or barley with potatoes. It was supposed to contain beef, but the meat itself never reached the prisoners; it was thoroughly scraped from the bones and used in preparing various delicacies for the GPU lunchroom. (I know this because at one time I worked in the prison kitchen.) Only the "political" prisoners received a small piece of meat for dinner.

The second course was a cereal (*kasha*): poorly shelled barley (nicknamed "shrapnel"), millet or sometimes buckwheat. Both the soup and cereal were cooked by steam in special boilers under high pressure, transforming the former into a malodorous, muddy liquid and the latter into a sticky substance void of all nutriment.

Dinner time for so large a number lasted for more than

an hour, although ten minutes would have sufficed for each man to consume his portion. Then the table boards were again removed and those who had cots lay down, the rest of us trying to find some more comfortable place on benches near the wall where one could lean back. It was the "dead hour" and we were not allowed to move about or talk. This was no easy time — two hours on a narrow bench; many preferred to crawl under the cots and lie on the floor. At about four o'clock the command came to "get up" and the preparations for the evening meal of cereal and "tea" began.

So passed the whole day in petty bustle, endless moving about and waiting in line. The quietest time was between six and nine when it was possible to squeeze into a seat at a table and read by the dim light of one of the two 25-watt lamps in the ceiling or else get into a corner for a talk with someone.

This was also the hour fixed for lectures or discussions to divert the thoughts from prison actualities. Among the prisoners were many men of diverse specialties. I remember listening to lectures on "The Manufacture of Glass," "Iron," "Contemporary Views of the Structure of Matter," and many other topics. I was asked to speak on geographical and biological subjects, and I tried to tell in the most interesting manner about the different countries I had visited during my numerous expeditions, recalling incidents, types of people and anything that would at least for a time cause prison life to be forgotten. Sometimes I succeeded. The whole cell, including the workmen, peasants and criminals who could not understand many of the other talks, listened attentively.

The common people were always friendly to me. I never felt that animosity between the intellectual and the man from the crowd which Dostoevski describes in his "Memoirs from the House of the Dead" and which is also de-

scribed by others who had formerly been in exile. I often met with a thoughtfulness and kindness on their part which touched me deeply.

During my first lecture, the subject of which was my expedition into Western Mongolia to the sources of the Ir-tish, I noticed with surprise that the criminals listened to me with excited attention. My young bandit friend, Vania Efimoff, who was unable to say anything without swearing, looked straight at my mouth, afraid to lose a word. Once in a while he would let out a cry of enthusiasm which he could not restrain.

“ Ah, son of a bitch, how he speaks! You could not read the like even in a book! ”

This lecture of mine appealed to his adventurous heart and he became touchingly devoted to me. He liked to sit down on the floor near my bench, to put his head on my knees and dream and plan that, in case we both were freed, I would go on an expedition again and take him along. Alas! He knew too well that these were only dreams.

One day, sitting near me thus, he told me the story of his short life — he was only eighteen years old. His father, a peasant and a poor one, was left a widower with five children, the oldest of whom, Vania, was then seven. Later, the father took a second wife, a rich widow, but in doing so deceived another woman about whom Vania knew. So at the age of nine he left his father, whom he now despised, and went away with his two brothers aged seven and five. He left the girls with his father, but the boys he decided to take care of by stealing in the market. Thus began his thief's career — prison colonies for young criminals, escapes, new imprisonments, gradual specialization in theft and, finally, the accusation of banditry. None the less he cherished a firm belief that there should be in man justice, truth, principles and honesty which he demanded even in prison life.



For example: once it so happened that the task of washing the cell fell to a tradesman imprisoned with us. Washing the cell is dirty, disagreeable work; only the old and the sick are freed from it. This tradesman made an arrangement with a workman, imprisoned for stealing soup from a coöperative store, who agreed to do his task for one rouble. Efimoff found out about this agreement, and as soon as the workman began washing the floor he dashed at him and in a voice vibrating with rage declared that he would not let him do it, that it was cowardice for prisoners to employ each other. Seeing that the affair was going to end in a fight — Vania was strong and agile — the workman backed out and returned the rouble to its owner.

“If you have no money, ask for it and we will gladly share, but do not sell yourself in prison,” grumbled Vania.

Vania rendered me many a service, but one was especially touching. In one of her early packages to me my wife sent a little tobacco in a pouch made from a piece of an old silk dress of hers. I lost it one day when we were taking our mattresses out of the cell. Vania noticed that I was grieved and insisted on finding out what the matter was. He crawled all over the cell, looked under every plank, quarrelled with half of the people, but found the pouch and brought it to me with a victorious and joyful air, as if it were a happiness for him, too.

“I understand,” he said, “it comes from home.”

I carried this pouch with me through all my prison life.

Undoubtedly Efimoff could have been developed into a steady, strong man. But the Soviet system, which likes to boast of its ability to reëducate people, preferred to “liquidate” him, in spite of his eighteen years.

One evening, as we all were going to sleep, Efimoff and Pavel Sokol were called out “with their belongings.” Near the door of the cell stood several guards and the assistant

commissar of the prison. There could be no doubt — execution.

Vania had hidden a knife which the criminals used for shaving.

“ Hey! Shall we? ” he asked Pavel. “ It’s easier to die in a fight.”

“ Leave it! ” answered Pavel with artificial calmness. “ The devil take them! ”

He spoke slowly and evenly, but the cigarette between his lips, his last one, trembled and would not light. Pavel walked out slowly, bent over, as if with great effort; Vania with quick steps, his eyes shining. As he reached the door he shouted loudly:

“ Do not remember me unkindly, comrades! Good-bye! ”

## CHAPTER XVII

### OLD MEN AND BOYS

SOON I became acquainted with everyone in the cell, knew all of them by sight, learned the names of many, what they were accused of, how long they had been in prison, what kind of "pressure" the examiners used, and so on. I collected a lot of new information which I only vaguely suspected when free. I also learned quite a few lessons: how the investigation is conducted, what methods are used to obtain a confession. I saw the results of submitting to the will of the prosecutor and becoming a "novelist," that is to say, writing fantastic confessions according to directions given by the GPU.

To understand the life of those imprisoned in the U.S.S.R. while their cases are under investigation it is necessary to realize fully that the prison régime is intended, first of all, to weaken the prisoner morally and physically and break down his resistance, thus making easier the task of obtaining from him "voluntary confessions" of crimes he had never committed. The examining officer not only determines the prisoner's régime — allowing or forbidding exercise, remittance of food parcels, visits with relatives, reading of books — but he also has the right to transfer the prisoner to the dark cell or to punishment cells — ordinary, hot, cold, wet and so on.

The punitive cell in the prison of preliminary detention in the U.S.S.R. has lost its initial function as a punishment for breaking prison regulations and serves only as a means

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of coercion during the conduct of the investigation. The prison administration has no power over the prisoners and only fulfills the orders of examining officers.

The purpose of solitary confinement is to force a man, who is depressed by threats of violent death and torture, to remain alone with his fears, without any possibility of distraction or moral support and encouragement from others. Those confined in solitary cells often lose their minds and after six months of this régime the majority suffer from hallucinations.

The "double cell" (single cell into which two men are placed) is perhaps the easiest form of imprisonment, but in this case the welfare of the prisoner is entirely dependent upon the companion assigned to him by the examining officer. Sometimes his companion is a man violently insane who attempts to do him harm and beats him, or else one afflicted by melancholia, who is continually attempting to commit suicide. In other instances he may be a criminal who causes annoyance by his rough behavior and profanity or a man suffering from venereal disease, or even a spy who in the cell keeps up a conversation bearing on the subjects covered at cross-examinations and who persistently advises compliance with the wishes of the examining officer and the signing of the "confession."

The common cell depresses by its filth and vermin, but more than anything else by its crowded condition which forbids eating or sleeping in peace, and does not allow a minute of real rest. The prison diet serves the same purpose — the weakening of the prisoners. Although sufficient in quantity it is intentionally lacking in vitamins and contains almost no fats — hence scurvy and boils. Sufferers from scurvy are more compliant, more amenable to the "exhortations" of examining officers than healthy ones, and can be made to sign anything.

The people in the cell knew that I had been arrested in

connection with the case of the "48" and that I was threatened with execution. I saw much sympathy from everyone. They taught me how to behave, gave me all sorts of advice. In prison nobody was afraid to talk of his "case," of the questionings, tortures, falsification by the GPU of cross-examination reports, forgery of signatures and the like — topics which outside the prison could only be discussed with a most intimate friend, behind closed doors.

What was striking at first was the extreme pallor of the prisoners, the result of a long sojourn in prison — their colorless faces, overgrown beards and hair, dusty and shabby clothes. In the filth of the cell they could not look otherwise. And yet, the majority in this cell were not only intellectuals, but foremost specialists in their lines, men with well-known names and reputations. For instance, there were two professors of the Petrograd University, several professors and instructors of technical and engineering schools, many engineers in different lines, technicians, railroad men, aviators, artillery officers, naval officers and, finally, clergymen. We had representatives of most of the largest factories, such as Putilov, Obouhov, Prohorov, and also many men of purely scientific careers, who had spent all their lives in laboratories, or in university chairs. Unfortunately I cannot speak of them here, for men of important individual ability cannot be described as a group. To tell of their work and its significance for Russian science and culture and to unfold the grippingly tragic picture of the transfer of the Russian intelligentsia into prison and penal servitude remains for another. Only he who gains admission to the secret archives of the GPU will some day reveal the unbelievable history of the destruction of a whole generation of men of science.

"In no other place in the world is the work of scientists valued so highly as in the U.S.S.R.; in no other place in

the world is the work of specialists the object of such care as in the U.S.S.R." So speak the Soviet statesmen and the Soviet press.

In order to appraise these words I would suggest that they cast a glance into the prison kitchens in Moscow, Lenin-grad, Kiev, Kharkov and other cities of the Union. There, huddled together on narrow wooden benches, with thin, sharpened-down dinner knives in hand sit professors and other educated and cultured men. In front of them are bags with dirty, rotten potatoes which in "capitalistic" countries would not be used even to feed pigs; and here these men sit diligently, seriously and clumsily peeling such potatoes for the prison soup.

But many went willingly to such work, for owing to the painful monotony of prison life and the enforced, endless idleness even this work seemed a distraction and rest. Besides, in the kitchen one sometimes succeeded in stealing or begging an onion head. The need of raw food was so great among us, suffering from scurvy as we were, that every one of us would have gladly worked a whole day at any kind of labor, if by so doing we could only obtain a bit of onion. But the examining officers allowed this kind of escape from the demoralizing prison boredom only when they considered the case completed and had ceased to exert pressure. Highly qualified engineers competed for the right to do plumbing jobs, repair locks, electric lighting and telephones. Learned professors claimed the jobs of polishing floors and cleaning stairs. One clergyman, until his execution, was for a long time in charge of the boiler. Literally hundreds of men of the highest education and with a knowledge of foreign languages registered for work in the library. But the GPU adhered firmly to the principle that the prison régime exists first of all for the purpose of exerting pressure on the prisoner and it was only the examining officer who could grant these greatest of privileges. One of

these was the right to work in the packing-box shop. This shop was located in the yard out in the open, and work was carried on there in every kind of weather. Clothes were not supplied for this work, so that those who had no warm coat or footwear were unable to work there in winter. All this was not easy and the working day was twelve hours long, but the "boxes" afforded a chance of remaining out of doors and in addition this was the only work for which money was paid. After having acquired some experience it was possible to earn about one rouble a day. Of course, in prison one could spend money only on newspapers, but everyone was faced with deportation and forced labor and many could not count on any help from "outside," so that the prison rouble represented a real treasure.

The only ones who did not aspire to work were the old-timers of the prison. There were only a few of these, but one of them had been in prison already for over two years. We could not discover exactly why they were being held so long or of what they were accused. The case of one of them apparently had been hopelessly complicated owing to a mistake in a name. He had been sentenced to ten years in concentration camp and then had been returned from Popoff Island, the distributing point of the camp, but his case was still dragging along. Others had either been forgotten or had ceased to interest the examining officers. Having outlived all excitement and fear they had now become apathetic and indifferent to everything except the trifles of prison routine which for them had taken the place of real life.

"You are too young, you still know nothing," an old German liked to say. "Stay as long as I have and then you will learn. Two years and a half! Is that the way to sweep the floor! Here's how it should be done."

And he would pick up the broom and explain to the

novice the principles of sweeping the floor which he had worked out for himself. Others would expound in a didactic manner the rules for washing, exercise and meals. Keeping strictly to the established prison routine these old-timers nevertheless spent the day according to a special system of their own. They got up before the official time and, without hurrying, thoroughly washed themselves, unceremoniously splashing the novices who slept on the floor. Then they carefully folded up their bedding and cots, timing this task so as to finish it exactly at the moment of the general "getting up." And during the ensuing commotion and forming of lines they leisurely stood to one side smoking rolled cigarettes in home-made holders.

Their attitude towards food was original. Provisions which they received in remittances were divided into daily rations and wrapped in a special way in paper or packed in small bags. They would drop a small pinch of tea into their mugs, then carefully cover them up with a piece of paper cut out in advance and wait with a dignified air for the tea to steep. They even ate the prison *kasha* seasoning it with butter received in remittances. The prison soup they improved by adding to it small pieces of bread or salted cucumber — one of the favorite remittance items. They had their own favorite soups and *kashas*: some preferring barley cereal, others millet. There were no other varieties. They had already been eating these for a year or two, yet still continued to discuss their merits and drawbacks.

All day long they played chess, checkers or dominoes, giving themselves with such earnestness to their games that they considered everything else a hindrance to what had become their calling in life. With difficulty would they tear themselves away from the game to eat or go out for exercise and they were greatly annoyed when preparations for the night halted their games.



Their eccentric egoism, possible only under prison conditions, expressed by a complete indifference to and disregard of all the hardships experienced by other prisoners, had reached such proportions that they would not even stop their game of dominoes when men were being led out of the cell to be shot. The harsh voice of the guard would be heard from the other side of the bars: "Well, get going, hurry up!" The victim would collect his things with trembling hands and murmur his last "Good-bye, comrades," and still they would continue slapping down their home-made dominoes.

Yet once these men had been human beings! Were they by nature sullen and serious, thoughtful only of themselves, or was it that the GPU had changed a group of lively, energetic men into such miserable caricatures?

Many men over seventy years of age passed through the large cell in which I was confined. One of them especially attracted attention. He was extremely thin, delicately built, with hands and feet so fragile that it was frightful to look at them. He could not bend his knees and his legs, encased in puttees, looked like those of some strange bird. His head, completely bald and covered with yellowish skin, was unsteady on a long, thin neck. He wore huge, dark-rimmed spectacles that made his eyes enormous; his sharp nose almost touched his chin across a toothless mouth. His eyesight was poor and he was almost deaf. Eating was most difficult for him; he would lose his spoon and then his bread, while both lay right under his hand. He would search for something in his bag, grumble that everything was done wrong and then forget what he was looking for. Sometimes he would fall asleep while sitting up; at other times he would have fainting spells and we would ask for the doctor, but by the time the doctor's assistant could ar-

rive, usually in about two hours or more, he would suddenly sigh and come to life.

He had been accused of espionage, because his married niece, who lived in Vladivostok, escaped abroad. He himself had not left Petersburg and had forgotten when he had seen her last. I do not know his final destiny.

During our walks in the courtyard of the prison I noticed another old man of striking appearance — also not less than seventy years old. He wore an amazing old black coat patched with all sorts of materials, including red velvet draperies. Accused of having been the leader in some “ espionage organization,” he was later shot.

There were boys, too, in the cell, really mere children. Two of them, a German and an Armenian, came from educated families. The German, pale, thin and awkward as youths often are, a dreamer, wished to see the world about which he had read in books or perhaps in Soviet periodicals such as “ The Pathfinder ” or “ World of Adventure.” The Armenian — practical and gay, wanted to make his fortune in the despised “ capitalistic ” world. Both chose the classic way of escape, they were stowaways in the coal bunkers of a foreign steamer. Discovered by the secret police, they were arrested and sent to the headquarters of the GPU. What they went through they never told. Now they were in prison, while the GPU was compiling a “ case ” of espionage against them. Very likely they would have to go to a prison camp. According to the Soviet Criminal Code the punishment for illegal crossing of the frontier is three months’ imprisonment. But these crimes are always taken up by the GPU and not by the court, and the punishment becomes five to ten years in prison camp. The GPU reasons as follows: *any attempt to leave the country must be espionage, because if it succeeded the fugitive, even though a child, would tell of what was going on in the U.S.S.R. —*

*and foreigners must not know.* The reality of Soviet life must not be published or advertised.

Three other boys in our cell were guilty of a domestic crime. They were children of workmen, fifteen to sixteen years old, pupils in a secondary school. Boys of that age are always hungry, and in the U.S.S.R. they are obliged to be satisfied with lean soup, potatoes and cereal—in a very restricted quantity. When returning from school one day they passed a market in front of which a man offered quite openly to sell them extra bread-cards at a very low price. They yielded to the temptation, bought the cards and joyously entered the coöperative store to buy the bread, delighted at the thought that they would no longer have to be satisfied with the stingy slices given them by their mothers. No sooner had they made their purchases than they were arrested by agents of the GPU.

“Eh, boys, wasn't the man who arrested you the same one who sold you the cards?” jokingly asked one of our cell-mates.

The boys were embarrassed and did not know what to say.

“That's it, you should be careful from whom you buy,” added one of the workmen in a fatherly tone.

These boys behaved very timidly while in the cell, as if they felt embarrassed that they were placed together with grown-ups, mostly educated, “important” people.

“If we were only set free,” said one of the boys excitedly, “we would immediately find him at the market, the one who sold us those cards. It was his fault, and not ours—and we said so to the prosecutor.”

“Of course, we would find him,” added the other.

A few days later it was published in the newspapers that, owing to the energy of the GPU, a large organization had been disclosed which speculated in bread-cards.

“Well, boys, you are not the only ones caught,” said a

workman trying to comfort them. He understood these boys in torn pants, worn shoes and shabby coats. "You're not the only fools. They must have arrested some forty people and are boasting of it. Just the same, boys, don't expect to go home. We will probably have to journey together at the expense of the State — rather, at that of the people."

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### PRIESTS, WORKMEN AND POETS

THE percentage of workmen held in the Shpalernaya prison was negligible as the majority of them when arrested passed through Kresti and suburban prisons. Even in our prison, however, they were well represented as to diversity.

Those workmen who were detained in connection with the case of the "48" were of greatest interest to me. Employees and workmen of the U.S.S.R. had become accustomed to vote with complete indifference for or against anything — as required: against "British lords" who looked down on the workers' state "through their monocles and lorgnettes," as one orator expressed it; against the Pope of Rome, who had proclaimed some kind of incomprehensible "crusade"; against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, in spite of the fact that in the U.S.S.R. scores and perhaps hundreds were being done away with and nobody seemed to be worrying about it. The same indifference was displayed in voting for industrialization, collectivization, "shock" work and many other programs. A certain hopeless resistance was evidenced only when a subscription to a new state bond issue had to be accepted — a subscription which called for no less than a whole month's pay — 100 per cent participation — and which reduced yearly earnings by about 15 per cent. But, in spite of such a systematic and lengthy training in directed voting, not all workmen accepted calmly the suggestion of adopting the resolution

calling for the death of the forty-eight "wreckers" of the workers' supply organization. As a result many found themselves in the Shpalernaya prison. We had in our cell three workmen belonging to this group. One of them, a Communist and a Czech by nationality, was arrested for saying at the meeting:

"If there existed such wreckers, and if they were carrying on wrecking activities for five years, then the GPU should be disciplined for tolerating such counter-revolution."

Well, he was himself "disciplined," with the prospect of deportation to a concentration camp.

A peculiar case in the prison was that of a poet-proletarian. He did not belong to the type of wily individuals who called themselves proletarian poets, sang the praises of industrialization, joined the Gepeists in their drinking parties, courted the latter's ladies and in general, as it is termed in the U.S.S.R., were "gaining 120 per cent favorable footing." He was a real factory workman, disinterestedly devoted to poetry which he considered a service to truth.

He had written a poem about factory life. He had written poetry before but because of his shyness had never shown it to anyone. This poem, however, had seemed wonderful to him and he took it to the factory committee in order to have it published in the wall-newspaper. The poem in which he told of the hardships of a workman's life, the hunger in the family burdened by a large number of small children, was returned to him with the notation that he should be ashamed to approach the committee with such a "counter" (counter-revolution) and that in general his ideology was rotten and dangerous. The same night a search was made in his room; the returned copy of the poem, its first draft, two or three other poems and the poet himself were all collected and taken to the GPU.

At the cross-examination, crushed by the catastrophe which had befallen him, he completely lost his head. With great agitation and hoping that I might help him with advice he related all the details to me:

“ The examining officer said to me, ‘ You wrote this for the purpose of anti-Soviet agitation! ’ I explained to him that there was no agitation in the poem, that I took it to the factory committee and had shown it to nobody else. — ‘ That’s true, I hadn’t shown it to anybody, ’ he confirmed, looking honestly into my eyes. “ The examining officer listened to me, then took a sheet of paper, asked my name and the other usual information and wrote out a statement as if I was testifying that I had composed this poem with the purpose of agitation against the Soviet Government and had transcribed it for distribution among the workmen of the factory. He handed this statement to me and ordered me to sign it. I started to tell him that what he had written was not true, but he began shouting at me: ‘ You damned fool, where do you think you are? Do you dare to argue here? Do you think we have time to be bothered by you? ’ And he went on swearing even more wildly. ‘ Write, ’ he said, ‘ you son of a bitch, once I order you to! ’ ”

“ Well? ” I queried, as he stopped and became gloomily silent.

“ Well, I signed. ”

“ But why did you do it? ”

“ He had ordered me. What else was I to do? ”

“ If he had ordered you to sign a statement that you had killed your own father, would you have done it? ” I asked.

“ No — I don’t know, perhaps I wouldn’t have signed it, ” he said aghast, “ but now, what shall I do? ”

He seemed in complete despair, perhaps realizing only now the irreparable consequences of his act and not having the fortitude to resign himself to the inevitable.

“ I didn’t say it,” he continued, “ he wrote it all himself. I thought that if I refused to sign he would again say that I was against the Soviet Government. I signed, and now I see that I have destroyed myself. Some advise me to write a denial, that perhaps then they will destroy the first report. The examiner himself knows it is false. Why should he want to destroy me? I’m not a class enemy — I’m a workman.”

It was evident that after the signing of such a statement he was lost. The examining officer had drawn from him everything he needed and he did not send for him again. There was nothing for the workman-poet to do but wait for his sentence.

Proletarian origin helped people out only in cases which involved real, and at that, criminal offenses. We had such a workman in our cell. He had stolen sixteen pieces of soap from a coöperative store — a simple case — but the GPU had insisted that the theft, so committed, revealed a definite intent to harm the workmen’s supply system. His psychology was completely Soviet but he was nevertheless accused of “ wrecking.” The laborers in the cell despised him and called him “ Soap.” The professional thieves teased him, saying that he was degrading their trade. But at length the GPU declined to prosecute and he was told that his case would be referred to the People’s Court, where he would be tried as an ordinary thief.

“ Hurrah for the Soviet Government!” he shouted, on his return to the cell. “ Everything is arranged. ‘ Taking into account the proletarian origin, sincere repentance and low self-consciousness the sentence is to be considered conditional,’ ” he declaimed. “ To our workmen’s Soviet Government — hurrah! Go to Solovki without me! Good-bye! ”

There were in the U.S.S.R. periods of special persecution of former functionaries, officers, intelligentsia, peasants



and specialists of productive enterprises. These persecutions increased, diminished and again grew in intensity according to the various turns of the political wheel, reaching their climax after the promulgation of the Five Year Plan. The persecution of the clergy, however, which began during the first days of the Soviet attainment of power, never ceased. It continued in spite of the widely-heralded assertions of complete religious freedom which the Soviet Union tried to prove by exhibiting to "illustrious foreigners" like Bernard Shaw some church that had not yet been destroyed. The citizens of the U.S.S.R. knew very well that clergymen were continually being arrested and that it was difficult to find a priest to read the burial service over the faithful. During my stay in the Shpalernaya prison there were always in each cell from ten to fifteen persons held in connection with cases involving questions of religion. And there were some of them in isolation cells, so that their total number must have been about 10 per cent of all the prison inmates. They were formally indicted under Article 58 (Pars. 10 and 11) as being guilty of counter-revolutionary agitation and participation in counter-revolutionary organizations—the penalty for which was from three years in concentration camps to capital punishment with confiscation of all property.

I have already told about the GPU methods of building up accusations and staging trials. The fabrication of religious "cases" was no exception to the general rule. The same wholesale arrests of people who did not even know one another; the same pressure to force them to give false evidence, to sign false depositions, or sometimes only to word their statements in such a manner that the church, for instance, would be called an "organization" without stating, of course, what kind of an organization; the same fantastically concocted accusations of agitation and plotting against the Soviet Power. These were easier for the GPU to build up than any other kind, because a sentence

taken at random from any sermon, after misrepresentation by the examining officer, could be construed as counter-revolutionary propaganda. A few simple and devout old men and women, not appreciating the insidiousness of the questions put to them by the examining officers could, while answering quite honestly and sincerely, give material for further indictments. There was such an instance in our cell, a man whose two sons fifteen and sixteen years old were in the same prison, while his wife was detained in the women's section. Their only crime was that they were church-goers, but their position was hopeless because the boys, at the instigation of the examining officer, had signed a statement that they belonged to an "organization." This officer had told them that the church is a group or, in other words, an organization of the faithful and that any member of the church belongs to it. The boys testified that their father and mother belonged to the same organization, and the examining officer construed this statement as counter-revolutionary. Such testimony was more than sufficient to condemn them all to concentration camps, since in the U.S.S.R. *any* non-government "organization" is considered counter-revolutionary.

The same methods were used to build up the case of the Cronstadt church, whose clergy, church warden and many parishioners were arrested.

Besides these special cases, the Soviet authorities take advantage of every possibility to molest the clergy, and in nearly every "campaign" they were among the accused. In 1930, for instance, there was a shortage of small change and the government declared a campaign against "speculation in silver." Raids were organized and anyone found with more than 3 roubles in silver was punished. Those who had 20 or 30 roubles' worth of silver in their possession were shot or deported to prison camps. No law had been previously passed forbidding the hoarding of silver; in

fact, only a short time before, there had been a government campaign to encourage savings and the State Bank had issued special small savings banks for change. Now the possession of such a savings bank was considered a crime. This campaign against hoarding silver was very useful in "liquidating" the clergy. This is how it was done:

Immediately after a church service, preferably on a holiday, a searching party of the GPU would appear and, of course, find the change that the parishioners had put on the plate for the use of the church. The priest, the deacon and the church-warden would be arrested and accused of "speculating in silver." The "proofs" being at hand, the case would be settled without delay, the priest in many cases being sentenced to the highest degree of punishment—shooting, the others deported. During this period the list of priests accused in this way of "speculation in silver" was published in the newspapers with the intention of raising popular feeling against them, because, since small change was required of them for all payments to the government (such as street car and train fares, telephone calls and the like) the population was really suffering from the shortage of silver. One of the priests who was detained in the same cell with me (where newspapers were allowed) read his own name in one of these lists, followed by the notation that the sentence had been carried out. Shortly after, he was taken directly from our cell and shot.

Those who were arrested in the religious trials displayed characteristic fortitude. Most of them accepted their arrest as a trial sent by God and as persecution for faith and truth and did not try to resist the examining officer. In some individuals this attitude stood out with special clarity and, of course, did not lend to any lightening of their sentence. On the contrary, the examiner never lost an opportunity to take advantage of it.

Such prisoners did not try to conceal their faith and

religion. Every evening they would gather in the corner of the cell farthest from the guards and sing prayers quietly, almost in a whisper. The general noise in the cell would cover their voices and they could not be heard by the guard in the corridor.

Most of the accused in the religious cases in our cell belonged to the New Church, but there were also some representatives of the Old Church. One of the most remarkable men in this latter group was the priest, Father V. A cultured and educated man, he bore himself with such dignity and kindness that even the most worldly-minded people in the cell abstained from mockery and stupid jokes in his presence. He never spoke of his "case," but we knew from others that during his cross-examination he had been very brave and dignified. We knew also that he was in great danger.

One evening in December 1930 at eleven o'clock he was called out of the cell "with his belongings." This usually means execution. Father V. remained as cool and collected as ever, but he paled a little and his eyes gleamed. Quietly, trying not to wake his neighbors, he gathered his belongings, made the sign of the cross, saluted silently those who had awakened and left the cell. We felt sure that he had been shot, but later learned that he had been placed in solitary confinement. What his ultimate fate was I do not know.

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## CHAPTER XIX

### GEPEISTS, SPIES AND FOREIGNERS

**G**PU officials and Red Army men of pure "Red" stock could also be found among the prisoners. They were usually accused of discrediting the Soviet Power while under the influence of liquor. It was a transient element which gained release with comparative ease, since examining officers were not interested in building up cases against them. New men, however, were continually replacing those discharged.

Getting drunk in some public place or restaurant frequented by foreigners and Gepeists,<sup>1</sup> they would start boasting of their positions, thereby attracting attention, and the GPU did not care to have Soviet information carried away to foreign countries.

It also often happened that such men would lose compromising or secret documents. We had in our cell a man held in connection with such a case. He was a "political director," one of those who are attached to army units and whose functions are to "educate" the army and, incidentally, watch over the reliability and loyalty of members of his unit. He was a daring fellow and apparently a confirmed drunkard. In a state of drunken oblivion he had lost his brief-case containing secret documents. He could not remember why he had carried these with him to the party he was attending. He had gone somewhere with somebody in an automobile, had drunk some

<sup>1</sup> Gepeist = Gay-Pay-ist and means an employee of the GPU. — TRANSLATOR.

more and had gone somewhere else — but he absolutely could not remember where and with whom, and he had come to his senses only when he had been put in prison and, at that, not immediately. He knew enough not to attempt any explanations and thereby give into the hands of the examining officer additional material. But he hoped that the latter would understand his plight and discharge the case.

“As if they, themselves, didn’t drink,” he consoled himself.

There were spies, too, in our cell, whose duty it was to watch the prisoners and encourage them to make incriminating admissions. One respectable old man pretended to be a “literary worker.” During the early days of my imprisonment he began to question me.

“My case is simple,” I replied. “They want to make me the 49th.”

“Yes, so I heard. And don’t you think,” he began softly, “that it might be wise to admit yourself guilty of some insignificant misdemeanors or mistakes in order to gain their confidence and indulgence?”

“No,” I answered. “I have committed no crime and I respect the investigating authorities too much to delude them by false confessions. As for you, I don’t advise you to recommend that we lie to examining officers.”

He went away with an offended air and left me in peace. I watched him, however, and soon convinced myself that he was starting similar conversations with every new specialist brought to our cell.

One morning Engineer V. was thrust into our midst, apparently very tired, with nerves on edge. He had been arrested at the factory, had been cross-examined all night at the Gorokhovaya and did not know what had happened to his family. General cleaning was under way in the cell and everybody was crowding into one corner. The old

man came up to him. I approached them from behind, but my assistance was not needed.

"Don't you feel guilty of anything, even if it is some very small thing?" I heard the old man ask. "I know from experience that a frank confession helps greatly."

"All night long the examining officer urged me to do that very thing," calmly replied the engineer. "I'm tired of such kind advice. Leave me alone."

The U.S.S.R. is the socialistic fatherland for the toilers of the world. This can be clearly seen by studying the men held in prisons and concentration camps of the Soviet Union; one can find there representatives of workers of probably every nationality. And these are true toilers, since the bourgeoisie visiting the U.S.S.R. know what measures to take for personal safety and do not tarry long. The honor and pomp with which important members of the foreign bourgeoisie and aristocracy are treated in the U.S.S.R. were reported by the Soviet press when describing the visits of Bernard Shaw, Lady Astor, Amanullah Khan and others. But the poor who are attracted by the rumor that there is no "crisis" in the U.S.S.R. and who go there to work receive no official reception and often pay dearly for their credulity.

Among those whom I encountered in prison were a Japanese, an Austrian, several Mongols and Czechs, many Finns, Estonians, Letts, Poles, Germans, Chinese and many gypsies.

The majority of foreigners in the prison were Communists or people of extreme radical ideas, who, believing in the achievements of the proletarian revolution, came to the U.S.S.R. to seek protection against what seemed to them oppression at home and who dreamed of realizing their democratic ideals.

Among these foreigners was a member of the Estonian

parliament, a Communist. I do not remember his name, but I can yet see his broad figure, fair hair and short-sighted eyes behind thick spectacles. He had been imprisoned already for more than a year and, evidently because of his prominent past, fulfilled the duties of corridor cleaner. I had no chance of talking to him but the other cleaners told that he had fled from Estonia fearing repressions for his communistic ideas and had landed straight in the Shpaler-naya prison. The curious part of the story was that before his escape from Estonia he had legally come to the U.S.S.R. as a member of a delegation of foreign Communists and had visited this very prison in the capacity of an honorary and distinguished guest. He was now able to see for himself how much prison reality differed from what he had been shown.

Later in my imprisonment I had pointed out to me a Czech, a member of the Central Committee of the Czech Communist Party. He had been called to Moscow on business connected with the III Internationale but, instead of being sent back home, had been arrested and finally deported to the Solovetski concentration camp.

Another interesting case was that of the former Secretary of Agriculture of the independent Mongolian republic, a real Mongol. He was a cultured man, a graduate of the Moscow Agricultural Academy. He, too, was made to come to Moscow under some pretext and was then sentenced to ten years of forced labor. I could never understand how it was possible for the Soviet Government to deport him, a secretary of an independent state — but it was a fact.

Perhaps one of the most pathetic foreigners in our cell was a workman, an Austrian citizen by the name of Stern whom I met the first night after my arrest. As I have already said, I was assigned a place on the floor between two cots next to the toilet. One of these cots was occupied by a



sleeping man, pale, drawn and frightfully dirty. He had on a dark woollen sweater worn next to the skin and almost completely rotted — there was no sign of underwear. Bed bugs in scores crawled over his grey army blanket and over his face and hands. One leg, in dirty worn out trousers and a filthy rotten sock, was sticking out from under the blanket. And such a strong smell emanated from him that I thought he might be dead. I abruptly shifted my position; he moved, turned towards me, opened his eyes and gave me a blank and lifeless stare. I spoke to him and asked him how long he had been here.

“Three years soon. Three years — this cell,” he replied in broken Russian with a distinct German accent.

I began talking to him in German. He showed some evidence of life and told me his story, simple for Soviet reality, but one that workmen abroad might find it hard to believe.

In 1925 three Austrians, one of them a Jew by the name of Stern, signed a three years' contract for work as specialists in processing leather in a Leningrad factory. By 1928 living conditions in the U.S.S.R. had changed for the worse and they decided not to renew the contract but to return home. All were then imprisoned at the Shpalerka and informed that they would be released only if they signed a new contract. They would not yield, but the Austrian consul, learning of their plight, intervened though only in behalf of two. Stern — the third — was left to his own devices. He was forgotten.

I gave him a spare suit of underwear and his eyes lit up with pleasure.

“Thanks, thanks! I'll wash now. I didn't want to while I had no underclothes. I'm eaten up by lice.”

“Lice?” I asked.

“Yes, lice. When one has no underclothes one is de-

voured by them. Others get clothes, remittances — I have no one, nothing.”

In his excitement he was talking loudly and our neighbors protested.

“This is outrageous,” they said. “They won’t let us sleep at night. Isn’t there enough time to gossip during the day?”

Then came the dry authoritative voice of the foreman: “Stop whispering!”

Later I came to know him better. He was disliked in the cell because he refused to wash and was a burden to all his neighbors. Moreover for days at a time he would not speak a single word. Nobody else in the cell knew who he was or why he was there. Some believed him a madman, others — a spy. It was not hard to take him for a madman. All day long he would walk in the cell, stop, look fixedly at the toes of his shoes and then resume his walk. Sometimes he would sit down on a bench, stare at one point and suddenly burst into laughter. Then, becoming embarrassed, he would try to control himself, hiding his face in his hands, but to no avail, and he would continue to laugh quietly for a long time. At other times he would burst into tears.

One day two months after my arrest he was called to the corridor bars and told to be ready the next morning with his things — he was being sent abroad. His eyes glistened and signs of color appeared in his cheeks. He talked, walked briskly about the cell and looked for something to do.

In the morning he came up to me, wished me luck and release — release before anything else. He asked for my address in order that he could return the underwear I had given him.

“No, my friend,” I replied. “I’ve only the prison ad-

dress and there's no need to send anything back. If we ever meet again, we'll have a glass of beer together."

At that he left.

Writing now I remember him as a friend. If he ever sees these words and writes to me I shall be very glad. He knows what it means to start life anew after one has been through a living death.

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## CHAPTER XX

### A BULLET IN THE HEAD

**F**OR a whole week I had not been taken to another examination. This did not surprise me because in the cell I had very soon found out the habits of examining officers. The Golden Rule for a Soviet prisoner is this: *Do not trust the examining officer.* He always lies. If he says: "I will send for you tomorrow," it means that he will let you alone; if he threatens: "I will forbid remittances," it means he has not even thought of doing it. However, knowing all this, it is still hard not to believe him sometimes.

At last the guard called out my name.

The examining officer, Barishnikoff, was sitting at his desk looking very morose.

"Sit down. How are you?"

"All right."

"I haven't sent for you for a long time; I'm very busy. Did you make any acquaintances in the cell?"

"Yes."

"Did you find anyone you knew there?"

"No."

"With whom have you made friends?"

"With the bandits. Nice fellows — Sokol and the others. Do you know them?"

"With whom else?"

"With nobody else."

"It's time to stop dodging and answer properly."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Your crimes are known to us. Drop your independent manner. *You are a wrecker!* Yes, you're a criminal and I speak to you as a criminal."

"I am not convicted, I am under investigation."

"No, you are a criminal. It's not a court trial here. Your dodging and cunning will only lead you to a bullet. I'm tired of bothering with you. Are you ready to immediately write out the confession? No? We will talk to you in another way. Well? I am waiting for your confession."

"Of what?"

"Of *wrecking*. You are — a wrecker. You were in contact with the international bourgeoisie and the wreckers of the Soviet Government and you received money from abroad for your base activity."

I laughed.

"You laugh? Wait a while and you will see nothing funny."

"I can't help laughing in spite of the tragedy of my position. We are mature men and I have to listen to your accusations which can only be termed ridiculous. You know perfectly well that what you are saying is not true. You have searched my apartments in Murmansk and Leningrad; you have been censoring all my correspondence, have had every man I met under observation, have watched my income and expenditures; you know, as well as I do, that I haven't received money, nor even a single letter from abroad since the Revolution."

"You refuse to confess?"

"I have told you and I repeat again, I have never been a wrecker; I have never been in contact with any international bourgeoisie; I have never received money illegally from anyone."

He struck the desk with his fist and cried: "You lie!"

I kept silent.

"Well?"

"I have no intention of carrying on a conversation in this tone. As long as you behave this way I am not going to answer you."

"You refuse to confess? We will enter this into the record."

"I refuse to answer to rudeness and shouting. You may enter that into the record."

"Intellectual's whim," he grumbled and changed his tone. "I can't waste so much time on you," he continued, getting out a sheet of paper for the record. "I will write down in brief your confession and you may go back to the cell. We will continue tomorrow."

This comedy was beginning to make me angry. I kept silent in order not to say something rude. It was not to my advantage to have him lose patience and so I held myself in hand.

"Well?" he said. "I am ready to write."

"I told you already that I have nothing to confess to."

"Why then do you make me write your confession?"

"I don't make you do anything. Write whatever you please, if you need it. I will sign no 'confessions.'"

"And *tomorrow* you will not sign?"

"Certainly not."

"And the *day after tomorrow*?" he continued threateningly.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"And you will never sign?" he snarled in a menacing whisper, piercing me through with his eyes.

"I will never sign it, I have told you that already."

"Then — a bullet in your head! Do you understand? A bullet! A bullet in the back of your head, into the back of your head — a bullet!" He was almost shouting.

"Go ahead and shoot," I replied calmly. "I have nothing more to say."

“ We will send you ‘ to the left,’ we will liquidate you. Do you understand? We will write you off.”

I kept silent and he continued, showing the richness of a special GPU vocabulary in its figures of speech describing the death penalty: “ the highest degree,” “ to be shot,” “ to be sent to the moon,” “ to be written off the books,” “ to be sent out without a transfer,” “ a friendly slap,” “ to the wall,” “ to the left,” “ to spend seven kopeks,” and so on. Evidently in this he considered himself an expert. He rehearsed these phrases, combining them in various ways. All this lasted for a long time, perhaps an hour. He was beginning to repeat himself; I was feeling terribly bored. Finally he stopped and said with special significance: “ You are wasting time in vain. You will confess. I have broken down better men than you! ”

“ I think it is not I who am wasting time, but you! ” I exclaimed in complete anguish. “ I have told you that I never ‘ wrecked.’ I have nothing more to add. If you find it necessary, shoot me; what’s the use of all this delay? ”

“ Not so fast. We are in no hurry,” continued the examining officer, subduing his voice. “ Nobody can overhear us and there are no witnesses to our conversation. Admit orally that you *are* a wrecker and I will promise to have your life spared. Later you can repudiate your statement and there is no need of entering it into the record. I only want to see your sincerity, to see that you have surrendered. That will suffice me.”

I kept silent and looked at him in astonishment. What was this new move?

“ I’ll tell you frankly,” continued Barishnikoff, “ we, the examining officers, are also often forced to lie, we also say things which cannot be entered into the record and to which we would never sign our names.”

“ Everything I say,” I replied, “ I am ready to enter into

the record and subscribe to. I am not going to lie to you either orally or in writing."

"Well, we are going to see about that later," and again he changed to an offensive. "You have stated in writing that you were a friend of both Tolstoy and Scherbakoff. Didn't you have a quarrel just before their arrest?"

"No."

"They had, therefore, no reason for denouncing you?"

"None."

"Well then, be it known to you that I have here," he tapped his brief-case, "*confessions*, written in their own handwriting, destroying you. All your wrecking activity has been disclosed by them and they have stated precisely when, from whom and how much money you have received. Two witnesses testify that you are a wrecker, and these witnesses are your friends. This testimony is quite sufficient for us to have you shot. I give you a way out — confess frankly and wholeheartedly and you will save your life. If you confess — you get ten years in concentration camp; if not — you go 'to the left.' I am waiting."

"All this is not true," I said with difficulty, keeping myself under control and choosing my words carefully.

"What isn't true?"

"I don't believe that Tolstoy and Scherbakoff testified that I am a wrecker," I answered.

"Let me ask you," he began with ironical politeness, "what grounds you have for not believing it?"

"Only those which I have already mentioned: we were friends; I know these men as having been absolutely honest and will never believe that they could falsely denounce me. Moreover, you have yourself warned me," I added with a laugh, "that you don't always tell the truth."

I saw that he was hesitating whether to display indignation or turn my words into a joke.



"Nevertheless, their depositions are right here," he laughed cruelly and again tapped his brief-case. "Do you want me to show them to you?"

"Don't take the trouble, I still won't believe it."

"You don't believe in documents?" he exclaimed with simulated indignation, and ended much more sincerely: "Your faith is of no interest to us. The 'Council' will believe and we shall shoot you."

"Well, go ahead and shoot, the sooner the better."

"Don't be in such a hurry. First you are going to write for us what we need. Your confession now can still save you, but later — no. You might write, beg, implore, but we will still shoot you. We won't tolerate enemies who resist us."

Again the same thing, I thought, "we will shoot," "we will shoot," but, when the point is reached they linger — "We are in no hurry." How could one find out what they really intended to do with me? I shall not let them beat me, they will have to bind me first.

As if in reply to my thoughts he continued: "I see that I am really wasting too much time on you. I am busy. I have to leave now and you shall wait for me, do you understand? You shall wait right here, standing in the corridor. I will return when I see fit; maybe in this way you will become more compliant. You shall return to the cell when you have written out your confession and a detailed statement not only of your own crime but also of the wrecking activities of Tolstoy and Scherbakoff which are well known to you."

Saying this he donned his overcoat and cap. Then he opened the door of his office.

"Please."

I went out.

"Stand here, so. Near the wall, but don't lean against it.

Did you take sugar in your pockets? No. It's a pity, it would have come in handy now. Stand and think. I am busy. I will come back, but I warn you that I will not waste any more time on you."

As he left, a guard made his appearance and began pacing up and down the corridor.

So, I was given the "standing test."

In our cell were several men who had been subjected to it. One, Engraver P., over fifty years of age and heavily built, had stood for six and a half days. He was not given food or drink and was not allowed to sleep; he was taken to the toilet only once a day. But he did not "confess." After this ordeal he could not walk back to the cell and the guard had to drag him up the stairs. His whole body was swollen, especially his legs; he stayed in the hospital for a month and could hardly walk at all thereafter.

Another, Artisan B., about thirty-five years old, who had one leg amputated above the knee and replaced by an artificial one, had stood for four days and had not "confessed."

Engineer T., sixty years old, had stood for four and a half days and had finally signed the "confession."

"Well, it's interesting to test oneself," I thought as I stood there in the corridor.

In about two hours Barishnikoff returned and entered his office without saying a word, but casting an enquiring glance at me as he passed. I put on an expression of complete indifference and pretended not to see him.

In about ten minutes he came out and stopped in front of me.

"Have you done any thinking?"

"I have nothing to think about."

"Are you going to confess?"

"I have nothing to confess. I have told you that I have committed no crime."

“Does that mean we should release you?”

“Yes.”

“We should *shoot* you! Do you understand? A bullet in your head; remember that: *a bullet in your head,*” and then after a minute of silence, “Go!”

I went along the corridor, the guard behind me.

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## CHAPTER XXI

### “NEVER TRUST THE EXAMINER”

I RETURNED to the cell in a depressed frame of mind. In the presence of the examining officer I had felt more anger than fear; now, left to myself, I lost my assurance.

There was no doubt that I would be killed as all my friends had been. My wife and son would be deported. This had happened to the families of the “48.” I would have to await in silence the day when I should be called out “with things,” led along corridors down into the cellar where my hands would be tied, a bag thrown over my head and one of these scoundrels would send a bullet through the back of my head.

Well, this would not happen! I would not surrender and die like a calf in a slaughter-house. I thought it all over and decided that at my next cross-examination I would kill the examining officer. The necessary weapons could be obtained from some of my crafty cell-mates: a table knife which they had sharpened for shaving, a file which could well serve as a dagger, or a small steel bar. I decided upon this bar. It could easily be concealed in the sleeve and was heavy enough to fracture the skull with one blow. But I must hit with accuracy; I must not miss. Of course, Barishnikoff carried a revolver with him but he was careless, especially towards the end of a cross-examination. When he took his overcoat and cap from the rack his back was towards me. This would be the moment for striking. He would fall to the floor, I would grab his revolver,

rush out into the lunch-room and, if favored by luck, kill two or three other examining officers.

I would be killed myself during the fight, but the picture appealed to me. At least my family would learn how I had perished — a more glorious death than execution.

I lived with this idea for several days and it was not until I had talked with one of my neighbors that I realized I had not sufficiently absorbed the Golden Rule of the Soviet prisoner — never to trust the examining officer. This cell-mate was an engineer of renown, accused of espionage, wrecking and assisting intervention. He had been imprisoned for about six months and had been cross-examined fifteen times. But with his experience he looked at my case from an optimistic point of view.

“You’re getting along excellently,” he exclaimed when I told him about my situation. “There is nothing to be gloomy about! I’m sure that the examining officer has absolutely no material against you. That he scares you with execution indicates that this is his only trump card. The ‘standing test’ has also evidently proved a failure. As for the punitive cell and the ‘conveyor,’ such tortures are only for those who are frightened and wavering. He might transfer you to a solitary cell but he probably knows it wouldn’t work in your case. And you’ve been here long enough to know how to get along if he forbids exercise and food remittances. It’s an excellent sign that he has resorted to the verb ‘to shoot.’ If he really had any incriminating material from your two friends, he would have dealt with you differently, keeping this as his final trump card instead of threatening you with execution. There may even be a chance that you’ll be released. Certainly this happens in extremely rare cases, but it does happen.

“Remember Engineer D. from cell No. 20? He was threatened for two months with execution and was thoroughly exhausted. The last time he was sent for, the exam-

ining officer, a burly ruffian, literally picked him up by the collar of his coat and put him on a chair. 'Stand,' he shouted, 'you son of a bitch, I will kill you! Confess! We will shoot you anyway!' D. remained standing on the chair for two hours, and the next day was called out 'with things.' Later he sent us a conventional sign — he had been set free.

"You'll see that the examining officer will change his manner towards you, but don't yield. Stay calm and don't let him get the better of you. For some reason or other they need your authentic 'confession'; that's *your* trump card."

After this conversation I made up my mind to hold myself in hand. There was always time to kill the examining officer, I thought. Day after day went by and I was not called out for further questioning.

Meanwhile another confirmation of how impossible it was to believe the examining officer was afforded me by the case of the young man who had been put in the van with me when I was being taken to prison. After the first cross-examinations he had been extremely depressed and discouraged. He was accused of espionage, an accusation with no foundation, but none the less the examining officer threatened him with Solovki. Although he belonged to the nobility and had been an officer in the army during the War, his ideas were very radical and apparently he sincerely sympathized with the Bolsheviki.

A few days later he came out for exercise with a cheerful face — the examining officer had told him that he was convinced of his innocence, had offered apologies for his arrest, permitted him to buy anything he wanted in the GPU lunch-room, had allowed him to write his wife to let her know that he would soon be set free and asking her, therefore, not to send him any more food parcels.

Then, as a surprise, the examining officer invited the

wife to come and visit her husband, and during the interview had ordered tea and cakes, remarking jestingly that he was sorry he could not provide champagne to celebrate the happy occasion. They had been allowed to talk for two hours and, although the examining officer had been present all the time, he had behaved like a kind friend. The wife had asked him to let her husband go home then, but the examining officer had laughingly replied: “Not so soon, wait until Thursday” — promising to have all the necessary papers ready by that day.

There were five days left — five more terrible days in prison. But he was completely transformed — like a new man. Yes, the GPU was a wonderful organization; the way they understood men was surprising! I had on the tip of my tongue the words: “Don’t trust the examining officer!” — but I did not want to destroy his cheerful disposition.

Came Thursday. He was so excited that he sat all day “with things” awaiting the call to freedom. He was not called out until evening. At eight o’clock the “cuckoo” made her appearance in our corridor. He was called out and given a sentence of five years in a concentration camp. The next day he was deported: he was not allowed to take leave of his wife, received nothing from home for the journey and left the prison completely crushed by the sentence.

“So you see,” said my adviser, the engineer, “better let them threaten you with execution than offer good things from the lunch-room. But what a scoundrel! The sentence had been passed two weeks before, and the examining officer, knowing this to be the case, had arranged all this as a joke.”

“But why? What was the sense of it?” I questioned.

“Sense? Pleasure, my dear friend! They are sadists! He sent for the wife, arranged the interview for them and delighted in visualizing how carefully she would be preparing for his home-coming and how he, in the cell, would be

counting the hours and minutes. And then — the blow! Deportation! And she would learn that he had been sent to the concentration camp without proper food and clothing.”

“Just like them,” said another well-known expert and prison old-timer who had joined in our conversation. “And do you know the way in which a commutation of the death sentence is made known to the prisoner? The examining officer sends for him and then pays no attention to the prisoner when he is brought in. Then he searches among his papers and picks up the sentence, looks at the prisoner for a long time and finally gets up and begins to read loudly and slowly: ‘Excerpt from the minutes of the meeting of the GPU council. The case of so-and-so accused by so-and-so was heard and the sentence passed. . . .’ Then comes a long pause. You can imagine the effect it has! Then still louder, emphasizing every syllable he utters the words: ‘TO BE SHOT.’ Deathly silence follows — and he gloats over the effect produced; then a few minutes later he adds: ‘but the Soviet Government is lenient even to such criminals and the sentence of execution has been commuted to confiscation of all property and ten years in a concentration camp. Go!’

“The examining officers, at least many of them, revel in such scenes. Others don’t bother with such details and have the sentences read by the ‘cuckoo’ in a solitary cell or even in the corridor. The examiners get great pleasure out of bullying a man as much as they can. I can just imagine how they act during executions!”

“You see,” concluded my first companion, “how can one believe them? The examining officer lies to get you confused, lies for pleasure, having unlimited power over the prisoner, and lies aimlessly from habit. Our only defense and weapon is, as I have said before: *don’t trust the examining officer.*”



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## CHAPTER XXII

### TAIROFF ALLEY

**T**HE GPU has many methods of trying to wring confessions from its innocent victims. Most of them are threatened with execution, and a great number are kept in isolation cells and deprived of outside communication, exercise and books for well over a year. In many cases even their relatives are arrested, thrown into prison and sometimes sent to forced labor.

Of the people whom I met, V. was subjected to one of the most cruel kinds of treatment. Kept for eight months in an isolation cell without exercise or food parcels, he suffered from a severe attack of scurvy. He had been a healthy and strong man of middle age, but one by one he lost his eight front teeth and those remaining became so loose that he could eat bread only after soaking it in water. Moreover, he had been subjected to one of the most humiliating and disgusting measures — the transfer to Cell No. 16.

Cell No. 16 was known among the prisoners as “Tairoff Alley,” the name of the favorite haunt in Petersburg of the city rogues, prostitutes and thieves. Built to contain but ten or twelve men, it actually held forty or fifty — and these, thieves, robbers and vagrants of the lowest type. Borrowed from other detention institutions, they made up a cell which was characterized by its loose discipline; fights and wild rioting never ceased and the air was filled with

blasphemy. These prisoners amused themselves by gambling for money, clothes, food and tobacco. Even gold fillings from teeth were lost in this way and pulled out on the spot in the most brutal manner.

Counter-revolutionaries, or "*Kaers*" as they were called, who refused to confess were put in this cell and left to the mercy of the regular inmates. Such "*Kaers*" were immediately robbed of all their possessions and, if they offered resistance, cruelly beaten. To transfer a prisoner to Cell No. 16 meant that he would be deprived of everything that is most valuable in prison life: clothes, food parcels, pillow, blanket and tobacco pouch.

It was rare for anyone transferred to this cell to remain unharmed. When V. was sent to it he found there one intellectual who in a few days had been completely beaten down morally and physically. All his clothes had been gambled away by the criminals and he was left only partially covered by a filthy rag. But the calm and venerable appearance of V. was so imposing that it impressed even the ruffians. His cleverness and tact did the rest. As soon as he was led into the cell he voluntarily handed over to the foreman everything he had with him in prison except his clothes, and declared at once that he would turn over his food parcels for general distribution. The foreman of the cell, with his usual authority, took him under his own protection and ordered that he should not be harmed. Imagine the surprise of the examining officer when the next day he discovered that V. had not been mistreated in any way. And although he tried to instigate violence by summoning the foreman to tell him that V. had complained of being robbed, the foreman quickly saw through the trick and on his return to the cell told V. about it.

This incident only strengthened the good-will of the criminals toward V. Flouting the prison rules they would see that V. got out into the yard for exercise, guarding him

closely as they went and pretending that they were dragging him out by force. A curious picture he presented, this dignified gentleman with a magnificent gray beard and spectacles, walking in the yard surrounded by a crowd of bedraggled thieves, three of whom were entirely naked. It was not long before the examining officer, seeing that he had not succeeded in subduing V., transferred him back to a general cell.

A different type of pressure was exerted upon a man by the name of B. arrested in connection with the "Academic Case."<sup>1</sup> For a year he was kept in isolation without exercise, food parcels or reading matter. Finally he was given an ultimatum — to sign the "confession" or be shot within three days. He did not sign. In the evening he was called out with his "things" and transferred to the death cell where for two days he could listen, day and night, to the groans and screams of those being dragged to execution. At last he was taken under heavy guard into the cellar where, according to rumor, the executions took place. Every moment he expected to be shot in the back, but no — from there he was led up a dark flight of stairs and ushered into a brightly lit room where two examining officers were seated. Then he lost consciousness and could not be questioned.

After this harrowing experience he was transferred to a double cell and given a madman for a companion. This man would throw himself on B. and beat and choke him. Scratched and bruised, and with torn clothing, he was again brought before the examining officer in whose office he found his wife who had also been summoned for questioning. Then, seeing the strong impression this meeting produced upon both of them, the examiner addressed himself to B. with pathetic words:

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, page 359.

"Pity your wife! Save yourself! Sign the confession! I offer it to you for the last time, otherwise you will be shot."

B. again had the courage to refuse to give false testimony and was sent to the concentration camp. Had he submitted to the advice of the examining officer, undoubtedly he would have been shot.

The "wet cell" was another means of coercion. Here the floor was flooded with water and the only furniture was a very narrow plank on which one could sit but not lie down. There were no sanitary conveniences and the prisoners were not allowed to leave the cell for any reason. Their feet had to remain in the filthy, putrid water filled with ordure; this developed ulcers. I knew of one prisoner who after six days in this "wet cell" finally signed a false confession. But he left behind him another prisoner who had been there for over thirty days and still refused to sign a false statement.

These cases are but an insignificant part of what I saw and heard of the methods of the GPU, just a few examples showing the conditions under which the Russian intellectuals suffered imprisonment.

Instead of subjecting me to any of the above violent methods, the examining officer got into the habit of sending for me once every week or ten days and keeping me in his office for four or five hours. Each time he would urge me to confess or would threaten me with death, but with decreasing insistence. He would often ask my opinion on some "technical detail," as he called it, for instance, the practicability of manufacturing "fish flour" from fish waste. He would lazily look over a newspaper, while I talked, intentionally complicating my narrative with minute details which I felt sure he did not understand. Now

and then his eyes would close, but if I stopped talking, he was wide awake.

“ Well, go on! ”

Watching him carefully I gradually began to change the subject — describing some unusual characteristics of the various kinds of fishes in the Barents Sea. The effect was extraordinary.

“ A perch at a depth of 300 meters! That’s wonderful! What kind of perch is it? ”

I would explain to him that it is a deep-water fish, of a fiery red color, with enormous black eyes and sharp spikes and that it is viviparous — that made a great impression on him and the subject of the cross-examination shifted to the question of viviparous fish!

He listened with apparent interest to stories about sea-wolves, and toothed whales that swallowed seals, and killer-whales that chase a Greenland whale onto a shallow bank to devour it. Such conversations convinced me that Barishnikoff was a typical Soviet state functionary, unquestionably lazy, who went to the Shpalerka for the same reason that all Communists go to their offices; in order that the number of hours they “ worked ” might be registered.

I decided to take the offensive. Choosing an opportune moment during our conversation on a subject entirely foreign to the cross-examination, I addressed him unexpectedly in a calm and casual manner:

“ May I ask you a frank question? ”

He nodded.

“ Why are you keeping me here? You know very well that I am not a wrecker, that I have committed no crime. I have the impression that you want at any cost to establish a crime where you know well there is none.”

At first he appeared taken aback and then began claiming that the GPU never arrests and imprisons anyone with-

out cause; if I had been arrested, there must be a reason for it.

I shrugged my shoulders. The old story was beginning all over again. He resumed his aggressive tone and continued:

“What do you think, that we decided to expose an ‘organization’ in your Trust and that I simply picked from the list of employees those names which seemed best to fit into the picture? That I came across your name — a nobleman and a scientist — found it to be well fitted and so got hold of you?”

“Yes, I believe that’s the way it was done,” I replied, trying to speak calmly and without irritation.

“No, it was not done that way. We have strong evidence against you. You are a wrecker. At Murmansk, during the general meeting at the time of the execution of the ‘48,’ the question was raised as to why you hadn’t been arrested. This shows that your wrecking activity was no secret to the workmen.”

I smiled and thought to myself: “What strong evidence!”

He noticed my smile and hesitated, knowing as well as I how general meetings were conducted.

“Possibly you engaged in wrecking activity not out of desire of personal gain, but entirely out of class hatred. I’m becoming convinced that this was the case. To some extent this lightens the gravity of your position,” he said trying to gain a new foothold.

“Class hatred? Where did you get this from?”

“I sincerely advise you to confess,” he repeated, finding no suitable reply. “It will save you. Then, when submitting your case to the council, I will ask for leniency in the verdict.”

“Confess what? You know yourself that I’ve done nothing criminal. Here you have been questioning me for the

last two months — tell me of what my ‘wrecking activity’ consisted?”

“You knew of the ‘wrecking activity’ of Tolstoy and Scherbakoff.”

“No.”

“But you know they have been shot at wreckers. Working with them you could not have failed to know of their ‘wrecking.’”

“I knew their work. I know that all the success of the trawling business is due to the knowledge and energy of Scherbakoff.”

“Don’t forget that wreckers are cunning,” interrupted the examining officer. “Keeping up the outward appearance of excellent work, they know how to ruin it from the inside. Confess that you knew of the ‘wrecking activity’ of Tolstoy and Scherbakoff and I will accuse you only of failing to report. This would come under another Article and would get you the minimum punishment. This is the most I can do for you.”

From then on my “case” was narrowed down to a persistent attempt to obtain confirmation of the wrecking activities of those executed in the autumn of 1930. At first it was not quite clear to me. Evidently they had been murdered not only without being convicted of a definite crime, but also without the observance of those minimum requirements needed by the GPU to “prove” their “guilt.” I found out later that this was so. *It was not until the winter of 1930-1931 that the GPU actually attempted to collect “proofs” against the “48” who had already been executed.*

A few days later the examining officer informed me of the official accusation against me. He was evidently afraid to continue our previous conversation, fearing that it might lead to a final loss of his prestige. I was being accused — according to Article 58, Paragraph 7 — of eco-

nomic counter-revolution, that is "wrecking." The punishment for this crime is from three years of forced labor to the death penalty with confiscation of property.

The examining officer wrote out the accusation act in my presence on a special form. Its formulation was poorly made and, to me, incomprehensible. It was one long sentence containing numerous incidental propositions oddly separated by commas. Its meaning was approximately as follows: I was accused of engaging in wrecking activity from 1925 to the day of my arrest and, concretely, my wrecking consisted of "promoting the rise of prices of materials and production equipment."

"Sign to the effect that the accusation has been read to you," said the examining officer.

"But I don't even understand the accusation," I objected. "How was it possible for me to promote the raising of prices of materials and production equipment?"

"Whether you understand it or not isn't important. Simply sign that you have *read* the accusation. I don't ask that you agree with it," he grumbled. And I signed.

After that I was not called out for questioning for a whole month and was even allowed to work in the prison library, delivering books to the cells. Life became easier. I had seven companions working there with me and, best of all, I was allowed to read in its spacious room. I still lived in the same cell, but I left early in the morning and returned to it only just before roll-call at night.

It was a mystery to me why my case had dragged on for so long. I was not called out for cross-examination any more. Maybe my "case" was completed and I would soon receive my verdict from the "cuckoo." Perhaps I would even be released.

Meanwhile I had become an "old-timer" with the cell privileges that accompany this status, and I knew the mi-



nutest details of prison regulations. I had gathered together a prisoner's kit of forbidden, but extremely useful, articles: a needle which was a gift from a fellow-prisoner who had been deported; a piece of string which I picked up in the prison yard and which served to hold up my trousers; two large nails which I flattened into a knife and a chisel; a pipe which I made from specially processed bread and a game of chess of the same material. I became used to long hair and learned the trick of shaving with a piece of tin or broken glass.

The acute nervous tension and excitement of the first days of imprisonment subsided. Routine, weariness and oppressive sadness took their place. The third month passed, the fourth began, but no change came. It was as if time had stopped on one dreadful day.

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## CHAPTER XXIII

### “NOVELISTS”

**B**EFORE my imprisonment I had been certain that the alleged “voluntary confessions” of scientists and specialists were faked and the records falsified. I could understand that there might be people of weak will-power who under torture or the threat of death would write any kind of confession; but that men of strong character and unquestionable honesty, like the “48,” could do such a thing seemed incredible to me. I was, therefore, surprised to learn how many prisoners do write false confessions and denunciations. There is no doubt that the GPU does not stop at falsification of signatures, or the addition of words which completely change the meaning of a statement, or even the drawing up of entirely false records of investigations, but, hard as it is to admit, there are also people who write shameful calumny against themselves. Only those who have been in the clutches of the GPU can understand how, under the pressure of examining officers, repulsive “confessions” of participation in counter-revolution, espionage and “wrecking” are written, which condemn not only their authors but many other innocent people as well.

Such “confessions,” however, are of such usual occurrence that there exists a special term for them in the prison slang. They are called “novels” and those who write them — “novelists.” As a matter of fact this forms the basis for dividing all prisoners into two categories: those “confess-

ing” and those “refusing to confess.” I belonged to the latter group and deeply sympathized with my comrades, but the psychology of those who did “confess” was of vital interest to all of us. Finding out what were the forces which compelled them to capitulate to the examining officer, to accept the guilt of a base crime, to become betrayers of their relatives, friends and fellow-workers, meant delving into the very depths of prison misery. We, the “unyielding,” had one consolation left — our honor; they, on the other hand, had lost even that.

After a closer study of these individuals I came to the conclusion that they had become “novelists” from various motives, but the thing which struck me most was the fact that there were some who “confessed” consciously for practical purposes. These were men of mature age, the majority of whom had formerly held positions of social and official importance. This group consisted almost entirely of engineers, well-known specialists and some professors and scientists. Many were men of wide practical experience, strong character and high ethical standards. Before the Revolution many of them had been men of irreproachable integrity, and now they openly told of giving false testimony and denouncing their friends and associates, arguing that to have done otherwise would have been impossible and unwise. Some of them even looked down upon the “unyielding” and brazenly urged them also to “confess.” But there were others who talked about it with repulsion and horror, endeavoring by means of words to alleviate their consciences.

At the Shpalerka, as an example to those refusing to “confess,” a special cell, No. 23, had been set aside. It was occupied by nine important engineers who had “confessed.” There were ten cots in the cell; in the middle stood a big table over which hung a bright lamp with a shade and each prisoner had a stool. They were taken

separately to the bathhouse and given better food. We saw their cell when passing along the corridor and met these engineers at exercise in the yard.

I recall one of these men with whom I argued the subject of "confessions," but to no avail.

"No, my friend," he continued, "we have become accustomed to make deals with our conscience, we have become hardened to the fact that without lying one can't live through a single day in Sovietland, and we have long ago lost all our principles. Why then now, when the threat of an infamous death hangs over us and our families are threatened with poverty, hunger and even deportation, should we not do everything possible to alleviate our fate? The GPU demands that we confess to wrecking and espionage — all right, we *are* wreckers and spies. They demand denunciation of our friends — all right, we'll denounce them. If I don't, somebody else will. We coöperated with the Soviet Government when it required that we formulate and approve absurd plans which ruined the industry and impoverished the people, and now again we coöperate with it when our 'confessions' of wrecking are needed to cover the shame of its failures. In both cases we are risking our lives for the sole purpose of putting off the inevitable and of saving, for a time at least, the lives of our relatives and ourselves."

"No," I argued, "you are wrong. I have always fought my utmost against plans I knew to be unfulfillable. Here in prison, having lost everything, I am still able to say that I did no harm by my work, even that perhaps in peace time I would not have worked with so much zeal nor served my country more diligently. No, I shall never denounce myself or anybody else."

"But what will you gain by your stubbornness? You will get into open conflict with the examining officer and his report to the Council will be unfavorable to you. The GPU

Council will also be ‘ sore ’ at you because the GPU must necessarily disclose plots in order to justify its enormous appropriations and expanded staffs — and that means you can’t expect mercy from them. I am not forgetting, either, that the Soviet Government needs our ‘ confessions ’ with which to explain why our country is suffering poverty and famine instead of the promised well-being and prosperity. With matters as they are, you’ll get the heaviest punishment and probably be shot. They don’t need your ‘ confession ’ in order to convict you. Don’t forget that there is no trial, you will not see the council, the examining officer can forge your signature or even force others to give incriminating evidence against you.”

“ Let him do what he likes! I will not assist him in this dirty work.”

“ This may be very honorable, but in our times — pardon me — it’s ridiculous! Our times are times of realistic politics and not of knighthood or quixotism.”

“ And are you sure that your confession will save you? ” I asked. “ Remember the case of the ‘ 48 ’; they ‘ confessed ’ and the next day the GPU announced the executions. You see, the GPU has its own peculiar kind of logic.”

“ Even so we do gain by confessing. First of all, our relatives are not imprisoned as a means of forcing us to be more compliant. Then, we ourselves avoid torture and other means of coercion. The prison régime is made lighter for us and therefore we have more chance of leaving the prison without entirely ruining our health.”

One of the younger men in prison, a radical who openly sympathized with the Bolsheviks, broke in on the conversation. He, too, was being accused of “ wrecking.”

“ But it’s terrible to realize what harm you cause by your false confessions. Put yourself in the position of the examining officer to whom you’ve confessed and the GPU Council that reads your ‘ novels.’ You’re forcing them to

believe in wrecking which does not exist, to search for it and ultimately destroy us who are indispensable to the country.”

“ Oh no! They’re not as naïve as all that. My examining officer knows very well that I’ve never wrecked and that in general we never had any wrecking activity at our factory. It’s all their own invention anyway. How much *my* examining officer believes in wrecking activities can be seen from the following incident. He forced me to sign a deposition that I had engaged in wrecking and that I received money for it from abroad. Then he said, ‘ Write how much.’ How much? The devil only knew! All the money I saw was what I was given by the factory. I thought for a long time and figured out how much might be required to bribe an engineer of my position who received, as I did, one thousand roubles a month. Finally I wrote down that I had received during the five years 200,000 roubles. ‘ What are you writing?’ he cried. ‘ What do you mean by 200,000? What idiot would give you that? Cross out one zero, make it 20,000. No, even that’s too much! You’ll have to write the whole statement over. Say that you received 10,000 roubles.’ ‘ But —’ I replied, ‘ that makes only 2,000 a year. And what person would believe that I had taken this risk for only 2,000 roubles? Why, by consultations or prospecting work I could have earned more than that at any moment, but I didn’t take advantage of this opportunity for fear of being accused of grabbing too much work for myself.’ ‘ Don’t argue, write down 10,000 roubles.’ What could I do? I wrote it down. And you insist that I should have risked getting a bullet in my head to avoid tempting this scoundrel to believe in the existence of wrecking activity! ”

The subject of “ confessions ” was discussed a great deal in prison because it represented both the basic point in all our “ cases ” and the “ work ” of our examining officers.

It was very hard to control one's indignation against those who were “novelists” from principle. As for those who had surrendered to the examining officers because of direct torture or even the fear of it, they presented an extremely pathetic picture: men of weak will and confused old men — complete moral wrecks.

In the winter of 1930 an old man, Professor Z., was transferred to a common cell after half a year of solitary confinement. I saw him when he was taken out into the yard for exercise for the first time. He was completely broken, his back was bent and he moved about with the greatest difficulty. There had been rumors that he had denounced a large number of people, and the minute he entered the yard prisoners rushed to him from all sides.

“I'm sorry, friends, sorry!” he was saying in a trembling voice. “Yes, I have denounced you. Yes — you, too. And you. . . . And him. I couldn't hold out. They forced me to do it. I'm old — I couldn't hold out. I also have been denounced. Do you know Professor N.? It was he who denounced me. They arranged a meeting and he shamelessly denounced me to my face. What could I do?”

“Professor,” said one of them with indignation, “you didn't know me at all, you had no connection with my work, you scarcely knew me; why did you bring false accusation against me?”

“And what have you written about me?” interrupted another excitedly.

“I don't remember, friend. I forget. . . .”

“Old ass!” said somebody. “He already has one foot in the grave, and in order to get a sentence of ten years in concentration camp, which he will never outlive, he not only sells his good name, but ruins everyone whose name he remembers. What a despicable coward!”

Meanwhile the old man was telling of some of the testimony he had given against them. It was a painful scene.

Here was a formerly respected professor ending his long life in infamy.

Many of the "novelists" made attempts to conceal their "confessions," but it was almost impossible. The examining officer does not make a secret of such "confessions," but uses them as a means to coerce others. So many people are involved in each "case" that the news spreads rapidly and widely, is long remembered and follows the "confessors" even into exile. The attitude of the other prisoners toward these men is not one of outward hostility but rather of distrust. It is at the hands of the examining officers that they get the worst treatment. Having squeezed from the "novelists" all the testimony they need, these GPU officials invariably drastically change their attitude toward them and begin to ill-treat them. More than once I have heard examining officers shouting: "Intellectual scum! Just scare them a little and they crawl on their bellies denouncing everyone!"

After the "confession" had been made and the usefulness of the "novelist" exhausted, he lost most of his privileges and advantages. We were, there in the prison, primarily interested to learn if "novel writing" really brought a lighter sentence, as promised by the examining officer and as often believed "outside." In our time prison practice did *not* confirm this. I know of cases where those who had "confessed" were shot, while those whom they had falsely denounced — and who had remained firm — were sent to concentration camps.

Reviewing the GPU "cases" which I encountered in prison, I came to the conclusion that "confessing" gave the prisoners no advantage either during the investigation or later and that their subsequent loss of self-respect must, in the majority of cases, have caused great mental torture. I feel very sure that there were only a few who "confessed" for pure gain. It is only the man himself who, knowing the



horrors which the examining officer devised for him, can judge his own case. How can one accuse Professor T. of weakness, when he surrendered only after being shown, through the porthole of the hot cell, his wife and daughter gasping for breath, lying on the floor and striving to get air by pressing their mouths against the crack under the iron door? What one of us could be sure of having the strength of A. B. Ezerski, executed in connection with the case of the “48,” who was carried out on a stretcher after two cross-examinations lasting 100 hours each still refusing to sign the lie which they tried to make him endorse?

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## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE SPREAD OF DISEASE

**I**N January, 1931, a noticeable activity pervaded the administration of the Shpalernaya prison — as if an inspection was imminent. Cells were being emptied; prisoners in batches of 20 or 30 men at a time from the whole corridor were being called out “with things” and were evidently being transferred to other prisons. Common cells became less crowded: only 60 or 70 men were left in our cell. Cell No. 19 was completely emptied and transformed into a “distributing cell”; all the newly arrested were placed in it and, before being transferred to common cells, were taken to the bathhouse. Prisoners who did not get remittances from home were given prison underwear. The disgusting mattresses stuffed with straw dust were replaced by others filled with fresh straw. All this excited the prisoners and rumors spread that a delegation of foreigners was going to visit our prison. This surmise changed into assurance when a painter, also one of the prisoners, made his appearance and filled all the cracks in the walls with plaster, immuring thousands of bed bugs. On January 24th, when everything seemed to have been completed, the prison was inspected by the representative of the GPU, Medved “himself,” with a whole retinue of attendants. In spite of our isolation, rumors spread very quickly in prison and the same day everybody knew that Medved had been dissatisfied, had found the cells too crowded, the place not

ready for demonstration and had ordered that the prison be immediately — tomorrow — “cleaned out,” that is, that we be transferred to another prison. Alarm was general. However bad it was at the Shpalerka no one wished to be transferred to another prison where conditions might be still worse.

No one believed that all these improvements could mean a change in the prison régime in general. We had already experienced something of this kind, but to a lesser degree, in November 1930, when the prison was threatened with an epidemic of typhus. In our crowded condition, infested by lice, a single case of typhus would have necessarily developed into an epidemic which could have easily spread to the city. Then, for the first time, we were given a chance to wash ourselves properly in the bathhouse. Usually we were allowed only 15 minutes for washing in the bathhouse, less the time spent to reach it and to undress; a group of 20–35 prisoners were crowded in a room meant for 20. No hot water was available; soap was not supplied. Only the most aggressive minority succeeded in washing themselves after a fashion, but even they did not get rid of lice. One of the causes for the spread of these vermin was the “disinfecting” process, which meant that all the underwear and clothing of those washing in the bathhouse was stuffed into two enormous bags which were then slightly heated by steam. Ten minutes later the bags were brought back and their contents emptied onto the dirty floor of the dressing room. Perhaps part of the clothing nearer to the sides of the bag got warm, but in the middle everything remained cold and the disturbed lice ran actively over all the clothes.

We did not doubt that the lice régime was one of the means of coercion for we were well acquainted with the favorite threats of examining officers: “I’ll rot you in the lice cell!” — “After a year of feeding lice you’ll confess!”

A man who is dirty and infested with lice loses his self-respect and offers less resistance to the threats of the examining officer.

The only real way of fighting lice in prison was to hunt for them, and every day we engaged in this occupation while the light was sufficient near the windows. Moscow residents, who came to us from the Butyrki prison told us that the prisoners there had established a daily "hour of fighting lice." But there were always people who had become indifferent to everything and who could not be forced to give time regularly to this task.

In November, with only the very slightest help from the prison administration, we succeeded in overcoming the lice, but as soon as the threat of the typhus epidemic lifted, we were again returned to the old régime.

Besides lice, the GPU had another ally which was still more effective — scurvy. The special prison diet, the forbidding of fruit and vegetables in prison remittances and the lack of fresh air, led to almost general sickness. Comparatively young men lost their teeth and nearly everybody suffered from bleeding gums or sore joints, especially in the legs. It is a known fact that the typical symptoms of scurvy are lack of energy, apathy, depression. This was widely made use of by examining officers and in January, having temporarily destroyed bed bugs and lice, they continued to permit scurvy, furunculosis, anaemia and tuberculosis to flourish.

I have not mentioned the wide spread of nervous and mental diseases. After half a year of solitary confinement almost everyone begins to suffer from hallucinations; many lose their minds completely and become violently insane.

Cases of sudden insanity often occur at the moment when the prisoner after a long spell of solitary confinement is placed in a common cell and is unable to withstand the shock of transition to the crowd and noise. At night we

would often hear heartrending screams. The whole prison would become silent and listen in suspense trying to make out whether someone was being tortured, dragged to execution or had become insane. Some of the prisoners could not bear it and would call the warden on duty. If he happened to be a good man, he would honestly reassure them.

“But no, this is not in the examining officer’s office. Don’t you hear, — the screams come from upstairs. It’s just somebody gone crazy. He’ll soon be taken away.”

This was the life at “Shpalerka,” and nevertheless we dreaded the prospect of a change to another prison.

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## CHAPTER XXV

### WE MOVE TO "KRESTI"

**O**N the morning of January 25, 1931, we learned that five hundred men were to be transferred to the "Kresti" prison. General commotion followed. Many, especially old-timers, were very distressed for with the transfer they would lose all their privileges. We were all grieved at the thought of losing our small but valued possessions such as needles, pieces of string and home-made knives, which would most certainly be taken from us in the search which always accompanies such a transfer.

The disturbance and confusion created by the administration's demand of immediate execution of orders were exceedingly depressing. For hours we were kept standing in the cell awaiting the humiliating procedure of being searched; for hours we were checked, our names entered into lists, counted and recounted; for hours we were kept waiting for the "black crow" which, filled to the utmost, transported us in groups to the other side of the Neva — to Kresti. Those who were awaiting transportation and had already been searched, counted and registered were guarded not by the prison guard, whose number had proved insufficient, but by ordinary soldiers of the GPU. They looked at us with curiosity and entered cautiously into conversation.

"What are you imprisoned for, Comrade?"

"Who knows, I don't know myself," was the usual reply.

"That's it, all are like that. Why do they keep people like you in prison? Thieves are free to infest the streets, but good people are kept in prisons."

"Not so loud," another soldier warned him, "don't you see — the spy?" and he nodded towards the approaching prison warden.

At last came my turn. We were pushed into a closed wagon, packed so tightly that the last ones had to be pressed in with the closing door. We were rushed away, the embankment of the Neva whisked by the little window; then came a sharp turn and we entered the prison yard.

Before the Revolution the cells of Kresti had been equipped for one inmate: a folding cot, a table, a chair, a cupboard for food utensils and clothes, a washstand and a toilet in the form of a wooden box with a cover and a pail inside. After the Revolution all this equipment had been broken and destroyed. In place of the cot were rough boards on low trestles, in place of the toilet a dented, unbelievably dirty, rusty pail with no cover whatever. This pail could be carried out for emptying only twice a day; one can imagine the stench that permeated the cell. Moreover, in accordance with the Soviet principle of crowding people together, at least five men were placed in each cell — two of them could sleep on the rough boards and the others on the floor. Six men were placed in many of the cells and in some even ten. With only five prisoners in our cell there was not room to walk around, and the only exercise we had was when we were led out for our one minute washing in the lavatory at the end of the corridor and during the fifteen minutes' exercise in the prison yard.

Besides all these hardships, we were confronted with intense cold and terrible dampness. Water literally ran down the walls in spite of our continually wiping them, the floors were wet all the time and the window panes covered with a thick coating of frost.

My cell-mates turned out to be new ones to me and presented a rather varied assortment. The senior by position and respect was a Professor E. whom I had known previously from his scientific works. He had been in prison for two years and was accused of counter-revolution. For the last three months he had not been taken to cross-examinations and he was expecting to receive his verdict at any time. Then there was an artillery officer of the old army who had been in prison for a long time. The Tartar who was with us had been arrested recently; formerly the head janitor of a big apartment house, he was being held in connection with the case of the Moslem priest Bigeff, who had escaped abroad. Many Tartars had been arrested in connection with this case. The other member of our group was an old jeweler, an employee of the state jewelry store. He had been in prison four months and was the only one of us who did not know of what he was being accused; up to that time he had not yet been taken to a single cross-examination.

In spite of the diversity of our professions we all very quickly became friends, a matter of great importance because our quarters here were perhaps more crowded than at the Shpalerka. We began by strictly regulating our day.

In the morning before "tea" we had gymnastics under my direction. And before exercise time in the yard Professor E. and I gave something like popular lectures. After dinner everyone kept quiet, busying himself with his own affairs. Professor E. usually formulated chess problems or made some small article for our comfort — a shade for the lamp, a cover for the toilet pail or small shelves. Tools and materials lost during the transfer were again being picked up and utilized with an ingenuity of which only a prisoner is capable. For a long time I occupied myself with modeling chessmen, pipes and cigarette holders out of bread which was previously subjected to a special treatment. All



this was, of course, done in secret because the tools — pieces of tin, glass, wire and the like — and the materials which we used, except for the bread, were being obtained in violation of prison regulations. Usually we picked up all our treasures in the yard during exercise or when we were being led to the bathhouse. I have to admit that prison boredom made us so proficient in this respect that once I even succeeded in stealing from the yard a whole log of wood which became for us a source of endless handicrafts.

In the evening we told each other stories, mostly personal experiences, so that we would not discuss "cases" or dwell on prison actualities.

In spite of our miserable existence, the extremely crowded conditions, putrid air, darkness and dampness, I felt that I was resting and that my nerves were becoming calmed. The organization and the friendly atmosphere in our cell had a restful influence after the chaos and noise of the common cell at Shpalerka. The examining officer seemed to have forgotten me completely. Somehow I could not bring myself to believe that I might suddenly be taken to execution or be deported. And what if they released me? What if I were to return home and see my family again? Would I work again — under the constant threat of new imprisonment? Work, and take the place of my executed comrades? Never! In the "freedom" of my native land there was no place for me.

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## CHAPTER XXVI

### "THIS IS NO TRIAL"

**T**HE first night we kept awake for a long time. The light was out, but our Tartar continued to tell his stories in a low voice and we were following with interest his narrative of how people used to live. Suddenly we heard footsteps, then the clinking of keys. The light was turned on and a voice called out:

"Name?" — the guard pointed his finger at each of us in turn. He came to me and I replied. "Initials?" "V. V.," I said.

"Initials in full!" he growled threateningly.

"What do you mean, first name and father's name?"

"Of course!" he snapped. I told him.

"Get going, quickly!"

I began to dress. My cell-mates were looking at me with compassion and concern.

"Shall I put on my overcoat?" I asked. "Nothing has been said about it," he answered, "it means without overcoat."

I went out and followed him; we descended steep iron stairs to a lower corridor where he stopped me and left me shivering in the gloomy silence of the prison night. When I had become thoroughly chilled he returned and growled, "Get going!"

I entered an office. Facing me was a new examining officer, his face cold and repulsive. He was a young man of slight build and dark complexion, with a narrow forehead

and small cruel eyes. There was a general's insignia on the coat of his military uniform. My former examining officer had been a colonel. Evidently this one was the chief.

“ Sit down,” he said glumly. “ What were you questioned about at your last cross-examination? ”

“ About the possibility of utilizing the fish waste from the Murman Coast.” — It was the first thing that came to my mind.

“ Tell about it,” he said in an ominous voice.

I began speaking slowly in order to collect my thoughts. It was very cold in the office; the examining officer had on a heavy top coat. I could not help shivering and this distracted my thoughts. It was stupid of me — this scoundrel might think I was shaking with fright. He gazed at me piercingly — annoyingly — but did not say a word.

Suddenly he interrupted me sharply: “ Enough! Stop stuffing our heads with your stupid technicalities. Remember, this is no trial. The Comrade who conducted your case came to the conclusion that you ought to be shot. I agree with him. You *ought* to be shot! ” He was not speaking but shouting angrily and wildly.

“ Well, what's the matter — shoot! ” I replied, controlling my anger with difficulty.

“ M. and T. visited you at your home! ” he said, naming two women of my acquaintance. “ Yes,” I replied.

“ They are prostitutes! ” he shouted at the top of his voice.

“ No, one is the wife of a professor and the other of an engineer. You know it.”

He jumped from his chair and began pacing up and down the room, and for some reason of his own he continued shouting loudly. — “ The cross-examination is going forward in enormous strides! ”

I burst out laughing. As I was trembling all over with anger the laugh came out loud and insolent.

“What are you laughing at?” he cut in.

“It’s funny and that’s why I’m laughing,” I replied provokingly.

It would be hard to reproduce the content of the subsequent cross-examination. He shouted at me and I at him. The door of the office would not stay shut and every other minute he would run to it and slam it closed, but it would open again and our voices resounded throughout the entire prison building. Doubtless the whole prison was listening to us with apprehension. He threatened me with execution, shouted fantastic abominations about my life and repeatedly accused me of having received money from abroad. I was so overcome with anger that I scarcely knew what I answered. His insolent manner, his face and his voice, all were driving me wild. “I must not hit him,” was the only thought that remained clear in my mind. We stood facing each other — our fists clenched.

“Who is the examining officer, I or you?” he shrieked.

“You are! Do you think I would engage in such work?” I shouted in reply.

“We’ll shoot you! And there won’t be any less fish in the sea for it,” he yelled. “We’ve shot Tolstoy, we’ve shot Scherbakoff — and there’s no less fish in the sea. And we’ll shoot you too!”

“Good! Shoot everybody, there’ll be more fish in the sea when there’s no one left to catch it.”

“Wrecker! Tolstoy testified that you were a wrecker.”

“Lies!”

“You say the GPU lies?” he shouted threateningly.

“Lies! Lies!” I screamed, completely losing control of myself.

“Get out of here! Go to hell!”

I rushed out of the office and bumped into the guard, who because of the shouting had stationed himself at the door ready to spring to the assistance of his chief.

The examining officer rushed out after me. “ Where are you going? ” he shouted.

“ To hell! ” I shrieked.

“ Only death will correct you! ” he snarled angrily, and addressing the terrified guard, “ Take him to his cell.”

I ran up to the fourth floor several steps at a time, stamping on the iron stairs, paying no attention to the guard who could barely keep up with me. He made no attempt to stop me, and in my excitement I ran up the wrong stairs and could not find my cell. This cooled me off; I controlled myself and let the guard find it for me.

Nobody was asleep in our cell, and as soon as the warden had locked me in everybody began questioning me anxiously as to what all the shouting had been about.

My anger had subsided. I saw all the absurdity of the scene and hilariously began to describe it.

“ Does it pay to behave like that? ” asked Professor E. “ One should control himself. You shouldn’t act that way with them. You’ll only make a worse enemy out of him.”

“ But, my friend, what can I do — if I have such a stupid temper? God be praised that I didn’t hit him in the face. At any rate, he didn’t succeed in frightening me.”

E. was much concerned about me. He, himself, was an admirable example of self-control and his attitude towards the guards and prison administration most exceptional. His large, heavy figure, his serious yet kindly face, his self-confidence and long-standing habit of authority — all these presented such a complete picture of dignity that even the jailers felt uncomfortable in his presence. I greatly envied him that self-control and dignified bearing, but for me it was unattainable.

Then he related in his interesting manner the story of his first cross-examination at the Shpalerka. The examining officer had asked him how old he was. He had replied

with perfect politeness and immediately added: "and how old are you?"

The examining officer became confused. "And what has that to do with the case?" he asked.

"Nothing, of course. I just asked out of curiosity. If you find my question out of place, please don't answer."

"Well, twenty-five," modestly replied the officer.

"Twenty-five," the professor sighed with sympathy. "How young you are! You weren't even born when I was imprisoned in this very prison for opposing the Tzarist régime. You see how times change!"

"Education?" drily interrupted the examining officer. The other replied and immediately asked: "And what is your education?"

"I studied in the Pedagogical Institute, but I didn't graduate."

"You see," mused E., "I gave a course there. If you had only stayed longer you would have listened to my lectures; you would have become a teacher. It's good, useful work. You didn't graduate — and now you are working here. A pity! What a pity!"

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## CHAPTER XXVII

### TORTURE IN THE LICE CELL

**T**HE night following my rowdy encounter with the examining officer the old jeweler was summoned to his first cross-examination. He was gone for four days. After having sat in prison for four months he was so upset at being called out that he left behind his set of false teeth. He was unrecognizable when he returned on the night of the fourth day. As soon as he entered the cell he began to talk excitedly. He ravenously attacked the food we had saved for him, choked over the soup and bread, shook with laughter, stumbled over words, but still kept on trying to eat and talk at the same time.

“What fun, what fun! I’ll tell you all about it, but you won’t believe it. You will never believe what I’ve been through. — Fun. — How smart they are — they certainly know how to do it. They took me to the Gorokhovaya and put me in the ‘lice’ cell. Yes, the ‘lice’ cell. You know, you’ve heard of it — the ‘lice’ cell. What fun!”

Then he choked over his soup and bread and began coughing violently. We admonished him to calm himself and rest, but he hadn’t eaten for four days. He continued eating and chattering at the same time.

“There are between two and three hundred people in the ‘lice’ cell, men, women and some children all thrown in together. How hot it is! And how crowded, without room to sit or lie down. They shoved me in and there was

only standing room. The crowd sways back and forth incessantly— red faces and bulging eyes. It's fearful! But I found a friend in there who urged me to squeeze forward towards the grill. May God reward him — my friend — for telling me this, for showing me what to do; otherwise I would not be living now. Towards the end of the first night I lost consciousness. What happened and how — I don't know. When I came to I was lying down. I had been hauled out into the corridor. If I hadn't been near the grill I would certainly have died. My head was resting on a woman — a fat woman with large breasts who was also unconscious, and beyond her there was another woman. What fun! Oh, what fun! ”

He rocked with hysterical laughter, choking and coughing. We passed him his teeth so that he could eat more easily.

“ Thank you, thank you! ” he sputtered. “ I'd quite forgotten about my teeth, and I was wondering why I couldn't eat. That's fine. Thank you! ”

Although he was still trembling and laughing, his story soon became more comprehensible, and for the first time we were hearing directly from the lips of a witness a description of perhaps the most vile method of torture used by the GPU — the “ lice,” “ crowded ” or “ foreign currency ” cell. Gradually out of his incoherent words and answers to our questions we were able to get quite a complete picture of the unbelievable way in which the GPU finances much of its work.

According to him the “ lice ” cell at the Gorokhovaya is only about *half* the size of those crowded common cells of the Shpalernaya, but two to three hundred persons are jammed into it. There the people must stand pressed closely together. To add to the torture a high temperature is maintained in the cell. Everybody is covered with lice and fighting them is quite impossible. There is no toilet



in the cell. The prisoners are taken out, three at a time, heavily guarded; men and women are taken together to the same toilet. This goes on continuously throughout the day and night. And every time even one person squeezes his way to the grill a general motion is started, resulting in a continuous swaying or rocking throughout the entire cell.

No one may sit or lie down. From time to time a GPU official enters the cell and stands up on a stool in the middle of this exhausted mass of people. If he finds that any one of the prisoners is sitting he makes the entire cell do a squatting exercise — lowering themselves slowly with bended knees and then slowly raising themselves up again time after time. This is such torture when everybody's legs are swollen from long standing that the prisoners themselves watch over each other so that no one may slide down to the floor.

The underwear of those who have been in the cell for several days becomes completely rotten and worn out and their entire bodies covered with lice bites and often a rash from nervous eczema.

“Do they have anything to eat there?” we asked, horrified at this picture of torture.

“Yes, yes! Each person gets 200 grams of bread and a mug of water a day. All drink water, but no one eats the bread — it would stick in one's throat. What a farce! The whole cell can be seen from the corridor. People are taken to see it before examinations and later, on the threat of being thrown in there, give up all their money, jewels — anything to save themselves from it. They are cunning, very cunning, those devils of the GPU.”

“But you, Ivan Ivanovitch, why didn't you immediately say that you'd give up everything?”

“They didn't ask me to. That's just it — they didn't ask for anything. They kept me here four months without say-

ing a single word to me, you know that. For almost four days they kept me in the 'lice' cell and I couldn't even speak to them about it. That's just one of their ways of terrifying people. Some are put in the cell and others are shown it from the corridor. The GPU knows how to frighten people, they're cunning!

"It was not until the fourth day," he continued, "that forty of us were picked out and taken to another cell where we waited for one hour and then another. At last a young fellow came in; he was young and alert and explained everything so clearly that we understood what it was all about.

"'You are parasites,' he said, 'and enemies of the Soviet Government. You all ought to be executed without mercy, but the Soviet Government will be lenient towards you for a time. It will let you cut your own roots. The Government needs money for the *Piatiletka*, real money! Foreign currency and gold coins will do, and those who haven't any can give gold articles and precious stones. The richer the Government is, the sooner will it be able to fulfill the *Piatiletka* and establish a classless society where there will be no room for parasites like you. In a word, you must give voluntarily to the *Piatiletka* that amount which will be assigned to each one of you. And those who refuse will be returned to the "lice" cell or sent to the "conveyor." And don't forget about the concentration camps.' Then after considerable swearing at us he sent us one by one to the examining officer.

"This officer was, I'll have to admit, a clever guy — very clever, and an expert in precious stones. When he told me that my contribution must be made with a certain value in precious stones, I agreed to it all. It meant I must give away all the jewels that I had collected in my fifty-five years of work. My only worry was that these might not be enough to cover the amount required from me. He told me to sign the agreement and I did. 'I will send you today to your

apartment and you, yourself, can show us where these precious stones are hidden. If there aren't enough to meet the amount you must contribute, we shall put you back into the "lice" cell.'

"And everything happened as he had said. A man was appointed to go with me and we went in a street-car straight to my home."

"You rode in a street-car and you've been home?" we asked in amazement.

"Yes, we simply took a street-car — and how strange it felt. I couldn't believe it was true, that I actually was outside, riding on a car, that the people all around me were free. And I myself seemed free, but I knew that actually I was a prisoner. Oh Lord! Oh Lord! When my old woman answered the door-bell she almost fainted. But she immediately understood that something was wrong because I was with a stranger; she didn't know what to do. But my companion took me straight to the place where the stones were hidden. I took them out, counted them and entered them all on a slip of paper. Then he ordered me to get going back to the prison. But my old woman begged that she be allowed to give me some tea. And he was a good fellow and gave his consent. Well, you know, at home there is nothing to eat, but I had a glass of tea and changed to clean underwear. I cheered up the old woman as best I could, saying that everything was all right and I would soon be back home. She was crying. We are both old. And he, the Gepeist, was hurrying me, saying, 'Let's go, old man, stop moping!'

"When we got back to the Gorokhovaya the same examining officer looked over my stones and made an expert valuation. 'Good,' he said, 'everything is all right. This will be enough from you for now, old man. The day after tomorrow you will be free, and for some time we'll let you alone.' And here I am."

"But Ivan Ivanovitch, how did it happen that they let

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you go so soon?" we asked. "We've always heard that people were kept in the 'lice' cell for weeks."

"Many of them are," he replied. "There was a jeweler friend of mine who'd been in there for thirty days, and twice he'd been taken to the 'conveyor.' You see, some people would rather lose their lives than give up their money. Either they won't give it up or they try to bargain about the amount. And there are still others who are asked to give up something they've never even had. That's what's really so horrible, for they're tortured, really tortured, until they wish they were dead; then they're deported to the concentration camp for insubordination.

"And there are all kinds of people there: merchants, dentists, doctors, engineers — all sorts. Anyone who might have some money is being taken. No matter how carefully money or gold is concealed, the GPU scents it and demands that it be turned over to them."

Ivan Ivanovitch finished his story and we went to sleep, and the next morning he woke up the same as he had always been — silent and reticent. We tried to find out more but he would not talk. Evidently the memory of his talkativeness of the night before, occurring because of nervous strain for perhaps the first time in his naturally quiet life, was very unpleasant to him. He told us nothing more.

The following day he was sent home "with things." Ivan Ivanovitch had bought himself out of prison.

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CHAPTER XXVIII  
THE "CONVEYOR"

THESE were many men whom I came across later who had not only undergone the tortures of the "lice" cell but also those of the "conveyor."<sup>1</sup> One of these was a former bank employee, a Jew, about forty-five years old, but in appearance much older. His hair was quite gray, he was bent and walked with difficulty.

"I had no gray hair when I was arrested," he said. "Half a year at the Shpalernaya and thirty days at the Gorokhovaya and look at me now; I'm an old man — gray hair, sore legs —"

"From the 'lice' cell?" I interrupted.

"The 'lice' cell is comparatively nothing," he continued. "It's fearful, it's terrible, but it's not the 'conveyor.'"

"Just what is the 'conveyor'?" I asked.

"The 'conveyor?' Well imagine if you can a torture so terrible that if they ask you to cut off your arm you cut it off. That's what the 'conveyor' is like.

"Picture for yourself a group of about forty prisoners, men and women, all worn out, hungry, eaten by lice, suffering with swollen legs from long standing — people who have not slept for many nights. Single file we were led into

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<sup>1</sup> The word "conveyor" is a literal translation from the Russian. It is a term used to denote that sort of endless belt which is used in factories for the transference of goods from one department to another, a contrivance familiar to anyone who has visited a canning factory. — TRANSLATOR.

a big room with three or four desks, and at each desk was an examining officer. Then comes another room and more examining officers, a corridor, stairs and more rooms with examining officers. At the command 'at a run' we had to run from one desk to another. And as we approached each desk the examining officer would start shouting at us in the vilest language imaginable. They used their foulest swearing on us Jews. They would hurl their most obscene oaths at us and shriek, 'Kike, scum — Give up your money! I'll run you to death! Give it up! — You won't? Get along, you son of a bitch. Do you want to feel my stick?' And he would swing his stick across the table.

"In front of me ran a woman, a dentist, a most respectable person. She was not so young, about forty, heavy and in ill health. She gasped for breath and could hardly keep on running. They shouted at her in the foulest language, enumerating every sexual perversion imaginable. The poor woman kept on running, would fall down, be picked up and roughly pushed from one desk to another. She was screaming: 'I swear that I have no gold, I swear! I would gladly have given it all to you, but I haven't got it. What can I do if I haven't got it?' And still they shouted their oaths at her. Some examining officers shout so strenuously that they finally lose their voices and can only shake their fists and threaten with their sticks and revolvers."

"Well, and then?"

"Then, they keep on running. Running round and round again.

"But there must be an end to it?"

"The end? The end is when the person falls down and can't get up any more. He is shaken, lifted up by the shoulders, beaten on the legs with a stick, and if he can he runs again, if not — he is taken back to the 'lice' cell and the next day it's the 'conveyor' again for him.

"This sort of torture lasts for from ten to twelve hours.

Examining officers go away to rest; they get tired sitting and shouting obscenities and so are relieved by others, but the prisoners have to keep on running. And yet there are some people who won't give up their money at once. They know all about the 'conveyor' but still won't give it up. It is not until they have run for several days, have lost consciousness, have come to and been forced to run some more that they surrender. At first I was angry to think that it was because of such stubborn people that the use of the 'conveyor' continued, but I soon learned that they were the clever ones, at least very often."

"But I don't understand," said one of us.

"You don't understand," he smiled sadly. "Well, at first I didn't. You see, one has to know *how* to give up money to the GPU so as not to suffer more. Let's assume that they are demanding 10,000 roubles of you and that you have exactly this sum. What should you do? If you agree to give up this 10,000, then the examining officer thinks that you probably have more — maybe 15,000 or 20,000. So he takes your 10,000, puts you in the 'lice' cell, then sends you to the 'conveyor' and demands 5,000 roubles more. And how can you convince him that you haven't got it? You might die on the 'conveyor,' but you can't give away what you haven't got. And so, in order to convince the examining officer that you are depriving yourself of your all, of something which is as vital as life itself, you must endure torture, risk your health and perhaps finally win freedom. You have to understand the psychology of the examining officer.

"But we who have nothing," he continued, "what can we do? I swear to you now, as I did to the examining officer, that I had and have no money. Before the Revolution I worked in a banking firm and therefore they thought that I must have some foreign currency. They wanted 5,000 roubles and I didn't have it. I had to bear the worst of

treatment, have lost ten years of life and was sentenced to five years in concentration camp — one year for every thousand roubles that I didn't have.

“ But hasn't some accusation been brought against you? ”  
I asked.

“ Accusation? What accusation? Just give up the money! If you do you'll be free, if not — it's concentration camp. They can always find some suitable article in the Code. If I had never speculated or possessed foreign currency, I would be accused just the same — according to Article 59, Paragraph 12 — of speculation in foreign currency. If I had actually speculated and had the money, I would pay up and go home. This is proletarian justice! ”

“ And how do they pick out the people to be arrested? ”

“ It's all very simple. They arrest anyone who before the Revolution or at the time of the NEP was in business, since there is a possibility that such a man may still have some money. Jewelers are arrested for the precious stones and metals which they might have, dentists for the gold which they must use in their work and doctors and engineers because they formerly earned high salaries. If such people spend much money, they are accused of misappropriating funds or receiving money for 'wrecking'; if they spend little they are suspected of having money invested in foreign currency and this currency is demanded of them.

“ I will only add that between 80% and 90% of the people arrested in connection with such cases are Jews. Who were the jewelers, watchmakers and dentists? Jews. In the common cells 10–20% of the prisoners are Jews, at the Gorokhovaya 80–90%. Yet people say that the Bolsheviks are Jews, that the Jews stimulated the Revolution! Soon we will all be in concentration camp together. Even those who give up their money don't remain free. Many of them are arrested again for the second, third and fourth time. As long as they can pay they will be arrested, and when



they can pay no more they will be sent to the concentration camp. The GPU is destroying the Jews, but they are doing it without noise and in their own fashion."

My companion was right, for it was true that Judeophobia had reached enormous proportions in the GPU. Jewish prisoners were commonly addressed by the examining officers as "mangy Kikes." At Kresti one of the officers even made the Jews shout, "I am a mangy Kike," as they ran along the corridors back to their cells after cross-examination.

"They collect plenty of money this way," he went on. "It's now one of the chief ways in which the government gets hold of foreign currency. The *Piatiletka* has failed — there is no merchandise or goods, they must have foreign currency to pay for machinery purchased from abroad even though this equipment is no longer of use to them. So they are collecting it. Other countries don't care how the Bolsheviki procure their money. Money doesn't smell! They may not want to accept our goods because they are produced by forced labor or because they don't need them, but they are ever ready to trade with the Bolsheviki and they take willingly that money which is extorted from the Russian people by torture."

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## CHAPTER XXIX

### DYNAMITE AND IMAGINATION

**D**AYS went by at Kresti much as they had at the Shpalernaya, the only difference being that here the cases of most of the prisoners were nearing completion and, therefore, many were being deported. Our Professor received a sentence of ten years in concentration camp and his place was taken by a young army aviator. Ivan Ivanovitch was replaced by an employee of the Academy of Science. Life took on a routine aspect and human tragedies were now affecting us less, perhaps, than during the first period of our imprisonment, when one night a new inmate was pushed into our cell.

He was quite young, his clothes were torn, his hands trembled and his eyes wandered aimlessly. He was in such a state of agitation that he did not seem to see us or to notice his surroundings. He dropped his things helplessly on the floor and tried to walk back and forth in the cell. But there was no room and he stopped in the corner near the door grasping his head with his hands and muttering incoherent words.

“Forty-eight hours — in forty-eight hours execution. The end. There is no way out. What can I do?”

He turned and twisted as if in the agony of death. We suggested that he sit down on one of the cots, offered to arrange his things for him and get him a drink of water but he did not hear or notice us, seeing before him only his own impending fate. At last in answer to a question

from one of us as to who he was and whence he came, he turned to us and started to talk irrepressibly, telling his story and trying to make us understand the unbelievable and absurd course of events which had brought him to this pass.

"You understand," he cried, "I suffer from hysteria. I have a sick imagination and am obsessed by a mania to invent extraordinary stories. But how can I explain that to the examining officers? How can I make them believe that it is all nonsense, that I made it all up? It's impossible. I'm going to be shot in forty-eight hours. And there is no way out."

"But what have you invented?" we asked.

"Dynamite — that I kept dynamite. I never had any dynamite, but I told the girl I lived with while I was a student in Petersburg that I did. I don't know why I told her that. Probably to be interesting. She was frightened and made me swear that I would return the dynamite to the people who had given it to me for safekeeping, and I promised." — He shrugged his shoulders, "There wasn't any dynamite, but I couldn't explain this to her — it would have sounded absurd. But I soon forgot about telling her this. We separated. I finished the Institute, married another girl and went to the South. Life there was boring to my wife. I had to give myself entirely to my work but was earning little. She wanted to live in Moscow, to dress up and go to parties. We often quarreled about little things like a new hat or painted lips. One day she declared she was going away and would not return. She went out, but came back again and started caressing me and asking my forgiveness. Usually she was sulky after quarrels. I began to think that she really understood that she had been at fault, I believed that our life would start anew. In the middle of the night I woke up, my wife was sitting on my bed looking at me strangely. I was frightened.

“ ‘Where,’ she said, ‘did you hide the dynamite?’ ”

“ ‘Dynamite? What is this nonsense? I don’t know anything about any dynamite. Go to sleep.’ ”

“ That was all. I couldn’t remember when I had told her this nonsense about the dynamite. It must have been that the girl I had lived with in Petersburg had told her — they knew each other. But I paid no more attention to this conversation of ours. A few days later came the search and arrest. My wife was arrested, too. We were taken to Leningrad, separately of course, and I did not see her and understood nothing. I was worried about her because I thought she had been arrested on my account. During the questionings I thought at first that it was all a misunderstanding, a mistake. I was told names of people I had never known, questioned about places I had never been to. And finally the examining officer declared that my persistence would be of no avail as they knew that I *had* kept dynamite. I denied this and also that I had told anyone that I was keeping it.”

“ But why did you do that? ” asked one of us excitedly, realizing that here he had lost his only chance of explaining the whole story.

“ I don’t know myself why I did it. I was upset. I saw all the horror of my position. My wife — it was undoubtedly she who had denounced me, after the quarrel. I don’t know why I said ‘no.’ Afterwards I was afraid to contradict myself, to tangle up the testimony. I was questioned many times and at great length by different examining officers. I firmly maintained that I had never kept dynamite. I said that I had told nobody that I kept it — this was a lie. And it finished me — I will be killed in forty-eight hours. Killed because of a foolish stroke of imagination, because of a desire to make myself interesting to a woman.”

Again he became restless, but there was no room to move around; he could only stand in the corner and literally strike his head against the wall.

"Why will you be killed? Why in forty-eight hours?" we asked. It was painful to watch his insane despair.

"Everything came to an end today. There is no more hope. It's the end. Today they took me to the Gorokhovaya. I was kept waiting in a large room beautifully furnished, not at all like a prison. My examining officer ran in several times, asked me something, fussed around. I was excited and completely worn out. Then he ran in again and said, 'Come quickly!' I was taken into a large office with upholstered furniture, rugs, curtains. At the farther end stood an enormous desk, and at the desk sat a man — clean shaven, pale, with a twitching face. Several Gepeists stood respectfully at his side, among them my examining officer. I felt very uncomfortable — I was so dirty and poorly dressed. All eyes were on me; I began taking off my overcoat. 'This is no check-room,' shouted the man at the table. 'Come here!'"

"That was Medved, the GPU representative in Lenin-grad," interrupted the aviator. "I know *him*."

"Perhaps," continued our young friend, reliving the horror of the whole scene. — "I went up to the desk. He was staring at me cruelly, his face twitching. There was complete silence. It was hard to bear. At last he spoke: 'Remember, the time for joking has passed. Have you been keeping dynamite or not?'"

"'No,' I said.

"He struck the desk with his fist: 'Are you going to lie to *me*, you wretch. Answer — did you tell anyone that you were keeping dynamite?'"

"'No.'

"'Ah, so! Well, you'll get what you deserve, you scoundrel!' And throwing a paper across the table to me he said, 'Read!'"

"I took the paper and began reading, the letters danced in front of my eyes — '*Decision of the GPU Council. Examined Case No. — of the accused according to Article 58,*

*Paragraphs 8 and 6. Verdict: TO BE SHOT.* 'You understand — shot! — I couldn't see or understand anything more.

"He told me to sign that the verdict had been read to me, but my hand trembled so that I couldn't write.

"'You tremble, wretch. You're not afraid of lying, but you're scared to die. Write, I tell you!' — With difficulty I signed.

"'Now listen,' he said. 'Your death sentence has been signed, and I can kill you whenever I please. But I can also pardon you. Tell the truth and I shall pardon you.' He looked straight into my eyes: 'Tell me, did you tell anyone that you were keeping dynamite?'

"I answered, 'Yes — I did.' You understand, I answered: 'Yes, I did.'

"Then he turned to the Gepeists. 'Well? Do you see now how a cross-examination should be conducted?' Then to me, 'What did you do with the dynamite?'

"'I never had any dynamite,' I answered.

"'Again lies!' He struck the desk so hard with his fist that everything on it shook. 'I'll kill you right now, you scoundrel. Tell the truth, what did you do with the dynamite?'

"'I never had any dynamite!'

"'Well, I shall force you to talk! Bring in the witness.'

"The door opened, my old girl-friend in Petersburg was led in. I recognized her at once although she had changed greatly. She sat down on a chair, but did not look at me.

"'Do you know her,' he asked me.

"'Yes, I know her.'

"Then he turned to her. 'Did he tell you that he was keeping dynamite?'

"'Yes,' she replied.

"'Where did you keep the dynamite?' he shouted at me.

“ ‘ I had no dynamite, I lied to her.’

“ ‘ You are lying now, scoundrell ’ he screamed, and then he turned and asked her whether she thought that I might have been lying about it, whether for no reason at all I would invent such a story.

“ ‘ Yes,’ she replied in a low voice, ‘ I believe it is possible. He’s a sick, hysterical man. I think — I’m sure that he was lying to me then, that he invented the story about the dynamite.’ Here for the first time she looked squarely at me with clear, open eyes.

“ ‘ Yes, I lied to her,’ I cried out chokingly. ‘ I just wanted to boast. I lied — I don’t know myself why I did it.’

“ She was then led out of the room, and he turned to me again. ‘ Don’t try staging any scenes, you wretch, this isn’t a theatre. I’ll make you sing a different tune when we bind your hands and stick this toy to the back of your head.’ He grabbed his revolver. His face twitched terribly and he shouted, ‘ Bring in the next witness! ’

“ My wife was led in. She looked at me with hate in her eyes. I stared at her: she had on a new coat and a new hat. Where did they come from? She was arrested at the same time I was, and we had no money. She couldn’t buy such a coat.

“ ‘ Did your husband tell you that he had kept dynamite? ’ he asked her.

“ ‘ Yes,’ she replied loudly.

“ ‘ Do you believe he might have lied to you? Think carefully before you answer. His life or death depends upon it. If you say that you are sure that he had kept dynamite, we will shoot him.’

“ ‘ I am sure that he was telling me the truth,’ she said, and jumped up from the chair. ‘ He was always telling me that he hated the Soviet Government, that he yearned for the coming of the White Army, that it was only because of the Soviet Government that he was forced to live in such

a dull hole, that otherwise he would have lived in Petersburg or Moscow, could have dressed well and dined in restaurants.'

"It was unbearable. 'What are you lying for?' I shrieked. 'What have I done to you? You were the one who yearned for life in Moscow, for dresses — not I. When did I speak to you about the Whites? You know well enough that when I told you of my intention of entering the "party" you argued against it. It's *you* who spent all our money, *you* who insisted that I give up my work in the provinces and move to Moscow.'

"And all the time the examining officer was watching us with unconcealed contempt. 'Here's what I'm going to do,' he said. 'I give you ten minutes to come to an understanding.' Then he addressed my wife. 'After these ten minutes are up you will give me your final answer, whether you consider him to be an enemy of the Soviet Government capable of terrorist acts or whether you think he simply invented the story about the dynamite for the purpose of boasting.'

"For those ten minutes my wife kept on screaming — that I should confess to having had dynamite. She invented absurd conversations that had never taken place to the effect that I had criticized the Soviet Government and that she had tried to change my opinions. I tried to stop her, I saw that I was losing my last foothold. At times I ceased hearing what she was saying, became unconscious of where I was and what I was saying myself. At last the officer interrupted us:

"'Enough, I have heard enough. You've talked fifteen minutes instead of ten. Give your final answer: was he an enemy of the Soviet Government and are you sure that he was telling the truth when he told you that he had kept dynamite?'

"Again she jumped up from her chair, and screamed:



'Shoot him — he kept dynamite! He is an enemy of the Soviet Government!' She tore open her coat. 'Look, I am pregnant, pregnant from him, he is the father of my child, and I swear that he kept dynamite, that he is an enemy of the Soviet Government, that he yearned for the coming of the Whites!'

"Her hysterical screams drove me completely mad. I reached across the desk, grabbed the officer's revolver, stuck it to my forehead and pulled the trigger — but it did not go off. I found myself on the floor, one Gepeist holding me down with his knee on my chest, another wrenching the revolver out of my hand. I remembered nothing; I could hear only her terrible voice and laughter: 'Don't believe him, he is a liar, a coward — shoot him!'

"When I was picked up from the floor, she had already left the room.

"'Confess now that you *did* keep dynamite,' the officer said.

"'But I *didn't* keep dynamite,' I cried in despair, 'I never had any.'

"'Silence. I give you exactly forty-eight hours, no more — no less. In that time you must tell me from whom you received the dynamite and to whom you gave it. If you don't, you will be taken from the cell and shot!'

"I didn't know what to answer. He did not believe me when I told the truth. I began pacing up and down the office.

"'Stand still, you wretch, this is no parade ground!' he roared as he banged on his desk. I rushed over to him and shrieked something to the effect that if I wanted to walk I would. Then I was seized and led out.

"In the automobile, when I was being brought back here, one of the examining officers asked me why I had lied. He told me that it was clear to him that my wife's testimony had been false, he urged me to tell the complete

truth — that way I might be pardoned. But I know it would be useless. There's no way out for me — do you understand — none!

He stopped talking. In the darkness of the night some of us dozed off, but all night long his desperate moans continued. In less than forty-eight hours he was taken away "with things."

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## CHAPTER XXX

### THE DEATH CELL

THE examining officer sent for me again exactly one week after our first stormy encounter. He sat at his desk looking sullen and grim.

"Sit down. Well, are we going to shout at each other again today?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I don't know what method of questioning you are going to use today. It doesn't depend on me."

"Then let's talk peaceably," he said.

The talk soon narrowed to one subject — "confession" of my own "wrecking" or of knowledge of the wrecking activities of Tolstoy and Scherbakoff. There was no shouting or swearing, but it was clear to me that he would not hesitate to use any of the "means of coercion," although as yet he had not decided which ones to apply. It was not long before I heard what I was expecting.

"If you persist, I'll be compelled to use special measures — your wife will be arrested and kept in prison until you sign a frank confession."

I remained silent. It was a cruel blow and not what I had been expecting.

"Well? Does this leave you indifferent?" He spoke slowly, clearly, watching me closely.

"I have told you that I have nothing to confess and I will not lie. I respect the investigating authorities of the GPU

too much to make false statements just because of your threats," I replied with a precision that equalled his. I knew that this answer would make him furious. There was nothing he could say to it and it was my only revenge.

He sent me back to the cell. I was in despair. For once I believed the examining officer. He undoubtedly understood that I could not be broken down by threats of execution or by punitive cells; he had now struck at a new, more sensitive point — my family. Long ago I had resigned myself to the idea of my own destruction, but I had consoled myself in the belief that my wife and little son would be spared. Now everything was going to pieces.

Would he carry out his threat? I would find this out only in a week when I received my remittance from home. The list of its contents was always written in my wife's handwriting; if the writing was not hers, it would mean . . .

But I did not have to wait a week; three days later the examining officer sent for me. "Yesterday I arrested your wife. She is now in the Shpalernaya prison."

I was silent, thinking only of how to hide my emotion. He must not notice what an impression his words had made on me. Only by feigning indifference could I now help her.

"What else could I do?" he continued, watching me closely. "All other means have been exhausted. We must force you to confess. For the present your son is still at home. But if you persist in refusing to sign your confession, your wife will be deported to Solovki."

He paused and gave me an inquiring glance: "You, of course, understand what fate awaits a woman at Solovki?"

Another pause.

"You know they're not very considerate of women out there," he went on.

"Well, what can I do about it?" I replied, holding myself in hand as best I could.

"Confess. Confess and your wife will be released immediately."

"I have nothing to confess."

"You won't surrender? We can't be bothered with obstinate enemies. You'll be shot; and your wife will go to Solovki. And just think what will become of your son."

"The Soviet Government will take care of him," I replied harshly.

"Remember, I'm talking to you for the last time. Don't give me your answer now; I see you are too excited."

I shrugged my shoulders and looked at him wrathfully.

"Go back to your cell and think the situation over carefully," he said as he picked up a sheet of paper and a pencil. "I'll wait three days — three full days — for your written confession. Write it briefly: 'I admit myself guilty of wrecking' or 'I knew of the wrecking activities of Tolstoy and Scherbakoff.' That'll be enough. Then hand the statement to the warden on duty. I will get it immediately and at once give the order to set your wife free. Her release depends only on you. Remember this! If you don't send me your confession, I'm telling you for the last time, your next summons from the cell will be a call to execution. We don't joke with wreckers. You'll be shot! Don't forget the fate of Tolstoy. Your wife will go to Solovki, and your son — to the house for waifs. All this depends only on you."

He handed me the paper and pencil.

"I will not take your paper," I cried, "what is this foolish comedy? Shoot me now, do you understand, I'm tired of all this, do you understand, shoot! You have your revolver and I have nothing to confess."

"So you suggest that I take the law into my own hands," he replied sarcastically. "We're in no hurry. Everything will be done in due time, when all the formalities are complied with. I've not asked you to answer me now. You refuse to take the paper — all right. You have only to call

the warden on duty and at any moment during the three days you will be given paper and pencil. I give you three full days to think it over, but after that don't expect any mercy for yourself or for your wife. Go back to your cell."

Had he lied or told the truth? Could this really be the end? Was it true that my wife was in prison?

I waited anxiously for the remittance from home, and when it arrived I snatched the note — it was written in my boy's handwriting and signed "*Son A. Tchernavin.*" What a signature he had invented — "*Son!*" Poor little lad! At the age of twelve, instead of playing and going to school you have to be weighed down with remittances and wait around prisons. Where are you getting the money? Are you selling things in the market place? And afterwards — how are you going to live? You don't even know what is in store for you in three days?

As the third day was drawing to a close, I called for the warden on duty and asked for paper and pencil. On one half of the sheet I wrote to the examining officer, on the other I made a copy of my statement for the prosecutor: "*I am accused of wrecking. I never engaged in wrecking. I know nothing of the wrecking activities of others; I have received no money illegally from anybody.*" This I signed and gave to the warden.

Night came. The command to go to bed was sounded. We put out the light and lay down, but no one slept. If the examining officer had not lied, I would soon be called to execution. About one hour passed. We were talking quietly, our ears on the alert for any sound. At last we heard footsteps in the corridor and the clang of keys. Somebody stopped at our door. The light went on and the lock turned.

"Name?" said the guard pointing his finger at one of my companions.

I loudly called out my name as I knew they had come for me.

The guard immediately turned to me. "First name, father's name?"

I answered.

"Get going, 'with things!'" he said. The examining officer had not lied.

I collected my belongings with indifference. What did it matter what I took with me. I had not far to go. My companions helped me with special care as though trying to show that they did not believe I was being taken to execution. Their faces were pale and serious; they were trying to hearten me, but avoided looking me in the eyes. The guard was hurrying me. How familiar it all was! How many times I had witnessed such scenes of people being led away to execution.

I said good-bye to my companions and went out into the corridor. The door was slammed after me.

"Get going!"

"Where to?" I asked loudly.

"Be quiet, and follow me," said one of the guards. The other marched behind. They proceeded carefully, stepping on the rope matting which covered the floor of the corridor, taking care not to make any noise. We descended to the floor below and into another corridor. There one of the guards spoke in a low voice to the warden, but I could not hear what was said. We moved on and finally stopped at the door of a cell.

"The death cell," I thought. "This means I won't be shot at once."

The lock slid back, the door opened and I went in. It was an ordinary cell, exactly like the one I had just left. It had contained five men, but there were only four left — the fifth having just been taken away "with things."

The following morning the examining officer sent for

me. He had evidently tried to play a trick on me and wanted to see what effect it had had. But I had slept soundly all night in my new cell and was well able to give my face an expression of indifference and boredom. He questioned me in the usual manner as though he had forgotten the threat that I was to be shot. But at the end of the interview just before letting me go he asked a most unusual question.

“ Well, tell me, what was there in your latest work that could be singled out as useful to the fishing industry? Which of your scientific works have been applied successfully? ”

I named several experiments of my laboratory which had received wide practical application. He made some notes and sent me back to the cell.

It was not until a month later, on April 10th, that he sent for me again and informed me that the investigation of my case had been closed. “ You will now go and work for nothing in your same Murmansk; ” then he checked himself and added: “ that is, of course, unless the Council decides to have you shot. ”

It was the first time since I had been arrested half a year before that I had heard that I might *not* be shot. I went back to my cell and awaited the verdict with complete indifference — what did it matter? My only worry was about my wife. Would she be released? I anxiously awaited the remittances from home, but every time the list was in my son's handwriting. Two weeks passed — two remittances — and there was still no news from her.

For six months I had been living in prison, continually battling with the examining officer. It had been a time of extreme strain. Now came the reaction. Sitting idly and waiting for a senseless verdict I was seized by an anger so fierce that it was choking me — I could neither eat nor sleep. After three days of this internal torture I finally



forced myself to eat, but I did it with the greatest difficulty and was rapidly losing weight. I was oppressed by the realization of my complete helplessness and hopelessness. I felt like an animal in a cage, an animal which had come to understand that it was useless to gnaw the iron bars of his cage, that he could not break them down and would never again be free. I *must* escape — but first it would be necessary to learn where I was to be sent and what was to be done with my wife and son. Then I could work out my plans. The thought of escape became an obsession, I stopped noticing the prison, the people around me — I was now waiting only for my sentence.

The 25th of April, in the middle of the day, the warden entered the cell, called out my name, and read: "*Excerpt from the minutes of the meeting of the OGPU Council April 13, 1931. Case No. 2634 of Tchernavin, V. V., accused according to Article 58, Paragraph 7. Sentence: Deportation to a concentration camp for a term of 5 years. The case to be filed.*"

"Sign that the verdict has been read to you," he added.

I signed.

"May I send a telegram?" I asked.

"You may, if you have the money."

I wrote a telegram addressing it to my son: "*Received sentence. Apply for visit,*" and gave it to the warden.

The same day I was taken to a medical examination and while the doctor was entering his report I succeeded in reading from the form on which he was writing: "*Destination: Solovetzki camp at Kem. Régime: Ordinary.*"

Strange as it may sound, the news that I was being deported to the Solovetzki camp, famed for its unusual cruelty towards prisoners, pleased me greatly. It was in a country familiar to me from my numerous expeditions: the deep fiords of the White Sea, the archipelagoes, the endless labyrinth of bays and straits, cliffs, granite rocks piled up in dis-

order, the nearly impassable forests and swamps. If I could only get to the sea — there I would be a match for the guards. “How far is it from the frontier?” I speculated, trying to visualize the map. “About 200–300 kilometers of completely uninhabited forest and swamp. Perfect. Just what I need.” And at that very moment I made up my mind that I would escape to Finland.

I was a convict now — no longer a citizen. From the beginning of the Soviet régime I had carried on my work as usual, striving to be of both scientific and practical assistance to the industry for which I worked, and living only on what I earned for these services — yet here I was, kept in prison for six months and cross-examined no less than *seventeen* times. They had given me but two alternatives: ten years at forced labor if I “confessed,” or execution if I did not. I had not confessed, because I was not guilty; in all their records there was not a hint of any crime committed by me. And yet they convicted me. Five years in concentration camp!

My comrades were congratulating me.

“Only five years! And no confiscation of your property! Surely they’ll release your wife now?”

But would they?

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## CHAPTER XXXI

### MY SON TAKES A MESSAGE

WE were to be deported the following day. Early in the morning prisoners began to be called out to meet their relatives. There was great excitement among us, each one wondering whether he would be given a last chance of seeing those he loved. During the period of investigation scarcely any one was allowed to see members of his family, but before deportation permits for visits were granted quite freely. The only question was whether the relatives would get the news in time to go through the detailed and complicated formalities of procuring permits for such visits. The day was advancing, but still many of us had not been called out. We had lost everything — would we also be denied the right of seeing for the last time those who were dear to us?

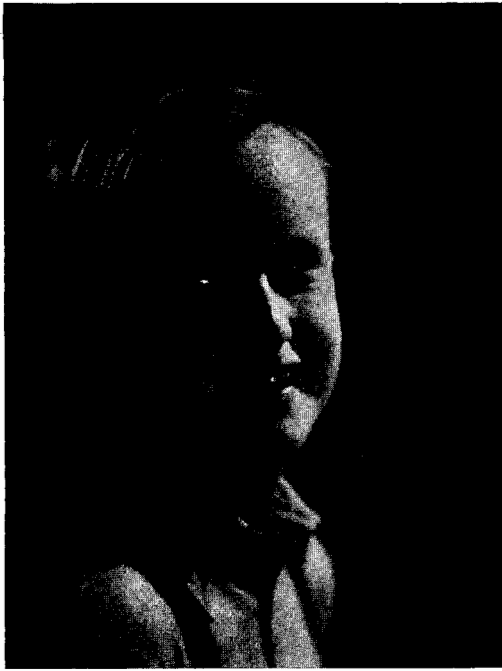
Preparations for our departure were going on hurriedly: prison equipment such as mugs and bowls were taken away from us; a party was being made ready for the bathhouse. I tried not to think of the visit; the thought that I might be sent away without once more seeing my son was unbearable. At least one hundred of us were lined up and counted before being led out to bathe ourselves. And just as we were about to start, a warden arrived with a list of names. He called out twenty, mine among them. One minute later and we would have gone to the bathhouse and I would have missed my boy's visit.

Trembling with emotion we were led into a large room — a grilled partition in front of us. About a meter beyond was another grill behind which stood our visitors. There was a terrible crush — a hundred prisoners on our side and more than a hundred visitors on the other — all desperately trying to find their loved ones. People were jammed closely together, some holding fast to the bars and pressing their entire bodies against the grill, their faces distorted by emotion; others hopelessly trying to find an opening in the human mass through which they might squeeze. All knew that they were seeing their relatives for the last time, that in ten minutes they would be separated perhaps forever. The excitement and noise made conversations almost impossible — the strained and breaking voices of women, the ringing shouts of children — it was like one terrifying scream of torture and farewell.

In the midst of this chaos I saw my son. He was standing close to the grill, holding on to it with all his might, waving to me and shouting with his brave, little voice. I rushed towards him but could not reach the grill. "Let me pass! Let me pass, for God's sake!" I cried, but no one heard me. Each one had before him only that face which was dear to him and heeded only their words. Frantically I tried to push one prisoner aside and for a second he turned to me, his face wet with tears, his hands clutching the grill convulsively. With one great effort I shouldered my way forward and grasped the fence with one hand. There was a sharp cracking and the grill started to fall. Guards rushed out to support it and while they were propping it up I succeeded in getting up close to it that I might hear the words that my son was shouting.

"Mother is in prison," he yelled through the din and moanings of other human cries. "I take remittances to her. They won't let me see her. She once sent me a letter."

"And how is N.?" I shouted.



ANDREY

THE AUTHOR'S SON

*“My boy, for whom  
there had been tragedy  
enough already”*

"She is in prison."

"And N. N.?"

"She is also in prison. Misha is left alone, too. He takes remittances to her."

"And N. N. N.?"

"She died."

I was afraid of questioning him further. There was no one left on whose help I could count. Through the crowd I could vaguely distinguish a woman totally unknown to me who stood behind my boy. Evidently she had brought him to the visit.

"If Mother is deported, try to go with her," I shouted.

"All right," he replied, and his childish mouth twitched and large tears dropped fast from his eyes and ran down his cheeks. But he was not noticing them and was not wiping them off.

"Have you got any money? What are you living on?" I asked.

"I've sold your camera."

"Good, sell whatever you can. Take remittances to Mother. Send nothing to me. Now listen carefully: I am going to Kem. Kem, do you understand? For five years. And remember this: I have not written any confessions. I am being deported innocent. Remember well: I have not surrendered."

I was shouting loudly and to my surprise felt that my voice was breaking, that tears were running down my face.

The visit was ended. We were being driven out of the room.

"Good-bye, dear, good-bye!" I called out in haste amidst the terrible moaning and screaming that filled the room.

"Remember Mother! Take care of her! Good-bye."

PART THREE  
*WE ARE CONVICTS OF SOLOVKI*

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## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE CONVICT TRAIN

**T**HE turmoil of departure began early next morning. We were led downstairs and lined up in military formation. The prison administration was delivering us to the guard which would accompany us to the concentration camp. They called us out, one at a time, to a desk, asked us our names, the Article under which we had been convicted, and the term of our sentence, and then handed us over "in person," together with an envelope containing our "case," to the convoy guard.

There were many misunderstandings — the GPU lists were full of errors. Names and sentences were incorrectly entered; we knew already that a similarity in name had often sent the wrong man to Solovki.

Those who had been checked off were taken into another corridor where they were searched again and this time all tobacco taken from them — precluding any possibility of the prisoner throwing it in the eyes of the guard and thus attempting escape. Criminals often tried to effect such escapes and they were therefore forced to undergo a particularly thorough search, during which they were completely undressed and fingers shoved into their mouths.

At last, several hours later, we were all again assembled, counted once more, lined up in pairs and led to the exit, where each of us was given one kilo of bread and two herrings — provisions for the journey of eight hundred kilometers to Kem. We were all carrying our things in our



hands, and since we were not allowed to halt in order to pack away the food issued to us, many were not able to take these rations. Little did we dream that we should be six days on the road!

The commander of the guard addressed us:

“ You are to march in military formation! Obey all commands! One step out of line to the right or left will be looked upon as an attempt to escape! The guards will fire without warning! ”

Then to the guards:

“ Load rifles! ”

Bolts clicked.

“ Watch closely! Fire without warning! ”

The gates were thrown open and we were led out onto the embankment of the Neva. It was a warm spring day. The Neva rolled wide and peaceful. Many of us were seeing it for the last time. On the sidewalk near the prison gates and opposite them stood small groups of people huddled together, mostly women and children, relatives who had come to get one final glimpse of their kin. Pale, emaciated, poorly clad, they differed but little from us, the prisoners. Soldiers of our guard were swearing at them, chasing them away and threatening to throw them all into prison. But the women outwitted them, running ahead and returning along the other side of the street in order to exchange just once more a scarcely perceptible smile, nod or glance. There was no one to see me off: my wife was still in prison.

“ Get along! Don't lag behind! ” we heard continuously. Walking, in an overcoat and carrying one's belongings, was extremely hard after half a year of imprisonment. I felt dizzy, my face burned, my heart beat violently. The old men suffered most; they gasped for air and stumbled; the guards swore at them and forced them on. Passers-by looked at us with lazy indifference.

We were herded along small side streets towards the yards of the Finland Railway, although the Kem-Murmansk trains left from the former Nikolaevski Station. In other days, prisoners were taken by way of the Liteini and Nevski Avenues, but during the mass deportations of 1930 this was considered to be too conspicuous a route — they might be seen by foreigners.

We were packed into so-called "*stolipin*" carriages — third-class passenger cars with bars in the middle and barred windows and doors — sixty men to a car intended for twenty-eight. Only those who had upper berths or baggage racks were able to lie down; the rest sat up for the whole journey, in great discomfort; walking in the car was forbidden. Sentries were stationed outside and inside the doors. Eight cars were loaded in this fashion, one of which was reserved for the women. Criminals and political prisoners (counter-revolutionists by Article 58) travelled together and lacking the discipline which we had succeeded in maintaining in the cell, these criminals were hard neighbors.

Until darkness we were kept on sidings, during the night we were transferred to the Murmansk railroad and only in the morning were we started on our way. We did not stop at stations, but were held up for long periods at semaphores and on sidings. Evidently even here there was the risk that some foreign observer might see us. As a result of this we could not get water and suffered intensely from thirst. The small tank of water in the car was drained the very first day. As the ration given us consisted of black bread and herring, the thirst caused by such food was unbearable. Moreover, the windows were double and closed, the weather was warm and it was unspeakably hot and stuffy in the car. We begged for only one thing — water. We were told that hot water was allowed once a day and then only if the train stopped at stations where it was avail-

able. Only once during the whole journey — the first day — were two pails of hot water brought for all sixty of us. For the remainder of the trip we were without water.

We concentrated all our efforts on opening the windows which were screwed down tightly. One of the criminals had a knife but it broke. I worked for half a day thinning a copper coin while the criminals scoffed at my labor — an “intellectual” trying to be a burglar — but when my screw driver actually opened the window they decided to make friends and to show me their skill. “Longy,” a strong fellow about twenty years old, placed his finger across a big lump of hard sugar and with one blow of his fist smashed it to bits — his finger, to be sure, started bleeding. “Lively,” a youthful thief, extracted from my pocket my purse containing three roubles (with which I was entering my life of forced labor) and with equal artistry restored it again. “Sashka-the-Jew,” apparently not more than fifteen, sang all his repertory of waif’s songs for me — inimitably, with feeling and musical sense. These people were all past redemption, but their endurance was amazing; they were able to sleep, almost naked, in any position without suffering, and could endure hunger equally well. From the very first moment of deportation they watched diligently for any chance to escape.

On the fourth day of our journey, as I remember, in the car next to ours, criminals had managed to saw out an opening in the floor through which a man could crawl: it was discovered only when everything was ready for an escape. Their plans showed forethought: Petrozavodsk was behind us and our train was passing Vigozer and Segozor, approaching the White Sea. Around us — a forest of evergreens. The days were warm, but the swamps still frozen. The snow had melted almost everywhere and it would be easy to find last year’s moorberries and bilberries.

The criminals in our car were greatly excited by the news of the unsuccessful attempt.

“ Where did they want to escape to? ” I asked them.

“ To Leningrad, certainly. There is no other place. One would have to walk through the woods to Petrozavodsk as far from the railroads as possible and from there one could even take a train if one had the money.”

“ Why would they have to walk as far as Petrozavodsk? ”

“ One can't board a train here; special men of the camp guards search the trains and examine all papers. From Petrozavodsk back to Leningrad there is no control.”

“ But in Leningrad they would be caught again.”

“ Let them catch us! Such is our fate. We'll escape again. And it's not so easy to find us in a city.”

“ It's hard in the woods just now,” I went on, trying to learn all I could about escaping. “ There's nothing to eat. Nights are cold.”

“ And at the camps it's going to be warm and there will be plenty to eat! ” they rejoined sarcastically. “ We're hardened to cold and hunger.”

“ Why don't you escape abroad? ”

“ They've plenty of their own riff-raff there; we're immediately caught and sent back. ‘ Politicals ’ should escape abroad. They can't conceal themselves here. But if they're caught in the act of escaping, it's the end for them. They're killed. If we're caught escaping we only get an extension of our term — for one or two years, that's all.”

I shall never forget one monk who was with us, condemned to 10 years at hard labor. He was still young, but frightfully thin and pale, with sunken eyes and a racking cough — evidently in the last stages of tuberculosis. While the criminals argued and quarreled, jested roughly and fought, he sat unmoved, looking out of the window upon the Karelian woods and swamps from which it was clear he would never return. Did he really see the cold, dismal landscape with its gnarled sickly birches and windblown firs, or did it glide by unnoticed before his eyes? During

the whole journey he did not once lie down — nor would he eat or sleep. Through all this tormenting time he sat huddled on a narrow bench beside the grated window.

Of quite a different type was another monk, likewise on his way to serve a 10 year term at Solovki, a sturdy old man about sixty with coarse features, bald head and a shaggy gray beard. His voice was loud, confident and even gay, his laughter infectious. Evidently prison life had not broken his healthy and carefree nature. His various friends had outfitted him for the journey with warm clothes, boots and provisions. Probably they would not forget him in prison; someone had helped him to procure a good place in the car.

“Don’t be downhearted, brothers,” he encouraged us loudly and cheerily. “People live in Solovki, and we shall be able to. The will of God is in everything. Fate willed that we suffer for our Lord and we will bear it. I shall accept it with joy.”

He was going to Solovki as if on a pilgrimage — it was his duty to go.

A year elapsed before I met him again in the Solovetzki concentration camp. It was winter. He was painfully plodding along, with the aid of a stick, in a group of watchmen — all old men like himself, all hunchbacked and covered with ragged remainders of their old clothes and a few convict jackets. Some had coiled pieces of rope around their shivering bodies — for warmth. Their hair and beards, matted and tangled, were blowing in the wind; their faces were weather-beaten and red from the cold. Every night they were on duty at the supply stores.

The once cheerful old monk was the tallest among them but nothing was left of his health and strength. His eyes were dim, his face lined with deep furrows. I saluted him but he answered indifferently without looking up. He also had been broken by Solovki.

We discovered among us a criminal who had escaped from Solovki but had been captured and was now returning there with an extended sentence. Although only about thirty-five, he looked like an old man. He made faces and acted like a clown.

"Hey, you!" a workman addressed him, "what will life be like in Solovki?"

"You'll see for yourself; it's fun there!" replied the other, laughing and showing his pale, toothless gums. "See what beautiful teeth I have? I got them from eating *kasha* at Solovki, working in lumber camps and sitting in 'isolation' cells."

"Is it scurvy?" asked the workman, looking at him with horror.

"That's it. What was left in my mouth by the 'stick' came out from scurvy."

After this conversation we felt still more depressed.

By the fifth day no one had any food left. All were hungry and suffering from thirst. Only sixty kilometers to Kem, but the train was standing at sidings more often than it was in motion.

Toward the end of the sixth day of our journey — on May first, the holiday of toilers all over the world — we reached Kem and our train was switched to a siding. Each of us received a mug of hot water, but no food. That night and the whole of the next day we remained on the siding without food or water. I doubt if cattle could have survived under such conditions — but we lived on.

On the evening of May 2nd we were transferred by a railway branch to Popoff Island, the Central Distributing Point of the Solovetzki prison camps.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII

### “WELCOME” TO SOLOVKI

**P**OPOFF ISLAND is attached to the mainland by a low-lying portion of land which is covered with water twice a day, when the tide comes in. The rest of the time it remains a swamp, passable only with great difficulty. Once it had been thickly wooded, but now only a few crooked trees remain; the polar birches spread along the ground and moss bogs alternate with enormous granite rocks polished by ice floes.

The island has a harbor to which foreign ships come for Soviet lumber, an enormous sawmill and, at a distance of two or three kilometers from the harbor, two distribution points of the Solovetzki concentration camp — “Moreplav” and “Kop.”

We detrained and marched to “Moreplav” along a muddy road, across swamps and through melting snow. We were even more unsteady on our feet than when we left Kresti; we could not carry our things without dropping them now and then, but the guards drove us onward. For two kilometers we dragged ourselves along until we caught sight of wooden watch-towers, sentinels, a barbed wire fence and a high gate.

“Look up!” said my neighbor, pulling at my sleeve.

Over the gate I saw an arch decorated with branches of fir trees and carrying two placards: “LONG LIVE MAY 1ST, THE HOLIDAY OF THE WORKERS OF THE ENTIRE WORLD!” and “WELCOME!”

I could not help laughing; Soviet hypocrisy and conceit cannot be excelled.

“ What do you think,” asked my neighbor, “ is it a joke, for foreigners or for a moving picture? ”

We headed for a small side gate. Two guards on either side would seize two of us by the arms, push us through the narrow aperture and count loudly while a GPU agent checked off the pairs in his notebook.

Again we were counted, our names checked and our papers inspected. At last the formality of delivery was finished — the camp had taken us over. We stood in formation, waiting. The short night was drawing to a close; the air was transparent and filled with the familiar smell of sea and forest. My heart was stirred with emotion. I did not care what was going on about me.

“ Those who have served in the GPU or the Cheka come forward! ” came the command.

Several men stepped out from our ranks. They were led aside. “ Our future bosses,” whispered my neighbor.

“ Those who, when arrested, were serving in the Red Army, come forward! ” again came the command.

A few men obeyed. “ The future military guard,” explained my neighbor. “ ‘ Forty-niners ’ and ‘ thirty-fivers,’ forward! ” These are the articles of the Criminal Code covering theft, vagrancy and so on.

“ Who will these be? ” I asked my neighbor. We could not then imagine that these criminals would become the rank and file of our guards, supervisors, foremen and especially educators.

Now only peasants, intellectuals and workmen were left — they were the real prisoners and would have to work.

After this division into “ classes,” we were ordered to give up all the money we had with us; it was exchanged for special scrip of the GPU. If the authorities decided that a prisoner had too much pocket money, it was all con-



fiscated and he received no scrip in exchange. Another search followed. It was five o'clock in the morning before we reached the special barracks of the 3rd quarantine company, composed of recently arrived prisoners. It was a low wooden building with small windows, nearly all broken and stuffed with dirty rags. The prisoners' quarters were divided into four sections, each about five meters by thirty meters, the long sides fitted with two tiers of boarding and a narrow passage down the middle. A small sheet-iron stove served for heating. The floors were of thin planks which bent under foot, with large cracks between them. Everything was black with soot and dirt. I climbed on to the upper boarding and lay down against the outer wall. No bedding of any kind was provided; indeed it would have been difficult to use, for each man had only space about fifty centimeters wide. There were a thousand prisoners in the building, two hundred and fifty in each of four platoons. I stretched myself on the bare boards with real pleasure, but almost immediately I was attacked from every side by bed bugs and compelled to start a war against them. Hardly two hours had passed when the command sounded:

“Get going to roll-call! Be quick!”

The former Gepeists and Red Army men who had been deported with us were already dressed in some kind of military uniforms, with the word “guard” on their caps, and were armed with rifles. They were lining us up, ordering us about, swearing, as yet timidly, but trying to imitate their superiors — also criminals who were masters of profanity.

The company commander, a thin-faced professional thief, wearing an elegant military overcoat, strode up and down the line giving orders in a loud voice. After the command “Attention!” he began reading the order of the day from camp headquarters.

“Order of May 2nd, 1931, Moreplav, Solovetzki-Kem

Forced Labor Correction Camps of the OGPU.” He made a special emphasis on the letter “O.”

“For illegal cohabitation on the territory of the camp, prisoner of the 5th company, Ivanoff Vassili, alias Petroff Ivan, and the prisoner Smirnoff Eudoxie are hereby sentenced to solitary confinement for fifteen days, but will not be relieved from work.”

“Prisoners Koozmin, Stepanide and Platnikoff Irene for careless cleaning of the building: to be subjected to seven days’ solitary confinement.” And so on.

We listened with interest, wondering what crimes were committed here and what punishments followed.

The reading finished, our commander addressed us. We found out later that delivering speeches was his weakness, that he took advantage of both morning and evening roll-calls to gratify it, and that these speeches were called “cultural-educational talks with the prisoners.”

“Where are you?” he began. “In the forced labor correction camps of the OGPU. Understand? You were sent here as a non-productive, parasite element for correction and acquisition of working habits. Understand? I am your chief and educator. This is not the year 1930 for you! Then it was Camps of Special Designation of the OGPU; that meant destruction of the prisoners, meant swearing and beating. Now it is cultural and working education, literacy, political literacy and so forth. Understand? Instruction is compulsory according to camp regulations. We have a semi-military organization. For instance — the company platoon. We have a citizen company commander and citizen platoon commanders. We have cultural-educational work and discipline. It’s no brothel for you here. Breaking discipline means violating camp regulations. Punitive cell. . . . Understand?”

This introduction dragged on for a long time, then came the real speech.

“ A fight occurred in the company under my command. I see in this a violation of camp regulation and a class struggle. (*Pause*) I have found after investigation that prisoners Petroff and Belovzoroff have beaten up prisoner Gartushvili. This must be looked upon as class enmity and persecution of national minorities, which is class struggle. Understand? And what is the punishment inflicted by the Soviet Revolutionary Criminal Code for the organization of class struggle? The highest measure of National defense! (*Pause*)

“ It follows that those guilty of violating camp regulations will be subjected to . . . I will put you in the punitive cell, you sons of bitches! Understand? This is a working correction camp and not a saloon! I'll inject proletarian psychology into you! ”

It was a long time before he was done and let us go back to the barracks, so weak that we were dizzy and so weary that we felt ready to lie down and die. Was it possible that we were not going to be fed? This was our only thought.

The company commander came in and dispatched two prisoners for lunch and two others for hot water.

“ Citizen commander, and what about food utensils? — We have nothing to eat from! ” rose voices from every side.

“ What do you want — the food put into your mouths? If you get hungry you'll find something to eat from, ” the commander said and went out. Many prisoners ran to the refuse pile and picked out discarded tins.

Two pails were brought in; one contained millet cereal, *kasha*, thin and watery, the other “ hot water ” almost cold. A man's ration was approximately 200 cubic centimeters of each liquid (little more than half a cupful) and some bread. Each prisoner was supposed to receive 400 grams (14 ounces) of bread per day, but actually we were getting much less.

“ What is this? — But it's death! — Is it possible for a man to live on this? ” exclamations rose from all sides.

A few minutes later the company commander reappeared.

“Stand up! Attention! Who complained about the food? Come forward!” he shouted loudly. “No discontented? Take care, I will tolerate no mass action! I will immediately refer those guilty of it to the Investigation Department of the camp. Talk is short there — isolation or death. Understand? What discontent can there be? *Kasha* too thin? In the first place it’s not *kasha*, its porridge, and porridge can’t be different. Do you understand?” He glowered at us, then sharply turned around and went out.

All those who still had some money began to search for food. We were not allowed to go to the GPU store, but with the help of the guards could buy some spoiled food-stuffs — mildewed herring and fermented preserves. Outside the prison camp such goods could not be legally sold, but here they brought full price from starving prisoners. Through the guards and through criminals, who shared with them in the transaction, we could buy black bread at five roubles the kilo (about two pounds) — its official price was nine kopeks — and also water at fifty kopeks a mug. Suffering as we all were from thirst, even the most destitute of us spent his last kopek for water.

Tobacco could be got for three roubles fifty kopeks the gram and vodka at what price I cannot even imagine.

After the depressing experience of this “lunch” we were taken in groups of thirty to the bathhouse built, of course, by the hands of prisoners on the very shore of the gulf. Each man took all his things: overcoat, cap, blanket and pillow; these together with everything we wore had to be turned in for disinfection. Stark naked, we were lined up before an enclosure in which four barbers, also prisoners-criminals, plied their trade with furious speed; two operated on the head while the others shaved the body. Coming out from behind the partition we were a pitiful sight. Tufts of hair were sticking out; blood ran down our bodies from

razor cuts. Trembling with cold we entered the bathhouse, receiving two tin tags which were to be exchanged for water and a tiny piece of soft soap. Inside the bathhouse there was no running water; each prisoner was given two small basins of warmish water which cooled immediately. After bathing as best we could, we filed into the dressing room to wait, naked and disfigured, for our disinfected things to be restored to us. They were hardly recognizable: crushed and smelling vilely, fur coats and caps were completely ruined. We returned — a sad procession — to the barracks. The weather had changed, a sharp north wind was blowing and large flakes of snow were falling. In the barracks it was terribly cold. I climbed up to my place. The open cracks were letting in the snow and I had to stuff them up with my underwear. In vain we begged our company commander to give us wood for the stove; he refused.

We were very hungry. Dinner was brought in: soup of sour cabbage, smelling horribly, and for a second course the same kind of "porridge" as before. Something had to be done. My neighbor and I together bought one kilogram of mildewed smoked herring. After this purchase I had two roubles left and my neighbor, formerly a well-to-do Petersburg engineer, three roubles and a half — under favorable conditions this money might suffice for two more meals. Starvation lay ahead of us. On the trip from Kem I had developed symptoms of scurvy, bleeding gums and stiff joints. We only hoped that we might soon be sent to work; it was rumored that at work the food was better. While we were sadly discussing the future a commotion arose in the barracks and exclamations of astonishment were heard.

A woman had entered our quarters! She was young, about twenty years old, clad in a prison coat and a very short skirt. Her hair was arranged attractively and her entire appearance and manners left no doubt as to her pro-

fession. With her was a young man also in prison dress. Reaching the middle of the barracks and drawing the crowd around her she addressed us as follows:

“Comrades! Subscribe to the loan for the *Piatiletka* in four years! Every prisoner must share in the upbuilding of Socialism. Let each one subscribe as much as he can. I accept subscriptions in installments — to be paid within six months.”

We listened to her in open-mouthed astonishment. Here we were, convicts, hungry, reduced to the last stages of poverty — and they were demanding from us “voluntary” subscriptions to the loan! Timid voices, not so much in protest as in bewilderment, were raised from various sides.

“But where shall we get it from? Everything has been taken from us. . . . We can subscribe, but how are we going to pay? . . .”

“Comrades,” she replied in a coyly offended voice, “this is a very strange attitude on the part of your company. One should be conscious. Where to find money? Perhaps some of you will get it from home.”

“They have nothing to eat at home,” someone shouted behind her. “Their last kopeck has been taken away for loans.”

“Then you will be sent to work,” the girl continued, unruffled. “You’ll be getting premium money.” (Premium money is paid to prisoners who work; for an ordinary workman it never exceeds three roubles a month.)

“What does this mean?” the girl continued in a sulky voice. “What a quantity of men, and no one wants to subscribe! Here I am also a prisoner, I have nothing, but *I* have subscribed.”

“According to what article are you sentenced, citizen?” came a sarcastic question.

“Article 35.<sup>1</sup> I am an element close to the masses.”

<sup>1</sup> Theft and prostitution.

“You’ll not perish here, girl, you’ll make money,” murmured somebody in the crowd. “She’ll always have enough for bonds and face powder,” added another.

“Men, you should not insult me; you should be conscious,” she replied, evidently not offended.

“Comrades,” broke in the young man with a voice of authority, “everyone here has to prove his loyalty. Those who don’t want to subscribe to the loan, and especially those who agitate against the loan, as is being done here, are inveterate enemies of the Soviet Government who don’t desire to undergo correction. Against such enemies special measures are taken here. I recommend subscribing to the loan.”

To our great astonishment one of the prisoners who had arrived with us made his way to the girl, took from her hands the lined sheet of paper, and entered his name for fifty roubles — an enormous sum for a prisoner.

“You see,” she exclaimed triumphantly, “how conscious this comrade is.”

The first one was followed by a second, third, and fourth. Then the beggars fell into line; they hesitated, sighed and finally wrote, some ten roubles, others fifteen roubles. The young man and the girl were working busily.

“Where do you get so much money?” I asked the first subscriber.

“Well, I have donated the exact amount which they took away from me. Let them use it for the loan. Anyhow the money is lost.”

“It does not seem to be turning out so well,” my neighbor said quietly. “Look, they are all subscribing; we may be the only ones to be ranked as enemies of the Soviet Government.”

“Oh, let them go to the devil,” I growled, “they will not extend our term because we don’t subscribe. What a touching picture this is — prisoners, convicts, incorrigible

counter-revolutionists, hungry, bedraggled and degraded, but burning with enthusiasm for the building up of their Socialistic fatherland. Let's try to find out what N. does over there; he hasn't a kopek but he has put his name down for twenty-five roubles.”

I quietly spoke to N. “ Are you expecting an inheritance, that you squander twenty-five roubles? ”

“ What can I do, if everybody else is subscribing? Let the devil take them, let them see my consciousness and reformation! ”

“ But how are you going to pay? ”

“ I have no ideal! I haven't a kopek and no one to send me any and therefore I can subscribe with a light heart. What can be taken from me, my pants? ”

More than half the prisoners subscribed. Only the peasants and a small group of intellectuals obstinately held out.

“ It makes no difference, comrades, you're *going* to subscribe! ” the young man concluded sarcastically. “ As soon as you are taken to work you will give away the first premium money you get. ”

“ All right, let them first give and then take it away. In the meantime we have nothing. ”

After they had departed, the barber appeared, donned a filthy smock and laid out his tools on the dirty window sill.

“ Whoever wants a trim or shave for pay, at a reduced rate, get going, form a line! ”

Everybody had been so disfigured that many responded. Undoubtedly this barber would split his fees with those who had maltreated us in the bathhouse — all camp barbers were criminals and strongly organized. He began his job, working quickly and unceremoniously; his charge varied with the individual — for some, one rouble, for others, fifty kopeks. In the midst of his work, when he had just finished shaving one side of a prisoner's face, the pla-



toon commander entered and called out: "Get going to the company commander! He wants to be shaved." The barber collected his tools and disappeared.

So ended our first day at Solovki. I remembered the placard over the gates:

"WELCOME "

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## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE LUMBER CAMPS

WE remained in the quarantine company for two weeks, with little to do and suffering badly from cold and hunger. Sometimes we were driven out to load logs on small hand cars; other men moved them down to the wharf and stowed the lumber aboard foreign ships. This procedure had been in effect since the beginning of the campaign abroad against the use of convict labor in the lumber business. The prisoners were kept out of sight of foreigners and so, although lumber was cut and prepared by convicts, all the work on the wharves and ships was done by free hired labor. There was a shortage of "free labor" at that time and, therefore, delays in loading were common.

When the quarantine term was ended we were transferred to another barracks which looked better from the outside, but inside differed little from the first one — the same filth, cold, crowding and bed bugs. The only difference was an enormous placard stretched across the entire barracks, bearing the words: "*Work without beauty and art is barbarism.*" This placard was the result of the activity of the "Cultural-Educational" Department. The peasants in bewilderment tried to decipher this strange motto by syllables. "Barbarism? What is it, comrade? Perhaps you know?" they asked.

Now we were allowed to walk within the camp yard and meet the prisoners from other companies, both novices like

ourselves and veterans who had been in the camp for several years. The latter were mostly peasants who had been working in lumber camps until hurriedly withdrawn because of the anticipated arrival of an American Commission which was going to investigate whether forced labor lumber camps actually existed.

In preparation for this visit all lumber camps were liquidated in a few days, the prisoners' barracks leveled to the ground and the prisoners themselves herded back to the distribution points. These peasants described vividly to us the panic and hurry involved in this liquidation. A special messenger on horseback came riding swiftly to distant camps in the midst of the wild forest, delivered his message to the chief and galloped away to the next camp. Orders followed to stop work, to pull down the barracks, to tear down everything which could be destroyed. Special attention was given to the wrecking of punitive cells, guard towers and barbed wire fences. In barracks built of logs, which were hard to destroy at short notice, all inscriptions made by prisoners, all notices, orders and placards were scraped off or removed. Everything that could be burned was set on fire. A special agent of the GPU made a tour of inspection to ascertain that no sign was left which might indicate that prisoners, and not free lumbermen, had been at work there. Then, whether day or night, prisoners were driven out of the woods to the railroad. The rush and panic was such that many believed war had been declared and that all were being removed further from the border.

If a train appeared in the distance while the large crowds of prisoners were being driven along the railroad tracks, they were made to lie down in the swamp, in the snow, and remain hidden until the train had passed; the GPU was afraid that somebody might see them from the car windows.

After this retreat the prisoners were dispersed among

the various distributing points, where they languished on meager rations. "We felt better at work in the woods," they told us. "We were given one kilo of bread there—here only three hundred grams. *Kasha* was also thicker. Here the only thing left is to die of starvation."

"But what we miss especially is the premium tobacco we were getting," added another, "not much, but still four packages of fifty grams each a month. It's perhaps easier to go without bread than without a smoke."

"Tobacco is expensive here," said another, "three roubles for one eighth of a pound, and three roubles is a month's premium pay. And we don't even get that here."

We, the novices, asked a question: "Isn't it true that in lumber camps 'work assignments' are allotted which no one can accomplish, and that this means death?"

"No, dear man, there's no danger of it now. Beating is not allowed any more—they stopped it a year ago. Did you hear about Kourilko? When he was operating here on Popoff Island what a number of people he crippled and killed! It will soon be a year since he was shot. It's your luck that you got here after he had gone, after 1930."

"But what was going on here before?"

"What was going on? Well, I'll tell you, but let's move farther away."

We found a place in the sunshine sheltered from the wind. Peasants were straightforward people; one could talk to them without fear.

"We came here to Popoff Island in 1929, during the time of Kourilko. We were brought in railway cars. We all stood waiting, holding our little boxes or bags, some with packs on their backs. We heard the command: 'Get out of the car one by one!' The first one came out. The step is high from the ground—you know yourself. Two guards were stationed below. Just as he was ready to jump, they shouted: 'Stop! Do you wear a cross?' He was afraid

to tell them that he did. 'No, I have no cross,' he said. 'Well, jump!' He jumped and they began to beat him on the head with their fists from both sides. He just dropped. 'That's what you get for not wearing a cross! Next!' The next one came up, he had heard what had happened and was badly frightened. 'Do you wear a cross?' 'Yes,' he said. 'Jump!' And they beat him also, saying: 'That's what you get for wearing a cross!' The third one did not answer at all and he was beaten for keeping silent. The whole convoy got the same treatment. Then we were led behind the barbed wire — and what didn't they do to us there!"

An older peasant interrupted. "I will tell you how we were driven into the woods to work. It was winter. We were on foot. We had to carry our own things and pull sleighs with provisions and with the things of the guard. It is hard to walk through soft, deep snow. All of us were starving; our strength was failing us. We were dropping our belongings; many were discarding even their clothes. The guards were picking up these things, putting them on the sleighs and dividing them amongst themselves. When we reached our destination in the woods, we were ordered to trample down the snow. We were formed into lines and ordered to stamp down roads leading to the camp and a place for the barracks to be erected. The snow — you know how it is here — comes up to the waist and in places up to the chest. For the night the guards had a tent — and we lay down just as we were, right under the trees. We cut wood for them and prepared their dinner. Then we built barracks for them but we slept on the snow under the branches. Next we built the punitive cell where we would be locked up to die; then a storehouse. When all these were completed we were allowed to erect barracks for ourselves out of thin trees. It had no floor. How many of us froze or died felling trees and building the camp cannot even be estimated."

“ And how is work in the woods? ” we asked with apprehension.

“ Work in the woods is given out by assignment to two men working together. The whole assignment is called 100 per cent. A specialist determines what per cent each tree represents. Where the trees are thick, fewer trees make up an assignment, where they are thin — more trees. Well, in a word, the assignments were such that two experienced lumbermen could scarcely accomplish them in fourteen or sixteen hours of hard work.”

“ And those who could not accomplish them? ”

“ They were not fed or permitted to return to the barracks. Also they were beaten.”

“ Well, and what happened to them? ”

“ A man, hungry and cold, can he work? If he couldn't keep up with the work, the only thing left for him was to die. In any case he would be beaten or in winter put out naked on a tree stump in the bitter cold; in summer left outside, undressed, tied to a tree, with his hands bound, at the mercy of mosquitoes. A deer can't endure the mosquitoes and runs away to the seashore where there is wind — how could a man? ”

“ They died? ”

“ Of course they died. Many also died in the ‘ scream-cells ’ — our name for punitive cells. They would call and scream in agony for some time, before death, thinking that someone might take pity on them, then they would quiet down and die from cold. And what did the guards care? ‘ Let them die, the good-for-nothings, ’ they would say. It is true, only the strongest survived. If a guard came to dislike anyone he was a doomed man. They had their own way of doing it; they would order the man to go out into the woods to bring in a log, perhaps not more than a hundred feet away. Failure to carry out the order meant death. If he went the guard would let him get fifty feet away, then take aim and the job would be done. A report would be

prepared that the prisoner had been shot attempting to escape."

The company broke up. I stayed behind to listen to a peasant from the Ukraine.

"I will tell you of how my comrade died. Two years have passed, but when I think of it tears come in spite of all that I have seen here. He was a young fellow and belonged to the sect of 'Sabbath.' They believe it is a great sin to do any kind of work on the Sabbath — Saturday. No one in all the camp was his equal in work; he was tremendously strong and a steady worker, very quiet and compliant. He never spoke an obscene or even a rude word. He did everything he was ordered to, except that he definitely refused to work on Saturday. He worked out his Saturday's assignment on the other days of the week in addition to his daily quota. The supervising authorities tried in vain to break him; he was beaten over and over again, until finally they left him alone. And so it went on for some time. Then a new chief came to our camp. He noticed that on Saturday this fellow would stand idle. 'Why don't you work?' 'I can't, such is my faith. I will work out my assignment but not on Saturday.' 'Ah, you can't! I'll show you your faith!' and he struck him hard. 'Will you work?' 'I can't,' he replied. Again the chief struck him. Blood was running down his face, but the beating went on. 'Will you work now?' 'I can't work today.' 'You can't?' He called the guard and exchanged some words with him. The guard shouldered his rifle, aiming at my comrade. 'Will you work?' 'I can't; if I have to die for my faith, kill me!' The chief said something to the guard. The guard fired. My comrade moaned and fell. He was still alive, his chest shot through. The chief approached him. 'Will you work?' and kicked him in the face with his boot. I ran up to my comrade and begged him to comply, to take a saw in his hands, if only for appearance. 'For God's sake do it,' I entreated,

'otherwise you will be killed.' But what question could there be of work when the man was dying? He raised himself up, looked at me and fell face downward in the snow. They kicked him, over and over again, and left him alone. After work we were allowed to bury him."

My companion had been speaking slowly, sadly, without indignation or resentment, as they all did. How many stories of this kind I have heard, especially from peasants and from fishermen with whom I had to live and work, and they were always told not alone as narratives of individual human lives but as revelations of an implacable fate that was wiping out mankind.



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## CHAPTER XXXV

### THE SIGN OF THE ELEPHANT

OUR company commander in his speech of "Welcome" had dwelt upon the change of policy in the GPU camps, since the spring of 1930. It was true that a special commission, sent from Moscow to the Solovetzki camp had declared that the destruction of prisoners, systematically carried on for many years, and now, it was implied, for the first time discovered by the GPU, was due to irresponsible actions of the camp officers, recruited from the ranks of prisoners.

Fifty supervisors, guards and other camp officials, including Kourilko of Popoff Island, famous for his cruelty, were summarily shot. Several salaried Gepeists were transferred to other camps, but many executioners still succeeded in retaining their posts. In this case, as always, the GPU had not paid with their own heads.

There was a change, however. The former "Camps of Special Designation" were now to be called "Solovetzki and Kem Working Corrective Camps." The abbreviated form of this new name, "SIKTL," being unpronounceable, the old abbreviated name "OOSLON" continued in current use, and the emblem and trademark of the camps — an elephant — was left unchanged. ("Slon" means elephant in Russian.) This trademark can be found on many goods in the U.S.S.R.

Punishments, whether reduction of rations or solitary

confinement and death, were now to be imposed only according to the decision of higher authorities who had no direct contact with prisoners. Their judgments were to be announced in the order of the day. In this way the life of the prisoner became a little less terrible.

Evidently the underlying reason for this abrupt change in policy was the tremendous influx of prisoners in 1930 which came as a result of the failure, then already quite apparent, of the *Piatiletka* in industry as well as in agriculture. No longer tens of thousands but hundreds of thousands of "wreckers," "*kulaks*" and "*sub-kulaks*," found themselves in convict camps.

It was utterly impossible, even under the Soviet régime, to keep such hordes of prisoners concealed on isolated islands of the White Sea and in the wilds of Karelia, treating them in whatever way one pleased, without the news of it leaking out and spreading. "Undersirable" publicity, in 1929 and 1930, found its way abroad. Especially unfortunate for the GPU had been the testimony given under oath by the medical student Malisheff who had escaped from the Solovetzki camp. The foreign campaign against forced labor in lumber camps was injuring the camp's basic activity which brought in the foreign currency so indispensable to the GPU in its work abroad.

Soviet counter-agitation, such as the badly staged film, "*Solovki*," and a few articles in Soviet journals, where Solovki was represented as a resort offering a pleasant rest to prisoners, had no success whatever. To continue the destruction of prisoners behind such a thin screen had become impossible.

Finally, the destruction of prisoners was recognized as commercially unprofitable. Why destroy a working force, often highly qualified, when it can be made to produce a profit? Therefore, from 1930 onwards the concentration camps were transformed into a tremendous system of slave-

driving enterprises of the GPU. At the present time, the GPU no longer tries to conceal the existence of forced labor; it has taken the offensive: having given to its camps an appearance of corrective institutions for dangerous criminals, it widely advertises these institutions, its educational work there and the results of the working activity of its pupils. Soviet writers, such as Gorki and Alexis Tolstoy, are now by order of the GPU writing novels and comedies in which they sing the praises of forced labor. Meanwhile, under cover of all this noise the GPU carries on its work on the quiet and collects enormous profits from its slave trade.

This new system, the economic features of which I shall describe more fully later, brought a decided change in the preliminary treatment of prisoners — as we had already found out. It had been decreed that lice should be abolished; that explained the hair-cutting and shaving and the disinfecting of our things. No longer would there be the “lice régime” and “lice cells,” either in prisons or in the camps, which had been such powerful weapons, in the hands of both examining officers and camp authorities, for the liquidation of prisoners. Epidemics of eruptive typhus — caused by lice — had never ceased; victims died by thousands. Now, after treatment at one of the “distributing points,” if a single one of these vermin was found on a prisoner when he came up later for medical examination, the physician at the “point” got thirty days in a punitive cell. There were to be no more epidemics — the maximum work must be obtained from prisoners.

A personnel bureau, also composed of prisoners, took care of the registration of newly arrived prisoners at the distributing point. Individual cards were filled out for each prisoner, showing his special qualifications and the work to which he might be assigned; these cards were then sent to the office of the central administration of the camps

which also received all requisitions for labor from the various camp sections.

Next came a medical examination of the prisoners to determine their physical capacity for work. In 1931-32 all were divided into three groups; the first group, those fit for any manual labor; the second, those fit for lighter work; and the third, those unfit for any kind of hard labor. This classification was changed from time to time; once there was another group of those who could not walk unaided. Prisoners in the first group were used in lumber camps, road construction, land reclamation, loading and unloading operations, in the fishery section, and so on. Those in the second group were assigned to the same classes of work but on lighter jobs, while the third group was put to work as watchmen, cleaners, office clerks, etc.

Some prisoners arrived in such condition that they could not even sit up — for example, Professor Farmanoff, who before his arrest in 1930 was giving a course in Ichthyology at the Petrovski Agricultural Institute. He was seventy years old and paralyzed in both legs; he had been carried on a stretcher from the prison to the train and thence to the camp hospital where he still remained, unable to sit up on his cot, through the years 1931-32. He was still there when I escaped. It is horrible to think of his dark and hopeless fate.<sup>1</sup>

As a general rule all prisoners in the first group are sent to manual labor: exceptions are made only for those specialists whose services are needed by the GPU; they remain, however, under the constant danger of being sent back to "regular work" in case their special knowledge is no longer needed or there is shortage of labor, or as punishment for disobedience or some error. Educated persons of the second and especially the third group are usually sent to the numerous administrative offices of the camp as clerks,

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<sup>1</sup> See page 73.

bookkeepers, statisticians etc. Priests, however, form a special class: according to special instructions from the GPU they are sent only to hard manual labor or, in cases of complete disability, are appointed night watchmen. Those whose specialties are of no practical value to the GPU, such as historians, archaeologists and literary men, have the hardest time of all in finding suitable assignments.

Doctors, who are also prisoners under the strict supervision of GPU officials, are told in advance what percentage of recruits they are allowed to find unfit for work. They dare not disobey. Considering the condition in which men reach the camps after prison life and the journey, no normal medical commission would have been able to find a single healthy man really fit for heavy manual labor. But the plight of doctors and prisoners is aggravated when there is a shortage of labor in the GPU, such as occurred in the summer and autumn of 1931, when the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal began. Conditions were frightful; the prisoners worked in swamps, in forests, without living quarters, in miserable clothes. The casualties were unbelievable. To provide replacements a reëxamination of the second and third groups was ordered and all those below the age of fifty, if only they had arms and legs, were transferred to the first group and sent to dig the canal. The first group is never reëxamined; a man stays in it until he drops.

After this preliminary classification, prisoners were distributed among the various sections of the camp as called for by requisitions. Most of them departed for work with the vague hope that life would be a little easier; only the detachments taken to the Solovetzki Islands left with apprehension. These ill-fated men knew that they were branded as especially dangerous prisoners and, therefore, had little chance of "amnesty" or any reduction in their term. Fearful also is the extreme isolation of the Solovet-

zki Islands, especially in winter when for seven months contact with the mainland is maintained only by occasional trips of GPU aeroplanes.

Doctors and actors were always the first to be "distributed" — individually, often on the day of their arrival, with entire disregard of quarantine requirements, for the reason that they were at the disposal, first of all, of the hired, free officials of the GPU. The wives and mistresses of these Gepeists continuously demand medical attention for themselves and their children from the ablest physicians whose "arrival" is always known in advance. Actors and actresses are awaited with no less impatience; a theatre, with small opera, musical comedy and dramatic casts, is attached to the camp headquarters and follows these headquarters when they are transferred from one place to another. The actor Ksendzovski, former director of the "Musical Comedy" in Petersburg, was at one time the leading man in this theatre. Unfortunately I never had a chance to visit this peculiar slave theatre, but I sometimes heard sad news about its life and from day to day I watched the decline of a young and pretty actress who, under the conditions of camp life, had very soon lost her voice, left the theatre for a clerical position, and was compelled to spend the whole long day, until eleven at night, in the heavy smoke-laden atmosphere of the administration offices.

Next, after the doctors and actors, the engineers and technical men were singled out — agronomists, lumber specialists, bookkeepers. The rest of us were eager to hear about all the camp activities in the hope that, somewhere among them, we might find work in our chosen field.

Talking with old-timers returned from lumber camps, I learned that a whole fishing industry section was included in the camp organization and that the fisheries were located in sparsely inhabited places along the western shore of the White Sea.

I knew that region and it seemed to me that, if I could only get to work as a specialist there, I should have taken the first, perhaps scarcely perceptible, step towards my goal — escape. All that I could do now was to give on my registration card such information about myself as might influence the management of the fishery section to believe that my work would be of real value to them. To that extent I succeeded. Only a month had passed before I was told, in confidence, by the employees of the registration department, also prisoners, that the Administration of the fisheries in Kem had requisitioned me — as a scientific specialist.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI

### VEGUERASHKA

**S**PECIALIST I might be, but as a convict I had to report to my new chiefs. In prison clothes — cheap cotton shirt, pants and cap, a well-worn army coat and old shoes — I marched through the mud, an armed guard beside me, to the railway station of Popoff Island. I scarcely noticed the drenching rain. Convict though I was, Fortune had begun to smile on me.

The guard sat down beside me in the car, keeping his rifle between his knees. There were many passengers: workmen from the saw mill, peasants, women and children, free people who were carrying on the casual conversations of ordinary life. I had not seen children for a long, long time. I wanted very much to talk to a small, light-haired boy who sat opposite me and who was slyly looking me over, but I could not — “illegal intercourse with free people” would have brought me to a punitive cell.

Through the open window I could see swamps and thin forests, but not a single human being — a dreary and dismal landscape. I turned over in my mind the chances of escaping from the train . . . perhaps one could jump off while it was moving . . . probably the guard would not follow . . . he would shoot, but the motion of the train would spoil his aim . . . the forest nearby was thin but still it afforded sufficient cover. . . . At that moment I noticed a road alongside the track and a man on horseback,



with a rifle, following our train. When we came to a stop he would overtake us and slowly move ahead; when we passed him he would change to a gallop, be left behind and then catch up with us at the next stop. Undoubtedly he was doing this for some reason: he could easily detect a fugitive and capture or shoot him. No, one must be more cautious, I thought, they are not so careless.

At the last stop before reaching Kem my guard gloomily commanded: " Well, get going, get out! " We were bound for Veguerashka.

Two kilometers to the west, on the shore of the gulf lay the low, gray little town of Kem; to the east was a section of the Solovetzki camp — Veguerashka, built in 1930. After the transfer of the camp administration from the Solovetzki Islands to Kem, Veguerashka was under the eyes of the higher command and prisoners here were said to live under better conditions than elsewhere.

Veguerashka stretches along the left bank of the river Kem and is encircled on the land side by a high barbed wire fence, equipped with watch towers for guards. Inside the barbed wire are two-story log barracks for the prisoners, built with a certain pretence to style. The window frames are very large, but set at wide intervals and covered by close lattice work. (In 1930 it had been impossible to obtain panes of glass of any considerable size.) The roads leading to the barracks are muddy and the buildings stand on swampy ground. Narrow wooden boardwalks are laid alongside the barracks. Nearer the river bank many other buildings had been erected without any system whatever — the kitchen, bathhouse, two stores, the printing house, bakery, electric power station and hospital.

A few prisoners in gray garb were visible on the boardwalk near the buildings, wandering about aimlessly and slowly; they were the sick, who had been relieved from work, and a few men just arrived from other camps and not

yet appointed to any work. The building nearest the entrance was the women's barracks; political prisoners and criminals were quartered in it together — elderly women of refinement, mostly wives of professors, young girls, students, nuns, peasants, gypsy women who had not yet lost their proud, free bearing even in prison and, most conspicuous of all, the representatives of the Leningrad underworld.

I was assigned to the barracks of the third company, considered to be the best and the cleanest; it contained educated men exclusively: doctors, engineers, agronomists, technicians, bookkeepers and so on, all holding responsible positions in the various departments of the camp administration. But the barracks differed but little from those on Popoff Island; the same dirt and crowding — a thousand men, five hundred on each floor, in double bunks.

Each prisoner had the same fifty centimeters' width of bare boards on which to sleep, eat and spend all his free time during the long years of his absence. The lighting was poor — small, unshaded electric lamps fixed on the ceiling, shining all night long into the eyes of those on the upper tier of bunks, while those below were almost in darkness.

I had become hardened to everything, I thought, after ten months of imprisonment, but here the overwhelming stench was unbearable. The toilets for a thousand men were inside the building and had no running water. Every night they were bailed out and we would literally gasp for air. Sleeping men would moan and toss about; I had acute attacks of sickness and in search of a little fresh air would cautiously step past the dozing guards to the stairway, trying to remain there the whole night, pressing close against the wall to escape detection.

The day's routine began at seven. A thousand men in one washroom without soap or towels, for half an hour,

and then out into the yard where the line formed for rations — in the rain or snow. *Kasha* from boiled millet or barley, and bread — the basic ration — were issued according to the “groups” to which a prisoner belonged. First group, 800 grams; second group — including specialists in production — 500 grams; all others, 400 grams. The first group — manual laborers — were given a few drops of vegetable oil in their *kasha*. Those who had tea-kettles could get a little hot water. Everybody hurried because of the long procedure which followed before one could leave for work outside the camp. First a “work book” had to be obtained from the company commander in the barracks, then this book had to be presented at camp headquarters, where a permit was issued to leave the camp. Those who had received their books and permits were lined up on the boardwalk and led to the gates, where the sentinel counted the prisoners and checked the permits. Outside the fence the prisoners were again lined up into formation and then led away under guard to their places of work. Eight o'clock was the hour of departure and by nine o'clock all prisoners had to be at their posts in the many camp institutions distributed over the whole town of Kem.

Some of the guards were exacting service men and required us to keep a military formation, but we were miserably shod and many of us ploughed through the sticky mud nearly at the end of our endurance.

“Don't break the lines!” the commander of the guard squad would shout, halting us and lining us up. “I'll keep you standing here till evening!”

“What do we care!” would be heard from the lines. “The term still goes on!” Then the guard would rush to find the offenders, collect five or six documents and note down the names — that meant five to ten days in punitive cells for the offenders.

There were other formalities upon arrival at the place

of work and then it was work the whole day through. At five came a recess, the formation in the street, the assembling of the various detachments, and the march of two kilometers back to Veguerashka, another roll-call and the surrender of documents before the hungry workers dragged themselves to the kitchen windows for a dinner at six — soup with a few leaves of rotten cabbage and a small piece of salted horse or camel's meat and a spoonful of the morning's boiled millet. At seven it was time to "take out the documents" once more and march off to night work which began at eight and ended at eleven. It was midnight before we returned to the barracks, received another spoonful of *kasha* and some hot water, and lay down upon the bare boards, tortured by bed bugs and the prevailing stench.

There was scarcely time to fall asleep when the night inspection began; and although we were not forced to get up for a roll-call, there were always errors in the lists and all would be awakened.

There was no heat in the barracks unless the prisoners collected rubbish to burn; wood was not supplied — and yet this was winter in the Far North.

So would life go on — and still goes on for thousands of Russians — for the five or ten long years of prison terms, — hopeless, monotonous days and restless, troubled nights.

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CHAPTER XXXVII  
ASSIGNED TO DUTY

**M**Y first day I started off to work alone. Before my permit was issued, the group to which I belonged had already been led away to Kem. I cannot describe how strange it seemed, after months of imprisonment, to be walking alone along a street without a guard at my heels. I had about two kilometers to go — a half hour's walk. In order to realize my new "freedom" to the full I would walk now faster, now slower and then stop; I could do this of my own free will with no one to shout threateningly at me from behind. I had difficulty in checking a continuous desire to look back in order to assure myself that no guard was following me. I kept to the middle of the street, for I knew that any camp officer or guard who met me walking on the sidewalk in Kem could send me to a punitive cell, but I walked slowly and crossed over from one side of the street to the other several times, taking my time.

The GPU risked nothing in letting me out without a guard; I was dressed in prisoner's clothes, I had neither provisions nor money. Not only the town itself but all the roads about it swarmed with guards. Furthermore, my wife was a prisoner in their hands at the Shpalernaya and my son also was in Leningrad; if I escaped they would be held as hostages.

I was no stranger in Kem for I had been there in other days, doing experimental work in the White Sea. It is a fishing village rather than a town, spread out along the

river bank, with one paved street (built by prisoners in 1928) and small, gray wooden houses. In the upper section of the town, on a mound, stands the beautiful old Cathedral built in the 17th century, now in a sad state; from one dome the cross has fallen while from the central dome a radio antenna projects. It is permitted to hold services there once a year but the townspeople are too poor to keep the Cathedral in repair.

Here, in Kem, was the stone building occupied by the Solovetzki Camp Administration, built in the time of the NEP and designed for other purposes. The ground floor, with enormous plate glass windows, had been occupied by a luxurious department store for GPU officials, an elaborate barber shop and a photographer's studio. But the chief pride of the GPU had been a large restaurant on the second floor, with a balcony for the public and a platform for the orchestra. Here the Gepeists revelled day and night—there were also private rooms at their disposal. The GPU used to boast that nowhere else in the U.S.S.R. could better food and service be obtained. There was a reason; here worked the best cooks and confectioners taken from all parts of Russia. Former owners of famous restaurants served as waiters; the slightest error or a word of dissatisfaction from a "customer" meant, for the employee-slaves, a term of solitary confinement or transfer to the lumber camps. The orchestra, too, was first-rate; it was composed entirely of real musicians.

Times changed, the store was abolished and the maintenance of a luxurious restaurant for public revels was inconsistent with the new general policy of the party. Both restaurant hall and stores were cut up into a number of small cages where, packed in like herrings in a barrel, specialist-prisoners created Five-Year GPU production plans and added up the profits of forced labor. But one building could not house the enormous administrative body of the

GPU. All the best private houses were confiscated and labelled with GPU signs, intelligible only to the initiated.

My destination was the Section of Fisheries, the so-called "*Ribprom*," with its headquarters in one of these houses, where, in days gone by a rich peasant must have lived. I entered it. The small low room was filled with desks of various sizes and shapes so close to each other that one could scarcely pass between them. At these desks, seated on stools (chairs were considered too great a luxury for prisoners), were "specialists" at work writing, reading and calculating. Over some of the desks hung signs: "Office Manager," "Bookkeeper," "Production Manager," and so on. At a small table sat a young girl, in prison dress, before a typewriter. The room was noisy, and the air filled with tobacco smoke.

I was greeted with cordiality by the specialist-prisoners, my colleagues in the new work, all university men convicted as counter-revolutionists, and all dressed as poorly as I was, in a combination of civilian clothes and prison raiment. Their thin, drawn faces and especially their gray complexions were eloquent of their hardships. They seated me at a table, brought me a mug of hot water, a bit of black bread, a few small salted herrings and several pieces of sugar.

"Please eat, don't be shy. The herring is of our own catch, from the fisheries; we got it through 'pull.' The chiefs have not come in yet: only our own people are here; don't be afraid, there are no spies."

I refused the sugar because I knew it was a great delicacy.

"Do eat it! N. got it in his packages from home — we're allowed to receive them here; that is what keeps us alive. They reach us safely — of course they're censored, but everything is untouched — because in the package department here only political prisoners are at work — honest people."

"I have nobody to send me packages," I replied, still declining to accept the sugar. "My wife is in prison, my son is at home alone and has to take remittances to his mother."

I learned from my new colleagues that I had been assigned as an "ichthyologist," and from the "regulations," which they showed me, I saw that my duties were to include research on fish biology and fish breeding. Fate was certainly favoring me.

It was about ten o'clock when the assistant to the Chief of the Section came in to his "office" — in a corner of the same room. He called for me two hours later. I spent the intervening time thinking over what I would say to him and decided that I would ask for research work because it would demand travel at sea and along the shore, affording me a certain freedom of action which ought to facilitate my escape. But I must invent some objective for my research which would be of practical interest to them; I could do only that after I was familiar with their activities. Soviet experience had taught me this.

I was called in to see the chief, V. A. Kolossoff. Let me interrupt my story to tell what I heard, as time went on, about him. By training he was a lawyer and after the Revolution had held the post of prosecutor somewhere in Turkestan, — in Tashkent, I think. A non-party specialist could hold such a position only if his actions had clearly demonstrated his loyalty to the Bolsheviki. In 1928, however, he had made some kind of slip, got involved in a criminal case and had been sentenced by a court, not by the GPU, to three years in the Solovetzki concentration camp and to a further three years of exile in a distant province. He reached the camp during its most terrible period, but he managed to survive and to prosper through his attachment to one man.

Those were the days when the notorious Frenkel was



flourishing, then a political prisoner, now a Gepeist. Frenkel, understanding very well that it was impossible to survive under prevailing conditions, presented to the Chief of the camps a project which should transform this losing enterprise into a gold mine for the GPU — namely the maximum use of forced labor in lumber production and road construction. The project was approved and Frenkel became the head of all production activity. It was his organization of the lumber export trade that furnished the GPU with foreign currency needed for its work abroad. One cannot even estimate how many thousands of prisoners were sacrificed to make his career. Among his latest inventions are the White Sea-Baltic Canal and the Moscow-Volga Canal. Chekists came and went in the camp, but Frenkel outlived them all; he is still firmly established in power.

Kolossoff became private secretary to this powerful Frenkel and was immune. He enjoyed telling how once, while still a prisoner, he had drunk himself into complete oblivion, had attacked a sentinel of the guard, had disarmed him and then climbed up, rifle in hand, to the watch tower where he had peacefully gone to sleep. Brought up before the commandant, he proudly boasted: "I am the secretary of the chief camp Jew." That was enough. The drunken Kolossoff was carefully transported to his "free" apartment in Kem. This incident had for him no unpleasant consequences whatever. Next morning when he reported to his chief, Frenkel asked him laughingly: "Is it true that in the commandant's office last night you called me the 'chief camp Jew?'" "I really remember nothing of what happened yesterday," he replied.

At the end of his term, rather than going into exile he had preferred to remain at the camp, as a free hired employee of the GPU. He brought his wife to an apartment in Kem and lived quite comfortably, enjoying all the priv-

ileges of his position — the right to receive a variety of provisions, the use of a horse, and so on.

In the section of fisheries this clever and cunning man was in charge of all the production, planning and commercial work, although he knew nothing about the fishing business. That, however, is not unusual in the U.S.S.R. where, as a rule, the chief sits in his office, signs his name, and takes part in meetings and conferences armed with plans and figures prepared for him in each specific case by the specialists. In fairness to Kolossoff it must be admitted that he used these materials quite well and therefore enjoyed, among the GPU chiefs, the reputation of an efficient and experienced executive.

This was the man now sitting opposite me, sprawled in an armchair and contentedly stroking his well-groomed graying mustache. He was looking at my wretched prisoner's clothing, which hung on me like a bag, and at my head with its tufts of hair. From his self-satisfied expression I judged that the superiority of his position gave him real pleasure. I found out later, however, that he was not unkind and that his attitude towards specialist-prisoners was quite decent.

"Well, how are we going to use you?" he began. "I know you are a learned professor, but ours is a production enterprise and I think we will attach you to production work."

"Unfortunately I have never worked directly on production," I began boldly, "and I doubt if my work in that field could be useful to you. My specialty is research. Judge for yourself," and I enumerated the most important research works I had done, carefully avoiding any mention of my work in production. "I believe that good research work would be of greater use to the enterprise than poor production work. Furthermore I would never dare take up work I know nothing about."

“Nonsense,” he interrupted. “You know I am a lawyer by training and was once a prosecuting attorney, yet here I am in charge of all the production. We are not going to press you. Look around, rest, acquaint yourself with our enterprise and we will talk it over later. Determine for yourself what kind of work you can do here. You are appointed as an ichthyologist; that’s a very indefinite position. We’ll be able to use you on any kind of work.” And the interview had come to an end.

That very day, sitting on a stool at one corner of a wooden table made from a drafting board, I began the study of the Section of Fisheries as an enterprise. Perspectives were opening up before me: I had already determined to concentrate all my efforts to obtain an assignment to research work in the North with one underlying purpose — escape.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### SLAVE LABOR AND BIG BUSINESS — A STATE WITHIN A STATE

**F**ROM my own investigations of the Fisheries Section and, as time went on, from conversations with prisoners in other sections and in the central administration of the camp, its complicated structure and its operations as a productive commercial enterprise were becoming clear to me. Let me describe them.

In 1931 the Solovetzki camp reached the height of its development. It contained fourteen sections. The river Swir and Lake Ladoga formed its southern boundary; its northern limit was the Arctic Ocean. The enterprises of this so-called camp extended approximately 1500 kilometers along the Murmansk railroad, taking in also the whole of Karelia. It was still growing and tending to expand beyond these limits. To the east this was checked by another enormous enterprise owned by the GPU — the Northern Camps of Special Designation — and to the west by the closeness of the Finnish frontier. Therefore the camp was reaching out to the islands of the Arctic Ocean, Kolgoueff and Vaigash, and to the southern shore of the Kola Peninsula (Kandalaksha and Terek shores of the White Sea). The number of prisoners was increasing daily. Enormous projects were being carried out and plans for even wider activities were under way.

Operating independently on the territory of the so-called

autonomous Republic of Karelia the Solovetzki camp established there, on a large scale, its own commercial enterprises, duplicating all the enterprises of that state. The camp had its own fisheries and lumber camps, its own brick-yards, road construction, agricultural and cattle farms—all of which were completely stifling Karelian industry. Besides these activities of a permanent nature the camp also undertook work of temporary character on a still larger scale. Some of this work had a definitely strategic purpose; for example, the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal (actually the joining of the Onega Bay of the White Sea with Lake Onega), the building of highways to the Finnish frontier, the reclaiming and levelling of large expanses of swamps and woods for military airports, the erection in the most important strategic points (Kem, Kandalaksha, Loukhi and others) of whole towns for quartering troops, with barracks to accommodate thousands of men, hospitals, warehouses, bathhouses, bakeries and so on. Besides this, in 1930-31 the camp also engaged in activities of an economic nature: the clearing of marsh land to be used for camp farms, preliminary work for the construction of a Soroka-Kotlas railroad which was to join the Siberian trunk line with the Murmansk railroad (this work was abandoned in 1931), the preparation of firewood for Moscow and Leningrad, and other activities.

In 1932 the GPU evidently decided that the Solovetzki camp had grown too big and it was, therefore, reorganized. After many changes, two new independent camps—the White Sea-Baltic camp (for the construction of the canal) and the Swir camp (for preparation of firewood for Moscow and Leningrad)—were finally formed and were no longer a part of Solovetzki.

Each camp had many sections. Every section was a complete commercial entity, similar to those which in the U.S.S.R. are called “trusts,” designed to make profits by

productive commercial operations. Each section had its own budget, its invested and working capitals. The administration of the section, as in all Soviet "trusts," included the following departments: planning, production, technical, commercial, bookkeeping and executive. The higher officers were usually three in number: the section chief and his two assistants. The section was composed of production and commercial units the nature of which depended on the section's activity: factories, trades, agricultural farms, lumber camps and so on. Each section worked in a definite production field and had its own distinct territory. The marketing of its product was effected either independently in the Soviet market or through intermediaries. Goods produced by sections using forced labor and sold in the home market were often stamped with their trademark. As I have said, the trademark of the Solovetzki camp was an elephant. Dealings with foreign markets were, of course, handled through the *Gostorg* (State Trade Commissariat) and sometimes even through a second intermediary, in order better to conceal the origin of the goods. The Section of Fisheries, the *Ribprom*, in which I worked, had a canning factory, a fish-smoking factory, a shop for construction and repair of ships, a net factory and over twenty fisheries scattered along the shores of Onega and Kandalaksha bays of the White Sea, on the Solovetzki Islands and on the Murman coast of the Arctic Ocean.

The sections were unified by and subordinated to the administration of the camp which regulated, combined and controlled their activity. The result was a very unwieldy and complicated bureaucratic body entirely unnecessary from the point of view of production efficiency. Furthermore, in Moscow there was a central organization independent of the camp administrations, for the combining, regulating and controlling of the activities of camp sections, composed of specialists in various fields of indus-

try. Each specialist was in charge of one branch of industrial activity in *all* the camps. Thus, for instance, a certain Bikson was managing the fishing industry at the Moscow GPU. He was a former fish merchant, had been deported to the Solovetzi camp and finally had entered the service of the GPU.

In this way the section had two masters: the administration of the camp and the council of specialists in Moscow. Both took every opportunity to meddle in the economic life of the section, although all the responsibility for the work remained with the section itself. Such a system of dual subordination is characteristic of all Soviet enterprises and those of the GPU were no exception.

Like all other Soviet enterprises the camp sections formulated yearly and five-year plans, which were combined, along one line, into the general plan of the particular camp, and along another line, into the general plan for the given branch of industry by the GPU. There is no doubt that these plans were finally included in the *Piatiletka*. The industrial enterprises of the GPU, based on slave labor of prisoners, are growing from year to year and becoming a factor of decisive importance in the general economic activity of the U.S.S.R.

The concentration camps, therefore, are actually enormous enterprises operating in the same field with similar "free" Soviet State institutions. The management of the former is concentrated in the GPU, of the latter, in various commissariats. In many cases the scale of the work carried on by the GPU is larger than that of the corresponding Soviet institutions; it is quite probable, for instance, that the GPU lumber operations exceed those of free lumber "trusts." Communication construction has almost entirely passed into the hands of the GPU, and entire camps with hundreds of thousands of slaves are engaged in these works — the White Sea-Baltic Canal, the Moscow-Volga Rivers

Canal, the Sizran and Koungour railroads and the gigantic Bamlag, Baikal-Amour railroad development. It would seem that the planned economy, proclaimed by the Soviets, would have precluded the existence on such a grand scale, of an industrial organization paralleling the state industry, but the point is that *the GPU in the U.S.S.R. is not simply a state institution, it is actually a state within a state.* The GPU has its own troops, its own navy, millions of its own subjects (the prisoners in camps), its own territory where Soviet authority and laws do not function. The GPU issues its own currency, forbids its subjects to use Soviet currency and does not accept it in its stores. The GPU proclaims its own laws for its subjects, has its own jurisdiction and prisons. It is not surprising, therefore, that it maintains its own industry, parallel to Soviet industry.

There can be no exact comparison between GPU and State enterprises because the former have peculiar features differentiating them from all other business ventures, whether Soviet or not. They deserve the attention of economists.

As I continued my studies of the Fisheries Section I was struck by several of these unique features which it revealed. The invested capital was negligible, the cost of production unusually low, and the profits enormous. With a catch of 700 tons, and the purchase of a similar quantity from fishermen, — a total of 1400 tons — the *Ribprom* had earned in 1930 a net profit of one million roubles. Compare this with the record of the North State Fishing Trust which in 1928, with a catch of 48,000 tons, earned a profit of less than one million roubles.

All the production buildings of this enterprise — considered as part of the invested capital — were nothing but barracks of a temporary type. The largest establishments — the canning, fish-smoking and net factories — were



housed in large barns on the verge of collapse. The equipment was primitive; at the canning factory, for instance, there was neither running water nor fresh water; sea water was used. At most of the fisheries the salting was carried on in the open as no buildings were available. There was no refrigeration of any kind — not even ice-cellars. Mechanization of work was entirely absent — everything was done by hand.

In consequence, depreciation of invested capital plays almost no part in the computation of costs. In this respect all enterprises of camps, even those engaged in such complicated works as the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal, present an extraordinary similarity. All work is carried on by hand, not a single building of real capital type is erected, all service buildings are constructed as cheaply as possible. This is a feature unknown in Soviet enterprises, where enormous sums are being spent for capital construction and mechanization, often without any rhyme or reason except that of “overtaking and outstripping.”

Why this difference? First, the camp enterprises are not intended for “show,” and second — this is the chief reason — the camps have *slave labor*. This personnel is actually the invested capital of the GPU enterprises; it takes the place of expensive equipment and machinery. Machines require buildings, care, and fuel of a certain quality and in fixed quantity. Not so with these prisoner-slaves. They need no care, they can exist in unheated barracks which they build themselves. Their fuel ration — food — can be regulated according to circumstances: one kilogram of bread can be reduced to 400 grams, sugar can be omitted entirely; they work equally well on rotten salted horse or camel meat. Finally, the slave is a universal machine; today he digs a canal, tomorrow he fells trees, and the next day he catches fish. The only requisite is an efficient organiza-

tion for compelling him to work — that is the “specialty” of the GPU.

But that is not all. This invested capital costs nothing to obtain as slaves did in capitalistic countries when slavery existed; the supply is limitless and there is neither interest to pay on funded debts nor any depreciation reserve to be set up when the balance sheet is made out.

And then there is the matter of wages, salaries, social insurance, union dues, and so on, all of which may be grouped as “labor costs,” of vital importance to Soviet business. The GPU does not have to worry about these. Among the thousands of workmen in a camp section not more than a few free hired employees get salaries; the remainder work without pay. It is true that the GPU pays out premiums to those prisoners who work irreproachably, but this represents not more than 3 or 4 per cent of what the GPU would have to pay a free worker. And even this miserly pay is not in Soviet money, but in GPU scrip. The prisoner can buy for it (only in GPU stores) an insignificant quantity of food which is the waste that otherwise could not be sold. Here again the GPU makes money.

Thus, labor costs cannot be said to influence seriously the cost of production in the GPU. The absence of these two items of expense — depreciation and wages — gives the GPU a saving of not less than 35 per cent in such a venture as the fisheries, and a considerably greater saving in works like the construction of the White Sea Canal.

Moreover, the GPU trademark guarantees an assured home market for its goods — a Soviet purchaser never refuses goods offered him by this “firm,” which are sold in open violation of trade regulations of the Soviet Government. A mark-up of 100 to 150 per cent over cost is the usual GPU figure according to its own “plans,” and this mark-up is practically synonymous with “profit” — whereas the Soviet State enterprises are not allowed a profit

of more than 8 per cent. Actually the GPU is not content with the limit approved in their plans and often sells its goods with a mark-up of 200–300 per cent and sometimes even more.

Here is an example. The Section of Fisheries dealt in fish which it caught or bought from free fishermen, who sold their catch both to the GPU and to other State enterprises (Corporations and Trusts) at fixed prices established by the local executive committee.<sup>1</sup> The Section of Fisheries bought frozen herring from the fishermen at the fixed price of 10 kopeks the kilogram, delivered to the warehouse of the Section, where it would be resold, on the spot, to another GPU organization — called “Dynamo” — for 1 rouble (100 kopeks) the kilogram. The new purchaser would cart it to the State Kem Inn, two blocks away, and sell it there for 3 roubles (300 kopeks) the kilogram. That ended the transaction for the GPU. I might add that the State innkeeper, who had nothing to fear from the authorities, would salt it slightly and retail it in his restaurant at one rouble a fish. The White Sea herring is small — there are fifty to sixty in a kilogram — so that the consumer was buying them at the rate of fifty to sixty roubles the kilogram, which was 500 to 600 times the fixed price of 10 kopeks established by Soviet authorities.

I have already pointed out that the GPU was getting rid of its defective merchandise with the greatest ease. Such merchandise is the bane of all Soviet enterprises. Worthless raw materials, inexperienced labor, complicated machinery which nobody can properly handle, extreme haste, uneducated Communist-managers at the head of enterprises, all these factors bring the amount of defective goods to a colossal percentage which wrecks all plans and estimates.

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<sup>1</sup> The sale of fish to private individuals, or at a price higher than the one established, is strictly prohibited and is done only secretly and in very small quantities.

In this respect the GPU "businesses" are in a favored position compared with their Soviet competitors. Rarely would a purchaser dare to claim that the GPU had sent him defective goods; he would simply pass them on to the indulgent Soviet consumer. And if the goods are so defective that even the GPU cannot dispose of them in the open market, they are sold, in GPU stores, to prisoners at prices often higher than those of regular GPU goods in the open market. They are also handed out as a premium for "shock" work. The hungry prisoner is happy to get even this.

Widely developed graft is another distinctive feature of all GPU enterprises, when compared to regular Soviet enterprises. Bribes are taken on every occasion and without any reason by everybody from the highest Moscow GPU officials down to the last hired man of the guard. Graft in the inner life of the GPU and their camps has grown such deep roots that it has come to be regarded as a natural condition and the free hired GPU officials openly give and accept bribes unashamed. Money in the U.S.S.R. has little, or rather only a conventional value. Monetary bribes, as such, figure only in fantastic GPU "cases" in which foreign capitalists are supposedly buying Soviet specialists with "Soviet currency." Actually it is doubtful if anyone in the U.S.S.R. could be tempted by Soviet money. Be that as it may, the GPU accepts bribes only in kind, the quality and quantity depending upon the particular case and the rank and position of the person receiving the bribe.

The Section of Fisheries used its own products — fish — as bribes. The Moscow GPU Comrade Boki (member of the OGPU council, in charge of camps) and his equals were given salmon designated for export to England, and a special kind of Solovetzki herring marked by four zeros. In fact, "four zeros" herring was never placed on the market but was reserved for bribes. The export salmon and

the "four zeros" herring were also given to the chief of the camp and to the chiefs of the investigation department. Officials of lesser importance received salmon of inferior quality, a box or two of ordinary smoked White Sea herring; the lower officials a few cans of preserved fish. In some cases these bribes were masked by the sending of a bill for a ridiculously small amount.

Whenever a "plan" or a report was to be submitted to the camp administration or to Moscow, the necessary preparations proceeded along two contrasting lines: in the offices, the prisoner-specialists worked day and night compiling memoranda; in the storeroom, other prisoners packed fish in barrels, boxes and baskets — this was the more important work. The Chief of Section, Simankoff, often with both of his assistants, personally supervised the packing, inspected the "presents" which were being sent to those "higher up," and themselves carefully marked the destination of each package. God forbid that an assistant should get a larger "present" than a chief. And the practice was the same when higher authorities came on an official visit. The main concern was to arrange a good reception and to prepare a pleasing package as a gift. The Section of Fisheries was no exception in this respect. All sections sent "presents" to the chiefs. The Agricultural Section sent hams, butter, and the best vegetables; to local authorities it sent cream and to the ladies, flowers. The shoe and clothing factories, among whose prisoner-workmen were the best tailors and cobblers of Leningrad and Moscow, dressed and shod their chiefs and their families, while the Handicraft Section made elaborately carved boxes for their superiors.

Such a system of universal graft no doubt adds color to the life of GPU officials.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX

### SENTRIES — SPIES — EDUCATORS

**S**LAVE labor in its enterprises forces the GPU to maintain in its camps three special organizations unknown in regular Soviet concerns: the Military Guard — VOHR; the Information-Investigation Department — ISO; and the Cultural-Educational Department — KVO.

#### VOHR

The military guard is designed to prevent escapes and to pursue fugitives. Organized like an army with headquarters at the Camp Administration, its troops are attached to every section of the camp and detachments are stationed at every point, in every sub-camp and district where prisoners may be found.

The members of the guard wear army uniforms; the officers have revolvers, the enlisted men rifles. There are no free enlisted men; without exception all are prisoners — criminal convicts, recruited for the most part from Red Army men serving sentences. And but a very few officers are free men. Thus it appears that prisoners are guarding themselves and the cost of maintenance is very low.

Their duties and responsibilities are numerous: policing the camp, escorting prisoners inside and outside its limits; operating the punitive cells at all the points of the camp; watching the routes along which fugitives might pass, including sentry duty at all railway stations from Petrozavodsk to Murmansk; inspection of all trains along this

section of the railroad in order to detect fugitives; the training of German shepherd dogs to follow the scent, leap at a fugitive, throw him to the ground and seize him by the back of his collar. We could watch this training of the dogs as we marched past the kennels near the Veguerashka camp. There was also rifle practice and hand grenade instruction for the guards, both of which we could see.

The VOHR is quartered in special barracks, 100 men to a building in which ten times that number of prisoners would have been packed. They have cots with sheets and blankets, and get better food: one kilo of bread per day, sugar, butter and other luxuries. During pursuits of fugitives they are given special rations: canned beef, butter, sugar, biscuits and macaroni; and they receive a premium of 10 roubles a head (in GPU scrip) for the recapture of an escaped prisoner.

The VOHR eats well, drinks well and does not lack women, especially in the big camps where there are always enough women prisoners, thieves and prostitutes from the city underworld and many peasant women who are scared into cohabitation. (In 1931 at Veguerashka a medical examination disclosed the fact that 90% of the guard suffered from venereal diseases in an acute form and 10% in a chronic form.) At distant points, where there are no women, the guard detachment sends for a cook, a washerwoman or a charwoman — a prisoner — who is forced to serve them in all respects.

### ISO

The Information-Investigation Department with its branches in every major camp and section plays the same rôle inside the camp that the GPU does "outside," but perhaps still more mercilessly. The functions of this "GPU within the GPU" are the same: undercover spying on the prisoners as well as on the free hired Gepeists; secret obser-

vation of all institutions and enterprises of the camp; instigated "cases" of "espionage," "wrecking," "counter-revolution"; the handling of all cases of "escapes." The ISO maintains camp prisons known as "isolators" where "confessions" are forced: detention in them is terrible.

Like the GPU, the ISO has a staff of examining officers who also fabricate "cases" against prisoners — a careless word or the slightest, even involuntary, negligence are considered heinous crimes. Sometimes even these pretexts are unnecessary, for the ISO can convict a man of "incorrigibility" when the camp authorities decide to get rid of an undesirable prisoner.

Secret lists are kept of all prisoners and none of them may be appointed to any work, or transferred to a new assignment, without the approval of the ISO — which need not give its reasons for disapproval. In addition, it conducts all searches, censors prisoner correspondence, issues permits for visitors, and so on.

The staff of the ISO is not large and, except for the highest offices, is recruited from Gepeists sent to the camp for criminal offences. Its secret agents, however, called "SEE-SOT" are legion; they permeate all camp activities. It strives, by every possible device, to enlist political prisoners for this contingent because they have better education and are not so readily suspected of being spies; the number of educated men who yield to this temptation is probably too small to suit the ISO, but they can be found in every camp.

The quarters of the ISO are isolated from all other camp activities and its staff employees enjoy all possible comfort including a "free apartment," choice rations, and the services of young educated women from among the political prisoners. In general, the position of young women in the camp is pitiable. Resistance to attentions from a free hired Gepeist or an employee of the ISO leads to a transfer



to "general" work in the company of thieves and prostitutes, where "attentions" may take a still more disgusting form; it may also lead to the institution of a "case," an accusation of counter-revolution or "incorrigibility" — and execution.

### KVO

The third organization — the Cultural-Educational Department (KVO) closely corresponds to the ISO and has its own corps of agents, officially called "camp correspondents" (LAGCOR) but regarded by the prisoners as also spies.

KVO's activity is two-fold: detection and publicity. The first, and most important, involves active assistance to the ISO in the organization of detection; the majority of KVO employees are at the same time secret agents of the ISO, and both departments often interchange their members. An "educator" who had distinguished himself by a denunciation is promoted to examining officer while an incompetent examining officer, or one who had become a drink addict, is demoted to "educator."

The second field of activity is known as "reëducation" or "reforging." Under this mask the GPU camouflages its commercial enterprises, representing them as institutions designed to reëducate inveterate criminals and reforge them into "enthusiasts of Soviet construction." The method is rather primitive. Men unfit for any other kind of work are enlisted as "educators." The chiefs of the KVO and of its branches are mostly Chekists who had become inveterate drunkards and for whom a position had to be found. The prisoners working in the KVO are persons quite unfit for any production enterprises; with the exception of lecturers, of whom I shall speak later, they are criminals, former contributors to Soviet newspapers or employees of professional unions who had been deported for systematic embezzlement or fraud.

The appropriation for "cultural-educational" work is small and most of it is allotted to the publication of the camp newspaper; since the work in the printing room is done by the prisoners and since they are compelled to buy it when they receive any premiums in GPU scrip its publication cannot be a heavy financial burden on the GPU.

This newspaper is a strange thing. An edition appears every three days in every camp. The pioneer in the field was the "*Perekovka*" (Reforgery) first published in the Solovetzki camp and later transferred to the White Sea-Baltic camp; to take its place "*Trudovoi Trut*," in no way different from the "*Perekovka*," was published in the Solovetzki camp in the autumn of 1931.

In the heading "*Perekovka*," the letter "K" was represented as a hammer striking the letter "O," from which small fragments and sparks flew in all directions. At the top of the sheet were two inscriptions: "Not for circulation outside the camp" and "Work in the U.S.S.R. is honor, glory, valor and heroism!"

In outward appearance it looks just like any other provincial Soviet paper: the same mottoes, slogans of the day and screaming titles. In the text, the same talk about phalanxes, shock workers, storm columns, enthusiasts, vanguard of storm positions, socialistic achievements, fronts of proletarian victories, and so on — all this enhanced by an immoderate use of exclamation marks and titles in the imperative, such as: "Stop!" — "Accomplish!" — "Liquidate!" — "Develop!" — "Break!" — "Strike!"

The paper is devoted to camp life; news from the U.S.S.R. or the rest of the world is given a very small space on the last page, such as the 100–200–300 per cent overfulfillment of Soviet plans, or the strikes, famines and crises in the outer world. Articles, written by prisoners of the editorial staff, sing praises of the authorities or demand the disclosure and punishment of those guilty of various

“breaches in the front.” The guilty men are always prisoners. Anonymous denunciations sent from places of work appear in a special column headed “Camp correspondents write”; this correspondence serves as basis for the framing of “cases” against prisoners by the ISO.

Penniless though we were, and confined behind barbed wire, even here we were not free from lies, denunciation and the constant threat of some new fantastic and senseless accusation. And all of us who were receiving premium compensation were compelled to subscribe to this paper, although we had no protection whatsoever from its dirty slander.

Besides this printed paper, which is edited at the camp center, each “point” has its “wall newspaper,” with hand-written articles composed under the auspices of the KVO and appearing five or six times a year in major camps and once or twice a year in smaller camps. Not only the prisoners, but even the hired Gepeists regard these papers with disgust and loathing.

KVO also manages the mass meetings for prisoners, as ordered by headquarters from time to time — especially on the occasion of a new State bond issue, or the organization of “shock activity” for a new drive against bed bugs. Such meetings are held in the workshops after the day’s work is done. The more formal “general” meetings take place outdoors in a space enclosed by a wire fence, within which the prisoners, accompanied by guards, are lined up in military formation around a platform to await, in freezing weather, the arrival of the authorities. Then one of the chief “educators” delivers his address; in my time (1931–32) the favorite subjects were the “intrigues of French imperialism,” “Communist progress in the German elections,” the “victorious march of Communistic revolution in China,” and “the success of the *Piatiletka*.” No doubt other subjects are being used now.

Speeches about the reeducation of prisoners were less

frequent and were delivered by radio so as to reach a wider public than the convicts who were experiencing the benefits of this "reforging." An amusing incident occurred once at Solovetzki in 1931 in connection with such a speech. The senior "educator" was drunk but this fact had been discovered too late, and he could not be stopped. The poor devil, in his enthusiasm, went beyond all limits of discretion; but it was the only speech to which the prisoners listened with interest and attention. Incidentally, he stated that the "camp correspondence" movement (which means anonymous denunciation) was growing enormously, that already five million "camp correspondents" had been enrolled from among the prisoners . . . here he stopped abruptly for no apparent reason and then shouted into the microphone his brilliant concluding phrase: "Lenin himself was an honorary camp correspondent."

Thus it can be seen that prisoners in concentration camps not only form the labor force and organize production and trade, but also guard against their own escape and pursue themselves as fugitives, organize a system for spying on themselves, imprison themselves in "isolators," and either sentence themselves to execution or "reëducate" and "reforge" themselves.

At first glance, this would seem incredible. But, if it is borne in mind that this system had developed from "camps of special designation," whose main purpose — extermination — was being accomplished by the prisoners themselves, the contemporary situation in camps of the new type will not seem so extraordinary. It must be remembered that the contingent of prisoners is not homogeneous, that by cleverly breaking it up into such groups as former Chekists, criminals and politicals, by placing these groups under different conditions of life and work and then inciting them against each other, the GPU is able to accomplish anything it may desire.

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## CHAPTER XL

### THREE PILLARS OF SOLOVSKI

**T**HERE is a saying at Solovki that the camp rests upon three pillars: foul language, protection and denunciation. In this camp, I think, profanity — in which I include every form of vile speech — has reached its highest development. It is universally employed, by officials — as evidence of their power over prisoners, and by prisoners — as an expression of their contempt for a life of slavery, for all their surroundings, and for themselves.

The subordinate officials, together with the guard and the criminal element, delight in using the word “intellectual” combined with the foulest language imaginable. This practice is undoubtedly the result of “cultural-educational” work which aims to incite the criminals against the politicals and especially against the “intelligentsia”; it is a repercussion of the same campaign against the intellectual class which the Soviet Government has carried on for the last fifteen years.

This attitude is well illustrated by the Solovetzki version of “Little Red Riding Hood,” here known as “*Shourka Tchervonchik*,” — the very name revealing her status as a lady of easy virtue. Wearing a red *Komsomol* handkerchief around her head, she sets out for a party meeting of shock workers, but, once outside the confines of the camp, she meets a big, gray wolf who, baring his great teeth, asks her fiercely: “Where are you going, Red Riding Hood?”

“Get away from me you — — — intellectual,” she replies with such a volley of unprintable words that the poor wolf runs away in terror.

Much more important than profanity, however, are the other two pillars of Solovki.

“Protection,” meaning, in camp vernacular, the enjoyment of illegal privileges or preferred treatment, has actually been developed into a peculiar system which originated in the GPU, whose employees, — the Gepeists — enjoy in full measure the protection of the Soviet Government. A card bearing those three magic letters opens the door wide to opportunities for obtaining everything of which the millions of working people are deprived. The Gepeist may have his “living space” (apartment and wood for fuel), his provisions and clothing, a theatre seat or a reservation in a train, — all because of this protection and according to his relative position and his connections. And that is not all. He is not subject to the law of the land; he is above it. If he commits a serious crime, such as murder or rape, he is not held for trial by an ordinary court, but is dealt with in a “home” fashion. If he happens to have good connections within the GPU he is likely to get off quite free, if not — his punishment is reduced to a minimum, perhaps a transfer to another place of work within the same GPU.

In the camps, Gepeists thrive on protection in perhaps still greater measure. Their main support is Moscow and those who have connections in the Central Administration of Camps are fortunate indeed, yet even they need also “inside” camp protection for they are never satisfied with their legitimate and generous rations and remittances. Since many commissariat positions are held by prisoners, these in their turn gain protection with the authorities, obtaining from them various privileges, such as the right to live in “free” apartments, to be detailed outside the

boundaries of the camp, or to receive permits for long visits from relatives. The life of such favored prisoners differs sharply from the existence of regular prisoners — peasants, workmen and specialists.

Among the regular prisoners, nevertheless, the same system is also widely used, but with much less success. The Gepeist through protection gets a nice apartment, furniture, export salmon, fresh caviar, pork, cream, imported clothes and perfumes: the regular prisoner can only hope to secure a few more centimeters of sleeping space, a chance to buy an extra 200 grams of black bread or a package of tobacco; and if he gets two or three pieces of sugar, or permission to take a walk through Kem unaccompanied by a guard, he boasts of having great protection.

Insignificant though they are, these material benefits are highly valued and their psychological effect, due solely to protection, is significant. The prisoner has a chance to raise himself above the gray subordinated mass, to gain at least a slight superiority over his fellows. This flatters him and introduces a kind of consolation into his cheerless life. For that reason he makes no attempt to conceal the fact, as would seem natural among comrades, but on the contrary in the majority of cases he boasts about it. His reputation for having "protection" makes life easier and further favors follow.

Striving to receive and enjoy this "protection," every prisoner is equally ready to bestow it. This is perhaps even more pleasing to his pride and is often also the result of a sincere desire to help others. A chance acquaintance in the camp, or work in the same group, or previous confinement in the same prison, bind one according to camp traditions to extend "protection" at all subsequent meetings. The cook will pour a few drops of mineral oil into your *kasha*, the acquaintance in the store will deem it his duty to hand you an extra box of matches, and the friend at the warehouse will pick out for you a pair of better boots.

Officially, to be sure, this system of protection is forbidden. All GPU stores of the Solovetzki camp in 1932 displayed two placards: "Nothing is given out through protection," and "Protection is buried"—to which the prisoners invariably added, "but its work lives on," paraphrasing the famous broadside: "Lenin is dead but his work lives on."

The most extraordinary case of "protection" I ever knew was that of the prisoner Lublinski (not his real name) whom I met at the Section of Fisheries. So characteristic is it of the relationship between the camp Gepeists and the protégés that I cannot refrain from describing it.

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning at the offices of the *Ribprom*. A gentleman came in, wearing a light black overcoat and carrying a cane. The overcoat was unbuttoned and one could see that under it he had on a well-pressed suit, a starched collar and a tie; around his neck a silk scarf, and across his waistcoat a watch chain. He had enormous horn-rimmed spectacles such as Communists who have been abroad affect. His face was ugly: a large wide nose, sensual open mouth and protruding ears. He took off his gray felt hat and wiped his bald head with a clean handkerchief of fine texture. He was about forty years old. In my inexperience, I decided that he must be some species of Gepeist or official of the Executive Committee. But he shook hands with all the prisoners, came up to me and introduced himself as "Edward Alexandrovitch Lublinski," and then sitting down on a stool with his back to the desk addressed the office manager in a languid voice: "Is Vsevolod Arkadievitsh (the chief's assistant) here? No? Too bad! I have hurried to no purpose; I did not even stop to drink my coffee."

Then stretching himself and yawning, he drawled: "I would like now to have a cup of hot chocolate with whipped cream and a biscuit. Well, there's nothing to be



done about it, not everything is possible; one has to suffer. I will take a walk. I'll go up to the lunchroom and have a cup of coffee. Does anyone want anything from the lunchroom for free employees? They have excellent little apple pies there for 25 kopeks each."

After collecting money from several men he strode off swinging his cane.

"Who is he?" I asked one of the prisoners, when he had gone.

"A prisoner, just like you and me. Does it astonish you? He is a 'protégé,' and a swindler. Be careful with him. Don't trust any money to him, not a kopek, he'll swindle you out of it as easy as anything. He has been caught many a time, but always gets out of it. Anyone else would long ago have been rotting in the 'isolator' but this one, you see for yourself what a dandy he looks. He is close to the authorities; they call him the vilest names to his face but he is received in their homes, plays cards with them, gambles and when necessary loses money to them. He does their shopping, goes to the station to meet Gepeists and their wives, stands in line for train tickets, runs errands for the whole camp administration. It's said that he's an expert in arranging for all kinds of perversions to which Gepeists are greatly addicted. He lives well, too, better than when he was free, has a room in an apartment, takes his meals at the lunchroom for free salaried employees and gets more premium money than any other prisoner. Officially he is assigned to the Section of Fisheries but he does no real work. An extraordinary clever rogue—but not an 'informer.' But remember—don't trust him with any money."

"But who is he, what was he sent here for?"

"That's hard to say: everything he tells about himself is a lie. He says that he has lived abroad, graduated from Oxford, was director of some big company in America. He

can't even do the work of a bookkeeper here but he certainly has other talents. One day we were sitting here, seven of us, hungry and very much depressed. We had tried to get a quart of milk from the Agricultural Section, but the chief refused a permit. Then Lublinski came in and modestly offered his services; he was just a novice then so we explained all about the need of a permit. He insisted, however, and went off with a kettle that would hold four quarts and he didn't ask for permission to leave the building. How we smiled! But very soon he came back and without a word put the tea kettle on the table. 'Well, were you turned back? You didn't have to wait in line?' we taunted him, but when we picked up the tea kettle it was full of milk. Four quarts! 'How did you get it? Who gave it to you?' He only shrugged his shoulders. After that he would bring us milk every day. Once one of us followed him to see how he did it. Very simple. At the milk department there would be a long line of guards, wives and servants, hired employees, nurses from the hospital. He would pass his tea kettle over the rail out of turn and in a calm voice would say: 'Milk, four quarts, for Lublinski.' The man serving milk would take the kettle from his hands respectfully and fill it to the brim. Nobody in the line said a word. Evidently it never occurred to anyone that this mysterious Lublinski was not some important visiting Gepeist."

As my comrade finished speaking Lublinski himself reappeared on the street walking by the side of the assistant chief of the Fisheries Section and nonchalantly swinging his cane. The guards saluted and Lublinski answered with a slight nod of his head.

Once inside the office he addressed the chief with inimitable insolence. "With your permission I have bought pies for my comrades in the lunchroom for the hired employees."

"How much does he charge you for the pies?" the chief

asked us. "25 kopeks? This scoundrel is profiteering again. They cost only 20 kopeks."

Lublinski's only duty at the Fisheries Section was to obtain telephone connections with the Section's points located outside of Kem; this was no easy task for the service was poor, but he accomplished it admirably in this manner: "Operator! Hello! Do you hear who is talking? Do you know my voice? Yes, yes, it's Edward Alexandrovitch of the OGPU. I need to get Soroka immediately. The line is busy? Disconnect the party. You have no right to do it? You are going to be responsible for the delay, I have an urgent message from the OGPU. Disconnect immediately. Thanks. Hello? — Soroka? Give me the Fisheries Section. It's Lublinski of the OGPU who is talking" and so on.

He tried this method once too often. The line was busy but he proudly broke in: "You should recognize my voice yourself." Unfortunately for Lublinski, the Chief of the Camp Administration was calling — and for this insolence Edward Alexandrovitch was ordered to "general duty" at a lumber camp, which for the ordinary mortal meant death. Not so for him. He contrived, through protection, to travel without a guard, in all his finery, including gloves and spectacles, and a pile of suitcases. Arriving at the station he demanded horse transportation for himself and his luggage, and so, in state, appeared before the Chief of the lumber camp, who, assuming him to be a secret inspector, did not dare send him to work, but lodged and fed him well. Eventually, someone intervened and he was returned to Kem!

Lublinski is not an exception in the camp — there are many like him. When Soviet writers picture touching scenes of meetings with prisoners in concentration camps their eloquent pens are influenced by encounters with various Lublinskis, some smaller and some greater, but always of the same type.

The third pillar of Solovki — denunciation — is based upon three independent systems of spying which cover all the institutions of the camp, first — the secret agents of the ISO; second — the camp correspondents of the KVO; and third, — the “volunteers.” According to prisoners with whom I talked and who had been in the camp many years, the ISO drafts its secret agents precisely as the GPU does “outside,” selecting a victim suitable as a spy, usually a respectable political prisoner with a “bourgeois” past. He is promised a reduction of term, and if he refuses, is threatened with the initiation of a new case against him or the arrest of his relatives. His function is to “inform” about questions of general importance: the frame of mind of prisoners, the work of camp’s institutions, the instances of “wrecking,” and so on. He must inform not only against prisoners but also against free salaried Gepeists. By pure chance, the report of one such agent, included in some business correspondence, fell into my hands. I warned those of my comrades who might have been in danger, but did not speak about it to the “agent” himself. It was better not to expose him for he was less of a menace now that we knew him.

Besides these regular agents, there are always prisoners who are ready, if opportunity offers, to inform against other prisoners in the hope of bettering their own lot. Some of them are afraid of being accused of “failing to inform.” Denunciations regarding preparations for escape are especially frequent and dangerous.

In the autumn of 1931 such a false denunciation nearly caused the death of an innocent man. The Section of Fisheries was sending small motor boats from the White Sea to Murmansk to catch herring; crews and captains were prisoners. When one of the boats entered a harbor to take on fresh water, the crew fell upon their captain, bound him and, summoning the GPU coast guard boat from Mur-

mansk by telephone, gave him up, testifying that he had urged them to take advantage of the sea voyage to escape. The captain's situation was hopeless although the absurdity of the accusation was apparent. The captain had already been in camp eight years, had been out to sea many times, and had only a few days left to serve before the end of his term. Nevertheless he was kept in the "isolator" under the most trying conditions and his execution was delayed only because individual members of the crew had contradicted each other. For half a year he defended himself with exceptional courage and coolness, until finally he was set free — an event which was regarded as a miracle. But it was typical of the GPU that his accusers were not punished, in spite of the falseness of their denunciation.

The second spy system is operated by the KVO, the educational department, through its so-called "camp correspondents," already referred to, who, writing anonymously, supply information against prisoners. This is considered as "social work" and for this activity they are enlisted in the ranks of shock workers and receive various privileges. Their identity is quickly discovered in small camps, however, and then their position is not enviable; the prisoners, as well as the camp authorities, do everything in their power to have the correspondent removed to some other point and then warn his co-workers of his pleasing occupation.

The third category of informers is the most numerous and annoying, although possibly least dangerous. They are the so-called "volunteers," who try to gain protection from the authorities by informing about minor violations of camp regulations. Everything is reported: who spoke disrespectfully of the authorities, who is not sufficiently diligent in his work, who procured vodka, who had a conversation with a "free" person and so on.

Foul language, protection and denunciation are organically connected with the GPU system and reflect its moral level: they are the inner pillars of the GPU camp, the basis of that "industrious education" and "reforging" whose praises are being sung today by Soviet writers.

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## CHAPTER XLI

### “THE TERM GOES ON”

**T**HE attitude of prisoners towards forced labor is adequately expressed by one of their favorite maxims: “the term goes on.” Whether one works diligently or loafs, whether the task is well or poorly done, time takes its course and the term of sentence comes to an end. This attitude is no secret to the GPU which has developed its own “methods of compulsion.”

Until 1930, in “camps of special designation” these measures were very simple: prisoners were given assignments and those who did not fulfill them were starved, beaten, tortured, killed. Now in the “industrious correction” camps these methods are of a more varied nature, but the use of physical force still persists. For example, wherever the nature of the work permits, daily assignments are still given out and the penalty for non-fulfillment is a reduction of food rations. The basic food is black bread; at heavy physical jobs the prisoner gets 800 grams per day. If he does not accomplish his assignment, his bread ration is reduced to 500 grams or even 300 grams, depending upon the percentage of the unaccomplished work. A daily ration of 300 grams of bread, in work of this sort, when the rest of the food has no nourishment, approaches starvation, and so the first means of compulsion remains as before — hunger. If this does not succeed, the prisoner is kept all night long in a punitive cell under frightful conditions; in the daytime he is led out to work. The next step is transfer

to the “isolator” as an “incorrigible.” I never was in the isolator myself, but I have observed prisoners being led from these isolators under heavy guard; mere shadows they seemed — no longer men.

For specialists and office workers, the first method of compulsion is “general work” — hard labor; the next measure is an accusation of wrecking and confinement in the isolator where the offender stays, usually, until he is shot.

Other means of compulsion are more subtle. Prisoners who accomplish their assignment are given “premium compensation” in special GPU scrip — manual laborers 3 to 4 roubles a month, specialists of exceptional qualification up to 25 and even 35 roubles. With this money they can buy “premium products,” in the GPU stores only, from a list which changes every month. The quality of the products is getting worse every year. In 1931 one could buy, during a month, about 200 grams of sugar, 100 grams of biscuits, 2 to 3 packages of low grade tobacco, 2 to 3 boxes of matches, and sometimes 200 grams of melted lard; in 1932 sugar, biscuits and lard were omitted from the list. Furthermore, the prisoner could purchase on his premium card 200 extra grams of bread per day, but even this extra ration — highly valued by the prisoners — could not be relied upon since the stores were very often short of bread. However small this premium compensation might be, it was a powerful incentive to hungry prisoners.

There were far stronger inducements, however, which cost the GPU nothing. First of all — the visit. If *for half a year* the prisoner had irreproachably accomplished his work, he might obtain permission for his closest relative to see him at the camp. Visits are of two kinds: “on general grounds” and “personal.” If “on general grounds” they take place at the camp commandant’s building, in the presence of the officer on duty, and last not longer than



two hours a day for one to three or four days. They differ but little from those in prison: in a narrow dirty corridor full of officials, the prisoner sits down on a bench beside his wife or mother. With the constant barking of the supervisors — “Talk louder! Don’t whisper! No remittances!” — such interviews are not cheerful. It is for this that the prisoner has worked to the point of exhaustion for six long months.

The “personal” visit is the dream of every prisoner. Then he is allowed to live in a “free” apartment, that is, in a room or corner of a room which the relative who came to see him has to find and rent. If the prisoner is in a camp within whose limits there are no villages or free inhabitants a corner of the barracks is reserved; at Solovki there is a special room so set apart. The prisoner is not exempt from work, so that he can see his relatives only during the dinner recess and at night. In spite of these limitations a “personal” visit is regarded as a great privilege; to gain it a man will go to the limit of his endurance, although such a visit lasts but three or four days and is granted only to those who have strong “protection” in the administration of camps.

But the lure of “visits” was not sufficient, because there are so many prisoners whose relatives are penniless, imprisoned or in exile. The inventive genius of the Chekists devised another method, a new “privilege” which the GPU announced with pomp and ceremony in the summer of 1931. Prisoners must be made to realize that this was no mere routine order but a real event, an unprecedented instance of special clemency — as explained by a high official who addressed them at a meeting. Prisoners who had an unblemished record for behavior and accomplishment of assignments would be granted a reduction in the term of their sentence, as follows: every three working days could be counted as four days of the sentence. Those who

would enlist in “shock brigades,” i.e., exceed their quotas and also demonstrate their political reliability by active participation in the social work, could have two working days counted as three. Thus a prisoner who had irreproachably accomplished his daily assignments during three years was considered as having served four years of his sentence; if, in addition to this, he had been a “shock worker,” his two years of work counted as three years of his sentence. These reductions of sentences were to be computed three times a year and the order itself would take effect on August first, 1931.

The “educators” responded on behalf of the multitudes of silent prisoners, voicing their gratitude to the benevolent GPU and promising in return that they would give all their efforts to the “reforging” of themselves and to striving for the “overfulfillment of plans” and so on. Meanwhile, we stood in line and listened, some believing, others doubting, but all wondering what real purpose was concealed behind the words of this new order.

It was very soon followed by “technical interpretations.” Persons who had been deprived of their rights before the arrest, former merchants, the clergy and other “non-productive elements” could have four working days counted as five, but could not join the “shock brigades.” Furthermore this reduction of the term was not to be automatic and equal for everybody, but would be granted only by special commissions which could deny it even to the most conscientious workers if they were found deficient in “social activity” or “proletarian psychology.”

Such interpretations somewhat weakened the appeal of the order to the prisoners but in general it had the desired effect because freedom is the goal of every captive. “When is *the day*?” is the first question asked in camp. Every hard monotonous day has its significance; it brings nearer the hour of liberation — “the term goes on.” And so the pris-

oner, however skeptical he may be, is ready to believe any rumor if only it gives him a hope of earlier freedom. Life in camp would be impossible without hope.

The new order strengthened that hope. A man whose term was five years, and who had already served two, would do everything in his power to be admitted to "shock brigades" and so reduce the remaining three years to two. A whole year saved! Freedom suddenly seemed so real and close at hand. It was as if he had grown a year younger. He did not stop to reason that in those "shock brigades" he might be digging his own grave, not paving the road to freedom. Hardly anyone could resist the temptation of the dream.

I was one of the few pessimists, perhaps chiefly because I did not wish even to think that I might stay in camp until the end of my term. The pessimists insisted that the GPU could never be trusted to keep its promises, at any rate to political prisoners, and that the terms of our sentences were so long that the GPU would change its policies more than once. But even if the decree remained in force (having proved its effectiveness as a means of compulsion), why think about it at all when everyone well knew how the GPU had treated those whose terms *had* come to an end? If their sentences had been imposed by a court — not by the GPU — they were freed on time, as in the case of criminals (such as murderers, swindlers, professional thieves). These made up no more than 10% of the prisoner personnel. The great mass of convicts — the remaining 90% — had dreamed their dreams of liberation on "the day," and then what happened?

Let me describe such a "release"; I had watched it more than once. The prisoner's term had reached its end. His comrades gathered around him, chaffing him in a friendly way about his impatience and his timid plans for a free life. Trying to conceal his emotion he would go to the

Registration Department and, with sinking heart, approach the window marked “Discharges,” there to stand until the tired prisoner-clerk found his papers in the files. “The reply about your case has not yet been received; come again in a month.” A second month would pass, and then a third — sometimes a year. And still he remained a convict, driven to work, threatened with the punitive cell and isolator. At last his “papers” would arrive and, very often, with them a new sentence. There were but three alternatives for political prisoners who had finished serving their terms: (1) a new term in the concentration camp; (2) exile to a far-distant village in the extreme North; — (3) in very rare cases, “minus 6” or “minus 12,” which meant that the prisoner could himself choose the place of his exile in the U.S.S.R. with the exclusion of six or twelve larger cities and towns and their adjacent districts. All the border regions were likewise excluded — such as the whole of Karelia, Murman, the Caucasus, the Crimea and so forth, so that in the vast expanse of the Union not many places were left to choose, particularly for a man trained in some definite and narrow specialty.

I remember well the tragedy of Gamid, the messenger in the Fisheries Section, who had come from Trans-Caucasia and spoke Russian badly. He was exceptionally honest and diligent in his work, bearing his imprisonment with a truly Eastern fatalism and an exceptional gentleness. Everybody at the *Ribprom* loved him and joked about his queer Russian and his unsuccessful efforts to improve it. As the expiration of his term approached he was in a fever of excitement. On the great day, he took from the little box he had brought from home a clean silk shirt, a Caucasian belt and well-shined high boots; during all the years of his imprisonment he had never shown them to anybody. Early in the morning he reported to the Registration Department. He returned in tears. His “release” proved to be only another

sentence—three years of exile in the Archangel District, which to poor Gamid, a southerner whose health had already been affected by the north, might prove a greater tragedy than his first deportation to the concentration camp. He took leave of us as if departing for his grave.

With such incidents in mind why should we work to win a reduction of term as promised by the new order of 1931?

This attitude the GPU understood and therefore, beginning with the summer of 1931, prisoners began to get releases after but short delays of a few days or at most a few weeks. And they were "complete" discharges instead of additional terms of exile. The prisoner was given his documents and could choose without restrictions the place of his future residence. And this was not all: the camp paid his railroad fare from the camp to the town he had chosen.

The first releases of this kind produced a great impression. The most inveterate pessimists were ready to believe that the GPU was actually changing its policy, while the prisoners themselves were overwhelmed. Some even felt embarrassed when they returned from the Registration Department with a complete release: how could they tell their comrades, for a release had heretofore been given only as a reward for denunciations. Soon, however, such discharges became the normal thing and political prisoners began to leave even for Leningrad and Moscow. Our spirits rose: the hope of freedom was being realized and for its sake men were ready to work until they dropped.

Not a month had passed, however, before ugly rumors began to spread about the camp: that released prisoners had hardly reached their homes before they had been arrested again without accusation and had been deported to some other concentration camp or exiled to northern provinces. Confirmation of these rumors followed soon. About two months after the release of B., my neighbor of the barracks in Veguerashka, the wife of one of the prison-

ers came for a visit to Kem. She knew B. in Leningrad very well and told of his fate. He had safely returned to his wife and son in Leningrad, where he obtained work and was happy. After a few weeks, a soldier came one day to his apartment and presented a summons to the police station. B. had gone there without taking anything with him, confident that he had been sent for just to straighten out some formalities regarding his papers. But he did not return from the police station and his wife had found him a few days later in the Nijegorodskaya Street prison, a transient prison of the GPU. A week later he had been deported directly from there to the northern part of the Archangel district — and no accusation had been formulated against him.

Still more convincing was the somewhat later case of one of our co-workers in the *Ribprom* who, as a reward for exemplary work and behavior, had been discharged under the provisions of the new “ order ” before the expiration of his term. A month after his “ complete ” release we received a note from him: “ *I am in Veguerashka in a barracks with criminals; I am going to be sent to ‘ general work ’; help me to get back to the Fisheries Section.* ” Through the Registration Department we learned that he had been given a new three years’ term in a concentration camp. No new accusation had been made against him but a slip of paper had been added to his papers in the files as follows: “ Excerpt from the minutes of the meeting of the OGPU council. Case of N. who had completed his three years’ sentence in the concentration camp. Decision: *extend his term for 3 more years.* ”

And so the prisoners in the camp were convinced, as these cases multiplied from day to day, that the “ complete release ” was but another GPU trick. Depression followed this conviction, more intense, I believe, than their former rejoicing, and they returned to that old attitude — “ the

term goes on " — under which they might at least preserve the last remnants of their strength.

But the GPU did not stop there. Knowing the weakness of prisoners for any kind of rumors of amnesty, it began again to let them spread.

It must be remembered that every political prisoner has, at the bottom of his heart, the faint hope that politics will take a new course, that the senseless accusation against him will be rescinded and that he will return to normal work. This hope has some justification; individual prisoners were sometimes freed for no apparent reason. In my time several prominent engineers who had been deported in 1931 to the Solovetzki camp with long sentences were suddenly freed. In the autumn of 1931, during one of the disputes with Japan, no less than twenty officers who had formerly served in the Red Navy were released. All such cases were heatedly discussed by prisoners and accepted as indications that their turn might also come. The Gepeists periodically spread rumors of amnesty in connection with some big undertaking.<sup>1</sup> In the Fisheries Section, for instance, rumors

<sup>1</sup> I ought to mention here the famous case of "amnesty" granted upon the completion of the White Sea-Baltic Canal (begun in December, 1931) — a case loudly proclaimed throughout the world by the GPU and the Soviet Government. At the beginning of this gigantic operation there were rumors of an amnesty for the two hundred thousand to three hundred thousand prisoners assembled at a special camp for that undertaking. In the autumn of 1932 the Soviet newspapers announced that the work was not yet done. On January 1, 1933 the order granting a reduction of term for blameless work (to which I have already referred) was repealed — the prisoners who had created this miracle of engineering with their own bare hands were cheated because the repeal was retroactive. Then came, in the summer of 1933, the transfer of 85,000 of them, a majority, to a new camp for the construction of the Moscow-Volga Canal. Some new stimulus was needed to arouse enthusiasm for work among those that remained to finish the White Sea Canal. At that moment, August 1, 1933, the GPU proclaimed its "amnesty"; some of the workers were freed, the others actually had their terms reduced — a total of about 70,000 in these two classes. Obviously there was no real amnesty; it was only as if the repealed decree had been restored. In effect, therefore, only one-fourth of the total number of prisoners originally working at the White Sea-Baltic Sea camp were benefited by this amnesty.

always circulated that in case of a good catch and the fulfillment of the Plan those who had worked "hardest" would be freed. More than once I observed how the authorities stimulated such rumors, for example, when fishermen were sent to catch the herring that appeared unexpectedly on the barren Murman Coast. There, beyond the Arctic Circle, they lived and labored, without sparing themselves, through the autumn and winter of 1931-32. Badly clothed and poorly shod, with rotting tents for shelter, mildewed bread and herring for food, they brought in a thousand tons of fish — but not a man was freed.

All these things which I learned about the system of the camp and the treatment of prisoners by the GPU served but to strengthen my determination to escape. So obsessed was I with this idea that when the "International" was sung, I could hear only one line of it, and repeat every word of that line with keenest pleasure and without risk:

*"We will gain freedom by our own hand."*



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## CHAPTER XLII

### WHAT PRICE FUGITIVES?

To pave the way for my escape I determined to find subjects for experimental work that would justify the *Ribprom* administrators in sending me out on an extended mission into the wildest parts of the northern region of the camps, where many small stations of the Fisheries Section were scattered and where supervision could not be rigid.

The only man who travelled around, visiting these stations was the Chief of the *Ribprom*, S. T. Simankoff, a cunning fisherman turned Communist who, though not an "old Chekist," had assured himself a Soviet bureaucratic career in the wild province of Karelia. When the GPU was organizing the Fisheries Section in Kem, not a single Gepeist could be found who knew anything about the fishing business. Simankoff, then president of the regional executive committee, representing the local authorities, was enlisted in the GPU. Clothed in a long Gepeists' top-coat, patent leather high boots with spurs, a red star on his cap and the insignia of a general on his coat lapel, the new chief was complete. The title of Chief of Camp Section gave him a multitude of material advantages.

To him I suggested that I be sent, before winter set in, to inspect and report upon *all* the fishing grounds and the *Ribprom* stations or points, working out at the same time the possible organization of new kinds of fishing activities

such as, for instance, the utilization of fish waste as well as of unmarketable fish. A new expansion of the business ought to tempt them, I thought. I planned to make the survey by using a small row-boat which would make it possible for me to go ashore at any desired spot.

In the "plan for my work in 1931" I intentionally did not indicate the exact region of research work, although it was obvious that a survey of all the stations of the *Ribprom* in one summer was impossible—it would have meant a journey of more than a thousand kilometers along the coast line. The points of the *Ribprom* are located in two basic regions: in the north—the Kandalaksha Bay, in the south—the coast of the Onega Bay of the White Sea. The latter is 250–300 kilometers from the Finnish border, while the northern sections of the Kandalaksha Bay were only 100 kilometers from Finland. The extreme northern section near the village Kandalaksha was mountainous, had no roads, and was almost uninhabited from the sea-shore to the frontier. On the other hand, the region between the Onega Bay and the Finnish border presented a flat, swampy stretch of land with numerous lakes and considerable rivers which might have presented obstacles for travel. I was not afraid of mountains—the range which stretched along the Kandalaksha was not over a thousand meters above sea level, and I could easily find a way over it.

But the more firmly I made up my mind to choose the northern region the more carefully I must conceal my interest in it. My program was discussed and condescendingly approved, but neither the region nor the day of departure had been fixed.

I was in no hurry myself. In all my enterprise one vital question remained indefinite. I had to know the fate of my wife. So far as I knew she had no "case" of her own, but was still in prison. I was inclined to believe that the examining officer was endeavoring to invent a "case"

against her. I was getting most alarming news from newly deported prisoners arriving from Leningrad: many specialists from the Hermitage, Russian Museum, Ethnographical Museum and others had been deported. My wife had worked at the Hermitage and she could well be "added" to those deported.

The cold, rainy June passed, then the clear and warm July and August had begun. Not more than a month was left suitable for work in those northern regions where the snow usually comes early in September and stays on the mountains until the next summer. My colleagues at the *Ribprom* were not encouraging. "You won't go anywhere," insisted some of them. "The authorities always have wild ideas! Besides, such a trip depends largely upon the ISO. If the ISO considers you a 'special' prisoner or suspects that you intend to escape you won't be allowed to leave Kem no matter what your chief does."

"No," said others, "that isn't it. The ISO may have nothing against you, but there hasn't been time enough to test you — you've just come. In this camp attempts to escape are generally made during the first year and at the earliest opportunity. The first assignment is usually given to some place nearby where supervision is good. If the prisoner's behavior is satisfactory then he may be sent to a more distant point."

I decided to try for such an assignment — to a station 20 kilometers from Kem where salmon was treated, in the village of Podujemie and reached by the Kem-Ukhtin highway leading to the Finnish frontier. Several villages are located along this highway with a regular line of communication maintained between them by trucks. The highway was patrolled by camp Gepeists and frontier guards. The distance to the Finnish border was 250 kilometers.

The authorities risked nothing by letting me go in this direction. To assure the ISO that I had no thought of es-

caping I was telling everybody that my wife was in prison and that I had left behind in Leningrad a twelve year old son, whose letters to me — the only ones I received — passed through the hands of the ISO. If I escaped alone, my dear ones would be left to their mercy.

Salmon was brought daily from Podujemie by truck to Kem for sorting and packing in salt or ice — destined for “ presents ” or for export to England through the *Gastorg*. The experts who treated it complained that the percentage of defective fish from Podujemie was very high. I inspected the loads for several days, determined that this high percentage was due to incorrect and careless killing and handling of the fish, and prepared a report suggesting a new method of killing the salmon.

Simankoff as a former fisherman became interested.

“ Send me to Podujemie,” I offered. “ I will demonstrate the new method to the fishermen and will teach them how it should be done. Your salters can then give their opinion about fish killed in this way and I guarantee that none will be defective.”

He approved my proposal and two days later my mission was officially arranged for. The ISO let me go. Another tiny step forward towards my goal.

On a beautiful summer evening — August 10th — I sat beside the chauffeur of a Ford truck going from Kem to the west. At our right was the railroad line — cutting off the coast zone — a magic barrier which held me in captivity. I would have to cross it some day. To the east of it — towns, villages, barbed wire entanglements and guards; to the west — a wild forest, swamps, lakes, with few settlements and scattered lumber camps.

The Kem-Ukhtin highway is built through the forest above the left bank of the river Kem, one of the most tragic enterprises ever undertaken and carried out by the GPU. The natives said that the whole 300 kilometers were paved

with human bones. Like everything in Sovietland not meant for display, it was in bad condition; the car swayed and rocked, the bridges were already unsafe. The chauffeur had a watch (a thing forbidden to ordinary prisoners because it might serve as a compass) and by the sign posts we estimated our speed at 30 kilometers an hour. "Ten hours to reach the frontier!" flashed through my mind. But I learned from the chauffeur that fuel was issued under rigid control, and not more than enough to reach the destination.

The sun was low and gilded the trunks of trees and the open spaces of the coast. I thought of my wife in a solitary cell at the Shpalernaya with its foul air and prison stench. I felt ashamed of breathing the fresh forest air, of looking at the beautiful woodlands.

At Podujemie we found one GPU guard and one prisoner, who received the salmon from local fishermen and sent it to Kem. The prisoner's room, hired by the GPU, in a peasant house, served also as an office where fishermen were paid. Before his arrest the prisoner had worked for the GPU as an informer, but for talking too much had been deported for ten years. Nevertheless, to the GPU he was one of "themselves" and so I found myself in the hands of two trustworthy guards. I had to spend the long summer evening with them and gather information, very cautiously, about escapes, while pretending to be interested in something else.

Escapes of criminals no longer interested me as they had when I was in prison. The criminal risks little, — a beating at the time of capture, a month in the isolator or an increase in term of sentence. The political prisoner, however, risks everything. Capture means first a terrible beating, then the isolator, tortures to force a confession of accomplices who never existed and then — a bullet in the back of the head.

The political prisoner, therefore, made his attempt only

after preparing for it in every possible way, while the criminal escaped at the first convenient opportunity. The guards did not take the escape of criminals very seriously and did not exert much effort in pursuing them: they would be caught when they came out to the railroad or reached a town. But for the pursuit of political prisoners posses would be organized at once: sometimes all neighboring villages would be mobilized and the frontier guard called to assist. The political prisoner always tried to escape abroad — in his fatherland he had no refuge.

This is what I learned from my guards; it was not encouraging. Attempts to escape were frequent here but seldom successful. The fugitives were always tempted to follow the highway, but this was fatal. It was guarded and all settlements along it were connected by telephone and telegraph with Kem. If the fugitive kept to the forest parallel to the highway the guard could easily get ahead of him and bar the way in places well known to them where swamps, lakes and rivers were impassable. Besides, through the woods, the 300 kilometers to the frontier would be increased to 450 and would take more than two weeks; obtaining and carrying a sufficient quantity of food for such a long time was impossible. Hunger would force the fugitive to come out to a village — where he would meet the Karelian peasants.

These peasants were the chief danger to be encountered. To them the hunting of fugitives was a sport — with a bounty of one bag of flour for every capture. It was rumored that every peasant in Podujemie and the other villages along the highway had received this bounty at least once and some had been rewarded several times.

The escape discovered, all the neighboring country was notified and everyone came out for the hunt. The pursuers were well fed, well shod, armed and familiar with the countryside; the fugitive was hungry, weakened by life

in prison and in camp, poorly shod and wandering in a strange forest. Nevertheless it was difficult to find him there, but after a while, at the end of his strength, he would come out in search of something to eat.

“Here live human beings,” he would think, “is it possible that they would give me away to torture and death?”

He would be greeted with friendliness and pity, seated at the table, fed; provisions would be prepared for him, he would be urged to stay longer and rest, and while the housewife would be regaling him her little boy would run out to fetch the guard.

Only the other day, my guards told me, the townspeople had caught a young peasant who had escaped from the Solovetzki camp. He had entered one of the houses on the outskirts of the village and had asked for bread. It was given to him and he had returned to the forest, only to fall into a trap. He began running but was struck down by two bullets, brought to the village and locked up in a barn. But he was a man of tremendous strength and during the night, in spite of his wounds, he broke down the door and made his way out. The escape was soon discovered, dogs were set on his trail, he was overtaken, badly beaten, bound and again brought back to the village. It was decided to lock him up in a bathhouse, but as soon as his hands were unbound he attacked his torturers, badly injuring two of them. In the meantime the GPU guard had arrived. The fugitive was overpowered and hung up to the ceiling by his legs. Blood was running from his mouth, he could hardly breathe and begged to be taken down. It was done only after he had lost consciousness — fugitives were supposed to be brought back to camp alive. As soon as he regained consciousness, he jumped to his feet, picked up a stone from the stove and hurled it with such force at the guard that it fractured his chest bone. Again he was beaten,

bound, and tied behind a cart which at once started for Kem. When he fell the horse would drag him along the road and the guards would kick him. They dragged him for three or four kilometers — then stopped. The fugitive was dead.

This fearful story, like others similar to it, was narrated calmly by my companions to whom the technical details of the case were absorbing — how the fugitive was caught, how he was beaten, but it never seemed to occur to them that he was a human being. He was only the object of the hunt, who gave them a chance to win a bag of flour and who made an impression on them by his obstinate unwillingness to die.

Next day I carried out my experiments successfully. The fishermen seemed to be interested, but after talking with them and seeing them work, I became convinced that they would not use my method. The reason for this lay in the fact that defective salmon was not officially "bought" from them and was left for their own use, while all good fish had to be turned in to the *Ribprom* at a fixed price. For the best quality salmon they were paid from 70 kopeks to 1 rouble the kilo, whereas for the defective fish, sold secretly, they could get from 10 to 15 roubles the kilo.

I was brought back to Kem by the same truck late in the evening and immediately went to sleep in my bunk. In a few minutes I was awakened. In the passage stood the assistant foreman with some kind of book in his hands.

What did it mean? Was I being sent away somewhere? To the punitive cell? All prisoners have such thoughts when unexpectedly called out.

"Sign for a telegram."

Hardly controlling my excitement I wrote down my name and took the telegram. What could have happened?

"*Returned safely home,*" signed by my wife.

There was still happiness in the U.S.S.R.



The first minute I felt only joy and tremendous relief. She has come out of the prison — the dream of every prisoner — she has seen our son. The boy is no longer alone.

The telegram had been sent August 10th, the day I had for the first time left the camp — it was a good omen.

All my plans of escape now changed and became more simple. My wife and son were free. It was imperative to see them, but according to camp regulations visits are not allowed, under the most favorable circumstances, sooner than six months after the prisoner's arrival at the camp. I could not hope to see my family before November 2nd and then it would be winter. This meant that the escape had to be put off until 1932, but then we could escape together.

I did not sleep all night. Thoughts about the escape filled my brain. The terrible crowding, the stench, dirt and stuffiness, even the bed bugs, I did not notice. From that moment I lived intensively with only this one thought — escape. The convict's life went on like a dream. What difference did it make how this accursed time dragged on. There was so much I had to do! Above all, I must regain my strength and train myself in walking and rowing. I must also complete my prospective trip to the north before November and return to Kem for the interview with my wife. Then we could talk over the escape.

The next day I wrote a report. The *Ribprom* salters approved the salmon I had prepared. From the authorities I got neither commendation nor reproof. According to my colleagues, this was a good sign.

Two days later the Assistant Chief, Kolossoff, sent for me.

"How are preparations for your expedition proceeding?" he asked, pronouncing the word "expedition" with a sarcastic inflection.

"I have prepared everything I could. I can start at any time."

“From what point do you intend to begin your survey?”

I had a strong desire to say “from the north,” but I shrugged my shoulders and said in an indifferent voice: “It makes no difference; I can begin either from the south or the north.”

“The south region is of more interest to us. Begin from there. Make a detailed report to the Chief of the Section; he is going to send for you. Be ready to leave.”

This was bad for me. How could I get around them? The Chief and his assistants were always in disagreement — could I not make use of this?

When Simankoff summoned me, I ended my report with the following words:

“Your assistant gave me the order to begin the survey from the southern region.”

“Nonsense, you will go to the north. You are to start tomorrow for Kandalaksha.”

Luck was smiling on me.

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## CHAPTER XLIII

### I GO EXPLORING

**B**EFORE starting I had to spend two days collecting documents and certificates as follows: (1) a military railroad ticket given me by order of the GPU; (2) a certificate authorizing me to wear civilian clothes (which would otherwise be a crime); (3) a certificate written rather curtly: "The ichthyologist, prisoner Tchernavin, is despatched to the Northern Section for survey work for 10 days;" (4) detailed instructions written by me on *Ribprom* paper and signed by Simankoff, providing for a two months' trip by row-boat. The contradiction in these last two documents was obvious. Camp rules prohibited the issuing of such a certificate for more than ten days, after which, if necessary it might be extended on the spot, after telegraphic communication with Kem. In any locality the chief of the guard could detain and return me under guard, if I was under suspicion or made an unfavorable impression. Finally the chief of the Northern Region in Kandalaksha had the power to prevent me from going any farther, so I carried with me from Simankoff a paper in which the latter evidently explained in his own way why I should be allowed to proceed on my travels.

My equipment for work was not very complete: a small drawing compass of Soviet make and of such poor quality it was impossible to measure anything with it, two iron boxes for the collection of fish and a kilo of formalin. Be-

sides these I had obtained, through "protection," a ruler with a scale and a couple of test tubes — to convince the guards that my work was both serious and scientific. As a means of catching fish for specimens and food I was given a small draw-net.

I boarded the train for Kandalaksha at the very last moment. The car was overcrowded. Most of the passengers were peasants, largely from the Ukraine and Northern Caucasus, with their wives and children and carrying their nondescript household goods in bags and small home-made trunks. They were dressed in worn-out homespun clothes, patched and torn. On their feet they wore bast shoes (*lapti*). The local fishermen looked at such footwear with curiosity; they had only seen it worn by prisoners. The children of the travellers were dirty, thin, pale and practically naked. This peasant crowd that filled the trains came from the North Caucasus and the Ukraine and, after being held up for days at dirty stations, were on their way to Karelia in search of bread. The proximity of abundant Finland and the difficulty of guarding this extensive frontier forced the Soviet authorities to give a larger bread ration in Karelia in order to prevent a mass escape of Karelians into Finland. The confiscation of the *kulak's* property was also carried on here with greater caution. Rumors about these regions of "plentiful" bread spread speedily over the U.S.S.R. and the peasants who had lost their all, where formerly there had been abundance, dragged themselves to this region of stones and swamps and withered trees, hoping to be fed by the rations given out by the State.

Many of them were contract laborers. There is so great a shortage of labor for the great "constructions," such as the chemical works of Kandalaksha, the electric power plant at Kniaje Bay and others, that these enterprises had to send out labor recruiting agents who were promising a kilo of bread a day and high boots. The hungry barefoot

peasants agreed to go anywhere for these things, but once in the north, suffering from the cold and finding themselves in freezing, lice-infected barracks, they would begin to creep homeward. They had received, in general, not even the much-desired boots, while all their papers had been taken from them by the recruiting agents. Having no money to pay for their return fare they became tramps, often barefooted and in rags, walking from station to station in search of food. In the official Soviet language this was called "the fluidity of labor." One should witness the depth of misery of this "labor" in order to understand the reason for its "fluidity."

The crowding, the filth, the crying of hungry children in the car was trying even to me—a convict. I went out on the platform and spoke to a thin peasant dressed in rags. He coughed continuously, his face was green and his eyes were sunken. Unquestionably he was in the last stages of tuberculosis. He had spent three months at his former job, but had been cheated at the pay-off and so had started off to find another. His wife had died and he was dragging with him five children, all hungry, dirty and sick.

"I worked for the GPU. I built a house for them at the frontier and there I was cheated out of my pay," he began.

"Where did you build that house?" I asked.

"Oh, about fifty miles straight west from station X."

"Was it a large house?"

"For about fifteen guards."

"Were you pretty well fed?"

"Well, they eat well themselves, but they fed us worse than their dogs."

"Do they keep many dogs there?"

"Three dogs. Believe me, my dear man, those guards have everything. They make *kasha* every day and eat it with butter. Their cabbage soup is made with meat, and there's so much bread they can't eat it up. And what easy

work they have! A beat of 15 kilometers and they patrol it in pairs. When two return two others start out. Mostly they lie around listening to the radio. And then," he added, laughing sardonically, "they don't like to go in the woods. They're afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Just imagine, there are two of them, each with a rifle and still they are afraid. It is said that there are escaped convicts there who will lie in wait for them and kill them."

"Do they take the dogs with them?"

"No, I never saw them taking dogs. Perhaps the dogs are not trained."

And so I accidentally learned the location of a new frontier post in a region important to me.

I had travelled often on the Murmansk railway and both scenery and stations were familiar to me, but now I looked at everything with new eyes. Some day I would plod along with a stick and a bundle: a beggar, a runaway convict, but free and no longer a slave of the GPU.

About 15 kilometers before reaching Kandalaksha the lay of the land was of particular interest to me. Here the railway goes around the northwesterly corner of Kandalaksha Bay, cutting off a deep fiord of this bay which extends westerly for about 20 kilometers. If I could begin the escape by boat up this fiord not only would I save 20 kilometers of walking, but pursuit would be made more difficult since the dogs would have no scent to follow.

Engrossed in these thoughts I did not notice that we had arrived in Kandalaksha. On the platform I met the searching gaze of guards, both in uniform and plain clothes, on duty in the station. I found myself in a place well known to me because of former expeditions to the White Sea. Below me, along the bay on both shores of the turbulent river Niva was spread the old fishing village. The sea was calling me, but I had to go up a hill about a kilometer

to the north where one could see barbed wire, watch towers and barracks. At the gate I was stopped by a sentry who verified my papers and examined all my belongings, even searching my pockets. In the commandant's office my documents were again scrutinized and my bags searched.

Until the spring of 1931 Kandalaksha had been the center of the northerly section of the lumber business of the Solovetzki camp around which a number of stations were grouped. Now the barracks were practically empty. I had to await further formalities, with nothing else to do but spend the whole day wandering about the enclosure and looking at the mountains and the bay spread below me. Far beyond Kanda Bay, which I had tentatively selected as the starting point for my escape, rose the naked summit of Gremiakha with the purple silhouettes of other mountains fading into the west. How far away were they? Perhaps 50 or 60 kilometers—and still the frontier was beyond them. Selecting one of the highest peaks I determined, with the help of a clock hanging in the commandant's office, the direction of the line joining Gremiakha and that distant peak. This might be useful to me if I should have to escape without watch and compass. Gremiakha once reached, I would scale its peak and choose another peak on the horizon to the west as the next point to aim for.

On the third day I received permission to go to the village for an inspection of the pier and the transshipping facilities for fish products. I was searched both when I went out and when I returned to the camp. On my pass the time of my departure and return were noted. I was allowed three hours, no more; if I overstayed this time any guard could arrest me. What strange conditions for research work, when the GPU loves to boast that specialist-prisoners are always employed along professional lines!

A week passed before the chief of the Northern Region decided to sign my permit for inspection of the *Ribprom*

establishments. Again I was searched, put into a skiff of the GPU and taken across the bay to the nearest *Ribprom* station known as "Palkin Bay," on a wooded promontory on the Karelian or westerly side of Kandalaksha Bay, not far from Palkin Bay which runs inland a considerable distance. Here fifty prisoners live in one log barracks. Barbed wire and watch towers were lacking and there were only two guards to check up on the prisoners morning and evening and to organize pursuit in case of an escape.

The chief means of preventing escape at such camps was a detective system among the prisoners themselves by which the necessary preparations were discovered; the prisoner usually gave himself away by saving provisions or by an unguarded word. Moreover a system of mutual responsibility had been introduced recently; if, on a fishing ground, one prisoner escaped, the others were considered as accomplices.

To me these conditions were novel and strange — to be surrounded, not by barbed wire, but by the forest and the sea. Boats lay on the shore. Had it not been for my wife and son I might have yielded to temptation and escaped on the first day of my arrival.

Next morning I decided to test the force and weight of my documents and my degree of freedom. I went to the guard highest in rank, showed him my instructions, on which were several seals, and told him that according to my orders I would begin my investigations on the following morning at seven and would not return until eight or nine in the evening. I talked to him for an hour about the usefulness of science and the enormous practical significance of my investigations. He asked several questions which showed that he was properly impressed by my learning, among them why a blackberry ripened before a bilberry, although they grew next each other.

"What do you think?" I answered quite seriously. "Comrade Lenin at ten years old was clever enough to



govern a country, while some other chap even at fifteen doesn't know how to care for a pig. It's the same with berries. They don't come alike." And I suggested that he try brewing a "tea" by cooking the berries together and adding sugar. This pleased him immensely; he would try it the next morning — and I could go into the woods for the whole day.

I took a basket with me on the following morning, carrying my test tubes for the benefit of the guards so that they might know my intentions were serious and scientific. Entering the forest I followed a path along the shore, wondering whether I was being followed. In a thicket I circled and came back upon my trail to inspect the footprints, but found only my own. I went on in peace, enjoying the quiet of the forest. Soon my basket became filled with the caps of edible mushrooms. Several times I startled woodcocks, black-cocks and partridges feeding on berries. I was so overwhelmed with this freedom, the joy of being alone, that time, fatigue and hunger passed unnoticed, though my strength had been severely undermined by prison and camp régime.

The sun was in the southwest when I came to rest beside a noisy brook and decided to eat some berries. The forest was extremely beautiful; through the trees shone the waters of the bay and I could hear the roar of the surf. I could have gone on through the woods to the purple mountains in the west, but like an obedient slave I "had" to return.

I went back in a roundabout way in order to study the country. I scaled a mountainside and climbed its highest tree. The bay of Kandalaksha lay before me like a map. In the west rose my guidepost, Gremiakha.

For five days I lived at Palkin Bay, taking walks every day. I often met local peasants going out to the fishing grounds, waiting for the run of herring. At every oppor-

tunity I approached them and made inquiries. Near Prolif, where the railway passed, I found an old man.

"Tell me, grandfather," I asked, "I suppose before the railway was built the salmon used to run up Kanda Bay?"

"Why shouldn't it have run up there?" he replied. "At the very head of the bay the river Kanda flows in. See," and he pointed to Gremiakha, "on one side of it flows a river called Kanda and on the other a brook called Gremiakha, too. There are also other brooks coming down and the salmon went there for fresh water — lots of salmon until the causeway was built. Now it cannot get through. They left an opening under the bridge, but at low tide you can't get through even in a rowboat. The salmon tries, however, but few succeed."

"Where does it spawn?"

"In the Kanda. It goes up the turbulent water into the rapids."

"Is it far to the lake?"

"Well, about forty *versts*<sup>1</sup> from the head of the bay, keeping to the northwest of Gremiakha. From there to the Finnish frontier it is about fifty *versts*."

"It must be hard to go through the forest carrying provisions," I remarked.

"We're used to it. There is a path there. We start at daybreak, rest and eat at noon, and before the sun reaches the north we are there. Sometimes we carry more than forty pounds on our backs."

"It must be hard walking. Aren't there marshes?" I inquired cautiously.

"You've spoken truly, there are soft places, very soft to step on."

"Tell me, grandfather, is it by that path that they carted guns from Finland during the war?" I asked, remembering an old story.

<sup>1</sup> A Russian measure of length equal to about two-thirds of a mile.

“ Oh! you’re all mixed up. It wasn’t by this path, but by a winter lumbering trail on our side of the frontier about forty *versts* along that lumber trail — only Finns live there. Also there’s a frontier outpost.”

“ And what are they watching for, grandfather?” I smiled.

“ How do we know? I suppose they try to catch smugglers and runaway convicts. There are about fifteen men there.”

“ Is it possible that convicts wander there?”

“ We don’t know, maybe they do. How could we know? Since lumbering stopped, there are few convicts hereabouts.”

My inquiry proceeded slowly, but the information collected was reliable and most valuable to me. I had learned from him the location of a second frontier guard post and now knew I had to beware of a path which was short and clear, but dangerous.

Since the idea of starting my escape by boat had got firm hold of me, I decided to investigate the passage under the railroad bridge. I took a boat from the fishing point, pretending to make soundings, spent a whole day on the water, and arrived at the conclusion that for an escape it would be necessary to have a boat on the inner side of the bridge.

I could not get permission to continue my expedition alone and had to stay on at Palkin Bay until a suitable companion was found for me. Thus I was able to make a detailed study of its surroundings. I could now find my way to any place within a radius of 15 kilometers either by day or by night. About more distant places I gleaned everything known to the local peasants. In order to systematize all this information I drew maps, which I memorized and then destroyed. I came to the definite conclusion that this region would be favorable for escape. But how to get my wife and son across the border was a hard problem.

The thought came to me that it might be possible to

organize a joint escape. The more I thought of it the more it appealed to me. My plan would not have to be changed; it would only be necessary to arrange the time and place of meeting. Success would be more likely if I could escape directly from this region and therefore I must invent something to interest the *Ribprom* so that it would send me where I desired. I must find pretext for such an assignment during my present investigations. Time was flying; it was the end of August; frosts would begin in September.

At length my companion arrived — a young university graduate who had been sentenced for three years. His term was nearly up. At home he had a wife and two small children. He brought with him a pile of documents and also an extension of my permit. On the following day we were given an old rowboat with four oars and a small primitive sail.

It is impossible here to describe this unique voyage of exploration; two convicts in an open boat, dressed in primitive clothing, without compass or any other instruments, travelling in the autumn on the White Sea, north of the Arctic Circle, without a tent or even a piece of canvas for protection against the rain. When we arrived at some camp point all depended upon the temper of the guard. At times we would find ourselves in strict solitary confinement. At other times, when overtaken by storms, we would spend several nights in the woods like the freest tramps in the world. We suffered often from hunger, we were always soaking wet and many a time, after a night in the forest, our clothes would be coated with ice. There were good days, too, when we caught fish in abundance and feasted before the fire, devouring fat autumn herring and rosy-meated trout. Mushrooms and berries also provided some sustenance.

Our boat leaked, and twice we were caught by a fresh off-shore wind and only succeeded in reaching the shore

after a terrific struggle. Nevertheless, we travelled five hundred kilometers, sounded the fishing grounds off shore and made a description of fourteen *Ribprom* points. We also discovered several new species of fish not yet reported from the White Sea and, what was of far greater importance to me, made observations on the basis of which I would be able to suggest to the *Ribprom* the advisability of a new enterprise here, which would give me the chance of carrying out my plan of escape.

The second of November I returned to Kem. There I found a letter from my wife — she had decided to come north and attempt to see me. I knew this would be difficult, but my trip had made a good impression, not so much on account of my official observations as because of the five hundred kilometers in a row-boat. My weather-beaten face, overgrown with a wild beard, my clothes and shoes in a state of complete disintegration, produced an effect upon the chief of the *Ribprom*. He was impressed also by my notebook with its daily entries of our activities, plans showing the location of all fishing grounds and *Ribprom* points with sketches of buildings and structures. It was a real guidebook to the region. He could not hide his pleasure, and I decided to take advantage of it by presenting to him a previously written request for a "personal visit" from my wife and son. I was not mistaken, my chiefs were pleased and they granted my request for a visit of five days.

My wife came with our son. I shall not describe our meeting since my wife has done that in her book.<sup>2</sup> We determined to escape together and tentatively made our plan for the end of the following summer. We also decided upon both the location from which we had to start and the exact meeting-place. My wife and son were to reach it on a day

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<sup>2</sup> "Escape from the Soviets" by Tatiana Tchernavin; New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1934.

to be agreed upon; I should then escape, meet them there and lead them to the frontier. We arranged a code for our letters, all of which were read by the censor of the GPU.

The five days passed and they departed. I was still a prisoner, but with one solemn purpose during the seven months to come: to live, in order that we might be free — or, if necessary, die — together.

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## CHAPTER XLIV

### SOLD: ONE CONVICT

**F**ORTUNE was still smiling on me in the concentration camp. Not only had I been allowed to work at my specialty, but I had made a long trip away from barbed wire, and had seen my wife and boy after only six months of service as a convict. Now came another stroke of luck; I was "sold" (to use a word commonly accepted by the prisoners as descriptive of this practice of the GPU) for three months.

The sale of specialists, widely practiced in concentration camps during the period 1928-1930, was discontinued in 1931, apparently because of an order from the "Centre," due to a campaign abroad against forced labor in the U.S.S.R. During my stay at the concentration camp in 1931 and 1932 the sales of specialists were very rare; I heard of only three: the first, a lawyer sold as legal adviser to one of the state institutions in Petrozavodsk; the second, K., another specialist in fish culture; the third — myself.

I had just finished working up the materials collected on my trip and writing a report of my survey, when the head of the *Ribprom* sent for me. He explained that the Section of Public Education of the Kem Executive Committee was organizing a three months' course for responsible administrators of fishermen's collective fisheries. Everything was ready, the money appropriated and suitable premises provided (it was found out later that they consisted of only one unheated room); even such a complicated problem as



THE AUTHOR — 1934

*“In the ‘freedom’ of  
my native land, there  
was no place for me”*

From a photograph taken in Finland



the feeding of the students had been successfully solved. There were thirty-five students, all professional fishermen, sent from all over Karelia by their local Soviets. A lecturer on political subjects was available, but there was one serious flaw — there were no lecturers on the main subject of the course — fishing. Simankoff had a prospectus announcing the following special courses: (1) The elements of hydrology in the Barents and White Seas; (2) The ichthyofauna of these basins; (3) The hunting of sea-animals; (4) New technique of fishing, unknown to local fishermen; (5) The elementary preparation of fish products and the organization of fishery enterprises.

All attempts of the Executive Committee to find a lecturer on these special subjects had been unsuccessful. In a week's time the students were to arrive and there was no one to teach them. Consequently the Executive Committee had come to an agreement with the administration of the camp to supply some imprisoned specialists. Simankoff was asked to select them; he chose a learned specialist, K., serving a sentence of ten years as a "wrecker," and me. K. is well known in Russia as an excellent lecturer and the author of a book on fish products which had gone through several editions and had been re-edited by the State Publishing Bureau while the author was in prison camp. I was to give the first three of the courses and K. the last two.

The agreement of "sale" was carefully scrutinized both by the representative of the Executive Committee and by the legal adviser of the *Ribprom*, Zelemanoff, formerly assistant prosecuting attorney of the Leningrad district. It was drafted with all the customary refinements of legal phraseology and naturally it was of great interest to me when I discussed its details with Zelemanoff. Some of the salient points were as follows:

*"Kem — December 1931."*

*"The Administration of the Solovetzki-Kem Correctional Labor Camps, which hereinafter will be designated as USLAG, on the one hand, and the Section of Public Education of the Central Executive Committee of the Town of Kem, hereinafter referred to as ONO, have agreed as follows:"* So began this remarkable document, and then for two pages followed its various sections:

*". . . USLAG places at the disposal of ONO two professors, the prisoners K., and Tchernavin, who have had considerable pedagogic experience, for the purpose of delivering a series of courses (list follows)."*

*". . . USLAG reserves the right to recall either of the above-mentioned prisoners at any moment and without any warning, but is bound to replace them by other prisoners of similar qualifications."*

*". . . ONO agrees to pay USLAG five roubles for every lecture hour" . . .* here followed the enumeration of the number of hours, dates of payment and so on.

It will appear strange, no doubt, that K. and I were delighted with the deal and that all the prisoners, including those specialists who worked in the administration of the camp and had good "protection," looked upon us with envy. We had been sold to a good master. What could be better for a prisoner, how could he dream of a better fate?

We moved from a dirty, cold barracks to a hotel in the town of Kem. A room was given to us two, alone. Each had a bed. There were two real chairs instead of stools or benches — and books. In addition we had a small table and even a mirror hung on the wall. To cap the climax, we were given a key so that we ourselves might lock our room — we who were accustomed to being locked in by others. Moreover, the Executive Committee bound itself to feed

us and we were given a dinner in the students' lunchroom, where, though the food was bad, we sat at a table and ate from plates.

To me the sale was of great importance; for three months I would live under more or less decent conditions and be able to rest and gather strength. Ahead of me was the organization of flight and the escape itself, in which the possession of physical strength, with steadiness of nerves, was a deciding factor.

Certainly there was plenty of work here. To lecture on such diversified and special subjects to such a group of students was no easy task in itself. Furthermore, while my pupils had little education and some could barely read or write, all had had excellent practical training, knew their sea, their fish and their fishing as only human beings can who have spent their whole life at this work. A slight error by the lecturer would be noticed immediately by such listeners and would never be forgiven. Besides, half of my students were Communists, endowed with a great amount of self-conceit, who had gathered bits of information and many slogans, the meaning of which they did not understand. I had come across such students in my work; they had done experimental work in my laboratory, refusing to study but criticizing my methods of teaching in subjects of which they had not even the vaguest notion. In my former position I could cope with them, but now, being a prisoner, a branded "counter-revolutionist," a "wrecker," how could I handle them?

These thoughts were most disturbing as I went in for my opening lecture. After the first hour, however, I found my fears unfounded. My students were peasant-fishermen, totally different from the workmen I had known in Murmansk who had only drifted into the fisheries, and from the Communist students, who had become ichthyologists because they had been designated to that branch by the Com-

munist committee of the university. The men whom I was now teaching had grown up to be fishermen like their fathers and grandfathers before them, loved the work, and were interested in everything that concerned it. Immediately I found that we spoke a common language and that the oldest and most illiterate as well as the boisterous young ones, spoiled by Communist propaganda, listened to me attentively, trying not to lose a single word. At first I avoided certain topics of hydrology which I thought would be tiresome and incomprehensible to them. Soon I found that these questions interested them. In explaining to them the properties of both salt and fresh water I pointed out that their freezing points were different. To my great surprise the whole class was extremely impressed by this fact.

"Now we understand why the water from the melted snow freezes while we are making holes in the salt water ice," some commented.

My remarks, full of technicalities, about currents, the rise and fall of the tide and the history of the White Sea, were listened to with the greatest interest. My course on ichthyology, however, interested them most of all. They asked pointed questions concerning their personal observations on the lives and characteristics of fishes and asked for help on certain complicated biological problems which they could not solve themselves. They were much pleased when I used the blackboard. I drew from memory a map of the White and Barents Seas and each of them tried to find on it the islands and bays where he had fished. They were particularly impressed with my drawings of fish.

"Look at that! The cod is just as though it were alive."

"Look at this salmon! You see its shape has changed; it has swallowed fresh water."

After class they plied me with questions they were too timid to ask during the lecture and some of them wrote

me extensive notes upon the subjects which interested them.

The work with these fishermen was a real pleasure. Their attitude was particularly attentive and courteous. To them I was a convict and a counter-revolutionist, but I never heard a single reference to my status; on the contrary they always emphasized their goodwill towards me.

I was convinced that such contact with fishermen who later would become managers of State fisheries was the best kind of influence against the Soviet persecution of specialists and intelligentsia and also against the system of the GPU with its so-called justice. I believe that the majority of my students now know of my escape and are in sympathy with me.

At the end of the course an examination was held in the presence of the members of the Executive Committee. The examination was a triumph for us. The only member of the examining committee who could appreciate the answers and judge how much had been learned was a woman who headed the section of public education and had spent two years in a university. The others could understand nothing, but were greatly impressed by the fishermen's answers.

The students and the representatives of the Executive Committee thanked us and shook hands. All that was lacking was a Soviet journalist to describe the touching scene of the reformation and reëducation of two counter-revolutionists (K. and myself) accomplished by the GPU.

Once again we had to reënter the barbed wire enclosure. April was already at hand. The *Ribprom* had been reorganized and transferred from Kem to the village of Soroka, about sixty kilometers to the south. The day following the examination we were sent there.

The Executive Committee paid the *Ribprom* the full

contract price on time. According to the camp regulations the GPU had to pay ten per cent of the money earned to the prisoners and we should each have received fifty kopeks for every hour of lecturing.

We never received a kopek.

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## CHAPTER XLV

### I PREPARE FOR ESCAPE

**B**EFORE me now lay the task of concentrating upon some one of several projects for new enterprises in the *Ribprom* which would assure me of work in the north at a propitious time and thus give me an opportunity to escape by the route I had chosen.

I did not bother much about the technical side of these projects, but concerned myself with the impression they might make on the GPU — the quintessence of Bolshevism. In order to be successful all my projects had to be framed with a view to the peculiar psychology of those who were to examine them and the technical side was of minor importance.

I was convinced that the GPU would search for some hidden purpose on my part — the desire to escape. I wanted to be sent north, to a sparsely inhabited region relatively near the frontier. This would naturally arouse suspicion; therefore I worked out schemes for the whole year, providing work in the north, the south and also in the open sea. I counted upon the GPU failing to notice that among these I had included one which would allow me to be at the place I had chosen for escape and at the proper time. This ruse succeeded to perfection.

I had already developed six new projects, as follows: (1) Mussels; (2) Lamprey fishing, not yet developed in the White Sea; (3) Salmon fishing in the open sea; (4)

Deep sea fishing at great depths; (5) Shark fisheries and (6) The catching of stickleback for the production of fish-meal and fat.

These I described in the most approved Soviet manner. For instance I chose as the heading for Number (1): "Employment of mussels as an essential food diet." This would sound familiar and satisfactory to the bureaucratic ear of the GPU. I began my exposition from the historical standpoint: Mussels had been brought alive to the court of Catherine II and had, with difficulty, been transported in carts all the way from Murmansk to Petersburg. Then I stated their albumen and fat content and caloric value. The Bolsheviks like to use words they don't understand — no project can succeed without such words.

The next step was to make an "orientative estimate of the raw product" — also a requisite of every project. In capitalistic countries fisheries are organized without first calculating how many fish there are in the ocean, — not so in the U.S.S.R. where there is "planned economy," and where they are afraid of catching less than might be caught. Such a "non-appreciation of opportunities" would be very dangerous. The investigator in the U.S.S.R. finds no difficulty in estimating natural wealth on land, on sea or under the earth. He takes a square meter in a given area where the plant or animal in question is found, counts the number of these plants or animals in that square meter and then multiplies it by the total number of square meters in the whole area. The resulting figure is usually very impressive in its magnitude!

After such a "scientific" determination of natural wealth one can proceed with the planning of any kind of production; he can calculate the cost of a product, the benefits that will accrue to the citizens of the U.S.S.R., making them happier and more prosperous.

To project Number (6) — the manufacture of fish-meal



from sticklebacks, — I gave particular attention because I planned to use it as the springboard for my escape. As a matter of fact this project had a real foundation and might have been successfully carried out to yield a profit.

The stickleback is a small fish not more than 9 centimeters long, with sharp spikes on its fins. It is widely distributed and lives in both fresh and salt water. In the White Sea it appears in large quantities, but is considered harmful because when caught in nets it prevents the catching of other fish. My idea was to use it for making fish-meal, as fodder for cattle. An experiment which I had carried out gave 3% of oil and a very satisfactory quality of meal. I wrote a prospectus based on this information, entitled: "The solution of the feed problem in Karelia."

I submitted my projects to Simankoff. He looked at the voluminous material and threw it into a drawer. It was necessary to exert some pressure on him to force him to put my project on the road to realization. I decided to resort to the "public opinion" of the camp. Public opinion in the U.S.S.R. is represented by appointed officials of the state; the press is nothing more than the mouth-piece of these officials. Moreover all public organizations are closely allied with the GPU. In camp, public life was represented by KVO, the Cultural and Educational Department; in its hands was the mouth-piece of public opinion, a little newspaper called the "Work Path." I decided to use this — to make the newspaper and public organizations of the camp assist me in my escape.

While I was under "lease" in Kem I had often met a certain comrade Gruzd, the editor of the "Work Path." He was also a prisoner, still quite young; a Communist in the past and a newspaper man, he had been sent to the camp for swindling. Here he was in a privileged position, dressed well, lived outside the camp, drank heavily and consorted with prostitutes among the prisoners. I offered

him a series of short articles on the natural wealth of the White Sea. The first one I called "Mussels," which Gruzd printed under the more picturesque title "Delicacies of Catherine II at the service of the Proletariat."

Other articles on lamprey, shark and stickleback appeared and had great success. The chief of the camp himself gave favorable attention to the writings of the reformed counter-revolutionist. It appeared that he was very fond of fried lamprey which he was unable to find in Kem. The article on stickleback was favorably commented on by the agricultural section, which proposed that the *Ribprom* finance this enterprise.

Among the prisoners themselves some were critical and said knowingly: "We know what Tchernavin wants by his inventions — a reduction in his term." In order to make my chiefs believe that this was true, I presented my projects, through the office of the *Ribprom*, to the "Committee on Inventions," a stillborn institution which exists everywhere in Soviet Russia.

By these means I succeeded in my desire; Simankoff was obliged to start my projects moving. He sent for me and told me to make the necessary preparations for the production of stickleback meal and the fishing for lamprey. I proposed to carry out the catching of stickleback in the summer; the fishing for lamprey I put off till autumn; so I centered all my attention on the former and made only slight preparation for the latter. I was certain that September would find me either in Finland or — dead.

The stickleback gave me much trouble in the organization of its transformation into meal. I was well acquainted with the process but I had worked previously on a large scale with the help of complicated technical equipment, while now I had practically no equipment — four old cast-iron vats without covers, three kilograms of nails and one hundred old bags to be used for filters. The question of

living quarters for fishermen was not even raised as in camp life this was always the last consideration. We had to gather all the material on the spot. The lumber had to be picked up on the beach and the brick and iron collected from abandoned buildings. In other words, we were to steal everything we could not otherwise obtain; this is one of the firmly established methods of the GPU in building and construction work.

I was given ten fishermen for this work, and two specialists, all prisoners. Under my direction, they were to build the necessary equipment, catch the fish and prepare the fish-meal, and I was to be responsible for the success of the work. I was granted permission to organize for production in two places; in one I intended to produce fish-meal and therefore it must be near a fishing ground where I was sure to find enough stickleback; the other was chosen solely because it was near the point from which I intended to start my escape. This place was near Kandalaksha and is known as the "Narrows." Unfortunately, as far as I could learn, there were few stickleback near the Narrows, but I succeeded in locating plenty of them about 100 kilometers to the south of that point.

The preliminary work was greatly handicapped by the total lack of all necessary materials and also by the severity of the prison régime in Soroka. I expected every day to receive the order to start for the place of my work. At last the chief of the *Ribprom* called me and explained rather ambiguously that, because of the lack of success in the herring fishing along Onega Bay, the *Ribprom* had decided to fit out a ship to search for herring in the sea and that I was to command the expedition.

"But how about the stickleback? Is that all off?" I asked.

"Oh, that will get along without you, your assistant will manage."

In vain I tried to prove to him that the idea was mine,

that I should carry it out and be responsible for the results. I tried also to prove that I would be of no help in finding herring in Onega Bay since that region was entirely unknown to me. He insisted, saying that I would be gone for only a month and could then resume my work.

A month! I would miss the first run of stickleback on which I particularly counted. They would never prepare any meal without me; the *Ribprom* would be disappointed and would close up the whole business; I would never get to the north and would not be able to make my escape.

It was necessary to obey. Let them begin the work without me — perhaps the run of stickleback would be later than usual. Besides, I knew those *Ribprom* boats; it would be almost a miracle if one of them could stand the sea for a whole month. When I saw how our motor boat was equipped I was sure that something would happen to it. It had to tow eight large fishing dories and, with its 25-horsepower engine, would never be able to buck the first fresh sea — some dories would be lost, some sunk and we would have to return. This comforted me.

I will not describe our travels about Onega Bay. Twenty-five fishermen were housed with me in the cold, damp hold, which also contained the nets. Our food was dry bread; there were no facilities for cooking.

We found no herring. On the tenth day the wind rose and toward night blew up a storm. The motor began skipping and the boat made no headway against the wind. Finally the motor stopped. The dories battered against the boat, some capsized and sank. All night long we tossed about the bay. Towards morning we came into the lee of an island and found that the boat was so damaged it could not go on under its own power. I took a dinghy and rowed to the mainland 20 kilometers away where I telephoned from the nearest village to Soroka and asked for a tug.

So ended the herring expedition. Luckily enough several other ships had been damaged during that storm, so my Chief took the loss of some of the dories rather calmly. Simankoff, strangely enough, was in fine spirits.

"I'll have to send you to your stickleback," he said and ordered the office manager to prepare my travel orders to the north. "Tomorrow you must leave and now you may go to pack."

Everyone was so accustomed by now to my travels that it usually took but a few hours to prepare my papers. This time, however, it was different. A day passed and I was not called to the office, so I went there myself.

While I had been away on my trip, all the prisoners working in the *Ribprom* office had been changed. A criminal, a former Chekist was now office manager. When I asked for my papers he laughed ironically and said:

"They are not ready. Why are you so interested in your papers that you have come without being called?"

I answered that I was not interested in the papers, but in the work, and walked out. In the corridor I met Simankoff, who demanded: "Why haven't you left for your work?"

"The papers are not ready," I replied.

"Why not ready? Send me the office manager."

The new manager, coming back from the chief's office gave me a wicked look. Soon he was followed by the chief himself, who passed by my desk, pretending not to see me. Something had gone wrong.

That evening, in the barracks, a prisoner whom I hardly knew came up to me and said in a whisper: "The ISO doesn't want you to go. On your pass, which Simankoff had already signed, Zaleskantz, the ISO chief, wrote 'I do not endorse.' You are being watched. Do not go again to the office."

Had I betrayed myself? I carefully reviewed my past

year in the camp and my every step in preparing escape. I knew that I had not broken the first and fundamental rule; I had confided in no one, either directly or indirectly. I had received letters and packages from my wife regularly and had written once a month to her and my son. They had come to see me; the ISO could deduce from this that I was attached to my family and would not try to run away. Could our code have been discovered? No; it was so simple and naïve that it was entirely safe from detection, and besides if it had been found out I should have been immediately put into the "isolator."

I was no longer the timid prisoner of a year ago—looking in bewilderment and awe at the specialists who ran the camp's affairs. By now I well understood the undercurrents of the camp life. In Kem I could have arranged to stir up things against Zaleskantz through the "camp publicity," but here in Soroka it was impossible. My only hope was in Savitch, chief of the Administrative Department of the *Ribprom*, an able Chekist who, for some dark affair, had served his term at Solovki before rising to high positions both in the ISO and the fisheries. When he came to the quarters where specialists were working he always spoke in a loud, patronizing tone, telling remarkable stories about himself.

"Could I set him against Zaleskantz?" I wondered.

That very evening he came to our quarters and after talking to another man wandered over to me and said:

"How are your inventions? When do you leave? We are waiting for meal, sharks and broiled lamprey. What do you call those molluscs of yours?"

"Don't you know," I answered, "that Zaleskantz has cancelled all my work? He wrote with his own hand, 'I do not endorse' on my pass."

I knew it was a dangerous thing to say, because I was not supposed to know these details, but I took the chance—and made a direct hit. Savitch was aroused.

“That cannot be,” he said reservedly, “the ISO does not *decide* these questions, it only expresses its *opinion*. The man who decides is the chief of the *Ribprom*.” With this he turned and left.

In less than an hour I was called to the office. The manager handed me a paper and asked me frigidly to sign the receipt; the paper was a permit allowing me to go to the north for two weeks — signed by Savitch. I was glad of this, because when the time came for my escape — not during the next two weeks — I wanted to have a permit signed by Zaleskantz, whom I hated most of all.

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CHAPTER XLVI  
FREEDOM — OR DEATH

**I**T is hard to describe with what a feeling of relief I boarded the train which took me north the following day. Now I must show results, produce a large quantity of fish-meal and assure the interest of the *Ribprom* in my enterprise. What would happen if the run of stickleback did not come? There were still two months before I had planned to escape.

I decided to go to the point near the Black River where there were greater chances for a successful catch. I did not want to be continuously under the eyes of the guard at the "Narrows." On reaching the point I was greeted with good news: the stickleback was already offshore. The day before I arrived a ton of them had been caught. The vats were full and the drying oven working.

At three in the morning I left in a rowboat on a scouting trip. The weather was calm and clear. The fish could be easily observed through the transparent water. The stickleback was coming in from the sea in a ribbon-like stream and was thick along the entire shore. We worked day and night for there was continuous sunshine. Even with our small nets we could catch a ton in twenty minutes and we dried the boiled mass in the open air. I sent enthusiastic reports to the *Ribprom* as well as samples of the oil and meal.

For two weeks the work went on. The fish still hung



around the shores of the mainland and the islands in a solid mass. With factory facilities enough fish-meal could be produced in two or three weeks to feed all the cattle in Karelia for a whole winter.

On June 15th I returned to Soroka. My arrival was a real triumph. The Agricultural Section had already sent in excellent reports about the meal. I was told that the *Ribprom* would discuss the question of expanding the stickleback fisheries immediately and that there would soon be a special conference at which I had to be present. Meanwhile I had to stay in Soroka and wait.

I decided to waste no time in asking permission for my wife and son to come and see me again. My request was referred to Kem and the answer came back quickly. The Chief of Camp granted permission for a visit to last ten days and to take place where I worked. This was a boon I had not even dared hope for. The organization of the escape was tremendously simplified; the most difficult problem — to meet at some predetermined place was thus solved easily and simply. About forty days still remained before the appointed day; I did not have to hurry and waited patiently for my chiefs to call the conference.

It assembled on June 25th; everyone was present, Simankoff and his two assistants, and Zaleskantz of the ISO — a charming company. I made a brief report, trying chiefly to impress them with "possibilities"; the figures aroused their appetites. They all spoke, interrupting each other, each presenting his own plan to enlarge the business and produce a thousand tons of fish-meal without factory equipment. Zaleskantz "outstripped" them, for he proposed feeding stickleback to the prisoners as well as to cattle.

From this meeting no practical plan resulted, but I was ordered to return to my enterprise and to find out the best "ways and means" myself, according to existing "possibilities." Since Zaleskantz was present and took a lively

part in the discussion, I was convinced that the ISO would not again block my departure.

In the morning came bad news; reports from both my points that the run of fish had ceased. Instructions were asked. Simankoff came in about noon, and growled: "Your stickleback is a bluff."

My papers were not prepared and I did not dare interview anyone that day. By evening the situation became still worse — a telegram arrived from the Murmansk department of the *Ribprom*; herring had appeared and men were needed.

Simankoff sent for me.

"You are appointed manager of the herring fishery in Murmansk. Tomorrow you leave for Murmansk."

"I cannot take the management of this work," I said firmly. I knew that, according to camp regulations, prisoners could not be appointed against their will to managerial positions. I knew also that, in the extremely rare cases of refusal, even valuable specialists, regardless of their health, had been sent immediately to "general work" — the heaviest kind of hard labor, felling trees, digging ditches, or logging. I decided, however, to risk everything.

"You will go," repeated Simankoff.

"How about the stickleback meal?"

"That is nonsense. Have you seen the reports? There is no more stickleback, and herring is now more important to us."

"You have kept me here for two weeks in idleness," I said in a rage. "There was enough fish to catch forty tons a day. While you were thinking, we could easily have made five hundred tons. Now the fish has gone. It is not tied up, waiting to be caught. Today it is gone, but tomorrow it may return. Yesterday you were ready to build stickleback traps and today you hear of herring in Murmansk and you want to drop everything and pursue herring. By the time I

arrive in Murmansk the herring will have gone from there, and the stickleback returned to my point, and so I will be travelling back and forth. Do you want me to catch fish in the train? What kind of fishermen are you? I will not go to Murmansk. You may send me to general work or put me in the punitive cell if you wish."

He was taken aback. The chiefs here were not used to such expressions of opinion, but this man was a former fisherman and I hoped my arguments might influence him.

"I will give you until tomorrow to think it over," he replied. "You will go to Murmansk."

I went to my quarters and sadly brooded over the whole situation. Only yesterday I had sent the last letter to my wife before our proposed escape. Now there was no time to let her know that everything had changed.

In the morning the Chief greeted me curtly: "Well, have you decided to go?"

"I will not go to Murmansk," I answered firmly.

Without looking at me he sent a messenger to fetch the office manager. I was convinced that he was going to give orders for me to be sent to "general work." The manager came in.

"Prepare a permit for Tchernavin to go north to work on stickleback." Then, glancing at me: "We expect you to produce 500 tons of stickleback. Remember that."

That evening I received my papers, signed by Zaleskantz, as I had hoped. This time I was leaving Soroka forever.

Late one night I arrived at the "Narrows." The plant had been established in the place I had selected, on the very shore of the bay. The equipment consisted of a shed with holes for windows; inside were kettles and home-made presses and the apparatus for drying.

In the morning I investigated the neighboring waters and convinced myself that the stickleback had gone from

the shore. Small schools of them, however, could be found in many places. I talked it all over with the fishermen and told them that unless we caught fish during the next few days our point would be closed and we would be sent elsewhere. We must, therefore, catch enough to fill the vats at least once or twice a day.

"We'll do it," they assured me heartily.

As a matter of fact, after much searching and spending the whole day passing seaweed and water through our nets we had caught about half a ton of fish. The vats were filled and the drying apparatus started. I immediately sent back a report that the work had been resumed. I was confident that under these conditions I could drag the work along for the remaining twenty days before the arrival of my wife.

Now came my last preparations for escape. Most important was a boat which I could use without interrupting the daily fishing operations and which I could get under the bridge to the westerly side of the bay. I chose a small dory which had fallen into disrepair; I dragged it ashore and spent my free time mending and caulking it, making oars and piecing together small bits of canvas for a sail. I told the fishermen I needed this dory on scouting trips in search of fish.

Next I had to verify the information I had collected about the paths leading from the westerly end of Kanda Bay towards the frontier and the location of houses and habitations thereabouts. This would require at least a full twenty-four hours absence, managed in such a way that the suspicions of the fishermen would not be aroused. I explained to them that in my opinion the stickleback had passed under the bridge up into Kanda Bay and that I ought to make careful survey of it. Early one morning I went in my dory up into the bay for this pretended investigation.

It was evening before I reached the head of the bay and explored the shore on both sides. At length I found several paths following the left bank of Kanda. Which of them was the main one? I had to find out. At about ten o'clock, after concealing the boat in a dense growth, I started off along a path leading west. This was a risky thing to do: any accidental meeting might mean death. How could I explain my presence on a path leading to Finland — at night? I walked briskly, trying to cover as much ground as possible. The walking was difficult, the forest thick and wild.

On I went for more than an hour until assured that it was the main path I was following — the right one to the west. I stopped to blaze a tree and then turned back, retracing my way to the dory to begin the long row against the wind to my quarters which I reached early in the morning.

Now it was clear in my mind how I would begin the escape: the first twenty kilometers could be made rapidly by boat; before our escape had been discovered we should reach the main path to the west and might continue along it for another thirty kilometers during the first night — at a great saving of our strength because we would not be forced to go through the unbroken forest.

I had rented, in a fisherman's house near the "Narrows," a room for my wife and son to occupy when they should arrive before many days. My preparations seemed complete. The time for action was at hand. Together we would achieve freedom — or suffer death.

My wife has told the story of our escape — how we started in the leaky row-boat, patched by my own hands, how, without compass or map, we walked over wild mountains, through forests and across swamps, to Finland and freedom.

However hard my own experiences may appear, they were less severe than those of the majority of educated

people in the U.S.S.R. Many who suffered torture and execution were older than I was and of much more importance to science. My sentence — five years of forced labor — was far lighter than the usual punishment.

The faith of Russians in world justice may be childish, but these prisoners and their families, and the widows and fatherless children of executed “wreckers,” still think that the world does not know what is happening to them. They cannot believe that a Christian civilization will knowingly permit such monstrous cruelties to continue.

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## APPENDIX

### THE "ACADEMIC CASE"

THE "Academic Case" (sometimes called the "Platonoff Case" — from the name of the academician S. F. Platonoff) was one of the "biggest cases" conducted by the GPU, comparable to the "Mine Trial," the "case of the 48," the trial of the "Industrial Party," and others. In the life of the Russian intelligentsia it had a far greater importance than the "trial of the Mensheviki," which had been conducted with such pomp in the Spring of 1931 and reported in detail in the Soviet and foreign press. The circumstances of the "Academic Case" are little known, because the GPU never brought it to a public trial, but decided the fate of the most prominent scientists behind prison walls. The meagre details which seeped out, through persons directly connected with the "case" or their relatives, were disclosed with so much caution and were so disconnected that even the formal facts of the case — for example, the accusation itself — remained to a great extent obscure and contradictory.

The substance of the "Academic Case" was this: a group of persons composed of scientists-historians was supposed to have formed a "monarchist" plot directed against the Soviet Government. This group, it was alleged, not expecting to be able to effect the overthrow of the government by its own means, had secretly entered into an agreement with the government of Germany whereby the latter

promised the assistance of its military forces. According to the GPU, the important positions in the future government, as planned by the would-be plotters, were to be held by academicians.

I can tell about this case only as I heard it from the lips of persons who happened to be with me in prison cells and in the Solovetzki camp. Furthermore I am hampered by the fact that I can relate only such parts of their story as will not lead the GPU to discover who my informers were.

The first peculiarity of the case is that it was a "failure" for the GPU. The "Mine Trial" and the trials of the "Industrial Party" and the "Mensheviki" had been carried out by the GPU to the very end, through all the stages of court procedure: the high-sounding announcements of the "disclosure of the plot," the beginning of the investigation, the opening of the court trial. It had been able to publish the "accusation act" and to stage the comedy of a trial in a most extravagant setting. In the presence of large crowds of spectators the accused men had been brought out onto the stage in the enormous hall of the former Building of the Nobility. They had publicly admitted their guilt, repeating by heart the parts prepared for them by the examining officers of the GPU. Citizen-Comrade Krilenko, in the lofty rôle of Prosecutor of the Republic had exercised all his wit and eloquence, assailing the bourgeoisie of the whole world which was plotting against the proletarian state, and hurling his tirades of defiance at microphones and foreign reporters. The spectators, the chorus in the play—tickets could be obtained only through local Soviets, professional unions and party organizations—had clamorously demanded the "highest degree of social defense" and had applauded the death sentence. Some of the accused men, who had strictly complied with the wishes of the GPU, had then been "pardoned" and the obedient public had with equal zest applauded the "pardon." At



the same time the GPU had dealt with the chief group of persons arrested in connection with the case, whose number had remained unknown except to itself, and finished with them in its routine way.

Even in the case of the "48," there had been some semblance of formality — first an announcement of "the Plot," then published "confessions," and finally the sentence with a complete list of executed men.

In the "Academic Case," however, the GPU had been unable to carry out even this minimum of formality. Arrests had begun before the announcement of the case and had continued after it; the case dragged on for two years, but, except for a few libelous newspaper articles, nothing had been published regarding it, no incriminating materials, no "confessions" (although some of the accused men were world-famous), not even the sentence. The case itself had been "liquidated": some of the accused had been secretly killed, the majority deported to 10 years of convict labor, a few lucky ones had been exiled to distant provinces. Due to the fact that resolutions concerning the men involved in the case were passed at different times, absurd inconsistencies had arisen: the most important "criminals," i.e. those who had been cast in the rôle of "leaders," had received the *lightest* sentences while others, admitted even by the GPU to be of secondary importance, had been sent to their death or to convict labor for 10 years.

According to public knowledge, the case had developed in the following way: In the autumn of 1929, after the "weeding out" which had taken place at the Academy of Science — when about three-quarters of the working staff had been dismissed and the papers had led the coarsest attack against everything connected with the Academy — there began to be at first arrests of secondary persons who had been in contact with S. F. Platonoff. A rumor was spread that the text of the abdication of Nicholas II had

been found in the manuscript department of the Academy of Science. It is hard to imagine what practical meaning this document could have had, but from it the GPU started a "monarchist plot." Almost all the employees of the manuscript department were arrested, its rooms sealed and the GPU began a search. Evidently nothing especially incriminating had been found there, but the blow fell upon Platonoff, as director of the library, and S. V. Rojdestvenski, his assistant.

Simultaneously the press was attacking the academician, S. F. Oldenburg, and the arrest of his secretary, B. N. Mollas, indicated that he might well become the central figure in the newly projected case. A. E. Fersman also of the Academy was in a similarly dangerous position. Many who were subsequently deported in connection with this case had been accused chiefly of being acquainted with A. E. Fersman or of coming in contact with him at meetings. In spite of that fact, however, Oldenburg and Fersman, although they remained in disgrace for a long time, were not arrested.

The "Academic Case" had been the achievement of the Leningrad GPU and at first the arrests had occurred only in Leningrad, chiefly in the library of the Academy of Science, in the Poushkin Building where gradually all the workers had been arrested, and in various "departments" subordinated to the Academy, especially in the Yakut department where Vittenberg and most of its workers had been imprisoned. The public regarded these arrests as a final blow to the Academy of Science, as a decision of the Stalin government to crush the last remaining independent thought in this institution.

It had been expected that the "case" would be tried in Leningrad in the Spring of 1930. But spring passed and the "case" was postponed until fall. The number of men arrested was continually increasing and other institutions

not only of academic but of a general educational character were being affected. Evidently the GPU had broader aims and was directing the blow against the Leningrad intelligentsia as a whole. The "Russian Technical Society," the "Bureau of Regional Research," the "Society of Natural Science Teachers," the "Religious-Philosophical Circle," separate workers of the Russian Museum, publishers, literary men, translators connected with the "World Literature," — every person and organization which was carrying on an educational work — were being included in the "grandiose counter-revolutionary organization," whose "branches" were so varied that not only Platonoff, but the Academy of Science itself, had been relegated to the background.

In the beginning of August, 1930, everybody had been literally aghast at a new wave of arrests — *this time in Moscow*. The Moscow GPU was "concocting the case" of Moscow historians, arresting the academicians M. K. Lubovski, D. N. Egoroff, the Professors U. V. Gotié, S. V. Bakhroujhin and many others. As D. N. Egoroff had been practically at the head of the former Roumiantzeff (now Lenin) Public Library, many employees of this library as well as a number of Egoroff's former students at the Women's University had also been arrested. In the meantime in Leningrad the academician, E. V. Tarle, who enjoyed great popularity and was looked upon as an authority in governmental circles had also been arrested.

In this way the "case" had expanded beyond the limits of Leningrad and rumors had spread that it would be transferred to Moscow. But the Moscow GPU was evidently at that time too busy preparing other trials; it ceded the "Moscow historians" to the Leningrad GPU and sent them the prominent men. All the "small fry" were deported wholesale.

The last large group of persons had been arrested in

November, 1930, that is, more than a year after the beginning of the case. The trial had been postponed to December or January, 1931, *but actually it never took place.*

The growth of the "Academic Case" had been, so to speak, a "natural" growth, which could have gone on indefinitely and could have also affected a number of foreign citizens. Such a growth is the necessary result of methods used by the GPU in conducting similar cases. In outline the method is this: first of all, the GPU arrests from ten to twenty persons who have something in common — for example, work in the same field or institution, membership in the same scientific society, attendance at the same church, patronage of the same tailor or barber or for that matter, a simple acquaintance. Next, they are strictly isolated from each other and all are accused of participating in a counter-revolutionary organization whose aim they are expected to reveal by confession. At cross-examination they are put through the usual GPU routine of investigation — threats of execution and promises of leniency in case of confession of the crime. Probably two or three of these twenty men will weaken and sign "frank confessions," which under instructions from the examining officer will incriminate two or three others. With respect to those who persist in refusing to "confess," the GPU now arrests some of their relatives in order to exert pressure and also perhaps to obtain more incriminating information about other people. In this way would be started the second, larger circle of arrests which can be followed by any number of more and still larger circles, as there exists no real case and therefore no limit which could stop its expansion.

In October, 1930, when I found myself in the Shpaler-naya prison, men arrested in connection with the "Academic Case" were being held in all the common cells, and in many double and solitary cells. According to our estimate, which cannot be considered complete, their number

amounted to 150 men. Besides these, many were in "Kresti" and "Nijegorodskaya" prisons. The list of names of these prisoners was quite impressive. Besides the five academicians, S. F. Platonoff, M. K. Lubovski, N. P. Likhatcheff, E. V. Tarle, D. N. Egoroff, many professors were among the prisoners. Since I am not a historian, I remember, incidentally, the names of only those men whom I chanced to meet or heard spoken of. Thus I remember Professor U. V. Gotié, S. V. Rojdestvenski, S. V. Bakhroujhin, Zaozerski, V. A. Boutenko, Priselkoff, Borodin (historian, professor of the Petersburg University), A. G. Woulfius, V. A. Baltz, the expert on the Far East, Meervart, teachers G. A. Petri, N. P. Antiziferoff, many workers of educational institutions of the Academy of Science, among them the librarian Pilkin, secretary B. N. Mollas, the curator of the Poushkin Building N. V. Izmailoff, Beliaeff, N. A. Pipin, G. Stern, Khordikainen, publishers Wolfson, Baranoff and so on. Explorers, numbering some thirty men, who had been arrested in the beginning of January, 1931, were also being accused in connection with the "Academic Case." Many did not know, until the sentence had been passed, what they were being accused of, and found out only later from the number assigned to their "case" that they also were a part of it.

No one could understand what was to be done with so large a group of people belonging to such a large variety of specialties and of such varied personal opinions. One could only watch with anguish the constant additions to their number.

Towards the end of 1930, when the Moscow GPU was brilliantly staging the trial of the "Industrial Party," it became clear to those of us familiar with the GPU methods that the "Academic Case" had failed and that it would not be brought to trial. In its public appearances, even the GPU had to maintain a certain standard of consistency and

the "Academic Case" fabricated by the Leningrad GPU was not on a par with the "Industrial Party's Case" fabricated by the Moscow GPU. One of the two cases could have been staged, but not both. As I have already said, the substance of the "Academic Case" supposedly involved the government of Germany. In the case of the "Industrial Party" the GPU had fabricated a "democratic-republican" plot connecting it with the French government. The rôles of some of the persons involved corresponded in the two cases in spite of their dissimilarity.

In 1929 when the GPU first conceived the idea of the "Academic Case," a challenge to Germany had been considered timely. In the autumn of 1930, however, friendly conversations with Germany were going on and it had been deemed more appropriate to turn the guns in the direction of France. Moreover, rumors were being circulated that energetic protests had been made by the German government against any mention of German names in connection with the "case" and Moscow had been obliged to fold up its plans.

And thus it was that the "Academic Case," so widely advertised at home and abroad, involving scientists with names of world-wide fame, had to be liquidated without noise — secretly. To release them as innocent would have brought undesirable publicity. It was, therefore, imperative to maintain an appearance of their guilt. So in February, 1931, the less conspicuous "participants" were sentenced to ten years in concentration camp, with confiscation of property. Since these people, although of honest names, were little known, and since the sentence had not been made public, the moaning which arose among the Russian intelligentsia had been heard by none. Engelhardt's wife, the sister of the writer Garshin, had in despair committed suicide by throwing herself down a stair well; the wife of Professor Boutenko hanged herself. The wife of one of the

sentenced men had been unexpectedly seized as she was bringing her husband the last food parcel and had also been deported. The two daughters of S. F. Platonoff had been sentenced to ten years in a concentration camp and only somebody's intercession had stopped their deportation.

It is hard to describe the impression all this produced. It was known too well that no guilt whatever could be attached to these people.

In May, 1931, the next group, arbitrarily chosen, had received its sentence, which proved to be still more cruel; five men were shot, the remaining deported to concentration camps.

Everyone was waiting in dread and apprehension for the sentence of the "leaders." Would they really dare to shoot these Academicians, who had given so much of their intelligence and labor to the creation of Russian culture, many of whom were over seventy years old?

Suddenly, in the summer of 1931, the direction of the wind changed for a short period. The leaders of the GPU, who had conducted the terror of the winter of 1930-1931, had been somewhat demoted: Akouloff had replaced Yagoda; Stalin had pronounced some vague words to the effect that not all specialists were enemies; some kind of a commission had been formed with authority to revise the cases that had been disposed of with too much haste and too much cruelty. It was rumored that according to recommendations of this commission somebody had been granted a pardon and that some of the examining officers who had overexerted themselves in the case of the "48" had even been shot. This happy period was of short duration, but the "leaders" of the "Academic Case" had felt its effects and had unexpectedly received "light" sentences — exile to distant cities, but not to concentration camps. At the same time the sentence of convict labor for the

daughters of S. F. Platonoff was commuted to exile and they had been allowed as a special privilege to join their father in exile.

So the case ended in August, 1931. The press had not mentioned a word about the sentences. Both the government of the U.S.S.R. and the GPU itself had evidently considered this case so dark and shameful that they had preferred to remain silent. Nevertheless all the victims remained in camps and exile. Platonoff, Egoroff and Boutenko have already died, having been broken by the hardships of their experiences. How many have followed and still will follow them, without a chance of freedom, without a chance of dying at home, we shall never know.

When the time comes that it will be possible to present the case basing it on documents and testimony of people who were directly implicated, this case will take its place as a true obituary of Russian, and especially historical, science. It will be one of the most tragic pages in the story of the destruction of the Russian intelligentsia.