CHAPTER XVI

A SEARCH FOR JUSTICE

I WAS ASKED to speak at the factory mass meeting in honor of Ordzhonikidze's memory. For once, at a Soviet meeting, I was able to talk from the heart. Seven years had passed since Ordzhonikidze picked me for training as one of "our own technical intelligentsia." Through these years he had encouraged me, protected me with an almost paternal solicitude; and I knew, of course, that I was only one of thousands whom he had thus shielded and used in the country's interests.

I must have communicated my own sense of loss to the audience, for dozens of my listeners wept unashamedly. The masses who went glumly, even sullenly, through the ritual approval of blood trials and the bogus Constitution, were capable of honest feeling. The ancient springs of Russian emotion were not yet dried up.

The newspapers published a long laudatory obituary on the Commissar, signed by Stalin and nineteen others of the supreme leaders. The Politburo designated a committee of seven distinguished industry and government people to organize the official funeral. Four eminent physicians certified that the departed had died of "paralysis of the heart." These figures stuck in my mind, where they point up the sinister political arithmetic of this period: before the year was over, only nine of the twenty who signed the obituary were still alive and free. The others had been shot, had committed suicide or were rotting in prisons. Of the seven on the funeral committee, only two remained alive and free; three were executed, one committed suicide and another was buried alive in a penal labor colony. Of the four physicians, only one survived and he lived in constant dread of liquidation.

Why was an elaborate certification of the leader's death necessary? Because the Russian people, and the Party membership especially, no longer believed that men in power die natural deaths. Many had been made cynical by strange events. A case in point was the death, some years earlier, of Stalin's young wife, Nadezhda Alleluyeva.

Prodigious efforts were made at the time to conceal the circumstances of her sudden end. All the same, many of the sensational facts became known and gained circulation, at least in the higher circles of authority.

Alleluyeva was the daughter of a pre-1917 revolutionist and apparently had inherited some of his outmoded humanitarian prejudices against mass terror. The brutal collectivization drive was more than she could tolerate, even from the father of her two children. She did not limit her expressions of horror to the family circle but repeatedly assailed her husband's policies at Party meetings at the Academy in which she was taking technical courses.

Merely to allude to these facts was enough to land one in prison, yet

they percolated through the higher bureaucracy, where scandal, sensation and intrigue are as rife as in the old Romanoff court. When, in the midst of her one-woman revolt, Alleluyeva's death was announced, the only element of doubt was whether she had killed herself or had been poisoned at Stalin's behest.

And so now, despite the deposition of the four doctors, doubts about Ordzhonikidze's death were widespread. It happens that I know some of the true circumstances. The time has not yet arrived when I can reveal the sources of my information, since it would mean their torture and death. But, because this Commissar's last years were so closely twined with my own, I feel it my duty to record the facts briefly.

Ordzhonikidze had long suffered from acute asthma and a crippled right kidney. He often joked about his ailments. More than once I saw him exhausted to the point of collapse, after a long day of work despite sharp pain. When the super-purge began in 1936, sweeping up thousands of his closest friends and colleagues in the Party and in Heavy Industry, he protested to Stalin, created stormy scenes at Politburo meetings, fought like a tiger with the N.K.V.D. His health took a turn for the worse. The blow of the arrest of Piatakov, his closest associate, made him desperately ill.

A friend of mine was in his office when someone brought him the news of the arrest of a distinguished engineer, the head of one of the big trusts under Ordzhonikidze's authority. The Commissar grew purple with fury, his eyes bulged, he swore and cursed as only a temperamental Georgian can swear and curse. Yagoda, head of the N.K.V.D. and chief architect of the first purge trials, had by this time been shot. The new chief of the Soviet inquisition was the hated Yezhov. Ordzhonikidze now phoned Yezhov and, in unbridled language, demanded to know why the engineer had been arrested without his permission.

"You little snotnose, you filthy lickspittle," my friend heard the Commissar shout, "how dare you! I demand that you send me the documents in the case, all of them, and right away!"

Then he phoned Stalin, on the direct circuit connecting the principal leaders of the dictatorship. By this time his hands were shaking, his eyes were bloodshot, and he kept pressing the spot on his back where the bad kidney was acting up.

"Koba," my friend heard him yell into the phone—Koba is Stalin's intimate nickname—"why do you let the N.K.V.D. arrest my men without informing me?"

There was a long silence while Stalin talked at the other end. Then Ordzhonikidze interrupted:

"I demand that this authoritarianism cease! I'm still a member of the Politburo! I'm going to raise hell, Koba, if it's the last thing I do before I die!"

Ordzhonikidze slammed down the receiver. He sat at his desk in a daze of futile anger.

Such scenes occurred almost daily. They sapped the Georgian's vitality. He made good on his threat and kicked up scandals at Politburo

meetings. Kossior, Rudzutak, Chubar and Antipov usually supported him —all four were later arrested and disappeared in the course of the purge. After a time he was too ill to attend meetings. But even from the confinement of his sick room he kept his many telephones hot with angry demands for the life or the liberty of officials who had worked under him and in whom he had faith.

During this final illness Ordzhonikidze's wife, Zinaida, to whom he was deeply devoted, was not allowed to visit him. N.K.V.D. guards, ostensibly protecting him, barred his friends from his bedside. The only visitors admitted were Mikoyan and Voroshilov, both members of the Politburo. They tried several times to convince the invalid to make peace with Stalin by acknowledging the necessity for the great purge. The visits, however, always ended in heated quarrels.

Though too ill to move around, he was by no means on the point of death. He might have lingered, as an invalid, for many years. From his bed he dictated letters to the Central Committee and the Politburo in which he condemned Stalin and demanded a plenary session of the Central Committee to consider the state of the country and to curb the floods of murder and destruction. His letters were written with passionate conviction. If they have survived, historians in some distant future will have a detailed indictment of the Stalinist counter-revolution from the mouth of the man who carried out the first Five Year Plans.

Two days later, to the complete surprise of his family and his attending physicians, Ordzhonikidze died. There are those who believe that in a moment of despair he took poison. There are others who believe that he was poisoned by Dr. Levin—the same doctor who later confessed to having poisoned Maxim Gorki. That he died by violence, that his end was not "natural," my sources have not the slightest doubt.

If they are right, then the elaborate funeral, the nationwide eulogies, were part of an obscene farce. In the published pictures, the widow—who had been kept from seeing her husband—stood by Stalin's side at the funeral. In the next few years Ordzhonikidze's name was soft-pedalled and after a time it was rarely mentioned. Cities, streets, factories bearing his name have gradually been rechristened. Very young Communists now rarely know who he was.

The new Commissar, succeeding Ordzhonikidze, was Valerian Mezhlauk. I was amazed when he summoned me to Moscow in a personal message. Mezhlauk was apparently taking stock of available technical personnel, sharply reduced by the purge, in taking the reins of the nation's heavy industries into his hands.

He was a solidly built, handsome fellow who had lived abroad. He had both the appearance and the manners of a European. Though a capable administrator, he had little political power or influence. Stalin was taking no chances, it seemed, on another "independent" Commissar in this key post.

"I'm thinking of appointing you to head up one of our largest plants, Comrade Kravchenko," he said. "Your Nikopol record justifies it. How would you feel about it?"

"Permit me to ask you, Comrade Commissar, who recommended me?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Well, you see, I am in a lot of political difficulties in Nikopol. I have been accused of sabotage and other sins. Perhaps you should know about this before you promote me to more responsible work."

I informed him, in some detail, about my recent troubles.

"Strange, strange that I wasn't told," Mezhlauk shrugged his shoulders. "I know that Ordzhonikidze valued you highly. Maybe you're right. Let's let matters rest as is, for the time being."

Subsequently I had reason to thank that lucky star under which I had been born. Mezhlauk was soon arrested and disappeared as if swallowed by mother earth, soon followed by his brother Ivan. Had he appointed me to an important position, I undoubtedly would have paid dearly for the compliment.

In the first days of March, Stalin delivered a long address at a Central Committee meeting. It was published in full. As usual, droves of Party hacks chewed over his words in endless popular and Party conclaves. Press and radio quoted and applauded by the hour. The racket could not obscure the core of his message: the purge to date, horrible though it had been, was only a beginning; more and worse would come.

"The sabotage and diversionist work," Stalin said, "has reached, to a greater or smaller extent, all or practically all our organizations." He reproached the Party with "having forgotten that Soviet power has conquered only one-sixth of the world and five-sixths of the world are in the hands of capitalist states. . . . As long as our capitalist encirclement remains, we will always have saboteurs, diversionists and spies. . . ."

It was, in scarcely veiled language, his declaration of war on all the country's organizations, on anyone who now, or in the future, might object to his absolutism. Hard work and even brilliant achievements, he warned, must not be accepted as an alibi where a man's faith was incomplete: "The real saboteur must from time to time show evidence of success in his work, for that is the only way in which he can keep his job as a saboteur. . . . We shall have to extirpate those persons, grind them down without stopping, without flagging, for they are the enemies of the working class, they are traitors to our homeland!"

The sadists, the inflamed vigilantes in every community thus had their signal. Ruthlessness had the right of way. We felt the results immediately in our own community. Several days after the release of Stalin's speech, the director of a large farm-implement plant was arrested and with him all his associates. The administration and technical staffs of the Nikopol manganese mines, of every other enterprise in the region, were decimated.

One morning, arriving at the plant, I found Brachko waiting for me. He was in a state of panic.

"Victor Andreyevich," he announced sadly, "the Secretary of the City Committee, Comrade Filline, was arrested during the night."

Later that day Comrade Los called me. He could hardly repress a note of triumph.

"We'll have to put your case before the City Committee again," he informed me gleefully. "You see, you were saved last time by Filline—an enemy of the people. Now we'll take care of you, never fear!"

My purgatory, which I had thought ended, was only beginning.

2

The "little chat" promised by Gershgorn was not too long delayed. When I reached the N.K.V.D. building at eleven at night, as instructed, he had not yet arrived. I waited for him in the crowded reception hall, my brain seething with frenzied theories. What diabolical trap were they setting for me? Would I be allowed to leave this house of horror?

It was nearly one o'clock when Gershgorn finally showed up—his fat cheeks freshly shaved and powdered, his bald peaked dome glowing. He was rested, brisk, ready for "work." I followed him into the large, bare office with which I was already too familiar. A vast polished mahogany desk, a few chairs, a huge safe and divan were all the furnishings it contained. Its bareness and cleanliness somehow suggested a surgeon's office.

"Well, Kravchenko," the head of the Economic Division began with spurious cheerfulness, "I trust you and I will understand each other quickly. So far you've managed to squirm out of it in the Party with those silly pieces of paper. But this hocus-pocus won't go with the N.K.V.D. We'll get to the bottom of that instrument business and your father's Menshevism and your connections with known enemies of the people."

In this first of many nights Gershgorn went over much of the ground already covered publicly. Referring to the *dossier* stuffed with reports by his agents all around me, he revived the memory of accidents at the plant, occasional failures to fulfill orders. In every item, and particularly in my relations with people involved who had since then been arrested or otherwise liquidated, he smelled wrecking and tried cunningly to snare me into contradictions and admissions.

Until four in the morning the interrogation went on. It dealt in large measure with other people, in the metallurgical industry. Through me the N.K.V.D. aimed to fortify its cases against other arrested officials, just as, no doubt, they were being pumped for incriminating data or opinions against me.

Had any of those unfortunate people really been engaged in sabotage, I would have seen evidences of it. Their plans, their products, their mistakes and achievements were reflected in my plant. But I had seen no sign of sabotage. There had been plenty of inefficiency and confusion and delays, but these were generic infantile diseases of newly born industries. No matter how hard I tried, I could not twist the facts into proofs of conscious wrecking.

Gershgorn was disgusted with my "stubbornness." As the night wore on he grew more impatient, more wrathful. The mock politeness of the start gave way gradually to an insulting insolence, peppered with ripe

Russian oaths. It seemed to him a personal affront that I should dare to resist his insinuations and puncture his fantastic theories. He acted, indeed, as if he were the victim, as if I were imposing on his good nature by forcing him to sweat and swear on account of my headstrong refusal to "cooperate."

A new day was dawning as I left the N.K.V.D. building. The surface of the Dnieper was soft, ripply silk. One could plunge into it and be shrouded forever in forgetfulness. I was never to leave this grim building without yearning for the comforts of death. *Why don't they let me alone? I want only to work, to give the best that is in me. Why don't they let me alone? Why?* My thoughts, like my body, were staggering. They could not adhere to a straight line. The few people who saw me walking along the street that chill, foggy morning must have been sure that I was intoxicated. . . .

I went to work at the plant that day, after a brief sleep, in a stupor. My temples throbbed with pain. I looked forward to the night as a kind of release. But late that afternoon Gershgorn's office telephoned. . . . I was to come once more, at eleven again, to proceed with our little "chat." I was there as ordered, weary, nervous and bitter. With only a rare break, the interrogation continued for nearly a month. It was the beginning of an ordeal by sleeplessness the horror of which I cannot expect anyone who has not experienced it in his own flesh and nerves to understand.

The wolves of Nikopol—Dorogan, Gershgorn, Los and the rest—howled for my blood. They were impatient to tear me limb from limb. One could almost see the saliva dripping from the corners of their mouths in anticipation of the feast. Why? Why? What could they have against me, who had done them no personal harm?

There were logical answers to these questions. Having liquidated scores of people, in our factory and elsewhere, whose activities meshed closely into mine, sheer consistency called for my head. As long as I was free, the purge picture in their territory seemed askew; a robust doubt of the guilt of those others, it seemed to them, would remain and flourish among the "masses" until this hole in the jigsaw puzzle of their fevered hoax was properly filled. Moreover, having initiated and advertised my case, it would be politically harmful to permit me to writhe out of it. Their "authority would be undermined," as the stock Soviet phrase had it.

But logical answers are only surface answers. The deeper reasons for the seemingly wilful persecution must be looked for in the slimy dregs of human perversity. The business had resolved into an exciting hunt and the huntsmen would not be deprived of their kill. No doubt they had begun without any special sentiments about me, one way or the other, but in the heat of the chase, in the moments of frustration, hate of me was born. They wanted to win, to add my hide to their bloody pile of trophies.

At the same time the hunters seemed minded, again perversely, to stick to the rules of the chase, at least outwardly. Simply to arrest me and shoot me in one of their slippery cellars would have made them look

ludicrous in the eyes of Nikopol. Mine had become one of those instances in which the kill must be made in the open, with public exposure and confession.

For several weeks, while I was being kept awake, tormented and insulted in the secret sessions, the public phase of my persecution was also carried out. The procedures of my first expulsion were unreeled again; once more there were investigating commissions, talk-fests at Party meetings, smears in the papers. I went through them in a state of feverish thirst for sleep and rest. Sometimes my body felt as if it were filled with lead, crushing me by its immense weight; then suddenly it would become feather-light, it would seem to float. Waves of heat and chill swept through me alternately.

New charges had been added to the old. The sabotage story was broadened and diffused, since the specific accusation seemed a bit shop-worn. The revised accusations put the emphasis less on my personal actions, more on connivance with men already properly identified as saboteurs; if not connivance, at least traitorous tolerance and lack of watchfulness on my part. The more tenuous the charges became, of course, the more difficult it was to refute them.

Actually, as the chase continued, I forgot why I was being pursued. I was merely tired, miserable, dizzy and baffled. In desperation, if only to break the weary monotony of the persecution, if only to evade the night sessions with Gershgorn for a little while, I decided to search for justice elsewhere. I put my plan before Director Brachko.

"Piotr Petrovich," I said, "I'm dead tired. My head is spinning and my nerves are at the breaking point. I can neither work nor eat nor sleep. Somewhere there must be a memory of truth and of simple fairness and I intend to go look for it. I shall go to the Regional Committee, the Central Committee, to individual comrades. I shall tell my sad tale to anyone willing to listen. Perhaps somewhere someone may give me advice or help. After all, I have committed no crime. Why should I be hunted like a criminal? Why, having been exonerated once, should I go through the horror a second time, then a third time? Yes, I'm setting out to look for an answer."

Brachko was worried by my condition and my proposal. He had no inkling of my night interrogations—I was under the strictest written pledges of silence. But he sensed that there was more cause for my despair than was evident on the surface.

"It's a foolish and futile quest," he assured me. "What's more, it's hardly wise for you to leave Nikopol now. They'll make good use of your absence. On the other hand, you look terrible and maybe you ought to get away for a bit. If you insist, I'll arrange to send you on an assignment somewhere."

And so I started out on my heart-breaking search for justice. I was to see scores of people and organizations, none of whom knew the address. . . .

I began at my birthplace, in Dniepropetrovsk. A former classmate of mine, Soshnikov, was now Second Secretary of the Regional Committee

and therefore a person of some political weight. Two other comrades from the Institute days were on his staff. One of them was Suvorov. He had been pitifully poor then, and I had often taken him home so that mother might feed him and mend his tattered clothes. The other was Ulassyevich. His head was not fashioned for study, so that, with other friends, I used to tutor him for hours to help push him through the courses.

Now all three sat in this Party building and dispensed wisdom to the "masses." Depositions from such a well-placed trio, giving me a good Party character, might be useful.

Soshnikov had grown fat and soft in the intervening years. He sat behind a big desk in a luxurious, softly carpeted office under a smiling portrait of The Leader. For a full minute he did not raise his eyes from the papers before him: a familiar bureaucratic assertion of self-importance. Finally he looked up and said, coldly:

"So it's you, Comrade Kravchenko. What can I do for you?" He used the formal "you" rather than the familiar "thou."

"Since when have you dropped the 'thou' to old Institute chums? Why in hell must you talk like the Lord's anointed?"

Soshnikov was embarrassed and excused himself on the ground of overwork, heavy responsibilities. I decided to come to the point without preliminaries.

"I'm in trouble," I said.

"So I've heard. . . ."

"Tell me honestly, in the years we were at the Institute together, did you observe any sabotaging on my part?"

"Of course not. What nonsense!"

"Then I'd like you to say so in a statement to the Nikopol Committee—you and Suvorov and Ulassyevich."

He squirmed and readjusted his teeming fat. He mopped new perspiration. He tried to change the subject. Finally he rang for the other two. Apparently they, too, had heard something. Their greetings were friendly but cautious, very cautious. I drew a bitter kind of relish from their threefold discomfiture. After some skirmishing they hit on the idea that I ought to go higher up; that it was not seemly for modest people like themselves to interfere in great matters affecting the life and safety of the nation.

"Thank you for your advice. I trust you realize how dirty and cowardly you are," I said and left without farewells.

This trio no doubt knew how to protect their own skins. Some time later Soshnikov became chief of the N.K.V.D. of Cheliabinsk province; Ulassyevich became Secretary of a City Committee in Western Ukraine; Suvorov, too, was promoted.

In the corridor, while looking for the office of the new Secretary, Comrade Margolin, I suddenly heard my name called.

"Victor Andreyevich, hello there! How are you? How nice to see you again!"

I turned around to face Ivan Zolkin, with whom I had worked at the

Petrovsky-Lenin plant. It was good to see someone from those simpler, younger years, before I had become an engineer and a "responsible worker." He seemed really pleased with the accidental meeting.

"How are things with you, Vitya?" he asked. "Why do you look so pale and drawn? Been sick or something?"

"In a way," I smiled. "The national epidemic. . . . Charges of sabotage and what not."

"Oh my dear Vitya, how dreadful . . . what a nasty business! Well, good-bye . . . must hurry for an appointment. Please excuse me. . . ."

And off he rushed. I was to meet him again exactly three years later in the Kremlin, and I was not surprised; the brief meeting in a Dniepropetrovsk hallway convinced me that Ivan Zolkin would go far in our blessed land. Last I knew he was head of an important Division in the Central Committee of the Party, a position he probably still holds.

Secretary Margolin's huge reception room was guarded by Chekists in uniform and in mufti. They watched the people who came and went. They asked me whether I carried any weapons before they let me in and scanned me with trained eyes for any suspicious bulge. Soviet officials, at least before they are arrested, are well guarded; the killing of Soviet officials is an N.K.V.D. monopoly and the N.K.V.D. brooks no competition.

Waiting there in Hatayevich's former ante-room, I recalled that he, too, had been dramatically protected when I saw him last, at the Nikopol Party meeting. Where was he now? I knew he had been arrested, but was he still alive? I had known most of his office staff but none of them was around now; no doubt they had shared the fate of their boss.

I knew nothing about Hatayevich's successor. I had never seen him before. After the several rebuffs, I was steeled for yet another. But amazingly, Margolin proved human. He not only heard me out to the end but didn't hesitate to express frank sympathy.

"I should like you to help me, Comrade Margolin," I pleaded. "Why should my case be reopened just because Filline is arrested? What have I to do with him? I was vindicated on the basis of documents."

"Be patient, comrade," Margolin spoke in a subdued voice. "What's happening to you, come to think of it, is pretty mild. We're in a critical period of the revolution. It's our duty to help the Party, not to criticize. All the same, I'll send a directive to the City Committee about your case."

"Thank you. If you keep your promise, I'll be most grateful."

"Don't thank me, comrade. None of us know where we'll be tomorrow."

The last words were uttered as a cynical pleasantry. But I looked into his eyes and saw that there was in them no trace of humor. On returning to Nikopol I would learn that Margolin had kept his promise: he had written urging justice and fairness. But by that time he had himself been arrested. His intercession, indeed, would plague me for a long time. It would be treated as another serious "proof" of my intimacy with class enemies!

The second stage in my quest for justice was Kharkov. I had counted heavily on help from Ivanchenko. He was one of the dozen or so outstanding industrial commanders of the country. Severe and incisive, uncompromising in his insistence on good work and in punishing laziness or ignorance, he was, all the same, a sensitive and kindly man. I knew that side of him. I knew that he would not hesitate to champion his subordinates when right was on their side.

But I found an atmosphere of panic in Trubostal. Ivanchenko, hero of the revolution and recipient of every honor and reward within the gift of the Kremlin, long a member of the government, had been called to Moscow, presumably on business. When he got there a reception committee of N.K.V.D. men awaited him and whisked him off to prison. Because he was especially popular in Kharkov, the arrest had been staged in Moscow. At the same time all his main colleagues at Trubostal—Shpelty, Strepetov, Spring and others, all of them non-Party men—were rounded up.

I found few to whom I could talk. New men, with frightened eyes, sat in most of the offices. But I did tell my story to a sympathetic engineer. He listened to me, then shook his head in reproof:

"Look here, Kravchenko, you think *you* have trouble! Have you heard what happened to Constantine Shpelty? Or to old man Spring?"

Both Shpelty and Spring were celebrated engineers. I had read and studied their works. Theirs were magic names to young Soviet industralists. Now I heard the details of their arrests; how they had been dragged from their beds, abused by obscene gendarmes and pressed into the truckloads of fresh prisoners. I left Trubostal as one leaves a cemetery . . . a cemetery in which some of the corpses still moved around, pretending to be alive.

On the way to the Provincial Committee headquarters I passed the Gigant, that beehive of a student dormitory where I had once been an important figure. I decided to look in. I went through its halls, peeped into the room where I had lived. Little trace remained of the cleanliness and order I had worked and agitated for. The place still swarmed with students, not much different from those of seven years ago: the same underfed, shabby but eager boys and girls, faith and ambition shining through in their eyes.

For the first time in years, I thought of Julia, the luscious and clever Julia who had been my sweetheart. Where was she? Was she alive? Did she sometimes recall the young Communist from the Gigant?

As I approached the Provincial Committee headquarters, I heard a familiar voice.

"Vitya! Vitya! Hold on there, where are you going?"

It was Senya Volgin, the same Senya who many years ago had argued with my father after Rakovsky's visit to the factory, who had been my co-editor of our plant newspaper, whom I had once reprimanded in the paper for staging a drinking party in the dormitory.

"Senya! How glad I am to see you after all these years!"

"I'm delighted, Vitya, dear one. Let me kiss you!" And he threw his arms around my neck.

"Be careful, Senya, you may regret the kiss. I'm contagious. Things have gone badly with me. . . ."

"The hell you say! Well, you must tell me all about it. I'm not one of those who run away. Say, remember what he called me, that father of yours? A 'spring chicken' who couldn't teach an old hen like him any politics! And, by God, he was right!"

We sat on a bench in the park—until a few weeks ago it had been called Postishev Park, but now Postishev was under arrest and the park was nameless. Senya was in military uniform and carried an important-looking brief case. He had gone gray at the temples. But the official trappings didn't suit him. He was still small, simple, unpretentious.

We sketched in our respective stories for the years since we had last been together. Senya now held a high post in the Provincial Committee.

"Yes, Vitya, you're sitting with a distinguished proletarian leader . . . 100 per cent Stalinist. Did you ever see carcasses hanging in the butcher shops? On their thighs they have a stamp: 'Tested—edible.' That's me, Vitya, tested and edible. But whether and when the Cheka boys will get around to eating me I don't know."

"Senya," I said, "this is no time for joking, it's a time for crying."

"I've done more than my share of crying. I have no more tears. So another friend is snuffed out, and another. . . . So my own turn is coming soon. . . . I have one advantage over you. I have a dependable source of consolation. It comes in bottles. Yes, it's true, I've been hitting the bottle pretty badly, but believe me, in bloody times like these I'm sorry for you teetotalers."

We compared notes on mutual acquaintances. Most of them were under arrest.

"So what shall we do, Vitya? Cry? No; doesn't do any good. Remember the song: *'What has passed won't come back, just as summer won't come back. . . .'* Red-headed Grisha used to sing it, remember? He used to wash his underwear himself, at the commune, and as it was drying what was there for him to do except sing while he waited? He used to put an overcoat on, sit down on a footstool, strum the guitar and sing. Poor Grisha was arrested a few weeks ago. You and I, we're still waiting, so let's have sense enough to sing."

We parted with fervid pledges to meet again soon. But it was not to be. The N.K.V.D. got Senya about two months later. His family told me that he had been pretty drunk when the N.K.V.D. came for him and sang at the top of his voice in the middle of the night. What did he sing, I wanted to know. An old favorite: *"What has passed won't come back . . ."* they said.

The train for Moscow was not leaving until late that night. I had already bought the tickets. It occurred to me to find out whether Eliena was in town. I telephoned her apartment. Eliena herself answered. To my own complete surprise, her voice did not stir me as I thought it would. My sufferings and inner despair seemed to have deadened softer feelings. I asked myself in some alarm: Have these scoundrels burned out old feelings in me? Have they erased the romantic streak in my make-up?

Eliena met me in my hotel. She was still beautiful, with that curiously rhythmic grace that used to go through me like a knife. But she had aged; the sadness in her eyes was deeper than ever. Her husband, she told me, had been arrested and sent to a concentration camp again and she was living with her mother. She had a modest job in an architectural bureau. I did not ask her whether she was still working for the N.K.V.D.

"Ah, Vitya, things have grown worse, not better," she sighed. "I know about your sufferings. You see, whenever I'm in Dniepropetrovsk, which isn't often, I try to see our mutual friends. You've forgotten me, but they haven't. How wonderful to find people who have remained clean, untouched, through all these dirty years. It's a miracle."

When she saw me off at the railroad station we promised to meet again. Both of us knew well enough that the promise would not be kept.

3

I had come to love Moscow. It's not an elegant or a beautiful city. For all its new "skyscrapers" and widened streets, it remains "the largest village in Russia." The Moskva River, curling through the city, seems to impose its wayward nature on the whole town, with its multitude of narrow, twisting alleys, provincial-looking squares, sudden Byzantine touches. No, it's not beautiful to look upon, except through a Russian heart.

What touched me, what touches any Russian in Moscow, is the curious sense of its age, its permanence. It was there before the Romanoffs and remained after them; it was there before the Communists and will remain long, long after them. It has a quality beyond politics, even beyond planned modernization. Somehow personal grief recedes, becomes smaller, almost negligible, in the presence of this eternal city.

I decided to avoid registering in a hotel. That would be too much like putting myself into a fish-bowl on an N.K.V.D. mantlepiece. Instead I asked Comrade Misha and his wife to let me live with them a few days.

Misha was a famous old revolutionist and was now active in the Society of Former Tsarist Political Prisoners. The government provided him with a comfortable apartment and a pension sufficient to keep the aging couple alive. He had fought on the barricades by my father's side. He had spent more than ten years in chains in the Alexandrovsk prison, until released by the revolution. Comrade Misha and his wife had always treated me like a son and they were now overjoyed to take me in, though alarmed by my pallor and harried looks.

"And how is my dear Andrei? Is he still puttering along?"

"Yes, father is well and as indignant about life and things as always."

"We are durable men, my generation. I wish I could see him again, to talk about old times."

At dinner I told him what had brought me to Moscow. I hid nothing. Comrade Misha had known Lenin, Bukharin, the other giants of the revolution personally. He called the present leaders, from Stalin down, by their first names. Lenin's widow, Krupskaya, often met him. He had been

treated—at least until the period of the super-purge—as one of their own by the new masters.

As I told my story, especially about the charges against my father, his comrade of the barricades, old Misha grew furious. He pushed back his chair in wrath and strode to a closet, from which he dragged out a heavy, rusty chain. He raised the clanging metal with both hands above his gray head and shook it in uncontrolled fury.

"I wore these shackles for ten years because I believed in truth, in fairness, in a better life!" he shouted. "And now the ruffians who call themselves revolutionists torture our children! A curse on them! A curse on the sadists who are bleeding our Russia!"

He was a tall, spare and sickly man. Standing there holding the rusty shackles aloft, he was terrible to behold. Misha's wife and I tried to calm him.

"What I don't understand, Comrade Misha," I said later, "is why all this terror is necessary. It can't be that we are all spies and saboteurs—a whole country of spies and saboteurs—all except the Politburo. . . ."

"Nonsense! There are no exceptions. In the Politburo itself, many have been arrested, and more than three-quarters of the membership of the Central Committee has been liquidated. Kossior, Rudzutak, Chubar, Postishev—under arrest. And lots of those close to the Politburo—Antipov, Mezhlauk, Bubnov and many, many others—have been swallowed up. Yakovlev, Stetsky, nearly all the best ones in the Central Committee, too. The *pogrom* is as bloody in high places as down below.

"Stalin and his clique want a Party that doesn't think, a Central Committee that obeys orders blindly, a Politburo that always agrees with him fully. And he's getting it. He's dealing with the problem the way Peter the Great dealt with it—by chopping off heads."

In the course of the evening we got down to discussing whom we might approach to intercede in my behalf. Krupskaya was out of the question. Only the fact that she was Lenin's widow saved her from arrest. Her hatred of Stalin and his methods was notorious and anyone for whom she said a good word would only suffer for it. Other close friends of Comrade Misha were themselves in a precarious position. But suddenly he had an inspiration:

"Yaroslavsky!" he exclaimed. "Yes, if Emilian has not been thoroughly corrupted he must listen to us!"

Yaroslavsky, one of the few Old Bolsheviks still in power, was looked upon as the official theoretician of the Party, Stalin's personal high priest. He was head of the Society of the Godless and wrote elaborate articles explaining and justifying every new Stalinist outrage. I had little hope, therefore, from that direction, but Comrade Misha talked himself into optimistic expectations. Hadn't Yaroslavsky known him for dozens of years? Hadn't they fought together against the Tsar, been in prison together?

Next morning Comrade Misha telephoned and arranged the appointment. That in itself was an achievement. Passes were waiting for us when we arrived at the Central Committee. Yaroslavsky wore a Russian blouse.

He embraced and kissed Comrade Misha and shook hands cordially with me. For a moment hope stirred in my heart. Here was a comrade of the old stamp, a man of my father's idealistic generation.

But no sooner did Comrade Misha begin to explain the purpose of the visit, than Yaroslavsky's face froze into an expression of alarm. He chewed on the straggly ends of his nicotine-stained mustache in growing nervousness.

"Well, Emilian, that's the whole story," Comrade Misha concluded. "If you help us, I'll love you like my own brother. If you don't, I'll know that you, even you, Emilian, are lost. . . ."

"Forgive me, Misha," Yaroslavsky's tone had become official. "When you come to me as an old friend, it's one thing; when you come to me as to a responsible leader of the Party Control, it's another thing. It's my duty to protect the Party and its Leader against enemies. There's no room for friendship and favors. We can't afford to be soft. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see. But why all this rhetoric? I'm not a mass meeting, or a page in the *Bezbozhnik*. Will you help or won't you? Speak plainly."

"Now don't get excited, old friend. Comrade Kravchenko, will you leave us for a few minutes, so I can speak more freely?"

"No, no, he remains here, Emilian!" Comrade Misha exclaimed. "I'll have none of your newfangled secrets and intrigues. Are we comrades or aren't we?"

"All right, have it your way," Yaroslavsky shrugged.

We left his office dejected, broken in spirit. Comrade Misha's eyes were blurred with tears; he had to hold on to my arm for guidance.

"So even Emilian is dead—I mean the frank and courageous Emilian who was once my comrade. Ekh, Vitya, I'm glad I'm old. I shan't have to watch the ugliness much longer."

The only concession to friendship which Yaroslavsky made was to give me the names and telephones of several important functionaries at the Central Committee, and permission to use his name to obtain an audience. In the next few days I saw these people. From the formality of their behavior—friendly, smiling but rigidly formal—I suspected that Yaroslavsky had tipped them off to treat me well and to do nothing. Even men close to Stalin, apparently, could not afford to give aid and comfort to a "saboteur."

I looked through my list of Moscow addresses. Was there anyone I ought to look up? As I read the names, I crossed many of them off: this one dead, that one a suicide, the others arrested. Finally I came to one that gave me pause.

"Lazarev!" I said to myself. "I'll look him up. In a sense it was he who started me off on the journey that led to this dead end. Wasn't it his influence, back in the Donetz Basin coal mines, that led me into the Comsomol organization?"

When I rang his doorbell, two elderly women came to open the door. They stared at me in alarm when I asked for Lazarev, and one of them began to weep.

"My poor boy's gone . . . nearly a year now. . . . Didn't you know?

They said he was an enemy of the people. The infidels! The torturers!"

And thus I learned that my first preceptor in the Communist movement, too, was among the outcasts. He was paying for that part of him reflected in Tolstoy's picture by the side of Lenin and Karl Marx.

Fatigued by the failures and sorrow of these days, I was impelled to visit the family A——. I could always count on old Mrs. A—— and her charming daughter, Tanya, for a pleasant hour or two. Despite many tragedies, they had preserved a little of their natural joy in living. Comrade A—— with his wife and a small son had fled to America after 1905 to escape the Tsarist police. Other children were born to them in the United States, a boy and two girls who grew up as typical American youngsters.

After the revolution, the family came to Russia. Lenin himself welcomed them. A—— took a prominent part in the civil wars. While heading a contingent of Red Partisans against Whites and Japanese in the Far East, he was captured. His body was chopped to bits and burned while other prisoners looked on. With the end of the civil war, the broken family moved to Moscow where Lenin gave them an apartment and a pension in recognition of A——'s heroic services. The elder son grew up to be an engineer—it was through him that I met his family. He was sent to a concentration camp in the purge some years back. The women had remained alone.

Now I came unsuspectingly to their home, in an old house covered with sores. Their door was locked and sealed with wax. I made out the dread initials, N.K.V.D. A neighbor stuck her head out to see who was there.

"Oh, God help us, young man. Citizeness A—— and her daughter have been arrested, sent into exile!"

She shut her door quickly, afraid she had said too much. I left the house thoroughly shaken. I hadn't walked many steps when I realized that I was being followed. One glance at his boots and I had no doubt it was an N.K.V.D. man, despite the civilian overcoat. All I needed to fill my cup of sorrow now, of course, would be a report that I had come to visit a liquidated family!

Fortunately a dilapidated taxi was driving by at that moment. I hopped in and urged the chauffeur to drive quickly to the railroad terminal; I was late for my train. At the terminal I paid him off and found another taxi, which took me to within a few blocks of Comrade Misha's house. When I told my kindly hosts about the incident, Uncle Misha once more lost his temper.

"Oh the scoundrels! It's no better than in the Tsar's time," he exclaimed, pacing the room in agitation. "No, worse—a thousand times worse. In those days we had trials, lawyers, a fighting chance. When we were in political trouble, our friends didn't shun us. On the contrary, they visited us and made a fuss over us. There were protest meetings, appeals to the government, to the press, speeches in the Duma. Now there's only horrible silence and fear and cowardice everywhere.

"Another thing, Vitya. In my time the whole world seemed on our

side. The democratic and liberal-minded people of England, France, America spoke up against the tyranny and gave us moral comfort. But today we're caught as in a prison. The outside world doesn't seem to know what's going on here. The very people who should be on our side are so often on the side of the tyrants and torturers and—the irony of it, my son!—they call themselves 'friends of the Soviet Union.' "

"Friends of despotism would be a better name for the fools," I said.

"Vitya, at our special library I sometimes see French and English papers. Only a few selected ones are allowed in, of course. Would you believe it, they write about the 'democracy' and the 'wonderful new life' in Russia! I'm not joking. I once saw an American book about our country. I read a few pages and I couldn't believe my eyes. The idiot author had been in Russia but had seen nothing and understood nothing. He described our bleeding fatherland as if it were some heaven on earth. The dolts! The charlatans!"

"But, Uncle Misha, it can't be that the whole world is really ignorant of what's going on here. It can't be that the whole world has gone crazy."

"Sure, it makes no sense, but if someone outside understands I've as yet to see evidence of the fact. I've been on lots of the official reception committees to delegations of foreign labor, foreign educators, students. It's clear from their fervor and from their naive questions that they know nothing of the horrors being visited on the Russian people. They know nothing of the reaction that's in the saddle here. Vitya, it's frightening. . . ."

He sat down, turned his face from me and began to sob.

My final act in the futile quest for justice was to call at the Commissariat of Heavy Industry. A spirit of boundless misery, which no one made the slightest effort to conceal, filled the whole organization. Few of the people I knew remained. It seemed almost indecent to inflict my troubles on officials who so obviously considered their own tenure among the living uncertain; in a place swarming with the ghosts of liquidated high officials, rank and file workers, Communists and non-Communists.

From the few officials who still dared talk to me I heard more about the magnitude of the N.K.V.D. raids on Soviet industry. The man credited with expanding the Soviet oil resources, M. Barinov, was liquidated together with his staff and assistants. So were Alperovich, head of the tool-bench industry, and his assistant, Stepanov, and many, many others. Nearly all of Ordzhonikidze's main associates—Alexander Gourevich, Rukhimovich, Pavlinovsky, for instance—were no longer among the free. Gourevich had been chief of all the metallurgical industries in the country; subsequently I heard that he went blind in prison and died there. His assistant, Anton Tochinsky, considered one of the leading Russian engineers, was also under arrest. Few high administrators, Commissariat department heads, directors of trusts and institutes, had escaped the storm of terror.

Merely to convey some sense of the extent of the slaughter, I want

to list a few of the liquidated with whom I had had personal contacts. Their names can mean nothing to an outsider, but to those of us engaged in Russian industry they meant the cream of our technical brains:

I. Bondarenko, director of the Kharkov engine plant; Constantine Butenko, head of the *combinat* at Kuznetzk; Ganshin, who headed up the oil industry in the East; Gvakharia, director of the Makayev plant in the Donetz Basin; Ossipov-Schmidt, head of the synthetic rubber trust; Mikhailov, assistant director of the famous Dnieprostroi dam; S. Makar, the famous builder of Magnitostroi; the top man in the slate industry, the Old Bolshevik S. Schwartz; Gugel, director of the Azov steel combine in Mariupol; I. Kossior, a brother of the liquidated Politburo member and for a time in charge of all Far Eastern industry; M. Vlassov, chief of the Cheliabinsk ferrous smelting plant; G. Krzheminsky, head of the manganese trust in Nikopol; Nikolai Radin, director of a large Mariupol plant; Fyodr Logiyko, director of the Nizhni-Dnieprovsky plant; Zvaisne, director of the Lysva plant in the Urals; Isak Rogochevsky, director of the Zaparozhe steel plant; Nikolai Donskov, head of the Chusovaya metallurgical factory; Khazanov, chief of metallurgy of all the Urals; Trachter, head of the Krivoi-Rog Ore Trust.

I choose the names almost at random and could prolong them for pages from memory. And I choose only top-shelf names.

On the train from Moscow I ran into my friend Jacob Vesnik, then director of the metallurgical *combinat* at Krivoi Rog. I paid less heed to his words than they merited, but somehow they remained in my mind, growing bigger, more meaningful as time passed. Vesnik was a great revolutionist and an important builder, an Old Bolshevik who had not yielded to the new totalitarian ways. He had been loaded with the highest decorations in the Red Army and then, when transferred to industrial work, had been close to Ordzhonikidze, Molotov and other Kremlin leaders. Frequently he had represented our country abroad on vital economic missions.

He was pleased by the accidental meeting. It turned out that he, too, had been in the capital in an effort to head off arrest. Vesnik's attractive wife, Eugenia, who was prominent in her own right, had recently been photographed with Stalin in the Kremlin. The publication of this photograph seemed a guarantee of immunity for herself and her husband. But Vesnik had no such illusions.

"I expect to be arrested on my return to Krivoi Rog," he told me. "I, too, found Moscow will give us no help. It all stems from the very top. You will hear us, the Old Guard who fought under Lenin, slandered as plotters of fantastic international frame-ups; you will hear us branded as traitors and enemies of the people. Remember, these vilifications are a screen for something else. Stalin and the Party cannot tell the masses the truth: that there is a conflict within the Party. For then the masses would want to take sides, and Stalin fears that the majority might win."

We talked a good deal. His many journeys abroad were mentioned. He looked into my eyes.

"If ever you get the chance to tell the outside world about the

horrors here, Victor Andreyevich, it will be your duty to do so. At this stage a Russian who loves his country and his people can do no greater service. The struggle for the liberation of Russia cannot and must not cease."

His expectations of arrest were justified. His wife, too, was arrested, notwithstanding the brief glory of having shared a photograph with The Leader. In time my friend's words came to sound prophetic in my ears.

4

It was evening when I reached Nikopol after the useless journey. I was feeling low, hopeless. As I approached my cottage, I wondered why it was in darkness. Where was Pasha? I had written her that I was coming and she should have been here. I tried the door. It was locked. I knocked, louder, still louder. No answer. Fingers of fear suddenly clutched my throat.

My voice was so choked up I could barely make myself understood when I went to the next house. My neighbor, a factory official, looked at me in surprise, as if he were seeing a phantom.

"Victor Andreyevich!" he whispered. "Is it really you? Alive? Not arrested? Thank God!"

"What's happened? Where's Pasha? I've merely been to Moscow on business."

"Didn't you know, Victor Andreyevich? You've been removed from your post and ordered evicted from your house. I don't know where your belongings are. A wagon came and took them away. . . ."

I asked for permission to telephone Brachko.

"Oh, I'm glad you're back, Victor," the director said.

"But Piotr Petrovich, what's happened? Why have I been locked out of my house?"

"Don't worry. Keep a grip on yourself. By order of the City Committee I had to relieve you of your position. I'm putting you in charge of the Technical Division of the plant. You understand that I had no alternative, that I'm heartbroken."

"Of course I understand, Piotr Petrovich. Where shall I spend the night?"

"Oh yes, I've reserved a room for you at the plant's hotel in Nikopol. Not much of a room, but the only thing available."

I rode back to town. The hotel manager was expecting me. He was sympathetic. He knew what a come-down it was for me, after my luxurious house with its garage and garden, and so he apologized when he showed me into the room. That cell-like cubicle with its peeling wallpaper would be my "home" for the rest of my stay in Nikopol. My books and other belongings had been dumped in disorder in corners. Aside from the bed, there were a small table, a cupboard, a small mirror, and a faded portrait of Stalin on the wall. There was no washroom, not even a washbasin.

But I was tired, too tired to think or feel. I slept late into the next morning.

CHAPTER XVII

TORTURE AFTER MIDNIGHT

MY HEART sank within me when I recognized Gershgorn's voice on the telephone.

"Well, well, so the little bird's returned from its long journey. . . . I hope you like the new quarters at the hotel. . . . Come to see me at midnight!"

As usual I had to wait for him. It had been the first day in my new post as head of the Technical Division of the factory. I had worked long and late and had been on my feet most of the time. The emotional strain of my degradation, and of the eviction from my house, had taken more out of me than the physical effort. In any case, I was exhausted, despondent, half-dizzy when Gershgorn finally let me into his office.

"Well, Kravchenko," he smiled wryly, "I hope you've had a profitable trip. We don't like having our investigations interrupted in this way."

"I had the necessary permissions," I said.

"I know, I know. And I gather you went to find 'protection'—through people like Ivanchenko and Margolin, eh? Now, alas, both of them are under arrest as enemies of the people!"

"It's true, Comrade Gershgorn, I wanted help from Ivanchenko. And why not? He had been my superior for a number of years and a member of the government. As for Margolin, he happened to be the Party Secretary for the Region at the moment. After all, I wasn't the one who appointed them to these posts."

"Of course you weren't. But an amazing coincidence—all your friends and patrons turn out to be traitors! Filline, Margolin, Ivanchenko, so many others. Tell me, how does it happen that Margolin wrote a favorable letter about you to the City Committee? An old friend of yours, no doubt."

"I saw the man only once in my life, that day in his office."

"I'm not so sure of that. . . . But let that rest for the moment. I'm more interested in the dirty saboteur Ivanchenko. You've known the traitor for a long time——"

"Yes, but I didn't know him as a traitor."

"You never observed any acts of wrecking and sabotage on his part, working so close to him, being so friendly with him?"

"No, never."

"What can you tell me about his work insofar as it touched on the pipe-rolling industry?"

I recounted all I knew, what the whole country knew. Gershgorn's fat, glistening face now wore an angry grimace. His thick sausage-like fingers —I noticed how carefully they were manicured—drummed impatiently on the desk.

"Kravchenko, quit being funny. You know this isn't the information need."

"It's the only information I have."

"I think we can help you remember a lot more before we're through 'training' you. We've had stubborn customers like you before. Now what do you know about Ivanchenko's relations with Kabakov?"

"Kabakov until his arrest was Party Secretary in the Urals and a member of the Central Committee of the Party. Naturally Ivanchenko used to see him often. But I know of nothing special or unusual."

"In other words, you won't talk."

"I'd gladly talk, but surely you don't expect me to invent information."

The new day was visible through the window, but Gershgorn, louder and more insulting as he grew more tired, was still hammering at me.

"Tell me, Kravchenko," he said suddenly, in the middle of another question, "why are you so afraid of arrest? Why do you chase around looking for help—even from Comrade Yaroslavsky? Maybe because you feel, deep inside, that you're guilty?"

"Please forgive me. It's now 5 A.M. and at eight I must report to work. If I'm not yet under arrest, it's not a very good hour to begin a philosophical discussion."

"Quite right, quite right. . . . We'll have many other nights together to explore the subject. I'm a student of human psychology, in my own way. You, as an engineer, test the resistance of metals, their pliability, their special qualities, yes? I, as a good Chekist, test the resistance of human beings, the political pliability of their minds and so on. Well, good-bye until next time."

I arose. I was so fatigued that I staggered. Wearily, holding on to the edge of the desk, I said:

"Look here, Gershgorn, I've known you for several years and you've known me. Do you really, honestly think I'm a saboteur? Please answer me."

"Sure, I'll answer you. We Chekists start by believing the accusations. Otherwise we'd get nowhere. As far as I'm concerned everyone's guilty unless he can prove his innocence. That's all for tonight. You can go!"

Late that afternoon I was at my desk in the new unfamiliar office. Drugged with sleeplessness, aching in all my muscles, my eyes burning, I tried desperately to focus my mind on the technical reports before me. The telephone rang. It was Brachko, but his voice was so dejected that I barely recognized it.

"Victor Andreyevich! Now it's my turn—the Factory Committee has just ended its meeting. I've been expelled from the Party! Expelled, after more than twenty years!"

"Piotr Petrovich, it can't be. . . ."

"Yes, and tonight a closed meeting of the Party organization in our plant will finish the job. I want to ask you—how shall I put it? But I'm sure you'll understand. I want to ask you not to speak for me. It would only make things worse." He hung up.

After a few uneasy hours of sleep, I went to the meeting. The new Secretary of the City Committee, Kondrashin, had been an engineer in my section. He was a sly, cautious man. He had that talent for avoiding responsibility which was so incalculably valuable under Soviet conditions. He let Comrade Los, the young man so hungry for power, conduct the case against Brachko.

In a long, impassioned and completely jumbled speech Los loads Brachko with all the sins on the super-purge calendar. The bad housing, the high percentage of spoilage, the low wages, the immense number of arrests in all departments of the factory—all of it, by Los's inflamed logic, is Brachko's fault; all of it is proof of purposeful and devilish sabotage!

"Out with him!" someone cries, and others take up the chorus. "It's about time! Down with wreckers!" Among the most vociferous, I notice, are several workmen, barracks people. In the nature of the case they can know nothing of the work or the character of the director of the great *combinat* in which they are insignificant cogs. They are merely expressing their private discontents, taking out their resentments, conveniently, on the highest administrative official. They do not stop to remember that wages as well as prices and appropriations for workers' houses are fixed by the authorities in Moscow.

"Does anyone wish to speak?" Los asks.

One after another Party members demand expulsion. Each adds a few more charges to the mountain of absurdity already piled up. Then a woman worker takes the floor. There is no room for doubting her sincerity.

"Comrades," she declares, "I work in the Nikopol Metallurgical *combinat*. Now, at last, it is clear to me why we live so poorly, why there are no houses for us workers, why we walk around without decent clothes. These Brachkos live in grand style, but the hardships of the proletariat don't touch them. Out with the saboteurs! They have jeered at us long enough!"

Her intenseness evokes stormy applause and cheers.

Finally Brachko speaks. He knows that his case is hopeless, that his words will not touch this excited meeting. These people are famished for vengeance, they need a legitimate scapegoat for their various private discontents. Brachko begins by telling of his twenty years as a loyal Communist. He tells how, before the revolution, as an officer at the front and a secret Bolshevik, he won over the soldiers to the workers' cause. He is interrupted with jeers, with dirty epithets.

"Don't play the demagogue! Enough of this manure! Pitch him out!"

Tears roll down Brachko's sunken cheeks. But the epithets revive his fighting spirit and he raises his voice above the interruptions. An embarrassed silence, a guilty silence, suddenly fills the large hall. He raises clenched fists above his head.

"I, Brachko, with these two hands stormed the Winter Palace of the Russian Tsars! I fought against the Whites and against interventionists! I carry a dozen wounds which I suffered for the revolution. Then, for

teen years, I worked day and night to build, build, build, despite rrible handicaps.

"And now I stand before you who are ready to tear me to pieces. Why? here I built you wish to tear down. You blame me for the very condi- ons against which I struggled with all my strength. I ask you for thing. I expect nothing. Go ahead and finish the dirty job. It's clear to e that I'm finished no matter what you decide here. But I want you to ink of what you're doing. I leave my fate to your conscience. None of our speeches, none of your insults, changes the fact that I'm completely thout guilt.

"Believe me or not, comrades, I love the people of this my native land. have risked my life a thousand times for them, and if now they reward e by destroying that life with their own hands, I take it like a soldier. hat's all I have to say."

The vote for expulsion was almost unanimous. I left the meeting and rove to Brachko's house, where the servant girl let me in. After a while he rrived, quiet as a shadow, his shoulders shaking in tearless sobs.

"Somehow I knew you would be waiting for me, Victor Andreyevich," e said. "Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Don't forget, if you ver have the chance—if this madness ever subsides—tell those who will isten that these were insane lies they have told about me."

He would not let me remain for more than a few minutes. If the Chekists found us together, it would be bad for both of us. He had no doubt that he would be arrested. The N.K.V.D. had wanted a "popular" pproval in advance in this case; it would make their labors in Nikopol asier.

Brachko did not show up to work next morning. I learned that he had decided to go to Dniepropetrovsk to appeal to the Regional Committee. But he got only as far as Zaparozhe, where he was removed from the train. I never saw him again, and to this day do not know his fate. Two days later his wife, his wife's sister and his secretary were arrested. Only his aged mother and a six-year-old niece who lived with them remained, and they were evicted from the house. The old woman, her mind snapped by the tragedy, wandered through the streets of Nikopol for months asking people whether they had seen her "little Piotr" who was "lost." Then she, too, disappeared.

2

The same week, the City Committee took up the "Kravchenko case" again. It was generally assumed that my number was up. But my lucky star had not lost its magic; it was Brachko, I recalled, who first referred to that mythical star, at the time I discovered the missing documents. That very day a long front-page article appeared in the Nikopol press accusing a group of engineers in our factory of various political sins, especially rudeness to workers. The chief culprits, according to this article, included Makarov and Shaikevich—my principal accusers!

The blow prepared for me was thus miraculously deflected. No doubt Los felt that it would be awkward to drag out his time-stained accusations when his main witnesses were themselves in hot water. The Committee forgot the scheduled subject and devoted itself to the new sensation. Both Makarov and Shaikevich were thrown out of the Party. Subsequently I came to know that the publication and timing of the article which saved me were not accidental; old Silinin and other friends had maneuvered it that way.

Brachko's arrest sent new currents of fear through the factory. Inevitably many of those who had worked close to him, whom he had befriended, would be rounded up. Chief engineer Vishnev was in a mood of black melancholy. I had to see him about some problem in my department. After the first few words I realized that his mind was no longer normal. He sat at his desk, wearing his best clothes, with his Order of Lenin pinned on his coat lapel. He was crying like a child, in breathless gasps.

"You see, Victor Andreyevich," he said, "when they come to arrest me, they will also arrest Lenin. Nobody talks to me any more. They no longer recognize me as the chief engineer. Only Lenin talks to me."

I would hear two years later, through a friend, that Vishnev's mind, already clouded, broke entirely during his torture. The secret police thought his insanity a "trick" to avoid "confession" and continued the torture until they were convinced his madness was genuine.

One night, a few weeks later, I was aroused from sleep. I was wanted on the telephone, in the lobby below. I got dressed and went down. It was Gershgorn. He ordered me to come to the N.K.V.D. at once.

Again I sat in his surgeon-like office. I envied the fresh, healthy flush on his face. If only I had my old physical vitality. . . . Acute insomnia, worry, the hopeless chaos in the factory were draining my strength, leaving me weak and nauseous.

"Well, let's get on with our little chat," Gershgorn exclaimed, flaunting his health, his energy. "And I do hope you will be more sensible, *more cooperative*, this time."

"What do you want from me?"

Gershgorn banged the table. Then he shook his hand in my face.

"Here *we* ask the questions!" he shouted. "All you do is answer them! Do you understand?"

"I understand. . . . Only I'm still not under arrest, I'm still a Party man in good standing . . ."

"That doesn't concern us here. To us you're a saboteur. I ask you again, what do you know of the sabotaging activities of Ivanchenko? You've had time enough to think it over."

"I know nothing."

"Look here, Kravchenko, it will be better for you, and will save me a lot of trouble, if you start talking. We have ways and means to make people talk. We make them soft as silk and yielding as butter. Do you understand?" There was a voluptuous, almost erotic, quality to his voice.

you value the shape of your face—you're not a bad looking fellow—'ll be more helpful. . . ."

"I'm speaking honestly. I can't tell you things that I don't know or aren't so."

"So you don't want to talk?"

At that point the telephone rang. He was wanted by Dorogan, Gershrn said. Would I please wait for him—in the corridor. We stepped out the room together and I was turned over to a uniformed Chekist.

"Have this citizen wait for me," he said.

Four or five men were already standing in the corridor, their faces ned to the wall, their hands clasped behind their backs.

"Citizen, go over there, take the same position," the Chekist said, oving me towards them.

"But I'm not arrested. I'm here just at Comrade Gershgorn's request."

"Shut up! Do what you're told! Face the wall, hands behind your ck, and don't dare turn around. And don't rest your head on the wall ther."

I took my place near the other men. We could not see each other, in dim corridor light, nor could we see what was happening behind our cks. In the course of the four hours I was kept standing there, other n joined the line-up. I had heard of this form of torture, one of the ldest in the N.K.V.D. book; now I was suffering it in my own flesh.

No one who has not been forced to stand in one position, facing nothgness, hour after hour, can ever be made to understand what it's like. our hands, your arms, your feet become heavier, more leaden, by the inute. You begin to feel every part of your body, each finger, each joint the finger, as a separate weight . . . tons and tons of crushing weariess. You know you can't endure it, yet you endure. . . .

Heart-rending shrieks came from the rooms along the corridor; shrieks d curses, the sound of blows and the dull thud of bodies hitting the or. People were being questioned, beaten, threatened. I don't know how ng I had been standing there when I heard steps and voices at one end the corridor. Someone began to sing:

Full of strength, aromatic and gentle
The apple-tree bloomed in our orchard. . . .

"Shut your gullet!" a Chekist shouted. "I'll make *you* bloom if you don't shut up."

"No use yelling at him, he's stark mad," another said, as the group went off somewhere.

I broke out in a cold sweat. Tears of humiliation flowed of themselves, without my knowing it, down my face. My whole body itched intolerably. When I uncrossed my hands to scratch myself, the guard ordered me to put them back or he would blow my brains out. As if to illustrate his threat, an unearthly howl, scarcely human, came from somewhere behind me. . . . Daylight began to filter into the corridor. I saw it reflected on the gray wall.

"Well, come along Kravchenko. Sorry to have kept you waiting. There's so much work, so much work. . . ."

It was Gershgorn talking, in a fresh cheerful voice. I turned around. I followed him through a blur. Sitting in his office, I felt no sense of relief. It was as if I were still standing, still pinned down by tons and tons of fatigue. Gershgorn asked questions but I caught only single words. They made no sense to me.

"All right, go home, get some sleep. You'll need it. I'll call you again . . . soon. And by the way, these little talks are nobody's business but yours and mine. Our little secret. If you babble to anyone, you'll regret it."

Back at the hotel, I washed myself with ice-cold water, then lay sleepless on the unmade bed until it was time to go to work. A message from the N.K.V.D. awaited me: I was to be there again at midnight. . . .

That night Gershgorn was unctuously polite, almost cordial at the outset. He even offered me tea and cookies, which I declined. I was not really being kind and considerate of him, he said. I was obliging him to behave like a beast—keeping me waiting in the corridor, for instance—when in fact he was not at all a beast. Did I think his was a pleasant job? Did I think he enjoyed it? But what is a man to do when he was born with a strong sense of duty?

"Tonight you can do us a little favor, Kravchenko," he said. "The N.K.V.D. will appreciate it, the Party will appreciate it. You see, we're not asking much of you."

"What's the favor?"

"Just your signature, your honest freely-given signature as an engineer, a Soviet director and a loyal Party member. You see, it's about a serious matter. A defense matter. Pipes with impurities have been provided by your factory for the chemical defense works. No fault of yours, of course. You didn't make the metal. Quite clearly it was organized sabotage which began way up high, in Moscow, and percolated down to Kharkov, then to the Zaporozhestal where the director was the enemy of the people Rogochevsky, now under arrest, and where the steel for your pipe was smelted."

The idea, I saw at once, was a horrible police fantasy. The steel we received was often of bad quality. I had reported it and protested repeatedly. Sometimes Brachko and Vishnev had been in despair about it. But there were simple, technical causes fully known to Ordzhonikidze, to Piatakov, to Ivanchenko—causes related to honest errors and inexperience at the smelting end.

"In the first place, Comrade Gershgorn, I'm not at all sure that the impurities and the bad quality were due to sabotage," I said. "Secondly, I should like to read the document you want me to sign."

"By all means. Here it is." He handed me a sheaf of some twenty long closely typed sheets.

I read slowly, for almost an hour. Waves of heat and of chill swept through me as I read. It was an extraordinary mixture of half-truths and full lies, carefully, ingeniously, fitted together to make a predetermined melodramatic pattern. The document was peppered with names, some of

which I knew, dozens of names: nationally prominent engineers in the chemical and steel industries, plant managers, foremen. Ivanchenko and Grachko were there, officials in half a dozen Commissariats, Piatakov—an amazing "amalgam" of important and obscure people.

There was a certain logic, a certain consistency, to the story—provided one accepted without question the premise that everyone concerned, from leading figures in the Commissariats in Moscow to smelters in Zaparozhe to foremen in Nikopol, was a disciplined, daring and diabolically clever member of a conspiracy.

"I can't sign such a document," I announced when I had completed reading. "I made pipes with the steel sent to me. Sometimes the steel contained impurities. That's all I know and that's all I could possibly swear to."

"Very well. Why then did some of our most eminent professors and industrial managers sign it? Do you set yourself up as a greater expert than all of them?"

The document, in truth, was signed by outstanding Soviet scientists and distinguished engineers. Their collective verdict was "sabotage." I could readily imagine how those signatures had been extracted. But in this place I could merely repeat that I would confirm nothing of which I had no personal knowledge.

"If you wish," I said, "I'll testify that there were impurities in the metal."

"Are you joking with me, Kravchenko? Have you forgotten where you are? Impurities! We don't need your testimony on that. What we need is your confirmation of sabotage. Pipe production was under your direction."

I was silent. Gershgorn argued with me, screamed at me, until dawn. He read passages to me and pointed out how "obvious" the wrecking intentions had been. The only thing obvious to me—even in my trance of fatigue—was that the Nikopol N.K.V.D. had been ordered to obtain what was in effect my indirect confession. It was a missing link in the chain of fantastic hypotheses. Once I consented to provide the link, I would be strangled with the same chain. I was not being heroic in refusing to sign; it was perfectly clear to me that the signature would be tantamount to my own death warrant.

Finally I was dismissed, with a string of curses and a pointed warning to think it over.

Night after night for many months I was summoned to headquarters, interrogated, threatened, cajoled. The ordeal of sleeplessness was calculated to wear me down. All day I worked; I could not afford to relax in my new post, because any error or failure would be construed as additional "evidence" of wrecking. And most of the night I was tormented.

Meanwhile the machinery of Party justice kept grinding. A new investigating commission reported, reluctantly, that the original accusations had been refuted by documents. The decision in my case reached under Filline was sustained under Kondrashin. Though a coward and an opportunist, the new Secretary was not displeased by the outcome; when

no one was looking he pressed my arm in congratulation. I was still a Party member, theoretically one of "the best of the best," one of the *élite* rulers of the land.

But the wretched nocturnal affliction went on without reprieve. Every night new accusations were hurled at me. What were my relations with those "wild dogs" Margolin, Brachko, Vishnev, Ivanchenko, Filline, Rosengoltz? Wasn't it a fact that I had consorted with the "Menshevik spy" Dubinsky? Hadn't I given aid and comfort to the "fascist spy" Zelman? Every new name and new subject provided Gershgorn with subject matter for hours of cross-examination and brow-beating. I was dazed and stupefied, aching in every nerve and muscle.

Soldiers on a battlefield know what prolonged sleeplessness is like. I felt like a swimmer carried far from shore by the tide, still flailing weakly, still above water, but his last ounce of strength flowing out of him with every painful stroke.

One night, after I had been kept standing in the corridor, face to wall, for four or five hours, Gershgorn sent me home without questioning. Sorry, he said, but he couldn't spare the time for further "chatting." The following night, however, he sprang a brand-new accusation.

"Kravchenko, you had two Americans living with you, didn't you?"

"Yes. They were helping us operate some American machinery."

"Why did the traitor Brachko put them precisely with you, not with someone else?"

"I suppose because I'm a bachelor. I was living alone in a big house."

"Tell me, did you ever complain about the Soviet regime to these foreigners?"

"No, of course not. They're still in the U.S.S.R. You can check up."

"Don't tell me what I can do. I'm getting tired of your insolence. What were your political connections with these Americans?"

"None at all. I treated them kindly, which was my duty."

"But it was Ivanchenko who ordered that machinery from the United States."

"Yes."

"Sabotaging plans between Ivanchenko and the American firm are therefore quite possible."

"I wouldn't know that."

"You wouldn't? You're an innocent and naive little lambkin. But"—and spoke slowly, ominously, as if about to make a devastating revelation —"but you visited these Americans in Kharkov, didn't you?"

"Yes, I ran into one of them on the street. He pressed me to come with him to the Krasnaya Hotel and I couldn't very well refuse."

"And you met them again in a Moscow hotel?"

"No. I was at the Metropole, eating, quite alone. The Americans were at another table, drinking, with a couple of girls. They yelled my name across the dining room. I had no alternative but to go over and accept a drink. I sat with them only five minutes or so, then left."

"And why did one of your Americans make a sudden air trip to Stockholm? And why did he bring you a present?"

"As far as I knew he went on some personal matter. There was no reason why he should tell me. As for the present, it was a piece of special steel, and certain materials for thermal tests, which we could not produce at home. It was just a favor to me and to our plant."

"But he also brought anti-Soviet directives for Ivanchenko from counter-revolutionary centers in Stockholm, didn't he?"

"I know nothing about that."

Interrogation about the Americans took up several hours. Suddenly the door opened. The hulking Dorogan, savage with anger, stamped in. His fleshy lips were twisted into an ugly grimace. Gershgorn stood up respectfully.

"Gershgorn, how long will you let this wrecker twist you around his little finger? Are you a Chekist or a dirty rag? Too bad we didn't arrest him a year ago instead of letting the City Committee mess with him."

Gershgorn seemed alarmed. Obviously he trembled in the presence of his chief.

"Comrade chief, I've been doing my best. Been working on him every night for a month. If you wish me to use firmer methods——"

Dorogan ignored him. He was towering angrily over me.

"Watch out, Kravchenko, or you'll get badly hurt!"

He went out, slamming the door. When Gershgorn released me, an hour or so later, I decided to talk to Dorogan. I wanted the ordeal wound up, one way or another. Outside his office, I gave my name to the guard. I was allowed to enter.

"Well, what in hell do you want?" Dorogan yelled.

"I wanted to ask what you want of me. I've been tortured so long. . . . Every night new accusations are invented. Comrade Dorogan, you're a member of the Bureau of the City Committee. You know I've been vindicated twice. I ask you as a Communist——"

"As a Communist!" he shouted and rushed at me like an infuriated bull. He slapped me with an open palm, first on one cheek, then on the other. He grabbed me by the throat and began to choke me, at the same time shaking me violently from side to side. He was a powerful man, his hands were shackles of iron being pulled tighter, tighter. Everything began to go black. . . .

"Get out before I kill you!" I heard him yell as he shoved me through his door.

I staggered against the wall and remained there for a few minutes, until the iron ring around my neck relaxed. I hardly know how I managed to get back to the hotel. Painfully I climbed the stairs. I threw myself on the bed and fell into a deep sleep.

3

One afternoon, about one o'clock, my office door opened and Gershgorn walked in, shaking the snow from his military greatcoat. "He's come to get me!" I thought.

"Hello, Kravchenko." The "hello" was reassuring. "Where is engineer Valentin Bichkov, the head of your chemical laboratory?"

"He's in the casting section. They're working with the electrical smelter."

"Call him immediately, immediately I say, but don't tell him why."

I got Bichkov on the telephone and asked him to come over to see me. He explained that he couldn't leave the smelting and pleaded to see the job through.

"I'm sorry, drop everything. It's important." I hung up the receiver.

"May I know why you want Bichkov?" I asked. "After all, he's my subordinate."

"Look here, Kravchenko. Wasn't what Dorogan gave you the other night enough? You *are* difficult to train. Incidentally, report to me at eleven tonight."

"Can't I have a single night of sleep?"

"You sign what needs to be signed, cooperate a little, and you'll sleep all you want."

Bichkov arrived, suspecting nothing. He was in overalls, perspired and grimy.

"Good day, Victor Andreyevich," he said, then, noting my visitor, and still unsuspecting, he added, "Good day, Comrade Gershgorn."

He extended his hand to Gershgorn, who ignored the gesture.

"Don't 'comrade' me, you wrecker!"

"What's wrong, Comrade Gershgorn? Don't you know me?"

"I know you all right. Your name!"

"Bichkov."

"First name and patronymic?"

"Valentin Ivanovich."

"You're under arrest as a wrecker. Come along!"

"But what's happened? I don't understand."

"Step on it! Forward, march!" Gershgorn had drawn his revolver and pointed it at his prisoner.

The bewildered young engineer went out, followed by the N.K.V.D. official.

I locked the door of my office. I had no more strength left. Perhaps I should sign, anything, everything. What was the use? What chance did I have against these power-drunk sadists?

An hour later, Bichkov's young wife came to see me. Their two-year-old daughter was with her. Mrs. Bichkov, a pretty woman, was weeping hysterically. The child, too, was crying. I tried to calm them, to reassure them. . . . And at night, doubly exhausted by the day's events and my own troubles, I went through another long session of questioning that pulled my nerves tighter, tighter. . . .

In three or four days Bichkov's wife called on me again. It appeared that a camera, a stop-watch and other plant property which her husband kept in his office had disappeared. Until they were restored, the financial department refused to pay her the wages due to the arrested man. I called Bichkov's assistant. He swore he knew nothing about this property, but I had a shrewd suspicion that he had stolen it. The plight of the woman and her child obliged me to call Gershgorn.

"Please ask Bichkov where he put the camera, watch and other items," I pleaded with him.

"Ask him yourself," Gershgorn replied. "Come over right away and I'll permit you to talk to him."

I wondered why he seemed anxious to stage this meeting between the arrested chemical engineer and myself. Within the hour I was in the N.K.V.D. Gershgorn rang for the guard and ordered him to bring in the prisoner "from the cellar." Soon two Chekists arrived and between them, hardly recognizable, was Bichkov.

I shuddered at the sight. His face was bruised and swollen. One eye was closed. His overalls—the same ones in which he had been arrested—were torn and bloody. His hands were caked with blood. A foul odor, the odor of prison and illness, hung around him. I could not believe that this battered creature was the same handsome young engineer who had come to my office a few days earlier.

And I knew why Gershgorn had asked me to come. He wanted to give me a glimpse of what happened to those who wouldn't "cooperate" with him.

"Valentin Ivanovich," I said, averting my eyes from the depressing sight, "where did you leave the camera, stop-watch and other plant property?"

"All those things, Victor Andreyevich," he replied in a tremulous voice, the voice of a man in agony, "are in the hands of my assistant. He used them in the laboratory."

"Thank you, that's all I wanted to know."

"Victor Andreyevich . . . my wife and daughter . . . my poor Mariusa. . . ." He began to cry aloud.

"That's enough, Bichkov," Gershgorn banged the desk with his hairy fist. "None of your dramas or we'll begin training you all over again. You didn't cry when you poisoned workers in your department, did you? Get out of here!"

So that was the charge against Bichkov! Recently we had worked on stainless steel pipe, which had to be etched in nitrous acid, in improvised wooden troughs. Bichkov had instructed the workers on the process in line with official instructions prescribed for all plants. Four men, having disregarded his instructions, were overcome by fumes and rushed to the hospital. Now, apparently, Bichkov was being accused of deliberately "poisoning" workers! It was the most fashionable sort of accusation, since it aimed to line up the workers against the engineers. The thing was not only far-fetched but insane.

Back at the plant, I summoned Bichkov's assistant, who happened to be a Party man though Bichkov was not. I threatened to turn him over to the N.K.V.D. as a thief if I didn't have the missing items on my desk in ten minutes. They were on my desk in two minutes. When Mrs. Bichkov arrived to claim the several objects for delivery to the administration office, I told her I had seen her husband.

"Valentin is well and looks rested," I lied. "Of course he misses you and asked me to tell you not to worry. He sent you and the child his love and kisses."

What else could I tell the unfortunate woman? She thanked me and left. I never saw her again, nor do I know what happened to her husband.

During most of the autumn, the N.K.V.D. kept me up nights only intermittently, but towards the end of 1937 the inquisition was resumed on an uninterrupted schedule. There was no dearth of subjects for "chatting"—every new batch of liquidations in the industry offered new complications on which my testimony was considered vital. It was then that I took the step from which I had long shied away in dread of offending the inquisitors.

I wrote to the Control Commission of the Central Committee, at its Dniepropetrovsk headquarters, complaining that I was being hounded with unjustified charges of sabotage. I didn't mention the N.K.V.D., having been warned a hundred times to keep my nocturnal sessions secret, even from the Party. In theory at least, the Control Commission kept an eye on the rights and honor of Party members. Formally I based my request on the reprimand which was still on my record; I asked the Commission to remove that stain.

A few days later an investigator arrived. I had been exonerated by the City Committee, he said, so why was I complaining?

"There is still a reprimand against me," I said. "It ought to be erased. I'd like the Control Commission of the Party to check the accusations against me." I outlined the main charges which were being thrown in my face night after night.

The investigator puttered around for several days, interviewed various people in the Party administration and in the factory, and departed. My nightly questioning proceeded with few interruptions. I had lost weight. My eyes were now chronically inflamed. Friends who had not seen me for a long time had difficulty in recognizing me.

Nikopol at this time was plastered with placards about the first "democratic elections" in Russia under the Soviet Constitution. On December 12, 1937, the peoples of Russia would exercise their proud right to choose members of the Supreme Soviet by "secret ballot. The posters, the press, the radio loud-speakers on Nikopol streets and in the metal factories and manganese mines were blaring forth the glad tidings.

"Rally around the Party! Vote for the happy socialist life! No one should fail to use his privilege of the secret ballot! The most democratic Constitution! Long live our Beloved Leader and Teacher, Comrade Stalin!"

It all seemed a mockery of my own sufferings and the sufferings of millions of others. No one took the "elections" seriously, of course. Like the mass meetings and the resolutions, it was a ritual which men went through, out of fear, in undisguised boredom, while the agitators and the radio horns shouted slogans. At this time new arrests were being made at our *combinat*—the head of our Financial Department, B——; the chief electrician, Romanchenko; and others.

On December 12, I stood in a long queue in the city and finally received the "secret ballot." It contained a single list of names drawn up by the Party. There was not even a space for voting "yes" or "no"; nor

pace for writing in other names. If we were opposed to anyone on the , we had been instructed, we had the right to cross off his name. In the sed booth I folded the slip of paper and threw it into the receptacle. ong the five thousand voters in our factory, probably not one had red to strike out a single name. The press boasted of this unanimous proval of the "happy life."

Election day was a holiday, a day for meetings and refreshments. rshgorn celebrated the occasion by keeping me standing in the corridor several hours and by being exceptionally brutal in his interrogations. om his questions I judged that Ivanchenko was being accused of wreck- in the pipe-rolling industry and that to round out the N.K.V.D. pic- re it was essential that I "confess" guilty collaboration.

"I cannot honestly tell you more than I know," I kept repeating.

"To hell with your honesty. What I need is facts, not your confounded nesty. What a shame we didn't pull you in at the proper time. You'd silky and yielding by now all right."

My resistance was cracking. I yearned for an end to the long torment, almost any terms. Sometimes I found myself drifting off into a drowsy ydream: I signed my name in large bold letters . . . the orchestra ruck up the *Internationale* . . . I was conducted in triumph to a big owny bed and tucked in by my mother and grandma Natasha. . . . hether my tormentors knew it or not, I knew myself that I was in a ood for surrender. Another week or two of this hammering, another ating or two, and I would give in, take the consequences. I was not ade of steel, alas.

It was at this juncture that old Silinin came to visit me at my hotel. ad he guessed that I was reaching the end of my endurance, that I might apitulate? Watching me at a distance, had he surmised what was hap- ning and realized that I needed some moral support?

"Why do you look so badly?" the old man began. "Tell me frankly, ecause I suspect the worst anyhow. You can trust me."

I needed little urging. The yearning to tell someone, to pour out my hing heart, was like a torturing thirst. I told him everything: how for hese many months I had been kept awake, how various incrimnating papers were being put before me to sign.

"I beg you, comrade, not to sign," Silinin said. "You've held out this ong, hold out to the end. Signing won't save you. It will only spring the ap and you'll be lost forever."

"But how long, how long can human flesh and nerves take the punish- ment?"

"I know, I know, my dear. I have seen a lot in my long years and I ave had experience of suffering. But I think the purge is easing off. here are not many more left for purging—about 40 per cent of all ommunists in the Nikopol district have been expelled or arrested, and or every Party member purged, at least eight non-Party people have een arrested. I have it from someone at the City Committee—though can't vouch for it—that there's a new directive; no more arrests of ommunists without the consent of the Party. For pity's sake hold out a

little longer. Dorogan has raised the question of your arrest at least five times at the City Committee. He's furious. If you yield to the rascals now you'll be letting us all down."

I promised. It was his faith in me, more than his advice or his optimism, which stopped me on the brink of capitulation.

"And now," Silinin said, "let's drink to the New Year."

Until that moment I had not realized that this was New Year's Eve. At the N.K.V.D. that night I stood from eleven till three in the morning in the dim corridor, facing a discolored wall, listening to the cries of the victims and the curses of their torturers. Neither Gershgorn nor Dorogan came for me—no doubt they were celebrating the advent of 1938 with their families and comrades.

Arrests in the plant took a new spurt in the next few days. Every time the *pogrom* seemed to have subsided, the pause merely turned out to be the prelude to a new attack. The brakes had been completely released with the death of Ordzhonikidze. His successor, Kaganovich, had none of Ordzhonikidze's scruples and squeamishness. He "cooperated" and arrests of technical and industrial personnel increased sharply. Among those now removed from our plant was Myron Ragoza, the commercial director of the *combinat*. His wife and adopted daughter were driven out of their apartment.

In the first week of January Gershgorn put a new document before me. It was my "voluntary deposition," in effect a confession. A long and devious statement it was, full of ambiguities and oblique admissions. The crimes of my friends, my superiors, my subordinates were outlined boldly; my own share of responsibility was treated lightly, almost casually. It was there by implication but not stated outright. This was calculated to make my capitulation easier, more tempting.

"Please understand," Gershgorn said as I read page after page of the technical fairy tale, "this is the *absolute minimum* which the N.K.V.D. expects from you. There's no room for bargaining. If you don't agree, you're declaring war on the N.K.V.D. and you won't get away with it. I'm as weary of this drawn-out examination as you are, so be sensible. Will you sign with a pen or a pencil?"

"With neither. The things I know in these assertions are not true . . . the rest I don't know. I have made no such admissions as you put into my mouth here."

"And I say you'll sign, you saboteur! The way Bichkov signed, the way Ivanchenko signed!"

"Do what you wish. I'll not confess to crimes of which I'm innocent."

Gershgorn sprang up in sudden fury and rushed at me, screaming, "Saboteur, wrecker, rascal! Take this—and this!" His huge fists were crashing into my face like a couple of pistons run amok. Blood spurted from my nose. Blood filled my mouth with a warm briny nausea. "Now will you sign?" And again the hailstorm of blows and kicks enveloped me. Blood from a head gash was in my eyes, blinding me.

I heard, rather than saw, Dorogan stride into the room. My nerves

I learned to recognize his heavy step. He, too, began to pound me with fists. I fell to the floor and rolled into a ball, as if crawling deeper my own skin, while four heavy, cruel booted feet stamped and ked me.

I moaned with pain. Gershgorn must have rung for the guards, who picking me up.

"Take the rascal away! Throw him out!" Dorogan bellowed.

As I was dragged through the door I felt his fist crash once more the back of my neck. The guards led me into a small room, where was left to nurse my wounds. I sat there for an hour, perhaps two rs. Time was an agony without dimensions. I could not organize any ughts. I was not even angry.

Then Gershgorn came in.

"Well, have you thought it over or do you want some more per-ion? We have much better arguments than you've tasted tonight."

"No, I won't sign. You may kill me but I won't sign."

"I'm giving you three days to think it over. Now get out!"

And so I left—but my Party card was still in my pocket. . . .

I found myself in the street, stumbling through a bitter snowstorm. gale lashed my butchered face with a thousand whips. I crawled the hotel. In the lobby my mind took in, mechanically, the words on a placard, left over from the elections: "Rally around Stalin for the ppy Socialist Life!"

I lay down on my bed without taking my clothes off. No matter how urned, I saw the portrait of Stalin against the peeling wallpaper. I not think of the physical pain, but of the humiliation. "So now, Com-e Stalin," I spoke to the portrait, "our acquaintance is complete. Noth-has remained unsaid. Everything is clear. Greetings, Comrade Stalin."

A profound sadness filled me, an impersonal sadness. I was suffering the whole human race. I was humiliated for all mankind. *I suffer for motherland and my people . . . for my poor "Socialist Russia."*

The pain seemed to recede. Pity was healing my body, the pity that ded my soul and was not self-pity but universal compassion.

Gershgorn, and you too, Dorogan, and your Führer in the Kremlin, you longer can hurt me. You don't understand that I shall not sign . . . use as long as I hold out, there is hope. You don't understand that fate of our country, maybe the fate of mankind, depends on my stance. . . . I'm not silky and yielding. I'm resilient steel. I'll bend but an't break. I can strike back and I shall strike back. . . .

For a while I dozed off, carried away on a big soft cloud. Then I awoke n and the pain flooded back into my tortured body. I looked into cold eyes of Stalin up there on the wall and I hated him and his regime had never hated anyone or anything. Now the old recurrent fantasy, bitter-sweet fantasy of shooting myself, gripped my mind and prodded body. But my body would not move. I was too tired to go to the case to draw out the revolver, to pull the trigger. My mind was doing se very things, while my body remained inert on the blood-stained bed. I was falling asleep, under Stalin's watchful eye. But part of my

brain was alert for steps in the hall. Tonight they would come to take me. There, I knew it! The steps echoed through my sleep. There was a knock at the door. I opened my eyes, arose painfully and stumbled towards the door. I held the doorknob for a few moments, my last moments of freedom. . . . Then I opened the door.

In the semi-darkness stood a woman, her winter coat covered with snow. She had a suitcase in her hand. At first I didn't understand. I thought it was part of a waking dream. Then I knew.

"Mother, dear mother!" I cried and fell into her arms.

4

Mother washed and dressed my wounds. She didn't cry. She didn't ask questions. Instead she talked about herself. Instinctively she drew my pity away from my troubles to her own. She was a woman of immense will power.

"Forgive me for coming like this, unannounced, Vitya," she said. "I felt there was something wrong. A mother's heart, I suppose. I've walked four miles from the station through this awful storm. I couldn't find a carriage or even a peasant cart. Several motorcars passed, but they didn't see me when I shouted. Four miles in this gale is a long walk, dragging the suitcase. You didn't think your old mother could still do it, did you, Vityenka? But we small women are the hardiest mothers of the lot."

She had brought me woolen socks, a blanket, some warm shirts . . . the things a man might need in prison or in concentration camp. I had told the family nothing about my ordeal. Yet my mother knew. She had no need to ask questions . . . Soon the light of the new day, reflected on the snow piled up on the window sill, came in through the window.

"Yes, Vitya, I'm experienced," mother sighed as she unpacked the suitcase. "I used to prepare these same things for your father when he was taken to prison. . . . The years roll on, but the prisons remain. Here's a pair of fur mittens, may God help us!"

Tears at last were flowing down her cheeks.

In the excitement of the reunion I had forgotten Stalin. But there he was, still looking down on me. A choking fury suddenly filled my heart. When mother left the room for a while, I pulled the Stalin portrait off the wall, slowly, deliberately, as if I were performing a difficult but terribly important rite. With ceremonial earnestness, not with relish but in sorrow, I tore it into shreds, then tore the shreds into still smaller pieces. Then I carried the little pieces of paper carefully, as if they were terribly precious, to the toilet in the hall, threw them into the bowl and pulled the chain.

I listened to the gurgling of the water, and I knew that never, never again would I feel the same about the Party, the Leader, the Cause. The umbilical cord that had so long bound me to these ideas and symbols, despite everything, was finally and forever cut. I would work

for the government, I would accept important Party assignments, I would make speeches. But it would all be play-acting, strategy, while waiting patiently for the chance to escape: Escape! I thought of it not as the end of the struggle but as a chance to begin the struggle in earnest.

5

At the plant I parried solicitous inquiries about my swollen eyes and bruises with a tale of accident, but I saw in their eyes that people were not convinced. A notification awaited me from Dniepropetrovsk: the Control Commission would take up my case the day after tomorrow and requested that I be present. The new director of the plant, Comrade Shalakhov, refused to give me a leave of absence. But I decided, in my mind, that I would go without his permission.

That night I saw Mother off at the station, calmed her as best I could, and told her that I would be home for a visit two days later.

Saying nothing to anyone about the scheduled hearing before the Control Commission, I left for Dniepropetrovsk. That night, the three days of grace being up, Comrade Gershgorn would wait for me in vain. The two full nights of sleep had given me new strength and with strength came new hope.

In the reception room of the Control Commission, at Regional Party headquarters, a Chekist was on duty. Beyond the large double door, I thought with a sudden surge of alarm, strangers would be deciding my fate. Eight or ten other men sat on the padded bench around the waiting room. From their morose looks I surmised that each of them had some problem not unlike my own. The Party investigator, the one who had come to Nikopol, came out of the Commission session. He recognized me.

"Oh, I'm glad you've come, Comrade Kravchenko," he said. And he smiled in a way that quieted my nerves a little.

Then another functionary came out and called a name. A tall, distinguished looking bearded man of about forty, flaxen-headed, arose excitedly. The functionary motioned him into the inner chamber. About fifty minutes passed before he came out again, deathly pale, mopping perspiration and obviously jittery. He resumed his place among the waiting men on the padded bench.

Suddenly two uniformed N.K.V.D. men came into the waiting room with cocked revolvers. One of them called the same name we had heard earlier. The man with the beard got up, looking dazed.

"You're under arrest," the N.K.V.D. officer announced. "Come along!"

"But it's impossible. . . . There must be some mistake. . . . The Commission is considering my case. . . ."

"Come along, and come quickly, or we'll carry you out!"

The Chekists and their prisoner left. The rest of us remained in silence, not daring to look at one another.

Finally I was summoned to the Commission. I found myself in a large, brightly lit room. Five men sat behind a long table covered with a

red cloth. I was too nervous to take in the scene all at once. My first impression was merely that no one was smiling, an impression of unrelieved grimness.

"Good day, Comrade Kravchenko," the man who was evidently presiding said. "Take a seat. Answer questions briefly and clearly. And don't worry."

As I sat down I scanned the five faces. And suddenly I observed that one of them was smiling, nodding recognition. *Thank God. . . . Gregoriev!* . . . Gregoriev was an Old Bolshevik, of pre-revolutionary vintage. He knew me since childhood. He had worked with my father at the Petrovsky-Lenin plant (now called merely the Lenin plant, Petrovsky having disappeared). A weight was lifted from my spirits. There would be at least one man who would understand, who knew that I was not made of the stuff of saboteurs, who knew that the elder Kravchenko was never a Menshevik. It gave my mind and my heart something to cling to, to steady themselves. I was able to speak out more boldly, more clearly.

For more than an hour I answered questions. One of the questioners, a dark Georgian with a dyspeptic face and a rasping voice, seemed hostile to me. The chairman and the worker Gregoriev seemed sympathetic. I answered questions about my father, about the "hoarded" instruments, about my relations with a long list of "enemies of the people." Having nothing to conceal, I replied without hesitation, always to the point at issue.

At one juncture Gregoriev, dropping the formal prosecutor technique, suddenly said:

"Comrade Kravchenko, I've known you and your family for a long time. Tell us frankly, how do you feel about things?"

"Frankly, comrades," I said, "I feel lousy. I've been tormented for more than a year now. Tormented, do you understand, comrades?" Unconsciously my hand went to my bruised face. "You should know that I came here without permission and that I don't know what awaits me when I return."

"And who is it that torments you?" the dark Georgian asked raspingly.

"I can't tell . . ."

"Never mind, never mind," the chairman interjected hurriedly, "let's get on with the inquiry."

And soon I was in the waiting room again, sitting where the man who had been arrested had sat. I began to smoke. Every time the outer door opened I felt sure that the N.K.V.D. was coming for me. After about fifteen excruciating minutes, I was summoned back before the Commission.

"Comrade Kravchenko," the chairman announced, now smiling broadly, "the Commission has decided to confirm the decision of the Nikopol City Committee and, in addition, to remove the reprimand. You may go back to work. No one will bother you again. But I would suggest that you change your place of work. A new start somewhere else, you know.

Have faith in our Party and our Leader. Good-bye, comrade, and good luck."

At the time, of course, he could not know that two months later both he and Gregoriev would themselves be arrested as "enemies of the people"!

All five men shook hands with me. I walked out. But I was not overwhelmingly happy, as I had been in my first purge at the Institute. I was free, safe, but the faith that had been in me was no more. A stone of hate was in its place.

I slept a deep dreamless sleep that night at the home of my family. In the morning I telephoned to one of my superiors at Glavtrubostal in Moscow. I explained to him that I had been fully vindicated by the Control Commission and that, upon its suggestion, I wished to be transferred to some other city. He understood and agreed to wire the Nikopol director that I was wanted immediately for a conference in the capital.

At Nikopol, Gershgorn did not call me again. Director Shalakhov ignored my breach of discipline in leaving without his authorization; he was intimidated by the message from Moscow. Having attended to some neglected work in my department, I set out for the capital.

Lazar Kaganovich, member of the Politburo and reputedly one of Stalin's very few trusted associates, was now holding the post once held by Ordzhonikidze. The path to his office had been opened for me by Glavtrubostal. Late one night, after the usual hours of waiting in a crowded anteroom, I was admitted to the Commissar's august presence.

I had seen Kaganovich several times earlier in his career. He had then worn a small dark beard and looked almost the typical intellectual. The man I now faced had changed startlingly. The beard was gone, replaced by a Stalinesque mustache. The face had grown heavy, jowly, brutal. It was not merely a physical change; the inner man seemed different; the intellectual had been transformed into the bureaucrat. As we talked, Kaganovich played nervously with a string of amber. This had become the fashion among high officials, a kind of Bolshevik rosary.

Briefly I told him about my troubles in Nikopol which, apparently, had now come to an end.

"The Party and the people are cleansing themselves of enemies," Kaganovich declaimed importantly. "It is unavoidable that sometimes the blows will fall in the wrong places. When the forest is cut down, the chips fly."

"That doesn't make things any easier for me, Lazar Moiseyevich."

"A Bolshevik must be hard, brave and unbending, ready to sacrifice himself for the Party. Yes, ready to sacrifice not only his life but his self-respect and sensitivity. Remember we live surrounded by capitalist sharks. From time to time we must examine our ranks, and purge them of capitalist agents—with fire and sword if necessary."

I did not argue. Ordzhonikidze would have understood my suffering, would have uttered a word of apology or compassion, but not this man Kaganovich with his steely cold eyes and his stale speeches. How tired I was of these harangues, these pious invocations, this sticky verbiage covering human horror!

The Commissar at first suggested that I become chief engineer of the Nikopol *combinat* but in the end I convinced him that I could not give my best efforts in that place filled for me with so many evil memories. Then he said he would leave the problem to Glavtrubostal. As I departed I recalled the phrase he had made notorious in the past two years: "We'll break their skulls in," Kaganovich had said in talking of class enemies and saboteurs.

Before I left Moscow I had been commissioned to the Andreyev metallurgical plant in Taganrog.

Back in Nikopol, I went to the City Committee offices to transfer my formal Party affiliation to Taganrog. Secretary Kondrashin was stickily affable. He informed me, in a whisper, that he had resisted bravely Dorogan's pressure for my arrest. He wanted to make sure of the credit. Who knows? Some day this battered Kravchenko might be in a position to save him in return. In the new Russia one hoards credits against a rainy day, politically speaking.

Outside the Committee headquarters I came face to face with Dorogan.

"So you're running away to Taganrog," he sneered. "Don't crow! You're never beyond our reach. There's no place on earth we can't run you down if we have to!"

"That's your affair," I said.

"What a pity I didn't clap you into prison right away instead of allowing the idiots to start a public expulsion process. . . ."

"But tell me, Dorogan, why do you hate me so? I have never done you any personal harm."

"That's my business," he snarled and walked off angrily.

In the plant I said good-bye to my workers. I was deeply touched by the simplicity and honesty of their affection. Though they did not guess the details, they were aware of the depth of my suffering and felt with me. Silinin embraced me with real feeling. So did Gushchin. Then I caught sight of Kiryushkin, wiping his hands on his apron, and went to him. I grasped his hand and pressed it heartily. We had little need for words between us.

"Farewell, Victor Andreyevich," he said, "may God watch over you. Whatever happens, remember that millions of us Kiryushkins are on your side, always on your side . . . even when we're helpless."

I had come to Nikopol, early in 1935, keyed to hope and eager to make good as an engineer and industrial executive, for the sake of the country and its people. I was leaving it, nearly three years later, shorn of all hope, emptied of ambition, insulted in my very soul. I would gladly have exchanged my higher income and so-called privileges for obscurity in the gray tattered herd of toiling humanity.

What, in the final balance, was my chief accomplishment in these three years? Only this: that I had remained free and alive while millions of others, as guiltless as myself, had been killed, or turned into slave labor for a merciless state, or driven from their positions.

There was a time when the industrialization of my country had been a challenge to stir young blood. I loved engineering. I thrilled to the rhythm of production, intense, ordered, unafraid—raw stuff fed in at one end of the process and finished products poured out at the other end! That creative impulse had been beaten out of me. Bold technical vision had been displaced by fear, caution, suspicion. My special training and technical aptitudes now seemed to be a cruel trap. I was caught forever, condemned to shoulder responsibilities in which there could be only danger but no joy.

CHAPTER XVIII

LABOR: FREE AND SLAVE

TAGANROG, in the Rostov province, lies on the Azov Sea. An immaculate and leisurely town of spacious gardens and orchards, it was now overcrowded by the Five Year Plans. It had become a city of smoke, soot and fishy emanations from the new canneries, a city overflowing for miles with new houses and barracks around aviation, motorcycle, metallurgical and shoe factories.

The Andreyev plant, named for a member of the Politburo, manufactured railroad wheels, sheet metal, pipe and other steel products. The management of the pipe section was to be my special responsibility, of course. I was assigned to a comfortable apartment in the administration compound, where the *élite* residences were located.

Had the planners been intent on dramatizing the contrast between the upper and lower classes in the Soviet world? I doubt it. Yet the contrast was there, it shrieked at you, made you uncomfortable. Beautiful shade trees shut out the sight of the factory structures and barracks. Gravel walks flanked by lilac bushes led to a swimming and boating strip (reserved for officialdom, of course) on a well-combed beach. There were also tennis and croquet courts, billiard rooms, an attractive special dining room.

The only thing lacking in this grandeur, indeed, was a smiling face or a cheerful expression. The worst of the purge hysteria was ended, but its fumes lingered. Nearly half the administrative personnel, Party and non-Party, had been swept out and those who remained were jittery, haunted, feeling almost ashamed to have been spared so long. A new Secretary, Dvinsky, formerly in Stalin's own Secretariat, had come directly from Moscow to rule the Rostov province Committee and a new director, Semion Resnikov, commanded our plant. But the phantoms of the liquidated leaders seemed with us always.

Ordzhonikidze, in giving advice to engineers, used to say often: "Learn technological culture and cleanliness from Boris Kolesnikov." The Taganrog metallurgical plant, of which he was director for a number of years, was Kolesnikov's show-piece. He had lived in the United States and was doing his utmost to introduce American organization and efficiency. He carried his "Americanization" to a point where associates thought him a difficult man. Now this Kolesnikov and his wife had been arrested; rumors insisted that both he and his wife had been shot and that their children were confined in the special Kharkov prison for minors.

Though only a few months had passed since Kolesnikov and most of his staff had been liquidated, at the time I arrived, few traces of his

passionate Americanization remained. The work for which he had been loaded with praise and medals lay in ruins. Sloth and confusion were everywhere. Production had broken down. Director Resnikov and I were appalled by the task ahead of us.

On meeting local and regional Party officials, I realized that my reputation had preceded me. The Nikopol Committee and Dorogan had transmitted full "materials" about me; I would not be permitted to start with a clean slate. The local Party bosses made me feel right away that I was on probation and at their mercy. They probed my mind and character, often crudely, looking for soft spots, trying to catch me off guard.

It was not exactly an encouraging start. My state of mind, moreover, was hardly improved by the fact that forced labor was much more in evidence here than it had been in Nikopol. A large contingent of N.K.V.D. slaves did most of the heavy work of loading and unloading at our warehouses. They worked ten to twelve hours a day under armed surveillance. An even larger group toiled on new construction projects at the neighboring Sulinsky Metallurgical plant; and I was always running into gangs of these helots on the auto-highway between Taganrog and Rostov.

The sight of the haggard, scarcely human creatures, in their filthy rags, squelched any stray spark of enthusiasm in my heart. The awareness of these millions of slaves working and suffering, dying like flies, all over Russia was so painful that I kept pushing it into the background. Every direct confrontation with the cruel facts was therefore a new shock. What sharpened its poignancy, always, was the feeling that but for an accident I, too, would be in the legion of these damned; that for all I knew I would be in their midst soon anyhow.

About two weeks after my arrival, when I had barely had time to analyze and organize my job, I was called to the Taganrog headquarters of the N.K.V.D., late one night. The deputy chief of the Economic Division, whose name I no longer recall, received me. He was correct but reserved in his manner. Spread on his desk, I noticed at once, were the "materials" about me prepared by his Nikopol comrades.

"It's my special assignment to keep an eye on your pipe-rolling shop," he announced, "and I thought we might as well get acquainted." He settled back in his chair, like a child preparing to listen to a bedtime story. "Well, tell me about yourself."

"I don't know what to tell you. It seems to me that you know everything already."

"No, no, my dear Kravchenko, everything is never known. Would you tell me, for instance, how long you have known engineer Nikolai M——, and how you happen to know him?"

M—— was assistant chief engineer at the plant. We had worked together at various times and I had a high opinion of him.

"What did he have to do with your appointment here?" the Chekist wanted to know.

"Nothing at all. I did not even know he worked here."

"Why then did M—— talk about you, and in an enthusiastic way, to Resnikov?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. Knowing me, he naturally might mention the fact."

"At the N.K.V.D. we see nothing natural about it. On the contrary, I consider it very strange that you, a Party member, should be treated like a protege by a non-Communist whose loyalty, between ourselves, is a bit uncertain."

His questioning then shifted to the former director Kolesnikov.

"Look here, comrade," I said with some heat, "I have answered these same questions hundreds of times for nearly a year and a half while I was being purged. I answered them at N.K.V.D. inquiries, at the City Committee, before the Control Commission, until I'm sick and tired of them. I've been sent here by Moscow to work. I've been cleared. Can't you let me alone?"

"Now, now, control yourself, Comrade Kravchenko." He looked at me in puzzlement, as if I were some obnoxious specimen in a bottle. "Please remember that it does happen that a man is cleared all along the line and then—bang!—he's arrested on new evidence."

I took the hint. Wearily I reiterated the stale information, the familiar denials, which had been squeezed from my weary mind and memory in the past year. This police official played with me, hour after hour, as a mischievous child plays with a beetle and, as far as I could see, with about as little reasoned purpose. He would drop a line of inquiry only to return to it suddenly—a trick to which I had been subjected too often in the past.

The one thing that he made me understand by his questions was that here, as at Nikopol, every engineer and manager was encircled by spies, both at his work and at his home. It was obvious, too, that the Taganrog N.K.V.D. was intent upon concocting a case against this M——. I surmised that, though free, the poor fellow was being given the same kind of nocturnal "training" which I had myself received.

With only two or three hours of sleep, I was in my shops that morning, making decisions on millions of rubles' worth of production. The cruel irony of it!

2

My stay on the shores of the Azov Sea was to be extremely brief. Without explanation, I was summoned by Glavtrubostal to Moscow. The chief of the organization, Merkulov, in the presence of his assistant, Kozhevnikov, announced that Commissar Kaganovich and the Party were about to pay me a supreme compliment.

"The Novo-Trubni (New-Pipe) plant in the Urals," he said, "has been a hotbed of wrecking and sabotage. Most of the rascals have been cleaned out and others will be taken in hand soon. We are strengthening the administration with able, qualified and politically reliable people."

"That lets me out," I smiled. "I'm a sinner, Comrade Merkulov. I've been purged and exonerated, but I'm besmirched from head to toe with foul charges."

"We know all about it, but we trust you."

"Come, Victor Andreyevich," Kozhevnikov added, "stop feeling offended for what's past."

"In any case," Merkulov continued, "we are appointing you head of our largest pipe-making sub-plant, the largest not only in the U.S.S.R. but in all Europe."

"But I don't want to go to the Urals. I'm tired. What do I want that awful place for?"

The Novo-Trubni plant at Pervouralsk, about forty miles from Sverdlovsk, was notorious in our industry. It had been built in a forelorn area miles from nowhere, in the midst of marshlands, mudflats, pine forests and concentration camps. It had been put into production years too soon, before essential departments were completed, before adequate power was available. Under the circumstances, output had been small and bad. The unfortunates sent to manage the unfinished plant usually paid with their liberty for mistakes made by the planners in Moscow.

"We know that Pervouralsk is a mess and will therefore give you fullest support," Merkulov promised. "Comrade Kaganovich himself will back you up. We'll give you the top salary, a bonus for every percent of improvement, a new automobile and anything else you ask for."

"I ask only to be allowed to remain in Taganrog."

"I'm sorry. I had expected you to show more appreciation of the Party's confidence. Your appointment stands. It has been passed through the Central Committee."

Alone with Kozhevnikov later I could not resist remarking:

"If you think that forced love will bear fruit, and since you threaten me with disciplinary action, I am accepting the appointment and will do my best."

"Well, that's splendid!" he laughed. "Love, you know, is a matter of habit. First comes constraint, then comes habit and finally love. So the matter is settled. Let's get down to work."

I met the newly appointed director of the whole *combinat,* Jacob Osadchi, who would be my only superior at the Urals post, and others just designated to work with us. An entirely new administration was being assembled in Moscow—without a hint, as yet, to the engineers and executives running the *combinat*. I looked forward to the new tasks with bitter misgivings. Novo-Trubni was producing only 35 to 40 per cent of its monthly norm, and was often cited in the press and in official speeches as a horrible example of mismanagement and sabotage. I was inheriting one of the worst headaches in the entire metallurgical field.

The atmosphere in Moscow just then, moreover, was nicely calculated to deepen my pessimism. It was the second week in March, 1938: the week when the third and most sensational of the blood-purge trials took place. The country by now was acclimated to grotesque accusations against the Fathers of the Revolution and even more grotesque "confessions." Yet it

stood aghast, incredulous, for the defendants included Bukharin, Rykov, Krestinsky and others whose names were closely linked with Lenin's.

Nikolai Bukharin, brilliant, ascetic, a "Bolshevik saint," had been the special idol of the Communist youth of my generation. I recalled our meeting long ago at Ordzhonikidze's office, and subsequent meetings in his own office. Even after he was expelled from the Politburo and was known to be in disfavor, Bukharin's appearance at a public meeting evoked ovations second only to Stalin's. Alexei Rykov had been Lenin's successor as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. He had the head of the fanatic, with a ragged beard and burning eyes; even his notorious weakness for the bottle did not lessen his popularity. Now these men, and others like them, defiled themselves, outraged the worship we had lavished on them. Now they were shot as spies, agents of capitalism and traitors.

I can attest that no one I met in Moscow attached the slightest value to their confessions. These men had consented to serve as puppets in a political morality play not in the least related to truth. Stalin was destroying his personal opponents and had succeeded in forcing them to participate in their own humiliation and extinction. We wondered about the techniques he had used. But even Party people were not expected to believe the trial testimony literally. To do so would have been tantamount, among Communists, to an admission of congenital idiocy. At most we accepted the fantasies in a symbolic, allegorical sense.

Old Comrade Misha, whom I visited on this trip, was badly broken up. He had known the executed leaders intimately before and after the revolution. His explanation of the confessions, though far from satisfactory, was the nearest I would ever come to a logical appraisal of the phenomenon. It was based on information obtained through his many friends in the Kremlin.

"To begin with, Vitya," he said, "a lie remains a lie no matter how many people confess to it. Let's forget rhetoric. Bukharin, Rykov and the others, for all their heroic past, were flesh-and-blood human beings. You told me yourself how near you came to signing a lot of lies under pressure in Nikopol. But what you went through was child's play against the moral and perhaps physical coercions used against these leaders."

"But these same men, Comrade Misha, held out against persecution and threats by the Tsar's police in their day."

"Unfortunately there's no comparison. The secret police of the Tsarist Okhrana were too primitive, not so scientific, not so devilishly clever as the present system. I wonder how many of us old revolutionists would have held out if the Okhrana had subjected us to the scientific sadism of the N.K.V.D.

"And there's another thing, equally important, Vitya. In the old days these men had a deep faith to sustain them. Men will sacrifice themselves and—what is more difficult—their loved ones for a great belief and a passionate hope. What did they have to sustain them under N.K.V.D. torture and solitary confinement? Neither hope nor faith. They were disillusioned men. Their life's work lay around them in ruins, beyond re-

pair. Why play the hero for a dead cause? Why continue to fight when there is no longer a glimmer of hope? Try to understand that and you'll begin to understand why yesterday's heroes became soft, pliant and devoid of all dignity."

"Do you credit the talk about bargains struck between the victims and the prosecution?"

"I believe it to be a fact and, you must understand, I base the belief on pretty intimate information. You know that the N.K.V.D. rarely liquidates a man without also liquidating his family. Do you really suppose it's an accident that Rykov's daughter, whom he loved above all other people, remains alive and free? Or that Bukharin's father, Rosengoltz's wife and other close relatives have not been touched? I take it for granted that the men besmirched themselves—played their assigned roles in the tragi-comedy—to save those they loved.

"Let me tell you what I know from comrades close to Yezhov, who's been in charge of the obscene business since Yagoda's liquidation. The scenario for the spectacle was prepared by the N.K.V.D. on Stalin's personal orders. Every actor—prosecutors, defendants, witnesses, judges—was letter-perfect in his role before the curtain went up. Those of the accused who wouldn't cooperate were killed off in the dark. The others were paid off with the lives of their children, wives, parents, close friends. They were promised in addition that they would have the right of appeal to higher instances, even to the Politburo. A little hope goes a long way under such circumstances.

"But in the case of Bukharin, Rykov, Krestinsky and a few others the bargains were more specific. If they went through with the parts as written, their death sentences would be commuted and they would merely be exiled to distant places, they were promised. Stalin even played on their vanity. How could he permit them to be shot, he said, when their names had such great historical weight?

"Well, the victims carried out their part of the arrangement. Stalin didn't. Obviously he never intended to. Within a few hours after the trial, the executions took place. Bukharin and Rykov died with curses against Stalin on their lips. And they died standing up—not grovelling on the cellar floor and weeping for mercy like Zinoviev and Kamenev.

"And here's another piece of inside information. Stalin has created a commission to write a new history of the Party. History will be revised, events will be twisted, to conform with the phantasmagoria of these trials. You and I will laugh at the distortions, or cry over them. But a new generation is growing up, without memory of the past. Already the libraries are being cleansed of any and every past book or article which contradicts the stupid inventions at these trials. The nightmare will take root as the official truth. The lie will have conquered. Ekh, Vitya, and for that I spent ten years in chains in damp Tsarist prison cells . . ."

Such was the state of things in Moscow as I left to clean those Augean stables in the Urals.

3

At the railroad station in Sverdlovsk (formerly Yekaterinburg and famous as the city in which the last Tsar and his family were slaughtered) I was met by an official from the Novo-Trubni plant. Fortunately he was someone with whom I was fairly well acquainted and he could afford to be frank. As we drove the forty miles to Pervouralsk, he brought me up to date on the plant. Though he talked with restraint, my worst forebodings were confirmed.

I would have to bring orderly production out of physical chaos and moral collapse. Some six thousand workers and their families, a total of seventeen or eighteen thousand people, were living under primitive conditions. The only ones who could be counted on not to run away were those born in the district and the forced-labor groups on construction jobs. The technical personnel, or what was left of it after the purges, was demoralized and, of course, shied away from responsibility. Because of the unsavory living and working conditions they felt themselves exiles and hoped only for speedy transfer elsewhere.

About seven or eight miles from Pervouralsk, I suddenly saw the barbed-wire fence of a concentration camp a few hundred meters off the road. We stopped the car so I could take a better look. The camp, acres and acres of bleak barracks in a huge clearing in the woods, seemed deserted, silent as death. It was six-sided and at each of the six corners there was a watchtower, equipped with big searchlights and machine guns.

"Where are the prisoners?" I asked my companion.

"At work this time of the day," he said. "A few of them are in our own factory, the rest in other plants, mines and on construction jobs. Victor Andreyevich, I see you're new to the Urals. You'd better get accustomed to the prisoners everywhere."

We resumed the drive. A pretty introduction to my new life!

Osadchi, the new director, had arrived before me. He was glum. One look at the *combinat* had been enough to extinguish the enthusiasm he had flaunted in Moscow.

"Comrade Kravchenko, we certainly have a job cut out for us," he sighed as we walked through the various buildings and shops. "It will be years before this *combinat* is self-sustaining. We don't have our own electric furnaces for making instruments. There's no thermic section, no satisfactory mechanical shop. The electric power is way below our needs and the gas station is a long way from being finished. There are no facilities for chromium-plating of instruments. In short, this isn't as yet a factory at all. It's only the beginning of one."

My own eyes confirmed his story. The mechanical department was a joke. The galvanic shop was unworthy of the name. The warehouses were not yet finished, so that thousands of tons of steel and other metal lay under the open sky. Metals of all types and qualities were heaped indiscriminately, without the slightest attempt at organization. The pipe-rolling machinery itself was of the most modern American and German

makes, representing millions of rubles in *valuta*. But of what avail were they without adequate accessory services? Even the imported machines were crusted with dirt and out of repair. Everywhere, protruding from the muck, I saw heaps of expensive tools and machine parts gathering rust.

An inspection of the workers' quarters completed my sense of despair. The housing I had glimpsed behind the barbed wire, under the muzzles of machine guns, differed very little from these wretched wooden boxes, damp and dirty, in which the free proletarians of our factory swarmed.

I engaged several of the women in conversation. They were sullen. Evidently they looked on us as the people to blame for their troubles, not as comrades in work. There was little farming in this part of the Urals; only the half dozen top officials, with automobiles at our disposal, could hope to obtain sufficient provisions in Sverdlovsk. The workers lived chiefly on bread, a few local vegetables and canned goods. In the brief summer the barracks were hot as ovens, in many barracks the rain came through holes in the roofs and saturated the plank walls. In the long Ural winters they provided no protection against the extreme cold.

After spending an hour in the barracks, I blushed with shame as I surveyed my own four-room apartment in one of the three-story brick houses, set among trees on the other side of the factory grounds. Elsewhere, even in Nikopol or Taganrog, it would have been considered a drab enough residence. But in Pervouralsk it seemed the last word in luxury, with its private bath, carpeted floors, good furniture and good kitchen. Along with the apartment, I inherited Dunia, the slovenly middle-aged peasant woman who did the cooking and cleaning, from my predecessor.

The promised limousine was waiting for me, as well as a small Ford which, in the muddy season, was more serviceable. I also had good horses assigned for my exclusive use. My basic salary was 1500 rubles a month but with bonuses and other incentive pay my average sometimes would be closer to 3,000 rubles. What this meant may be judged from the fact that unskilled laborers earned about 150, skilled mechanics around 250, and qualified engineers around 600.

An engineer would have to spend an entire month's salary for a plain suit of clothes; but this was purely theoretical, since no clothes were available in Pervouralsk and rarely even in Sverdlovsk. Only those of us who could make occasional business trips to Moscow or Leningrad managed to buy shoes and clothes. For the rest, a limited supply was at the disposal of the administration and we distributed this to deserving engineers, foremen or even workers.

I had been at work less than two weeks when the chief bookkeeper brought the semi-monthly payroll for my signature. As I studied the document I noted a curious item: a considerable sum "to the N.K.V.D."

"What's that for?" I asked, puzzled.

"That's under our labor contract, for the 160 penal laborers assigned to your section. Half their wages goes to the N.K.V.D."

"Are they from one of the concentration camps?"

"No, no, Comrade Kravchenko. That's quite another department of

the N.K.V.D. The contract laborers live here, like the free workers. But they have barracks of their own. They are men deported here for various crimes."

Subsequently I was told by the directors of other sections that all of them had contingents of this forced labor—250 in one shop, eighty in another, fifty in the third. The free workers did not associate with them, and in any part of the plant one could usually pick them out by their exceptionally pitiful appearance.

Once I talked to one of these forced laborers in my pipe-rolling mill. He was a short, cadaverous looking fellow. I found it hard to draw him out; evidently the wretched creatures were under strict orders to keep their mouths shut. But I learned that he had been a foreman in a Leningrad factory, liquidated three years earlier.

"But what's to stop you from running away?" I asked.

"Running away!" he shook his head sadly. "Where to? Where could we hide and for how long? But I would suggest to you, chief, that this talk isn't healthy for either of us."

We began the appalling task of digging our way out of the confusion. Electric furnaces had been lying around forgotten. We cleaned them up and after weeks of strenuous labor—a fourteen-hour day seemed a holiday—we had one furnace in operation. I installed a large mechanical section and assigned the qualified workers to teach the others how to operate it. I created a thermic shop and arranged for the training of novices to operate it. The chromium-plating section was built and equipped from scratch. Production in the past years had been slowed up by the lack of an internal telephone system and a proper despatchers' station; these too I built under handicaps which only a technician can quite appreciate. We set up indispensable ovens, cranes, work benches.

Besides such minimal technical installations, I put hundreds of men and women to work cleaning, scrubbing, painting, removing accumulated dirt. Without elementary order and cleanliness, I realized, there was no hope of raising output. Sabotage? It seemed to me miraculous that the plant had managed to produce even 35 to 40 per cent of the quotas assigned by headquarters.

Within two months the place was scarcely recognizable. My colleagues had been infected by my own determination and their eagerness to work had percolated down to the humblest bench hands and floor sweepers. By May we had not only raised production to 80 per cent—an achievement that had seemed impossible when I first arrived—but had improved the quality. Impurities in our pipes declined from an average of 12 per cent to an average of 5 or 6 per cent.

Naturally, this colossal effort left me no margin for a personal life. Besides being in charge of production, I was personally responsible for the housing, feeding, technical schooling and medical care of the two thousand workers and their families under my direct control. Though I had ample assistance, some of it competent, the ultimate responsibility was mine and there was rarely a day when my energies were not siphoned off by problems not directly related to production.

To add to my burdens, the purge hysteria was far from ended. Valuable men were snatched from me when I needed them most; those who escaped direct attack lived and worked in an atmosphere of unrelieved apprehension. By this time I had schooled myself to ignore the multitudinous spying and denunciations. I had trained my brain and nerves to focus on the job in hand, without expending nervous energy on futile angers. All the same, I was still shaken and sometimes paralyzed in my work at crucial moments when I discovered that the Economic Division of the local N.K.V.D. knew details of the work, details of technical decisions, even before I did. It made me feel naked, unprotected.

The Special Department of our factory, headed up by Comrades Kolbin and Stoffin, served as the eyes and ears of the Secret Police. Besides receiving copies of all orders and technical reports, these determined men had their agents deployed through every shop and office. That, however, was only the routine of surveillance. The *combinat* in addition heaved and staggered under the weight of endless special commissions of investigation, control brigades and individual inspectors. They came, quietly or with a fanfare of official trumpets, from the Regional Committee, the Central Committee in Moscow, Glavtrubostal in Moscow, the Commissariat of Heavy Industry and a dozen other organizations.

Nor was that all. Orders for pipe, routed through Moscow, always originated in other industries which therefore sent commissions to check on progress and to hurl sabotage threats at our dizzy heads. We produced pipe for tanks, aviation, artillery, ships, oil installations, automotive plants and numerous other purposes. Because the orders were invariably too large for our facilities, and the final products rarely up to exacting specifications, the trusts and industries involved, as well as the armed services, filed protests which in turn generated inspections, investigations, and of course new epidemics of N.K.V.D. "vigilance."

Hardly a week went by without its array of controllers and plenipotentiaries from this or that bureau, armed with awe-inspiring mandates, nostrils aquiver for the spoor of "wreckers." They took up my time, stamped and swore in my office and convoked myriad conferences. Depressed by the dullness of life in this remote place and by the stupidity of their own assignments, many of them ended by washing down their sorrows in vodka or expunging them in card games for high stakes.

In bed at last after a fourteen-to-sixteen-hour day, I could rarely count on uninterrupted sleep. There were long-distance calls from Moscow, again checking, pleading and threatening. There were police calls in connection with the incessant arrests. I had no sooner dozed off than someone on the night shift phoned with tidings of accidents, mislaid tools, spoiled products.

From the talk around me I was able to piece together a picture of the fearful havoc wrought by the purge before my arrival, in the Novo-Trubni plant and in every mine and factory of the vicinity. The story of Senion Magrilov, director of another metallurgical factory, within the town of Pervouralsk itself, remains indelibly impressed on my nerves.

His plant was perhaps the oldest in Russia, having been started, accord-

ing to local legend, by Peter the Great himself. It was manned by workers whose fathers and grandfathers had worked there before them. They lived in their own clean small homes, cultivated tiny gardens, had some pigs and poultry and in general maintained a standard almost up to the pre-revolutionary level. In sending Magrilov to manage this factory, the Party was in effect awarding him a sinecure. He was a Party member of long standing, well along in years, a close acquaintance of Lenin's widow and of Lenin's sister, Maria Ulianova, and regarded as one of the most influential figures in the region.

But the cyclonic purge madness did not spare him. The local N.K.V.D. hounded him with accusations. He was charged with sabotage and with protecting other saboteurs. After a few months of persecution, he gave up. He locked himself in his own office, pointed a revolver down his throat and pulled the trigger. . . . He left a long letter proclaiming his innocence and inveighing against the terror. The N.K.V.D. confiscated the letter, yet somehow the contents became known to the workers in the factory. Several of Magrilov's closest associates, because they were suspected of having read the suicide epistle, "disappeared" without leaving a trace.

The Magrilov tragedy was exceptional only because of the prominence of the victim. I heard the details of literally hundreds of arrests, torture sessions and suicides. But I could not permit them to affect my work. I learned at last to blot out disturbing knowledge. It's not an easy art to acquire, but only those who master it can survive as industrial executives in the U.S.S.R. Those who cannot keep their compassion under strict control, almost in a special air-tight compartment of their beings, are doomed to heart-break or insanity.

Moscow took cognizance of the remarkable improvement at the Novo-Trubni. A Moscow meeting of activists at the Commissariat, in the presence of Kaganovich, commended my work. According to the report in *For Industrialization*, the plant had been in a bad way, until the arrival of "Kravchenko. active young engineer and Party member," changed the picture.

4

The chief of the Pervouralsk N.K.V.D., Comrade Parshin, whom I had already met at Party conferences, paid me a visit. He was lavish with praise of the "miracles" I had wrought in stepping up production. Always the policeman, he consumed hours of my time with questions about the various orders on which we were then working, and about the "political mood" of various individuals under me. I could scarcely conceal my annoyance at the extent of his detailed knowledge about my work. It gave me conclusive proof that there were many informers around me.

"You're certainly eliminating the results of the sabotage of your predecessors," he finally said. From his mouth that was the highest conceivable praise. "I therefore hate to impose on your time, Victor Andreyevich. But tonight you can do me a favor. I'll call you later and tell you when to come."

The appointment, when it came through, was for two in the morning. The N.K.V.D. was housed in a well-built two-story structure, the most imposing on the muddy main street of Pervouralsk. Despite the hour, there were lights in every window; clearly business was brisk. The chief greeted me cordially and led me into his office.

"Make yourself comfortable," he said. "I'm afraid you may be here quite a while."

"What do you want of me?"

"Well, here's the story: We have an enemy of the people arrested here, an out-and-out wrecker. It's clear to us that he's to blame for much of the disorder you found in your plant. But he's an obstinate customer. My plan tonight is to question him in your presence. With a specialist like you listening in, he won't be able to pull the wool over my eyes."

"Frankly, I don't like the business at all," I said in dismay.

"That's strange. You surprise me. Didn't Lenin himself say that every good Communist must be a Chekist? Well, let's begin." He rang for his secretary, "Tell the guards to bring the prisoner from cell 7."

The chief prepared for the interview by pulling some thick files out of the huge safe—and by placing a revolver demonstratively on his desk. As he waited for his prisoner, he seemed to become tense, a tiger about to spring on his prey. Soon the door opened. Two guards with drawn revolvers entered and between them the remnants of what was once a man. The guards withdrew, leaving the three of us in the room.

"Hello," the prisoner said weakly, looking around as if dazed.

Parshin did not respond. I acknowledged the greeting. The prisoner was little more than a skeleton in rags. His face was of a pasty gray hue and looked like a death mask. A raw gash, purple with congealed blood, zigzagged from one temple almost to his chin. He stood with hands behind his back, his head bowed.

The Chekist began to read the prisoner's indictment, by way of acquainting me with the facts of the case. I learned that he had been under arrest for over thirteen months. Though he looked like a man of sixty, he was only in his early forties. He had been the chief construction engineer at the Novo-Trubni plant up to the time it was put into production. Looking at the man, I could not help thinking, "There, but for the grace of God, stands Victor Kravchenko."

"Comrade Parshin," I said in a low voice, "couldn't you let the prisoner sit down?"

"This is my affair," he replied. "This is the N.K.V.D. It isn't a vacation resort."

Having finished reading, Parshin addressed the prisoner in a stentorian voice:

"I shall question you concerning your wrecking activities in the pipe-rolling plant. Answer precisely, clearly and without mixing things up. You are in the presence of a trained engineer who knows the plant. You can't fool me any more. The first question: Why did you as chief engineer of the Capital Construction Board of the factory build wooden roofs over the furnaces, which could easily have been set afire?"

"According to plan," the prisoner replied with extraordinary precision, considering his physical condition, "the roofs should have been of iron. But a government order came through, passed by Commissar Ordzhonikidze himself, to use wood because of the great deficit of iron at the time. The order applied to our factory and to dozens of others. The Commissariat records should prove that easily. I considered it technically unwise but I had no power to countermand the Commissar's explicit instruction especially when I knew about the lack of metals."

"Your opinion?" the chief turned to me.

"The citizen—" I began.

"He's no citizen but an enemy of the people."

"Well, the prisoner is entirely correct. We had wooden roofs at the Nikopol plant and for the same reason, though by this time they're covered with galvanized iron. I happened to be present at a conference in Comrade Ginsburg's office when he, acting with the consent of Ordzhonikidze, approved wooden roofs for all shops except the smelting and Martens shops."

The Chekist was a little discomfited.

"Please bear in mind," he said, "that you will be held accountable for your testimony!"

"I'm fully aware of that," I said.

"Second question," he declaimed, turning again to the prisoner. "Why did you build a large pipe-making shop without galvanic, thermic and mechanical departments, without a base for repairs and without facilities for making the necessary precision instruments?"

"The project was for a large, modern *combinat*," the prisoner replied. "All of the departments you mention were to be outside the main shops, centralized in special service shops. The State Planning Commission and the Commissariat failed to provide the money, materials and equipment for these supplementary service shops. Thus it happened that the main plant was finished before the others were more than started. Then to our surprise we were ordered to start production, which I considered highly undesirable, and later I was arrested."

Whatever his thirteen months of suffering might have done to this man's mind, it worked well enough on professional questions. *A first-rate engineering brain*, I found myself thinking.

"What do you say to that?" the chief asked me.

"The prisoner is entirely right. The factory was started long ahead of schedule. Even now it is far from complete. If we were to wait until everything is finished according to the original plan, we would not be able to work for another year. Personally I think it was a mistake not to build the service sections in the main plant, but that's a decision made in Moscow. The completion of the main installations before the accessory portions certainly was not sabotage."

"Are you absolutely sure of this?"

"Quite sure. . . . May I give the prisoner a cigaret?"

"All right."

I handed the whole pack to the man, but the chief would not permit it.

"One cigaret is enough," he shouted. "Let him sign and acknowledge his wrecking and he'll smoke all he wants."

When the engineer put his hand out, from behind his back, I saw that it was wrapped in blood-stained rags.

For several hours the questioning went on. In every case I was able, in perfect honesty, to side with the engineer against the police officer. At about five-thirty, in the midst of a harangue by Parshin, the prisoner collapsed. I watched him slide down slowly, as if in a slow-motion film. After he was revived, by dashing cold water over him, the guards brought a chair for him, and the questioning was resumed. It was after six before the unfortunate was led out. I shall never forget the gratitude in his eyes as he looked at me from the doorway.

"I'm going to work on the protocol of this inquiry," Parshin announced, "and it will be brought to you for your signature in a few days. Sorry to have held you this long."

"Since it's too late to go to sleep anyhow," I said, "could you show me through the building?"

He hesitated, puzzled by the unusual request.

"There's nothing interesting to see," he said finally. "But if you wish. . . . It might help impress on you the responsibility you take in giving correct and true answers. . . ."

He combed his hair, put on the flat officer's cap with its red crown and blue top, and stuck the revolver in his hip pocket. We both put on our overcoats. Accompanied by a guard, we made a tour that will remain fresh in my memory for the rest of my life. We entered a yard, an iron door was opened, and we descended a steep stairway to a basement. The stench struck me like a physical blow. A weak bulb glowed in the corridor.

I observed that the guard, who sprang to attention as we entered, had been reading an instalment of the *Party History* then appearing serially in *Pravda*. I remember marvelling that this man, living in the awful stench of Stalinism in practice, should be so resolutely studying its theory. . . .

A commotion began in the rows of cells flanking the corridor. "Important guests!" someone shouted. The guard opened one of the doors and commanded "Rise!" Twenty-odd men rose to their feet. They were unshaven, indescribably pathetic, and most of them carried evidences of beatings. The only "furnishings" in the room were a bucket of water with a tin cup attached to it; another bucket in the far corner for human needs; the rough boards that served as beds; and a kind of wooden shelf loaded with the prisoner's rags and bundles. The cell would have been overcrowded by five, let alone twenty, prisoners.

The other cells were no less horrible. I lost all desire to see the rest. Several of the cells were reserved for women.

"Your ventilation isn't working," the chief said to the young Chekist at the door as we were leaving. "You'll stink yourself into the grave."

"I go to the public bath every day when I finish here," he explained cheerfully, "otherwise my wife won't let me into the house. The ventilators haven't worked for a long time."

When I emerged from the building, I found my chauffeur asleep at the wheel and aroused him.

"Ah, Victor Andreyevich, you were so long I began to wonder. . . . When we drive important people to this place, we never know whether we'll drive them back."

"I'm very tired, Petya. Let's go straight to the factory. No sleep for me tonight."

That afternoon my chief assistant came to see me. Could he stay away for three hours? A little probing disclosed that he had been summoned by the N.K.V.D.

"I can't spare you during working hours," I said. "Phone and say you'll be there after six. And by the way, after you've been there, come and see me again."

Late that night he did come to see me. He could not tell me what had happened, having been warned not to talk. But in the course of conversation I stumbled on the theory that he had been consulted on the very same case.

"Did you know the chief engineer on construction before his arrest?" I asked, as if casually.

"Yes, and Victor Andreyevich, I couldn't recognize him. . . ." He stopped himself, realizing he was giving away the secret.

Two days later Stoffin of the Special Department brought me the promised protocol.

"Just sign it and I'll rush it to Pervouralsk," he said.

"In the first place I don't intend to sign it without a very careful reading. In the second place, I don't propose to interrupt important work. I'll read it after work hours."

"But my orders are not to leave it out of my sight. I can't——"

"Just call your chief and tell him what I said. That will clear you."

Tremulously he phoned the N.K.V.D. Parshin was incensed. Finally, out of sympathy for the scared, brow-beaten Stoffin, I took the receiver from him.

"Kravchenko, you'll show more respect for the N.K.V.D.!" Parshin shrieked. "Especially after our visit to the cellar!"

"And you'll show more respect for the head of this plant!" I replied. "If you don't stop bothering me I'll call Kaganovich directly and tell him who's interfering with output."

The threat did the trick. Suddenly Parshin was apologetic. He was so overworked, he pleaded, and I must not think harshly of him. Of course I could read the deposition, and naturally on my own time.

At the end of the workday, with Stoffin waiting gloomily in the offices of the Special Department, I settled down to read the supposed summation of my night's testimony at the N.K.V.D. My hair stood on end. Everything I had said had been arbitrarily twisted into its opposite. Incriminatory words were put into my mouth. The prisoner's answers and my comments were doctored to support the allegations of deliberate wrecking.

On every page there was a warning, in large letters, that no alterations were permitted. All the same, I dipped my pen into the red ink and labori-

ously, sentence by sentence, edited the document. In many instances I even rephrased the questions, which had been distorted to falsify the intent of the answers. In a good many cases I needed only to insert the word "not," the meaning had been so completely misrepresented.

When I called Stoffin and handed him the blotched protocol, every page of it more red than black, he was bug-eyed with horror. Nothing so blasphemous had ever before happened in his experience. The blood left his face.

"But it's not allowed, Comrade Director. This is terrible," he wailed.

"Give it to your boss. The responsibility is mine."

I did not hear again about this matter. But a hurt and peeved expression spread over Parshin's long horsy face whenever we met. About three weeks later the news spread through the factory that the old chief construction engineer, after fourteen months in the stinking N.K.V.D. cellars, had been freed. Certainly it was not my intervention that was responsible; many others must have given the same kind of answers. But the stupid and inhuman officials who had humiliated and tortured him for more than a year were not even reprimanded. They continued to rule arrogantly and to arrest at will.

5

The young engineer Panov, in charge of my night shift, was one of my most conscientious colleagues. A man with even features, modest and taciturn, he made a good impression on people. The fact that his shift lagged on the production norm weighed on him and he put in many extra hours in the attempt to speed up the work.

What piqued my curiosity about Panov was the utter wretchedness of his appearance. The pallor of his features spoke of undernourishment. His one suit of clothes was threadbare and in all weather he walked around in canvas slippers. On inquiring I readily saw the cause of his poverty. Of his 550 rubles a month, 150 were taken away in taxes, loans and various dues, leaving him 400. On this he had to support his wife, a baby daughter and an old mother, who lived with him in a two-room apartment in the administration residences.

I saw to it that Panov received shoes and a work-suit from the factory storehouse. Touched by my concern, he screwed up the courage to talk to me about his troubles.

"Victor Andreyevich, may I talk to you frankly?" he asked, sitting in my office.

"But of course."

"Well, I'm here to implore that you help me to leave this hell-hole. I have a few connections and hope for an engineering post in the Army, but I need your cooperation."

"But why are you so dissatisfied here, Panov? You're young. You're getting valuable training under difficult conditions. Do you know what this flight from a difficult job is called in Party terminology?"

"I know, I know . . . opportunism, cowardice, and so on. But look at

my side of it. I spent five hungry, cold years at the Institute. My wife, whom I married while I was still a student, looked forward to my life as a full-fledged engineer. But what has she got? More hunger and loneliness and awful poverty. I can see that her love for me is fading out under these blows, and I want to save it. I want to save our little girl, who can't get enough milk. Do you blame me for trying to rescue our family life?"

"As for myself, Panov, I don't. I can understand it."

"Well, in the Army I'll be drawing 750 rubles, besides my uniform, an apartment, free rations. I'll be able to give nearly all my earnings to my family. Besides, I'll be devoting myself to defense, which is also vital."

In the end I agreed to help him obtain his release from the plant. Years later I learned, through the newspapers, that he had distinguished himself in the war. Under the Ural conditions he would have been turned into an embittered, broken man in a short time. It was clear to me that other men, intrinsically good human material, were being spoiled by a senseless emphasis on production which ignored the comfort and the health of the human beings behind the production.

No less destructive than the physical hardships was the constant pressure of insulting doubts about the men's honesty. No matter how hard we toiled, the whole system was geared to the assumption that we were traitors and scoundrels who would wreck our own handiwork if not kept under observation twenty-four hours a day.

There was the time a special commission came to see me in connection with an order for the Defense Industry Administration No. 14. The order called for pipes of extreme precision, for the production of which we were hardly prepared. Several other pipe-rolling mills had refused to undertake it on the ground that they could not fulfill it.

I called a conference of my factory heads and laid the problem before them, in the presence of the Defense representatives. We agreed that while we might tackle the assignment, the chances of failure were enormous. It would require rapid retooling, a search for specialized types of steel, and then work under great pressure.

I accepted the order only after having exacted a written document in which it was acknowledged in advance that results could not be guaranteed. I was given 20,000 rubles to distribute in bonuses if the task were completed on time. Not only my technical staff but the workers, realizing the importance and the challenge of the job, put their hearts and souls into it.

We fulfilled the order in fifteen days. There were times when I remained in the plant three and four days at a time, taking my meals in the office and snatching a few hours of sleep amidst the din of machinery. My assistants worked as hard as I did. Surely there could be no reasonable doubts of the honesty of our effort. Yet the Special Department and Defense investigators shadowed us every day, sniffing for sabotage. Our human dignity and professional pride were outraged. Neither the boruses nor the deluge of congratulatory telegrams could remove the sour taste left with all of us.

Kolbin, Stoffin, the officials of the Economic Department of the

N.K.V.D. and even the secretary of the City Committee, Dovbenko, were puffed up over their "triumph" on this order. They acted as if their annoying vigilance, rather than the skill and sweat of the workers and engineers, were responsible for the success.

"Why so much suspicion? Why all this joy that no one did any wrecking?" I asked Parshin.

He could scarcely grasp the questions, espionage seemed to him so natural. It seemed to him, indeed, the most vital part of any job!

"Besides, Victor Andreyevich," he took me into his confidence, "our success on this assignment sets a new task before the Economic Division. We must now find out why the other plants refused to accept the order! We've demonstrated that it was possible, why then did those directors refuse to touch it? Maybe they were telling the truth—but maybe they were sabotaging the defense industry. So you see how important our function is. . . ."

Several other special jobs—always in the hectic atmosphere of doubts and threats and pervasive spying—were finished with flying colors. The reputation of our Novo-Trubni plant was rapidly improving. Correspondents from *For Industrialization* and other papers wrote enthusiastic descriptions of how the "leftovers of sabotage" were being "liquidated" in this Ural plant. But output still stood around 85 per cent and Moscow, demonstrating its "Bolshevik firmness," pressed for 100 per cent. That meant grief as a reward for our success.

6

I had reason often enough to recall the advice I had been offered on the day of my arrival: to get used to the pervasive presence of prisoners, concentration camps and forced labor colonies. In Pervouralsk and its environs we were in the center of one of the large slave-labor regions of "socialist" Russia. One could not travel far off the main highway in any direction without running into the horror.

Elsewhere a discreet silence might be thrown around the subject. But here the reality was too big, too close for such reticence. One would say, quite casually, "There's good fishing on the Chusovaya River, a kilometer or so this side of the N.K.V.D. colony," or "You'd better follow that road to the left, past the concentration camp."

Our gas station was fueled with peat provided by the Uralturf trust. When I had occasion to complain about deficiencies in gas deliveries, the trust officials rang up Uralturf, which as a matter of course rang up the proper N.K.V.D. official for an explanation. Thousands of prisoners, women as well as men, cut and pressed the turf in the Sverdlovsk region. Peat constituted one of the fuel sources also for Uralenergo, the trust which supplied us with electric power.

I tried to avoid the sight, because it depressed me for weeks. Always I was sickened by the fear that I might find myself looking into the eyes of someone I had known and loved, so many hundreds of my friends had been swallowed up by the super-purge. Once, while on a day's outing with

a colleague, we came across a dismal stretch of marshes where perhaps three hundred prisoners, mostly women, were at work. All of the unfortunates were indescribably dirty and grotesquely clad, and many of them stood up to their knees in muddy water. They worked in absolute silence, with the most primitive tools and seemed utterly indifferent to the two strangers.

It was a scene out of some Dantesque hell which I could not drive out of my memory for months. The very word "peat" made my flesh creep.

Driving to and from Sverdlovsk, I became familiar with the sight of the big camp which I had stopped to see on the day of my arrival here. Its main entrance, in the side of the hexagon facing the road, was topped by an elaborate, rather modernistic wooden cornice, into which was set an oval portrait of Stalin. Often strips of red bunting inscribed with the current slogans were stretched on the cornice. At night small colored electric bulbs lit up the picture and the inscriptions.

A stranger, glimpsing this façade from the road as he motored by, might assume that some noble socialist establishment was housed behind the decorated gateway. Those of us who lived in the district knew that the hexagon of horror cut off 2,500 men from the world of the living. Searchlights in the six watchtowers played on the camp all night, revolving automatically, each in its turn, as in a lighthouse. These pillars of light, sweeping across the night sky, made pretty patterns—for those who did not know what they connoted.

Working in plants, mines and on construction projects in the surrounding area, most of the prisoners walked six or seven miles to and from work every day in all weather. This meant that in addition to working ten or twelve hours a day, they walked about three hours more, and few of them had footwear suitable for these forced marches.

Not far from Pervouralsk is the town of Ryevda, site of another metallurgical factory. Every time I went there, I passed a concentration camp with accommodations for about two thousand prisoners. A large part of this number worked in the factory, where construction was still under way, and most of the others were engaged on road building or were contracted for the nearby copper mines.

Another camp, containing only about a thousand prisoners, stood on the shore of the Chusovaya, a lovely, swift-running stream in a picturesque setting of dense pine forests on a turbulent hilly landscape. During the summer months our engineers and officials sometimes took their families to the banks of the Chusovaya for swimming, fishing and rest. They were careful to stop at a respectable distance from the camp; why spoil the outing with a grim reminder?

Having heard so many people rave about the beauty of this river, I finally decided to explore it. My two companions, both Party members, were also newcomers in the district, so that none of us knew about this particular camp. We were driving along, in my Ford, talking about factory affairs when suddenly we found ourselves on a hillock looking down on the barbed-wire enclosure, in a forest clearing several hundred yards from the river's edge. As usual, there were the four towers at the corners of the

quadrangle. Guards with fixed bayonets were in evidence. At the farther end of the enclosure several hundred prisoners, men and women, were working on the construction of a new row of barracks.

Our expedition was ended there and then. All desire to see more of the river left us and we drove back to Pervouralsk in silence. The truth is that even the most faithful and unthinking Communists in their heart of hearts despise and are ashamed of the slave-labor system. In the very heat with which some of the more fanatic comrades defended the system I often sensed an uneasiness. In calling the victims foul names—kulaks, wreckers . . . scum . . . dirt . . . they seemed to be shouting down their inner disgust. Every one of them knew quite well that another turn of the political wheel, another purge or crisis, might easily put them among the outlaws whose toil was fortifying our curious brand of socialism.

CHAPTER XIX

WHILE HISTORY IS EDITED

WHEN I THINK back to my sojourn in the Urals, filled with odious memories, one dismal episode crowds out the rest.

It all added up to a hoax played on Russian public opinion, an extravagant hoax in which big and little officials, in Moscow and in Pervouralsk, worked together to dupe the public. They did it so adroitly, dovetailing their lies so expertly, that to this day the "great victory at the Novo-Trubni plant" is cited as an example of the wonders worked by "socialist enthusiasm."

The affair began with the noisy arrival at our sprawling Urals outpost of a brigade of activists from Moscow under instructions to boost Stakhanovite standards at our pipe-rolling plant. Now that we were producing 85 per cent of the norm, one big Moscow-style heave and shove would push us "over the top" to 100 per cent or more. Where there's a will there's a way. There's no bastion we Bolsheviks can't take. Team work does it. All together, comrades, for our Leader and Teacher. . . .

Before leaving the capital, the heave-and-shove brigadiers had been received by Commissar Lazar Kaganovich, in the presence of the press. They came to Pervouralsk armed with extraordinary powers, and buoyed up by airy ignorance of our problems. The rhythm of production, which I had toiled so hard to attain, was suddenly smashed. The brigade called mass meetings and technical conferences and subjected us all to long agitational harangues. The walls of all our shops and offices, dining rooms and recreation halls broke out in a rash of red slogans. Suddenly no one talked, everyone shouted.

The workers shrugged their shoulders and shut their minds against the uproar. But the engineers and executives were driven to nervous frenzy. Only yesterday we were commended for reaching 85—now outside pressure was being applied to drive us to 100. We smarted under the implied slur. Director Osadchi went around with a long face.

"We've got to do something drastic, Victor Andreyevich," he sighed. "The Moscow press is making a great to-do about this Stakhanovite show and we just can't afford to fail. My head—and yours as well—are at stake."

Osadchi was a type of factory executive all too common in our country. The politician in his make-up always took precedence over the engineer. Official acclaim concerned him more than the actual production; records more than quality. What he lacked in technical knowledge he more than made up in "important contacts" in the proper quarters. He was a bit of a sybarite with a sweet tooth for Sverdlovsk girls.

"But what can we do?" I replied. "You know as well as I do that it's impossible to squeeze more than we're now getting out of the plant. Oratory is no substitute for tools and metals."

But Osadchi was already neck-deep in a brilliant scheme. He asked me to provide him with a detailed inventory of finished pipe accumulated in our warehouses. The quantity, it appeared, was considerable. There were stocks produced without specific orders in the preceding year, for instance. I gave him the figures.

Not until later did I realize why he needed this information and I was horrified. Osadchi, in connivance with the brigade, sent a special agent to Moscow who came to a secret understanding with Kozhevnikov, now the head of Glavtrubostal. Kozhevnikov in turn made arrangements with the Central Administration of Metal Supplies for Industry. Our agent returned to Pervouralsk with a batch of orders for various types of pipe to be produced for stockpiles throughout the country.

By a wonderful coincidence, the orders called for precisely the kind and quantities of pipe which we had in our warehouses. We needed only to clean, oil, pack the stuff—and credit them to current production! Cunning bookkeeping would save the day, or the month to be more precise.

It was a bald-faced fraud. But Osadchi, the City Committee, the Regional Committee, the brigadiers, indeed everyone was delighted. And everyone pretended to be blind to the chicanery. Only the Chekists snickered up their sleeves, knowing that this deception gave them a whip hand over some more of the industrial *élite* in their territory. Victory—not merely 100 per cent but any percentage we wished—was in the bag.

The big month, June, began. From the outset the daily totals were on a brilliant "Stakhanovite level." "Keep up the good work!" messages from Moscow urged me. We did, consistently; but not a word was said about the fact that some days more than 25 per cent of the claimed output was fraudulent, consisting of pipe from the warehouse. The foremen and workers, of course, were not fooled. They read the daily and weekly tallies . . . but they knew the truth.

As the month wore on, the delight of the conspirators took on an edge of anxiety. They were a bit frightened by their handiwork, particularly by the big play their "success" was receiving in the newspapers and on the air. Every one of them realized that some day the trick might be thrown up to them as "fooling the government and the Party." They drew together—the Moscow brigadiers and the local functionaries—in a feeling of common guilt and common danger.

I refused resolutely to be drawn into their circle. I made up my mind that, everything considered, I would be safer if I took no part in this jugglery of figures. I was aware, especially, that the artificially high June totals would set for me an impossible standard for future months. As the end of the great Stakhanovite month approached, I therefore gathered the essential documents and, for the record, wrote a full report exposing the trickery. I addressed it to Commissar Kaganovich, Kozhevnikov at Glavtrubostal, Osadchi and to Comrade Dovbenko, Secretary of the Per-

vouralsk City Committee, with copies for my private safe as insurance against the future.

Osadchi and Dovbenko were thoroughly scared. They immediately telephoned their confederates in Moscow, at Glavtrubostal, as I learned. Assured of support higher up, they summoned me to the City Committee.

"Are you crazy, Kravchenko?" Dovbenko roared. "Everything is going splendidly, Kaganovich is in raptures about our progress, and you want to throw a monkey-wrench into the works. What if we use a trick or two, when the goal is to raise the morale of the working masses? Have you no sense of duty?"

He was pacing his office in anger. Osadchi was biting his lips to keep down his righteous wrath.

"I'm sorry to disagree with you," I said. "I had no part in the scheme and I won't shoulder any of the responsibility. I warn you that after the noise has died down, we'll be back to the old percentage and we'll be blamed for not matching the June output."

"Damn it, we'll cross that bridge when we reach it!" Dovbenko declared. "You're treading a dangerous path, Kravchenko, putting your opinion ahead of everyone else's. You're discrediting the brigade sent by the Commissar, by a member of the Politburo! That's playing with fire."

"Sometimes super-honesty is super-stupidity," Osadchi put in. "We need a little worldly wisdom."

I refused to withdraw my report.

Soon the great month was ended, with the glorious over-all production total of 114 per cent! Moscow, Sverdlovsk, Pervouralsk rang with the victory. Accounts of the "magnificent triumph at the Novo-Trubni plant" filled the press. On the morning of July first I received a telegram from Moscow:

"Congratulations on your great victory. We share your happiness. We authorize you to give premiums to the individual workers. We trust that now the plan will continue to be regularly overfulfilled."

Reporters flew in from Moscow and motored in from Sverdlovsk to describe the miracle of Stakhanovism in action. Novo-Trubni, which was kept at 35 or 40 per cent by its sabotaging management only a few months ago, now stood proudly at 114 per cent under its loyal new Bolshevik leader, Comrade Kravchenko! Delegations from other Pervouralsk factories came to greet their victorious comrades.

Joy reigned everywhere, but in my own heart there was despair. Unwillingly I had been made part of a fraud and pushed into the position of accepting thanks and cash rewards for my part in perpetrating it. Behind closed doors, with the help of my three assistants and the chief bookkeeper, I computed the actual output for the month. Without the spurious "production" out of stockpiles, the figure stood at 87 per cent, that is to say, a shade better than normal. Half a dozen times I was interrupted during this sad exercise in arithmetic by long-distance calls of congratulation. The telegrams of praise kept piling up; one of them was from Kaganovich himself.

That night I began to work on a careful and very specific report of the fraud addressed to Kaganovich.

Meanwhile a mass meeting of the entire factory was called to celebrate the achievement. A platform, draped in red, was erected on the factory grounds and decorated with huge portraits of the Kremlin leaders. A brass band played incessantly. Thousands of workers and officials—many of them perfectly aware of the fraud—were massed in front of the platform. I thought I detected deliberate irony in the unwonted heat of their applause and in the volume of their hurrahing, as Osadchi, Dovbenko, Regional Party representatives, then brigade leaders orated.

Osadchi read some of the messages of congratulation. The workers, he said, by their wonderful showing this month had confounded the skeptics and critics. They had given a resounding answer to the dirty saboteurs and deviationists. Here he screamed:

"Long live our Party and its dear beloved Leader, Teacher, Father and Comrade, Our Comrade Stalin! Hurrah, comrades!"

"Hurrah!" thousands of throats echoed and the band struck up the *Internationale.*

I stood on the platform and was congratulating myself on having avoided the ordeal of a speech. But Dovbenko evidently meant to commit me publicly to a share in the "victory."

"And now," he announced, "we will hear from the comrade whose leadership was so valuable in attaining the glorious total of 114—Comrade Kravchenko!"

I arose. I made no reference to the June production, speaking instead of the difficult problems ahead of us and the need for steady, organized effort. I thanked the workers for what *they* had done and emphasized that an occasional spurt of energy was not enough, that output must be continuous. I received a huge ovation and left the platform with the feeling that some of my listeners, at least, had understood me.

The meeting wound up with the award of a Red Banner to my subplant, which I accepted from the Regional representative without a smile.

The brigade, on its arrival in Moscow, was received in audience by the Commissar, again under the eyes of the press. It was decorated and stuffed with bonuses. *For Industrialization* devoted a full page to the Novo-Trubni miracle and other papers pronounced their editorial blessings. I was still receiving telegrams of praise when I mailed my report to Lazar Kaganovich.

A few weeks later I made an excuse for going to Moscow, in the hope of bringing Glavtrubostal to my side in what, I feared, might explode in a national scandal. Kozhevnikov did not hide his displeasure with me; as one of the prime movers in the fraud, his own career was at stake.

"Try to understand me," I pleaded. "How can I face the workers and the technical staff when they all know or suspect that the great victory was just a great hoax? You know perfectly well that in the months ahead we shan't be able to live up to this artificial record. The workers will gain nothing from it. What's the sense of the whole thing?"

"Relax, Victor Andreyevich," he replied, acidly. "Your attitude, if I may say so, is very naive. You should take the long view on such things. If the Party finds it necessary to popularize a certain kind of activity—in this case Stakhanovism—it becomes a political necessity, in which the end justifies any means. Your alarm is nonsensical."

"You're wrong," I insisted. "We can't build on the basis of lies. They're sure to boomerang."

Kozhevnikov was losing his patience.

"I'll give you some advice, Comrade Kravchenko. Stop making noise about this business or you'll get hurt in the process."

I then called on the editor of *For Industrialization*. He professed to be horrified when I laid the facts of the fraud before him and urged me to write an article about it before I left Moscow. I did, and I sent a copy to *Pravda*. I never heard again from either of those newspapers, nor did I ever hear from Kaganovich.

On returning to the plant I found the workers, foremen and lower engineering personnel in a state of sullen resentment. There had been much talk of bonuses. These people, however, were paid on a strict piecework basis of accounting. Since they did not actually produce more than usual their only reward was a share in the noise and the Red Banner. But the administrative staff, including Osadchi and myself, received handsome bonuses: 150 per cent of our basic salaries. That made my June pay more than 4,000 rubles—a handsome reward for a hoax which I was trying unsuccessfully to disclose.

Echoes of my Moscow efforts had reached Pervouralsk, and officialdom was in a state of murderous fury. At the City Committee—significantly, in the presence of Parshin of the N.K.V.D.—I was accused of "undermining their prestige." Why was I trying to make trouble for all of them? Why was I "blowing up a fire that had already died down"?

It took months before these officials and factory colleagues forgot my "betrayal" and smiled at me again; but I did not regret my action. Whatever happened, my record was clear. In sober fact, nothing happened. Too many influential bureaucrats were involved in that piece of charlatanism. The "magnificent victory" became solemn history.

2

The publication in 1938 of a new official *History of the Communist Party* marked the tapering off of the super-purge.

I do not mean that the terror was stopped, that the Black Ravens remained unemployed. "Normal" arrests by the thousand, executions without trial, arbitrary exile of "undesirable elements" whose labor was desirable in forsaken regions, tortures and inquisitions continued. The population of concentration camps and forced labor colonies multiplied as never before. Already, among Communists close to the Kremlin throne, whispered estimates placed the slave labor forces at more than fifteen millions; in the next few years the estimate would be closer to twenty millions.

I mean only that the specific campaign to cleanse the Party and the

bureaucracy, planned after the assassination of Kirov, was now almost completed. There was not an office or an enterprise, an economic or cultural body, a government or a Party or military bureau, which was not largely in new hands. Had a foreign conqueror taken over the machinery of Soviet life and put new people in control, the change could hardly have been more thorough or more cruel.

The magnitude of the horror has never been grasped by the outside world. Perhaps it is too vast ever to be grasped. Russia was a battlefield strewn with corpses, blotched with gigantic enclosures where millions of wretched "war prisoners" toiled, suffered and died. But how can the mind's eye take in anything so vast? One can only look into this or that corner, and judge the whole from its parts. I was able, through the Kremlin, to obtain a few official figures. They do not compass the whole reality, they merely hint at its extent and malignity.

In the Council of People's Commissars, only Molotov remained; all the rest were killed, imprisoned or demoted. The Central Committee of the Party, in theory the heart and mind of the ruling group, counts 138 members and alternates; only about a score of them remained in that body when the super-purge had run its course. Of the 757 members of *Tzik*, the Central Executive Committee, sometimes described abroad as Russia's "Parliament," only a few dozen survived the storm.

The ruin was even bloodier in the so-called autonomous "republics" and regions. Without exception the commanding staffs of their governments and their Party organizations were wiped out by orders from Moscow—a sufficient commentary on their supposed autonomy. Industry and technology, the arts and education, the press and the armed forces—all were turned upside down, their leaders and most gifted personalities being shot, imprisoned, exiled or at best, stripped of influence.

The temptation in looking at the piled-up horrors is to concentrate on the famous and important victims, whereas the *pogrom* extended to the whole population. In the ruling Party, 1,800,000 members and candidates were expelled, which was more than half the total in these classifications; and in most cases expulsion meant concentration camp or worse. At least eight million more, Comsomol members and non-Party people, were liquidated—meaning anything from execution to exile or removal from their jobs.

But even these colossal figures don't sum up the tragedy. They're big but they are cold. Their very immensity makes them a bit unreal. One must think of the victims not in such impersonal terms, but as individuals. One must recall that each of these multitudes had relatives, friends, dependents who shared his sufferings; that each of them had hopes, plans, actual achievements which were shattered. To the historian of tomorrow, to the sociologist of today, these are statistics. But to me, who lived through it, the digits have bodies and minds and souls, all of which were hurt, outraged and humiliated.

I know, moreover, that millions who escaped the purge were maimed in their minds and wounded in their spirits by the fears and the brutalities amidst which they lived. For sheer scale, I know of nothing in all human

history to compare with this purposeful and merciless persecution in which tens of million Russians suffered directly or indirectly. Genghis Khan was an amateur, a muddler, compared to Stalin. The Kremlin clique had carried through a ruthless war on their own country and people.

It was the wind-up of this long war that was signalized by the appearance of a new history. It proved to be a document probably without precedent. Shamelessly, without so much as an explanation, it revised half a century of Russian history. I don't mean simply that it falsified some facts or gave a new interpretation of events. I mean that it deliberately stood history on its head, expunging events and inventing facts. It twisted the recent past—a past still fresh in millions of memories—into new and bizarre shapes, to conform with the version of affairs presented by the blood-purge trials and the accompanying propaganda.

It was bold, specious, conscienceless fiction. There was a certain magnificence in its unabridged cynicism, its defiance of the common sense of the Russian people. The roles of leading historical figures were perverted or altogether erased. New roles were invented for others. Leon Trotsky, one of the creators of the Red Army, was represented as a fiendish agent of foreign capitalists who had sought to sell out his country, in collusion with Rykov, Bukharin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bubnov, Krestinsky, Piatakov and virtually all the other Fathers of the Bolshevik Revolution. Joseph Stalin, of course, emerged as the sole leader inside Russia before the revolution, and as Lenin's one intimate and trusted associate thereafter. All books, articles, documents, museum materials which contradicted this extraordinary fantasy parading as history—and that means nearly all historical and political writings and documentation—disappeared throughout the country!

More than that, living witnesses, as far as possible, were removed.

The directing staff of the Institute of Marx, Engels and Lenin in Moscow, repository of ideological truth, were removed and the more important people among them imprisoned or shot. The same thing happened in branches of the Institute in various parts of the country. I happened to be intimately acquainted with the story of one of the outstanding figures in the Institute, Professor Sorin, and it seemed to me to sum up the whole shabby and tragic era of coerced falsehood.

Sorin at one time had been publicly denounced by Stalin because he had dared to write that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was in Russia identical with a "dictatorship of the Party." Then the culprit duly "confessed his errors" and emerged as one of Stalin's mentors in Marxist theory, fabricating speeches and articles to which Stalin attached his name. He was made assistant director of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, dug diligently for documents and quotations to support any policy Stalin wished to foist on the country, and seemed happily adjusted.

But a point seemed to have been reached at which the meek Sorin balked. He was willing to find and quote texts as required—but he drew the line at *inventing* texts and *falsifying* quotations. And so in the middle of one winter night the N.K.V.D. wagon came to Professor Sorin's fine apartment and took him away. No trace remained of him. His wife and child

were evicted from their home and left to shift for themselves. All of the professor's books, documents and notes were carted off to the N.K.V.D.

Other Institute people who knew too much about Communist history and theory to accept the faked version were similarly shut up, among them the chief director, Adoratsky. The head of the Party's propaganda division, Stetsky, was arrested. Thousands of others from the historical, political and literary "fronts" were sent on the one-way road to oblivion. The path was thus cleared for falsification without measure or limit. The new "history" became possible.

To brand the shame more deeply on our minds, "study" of the new version was made obligatory for all responsible Party people. History classes met nearly every night in this period and lecturers from Sverdlovsk came to our town to help hammer home the lies, while most of us fumed inwardly. Whatever human dignity remained in our character was humiliated. But even the most gigantic lie, by dint of infinite repetition, takes root; Stalin knew this before Hitler discovered it. As I looked on I could see terrible falsehoods, at first accepted under pressure, become established as unquestioned "facts," particularly among younger people without personal experience to the contrary to bother them.

What concerns the outside world especially in this falsified history is the directive issued in the introduction to this manual. "Study of the history of the Communist Party," it states, "strengthens the certainty of the final victory of the great task of the Lenin-Stalin Party: the victory of Communism in the whole world." Notwithstanding the new emphasis on Russian nationalism, this directive remains unchanged. Even when the Communist International was supposedly "abolished," the certainty of a Stalinist world revolution was not revised or discarded. The history is still official, not only for Communists in Russia but for Communists in America, England, China and everywhere else.

It fell to me to deliver a "lecture" on one phase of this Party history to responsible Party members of the Pervouralsk district. I went through the painful farce, of course, only because it was an order from the City Committee which I dared not disobey. My specific subject was "The Communist Party in the Struggle for Collectivization of Agriculture." I crammed my mind with the appropriate passages from the official history, read up Stalin's speeches on the subject, then stood in an auditorium filled with people and lied, as I was forced to do, for more than an hour.

Every falsehood tore open the half-healed wounds of my own shattering experiences in the collectivization drive and its aftermath of famine. I felt as if I were mocking the children with bloated bellies among whom I had worked and violating the corpses I had seen piled up in the villages. And all the time, as I spoke, I had no doubt that my listeners, too, knew I was lying. My words and their applause were equally spurious; we were so many actors going through our prescribed parts in a tragic political comedy.

Why did I, why did the audience, submit to the indignity? For the same reason that you hand over your wallet to a footpad who points a gun at you. Let no outsider, secure in his human rights, take a superior

attitude towards Russians obliged to "lecture" as I did and obliged to applaud as my audience did.

Along with the "education" of the Party and non-Party people in line with the refurbished history, the official propagandists relied on two effective foreign angles. The first was a one-sided and distorted description of life in the capitalist world, especially the United States and England. The lecturer would show pictures clipped from the foreign press in which strikers were being beaten by police, unemployed rioters were being drenched with fire hose, tear bombs were being hurled at the proletariat. Presented as a complete portrayal of capitalism, this material made a deep impression; it seemed to be authentic, documented, irrefutable.

The second was the citing of attacks on the Soviet Union by hostile foreigners in which there were slighting or insulting remarks about the Russian people. These writings failed to draw a clear line between the Russian people and the Soviet regime. The human self-respect as well as the national pride of the listeners were outraged.

Another result of the big purge deserves mention. Every Communist carries a Party card. It is his personal passport, his political patent. The booklet, besides personal data, has on it the signatures of the local Party officials who issued it. Because most of the leading Party officials had been purged, it transpired that most Communists had their blessed status affirmed by enemies of the people. The Kremlin could not tolerate this ironical touch. With a view to erasing the handwriting and the memory of the dead and the imprisoned, a new registration of Communists was therefore ordered in this fall of 1938. Where cards had been signed by liquidated "enemies of the people," new ones were issued.

The process was turned into a new, though minor, purge. Every Communist again appeared before three-man commissions and submitted himself to elaborate questioning. The new cards, besides, were no longer the simple affair they used to be. They now included a photograph. Besides, a special booklet was now compiled for every Communist, in two copies, containing detailed biographical data, a record of activities, rewards, punishments; one copy was deposited at his City Committee, the other at the Central Committee in Moscow. The whole procedure looked like a police documentation rather than a record of members of a political organization. The last pretense that we were participants in a voluntary association of comrades was dropped.

That there might be no illusions in this respect, a new rule was put into effect: Thereafter a Communist wishing to leave one city or region to settle in another—even if the change were on orders from above—had first to wait for a formal decision by the City Committee authorizing his departure. The ruling Party became, in effect, another prison—fitted out with comforts and a thousand privileges not enjoyed by the inmates of the larger prison called Russia, but still a place of confinement.

One day, as the first breath of a new winter could be felt in the Urals, Secretary Dovbenko informed me that I would have the honor of a leading

part in the coming "elections" to the Supreme Soviet. The Central Committee of the Party had selected Comrade Kuzmin as a candidate for election from the Pervouralsk district to the Supreme Soviet and it would be my privilege to "nominate" this man formally at a general meeting of the electorate.

"But why Kuzmin?" I asked. "He's never lived here and no one here knows him. As Vice-Commissar of Heavy Industry he lives and works in Moscow. Besides, I scarcely know him myself."

My objections were brushed aside. My factory having been in the limelight as winner of a Red Banner, I was considered the appropriate man to introduce Kuzmin to the sovereign voters. He would, of course, be the only candidate. The thought that there might be an opposition candidate, to challenge the Party's choice, did not even enter anyone's mind; it was outside the experience of the new generation.

Equipped with a file of information about "my" candidate, I put in several nights preparing the nomination speech. In the ritual phrases of Soviet demagogy I lauded Kuzmin, "a true son of the Party and the people," for his services to the revolution and his loyalty to The Leader. Dovbenko and his colleagues read the manuscript, made various changes, and declared themselves satisfied.

Several days later an echelon of elegant motorcars drew up in front of our factory. "My candidate," of whose existence I had been only vaguely aware until that week, stepped out, surrounded by his Chekist guards and his Party retinue. Kuzmin was a remarkable sight: a rough-hewn fellow, with a day's growth of beard, in shabby clothes. His embroidered Russian blouse was mended at the collar; he wore a workman's cap and Red Army boots. In short, he had come disguised as a proletarian!

I was disgusted by the masquerade and flushed crimson at the thought of my own share in the imposture. At four o'clock the electoral meeting got under way in the main square of Pervouralsk. From all the surrounding factories came delegations, with their banners and bands. Comsomol contingents marched to the scene, their young voices lifted in robust song. The red-draped tribune was adorned with the pictures of Stalin, Molotov, Kalinin, Voroshilov and others. I took my place on the platform, along with Dovbenko, Osadchi, Kuzmin and other dignitaries as an orchestra blared the *Internationale* and other hymns.

In due time I unreeled my speech, praising Kuzmin as "the best of the best." The populace cheered and the bands thundered forth their approval. A few others delivered standardized orations. Finally Kuzmin himself stepped forward to thank the people for their "confidence" and to assure them of his devoted services "if they should elect him."

"Long live the Brain, the Heart, the Strength of the Party and the Soviet Peoples, our Beloved Leader and Teacher, Comrade Stalin!" he concluded and the music once more reinforced the applause.

As we left the platform, headed for the gala dinner awaiting the top officials, Kuzmin took my hand.

"You spoke well, Comrade Kravchenko," he said. "Thank you, thank

you. When you come to Moscow come to see me. I'll always be delighted to be of help to you."

I could not avoid noticing, as we shook hands, that his fingernails were beautifully manicured.

Soon thereafter I did go to Moscow and, as it happened, in connection with business in which Kuzmin could be useful if he wished. His offices were large and sumptuously furnished. Rather to my astonishment I had to wait a long time. When I finally entered his private office I faced a man only remotely resembling the proletarian specimen on the Pervouralsk platform. Kuzmin was wearing European clothes, punctuated by a loud necktie. There was no trace of the negligent, common-man manner in this typically puffed-up, well-groomed, overfed politician.

"What is it, comrade?" he said in annoyance, looking at me blankly. "Where are you from?"

It was then that I realized, with a shock, that he had already completely forgotten his sponsor, the man who had presented him to his "constituency." It was the crowning touch to the farce of one-party, one-candidate elections under "the world's most democratic Constitution."

3

I have said little about my private life in the Urals, and before that in Taganrog and Nikopol. I feel the lack myself. I can almost hear the reader ask: Are Soviet industrial managers, then, mere machines, without personal dimensions to their existence?

I would be exaggerating if I answered with a plain affirmative. We Russians are gregarious folk, warm and talkative and quick to kindle in friendship. We wear our hearts on our sleeves. I am no exception in this respect.

The fact is that I made dozens, even hundreds, of friends in those years. Let it be remembered that to thousands of the men and women around me I was a person of consequence, one of the Party elect. I had favors to dispense. Under my roof they found abundance and comfort—things and conditions for which all but a handful of people were tragically starved. My standards of life were modest, even bleak, when compared to those of men in my position in America. But in Nikopol, Taganrog, Pervouralsk or even Moscow they were so far above the average, so remote from the working-class level, that I seemed to live in a world apart. Few of those who envied their well-paid *novi barii,* their new masters, or caught a glimpse of the sorry splendors of our life, realized the weight of fear, lack of personal freedom and professional independence, the torment of uncertain tenure under which we enjoyed our advantages.

Yes, I made friends and now and then even romance ventured through my door. But looking back, the sum total of these things seemed pitiably small. Human relations in this period, for men in my position, were all in a minor key, drowned out by the din of excessive labor and the howls of excessive politics. Sparks of romance could not hold out against the winds

of fear. Few of us felt settled, rooted. Our days seemed hurried and transitory—way-stations to another assignment or to sudden extinction. In making friends we had the frustrated sense of passengers meeting briefly on the station platform before taking trains in opposite directions.

But that tells only part of the story. If the years seem so empty, despite their clamorous events, it is because I lived in a spiritual void. Having lost faith in the Great Experiment, I had nothing to cling to—nothing but work and the dim and improbable hope of escape. How was one to retain inner dignity when the whim of some Poo-Bah in Moscow, or the zeal of some local Party or police official, might blot out one's personality without a moment's warning? How nurture self-respect under the myriad eyes of vulgar and too often malicious spies?

There were moments in which I coveted the family life of some colleagues and wondered whether I might not be happier with a wife and children. But the thought of how much more dreadful arrest must be to a husband and a father quickly cured me of envy. In my limited free time I used to go to Sverdlovsk for the opera and theatre. I also did a lot of reading—literature for my own enjoyment and political-economic works as a Party obligation; one could not fall behind in one's knowledge of Lenin, Stalin, Marx, Engels.

The Kolpovskys—Constantine Mikhailovich, who was our chief engineer, his pretty wife Vera and Ninnochka, their seven-year-old daughter—were one family group which touched my nostalgia for a normal home life. They seemed so integrated by a natural, undramatic love that you could hardly think of one of them without implying the others. I used to visit them occasionally and to little Ninnochka I became Uncle Vitya, with the privileges and obligations of affectionate unclehood.

When Kolpovsky went to Moscow on business, towards the end of the summer, he asked me to keep an eye on his family. The evening before his return, Vera and the child were at my home drinking tea and munching *zakuski*. Constantine Mikhailovich had been gone nearly two weeks, and his family could not restrain the joy and excitement of tomorrow's reunion. They could talk of nothing else.

I had invited director Osadchi to drop in and after a while he arrived. He greeted Mrs. Kolpovsky and the little girl in a rather nervous and even resentful manner, as if he were disturbed by their presence. I dismissed his mood as of no importance; probably merely the reflection of some office troubles. But soon he found an excuse for drawing me away to the balcony. It was a mild night, filled with pungent pine odors from the surrounding forests.

"Why didn't you tell me that the Kolpovskys would be here?" he asked in a low, tense voice.

"What a strange question! What difference does it make?"

"You don't understand, Victor Andreyevich. The situation is rather awkward, because Kolbin told me in great secrecy . . ."

"Told you what?"

"Well, you're not to say a word, but maybe you ought to know. Kolbin and several Sverdlovsk N.K.V.D. people will meet the express train

from Moscow at Sverdlovsk tomorrow. They have orders to arrest Kolpovsky."

"It can't be! Poor Vera, poor Ninnochka. But why, why?"

"As to why I don't know any more than you do. You know how it is. . . . But we'd better go back or they'll begin to wonder."

In a few minutes Osadchi mumbled some excuse and left us. Vera and Ninnochka remained an hour longer—garrulous, ebullient, impatient for tomorrow, and full of plans for their drive to Sverdlovsk.

"Constantine always pretends that he didn't expect us and that he's overwhelmed by surprise," Vera laughed.

Retaining my composure, pretending to join in their happiness, drained all my strength. When at last they left, I sank into a chair exhausted. The thought of what awaited them stabbed at my heart. It would have served no purpose to forewarn them and might only have gotten them, Osadchi and myself into serious trouble.

About midnight my phone rang.

"Victor Andreyevich, this is Kolbin. Could I borrow your Ford tomorrow? I have to go to Sverdlovsk urgently."

"No, I'm sorry, Kolbin, I need it myself," I replied brusquely. I did not relish the use of my car for this dirty business.

"But you have your new car. Please don't make trouble. This call is just a formality—I already have Osadchi's permission anyhow."

The knowledge that my own motorcar had taken one of the arresting officers to the station added to my burden of sorrow the next morning. Even while I was at work, part of my mind saw the gruesome scene. And my imagination was not too far from the reality. The scene was described to me, with undisguised glee, by Kolbin himself.

As the train pulled in, mother and daughter were waiting. They were in their holiday best, smiling and happy, flowers in their hands.

"There he is!" Ninnochka cried, and they rushed towards Kolpovsky as he alighted, carrying two suitcases. He was a handsome, broad-shouldered man with a shock of dark hair. His face lit up with a joyous grin as he watched his "two girls," as he always called them, approach.

But three uniformed N.K.V.D. men, revolvers in hand, stepped in between. They informed the stunned engineer that he was under arrest, took his suitcases and hustled him to a waiting closed car. They did not even give him time to greet or kiss his family. Mrs. Kolpovsky and the child wept hysterically. An N.K.V.D. man went in the car with them—their home would be searched and this was to make sure Vera did not touch anything.

After that nobody dared to associate with Kolpovsky's wife, and Ninnochka's playmates taunted her, with the cruelty of children. "Your daddy's an enemy of the people and we won't play with you ever again," they chanted in chorus. I recalled with a pang the times, long long ago, when little boys in Yekaterinoslav made sport of me because my father was in prison. The Kolpovskys, of course, were evicted from the factory apartment.

The arrest of the chief engineer alarmed the entire technical staff.

Rumors of every kind filtered through the shops. Because I had been in close business relations with Kolpovsky, my arrest was generally expected and, indeed, I was surprised that it did not take place. To this day I have no inkling of the charges against him—his work had been both competent and loyal and he seemed all engineer, a Party member but almost indifferent to politics.

I learned later that after a few months in prison Kolpovsky was "rehabilitated" and even restored to Party membership. He made a great career in his profession and in time was even decorated by the government. But the period of suffering had undermined his health. His old vivacity, his old joy in living, were no more.

4

For an outsider the personal history of a Soviet official can have the third dimension of reality only if the background is never blurred or forgotten: The background of half-hungry, shabby, long-suffering and despised masses, denied elementary political and economic freedoms.

There was rarely a day when some worker or his wife didn't come to me with a tale of poverty and disease. I did what I could, which was always pitiably little. Sometimes I succeeded in cutting through red tape to obtain a pair of shoes or a suit of work clothes for someone who needed it badly. Now and then I stirred the hospital service into action where the life of a child was at stake. But the evils were too many and too deep to be mitigated, let alone cured, by the efforts of a few thin-skinned officials here and there. The worst of it, as I look back, is that the sufferings of the people were taken for granted. They were accepted as natural and inevitable, like the mud and the inclemency of our Urals weather.

Despite official measures to tie workers to their jobs, our turnover of labor was shockingly high. In my own shops, from two to three hundred disappeared every month, in a total of some seventeen hundred. What this did to the continuity and efficiency of operations is self-evident.

Only a real improvement in living conditions could have solved the problem. The worker who packed his poor belongings and set out to find work elsewhere was driven by sheer despair. Perhaps he had heard that somewhere else his family might receive bigger wages and rations, a cleaner place to live in. But our new masters preferred to overlook causes and to deal with effects. The government propaganda evolved a lot of insulting names for these citizens seeking a better life. It called them loafers, deserters from the labor front, unstable elements. And it prescribed a larger dose of the one Soviet remedy for all social complaints: force.

The remedy took the form of a new "labor book" for all workers. Though formally put on the statute books on January 15, 1939, the actual distribution of the new document began several weeks earlier. It was hailed in the press as proof of the "growth and success of the working class, its loyalty to the Socialist Fatherland." Though decided upon by the Politburo and inflicted on the masses, who saw it clearly enough as another

lock on their prison lives, it was presented as the workers' own weapon in the struggle with "lazy disorganizers of production."

The labor book became for the rank and file workman what the Party card was for the Communist. He could no longer leave his job without a written entry in the book authorizing him to do so. He could obtain no other work unless the book showed his release at the previous place of employment. Moreover, the document carried a permanent record of any reprimands or punishments the holder may have received for lateness, production mistakes or other sins. Thus the worker was condemned to drag the burden of his entire past with him always wherever he might go; he could no longer hope to make a fresh start in some other city or industry.

I talked to dozens of the men and women at the Novo-Trubni plant at the time the new labor books were being issued. Without exception they hated it. The simplest-minded unskilled worker looked on the device as a piece of official trickery. Even those who had no intention of leaving their jobs felt themselves trapped.

"Who wants to leave a factory if life there is half-way decent?" they would tell me. "In what way will we be different now from the people in the concentration camps around here?"

But in the usual Soviet fashion, the victims were forced to accept their new chains not merely "willingly" but "with enthusiasm." It was not enough to suffer the whipping, they had to kiss the strap and shout hurrah. The trade-union officials conducted an "educational campaign" on the beauties of the new "discipline." They staged mass meetings at which selected Party people among the factory hands rhapsodied about the new blessings and at which shrill resolutions of approval, prefabricated in the City Committee in the spirit of the Moscow prescriptions, were adopted unanimously.

A commission of investigation arrived at our factory to make sure that the distribution of the new Stalin labor books had been duly carried out. One of its members, it turned out, was a classmate from my Institute days. At the supper table, in the intimacy of my own apartment, we got around to the question of labor books. Having been at a great many factories, my friend sounded dejected. The general resentment among workers had affected him.

"Yes, I make burning speeches about this new Soviet achievement," he sighed, "but, Vitya, I don't talk from the heart. First police cards for the Party members, now yellow tickets for the workers!"

I heard the same designation, curiously, from another source. One of my assistants came to the office on business.

"Well, Victor Andreyevich," he said with a wry smile, "you can congratulate me. Like a prostitute, I've just received my yellow ticket. . . ."

Having made certain that the proletarians could not run away, the government then took another step towards "socialism": It ordered a nation-wide revision of labor norms. The trade unions were again in charge of the excitement, and the revision was in every case, of course, upward. Once more, at public meetings, the employees of our various departments adopted resolutions "voluntarily" enlarging their work quotas which meant, in

truth, lowering their own wages. The Pervouralsk newspapers were lyrical in describing the great enthusiasm of the occasion, though no one present had seen anything beyond routine hand raising and routine hand clapping.

Having tied the workers to their machines and exacted more work for the same pay, we were ready for the next and most humiliating proof of the dignity of labor under the dictatorship of the proletariat. First came a loud and lusty propaganda storm on the theme of loafing and lateness. In various cities "demonstration trials" against "loafers" were staged. The proverbial man from Mars, had he descended at this time and place, would have been certain that we Russians were a nation of lazy louts, lolling in our featherbeds until the sun rode high; in our loutishness he would have seen a simple explanation of the pervasive deficiencies.

Then came the Draconian edict on "strengthening socialist labor discipline." Let foreign innocents who profess to see "economic democracy" and a "workers' society" in Russia study this edict. Let them consider whether the oppressed workers in their benighted lands would tolerate such treatment.

The new law provided that anyone late to work by more than twenty minutes must automatically be denounced to the local Prosecutor. He must then be tried and if found guilty, sentenced to prison or to forced labor. For fear that "soft" officials and "rotten bourgeois liberals" in the local courts might be lenient, the decree made arrest and punishment mandatory for executives and others who failed to report or otherwise shielded the "criminals" of lateness! Only serious illness, formally attested by the factory physicians, or the death of some member of the family, was acceptable proof of innocence. Mere oversleeping or transport difficulties could not be offered as excuses.

In my years as an industrial administrator I had seen many blows descend on the hapless heads of the workers. But none of them had been as incredible, as stunning, as this one. At first most people assumed that it was too drastic an edict to be enforced. But we soon understood that Stalin was in earnest. Twenty minutes was the margin between the limited slavery of "free" workers and the total slavery of the forced-labor contingents.

Every morning a list of the latecomers, with the exact number of minutes of their lateness, was placed on my desk. Party and labor-union offices in the plant received copies of this document. I had no alternative but to sign it and turn it over to the director who in turn sent it to the Prosecutor. The "criminals" were quickly summoned to a court hearing. We found it hard to believe that bread-winners would actually be torn away from their families, condemned to a year or more of forced labor, for such frivolous reasons. But we were dismally wrong. Aside from the warning contained in the law itself, the courts had received stringent instructions to be ruthless. They did their duty, though few of the prosecutors and judges could conceal their sense of shame.

In the first three months, throughout Russia, about a million workers and employees were brought to heel for loafing and exceeding the twenty-minute period of grace and most of them were convicted! Fathers and

mothers were dragged out of their homes, leaving their infants to starve or to be put into orphanages, for having overslept or because their illness had not been judged serious enough by the official doctors. In my own shops, dozens of workers were condemned every day. A great wail of sorrow and despair rose over the bleak barracks and apartment houses but it was not loud enough to reach the ears of the Politburo. To this day it has not been heard by the idiots who seek to extend the blessings of such "economic democracy" to other nations and peoples.

An old lathe hand came to see me. I knew him as a competent and industrious worker. He was crying. Even before he spoke I knew what it was about. I had seen his name on the daily list of sorrow.

"I was late by thirty minutes," he admitted. "But I am an old man. These hands have labored for forty years. What will happen to my wife and my children? Help me, help me, Comrade director!"

"Why were you late?"

"I have a bad toothache. It kept me up all night. Finally I fell asleep towards morning and didn't wake up in time. I ran to the shop almost without dressing, as if all the devils were chasing me. But I didn't make it!"

"I believe you, comrade, but I have no choice in the matter. If I should take off your name, I'd go to prison myself. I can only send a note to the doctor asking him to help you."

I wrote the note. But evidently the doctor was concerned about his own skin. The old man was sent off to court.

A woman worker pushed my secretaries aside and rushed into the office. She was weeping loudly in peasant fashion.

"Sit down and control yourself," I pleaded.

It appeared that she had been almost an hour late and had already received a court summons. She was a widow, supporting two children, an eleven-year-old daughter and another two years old, with her work in the factory. The elder child, she explained, was very sick. She had sent for a doctor but by the time he came and examined the patient, she found herself late for work.

I promised to talk to the doctor. Unhappily the little girl, in his opinion, was not as ill as a fond mother imagined. He could not honestly testify that the illness justified the lateness. The mother was sentenced to work on a forced-labor basis at our plant.

In another case the workman pleaded that he possessed no clock and had been in the habit of rising by the sun. An exceptionally dark, cloudy morning was responsible for his downfall. The explanation did not save him.

It was obvious to me that the curing of lateness was only one object of the Draconian decree. The other, and perhaps more vital, purpose was to expand the forced-labor population. The courts had specific orders. The machinery of "justice" worked diligently: free workers were stufied in at one end, by tens and hundreds of thousands, and newly minted forced laborers emerged at the other end.

These bitter disciplinary measures against the common man, destroying

the last shreds of his human dignity, coincided with an exceptionally bitter winter. The slaves in the Urals N.K.V.D. colonies worked outdoors despite the brutal cold, frost-bitten, gangrened, deformed. In the neighboring concentration camps, men and women were often frozen to death in the forests and in the unheated barracks and mud huts behind the barbed wire. In our barracks the suffering was intense. All in all, Pervouralsk was not exactly a joyous setting for our vaunted "socialist labor."

Indications from Moscow that I might be transferred to another undertaking were therefore welcome. There was always the illusion that things might be, if not better, at least less distressing, somewhere else.

For many months the metallurgical industry had been agitated by reports of a grandiose pipe-rolling project in Siberia—specifically, in Stalinsk (formerly Kuznetzk) where gigantic new industrial enterprises were already in operation. It would involve construction to the tune of over a hundred million rubles. In the prescribed Soviet fashion, the plans were being ballyhooed well in advance. I had heard the reports and read some of the ballyhoo in an impersonal way—but suddenly it all focussed for me to a sharp and terribly personal point. Without consulting my preferences, the Commissariat and the Central Committee of the Party selected me to direct the entire construction of this new plant at Stalinsk.

CHAPTER XX

SIBERIAN HOAX

"THE PEOPLE'S Commissar of Ferrous Metallurgy has named Comrade V. A. Kravchenko director of the metallurgical factory to be built in the city of Stalinsk, Siberia," the Moscow *For Industrialization* announced on February 28, 1939.

The reference was to the great new enterprise in Stalinsk, Siberia, planned to produce 170,000 tons of steel pipe yearly. Molotov himself, in his "thesis" for the coming Eighteenth Congress of the Communist Party, had stressed the importance of the Siberian undertaking. Construction, he said, would start soon and the first sections would be in operation by 1941.

To have my name thus linked with an industrial giant singled out for attention by Molotov—and inferentially therefore by Stalin as well—instantly threw a halo of glory around my head. My appointment was made publicly, as part of the build-up for the Congress. That was more significant than the post itself. It meant that I had "arrived," that I was in the upper brackets of the economic and political aristocracy. Friends and acquaintances who had shunned me during the difficult purge years suddenly recalled that they knew me and hastened to inform me of their pride in my success.

In preparation for the Siberian job I had a lot of work to do in Moscow, where I was given a fine room at the Metropole Hotel, all expenses paid by the government, and plenty of money. I could have what I wanted. Oh, it's no small thing to be a favored son of the Central Committee. The whole business of dictatorship, in fact, looks different, less grim, less tyrannical, when viewed from somewhere near the top.

No doubt this was the thought in my father's mind when he warned me, half in earnest, half ironically, not to lose touch with common folk now that I was among the "high and mighty." "Don't let 'them' buy you off with titles and honors," his letter said. I noticed with satisfaction this proof that time had not softened his attitude towards people in power. I should have been disappointed if he had made an exception for his own son.

The news of my designation, when it appeared in the press of my native city, seemed to my mother a wonderful sign that the ordeal of persecution was finally behind me.

"May God give you health, luck and success, dearest son," she wrote. "Do try to forget past insults. Turn your eyes forward. Work hard for our beloved land and our people, dear one. As for us, we live as always. Forgive me for mentioning it, but should you come home for a visit, bring

what you can from Moscow—fats, sugar, tea, fish. . . . Alas, we have nothing here. I would not mention it if conditions were not so terrible."

Father's letter supported her suggestion. Casually, as if merely in passing, he said: "We're told, my son, that we have achieved the 'happy life.' But don't let the slogans stop you if you can find a pair of shoes for your mother. Somehow the 'happy life' has bypassed Dniepropetrovsk."

My new status as a trusted executive, of course, did not exempt me from the routine solicitude of the N.K.V.D. boys. On returning to the hotel I would frequently find the telltale signs that my suitcases and wardrobe drawers had again been painstakingly searched. Now, as always, new acquaintances tried to draw me into dangerous political discussions. Happily I had learned to smell the *provocateur*; a kind of sixth sense, born in those night sessions in Nikopol, warned me to shut my mouth when people seemed too eager to "open their hearts."

I had learned, too, to guard my bachelorhood against the attentions of those denizens of the expensive hotels whom we called "Liubyanka ladies," Liubyanka being the N.K.V.D. headquarters in the capital. These girls were chosen by connoisseurs of female flesh and were decked out in costly elegance, including splendid fur coats, at the expense of the shabby proletariat. Those who had a smattering of foreign tongues specialized in seducing foreigners: diplomats, American and German engineers, newspaper correspondents. The others preyed on lonely bureaucrats important enough to rate rooms in the big hotels.

One night, for instance, I was settled in my room reading a metallurgical journal when the phone rang.

"Piotr Ivanovich," a woman's voice complained, "why haven't you called me so long? I'm lonely for you, dear."

"I'm sorry but there's no such person here," I said brusquely.

"Stop joking, Petya. As if I didn't recognize your voice!"

"I'm not your Petya. Please let me alone."

"So! I suppose you're with some other girl! Well, I'll come over and see for myself!"

In about twenty minutes there was a knock at my door. A tall, slim, striking blonde stood in the doorway. Snowdrops glistened on her coquettish little fur hat. She pretended surprise but smiled sweetly.

"Is Piotr Ivanovich home?"

"Listen, my little pigeon, I live here and there's no Piotr Ivanovich. Please let me be."

"But why so rude, my dear? An interesting-looking man like you should speak more civilly to an attractive woman."

"I'm busy. Forgive me but I must say good-night."

"Ekh, appearances are so deceiving. . . . You seem a real gentleman but don't even offer a lady a chair."

"Good night!" I said firmly. As I closed the door I could not resist adding, "Your technique isn't too good. You need lots more practice."

Because I needed to consult certain metallurgical officials in Dniepropetrovsk, I was able to make my visit home at government expense. I was provided with a separate compartment in the first-class or so-called "inter-

national" cars. I was well dressed, travelling in top-category comfort. Any citizen could see in me at a glance another solid, well-placed bureaucrat. The conductor was obsequious. I felt annoyed, to be thus accepted as a very symbol of the inequality which I despised.

The "hard" or third-class cars at the other end of the train, beyond our "international" dining car, were filled with ordinary humanity crowding double tiers of wooden shelves. As I walked through those cars, out of curiosity, I could sense reproof and even hatred in the eyes that examined my respectability. At stations, when I went out to stretch my legs, I thought I detected the same sort of hostility in the tattered peasants hawking a few vegetables, dried fish and milk.

Soon we were in my native Ukraine. The very landscape seemed more friendly than in the northern Russian provinces. But my heart contracted in pain as I looked at the poverty and neglect everywhere in evidence.

As we drew into a station beyond Kharkov, I was in the dining car. I was startled by several little faces peering through the window with sad, hungry, envious eyes. These were *bezprizorni*, homeless boys and girls in motley rags. They were staring at one of their "socialist uncles" at lordly ease under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

This in the Ukraine, which once upon a time provided food not only for all its population but for a large part of Europe! I paid my bill nervously, suddenly depressed, and hurried out of the dining car. What a gulf lay between the Russia of propaganda and official statistics and the Russia of flesh and blood! What a strange machine is the human mind that can shut out reality with walls of paper victories and empty slogans!

At the Sinelnikovo station I went out again for a walk in the invigorating cold. At the door of the first-class waiting room I watched a uniformed Chekist shooing off a peasant family—man, wife and several children, all of them laden with heavy bundles. "You belong over there, citizens, in the third-class waiting room," he said, and they walked off meekly. It would never occur to them, any more than to the gendarme, that people so work-worn might intrude on the first-class precincts in this our "classless society."

Several adolescent girls, provincial and pleasant-looking, their youthful faces framed in colored shawls, had come to meet the train. It was no doubt one of the great thrills of life in a provincial town like Sinelnikovo. In excited eagerness they peered into first-class windows, giggling and nudging one another. Perhaps they dreamed that some important first-class Prince Charming with a Party card and an Order of Lenin, rich and powerful, would see them, fall in love at once, and carry them off to the never-never land in Moscow.

The Dniepropetrovsk station was clean and orderly. My brother Constantine was waiting for me on the crowded, noisy platform, and with him was his wife. Having been away from home for over a year, I had not yet met this new member of the family. I embraced and kissed them both. They helped me with the huge packages of food and clothes which I had brought from the capital and soon we were on our way home, the luggage in one carriage, the three of us in another. It was good to see again the familiar

streets and squares and buildings, huddled in their blankets of snow as I shall always remember them.

"Ekh, Vitya, you look like a real Moscow eagle, a regular little Stalin," Constantine laughed. "Didn't I tell you, Klava, that my brother was a mighty important man?"

I thought I detected a serious note under the jesting. The older my brother grew the more he resembled our father. He had the same lean, clean-cut good looks, the same strain of irony.

"Why do you say that, Kotya?"

"Don't be offended, little brother. But you do loom magnificent in my provincial eyes. How shall I put it? Maybe it's that self-satisfied look that comes to proletarian leaders after a life-time of self-denial. . . ."

"Now stop it, Kotya," his wife broke in. "You wait for Victor Andreyevich as anxiously as if he were your sweetheart, and first thing you do when he arrives is attack him."

"But darling Klava," he explained, "this is the first and probably the last chance I shall have to attack a little Stalin to his face!"

We all laughed. Knowing my brother inside out, I could not dismiss his joke as lightly as his wife did. I knew he loved me deeply. As if reading my thoughts, he pressed my arm affectionately, just as he used to when we were children. His bitter mockery was not aimed at me but at the breed of self-important, comfortable and spiritually callous bureaucrats. It seemed to me that he was echoing the cynicism with which life among the working masses was saturated.

The stalwart Constantine was in many respects a typical Russian intellectual. He had resisted all pressures to draw him into the Party; but he had a profound love for our country and our people. Several years later, when the Germans attacked our fatherland, he would be among the first to go to the front and ultimately, as an officer, to lay down his life in defense of Russia. Whatever the press might say about the valor of such men, I was certain, when the news reached me in Moscow, that it was not for Stalin and his regime that he had fought and died, but for his people and his country.

Could he have had a premonition of his own fate and the fate of millions? In our talks during this visit he said at one point: "Our country is one thing, Vitya, its regime quite another. . . . Let's not confuse the two." At the time I paid little attention to the remark—though it expressed what I felt myself—but later it would recur to me constantly.

2

My parents had both aged visibly since our last meeting. With three sons helping financially, they lived far better than most of their neighbors. Yet existence was hard. Even with money it was impossible to obtain the kind of food they needed in their declining years. Besides, father suffered in his own flesh and nerves every blow struck at the workers—the labor books, the lateness decree, the stepped-up norms, the growth of forced labor. All his life he had identified himself so completely with the plain

people that every new humiliation hurt him to the quick, notwithstanding the fact that he was himself safe.

Mother seemed to have become more frail. My heart went out to her. The goodness in her seemed a tangible thing. It lit up her countenance and made it beautiful in a way that words could never convey. I never tired of watching her as she prepared our meals or bustled over her brood of grown-up men. Somehow I was pleased that the lamps still burned under her icons, as I remembered them from babyhood, witnesses that she had an unfailing source of consolation. She was convinced that it was her prayers which saved me in the super-purge, and I did not contradict her.

In the evening my brother Eugene arrived with his wife. It was a memorable reunion. Father, who had never learned to relax completely, to forget the world and its troubles, tried again and again to talk politics but was duly squelched by his three sturdy sons. There was much to talk about. Constantine's wife was an engineer, Eugene's a teacher, and all of us thus close to the tough everyday realities.

The following day my work took me to the Lenin plant. Its administrative staff was entirely new. It would have been foolhardy to mention Birman or Ivanchenko or any of the others who in the past had stood at the head of this great industrial undertaking; even Petrovsky, whose name was once linked with Lenin's in the title of the factory, had become unmentionable. But among the workers in the shops I found men who had known me for ten or fifteen years. They greeted me affectionately and crowded around me.

"You've made a name for yourself, Victor Andreyevich," one of them said, "and I'm happy with all my soul."

"Yes, old Kravchenko's boy will still be a People's Commissar. Just give him time," another laughed.

But before I left two of the older men talked to me in a more earnest vein. They were not only distressed but deeply insulted by the new decrees.

"Now we're bound to our machines, like our grandfathers were bound to the soil under serfdom," old Larin sighed. "Eh, Vitya, life is bitter and every day it gets worse."

"Yes, tell us, now that you're up there, when will we finally begin to live like human beings? We've been waiting twenty-two years now!"

What could I do but reassure them in the stock phrases of the editorials? Fortunately these men really did not expect answers from me. They knew that I was as helpless as the least of them, just another and more expensive cog in the same machine.

When I returned home father was waiting for me. He would not be robbed of the pleasure of a serious ideological talk with the one son out of three who had inherited a little of his political passion. Besides, I suspected that he considered it his sacred paternal duty to guide me on the path of righteousness. His great fear was that I, too, might yield to the temptations of power; that I might betray the class from which I had sprung for the fleshpots of the dictatorship.

I reassured him on that score. We talked for hours. He was, in the final analysis, one of the very few human beings to whom I could uncover my wounded soul without fear of being denounced. His own feeling, as he watched events, was one of disappointment. Mine went far beyond that. My doubts had ripened into a profound hatred of the new rulers, a vast contempt for their socialist verbiage, a dread of their engines of sadistic terror.

"And I'm not the only one who feels that way, papa. Stalin's purges have done him no good. True, a lot of ambitious newcomers have rushed to bring him their fervid oaths of allegiance and to fill the soft places held by those slaughtered and imprisoned. They owe their careers entirely to the purges. But Stalin's enemies are still numerous in the Party. Yes, they're in every office, in every trust, in the Kremlin itself. You simply can't kill and torture so many people without leaving bloody trails of hatred and passionate yearning for vengeance.

"Of course, there's also a new generation of Communists around Stalin who actually believe that all their predecessors were traitors and enemies of the Party. They simply don't know any better and no one dares tell them. These are the people who love and trust him and would go through water and fire for him. They're Stalin's strength and the country's tragedy."

Father reminisced about his revolutionary youth. What has happened to the Russian people, he wanted to know. Were there no longer young men with flaming ideals, with the courage to protest?

"A lot of us would like to speak out, to shout to the world," I said. "But we know it is impossible. Death comes too quickly for those who try it. Only the few who escape abroad can tell the truth. Here the terror is too complete, too all-embracing." I paused and looked into my father's eyes. "If I ever succeeded in leaving the country, papa, and decided to speak out with a full voice, do you realize what might happen to you, and to mama?"

"Don't worry about us," father replied. "We're old people who've lived their lives. Always do what you consider your duty, Vitya. Nothing else counts. To suffer pain yourself is nothing. The knowledge that you're the cause of pain to people you love, that's harder. How well I know it, son. Do you think it was easy for me to go to prison and leave my dear wife and my children to starve?"

When I departed from Dniepropetrovsk, my mother was with me. It required a lot of argument and the help of the whole family to persuade her to come to Moscow. She had never been in the capital and it gave me intense pleasure to be able to show her the city in grand style. Also, I wanted to give her a vacation from housework. Despite my assurances that there would be plenty to eat in the first-class dining car, she packed her suitcase with provisions for the journey.

The luxuries of the "international" car, and of the elegant rooms at the Hotel Moskva which awaited us, left her speechless. During nearly two happy weeks I saw Moscow through her unblurred eyes: performances at the Moscow Art Theatre and the Maly Theatre, opera, ballet, sport spec-

tacles at the Dynamo Stadium, the art galleries, the Park of Culture and Rest. Usually Irina, a woman whose acquaintance I had made several months earlier, was with us.

"Vitya, why did you insist on bringing me to Moscow?" my mother asked me, out of a clear sky, as we sat one evening in the hotel restaurant.

"What a question, mama! It's a kind of present, to show you how much I love you."

"Yes, of course, of course. But maybe"—she looked at me with a mischievous smile—"maybe it was also because you wanted to show me Irina? Now, now, don't blush, Vityenka. I can see you're in love."

"I confess, mama. You're right, though it isn't that I'm terribly in love. I'm tired of loneliness and I admire Irina tremendously."

"All I can say is that you show wonderful taste. Have you registered yet?"

"No, but it's all decided. Irina has work that she can't leave and I'm rather glad of it. I don't want to start my life as a family man in far-off Siberia."

Irina was tall, good-looking, with large blue eyes and light-brown hair. The daughter of a French father and a Russian mother, she made her living translating literary works from German and French for various Moscow organizations. I met her at a crowded house party to which a highly placed friend took me. Something about her—was it the sweetness of her expression, the sound of her voice, her quiet, easy bearing?—made a deep impression on me. I scarcely exchanged a word with her that night, although I was conscious of her presence every minute. And when I asked whether I could escort her home when the party broke up, she was not surprised. It was as if she had expected it all along.

There had been no drama about our meeting, none of the feverish tension, none of the hectic pouring out of confidences which had marked my first meetings with Julia or Eliena many years ago. Yet within a few weeks we knew that our lives would be tied together. Our relations had depth without turbulence. I had watched her first encounter with my mother without anxiety, knowing for a certainty that they would adore each other. Though so different in background and education and mental make-up, Irina seemed to me somehow cut of the same cloth as my mother. What they had in common was a goodness so unconscious, so selfless, that it added a dimension of spiritual beauty to their every word and act.

When Irina joined us after dinner—we were going to hear *Prince Igor* that night—my mother embraced her and kissed her. There was no need for words.

At first my mother was as excited as a young girl by Moscow, but after a while she grew thoughtful and sometimes even melancholy. It seemed to her unjust that we—and others—should be spending hundreds of rubles for hotel rooms and dainty meals and entertainment while others didn't have enough to eat. I had bought the three tickets to *Prince Igor* from a speculator.

"A hundred and twenty rubles!" she exclaimed when I told her. "But that's as much as a conductress on the trolley cars in Dniepropetrovsk

earns in a month. It's not right, children, I tell you it's not right. And look at the audience here! I've never seen so many overstuffed and overdressed people in one spot since the revolution. And all the time I thought there'd been a revolution."

"Come now, *mamochka*," Irina chuckled, "forget politics and enjoy the opera."

"But 120 rubles!"

One afternoon I took her to the Agricultural Exposition. She examined everything with intense interest—the farming machines, the blooded horses, the prize cows and swine. She removed the steel-rimmed spectacles from her tiny nose to read the slogans and statistics plastered on every wall.

"Well, how did you like it, mama?" I asked as we drove back to the hotel. "Why are you so quiet?"

"Vitya, call me a foolish old woman if you will, but to me it all seems a masquerade. Whom does it do any good? If there are so many cows in the country, why is there no meat in Dniepropetrovsk? If there is so much new cotton, why can't I buy a shirt for your father? It's a masquerade, Vitya, and those who put it on ought to be ashamed of themselves."

I did not reply.

"If not for the fact that I've met Irina," mother said, "maybe it would be better if I had gone to my grave without seeing Moscow. It's a city with two faces. A few fat hotels, theatres, museums, restaurants, but leave the main streets and there's the same poverty as in the provinces. Yes, two faces! From the towers of the Kremlin you call for world revolution, but a few blocks away people live without rights and in privation."

"Mama, you've grown up politically in two short weeks. . . . Don't tell papa; he'll be shocked. I really think he loves you especially for your old-fashioned political innocence."

3

The territory of West Siberia was vital to the national defense, being so located that it could serve either European or Asiatic Russia should war break out on either flank. In planning the development of the region, the War Commissariat played as large a part as the industrial commissariats. And Stalinsk was considered a crucial bastion in the system of defense. In Western Siberia many strands of the new industrialization—machine-building, automotive, aeronautical, chemical, metallurgical—were being knotted.

In the Russia of our time, where symbols often outweigh substance, it was a circumstance of the highest moment that the old West Siberian town of Kuznetzk, on the river Tom, had been renamed Stalinsk. The name of the almighty Georgian in his Kremlin heaven was never invoked in vain. It meant that the spot was earmarked for glory; and indeed, small accomplishments in Stalinsk sometimes loomed larger in the national propaganda than big achievements elsewhere.

It smacked of sacrilege, therefore, when I insisted on inspecting the site of the planned Stalinsk pipe-rolling factory before undertaking its construction. Comrade Kozhevnikov, who by now headed Glavtrubostal, was outraged and tossed me like a hot potato to Comrade Merkulov, who by this time had become Commissar of Ferrous Metallurgy.

"What's the idea, Victor Andreyevich?" Merkulov said. "I gather you want to make a personal check-up on a decision confirmed by the Commissariat, the State Planning Commission, the Metallurgical Project Institute, the War Commissariat, the Central Committee of the Party and the Politburo. Are you in your right mind?"

Put that way, my proposal did sound preposterous. But experience had taught me the lesson of caution. To assume responsibility blindly was for a Soviet industrial manager the surest short-cut to disaster. In a capitalist society a man merely gambles his money or his job; under Soviet conditions I was staking my life.

"Since I'm to be trusted with a hundred and fifty million rubles' worth of construction," I pleaded, "you should at least enable me to study the site of the project, the availability of labor and materials and construction conditions in general."

"Funds for the factory have been appropriated. The Project Institute in Leningrad has been working on the blueprints for months. But since it can do no harm, I'll authorize the trip. Only bear in mind, Victor Andreyevich, that we can't fool around with a Party decision!"

After four days by train, accompanied by my chief engineer, Gerardov, I reached Stalinsk. The small filthy station scarcely lived up to the city's inflated reputation. Dirt and confusion, in fact, seemed indigenous to this Siberian outpost. For miles around I saw structures in various stages of progress. As usual, work on ambitious industrial enterprises had been started with little if any thought of decent living arrangements for the workers.

Already over 150,000 people crowded into a town that had housed perhaps 30,000 a few years earlier. In addition Stalinsk drew heavily on forced labor, some 8,000 slaves being available in nearby concentration colonies. Some of the newly built administration structures and residences for the upper crust of workers, having been erected mainly by prisoners and at terrific speed, were already sagging and cracking. Every house and every hovel in the old town crawled with humanity. Behind the magnificent new administration colony and the new houses for qualified workers were the odoriferous slums, called "shanghais," and they were, in fact, as filthy and swarming as the worst oriental anthills.

Vast barracks colonies had mushroomed outward from the fringes of the old city. The overflow population, thousands of families, lived in the damp dugouts in the ground we called *zemlyanki*. These crude holes in the ground, covered with hand-made gabled roofs, were pathetically familiar sights around new enterprises in the Soviet Union where housing could not keep pace with new population. They were usually sixteen or eighteen feet long, eight or ten feet wide and six or eight feet deep—about enough to sleep two persons. The gabled roofs were normally made of boards and

reinforced with tree branches, straw, baked mud, whatever happened to be at hand. The lucky ones might also have a few planks to prop up the earthen walls and to cover the slimy floor.

In Soviet practice, new factories and administration buildings are erected first, housing for the ordinary workers only later. What a contrast, I thought, as I went through Stalinsk, between these "shanghais," these mud "homes," and the propaganda pictures in our films and magazines! How little there is in common between the official pretense and the unofficial truth!

The Stalinsk city fathers received us cordially, even enthusiastically. They were proud of their "boom" city and pleased to see another great unit added to its industrial expansion. But even at the first interviews I detected a certain uneasiness when the details of my construction picture were under discussion. Gerardov and I soon realized that this embarrassment was fully justified.

Conditions for undertaking the pipe-rolling project here were not merely difficult or unfavorable, they were utterly impossible. The factories already in progress were stymied by shortages of wood, cement, brick, fuel. Despite the prison camps there were neither enough workers nor living space for workers; the authorities had to use strong measures to prevent the directors of various jobs from stealing labor forces from one another. Available power was inadequate for present demands, let alone the new works being planned.

When we saw the site where our factory was to be erected, we were horrified. It was a huge naked stretch of muddy river front a considerable distance from town, without electric or gas lines, without railroad tracks or a trolley line, without so much as a negotiable road. It was more like building a new city in the desert than another factory in a functioning industrial community, so that neither the funds nor the time allotted to us could possibly suffice.

Most serious of all, the terrain was wholly unsuitable for a metallurgical establishment. One did not have to be a construction engineer to observe that the ground would not support big buildings and the heavy machinery called for by pipe-rolling. Gerardov and I looked at one another and shrugged our shoulders in disbelief. How in the world had so many engineers and commissions approved the site and the plans? Who had hoodwinked the Commissariat and the Central Committee? Who had permitted the outlay of millions of rubles in advance planning for an undertaking that was clearly doomed to failure?

We did not know the answers. But we did know that it would be tantamount to suicide for us to undertake the work. Any doubts we might have had were dispelled by a visit to an Institute building a short distance away and on the same type of terrain. We found its cellars flooded, its walls soaking wet, and the whole thing sagging though it was less than two years old.

Equipped with photographs, charts and other materials, we returned to Moscow. It was a heartrending task I faced—to unsell the government on a widely ballyhooed enterprise which had the imprimatur of the highest

authorities and involved the reputations, perhaps the freedom, of scores of big and little officials whose bureaucratic indifference or technical illiteracy was at the bottom of the inept project.

My report to Merkulov and his staff, including Kozhevnikov, had the force of an earthquake. Everyone stared in stupefaction. All of them, it was evident to me, thought only how to extricate themselves from what might snowball into a political catastrophe. The picture I drew was too clear, too detailed to be wished away. Besides, it quickly appeared that voices had been raised in warning before, but had been silenced by fear. The responsible officials looked at me with angry, accusing eyes, as if my findings rather than their own ineptitude were responsible for the unpleasant situation.

There followed weeks of stormy conferences, filled with veiled threats that my head would be forfeit if I made too much noise about the business. But I resisted all pressure to undertake the job despite the certainty that it meant wasted millions and wasted energy. In the end a solution was found: a perfectly typical Soviet solution, one, that is, which saved face for officialdom and concealed the gigantic mistake from wider circles.

At Kemerovo, about 160 miles from Stalinsk, also on the Tom, another important industrial center was under development. At the time the project was planned, this place too had been mentioned as a possible site for this pipe-rolling factory. Galvanized by fear, the bureaucratic machine now went into high gear and soon all the enthusiasm pumped up for Stalinsk was being efficiently diverted to Kemerovo.

All along the line, planning bureaus and Academicians, Party functionaries and technical authorities, suddenly discovered that Kemerovo must take precedence over Stalinsk. The "political conjuncture" abroad—by which we meant the tense relations with Japan—and the interests of Siberian industrialization generally, it appeared, demanded that Kemerovo receive preference. Stalinsk could wait—forever, I knew full well, though no one as yet dared to concede that openly.

And thus it transpired, in the confusion which seems inevitable in planning on so large a scale, that my appointment to Stalinsk catapulted me into Kemerovo. Again I demanded an opportunity to examine the ground and this time the Commissariat and Glavtrubostal could not demur.

Fortunately Kemerovo proved entirely satisfactory. It was a town of some 125,000 inhabitants, with wide streets, spacious parks and extensive blocks of new housing and especially beautiful buildings for officials and administrators. There were the usual acres of ugly barracks on the periphery and even some wretched *zemlyanki*, but in general conditions were unusually pleasant. I saw only one slum meriting the label "shanghai." In the public markets, where the *kolkhoz* peasants of the district brought the produce of their private gardens, fresh vegetables, meat, milk, butter, poultry, seemed abundant; the prices were considerably lower than in Moscow. By comparison with the Urals, this seemed a foretaste of heaven.

The site of our proposed factory evidently had been intended for some other project, now abandoned. We found some finished buildings, the

completed foundations for a series of buildings, a railroad track, gas and electric conduits, water pipes and other installations which would greatly simplify our work. Moreover, we were almost within the city limits, making the housing and transport problems for our labor that much simpler. Gerardov and I were overjoyed.

Kemerovo officials bent backward to be helpful. Our arrival meant that about 150 million rubles would be added to the city and the local press shrieked its pride in the coming construction. Though it had a coke factory, coal mines and war plants, the principal fame of Kemerovo (aside from a notoriety won through the Moscow blood trials to which I shall revert later) rested on its chemical industry. It was an open secret that the chemical *combinat*, one of the largest in the world, was geared for the production of military essentials.

We were warmly received by Comrade Sifurov, an engineer now serving as Secretary of the City Committee of the Party. Two N.K.V.D. officials, as if accidentally, sat in at our first interview. From their questions it was obvious to me that they had a shrewd understanding of the muted scandal behind the sudden shift of construction from Stalinsk to their city. Whether Merkulov, Kozhevnikov and others knew it or not, the eyes and ears of the Secret Police all around them had been wide open all the time. The Bureau of the Kemerovo City Committee, to whom I made a report, approved the transfer of the project to their city.

I returned to Moscow. Then I spent several weeks in Leningrad, working with the Metallurgical Project Institute, which had dropped the Stalinsk assignment and was hurriedly finishing plans for Kemerovo. Substantial amounts of money were deposited at the Kemerovo Bank to our account and I set out for my new post with my new staff.

Irina saw me off at the Moscow station. The gloom of our separation was lightened by the knowledge that my work would bring me frequently to the capital.

4

Hard work is the opiate of the disappointed. It was thus, at least, in my case. I applied myself to the tough assignment in Kemerovo with an intensity that was in large part desperation. The more ruthlessly I drove my body, the more easily sleep came at night. In drugging my mind with immediate worries about business details, I succeeded in blotting out disturbing thoughts about the larger national picture. The more deeply I hated the whole regime of terror, in fact, the more loyally I focussed my energies on the job in hand.

Though I had been entrusted with an enterprise running, ultimately, into many millions of government funds, I was not trusted to select my own administrative staff. The top officials were appointed directly by the Commissariat and the chief of Glavtrubostal, without so much as asking my opinion. This system aimed to encourage officials to watch each other and tended to create mutual distrust among people brought together for common tasks. It was sheer good luck that Gerardov proved both a com-

petent and a likable chief engineer, but both of us were saddled with some people who were neither able nor tolerable as human beings. Some of the local appointees, it was evident, were merely espionage agents for the Regional Committee at Novosibirsk, the Kemerovo City Committee, the Economic Department of the N.K.V.D., and Glavtrubostal.

From the outset our efforts were snarled in red tape and blocked by bureaucratic stupidity. I had to accumulate materials and tools and arrange for their transport and storage. Thousands of skilled and unskilled workers had to be mobilized, then provided with homes and elementary care. Under normal conditions such problems would not involve insurmountable difficulties. Under our Soviet system every step required formal decisions by endless bureaus, each of them jealous of its rights and in mortal dread of taking initiative. Repeatedly petty difficulties tied us into knots which no one dared untie without instructions from Moscow. We lived and labored in a jungle of questionnaires, paper forms and reports in seven copies.

I shall spare the reader technical dissertations. But a few examples may convey the flavor of business under the planlessness which is euphemistically called planned economy.

We were in critical need of brick. Hundreds of prisoners marched from their distant camps to toil fourteen hours a day to meet construction demands for this material by various Kemerovo administrations. At the same time, however, two large and well-equipped brickyards stood idle. They happened to belong to another commissariat which was "conserving" them for some mythical future purposes. I begged and threatened and sent emissaries to Moscow in an attempt to unfreeze these yards, but bureaucracy triumphed over common sense. The brickyards remained dead throughout the period of my stay in the city.

While we were making frenzied efforts to find homes for our workers, a bloc of new houses stood like a taunt, unfinished and useless, on the outskirts of Kemerovo. The credits made available for this project, it appeared, had been exhausted before the work was finished. I had the necessary money to buy and complete this housing but never succeeded in breaking through the entanglements of red tape. The organization which had started the building was willing to relinquish its interest. Everyone, in fact, seemed willing and authorization for the deal seemed about to come through—only it never did.

A vital tramway line running through our area was nearly completed. Several tens of thousands of rubles would have sufficed to put it into operation, and the funds were on tap. But because of some budgetary snarl the city fathers dared not release them without a decision from higher up. I wrote dozens of urgent letters demanding that the line be opened. There were stormy sessions of the City Committee of the Party and the Kemerovo Soviet on the issue. But month after month passed and nothing happened. Meanwhile thousands of weary men and women spent two and three hours a day trudging to and from work.

Such vexations were endless, piled one on the other. They turned every minor task into a major problem. They pinned down hundreds of useless

officials on futile jobs and thus, in a sense, gave them an economic stake in expanding and prolonging the confusions. Every conflict and red-tape blockade, besides, was aggravated by feverish spying, denunciations and investigations.

I could not honestly charge the troubles and delays to malice, though tempers flared and harsh words were exchanged. The true explanation lay in the pervasive fears which paralyzed individual officials and whole organizations.

Kemerovo, it happened, had suffered more than its normal share of the purge terrors and therefore had been slower to recover. Few of its top layer of technicians and executives had as yet thawed out from the fearful impression of the blood-letting. The city had figured sensationally in the Moscow trials. Its chemical works and coal mines had been pictured as among the main targets of sabotage activity; and it was in Kemerovo that a "secret printing press" was supposed to have been installed and used by the Opposition leaders.

The chief "conspirator" in this city had allegedly been Comrade Norkin, who was one of the defendants in the Piatakov trial and duly executed a few hours after the trial. He worked in Kemerovo as representative of the Commissariat of Heavy Industry. For my sins I had to sit now in the very office from which Norkin, if his senseless confession were to be believed, had directed his crimes. I was in daily contact with some of the men who had worked with him and several who had testified against him.

As my acquaintance with these people flourished, it was inevitable that Norkin's name should come up now and then in conversation. Invariably they would be overcome with embarrassment and, it seemed to me, also deep shame. They scarcely needed to tell me—though at least one did—that they had lied under N.K.V.D. pressure to save their own skins. Several times a gnawing conscience got the better of their discretion.

On one occasion, after a serious accident had occurred in the chemical works, I found myself alone with a prominent Communist employed there. Having told me some of the details of the accident, he suddenly exclaimed:

"And this is just the sort of thing for which Comrade Norkin and a lot of others were executed! The 'saboteurs' and 'wreckers' are dead, but the accidents go on. I suppose they're directing it from their unmarked graves. . . ."

"But what about Norkin's own confession, Comrade L——?"

"Don't be naive, Victor Andreyevich. If those engineers had really wished to make trouble they could have blown the whole *combinat* sky-high. Why would they have limited themselves so considerately to minor damage and petty tie-ups of production? Why would they poison workers? Confessions. Fairy tales for foreign idiots!"

It was apparent to any engineer that the chemical works, like so many of the new Soviet industrial projects, operated under great handicaps. Construction was shoddy and in many respects incomplete. Montage was inept. Workers were inadequately trained. The truth is that inexperience and honest blunders were at the bottom of the accidents here, before the

purge and continued to cause accidents now that the "enemies of the people" had been destroyed.

"The Commissariat of Heavy Industry files are crammed with reports about conditions that might lead to accidents," Comrade L—— said. "Many of these reports were written by the same men who later confessed sabotage. Does it make sense for engineers to warn against disasters they were themselves plotting?"

"I suppose not."

"And consider this: what would have been the effect on public opinion if the government had revealed these reports in court? Ekh, I'd better hold my tongue. When the heart's full it overflows."

What held true for the chemical enterprises applied also to the coal mines. One day Secretary Sifurov called me to his office at the Party Committee. That morning one of the mines had been flooded. The news of the accident was all over town and Sifurov was very much upset.

"Comrade Kravchenko, we must have several hundred pair of rubber boots for the men pumping the mine," he said. "I'm told you have a stock of boots and I want your cooperation."

I agreed, of course, to lend him the boots. Then I steered him into a discussion of the accident. Was it perhaps another piece of sabotage, I wanted to know.

"No point in rushing to such conclusions," Sifurov said. "Show me a coal enterprise anywhere, here or abroad, that doesn't suffer an explosion, collapse or flood now and then. It's in the nature of the job, especially here, where installations are still pretty primitive."

"All the same," I persisted, "we know from the trials and confessions that the Kemerovo mines were honeycombed with wreckers."

The Secretary looked at me for a long time, smiled wryly, and changed the subject.

Some time later, at the local headquarters of the coal trust, I was in conference with an official with whom I had become friendly. Our negotiations stretched beyond the regular work hours and soon we found ourselves alone. Suddenly, apropos of nothing in particular, he went to a filing cabinet and drew out a manila folder, which he handed to me without a word. I opened the folder and began to read at random carbon copies of reports to the Coal Administration in Moscow.

They were reports made long before the explosions and other accidents subsequently called sabotage had taken place. In urgent and sometimes desperate language they warned that to avoid loss of life and property protective measures ought to be taken without delay. The significance of these warnings was clear enough. Saboteurs would hardly have pleaded so vigorously for action to head off their own calculated crimes. . . .

Norkin's confession about the underground printing set-up had been confirmed at trials in Kemerovo and Novosibirsk by other prisoners and supported by photographs of the press and copies of the anti-Soviet leaflets. It was one of the few confessions seemingly bolstered by documentary evidence. I was intrigued by the story and never missed a chance to get some light on it now that I was on the scene of the crime.

During nearly a year's residence in Kemerovo I was able to piece together the facts, and they proved very unsavory indeed. I dare not reveal how I obtained the information, piecemeal over a long period, since it might endanger the lives of decent people. I am reduced to a bald statement of the shocking truth—a truth so shocking that I could not believe it until I had absolute corroboration:

A secret typographical establishment did exist. Many times I was in the cellar where it had stood; there were still signs of its presence. Leaflets attacking Stalin and calling for mutiny had in fact been printed. But the press had been installed, the leaflets had been composed and printed *by the N.K.V.D. itself.* To make sure that no one would talk, the architects of the ugly hoax used only workers who would be physically unable to talk—prisoners awaiting execution or sentenced to long terms of confinement. The job was done under cover of night. The prisoners were under constant guard, of course, and the technical guidance was provided by Chekists specialized in such things.

"What about the leaflets?" I asked one man who knew these facts. "Thousands of them were supposed to have been distributed here."

"What nonsense!" he replied. "You know well enough that anyone caught with such a leaflet would have been arrested. Yet I don't know of a single arrest on any such charge; neither does anyone else here. No one among the workers seems ever to have seen or even heard about the famous leaflets until the trial. Maybe the conspirators printed them up just to provide themselves with bed-time reading."

In any case, the circumstance that Kemerovo—its coal mines, its chemical works, its building trusts—had been honored with a big role in the plots left a heritage of jittery fears. No one moved without signed and triply sealed evidence of authority from Novosibirsk and Moscow. The incredible part of it, looking back on it all, is that we managed to accomplish as much as we did before the whole undertaking was washed out by another mysterious shift in policy. But in that I am running ahead of my story.

CHAPTER XXI

WHILE EUROPE FIGHTS

THE TREATY of friendship between Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin which precipitated war in Europe will be forever bound up in my mind with the straggling Siberian city where I worked at the time. It was at Kemerovo that I saw the pact streak meteorlike across our horizon and crash headlong into the minds and consciences of the Party membership. It left us all stunned, bewildered and groggy with disbelief.

The brief and dusty Siberian summer was drawing to a close in a welter of rumors about border clashes with Japan. The flurry of war alarms set off by the Munich settlement of the previous year had not quite died down. Those of us who thought about such questions at all were conscious of threats on both sides. That fascist Germany might make up with the U.S.S.R. and direct its martial energies elsewhere never entered our calculations, we had so long taken it for granted that the Nazis had only one real enemy, the Soviet regime.

I considered the Kremlin capable of any outrage. Its methods by this time seemed to me little better than those of the Nazis, especially in its treatment of its own people and in the forms of organization of power. Reading or listening to anti-Hitler propaganda, I could not help asking myself inwardly, "But how does this differ from our Soviet atrocities?" All the same, I refused to credit the news of a Soviet pact that freed Hitler to make war on Poland and on the rest of Europe. There must be some mistake, I thought, and everyone around me seemed equally incredulous.

After all, hatred of Nazism had been drummed into our minds year after year. We had seen our leading Army Generals, including Tukhachevsky, shot for supposed plotting with Hitler's Reichswehr. The big treason trials, in which Lenin's most intimate associates perished, had rested on the premise that Nazi Germany and its Axis friends, Italy and Japan, were preparing to attack us. Those nations, indeed, were only the spearheads of a world coalition of capitalists sworn to destroy our socialist fatherland. The brutalities of the super-purge had been justified largely on the basis of that imminent Nazi-led assault against us.

The villainy of Hitler had become in our land almost as sacred an article of faith as the virtue of Stalin. Our Soviet children played games of Fascists-and-Communists; the Fascists, always given German names, got the worst of it every time and the triumphant comrades ended by singing the Young Pioneer hymn, *Vsegda gatóv! Always ready!* In the shooting galleries the targets were often cut-outs of brown-shirted Nazis flaunting swastikas.

Only a few weeks before the pact we had listened, at a Party meeting, to a boringly familiar lecture on the world situation. As always, Hitler figured as the arch-criminal, creature and tool of the world plutocracy which was preparing to strike at us. When the orator said that Hitler and his Party were dictators, that the Führer and his clique were deified, that in Nazi Germany there was no freedom of speech or press, that everyone there lived in a state of fear and terror, many of us could not help thinking he was giving an accurate picture of our own regime.

An old anti-Nazi picture, *Professor Mamlock*, was still being shown in the cinema theatre on Kemerovo's main street. It portrayed Hitler's government as a sadistic gang of sub-human plunderers obsessed by hatred of the Soviet Union.

Not until we saw newsreels and newspaper pictures showing a smiling Stalin shaking hands with von Ribbentrop did we begin to credit the incredible. The swastika and the hammer-and-sickle fluttering side by side in Moscow! And soon thereafter Molotov explaining to us that Fascism was, after all, "a matter of taste"! Stalin greeting his fellow-dictator with fervent words about their "friendship sealed in blood"!

To gauge our astonishment one should know the official Communist "line" on the Nazis and Fascism generally up to the moment of the pact. Fascism, we were told, was not different from capitalism in kind but only in degree. It was simply capitalism in its final or death-agony stage, capitalism without its camouflage of "democracy" and "parliamentary trickery." In Italy and Germany, according to our version, capitalism had been forced to drop its "democratic mask" and was openly unleashing against the workers the terror which was being applied in disguised forms in America, England and elsewhere. It was only a matter of time, in fact, before the rest of the capitalist world, driven to the wall by its economic sins, would likewise abandon its spurious democracy and enter upon open fascism.

Hitlerism, we were instructed to believe, was thus merely the iron fist of the whole plutocratic, imperialist world. A war between Nazi Germany and its capitalistic patrons was unthinkable, illogical. Now that just such a war had come, it seemed to us no less insane than the compact of friendship between the U.S.S.R. and Germany—the compact which should be known by the names of Stalin and his Politburo, rather than the U.S.S.R., since neither our Party nor our people were consulted.

But there is no intellectual infamy that a government in absolute control of press, radio, schools and platforms—with police to enforce unanimity of opinion—cannot perpetrate. Once the shock had worn off, the new version of world relations was generally accepted. We now repeated endlessly that French and British imperialists, backed by American big business and Polish landlords, were engaged in a conflict to repress German imperialism and the outcome was of no importance to the one "socialist" nation. Those of us who retained doubts about this picture buried them deep in our hearts, where the teeming informers could not spy on them.

Professor Mamlock vanished from the cinema screens, along with *The*

Family Oppenheim and all other anti-Fascist films. The libraries, similarly, were purged of anti-Fascist literature. Voks, the Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, instantly discovered the wonders of German *Kultur*. Visiting Moscow on business, I learned that several exhibits of Nazi art, Nazi economic achievements and Nazi military glory were on view or in the process of organization.

The theatres of the capital were developing a great interest in German drama. In fact, everything Germanic was the vogue. A brutal John Bull and an Uncle Sam enthroned on money bags figured in the propaganda, but the Nazis were exempt from such ridicule. Hundreds of German military men and trade officials were in evidence in Moscow hotels and shops. They were busy with the gigantic program of Soviet economic help to Hitler's crusade against the "degenerate democracies."

The Soviet hierarchy does not need impressive arguments to line up Party opinion. An instinct for survival does the trick. To avoid trouble one not merely believes, but believes deeply, fervently, whatever absurdity is prescribed from on high. The great Stalin knows what he's doing—ultimately that was the sum-total of the Party reaction.

We talked about the new turn of events not only at formal discussion meetings of the various Party nuclei, but privately, in our own homes and offices. How can we people in Kemerovo, we said or implied, pretend to understand such grave matters? Our job was to build and run factories, and to govern the people working in the factories, secure in the faith that our Beloved Leader could make no mistakes. Only a recalcitrant few among the Party people, indeed, continued to think about the matter at all. The rest were soon as apathetic as the population at large. After twenty-two years of life under a dictatorship, genuine public opinion had become unthinkable.

All we knew for certain was that our country had extricated itself from a bloody war which was devastating the rest of Europe, and that seemed something to be grateful for. More than that, we were receiving some of the spoils of the war—half of Poland, Bessarabia, later the three Baltic countries—as a bonus on the Kremlin's clever neutrality.

Few of us foresaw that Russia would eventually be pushed into the fire, let alone that it would suffer more losses in life and substance than all the other nations combined. We took it for granted that the fighting countries would in time bleed each other to death, leaving the U.S.S.R. the real master of Europe. While the capitalists fight it out, the political formula had it, we shall strengthen ourselves, accumulate arms and benefit from the war experience of the others. When capitalism and fascism will have weakened each other, then, if need be, we shall throw twenty million men armed to the teeth into the scale of history; by that time the revolutions in many European countries will have passed from the theoretical into the practical stage.

This cynical view our leaders called "Bolshevik realism." It left some of us ashamed and perturbed. The role of vulture, picking the bones of a dead continent, went against our moral grain. We preferred to revive some of the romanticism of the early revolutionary years. At some point in the

struggle, many of us consoled themselves, the working masses would rise against their exploiters. Then the imperialist war would be turned into a civil war and an all-European revolution might even restore the revolutionary spirit and idealism of our own country. . . .

Though everyone accepted the new friendship with the Nazis, along with the mounting attacks on other European countries, I can attest that there was nowhere any enthusiasm for these things. The whole business was edged with emharrassment. Our political meetings, at which speakers from the center explained the new situation, seemed constrained and fidgety. This was particularly true after the U.S.S.R. invaded Finland at the end of November. When David fights Goliath, even Goliath's friends have a sneaking sympathy for the doughty little David. How could the simplest-minded worker at our mass meetings believe the fable that tiny Finland, unprovoked, attacked its colossal neighbor? The fact that we paid with hundreds of thousands of dead, wounded, frost-bitten and prisoners for a narrow strip of Karelo-Finnish marshland before that episode was ended added a good measure of bumiliation to the unpopularity of the adventure.

In the light of future events, one thing should be made clear. Stalin entered into his compact with Hitler in earnest. Had the Kremlin played with the idea that we must ultimately fight Germany anyhow, some part of the existing hatred of the Nazis would have been preserved; our anti-fascist propaganda would not have been so completely abandoned in favor of "anti-imperialist" (meaning anti-British and anti-American) propaganda. At least the more trusted Party officials in the Kremlin itself, many of whom I knew intimately, would have been apprised of the continuing Nazi danger.

Nothing of the sort happened. On the contrary, any whisper against Germany, any word of sympathy for Hitler's victims, was treated as a new species of counter-revolution. The French, British, Norwegian "warmongers" were getting their deserts.

The theory that Stalin was merely "playing for time" while feverishly arming against the Nazis was invented much later, to cover up the Kremlin's tragic blunder in trusting Germany. It was such a transparent invention that little was said about it inside Russia during the Russo-German war; only after I emerged into the free world did I hear it seriously advanced and believed. It was a theory that ignored the most significant aspect of the Stalin-Hitler arrangement: the large-scale economic undertakings which drained the U.S.S.R. of the very products and materials and productive capacity necessary for its own defense preparations.

The simple fact is that the Soviet regime did not use the interval to arm itself effectively. I was close enough to the defense industries to know that there was a slackening of military effort after the pact. The general feeling, reflecting the mood in the highest official circles, was that we could afford to feel safe thanks to the statesmanship of Stalin. Not until the fall of France did doubts arise on this score; only then was the tempo of military effort stepped up again.

2

Forty-seven million rubles had been assigned for my work in Kemerovo in 1940. By the end of 1939 the essential preparations had been made and we were ready to start on the main buildings of our projected factory.

In accordance with Soviet procedure, the actual job of construction was farmed out, by contract, to the building trust, Kemerovostroi. With them rested also the responsibility for gathering together the necessary workers. But since I had the biggest stake in the speed and quality of the job, I naturally took part in all the negotiations for labor forces.

And it was thus that I found myself, for the first time, directly involved in the technique of a large-scale deal for slave labor.

Both the Regional Party Secretary at Novosibirsk, Comrade Barkov, and our Kemerovo Secretary, Sifurov, were helping the trust to arrange for adequate labor forces. The Kemerovo Soviet, too, was active in the matter. A substantial number of free workers would be used, but the chief reliance would be on convict labor.

The N.K.V.D., representing its regional bosses, agreed to supply two thousand prisoners to begin with, the number to be enlarged in the spring, when construction on a bigger scale would become feasible. The details were arranged at several sessions in Kemerovostroi offices and at the N.K.V.D. headquarters. There was a lot of cold-blooded bargaining on the qualifications of the slaves to be supplied and the prices to be paid. An outsider intruding midway in the discussion would have assumed that horses or mules, rather than living men and women, were concerned.

At the first meeting I listened and said little. I thought: *So this is socialism in practice in the classless society of the happy life. . . . So this is the new life we are trying to impose by force on Finland at this very moment.* . . . A shudder went through me and I must have blanched. I felt weak. Sifurov looked at me with a puzzled expression.

"Aren't you well, Victor Andreyevich?"

"No, no, I'm all right . . . just haven't had enough sleep this week."

The N.K.V.D. spokesman explained that there was no dearth of prisoners, including the necessary percentage of skilled workers and foremen. He could provide five thousand, ten thousand, any quantity we wished. There was a ring of professional pride in his voice—a horse-breeder proud of his stables. The only difficulty was where to put them. The several concentration camps in the immediate Kemerovo district now held about fifteen thousand and he doubted whether any more could be crowded in.

Could a new camp be erected and staffed quickly enough to serve our purposes? Perhaps additional barracks might be thrown up in the existing camps? Finally we agreed to inspect one of the largest of the local enclosures before making definite recommendations on this matter.

On a bitterly cold and windy morning we set out in a limousine to see for ourselves. There were four in the party: an N.K.V.D. functionary, a representative of the trust, a Secretary of the City Committee and myself.

It was slow driving through the snow but in about twenty minutes we reached our destination.

The camp stood on an elevation overlooking a stream that branched off from the Tom. It was an almost square enclosure, surrounded by a tall picket fence topped by barbed wire, with look-out towers at the four corners and a sentry box near the entrance, where we now alighted. The wooden barracks were arranged parallel to the sides of the enclosure, forming a big square and leaving a large expanse, like a parade ground, in the center. This open space was in direct range of the machine guns in all the towers, so that a concentrated fire from all directions could be let loose in case of trouble. Near the entrance stood several well-built houses, which contained the administration offices and quarters for the guards.

We were expected and were immediately ushered into the main office, where the chief of the camp met us. He was not only cordial but almost obsequious. He was a short, chunky blond fellow, with rather handsome weather-stained features. It was evident that he stood in awe of the City Committee and the N.K.V.D. official in charge of our party. The reason for this I learned later. It appeared that he was an important Communist who had been exiled from Moscow. Though put at the head of a camp, he was himself an exile, his political loyalty under continuous scrutiny. Therefore the main Party functionary and the Kemerovo N.K.V.D. were keeping an eye on him and reporting regularly on his conduct of the camp.

On several other occasions I had been inside concentration camps, but I was not yet accustomed to the experience. I was still gripped by a morbid curiosity about every detail of camp life. Only a man inspecting the prison where he expected some day to be confined could understand my state of mind.

Looking out of the window, I saw about fifteen women prisoners, grotesquely bundled up against the cold, piling wood near one of the brick buildings. One of them wore a sack on her head. Several others had their hands bound in rags, in lieu of gloves. Soon four other women came into view, carrying huge buckets from which rose clouds of steam.

"What are they doing?" I asked, addressing the chief.

"Feeding the pigs and the poultry," he said and then added, with a certain pride, "We raise our own meat here."

"For all the prisoners?"

"The prisoners!" he laughed, as if I had said something witty. "You don't suppose we feed enemies of the people meat? This isn't exactly a spa or a restaurant, you know. But believe me, the food problem for ourselves and the guards isn't too easy either."

"And who are those three old men over there?"

I pointed to three bearded men in tattered overcoats, their heads wrapped in shawls, who were working on a pile of stones.

"Two priests and a rabbi. They're too weak to walk the eight kilometers to Kemerovo factories, but they're earning their bread doing chores in the camp."

"A curious thing," the representative of the trust commented, "how

well priests and rabbis get along together once these counter-revolutionaries are put behind barbed wire. I've noticed that fact in many camps."

"That's quite true and I've thought about it myself," the warden agreed.

Sitting in the office, we discussed our problem. Though the camp, with about three thousand inmates, was already overcrowded, the warden thought it might be possible to accommodate another thousand, though it wouldn't be easy. Some of the barracks, he explained, already did double service, one shift sleeping while the other was out working. Unfortunately it was not always easy to arrange this, so much depended on the kind of work for which the prisoners were farmed out. One possible solution, he thought, might be to build a third tier of "beds."

"True, it would be crowding them a little but the one in the middle tier, at any rate, would be warmer." He laughed again.

In order to make this plan clearer, he invited us to go through some of the barracks. We put on our hats and overcoats and followed him.

Chekists carrying rifles with fixed bayonets were in evidence at regular intervals. The barracks, made of unpainted boards, the interstices plugged with sawdust, were bolted and locked from the outside.

"How many does one of these structures hold?" I asked.

"That depends. Normally between 300 and 350. This one," the warden said, as a guard unlocked the door, "takes care of 310 women."

"Stand!" the guard shouted into the long, dim, low-ceilinged hall.

The prisoners obeyed with alacrity, those on the upper shelves clambering down in panicky haste. Only three or four remained stretched out; apparently they were too sick to move. They were women of all ages and nationalities, young and old, but all equally ragged and exhausted looking. The thick odor of stale sweat and squashed bedbugs made me slightly nauseous. Very little daylight filtered in through the dirty barred windows. Several small electric bulbs hung from the ceiling, but they were not burning now.

The barracks was so cold that our breath was visible, but many of the women were only half dressed. Here and there one of them, surprised by the unexpected visitors, tried to cover her breasts with a garment but most of them seemed indifferent in their sullenness; the last drop of natural modesty had now been drained out of them. Several of the faces were very young, even more were old and wrinkled, but the great majority, it seemed to me, were in their twenties and thirties. Many of them, I could judge by their faces and remnants of their old clothes, were intellectuals; despite the dirt and exhaustion, I could see traces of education and culture in their features.

The "beds" were bare boards, perhaps four feet wide, attached to heavy beams in two tiers—just a series of double shelves, without any sort of bedding. Here the prisoners slept, one on a shelf, in their clothes, some ragged garment rolled up for a pillow under their heads. Near the center of the hall stood a small wood-burning stove, pathetically inadequate for a barracks this size. Except for a few slop buckets for the prisoners'

physical needs, near the entrance, there was no furniture, no benches, no tables, literally nothing.

On arriving at a camp, prisoners were deprived of all letters, photographs of relatives and friends and all other reminders of the free world beyond. Bed linen and even such elementary comforts as toothbrushes and scissors were taken away from them. They were provided with metal cups and bowls and a wooden spoon. These possessions they kept on their "beds" or hung on their walls. Books, paper and pencils were strictly prohibited and, it goes without saying, there were no radio receivers. Correspondence with relatives was neither allowed nor physically possible.

Along one of the narrow walls, however, there was a kind of iron trough and over it a water basin with drip-faucets. Our official guide, in pointing this out, referred to it as "their washing accommodations." Then he enlarged on his idea that an additional tier added to every "bed" might make it possible to cram another hundred women into this one hall. He might have been talking about cattle, and with as little consideration for the prisoners who stood silently listening to our conversation. On one of the walls I noticed a frayed strip of red bunting on which I read the slogan, inscribed in white paint: *Work—the Road to Rehabilitation.*

"Are these prisoners all criminals?" I asked as we went out.

"No," the warden said, "these are all politicals—kulaks and other counter-revolutionaries. In the men's barracks we put them together but among the women, we have found, it's best to keep the criminal elements and prostitutes separate from the politicals. The problem of discipline is much harder with women prisoners.

The Chekist let us into another barracks, somewhat smaller. Here the women were all criminals, some of them prostitutes, the camp chief told me. Guessing that I was more interested in the camp than in the negotiations which had brought us here, he seemed quite willing to enlighten me.

Again the prisoners stood at attention. I suppose there is no more horrifying sight for the normal man than a few hundred filthy, diseased looking, shabby women. The deep-rooted romanticism of the male is outraged.

"*Starosta,* come here!" the warden ordered.

The *starosta* or overseer of the barracks stepped forward. She seemed in her middle thirties, in a torn, patched dress which once had been elegant. Her features, too, showed traces of former comeliness. She stood rigidly at attention, her hands behind her back.

"Everything in order here, warden," she reported in a clear but expressionless voice. "One sick. The rest ready to receive food and report for work."

"Good, dismissed!"

My eye caught a placard nailed to the wall near the door where we stood. I read it—a printed list of rules, enjoining cleanliness and strict obedience. At the end, in large black letters, I read the provisions for punishment: first infraction, two days without food; second offense, solitary confinement for not less than a week; third offense, at the discretion of the authorities, prolongation of the prisoner's term of confinement

or "the highest measure of social defense," which is the Soviet formula for death by shooting.

When we left this barracks I asked our host whether he had been obliged to impose the death penalty on prisoners.

"Not since the mutiny last year," he replied. Apparently he was assuming that as a Kemerovo official I would know what he was alluding to.

The men's barracks, to which he now took us, were identical with those on the women's side. Having become somewhat accustomed to the sights and smells, I was able to study the prisoners more closely. Though most of them were Russians, there were also many Uzbeks, Turkomens, Tartars, Armenians, Jews, Poles, even a few Chinese. Despite the fact that they were all unshaven and indescribably squalid and emaciated, I picked out faces which seemed to me intelligent, even distinguished. Perhaps engineers, professors, literary men, disgraced Party leaders, I said to myself. I observed one tall, broad-shouldered prisoner, standing erect and looking straight into my eyes. I felt as sure as if he were still in uniform that he was a military man. But the great majority, of course, seemed ordinary peasants and workers.

In one of the barracks the overseer was a powerfully built fellow with a broken nose and tiny, shrewd eyes.

"This is *Shchelkunchik*," the warden explained. The word means "nutcracker."

"Why nutcracker?" I asked.

"Oh, he's a famous safe-cracker and known by this nickname through half a dozen provinces," he laughed. "Criminals make better overseers in the barracks than politicals. They're not as soft."

"Most of them look down on the political prisoners," the N.K.V.D. man added, smiling. "You see, they're not enemies of the people . . . just scoundrels who've run afoul of the law."

"What's the proportion of criminals to politicals?" one of us wanted to know.

"Usually not more than 10 to 15 per cent here are criminal elements, and that includes the prostitutes. But of course we make no distinction in their treatment."

On the way home I gathered a few more details from the N.K.V.D. officer. The prisoners, I learned, are not permitted to smoke in the barracks. Only in rare instances do their relatives know where they are located. People condemned to short terms are usually put into prisons or labor colonies, so that the camps are filled largely with men and women serving sentences of five, eight, ten or more years or for life.

The term in truth matters little, since very few are released. They are not set free automatically at the end of their sentences but only on special orders from the N.K.V.D. in Moscow, which usually extends the sentences arbitrarily to keep its forced-labor armies at full strength. Those released are rarely if ever allowed to return to their original homes. Instead they are compelled to settle in prescribed regions, usually remote

parts of Siberia, the Far East and the Far North. There are large communities, indeed, composed almost entirely of former prisoners.

The more infamous camps in the Far North and the Far East and in the Siberian taiga count as many as thirty or forty thousand prisoners each. Because the death rate is fearfully high, some of these camps have special brigades of prisoners whose sole duty, twelve and fourteen hours a day, is to bury the dead.

In the camp we had just visited, the bread ration for prisoners—and bread is their main food—was from 300 to 800 grams (11 ounces to 30 ounces) a day, depending on the kind of work to which they were assigned, the nature of their crime and the fulfilment of production quotas. In addition they were given a thin hot soup of potatoes and vegetables twice a day, porridge and occasionally some dried fish. Failure to fulfill work norms was punished by reducing these rations. Scurvy, dysentery and other diseases of undernourishment as well as frostbite are commonplace in all camps. Few of the prisoners whom I observed were without running sores, inflamed eyes and other visible evidence of broken health. Under a true slave system, such as existed in the United States before the Civil War, for instance, the slaves represent an economic value and therefore receive at least the kind of care and protection given to work animals. The position of the Soviet slave is infinitely worse. The supply is well-nigh inexhaustible and the slave-holder, the Soviet state, apparently finds it more economical to let them die in droves than to feed and clothe them.

"What was that mutiny he mentioned?" I inquired.

"Oh, that happened at the end of 1938," the Party Secretary volunteered. "Some of the prisoners refused to go out to work . . . something about the food being rotten. The administration of course acted with vigor. Fourteen of the ringleaders, twelve men and two women, were shot. The executions took place in the camp, with all prisoners lined up to see the show. Then details from every barracks helped dig the graves, just outside the barbed-wire fence. Not much chance for another riot as long as the memory of this one remains fresh. Naturally the head of every camp has power of life and death over all prisoners. This is no time for liberalism in dealing with enemies of the people."

The last statement was obviously by way of political insurance. Our N.K.V.D. companion was the Secretary's intimate friend, but why take chances?

Before the housing problem for our two thousand slaves was solved, the whole undertaking was called off—"conserved," in the bureaucratic vernacular.

3

Not suspecting that all my Kemerovo effort was being tossed into the garbage pile, I was pleased with the sudden summons to Moscow at the end of December. It would enable me to celebrate the New Year with Irina. I assumed that nothing more serious was involved than final con-

sultations on our 1940 plans. But I found Comrade Kozhevnikov looking very grave.

"I have bad news for you, Victor Andreyevich," he said. "There's a Central Committee and Sovnarkom decision to stop work for the time being on the Kemerovo pipe-rolling project. The appropriation has been cut to one million rubles, just enough to conserve the work already done."

I stared in confusion.

"But that's impossible! We've worked so hard. Everything is in such fine shape. How can it be?"

"Don't ask me, I'm only the head of Glavtrubostal. I wasn't consulted —I was merely informed. Between ourselves, I'm as upset as you are."

"Millions have been invested in preparations," I went on. "Immense quantities of building materials are ready. Anyone familiar with Siberian industry knows that the project is essential. What in the world's behind it all?"

"I can only assume that it's the new international situation. Now that we're friends with Germany, there's no rush about defense enterprises. We have a breathing space."

"But wasn't the Kemerovo project mainly connected with the Far Eastern dangers? There's still Japan."

"Oh well, these are matters of the higher politics and we'd better keep our noses clean. With the Soviet-German pact, I take it, the Japanese danger, too, is no longer considered urgent."

"How about myself, Comrade Kozhevnikov? After all, I'm the responsible director and have spent millions of rubles in preliminary work. Shouldn't I let the Party know my reaction to the decision?"

My education in the great purge had made me sensitive to danger. I was aware how easily innocent officials might become the scapegoats for blunders at the higher levels of power—and the scrapping of Kemerovo seemed to me a terrible blunder.

"I'd suggest that you keep quiet, Victor Andreyevich. Just wind up affairs in Kemerovo and come back here. Kemerovostroi has already been instructed to stop work."

Should I follow his advice about accepting the decision in silence? I wrestled with this problem for weeks. An expression of opinion on my part would offend the bureaucrats responsible for the decision. It would make enemies for me. On the other hand, a passive attitude might in some future purge be thrown up to me as proof of indifference, of deficient Bolshevik zeal. After all, the project had important military significance. I had reason to fear that if the international situation changed, scapegoats for the abandonment of the work would be sought, new "enemies of the people" would be punished. Neither the Central Committee nor the Sovnarkom would be blamed—they are by definition sinless—but innocent bystanders like myself. Besides, my thinking on the subject was colored by emotion. I felt frustrated.

Even under the deadly impersonal system of state planning, a man tends to identify himself with his job. I had thrown myself unsparingly into the Kemerovo undertaking. Its scale and its importance to the future

of Siberia had interested me deeply. I had worked and schemed and quarreled with all kinds of officials in the interests of those big mills I saw with my mind's eye rising on that site. Now it was not easy for me to acknowledge that the whole thing was wasted.

My doubts about my course of conduct were resolved when I returned to Kemerovo. The city fathers, I found, were dismayed by the turn of events. Both the City Committee and the Regional Committee at Novosibirsk drafted formal reports to Moscow pleading for a reconsideration of the decision. The project, they said, was well advanced and a great many vital factories had counted on this new source of steel pipe. Both reports, moreover, praised the administration of the project and especially myself as its director.

I felt that I had little choice but to support their plea—a mistake that would plague me for a long time. In a statement addressed to the Central Committee of the Party and to Comrade Merkulov, Commissar of Ferrous Metallurgy, I pleaded for a continuation of the Kemerovo construction.

Returning to Moscow, I discovered quickly that my action had plowed up more malevolence against me than I had thought possible. Every Soviet organization is a hotbed of personal feuds, competing cliques, festering jealousies. This is almost inevitable in an atmosphere where political skill and influence are the decisive values. Kozhevnikov was peeved because I had ignored his advice. His assistant, Golovanenko, whom I had crossed on several engineering questions, had apparently long been hostile to me. Now he had a peg on which to hang his resentments.

Commissar Merkulov, indeed, seemed the only one who approved my action. But he was hardly in a position to offer me support. Confidentially he apprised me that the whole ferrous metals industry was under investigation by a special commission of the Central Committee of the Party headed by Malenkov. Ivan Tevosian, an Armenian who stood high in Stalin's favor, was in the commission. It was clear, he hinted, that he, Merkulov, was slated to be made the sacrifice for the cumulative ills of the industry. Soon thereafter, in fact, he was removed, being succeeded by Tevosian.

More than a month passed without a response to my report from the Central Committee. I became uneasy. On the advice of politically alert friends, I sent a copy of my statement to Stalin's personal Secretariat. While this step might protect me against direct punitive action by offended or alarmed officials in the Commissariat, it magnified my offense in their eyes.

They got their revenge, in ample measure and with interest. By concocting a petty and far-fetched court case against me—which I shall deal with later—they managed to embroil me in two years of fantastic litigation. They did not succeed in sending me to prison, and ultimately I was fully exonerated by the highest court. But they did succeed in giving me many anxious months and a too intimate acquaintance with Soviet jurisprudence.

While waiting for a new assignment, I remained on the payroll of

Glavtrubostal. The unaccustomed leisure tasted sweet. Night after night I took Irina to theatres, concerts, the opera, the ballet. Like most Russians, I like Moscow best in its hushed winter mood of brief days and crystalline nights, when its life is muffled in thick blankets of snow.

In those early months of 1940 Moscow was one of the few European capitals not blacked out by war. This fact was emphasized endlessly as proof of the sagacity of the Beloved Leader and Teacher. The war news was confined to small print on the last page of the newspapers, as if it did not really concern us. Yet people read that first and read it avidly. Instinctively they doubted the official assumption that our country could remain forever immune to the spreading holocaust. Perhaps it was this sense of its impermanence that gave the artistic and social life of the city that winter a special tang, a kind of hectic flush.

There seemed to be more house parties than usual. The street lights and the few electric signs seemed to blaze more arrogantly. The presence of German officials and some officers—especially in the larger hotels and restaurants—added a martial touch to the scene.

The war was also manifest in this neutral capital in another fact. The so-called open shops, where the state sold goods to all who could pay unrationed prices, were suddenly lush with unfamiliar foreign items; with suits, dresses, shoes, cigarets, chocolate, crackers, cheese, canned goods, a hundred other items obviously of non-Soviet origin. This was the overflow of goods from the frontier areas taken over by the Red Army. At the beginning these foreign luxuries came from Polish and Finnish territories; later in the year loot seized in the Baltic countries, then in Bessarabia, began to show up.

According to the propaganda theory, we were "liberating" these territories from capitalist exploitation and poverty. In practice Muscovites were thrilled to be able to buy these wonders of capitalist production, in the "socialist" capital. Thousands of Soviet officials sported looted elegance and amazing stories, sometimes no doubt exaggerated, about the good things to which the Soviet liberators helped themselves in the conquered areas spread through the capital.

Glavtrubostal was considering a suitable post for me. Any Soviet citizen, of course, can be assigned to work anywhere, arbitrarily and without so much as advance notice. In the case of highly responsible work, however, the sensible practice is to make the process as voluntary as possible. The Commissariat offered to put me in full charge of a metallurgical plant in the Transbaikal region of Eastern Siberia. I was also sounded out about a position as chief engineer in a Urals plant. At one point the job of director of a metallurgical plant in the Gorki region was under consideration for me. But not one of these possibilities materialized.

As to my own preferences, I was weary of the years of wandering and yearned with every nerve for a settled home life. I was eager to remain in Moscow. It seemed a paradise by contrast with the rest of the country. It took finesse in maneuvering and also some discreet political influence, in which Politburo member Andreyev was useful, but in the end I was given work in Moscow—in a metallurgical mill in Fili, on the outskirts

of the capital. It was a modest post, two rungs below those I had already filled, but because it was in the capital I was content.

The factory was a pre-revolutionary one, enlarged and modernized in recent years, employing about a thousand workers and bearing the same name as the trust, Glavtrubostal. Steel tape and pipe were its principal products. As assistant chief engineer I carried the main responsibility for actual production.

The top administrative officials had worked together in this factory for a long time. They formed a closed and intimate clique. There was the director, Manturov, tall, redheaded, every inch of his face covered with freckles. He was a rough-hewn, self-educated fellow, inclined to conceal his total ignorance of everything technical with confused bluster. He had attained some fame as a partisan fighter in the civil war period and still lived on this political capital. Though he had headed industrial enterprises for many years, their operation remained an enigma to him and sometimes he actually resented the engineers who knew their way about.

His crony and main support was Comrade Yegorov, Party secretary for the factory as well as chief of its Special Department. A short, stocky, middle-aged man with big bushy eyebrows, he was self-important by reason of his connection with the Economic Department of the N.K.V.D. When he stalked through the shops and offices with a possessive air, some of the workers behind his back muttered about "our little Stalin." His fierce eyebrows threw their shadow over my spirits during the year I spent near him. The third member of this inner clique was the head of the trade-union section, Comrade Papashvilli, a swarthy Georgian with a native zest for intrigue. The editor of the factory paper and a few other Communist activists played with the executives, making a cozy family.

Under the new Commissar, Stalin's friend Tevosian, lusty efforts were made to raise output. Fat bonuses were authorized for fulfillment of orders, with additional cash premiums to the administration for every percentage of over-fulfillment. Since the inner clique could not vote themselves rewards without extending the windfalls to the top technical officials, I was amply supplied with money. There were months when my salary and bonuses came to over 4,500 rubles. Irina's work as literary translator netted her about a thousand rubles. Our combined earnings were therefore, in good months, from twenty to twenty-five times higher than those of an average workman.

Despite this wealth, our "apartment" consisted of two small rooms on the top floor of a three-story building in the center of town, at number 5 Rozhdesvenka Street. Once the building had been a hotel. Now a batch of families were deployed along our corridor, with their furnishings, their servants and their assorted problems.

Among my neighbors were an ex-ballerina and her grown daughter; a factory foreman and his wife; the sloppy and soured widow of a former merchant, in the threadbare remnants of her ancient finery; a responsible official of some Commissariat. Some of them had servants. We merely had a houseworker who did not live with us but came in every day.

Though we lived close to this miscellaneous group of Muscovites for several years—so close that we stumbled over and exasperated one another—we did not really learn to know these people. The blight of suspicion was upon us, as it was upon every such group living in enforced and annoying proximity. Those who imagine romantically that common problems draw human beings together have never lived in an overcrowded Moscow communal apartment. Our many households shared two kitchens, one bath room and toilet, the one telephone in our common corridor. We closed our ears to the quarrels, the love-making, the arguments that swirled all round us. When the telephone rang, everyone rushed to answer. There was the pervading suspicion, too, that among our neighbors there might be informers.

In our apartment the N.K.V.D. informer—this I discovered much later, during the war—turned out to be the one person we would not have suspected. It was the merchant's widow, Silina by name. She listened to our telephone conversations, eavesdropped at our doors, and reported regularly. Unquestionably she had been drawn into this service by fear, to avoid being sent far away as a "hostile class element." Sometimes we wondered how she managed to obtain extra food rations; when I discovered her function in our corridor community, the answer was clear.

Aside from this woman, however, we were a neighborly enough group. Like typical Russians, we were ready to forget small disagreements; when misfortune knocked at someone's door, all were ready to help.

Let no one suppose, however, that we were badly off as living conditions in Russian cities go. Irina was lucky to have obtained such an apartment in a choice part of Moscow and I shared her good fortune while begging and conniving for space in one of the new residences going up in the city. We possessed an upright piano, good mahogany furniture, expensive rugs, a few paintings. Less fortunate friends, visiting us, spoke with genuine envy of our good life. . . .

Except for the interval when I served in the Red Army, I was to live in this place for more than three years. It was the nearest I would come in my mature years, to a stable family life. At the Glavtrubostal in Fili I worked long hours—often from seven-thirty in the morning to ten or twelve at night. But on free days and on the occasional evenings when I returned home reasonably early Irina and I felt that we had real home life at last.

Sometimes we entertained. My friends were almost all Party people, Kremlin and Central Committee officials, and technical specialists, whereas Irina's circle of intimates was drawn from the artistic and literary fringes of Moscow life. The two groups did not mix too well and we tried to keep them apart as far as possible. Perhaps this apartness was symbolic of our marriage which never ripened into a deep all-embracing relationship. Two people, I found, can develop true affection and respect for each other without really merging their lives.

My activities in the factory, my Party work, political lectures, meetings, engineering interests were all foreign to Irina's background and interests. Our two worlds touched but rarely overlapped. Besides, Soviet

officials as a matter of safety tend to keep their wives ignorant of their outside professional and political affairs. Experience has taught them that the less a man's family knows about his work and problems, the safer they are in the long run. With the threat of purge and arrest always over their heads, the servants of the all-powerful state try to safeguard their loved ones by telling them little or nothing.

In any event, it is a fact that I rarely talked to Irina about my industrial work and never about my political thoughts and doubts, though she was an intelligent and warmly sympathetic woman. Often I ached to share my troubles, to "talk out my heart," but fear of making her a partner to my "dangerous" political state of mind always curbed my tongue.

"Tell me, Vitya dear, what's bothering you," she often pleaded. "Why are you so unhappy? Is it my fault? Isn't there something I can do to help? Tell me, I beg you!"

"No, darling, it has nothing to do with you. It's just that I work too hard, I suppose. Nothing to worry about. . . ."

How is one to hope for a normal domestic life under the mental terrors of a totalitarian existence?

4

One day in June I received a letter from Glavtrubostal asking me to explain certain payments made by my commercial assistant in Kemerovo. I was puzzled but not yet alarmed. I did not grasp at once that this was the neat revenge arranged by Golovanenko and others whom I had unwittingly offended.

Under the Soviet law certain types of responsible workers, when appointed to posts in distant parts of the country, like the Far East and Siberia, were entitled to substantial additional payments, covering transportation and other expenses. The payments are made on the basis of individual formal contracts with the enterprise which employs them. Now it developed that in several instances there were no such contracts to cover payments made by my plant.

My assistant and the chief accountant therefore did not consider it necessary to draw any contracts. The law, backed by Kozhevnikov's signature, seemed to them sufficient. Personally I had neither hired these people nor authorized the payments. Nevertheless, as head of the project I was now held technically responsible for the oversight and charged with unlawful payment of funds, a crime punishable by as much as three years' imprisonment.

The scheme to involve me in this far-fetched accusation apparently had been worked out without Kozhevnikov's knowledge. He seemed surprised and embarrassed when I rushed to him with the letter. The charge was nonsensical, he thought, and ought not to worry me. But he felt that he could not inject himself into the affair without seeming to shield laxness in his own organization.

"Just answer the letter," he suggested, "as best you can and forget

about it. I imagine the matter will not be carried any further. It's too silly."

But he was wrong. A month passed. I took it for granted that the "criminal" charges against me had been dropped. But suddenly I was served with a notice that the Commissariat of Ferrous Metallurgy, in the name of Ivan Tevosian himself, had lodged a formal accusation against me in the People's Court. Thus I found myself the defendant in a serious criminal suit, in the ordinary civil courts, in connection with a "crime" with which I had not the remotest conscious connection. The chief bookkeeper in the Kemerovo project, Matveyev, was my co-defendant. My commercial assistant, who had made the actual payments, was not among the accused.

I managed to reach various officials in the court in an attempt to have the case quashed. They agreed that it seemed worthless on the face of it, but after all the accusation had come through Tevosian, not only a People's Commissar but, more important, a rising star in the Stalinist heaven. The machinery of "justice" could not be stopped. I would have to go through a trial. Everyone, in fact, took a grave view of the situation. When one citizen was accused by another, he might hope for an objective verdict in a Soviet court. But when a mere individual stood accused by the government, his chances were usually slim. Not abstract justice but "defense of the proletarian dictatorship"—which is to say defense of the regime—was the main purpose and obligation of the Soviet legal system.

First I underwent a number of preliminary examinations in which I was urged to plead guilty.

"Don't be a fool, Comrade Kravchenko," one of the prosecuting officials of the N.K.V.D. said, "avoid a trial and take your medicine. In that way your sentence will be much lighter."

"But how can I plead guilty to a crime about which I did not even know? I don't intend to accept a criminal record because of a stupid technicality! The moneys were paid out with official signed consent from Glavtrubostal."

I would not have believed that the examination in such a case would be conducted by the N.K.V.D. rather than the court magistrate; there were no political issues in the indictment. But where a Party makes the law, and executes the law as well, nothing is surprising.

"In that event you'll have to stand trial."

Four days before the scheduled trial I applied to the Collegium of State Defense Lawyers for an attorney. There is no real private legal practice in our country. You deal with the neighborhood Collegium, accept the lawyer assigned to you and pay the prescribed fees to the Collegium. Of course, since the lawyer is paid a miserable monthly salary, the common procedure is to reward him privately if he is amenable, taking care that no one knows about it.

A bored woman, yawning in my face, listened and perhaps even half-understood my story.

"Petrov," she called across the room to a man buried in papers, "a case under Article 109, trial in four days. Can you take it on?"

"No, I'm too busy," Petrov called back.

"All right, I'll find someone else," she said.

A first acquaintance with the lawyer she finally assigned to me was not exactly calculated to raise my spirits. He was a decent enough little man, with harassed eyes and hollow cheeks. He was meek and apologetic. When he heard that the charges had been preferred by Tevosian his expression changed from worry to despair. A Soviet lawyer, to keep out of trouble, must put the interests of the Party and the State above the interests of his client. My frightened little defender did not relish the role of opposing a People's Commissar. Indeed, he had no intention of playing any such dangerous role. . . .

The People's Court met in a shabby, badly ventilated room on the second floor of what was apparently a former schoolhouse. The lurid yellow paint on the walls was fly-specked where it wasn't peeling. Portraits of Stalin and other leaders, of course, were deployed all around the room. I waited, along with Mateyev and our respective lawyers, among twenty-odd people whose cases were on the day's calendar.

"The court is coming. Rise!" a functionary shouted at the top of his voice.

We stood up as two men and a woman entered through a rear door and took their places behind a red-draped table on a raised dais. For several hours I watched the proceedings in other cases. The presiding judge is a permanent court official and does most of the questioning; the other two are "people's representatives," a kind of equivalent of the jury in Anglo-Saxon countries. In this instance the people's representatives were a young worker, fidgety and self-conscious under the weight of this honor, and an elderly woman who, I thought, was probably an office secretary somewhere. Neither of them opened their mouths.

After questioning by the chief judge, the prosecutor and the defense lawyers made impassioned speeches—passionate oratory is a tradition of Soviet jurisprudence—and the three judges retired. In a few minutes they emerged with the verdict.

The questioning of Mateyev and myself followed the same lines as in the preliminary interrogations. Until then I had refused to believe that I might actually go to prison on such a preposterous pretext. But as my trial unwound my heart sank. My subjective innocence seemed beside the point. Objectively I had "squandered government funds." They had the Commissariat's word for it and the whole case seemed cut and dried.

After the judge was through with me I felt the prison walls closing in. Then the prosecutor took me in hand. He was a stout fellow, with a great mop of black hair. I felt that he resented my well-groomed person, as if it were somehow my fault that he had to support a family on 600 rubles a month.

"How much did you earn in Kemerovo?" he asked me at one point.

"I averaged 2,500 rubles a month, sometimes more."

He shook his unkempt head as if he had proven some important point and looked significantly at the judges.

"And what are you earning now?"

"Three, four, even as high as five thousand . . . it depends."

Again the prosecutor nodded knowingly and pursed his lips in ironic accusation. He had clinched some obscure logic which, I guessed, had more to do with his own embittered poverty than with the case under consideration.

"There you see, comrade judges, in what conditions the accused lives!"

"But what has that to do with the charges?" I could no longer restrain myself. "I conduct a big factory and I'm paid according to the law."

"The accused will please not interrupt!" the presiding judge admonished. "We trust the People's Commissariat which brings the charges, as referred to by the Prosecutor, more than we trust you."

The prosecutor's speech was loud and lusty. He gesticulated wildly. He dug into literature and the Leader's speeches for grim colors with which to paint these two "monsters" who had "wasted the people's money." An outsider unfamiliar with the facts would have supposed that poor Matveyev and I had embezzled millions and topped it off with murder. Three and a half years in prison, the orator demanded. Why three and a half, not five, not capital punishment, he failed to explain. The whole thing was so nightmarish that I wondered when I would awaken from the dream.

My defense lawyer, considering his Party membership, really made a heroic effort in my behalf. But one felt that he considered himself defeated before he started, that he was merely going through the forms. He didn't argue my guilt—even to him that seemed pretty clear!—but urged my pure conscience by way of mitigating the punishment.

The judges were gone perhaps ten minutes. They returned with a verdict: Two years' imprisonment, with the right to appeal within seven days. I was a convicted "criminal" because someone somewhere, in the Moscow offices of Glavtrubostal had tangled some red tape! A Commissar had signed a piece of paper laid on his desk by some zealous underling, after which the comedy played itself out almost mechanically. I know that it sounds grotesque, but such, alas, were the essential facts. The presiding judge and the Prosecutor were, first of all, Party members. They were dealing with accusations lodged not merely by a Commissar but by a member of the Central Committee of the Party. What chance did justice have under such conditions?

An appeal was duly filed in my behalf, which postponed my arrest. Several times, at intervals of a few months, I was called for interrogation by a variety of judicial functionaries, and early in the spring of 1941 a hearing was held at the main City Court. Again I refused to plead guilty. The Court took the case under advisement and in about thirty minutes announced its decision. The sentence was reduced to one year's "compulsory labor at his present place of employment."

This is a unique Soviet judicial invention. The convicted citizen continues to live and work in freedom—but 10 or 20 per cent of his earnings

are forfeit to the N.K.V.D. In my case it was 10 per cent. Tens of thousands of Russians through this strange device are forced to pay a part of their income as tribute to the secret police under guise of punishment for crime.

Notification of my new status was received by the bookkeeping department at the factory. From then until the case was thrown out as worthless by the Supreme Court, 10 per cent of my wages and bonuses was deducted every month for the N.K.V.D. treasury.

I shall disregard chronology long enough to wind up the story of my career as a "criminal." I appealed to the highest court immediately. By the time it got around to my troubles, however, war had come, Moscow was under Nazi bombardment, and the court had been evacuated to the Urals. In the process the court archives were put in such a sorry condition that no trace of my appeal could be found.

While I was in the Red Army, serving as a captain in an engineering unit and Political Commissar, Irina continued to work on the matter. The 10 per cent was not important. What was important was to erase the stain on my record. Soon after I was released from military service, in the first part of 1942, the Supreme Court reviewed the Kravchenko case. It reversed the decisions of the lower courts, attested my complete innocence and the case against me was dropped.

Had it not been for this exoneration, I probably would never have been allowed to work for the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) and certainly I would never have been permitted to leave the country. The animosities out of which the "criminal" charges against me were born had long been forgotten; when I ran into Golovanenko at the Glavtrubostal offices he barely remembered that he had once been angry with me. But the malevolence, once unloosed, operated on its own inertia and came close to wrecking my life.

CHAPTER XXII

THE UNEXPECTED WAR

ON THE morning of June 22, 1941, Soviet cities and airdromes were being bombed, Soviet armies were already in panicky retreat before Nazi *Panzer* divisions on a vast front. Germany's sudden invasion of Russia was in the headlines all over the world. Before sunrise that morning, everywhere in our country, the secret police began to sweep up "undesirables" by the tens of thousands.

But I knew nothing about the catastrophe that had spilled over the heads of the two hundred million people of my country. Neither did anyone else at the plant when I reached my office early that morning. Yesterday's war dispatches still reported smugly the exploits of Hitler's armies, the discomfiture of his enemies, the "capitalist jackals" and "plutocratic warmongers."

There had been, in recent months, not the slightest change in the tenor of official propaganda. There had been no careless word of compassion for the nations overrun by the Nazis, no risky expression of blame for the Hitlerite marauders. Though millions of Russians were deeply stirred by pity for the victims of the Nazi onslaught, we could not show our feelings openly. Only a few days before this fateful morning, in the Machine Import Department of the Commissariat of Foreign Trade, I had conferred with German representatives. We ironed out the technical details of German deliveries of electric-welding machinery to the Soviet Union.

On June 20, two days before the invasion, I had addressed a political meeting of workers and employees on the "imperialist war." My talk followed the prescribed line. Germany, I repeated, was eager for peace despite its great victories, but British imperialists, backed up by American finance, insisted on prolonging the war.

Neither I, nor anyone outside the inner Kremlin circle, knew that as early as January the State Department in Washington had warned our Ambassador, Constantine Oumansky, that Hitler was making ready to strike at Russia. The warning was repeated by Mr. Sumner Welles five weeks later and reinforced by similar British advices. They were all dismissed as capitalist tricks intended to break the beautiful friendship guaranteed by the Hitler-Stalin pact.

Cautious warnings had also been conveyed to their superiors by Soviet agents in Germany. They reported ominous movements of troops in our direction on a scale too vast for mere policing. Because I had a large acquaintance among officials of commissariats and factories producing goods for the Nazi war machine, I had been in touch often with trade

representatives just returned from Berlin. They were warned about Hitler's intentions. Germans had told them frankly, on occasion, that a clash was inevitable. But all this, too, Stalin and his court brushed aside as inspired mischief-making. They seemed mesmerized by their own propaganda.

As far as the mass of Russians was permitted to know, Soviet-Nazi collaboration was an idyl without blemish. To doubt this would have been to doubt the infallibility of Stalin. The suggestion that a German betrayal of our Leader's confidence was within the bounds of possibility would have seemed a venture in counter-revolution. To express open sympathy for the victims of the Brown Scourge was to court arrest.

And so the historic day got under way without so much as a rumor to disturb its routine. Work at our plant was already in full blast when it was announced that we would pause to hear an important radio address by Commissar Molotov. This procedure was unusual and sent a tremor of apprehension through the plant. We made wild guesses as to the Commissar's subject. No one guessed the awful truth.

Molotov's stammering and tearful words left us all stunned. What could we conclude from his sensational announcement? The *Führer*, crafty and deceitful, base and stupid, had unloosed his familiar *Blitz* on the country which for nearly two years had been depriving itself of sorely needed food, fuel, metals, oil and munitions to help him subdue Europe. We had scrupulously fulfilled our obligations. We had supported the Nazis not only with goods but with worldwide propaganda and diplomatic pressures. Now our reward was perfidy.

In a few hours a Party speaker arrived. We called a lunch-hour meeting of all our workers. I sat on the platform, along with the director, Manturov, and the head of the factory Party Committee, Yegorov. I scanned the tired, frowning faces of our workers as the orator reviled the treachery of the German dictator and extolled the honesty of our own dictator. I saw anger, consternation, as well as weariness, bafflement and sorrow. Some of the women cried.

Both Manturov and Yegorov made speeches in which they repeated, feebly, awkwardly, the new and strange slogans. It was not yet easy for any of us to refer to the "democratic countries" without an ironical inflection or to assail the Germans who only yesterday had been the victims of imperialist warmongering. It seemed fantastic to speak of England and France, so suddenly, as partners in a common cause when we had so long looked on them as the main threats to our national safety.

The workers, stunned by the news, clapped without enthusiasm at the proper pauses, then returned in a daze to their lathes, their desks, their drawing boards. We worked as usual to the end of the day. And yet it is likely that the coming of war shook many minds out of their years-long lethargy. There was Sergei Golovlyov, an electrical engineer and a Party member, for instance. He approached me after the meeting.

"So now it's our turn," he said. "It's a tough life we've been leading all these years, Victor Andreyevich. War, revolution, destruction, Five Year Plans, hunger and purges—and now we're back to war! When at last are we going to begin living like other people?"

"We must work and work, Comrade Golovlyov," I replied. "There is no other way."

"That's right. We must work and fight. But one can't help thinking. . . ."

"You had better go back to work," I assumed an official tone, just to play safe. "We'll talk about it some other time."

In my office, that afternoon, I was informed that the shift superintendent, Vadim Alexandrovich Smolyaninov, had not reported for work and that it seemed impossible to reach him by phone. I picked up the receiver and called his number.

"Is this the Smolyaninov apartment?" I asked.

"The *former* Smolyaninov apartment," I was told tartly.

"Please call Vadim Alexandrovich to the phone."

"Who are you?"

"The assistant chief engineer of his plant is speaking."

"He isn't here and won't be any more."

"Who is this? I'm speaking officially."

"I'm also speaking officially. This is an official of the N.K.V.D."

I dropped the receiver. So my friend Smolyaninov had been arrested! What a tragic end to a revolutionary career! A competent engineer and an educated man, Smolyaninov had been active in the revolution and had become personal secretary to Lenin. Later he served as head of the Office of the Council of People's Commissars, Chief of Construction at Magnitostroi, President of a Soviet Trade Delegation to the United States, director of Gipromez, a vital metallurgical Institute. In short, he had been an important figure in the Soviet regime.

In the big purge, however, he was expelled from the Party and reduced to assistant foreman in our plant. In time this former secretary of Lenin became foreman and finally shift superintendent. Recently he had been reinstated in the Party. His only son, a sergeant in the Red Army, was at the frontier. Now Smolyaninov was under arrest.

He was only the first of the victims of the merciless wartime terror to come to my attention. Dozens of others around me disappeared in the following days. A long time before, an N.K.V.D. friend had told me that in case of war all "dangerous elements" would be stamped out. In every village, town and city long blacklists were ready: hundreds of thousands would be taken into custody. He had not exaggerated. The liquidation of "internal enemies" was, in sober fact, the only part of the war effort that worked quickly and efficiently in the first terrible phase of the struggle. It was a purge of the rear in accordance with an elaborate advance plan, as ordered by Stalin himself.

Several years later, in America, I was to hear the amazing nonsense—apparently accepted even by intelligent Americans—that "there was no fifth column in Russia" because the blood purges had wisely eradicated all "traitors" in advance. I read this obscene absurdity in a strange, half-literate book by former Ambassador Joseph Davies, in the frivolous writings of others who pass as experts on the subject despite a profound

ignorance of the nature of Stalin's policies and regime. I could only marvel at the success of this childish propaganda evidently exported by Moscow.

I say "exported" because inside Russia the government took the very opposite tack. It insisted that our nation was rotten with fifth columnists. From the first day the press, radio and speechmakers howled for the lives of teeming internal enemies, spies, disorganizers, rumormongers, saboteurs, fascist agents. And the N.K.V.D. followed up the howling with mass arrests and executions. In the initial period, at least, we had the distinct impression that the Kremlin was no less frightened of its own subjects than of the invaders.

We had no fifth column in the sense of pro-Germans or traitors—this *despite* the blood purges. But we did have millions of patriots who hated the Stalinist despotism and all its evil works. To that extent the fright of the ruling clique was justified.

The savagery of collectivization, the man-made famine of 1931–33, the gargantuan cruelties of the purge years had all left deep scars. There was hardly a family that had not suffered casualties in the regime's offensive against the masses. Stalin and his associates were not worried about our loyalty to Russia; they were worried, and with good reason, about our loyalty *to themselves*. Perhaps, in their nightmares, they saw twenty million slaves suddenly crashing through prison walls and barbed-wire enclosures in a multitudinous stampede of hatred and vengeance, in a flood-tide of destruction. . . .

In any case, ruthless suppression of potential opposition took first place in the government's plans. It took precedence over measures of military defense. Soviet citizens of German origin, no matter how remote the taint, were arrested almost to the last man. The whole population of the Volga German Republic, nearly half a million men, women and children, was driven out of the region it had inhabited since the time of Catherine the Great and dispersed through Siberia and the Far East. Next came the turn of Poles, Balts and many other nationals who had not been bothered before the war. The isolators and forced-labor stockades bulged with additional millions. Our rulers behaved like a frightened wolf-pack.

Several days after the outbreak of the war, "military tribunals" were set up in Moscow, headed by the former President of the City Court, Comrade Vasnev. Branch offices of this new agency of terror mushroomed throughout the capital and its suburbs. The same was true in every other city. All the pores of Soviet life were blanketed by this organization, vested with extraordinary powers to arrest, to try in secret, to mete out death. There were special railway tribunals, river transport tribunals, Army tribunals—a nationwide army of witch-hunters under N.K.V.D. specialists, charged with the noble task of squelching discontent. Clearly the regime was in a state of panic.

The tasks of the new agencies, expanding but not supplanting the available instruments of surveillance and suppression, were summed up by Stalin himself twelve days after the invasion began:

"We must organize a ruthless struggle with all disorganizers of the rear, deserters, panic-mongers, cowards, disseminators of rumors. . . . It is necessary immediately to turn over to the courts of the military tribunals all those who by their panic-mongering and cowardice interfere with the defense of the country, irrespective of who they are."

Why this febrile fear of "disorganizers of the rear" in a country so recently "unified" by purge inquisitions, so often certified "monolithic"? Was not this vision of a whole nation corrupt with disloyalty and cowardice evoked by Stalin's threats in itself "panic-mongering" on a grand scale? Evidently the home-front enemies were too numerous to be handled by the hundreds of thousands of N.K.V.D. police, so that new tribunals had to be established. How could this happen in a country intoning hymns to the "happy life" under the "sun of the Stalin Constitution"?

Perhaps the Davieses and Durantys can answer these riddles. But listening to Stalin's throaty warnings, uttered slowly in his Georgian accent, I knew only that they did not fit into the picture of a nation cleansed of traitors in oceans of blood. And the deeds which they touched off belied that picture even more than Stalin's words.

In Moscow alone thousands of citizens were shot under martial law in the first six months. One word of doubt or fear or distress was frequently reason enough for hauling the culprit before the military tribunals. Thousands of spies kept their ears and eyes open in the bread and kerosene queues, in markets, shops, theatres, streetcars, railroad stations for any mutterings of despair, doubt or criticism. Every house committee reported on its tenants, every servant on her employers. It got so that people were afraid to mention that they were hungry, lest they be accused of reflecting on Stalin's wisdom or ignoring wartime difficulties.

It became widely known in Moscow Communist circles that as the enemy rolled closer to Moscow thousands of men and women who had been in prisons or labor camps for many years were summarily shot. They were the more prominent political prisoners of the Left—Socialists, Bukharinists, Social Revolutionaries, Anarchists, ex-Communists. They were the people whom the Kremlin dreaded most because, in case of a revolution, they might offer leadership to inchoate masses. Again that nightmare of the twenty million slaves bursting their chains. . . .

It was no secret that the machinery of military mobilization, too, was used to destroy those of little faith in the Soviet regime. N.K.V.D. *dossiers* were turned inside out. Lists of suspects—border cases where arrest seemed unnecessary—were in the hands of every neighborhood draft commission. Those told off for speedy extermination were promptly inducted and rushed with little or no preparation to the most dangerous sectors of the fighting fronts. It was a kind of left-handed purge.

The magnitude of the terror inside Russia cannot be overstated. It amounted to a war within the war. That was one expression of the Kremlin's jittery distrust of the Russian people. The other expression was an almost overnight scrapping of most of the "socialist" catch-phrases under which we had lived and suffered for twenty-four years. After a quarter of a century of Communist indoctrination, the government in its

hour of peril reverted to the traditional appeals of national patriotism, race loyalties, love of soil, later even religion. We were not exhorted to defend the land of "socialism" but the Russian land, the Slav heritage, the Orthodox God.

A more complete repudiation of the values we had lived by—coerced and temporary though it was—is hard to imagine. Socialism? Collectivization? The classless society? World revolution? The more territory the Germans overran, the less was said about these ideas for which the country had been tormented. Not until much later, when the tide of invasion was stemmed, were the familiar Soviet slogans revived. No doubt there were millions of ordinary Russians who retained faith in the Soviet type of society and thought. That faith, it seemed, was not shared by their masters in the Kremlin.

2

But let me return to the first day of the war.

In the director's office that evening I found Manturov himself, Yegorov and the director of a sub-plant, Larionov. We discussed the war. The radio was open, because we were eager for news. Suddenly a voice crashed through the martial music. In pure Russian it boomed:

"Citizens of Russia! Russian people! Listen! Listen! This is the headquarters of the German Army."

We looked at one another uneasily.

"Hadn't we better turn the scoundrel off?" Manturov said.

"To hell with him! Let's hear what the bastard has to say!" Yegorov decided.

"For twenty-four years you have been living in hunger and fear. You were promised a free life and got slavery. You were promised bread and got famine. You are slaves without any human rights. Thousands of you die every day in concentration camps and in the frozen wastes of Siberia. You are not masters of your own country or your own lives. Your master is Stalin. You are driven worse than galley slaves. Millions of you are at this moment in prison cells and forced labor camps. Your rulers have destroyed your Orthodox faith and replaced it with worship of Stalin. What has become of your freedom of speech and press? Death to the parasites of the Russian people! Overthrow your tyrants!" Then followed curses, anti-Semitic slogans, and the other vulgarities characteristic of German propaganda.

"Choke him off!" Yegorov cried.

Manturov hastily turned the knob. The ensuing silence was oppressive. We dared not look into each other's eyes. Soon we parted in clammy embarrassment.

About an hour later I returned to Manturov's office. I wanted to consult him about a substitute for the arrested Smolyaninov. As usual, I entered without knocking. To my surprise I found both Manturov and Yegorov again listening to an enemy broadcast. I understood their curiosity perfectly. For the first time in a score of years it was possible to hear

the Soviet regime denounced aloud, instead of hearing the regime denounce others.

"Come to us with these leaflets in hand," the radio voice was saying as I entered. "They will be your pass. Why fight for slavery and terror when the Germans bring you a free life?"

Manturov cursed as he turned the knob. Yegorov, no less disconcerted by my arrival, stalked out of the office. I talked about the Smolyaninov matter and other pressing items of business. Manturov interrupted me in the middle of a sentence:

"By the way, Comrade Kravchenko, it's best not to mention that we heard German propaganda on the radio. You know, just in case. The Lord protects those who protect themselves."

"I'll bet half of Moscow was listening," I said.

"They won't tomorrow. I've just had a telephone call: tomorrow all radio sets will be requisitioned."

"Requisitioned? What for?"

"For safekeeping, I suppose."

That was precisely what happened, in Moscow and the rest of the country the following day. All citizens, under threat of punishment, surrendered their radios to the local police. Subsequently I saw mountains of radio sets piled like so much cordwood into trucks being carted to storage places. For the duration of the war Russians were allowed only loud-speakers connected with the official radio stations. Elsewhere, in Germany and German-conquered countries for instance, listening to enemy broadcasts was forbidden and punished. In Russia the people were not trusted that far; they were simply stripped of their radios.

This was the first step in a blackout on information that was well-nigh total. The censorship of mail was not limited to letters to or from the fronts but embraced ordinary civilian correspondence. The war communiques in the first weeks proved so misleading, that few Russians believed them at any time thereafter. Little wonder that the authorities were plagued by disseminators of rumors and panic-mongers. Those things merely reflected the popular assumption that their government was lying.

At our factory we worked under growing strains. The mobilization decimated our labor forces. Dislocation of transport left us without essential materials. In theory our country had enjoyed twenty-two months of peace during which it could prepare for the cataclysm. In practice nothing was prepared. Disorder reigned in every department of our lives.

We could not believe the whispered reports that the German tide of conquest was rolling eastward at terrific speed. What of the colossal Red Army about which we had boasted? What about the strategic defenses presumably gained when we pushed our frontiers deep into Poland, Rumania, Finland, the three Baltic countries? What about the advantages supposedly derived from our long period of neutrality?

The communiques told us less than nothing, adding a dimension of confusion to the flood of rumors. Police cordons were keeping refugees out of the capital, to safeguard its morale. But enough of them trickled

through to give us a sense of the growing disaster. The communiques avoided frank admission of defeats. They even implied successes. But the name places were sufficient proof that the fighting was coming closer.

"During the past night," a communique at the beginning of July declared, "battles were fought in the Murmansk, Dvinsk, Minsk and Lutsk direction. . . . At Murmansk our troops offered stubborn resistance to the enemy, inflicting great losses upon him. . . . At Dvinsk and Minsk battles developed that exterminated the foremost tank units of the enemy. . . ."

But on July 3 Stalin came to the microphone for the first time. A horrified nation heard the truth about the holocaust spreading quickly towards the capital.

"The Hitlerite troops," Stalin said, "have managed to seize Lithuania, a considerable part of White Russia, a part of Western Ukraine. A grave danger hangs over our fatherland."

We could scarcely credit our ears.

"The aim of this war against the Fascist oppressor is to help all the peoples of Europe who are groaning under the heel of German Fascism," Stalin continued. "In this war we shall have faithful allies in the peoples of Europe and America. . . . Our war for the freedom of our fatherland will merge with the struggle of the peoples of Europe and America for their independence, for democratic freedom. . . ."

For the first time we thus heard Stalin himself using words like freedom and democracy in the old-fashioned sense, without satirical quotation marks. It all seemed topsy-turvy: the survival of our Bolshevik regime suddenly linked with the victory of the "degenerate democracies" . . . the leading capitalist countries promising to give all possible aid to the Soviet Union. An almost forgotten dream of liberty stirred again in many a Russian heart. Though it took a terrible war to accomplish the miracle, our isolation from the free world seemed about to be broken.

"Brothers and sisters, I address myself to you, my friends!" Stalin had exclaimed. In sixteen years of his reign we had not been thus addressed by him. A friend in my plant, made bold by the excitement of the moment, remarked to me in a low voice: "The Boss must be in a hell of a pickle to call us brothers and sisters."

We could not comprehend the reasons for our defeats. For two decades we had been starved and tortured and driven in the name of military preparedness. Our leaders had boasted of Soviet superiority in trained manpower and armament. Now the humiliating rout of our armies was being explained by lack of guns, planes, munitions. Three successive Five Year Plans, each of them sacrificing food, clothes, household goods for war industries, had been carried out "successfully." Yet at the first test of strength our country of two hundred million was trying to stop the tank *Panzer* divisions with bottles of gasolene! Tens of thousands of Russians were being hurled under the wheels of German tanks because, after twenty years devoted almost exclusively to military production, we did not possess any anti-tank rifles. It's all well enough to give up butter for guns—but in this case we had neither guns nor butter.

There were no reasonable explanations for the Soviet failures, nothing to assuage our humiliation. Poland had been surprised, then stabbed in the back by its eastern neighbor. France had been smaller, weaker than the assailant. But why should prodigious Russia, two years after the outbreak of war, with every advantage of numbers, time, military concentration, behave like a backward little country caught off guard? Had we been no bigger than France, we would have been crushed four times over in the first four months.

Only the boundless Russian spaces, the inexhaustible Russian manpower, the unsurpassed heroism and sacrifice of the Russian people in the rear as well as at the fronts, development of new and existing industries in the rear, installation of evacuated plants saved my country from extermination. These were the things that made a deep and costly retreat possible, while resources for a counteroffensive were gathered. The regime was able to arouse and use the deep national spirit and patriotism of our people. Later, after Stalingrad, the flow of American weapons and supplies began.

Mobilization was carried out in fevered haste and confusion. Reservists were rushed to the fronts without a chance to say good-bye to their families. Workers were driven almost directly from their shops to the battlefields. All this despite the fact that we had one of the world's largest standing armies, tempered by invasions of neighboring countries and by a full-parade war on Finland. The government was caught so pathetically unawares that it did not even have enough uniforms. In those first months even officers went to their death in makeshift garments and without adequate training. Millions of new soldiers trudged through the mud in canvas boots and the early winter caught them in summer uniforms. I saw recruits training with broomsticks instead of rifles.

The draft commissions worked from morning until late at night, inducting men from seventeen to fifty. They were guided, as I learned later, not by the existing law but by secret instructions of the State Defense Committee, drawn up after the war had started. Certain categories of essential workers, of course, had to be exempted; at the outset men with two or more dependents incapable of work were also let off. Beyond that, the mobilization was crude and heartless. The medical examinations took two or three minutes per draftee. I saw men with one eye, men who limped, consumptives, men suffering heart ailments and stomach ulcers, bearded fifty-year-olds so work-worn that they could barely drag their own weight, adjudged fit for the fronts. Only between one and two per cent were rejected on physical grounds. This, the press boasted, proved the high level of health attained under the Soviets. In fact it proved only a total contempt for human life.

The conflict had been in progress only a few weeks when the Party called for the formation of a Citizens' Volunteer Army. It seemed to many of us a startling confession of the same lack of preparedness. We recalled the words of War Commissar Voroshilov in September, 1939, at the time the war in Europe was already under way:

"The experience of the Tsarist Army has amply demonstrated that the

so-called Citizens' Volunteer Army was very weak and utterly untrained; it showed that hasty preparation in time of war was not very effective. Completely untrained people were sent to the front and all of you know how it all ended."

Now we were doing the very same thing. Worse, we were resorting to a volunteer system at the very beginning of the conflict, whereas the Tsar's regime had done so much later. "I deem it pertinent to remark," Voroshilov had said on the same occasion, "that the numerical growth of the Red Army and of the Navy is in complete consonance with the international situation, which our government, the Central Committee of our Party and Comrade Stalin are always studying attentively and closely." What was the quality of that study when within a few weeks after the German invasion "our government, the Central Committee of our Party and Comrade Stalin," without shame or pity, were sending hordes of untrained civilians to certain slaughter?

One July morning I was called to the Party Committee office in our factory, where Yegorov instructed me to conduct a meeting to enroll volunteers. I urged that he do it himself, as our Party leader.

"No, no, Victor Andreyevich. This has to come from the masses rather than the Party. You're very popular with the workers. It will be easier for you than for me."

The mass meeting started. I saw before me the grimy faces of my fellow-workers. I talked to them as one Russian to another, carefully avoiding the very words Communist and socialist. Like all of them I loved my country. I knew that it was something distinct from the gang who ruled and terrorized us. I was able honestly to put my heart into a plea for the people's militia. The fact that I could muster a sincere enthusiasm for victory, a passionate hatred for the invader, though I detested the Soviet regime, is the key to the mystery why the Russians fought and in the end conquered. They did not fight *for* Stalin but *despite* Stalin. No one knew this better than the Kremlin clique itself, as their every summons to a Patriotic War revealed.

To set an example, I was the first to register as a volunteer. Dozens of our factory workers, office people and technical staff followed suit. But not one of the uppermost crust of administrators volunteered. They squirmed under the questioning eyes of the workers but made no move to sign up.

Later that day I went to see Manturov. I pretended to take for granted that he would volunteer.

"Well, Viacheslav Ivanovich," I said breezily, "when are you signing up?"

His face turned the color of his flaming red hair. He shifted his weight uneasily. His little eyes darted all around the room and he cleared his throat.

"What I will do in the great war is a question to be decided by the Party District Committee. I have responsibilities. The factory will soon have to be evacuated . . ."

"You ought to enlist anyway," I urged. "The workers are talking.

If the Party wants to keep you here, it will do so. Meanwhile, why not enlist?"

But Manturov was taking no chances. Neither was Yegorov. They both ended the war with high-sounding titles and Orders of Honor by keeping carefully out of range of enemy fire. They should not be blamed personally, however. They were simply following out a policy made manifest by the Kremlin. Stalin was determined to conserve his *apparat*, the bureaucracy upon which the Soviet regime, in the final analysis, rested. Even in the most trying months, "indispensable" officials—and that included the Special N.K.V.D. Troops, the dictator's Praetorian Guard—were for the most part saved for the final showdown with the people of Russia. It was a showdown that never came.

My enlistment was canceled by order of the District Committee. Manturov and Yegorov would have been delighted to see me sent to the front without delay. They never forgave my attempt to sign them up, since it became known throughout the factory. But for the time being it saved face for them that Kravchenko and other volunteers among the top personnel were not permitted to leave.

3

The marshy strip of Finnish wilderness for which Russia in 1940 paid with hundreds of thousands of lives reverted to the enemy almost immediately. The Stalinist adventure in aggression thus achieved exactly nothing—except to drive our Finnish neighbors a little faster into the arms of Germany. Neither did the Soviet rape of Poland, nor the grab of the Baltic countries delay the invaders by more than a short time. "Strategic security" as an excuse for seizing frontier territory makes little sense in the epoch of mechanized warfare and long-range aircraft.

But among all the myths grown in the Communist hothouses of propaganda the most debased, because it is the most false, is the myth that Stalin used the twenty-two months of peace won by his appeasement of the Nazis to prepare against them. It is a lie. It is an insult to millions of Russians who suffered and died precisely because the interval was squandered. The war, when it came, found us with all our defenses down, and without so much as sensible plans for saving the people and the valuable war properties directly in the conquerors' path.

Those who doubt this need only read the proceedings of the Eighteenth Congress of our Party, held in February, 1941, only four months before the German invasion. Speech after speech drew a picture of industrial difficulties and failures, particularly in branches of economy related to war needs. I had a thousand proofs, in the course of my own work in the war years, that they had not overdrawn the picture.

Within a week after war started Moscow, the best supplied city in our land, was without bread. Queues blocks long waited for tiny rations, those far back in the lines never sure there would be enough bread, kerosene and other essentials for everyone. The capital of the Soviet Union was not even provided with decent bomb shelters. Not a single important war plant

in western and southern Russia was evacuated, or made ready for evacuation, *before* the onslaught. In accordance with the Kremlin's theories, we had prepared only for an offensive war and therefore failed to evacuate in proper time immense areas which immediately became battlefields. Millions of tons of raw materials and war equipment, grain, fuel, and most important, tens of millions of men, remained in the most vulnerable western sections, where they fell quickly into German hands.

I was in daily official touch with commissariats responsible for factories and stockpiles and workers in the area under attack. It soon became apparent to us that no one in the Kremlin had bothered, in the twenty-two months of grace, to formulate a program for the evacuation of people and property. The initiative, of course, could have come only from the very top. For anyone else to raise the question would have opened him to charges of "defeatism" and "demoralizing rumors." The suggestion that the glorious Red Army might have to retreat, even temporarily, would have been treated as sacrilege of the most reprehensible sort.

In the years of work in administrative positions in industry, I was often present and participating when secret mobilization plans were worked out. We took into consideration all sorts of needs—nonferrous metals, oil, coal, machinery, manpower—and the problems of their storage and transport. It was in conformity with these long-range plans that the government accumulated immense reserves of war and strategic materials. But the planning was concerned expressly and solely with offensive operations. They were tied to the assumption, often repeated by Stalin and therefore beyond challenge, that the war would be fought on foreign soil.

Faced with a defensive war of immense weight, we were helpless. We had to improvise everything from scratch—evacuation, mobilization, guerilla resistance in the enemy's rear. The Hitler gang had succeeded so well in putting Stalin to sleep that every British and American effort to waken him to the realities failed. Had he acted on the first warning proffered by the American State Department in January, he would have had five months in which to evacuate millions of people, scores of industrial establishments and tremendous quantities of reserve provisions and materials.

Because the Kremlin frittered away the period of grace, it left to Hitler as a prize of war a large part of what the Soviet people had created in blood, sweat and tears during fifteen years of industrialization. Factories, machine tractor stations, hydroelectric installations, mountains of supplies, not to mention tens of millions of work hands were abandoned to the bestial Nazis in the Ukraine and White Russia.

The habit of fear was so deeply rooted in the bureaucracy, after the super-purge, that few dared to take action even after the Nazis struck. Panic-stricken local officials and industrial trusts drew up plans for evacuating valuable machinery or supplies, as well as people. Not daring to act even in the most preliminary fashion, they wrote reports, filed them for decision by the "highest instances," then waited helplessly. In most cases they were still waiting when the Germans arrived.

Before Hitler, and especially after his ascent to power, the Kremlin

had spent millions of dollars on intelligence and counter-espionage work in Germany. It had gathered data on that country's political and war organizations. But during the super-purge, up to 1939, the great majority of the men in the intelligence services and in the General Staff of the Red Army were arrested, imprisoned, executed; many of them fled beyond our frontiers. The result of their years of effort was cancelled out as "counter-revolutionary and wrecking activities." The new intelligence services, it now became quickly and tragically clear, were weak and ineffective. We were paying the price of those years of ruthlessness.

A new supreme body had been set up to meet the crisis: the State Defense Committee. It became the chief repository for State and Party power, the brain and the force in all defense activities throughout the country and at the fighting fronts, the policy-making body on national and international affairs alike. This Committee in effect displaced the Supreme Soviet where power theoretically resided. The Council of People's Commissars became simply an executive organ, carrying out the orders of the new Committee and watching over the various Commissariats. In every province the representatives of the Committee enjoyed unlimited authority. The State Defense Committee was the most dynamic, flexible and ruthless body that ever existed in Soviet Russia. All its members were drawn from among the powerful members and alternates of the Politburo.

The military forces, beheaded in the blood purges, had not yet developed new leadership. Voroshilov, Budenny, and the other famous incompetents put in command of various fronts at the outset were worse than useless. Not until October were most of them removed and new men given the reins. That, too, was a measure of Stalin's failure to prepare for the ordeal.

The Germans, having helped to build and equip most of the vital industrial objects in Ukraine, knew the location and significance of every screw and bolt in these factories. They were able to drop their bombs with satanic precision on electric-power centers, water towers, transport points to halt production and to prevent last-minute evacuation.

A lot of to-do would subsequently be made in the Soviet propaganda about the factories evacuated to Siberia from White Russia and the Ukraine. In truth only a minor part was removed. Nothing would be said of the hundreds of plants left as a present to Hitler. Virtually every factory I had worked in or been connected with—in Dniepropetrovsk, Krivoi Rog, Zaparozhe, Taganrog—fell to the enemy almost intact. The same was more or less true of Kiev, Odessa, Kharkov, Mariupol, Stalino, Lugansk. Stalin's mistake in trusting Hitler was responsible for the fact that we abandoned to the enemy industry with a capacity of about ten million tons of steel a year, plus about two million tons in finished steel. It was all returned to us in time in the form of death-dealing tanks, guns, shells and bombs. The story was no less tragic for other industries.

During the period of the pact, Stalin helped Hitler conquer Europe by providing him with metal, ores, oil, grain, meat, butter, and every conceivable type of material, in accordance with their economic pact. After the invasion, Stalin helped him by leaving him immense riches in military

goods and productive capacity and—most shameful of all—tens of millions of people.

Failure to prepare will be held against the Stalin regime by history despite the ultimate victory. It was to blame for millions of unnecessary casualties, for human wretchedness beyond calculation. Why was not the population of Leningrad evacuated? This "oversight" is ignored by the hallelujah-shouters, though up to May 1, 1943, more than 1,300,000 died of hunger and cold, and the rest will carry the marks of their suffering to the grave, in three successive winters of terrifying siege. It was an exposed city. The preparations for saving its inhabitants should have been made long in advance, but they were not undertaken even after the war started. Responsibility for the gruesome sufferings of Leningrad rests directly on two members of the Politburo—Voroshilov, as the then commander of the Leningrad front and Zhdanov, the supreme master of the Leningrad region.

The same can be said for the unfortunate people trapped in Kiev, Odessa, Sebastopol, a hundred other population centers, including my own native city. My mother and father were caught in Dniepropetrovsk, together with Klava, my brother Constantine's wife, and her infant child. Only her iron will, fortified by religious faith, saw my frail mother through her frightful experience. She was chased from place to place by the Germans and finally confined in one of their filthy concentration camps. Both she and Klava survived; whether my father did I do not know.

There are millions of such fathers and mothers and children in Russia who paid in life and incalculable pain for the Kremlin's criminal "oversights." When finally evacuation got under way, the new Soviet system of class privilege made itself manifest in the crudest way. First priority in departing, and in using transport facilities, was reserved for the "indispensables," which is to say the leading bureaucrats, Party politicians, trade union functionaries, police officials making up the regime's "apparatus." Ordinary mortals were allowed to take only two suitcases, abandoning everything else, but top-priority aristocrats carried off even their bulkiest furniture. Skilled workers and others essential for the evacuated plants were evacuated but often had to leave their families behind, in going off with transferred machines. The favored officials, however, took along their real and imaginary relatives unto the tenth generation.

I repeat, the great alibi for the deal with the Nazis—the gaining of time—is a base myth, a fairy tale, a cynical propaganda lie.

4

It took months of direct experience with German brutality to overcome *the moral disarmament* of the Russian people. They had to learn again to detest the Nazis, after two years in which Hitler had been played up as a friend of Russia and a friend of peace. Let it not be forgotten that in the early weeks entire Red Army divisions fell prisoners to the enemy almost without a struggle.

Had the invaders proved to be human beings and displayed good

political sense they would have avoided a lot of the fierce guerilla resistance that plagued them day and night. Instead the Germans, in their fantastic racial obsessions, proceeded to kill, torture, burn, rape and enslave. Upon the collectivization which most peasants abhorred the conquerors now imposed an insufferable German efficiency. In place of the dreaded N.K.V.D., the Germans brought their dreadful Gestapo. Thus the Germans did a magnificent job for Stalin. They turned the overwhelming majority of the people, whether in captured territory or in the rear, and all of the armed forces against themselves. They gave the Kremlin the materials for arousing a burning national hatred against the invaders.

Refugees and escaped prisoners disseminated the bloody tidings of German atrocities and high-handed stupidity. The Nazi barbarians, we learned, treated all Slavs as a sub-human species. I know from my own emotions that indignation against the Germans drove out resentments against our own regime. Hitler's hordes succeeded in inflaming Russian patriotism more effectively than all the new war cries of race and nation launched from the Kremlin.

Had we been at war with a democratic country, humane and enlightened, bringing us a gift of freedom and sovereign independence within a family of free nations, the whole story would have been different. But the Russians were merely given a choice between their familiar tyranny and an imported brand. The fact that they preferred the native chains is scarcely an item in which the Soviet dictators should take excessive pride.

In its propaganda to the armed forces and the population at large the Kremlin insisted that the invaders were intent on restoring landlords and capitalists. This was an effective morale builder and, indeed, offered the most solid common ground on which the regime and the people could meet. Except for a negligible minority, it should be understood, the Russians categorically did not desire such a restoration, under any disguise, no matter how sincerely they might detest the political and economic despotism of the Soviet system. Anti-capitalist education and indoctrination during a quarter of a century had sunk deep roots in the Russian mind.

But millions who fought courageously against the Nazis, on battle-fronts and in guerilla actions, did dream that a new Russia, freed from a dictatorship of one party or one person, blessed with democratic freedoms, would rise from the ashes of the holocaust. The government nurtured this illusion, especially in the territories overrun by the enemy, as long as the war was going against us. The texts of the Atlantic Charter and Mr. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms were published in our press, quietly and without comment; even that thrilled us with new hope. In the propaganda beamed to the conquered areas, these documents were exploited to the limit, to give the partisans an implied assurance that they were fighting for a new Russia, not for the one that had betrayed them by its terror and one-party tyranny. In their suffering and despair people were eager to accept the smoke of agitation for the incense of freedom.

The regime and the people both strove to save the country—but their

hopes and purposes were as far apart as the poles. The dominant purpose of the regime was to save itself and its system for the further development of its Communist adventures at home and abroad; the people were moved by unadulterated love of their fatherland and the hope of achieving elementary political and economic freedoms.

The guerilla movement and the "scorched earth" tactics have been depicted by some romantic writers as spontaneous phenomena. Actually they were carefully planned and at all times controlled from Moscow. In his radio speech of July 3 Stalin said:

"In the regions occupied by the enemy it is necessary to create partisan detachments, both mounted and unmounted; to organize diversionist groups for struggle against the units of the enemy army, for spreading the partisan war everywhere, for blowing up bridges, roads, damaging telephone and telegraph communications, setting fire to forests, storehouses and caravans. In the regions seized it is necessary to create unendurable conditions for the enemy and all of his helpers, to pursue and destroy them at every step, to undermine all of their undertakings."

He also proclaimed that in the retreat all valuable property which could not be taken along must be "unconditionally destroyed." By this time it is no secret that many peasants and city dwellers resisted this policy, fiercely and sometimes bloodily. The scorching was done, in the main, not by civilians but by the military forces.

The staff of the partisan resistance was organized in the capital. The Secretary of the White Russian Central Committee of the Party, Comrade Ponomarenko, was in charge of guerilla warfare in White Russia. Ukrainian resistance activities were commanded by Demyan Korotchenko, Secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee. In the Baltic countries the same role was played by a Comrade Latsis. These were Party leaders of long standing, though later the propaganda played up unknown people who arose from the fires of actual underground conflict.

In accordance with plans, certain large Red Army units remained in the German rear, to become the centers of guerilla movements. Soldiers who had strayed from their outfits and found themselves cut off naturally joined the partisan battalions. Many thousands of non-Party Soviet officials, Party activists and the like, trapped behind the lines, knowing that their fate in Nazi hands would be torture and death, swelled the ranks of the resistance. The Germans themselves, by their policy of unrelieved *Schrecklichkeit*, did the rest.

Another aspect of the planned resistance is never mentioned anywhere. I refer to the N.K.V.D. agencies deliberately left behind in every area abandoned to the enemies, primarily to observe the behavior of Soviet citizens in the German rear. Tens of thousands of Soviet men and women later were executed, hundreds of thousands condemned to slave labor, on the basis of these observations. N.K.V.D. agents also joined in the partisan movement, so that the familiar system of Soviet espionage among its own people prospered even under German occupation. The families of those left in the German rear on special assignments were evacuated to the Soviet area and served as hostages to guarantee the loyalty of the agents.

Nor should it be taken for granted that the populations in occupied areas were all uniformly friendly to the partisans. In the Baltic regions, naturally, a large part of the inhabitants—often a majority—received the Germans as liberators from an unwelcome Soviet yoke and the guerillas were harrassed by civilians as well as German military force. But even in Russia proper—particularly in the Don and Kuban regions, where collectivization and famine had taken the cruelest toll—the partisan movement remained small and often faced popular opposition.

In the Ukraine, too, old grudges against the Stalin set-up frequently found murderous vent. The Ukrainian situation, however, was so complex that it would require a long chapter merely to summarize it. There was an out-and-out pro-German movement headed up by *émigrés* long trained for their role. There was a tremendous honest native movement that was equally hostile to the Nazis and the Soviets. A great many of the celebrated guerilla deeds in this vast area were inspired by detestation of Stalin no less than of Hitler. Even those who cooperated loyally with Moscow, taking orders from Korotchenko, were fed with calculated illusions about real autonomy—a new deal for Ukraine—once the invader should be driven out. In addition, of course, there were guerillas with a clean-cut separatist program, looking to the ultimate establishment of a completely independent and sovereign Ukraine.

The underground resistance will deservedly be glorified in Russian annals. It demonstrated the courage and tenacity of our people, a deep-rooted love of their own soil, their fortitude in the hour of disaster. But to twist all this into spurious evidence of the popularity of the Stalinist despotism, as so many naive outsiders were encouraged to do, is as pernicious as it is silly. For the sake of truth it must be recorded that a considerable job in the enemy's rear was done by special forces of the N.K.V.D. army, trained and equipped for diversionist guerilla warfare. Troops prepared for special sabotage undertakings were constantly being parachuted behind the German lines.

On September 18 the government decreed universal military training for all men between sixteen and fifty who had not yet been drafted. Actually men up to fifty-six were being taken for active military service and up to fifty-eight for non-combat services. In practice every man, whatever his age or physical condition, well enough to work was obliged to report for training at the end of his working day, which in most cases was twelve hours long. In the squares and on the boulevards of Moscow, weary, bleary-eyed men, half starved and inadequately dressed, drilled with sticks. With one or two rifles to a platoon, they received instruction in the art of shooting. Neither rain nor deep mud exempted them. Indeed, part of the training consisted of advancing through mud, crawling close to the ground through mud or snow.

Let the romanticists cite these drills as further proof of war fervor. The truth is less edifying. The training was obligatory. Abstention was punished as desertion, through the revolutionary tribunals of the N.K.V.D. Even as regards to the military forces, there would be less heroic drivel written on the subject if the world knew the nature of the discipline

enforced in the Red Army, especially the extent to which capital punishment was imposed for slight infractions without trial. It is true that Russian soldiers did heroic deeds, holding their posts in the face of hopeless odds, giving their lives to save their country, their people and their comrades. Stalin's subjects fought against Hitler as valorously as the feudal serfs under Alexander I fought against Napoleon. But those who make of our native grit, our capacity to fight and die, a special virtue reflecting glory on the totalitarian Soviet regime are either fooling themselves or fooling others.

It is not known abroad—and truth demands that it be recorded—that behind the Red Army at the fronts there were special "retreat-blocking" detachments. They were composed "Government Security" troops of the N.K.V.D. and cooperated with the political administration of the Army. Their task was to intercept fleeing soldiers, to prevent unauthorized retreats. They had the right to shoot anyone who left the ranks without permission for whatever cause and did not hesitate to use it; normally, however, they turned the apprehended soldiers over to the military tribunals.

We became familiar with the sight of truckloads of deserters, guarded by Chekists, coming out of prisons. Presumably they were being taken to some quiet spot for mass execution. Their heads were close-cropped, their faces earthy gray; skinny, miserable creatures shivering in ragged military uniforms. I know from intimate sources that the proportion of desertions was strikingly high.

The fact that millions of men unfit for fighting by any civilized standards were mobilized pell-mell and sent to face fire without sufficient preparation helps explain this phenomenon. So does sheer animal fear. Our simple peasants could face dangers they understood, but modern tanks, flame-throwers, air bombardment left many of them paralyzed with horror before they got accustomed to them. Lacking weapons to match the enemy's weapons, forced to use "Molotov cocktails" in place of anti-tank guns, droves of new recruits cracked under the strain. The government conveniently designated as cowardice the results of its own inexcusable failures. Contemptuous of life, it was perfectly content to match Russian flesh against German metal, Russian blood against German gasolene.

The terrifying size of Soviet casualties has been cited a million times as proof of our heroism—it should be cited, at least this once, as proof of the Kremlin's blundering brutality.

5

The evacuation of Moscow began in August and continued far into 1942, until the danger to the capital was definitely averted. For about a month, until I was taken into the Red Army, I busied myself with the task of disassembling our factory and preparing its machinery for shipment to the Urals.

As Nazi aerial bombardment intensified, part of the population began

to leave of its own accord. Optimists and hotheads shouted about cowardice and desertion. Soon enough, however, as the railroads and highways around the capital became clogged, we grieved because the authorities themselves had not organized this cowardice and desertion at the very start.

It was grueling labor for our half-starved men and women to take equipment off their foundations and to remove massive machinery. Even harder was the awareness that we were uprooting and destroying something for which we had paid with unbounded sacrifice, something which had become dear to us as the symbol of much-postponed industrial prosperity. We toiled in utter gloom. Not even the wildest detractor of the Soviet regime would have supposed that only six weeks after the outbreak of hostilities it would be necessary to begin to evacuate the nation's capital.

The normal hustle and bustle of our plant subsided. Life ebbed and seemed about to expire. Our workers, naturally so friendly, now plodded through their days in depressing silence. We all hoped against hope that the danger was being exaggerated. Once that hope seemed to have come true—we received an order from our commissariat to hold up the dismantling of equipment. But in the midst of our enthusiasm the order was reversed and we were urged to speed up the evacuations.

While a certain number of specialized workers were selected to go east with the machines, the rest were laid off in great masses, with two weeks' pay. The same was happening in all other Moscow enterprises. To the horrors of air attacks, food shortages, cold, disrupted electric and water supplies, was now added the horror of joblessness.

Though the Nazis were not to reach the suburbs of Moscow for another month, the atmosphere in the capital by the end of August was already that of a city doomed. The higher officials were packing their families and possessions off to Sverdlovsk and other Ural cities in automobiles, railway trains, airplanes. Hundreds of our leaders camped in their offices, suitcases and government cars in readiness for instantaneous flight. We worked all day, drilled all evening and fought the effects of bombings all night.

All responsible personnel in our plant, as in all of the capital's industrial establishments, were declared to be on "military footing." For weeks I did not go home, eating and sleeping where I worked. I shall never forget the scenes of horror—and of heroism—when we remained at our machines and posts while bombs and shells fell all around, while German airplanes howled overhead, while some women and youngsters in some of our shops cried hysterically. It was a test of nerves in which the Russian people around me showed amazing strength.

It was with a sense of relief, of taking my rightful place in the fighting ranks, that I entered the Red Army. Early in September my local draft commission notified me to appear for examination. A decent interval having elapsed since my voluntary enlistment was canceled, Yegorov and Manturov crossed me off their select list of "indispensables." My physical examination required all of two minutes.

I was assigned to Bolshevo, about 20 miles from Moscow, in the War Engineering College, retaining the rank of captain which I already enjoyed. I was enrolled in a special division in which officers were prepared for higher posts. Along with hundreds of other engineers of every kind, I undertook intensive courses in military engineering, as well as straight combat training.

Because Bolshevo was so close to the capital, Irina and I did not as yet have any sense of separation.

CHAPTER XXIII

PANIC IN MOSCOW

In Bolshevo I was appointed Party organizer, which made me top political commissar among my officer schoolmates. In all military matters, of course, I took orders from Colonel Varvarkin and his assistants. The mounting tragedy of our country's sorrows drew us all together. There was a contingent of boys in their late 'teens taking the courses, but my division consisted of mature men, tempered by long and tough experience in Soviet industry and politics, men immune to illusions. I did all I could to make the lot of my comrades easier.

In my heart I was a confirmed enemy of the regime. I loathed its brutalities. Evidences of its incompetence now piling up all around us deepened that loathing. Stalin's bargain with Hitler—the "realism" that backfired—was in retrospect so shameful that even Stalinist fanatics smarted under the memory. But I loved my native land and was moved by the deepest sympathy for my people. I knew many others who were in a similar state of mind. Without exception we kept our resentments under control. Without exception we were prepared to die for Russian victory.

The training being dispensed at Bolshevo was unworthy of a third-rate nation, let alone a Great Power after two decades of all-out industrialization. The tools we were given for building bridges, pillboxes, airdromes were so primitive that they practically came down to an axe and a shovel. Where, we wondered, was the high technique that had filled Communist oratory? I listened to a lot of ironic comment and plain swearing on this subject.

"This equipment for dynamiting," one of the officer-instructors told me with a straight face, "must be respected as a national heirloom. It has come down from the dim past."

"Aren't the Germans going to shoot us down like partridges while we put up such a cumbersome pontoon bridge?" I asked privately after a lecture.

"Unfortunately that's true, Comrade Kravchenko," the lecturer sighed, "but it's the only equipment we have."

With few exceptions, unhappily, the instructors were as primitive as the equipment with which they worked. The lieutenant colonel who lectured on road building might have taken lessons with profit from any foreman on a road-building job. But he was a trusted Communist and devoted nearly all his time to reminiscing about his exploits in the civil war period. Besides, as officers we devoted a lot of time to reading and discussing the selected works of Lenin and Stalin. Obviously we could

not be expected to lay mines and build bridges without a decent knowledge of Stalinist falsifications of Leninism.

Despite handicaps and annoyances, we studied hard and devotedly. All of us were deeply aware of the importance of our training. In due time, we knew, we would be responsible for the lives of soldiers under our command and for the solution of critical military problems.

By reason of my position as Party organizer I was in constant touch with affairs not only in our engineering unit but in the capital. I attended all meetings of our school Party Committee, along with the commanding officers. We heard confidential reports, consistently pessimistic, so that we were more dejected and for better cause than the non-Party officers.

I was in Moscow proper quite often and therefore subject to its deepening mood of despair. As the evacuation expanded and the Germans came nearer, confusion and alarm increased. As alarm grew, police repressions were intensified. It was a vicious circle which made the final climax of panic and looting—so carefully concealed from the outside world—inevitable.

By the end of September fear and disorder were spiraling upward toward explosion. Favoritism in evacuation made ordinary Muscovites fume with rage. For the first time in twenty years, in fact, I heard open cursing of officialdom. Every bureau and administrative office drew up lists of persons entitled to use trains to Kuibishev, Sverdlovsk and other places of refuge. In theory the sole test was "indispensability"; actually nepotism and political drag were the final arbiters.

The parasites of political power took up space for their furniture, their wardrobes, their mistresses, their relatives, while thousands of wretched families camped amidst their bundles and suitcases at the railroad stations in the vague hope of a place or even a foothold on some train going anywhere eastward. These were the lucky ones, Muscovites with official permits to depart. Thousands of others fled on foot.

The evacuees around the stations grew more numerous, more frightened, more noisy with every day. Their jitters infected the rest of the city. I sat in on conferences to discuss the problem. Had we been dealing with cattle we would at least have worried about fodder for the long journey. As it was, it occurred to no one to raise the question of food for the evacuees, how they would get to the designated points and how they would keep alive after they got there.

When the crowds at the stations became too large to control, cattle cars, open coal cars, even subway cars, would finally be rounded up. Without cleaning or disinfecting, these vehicles would be crammed tight with Soviet citizens and sent on their slow and hideous journeys. The process was marked by tears and hysteria. Children were lost, families were separated, people were forced to abandon cherished possessions. Often the pathos of these evacuations was raised to a pitch of delirium by air raids, stations being among the favorite Nazi targets.

Meanwhile, as if to taunt the miserable mobs, comfortable caravans of official motorcars streamed out of Moscow, loaded with the families

and household goods of the *élite*. The abyss between classes seemed deeper and uglier against the frenzy of war and danger.

In the first week of October the capital seemed to have lost its hold on life. A city, like an individual, can suffer a nervous breakdown. Trams and autobusses worked in fits and starts. The shops were mostly empty, but hungry people queued up anyhow. Although Irina had better connections and more money than most people, she was often in dire need of food. Homes and offices were unheated; water and electric service was intermittent and uncertain.

Day and night smoke belched from the chimneys of the N.K.V.D., the Supreme Court, the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, various other institutions and Party headquarters. Our leaders were hastily destroying records, wiping out the clues to their decades of official crimes. The government, evidently under orders from the top, was covering up its traces. The first snows of October were sooty with burnt paper.

One night, in strictest secrecy, the casket in which the embalmed body of Lenin lies in his mausoleum on Red Square was loaded by Chekists on a truck. It was taken in a special car to the city of Tyumen in Siberia where it was to remain until the end of the war nearly four years later. The most valuable items in the Kremlin and museums, too, were removed to the interior. The bombing of Moscow became with every day more frequent and more frightening, though not nearly as destructive as we had expected.

On October 12 the Germans showered our Bolshevo area with leaflets. I led a company of trusted Communist officers which picked up these German messages. We were, of course, forbidden to read them—anyone found with a leaflet in his possession was subject to immediate arrest. But we did try to read them surreptitiously as we worked. They left us unimpressed, even contemptuous of the enemy. The German propaganda seemed to me signally stupid. Its arrogance was repellent and it made the mistake of confounding love of country with love of Stalin.

The same night we were aroused by an alarm. Within half an hour three battalions of our young, half-trained officers in full battle array were driven to the western outskirts of Moscow. Forty-eight hours later about one-third of them straggled back, bloody, frozen, hungry and dispirited; the rest never returned. Most of these youngsters were fanatical Comsomols. They had gone into battle shouting: "For Stalin! For the Party!"

Beginning with October 13, all of us lay in the snow in the Bolshevo forests guarding a segment of the approaches to the capital from our side, where it was supposed that German paratroops would descend. I was wearing summer underwear, light canvas boots, a summer cap, a frayed army overcoat in temperatures already far below zero. My equipment consisted of a training rifle and exactly three cartridges. Though all of us were officers, only a few were any better protected against the cold, only the lucky ones had as many as five cartridges. The munitions which we had been promised by headquarters had failed to arrive. Many of us, of course, had warm civilian clothes with us; personally, for example, I had

a fine pair of boots, woolen underwear and other things. But we were rigidly forbidden to use any but regulation clothes. And so we froze and suffered for the glory of military stupidity.

Those days and nights in the snow, from which many of my comrades emerged frost-bitten and feverish, will remain forever engrained on my mind. More depressing than our lack of proper clothes and equipment and munitions, in that unpleasant memory, was the sight of automobiles filled with the parasites and their property, running away from Moscow. An officer crouching beside me in the snow-filled ditch exclaimed:

"If I see another car with bureaucrats I'm going to shoot the bastards full of holes."

"Better save your three bullets for the Germans," I said.

Marching back from Bolshevo after a night in the open, weary, starved, frozen, we sang one of the prescribed songs:

To battle for native land!
To battle for Stalin!
Battle honor is dear to us.
Our good horses beat their hoofs
As we rush against Stalin's foes. . . .

I had little love for Stalin at such moments. Not horses' hoofs but my slippery canvas shoes were beating the wintry ground. But I sang with the others. The words in our martial songs and the emotions in our hearts did not always jibe.

On the evening of the fifteenth two companies of qualified engineers were dispatched to Moscow on a confidential mission. In my capacity of Party organizer I became aware of the nature of their assignment, confided to me as a top secret. They were to be joined by other groups, from the special N.K.V.D. engineering units. Their job was the mining of Moscow. Explosives were deposited under the Moscow subway, the main Kremlin buildings, the electric power station, the waterworks, railroad stations, museums, theatres, the principal government structures, communications and fortifications. Everything was in readiness to "scorch" the capital. A heavy toll of German life, and a heavier toll of Russian life, would have been taken. The mines were not removed until the summer of 1942.

On the morning of the sixteenth, Colonel Varvarkin sent me to Moscow. I found the city in the grip of a full-blown panic. The most hysterical rumors spread everywhere. It was said that a *coup d'etat* had occurred in the Kremlin, that Stalin was under arrest, that the Germans were already in Fili on the edge of the city. Distraught people were sure they had seen German parachutists land in Red Square. They told one another that Germans were among us in Red Army uniforms. Crowds surged from street to street, then back again in sudden waves of panic.

Already rioting and looting had begun. Stores and warehouses were being emptied by frenzied mobs. The impression spread that there was

no more government; that millions of Muscovites had been abandoned to their fate without food, fuel or weapons. Order was collapsing.

In the Savoy, Metropole, and several other fashionable hotels and restaurants panicky women and ordinary prostitutes were assisting in dissipated carousing with high officials who had not yet left town. Wine and vodka flowed freely. Perhaps these parties were less orgiastic than the reports insisted, but the indignant stories were themselves symptomatic of the breakdown.

That some of the reports, at least, were true I learned subsequently in great detall. At Sovnarkom headquarters on the Sadovaya-Karetnaya Boulevard, for instance, high officials rounded up the younger women employes for a drunken debauch that went on for hours. In hundreds of other government offices and private apartments people behaved as if the end of the world had come. Aerial bombardment and rumors whipped the panic to frenzy.

I managed to return to Bolshevo by nightfall. There I found a disorderly, shouting mob milling through our buildings. The looting had begun soon after my departure and had been under way for hours. Local inhabitants had been rapidly reinforced by peasants from nearby villages. Our commanding officers had disappeared. Once the military stores were broken into, many of the officers had joined the marauding crowds to salvage some warm clothes. The locust swarm devoured blankets, sheets, uniforms, shoes, food supplies, everything that was not tied down. The premises looked like a shambles, the snow all around was trampled and strewn with discarded articles.

I succeeded quickly in locating Colonel Varvarkin. Evidently he was swamped with reports and helpless. He listened to the information in annoyance. No doubt he was reflecting the panic in the capital. Colonel Varvarkin assumed that Bolshevo would be evacuated anyhow. Better, perhaps, that our own people loot the supplies than to leave them for Nazi looters. . . . By midnight he and other officers returned, the looters had left and a semblance of discipline was restored. Soon we were again crouching in the forest snow, only too well aware that we had neither the force nor the faith to stop any Germans who might come our way.

Meanwhile in Moscow distracted men, women and children churned through the streets and beleaguered the rail stations. On the seventeenth, raging mobs in quest of food again broke into warehouses, markets and shops. The police seemed inactive. The Mikoyan meat combine was stripped of every last pound of meat, sausage and canned goods. Hungry people, left to their fate by the government, stormed the candy factory near Mayakovsky Square, distributing among themselves tons of confections, as well as sugar, butter and other raw materials. Dozens of other establishments were looted.

The disorders continued all day and well into October eighteenth. Thousands of Communists, believing that they were trapped in a doomed city, destroyed their Party cards, political literature and portraits of Stalin and other leaders. I can assert a terrible truth which was confirmed to me hundreds of times thereafter by people in a position to know.

The Germans could have taken Moscow during those days virtually without a struggle. Two or three parachute divisions dropping from the sky would have had the city at its mercy.

The hastily organized workers' battalions deployed on the fringes were untrained and ineffectively armed, and inside the capital the authorities were paralyzed. The first German tanks to reach Himki met with negligible resistance. Why they turned back is a mystery only the Germans themselves can solve for history. Presumably they overestimated Moscow's defenses and decided to wait for Spring and reinforcements. It is even conceivable that they interpreted the suspiciously weak defenses as a Russian trick to lure them into some hellish trap. The only thing certain is that they did not suspect the truth that the capital was practically defenseless and that psychologically it had already surrendered.

Beginning with the nineteen... the situation improved. The first seasoned Siberian and Far Eastern forces began to arrive. The police and the N.K.V.D. shook off their lethargy. That day Stalin over his own signature issued a decree which was conveyed to officialdom and put into effect immediately, though it was not published until two days later. The very tone of the document echoed the knowledge that Moscow was in a turmoil of unorganized revolt.

"For the purposes of securing the defense of Moscow in the rear, in order to reinforce the rear of the troops and also for the purpose of terminating the undermining activities of spies, diversionists and other agents of German Fascism," the decree began. It then prescribed extreme and summary punishments for all sorts of people: "Provocateurs, spies and other agents of the enemy, apprehended for disturbing law and order, must be shot on the spot."

The orders were addressed to General Sinilov, Moscow Commandant but, they specified: "At his disposal are to be the troops of Internal Defense of the N.K.V.D., the Militia and volunteer workers' detachments," the last named being a euphemism for Communists. Stalin preferred not to entrust the task to the Red Army, fearing, in the light of experience a quarter of a century earlier, that the regular soldiers might refuse to shoot their own people. He counted instead on the animal fear inspired by the very name N.K.V.D., just as the Tsar's advisers under similar circumstances had staked their safety on the dreaded Cossacks and gendarmerie.

The military tribunals worked around the clock. Though many thousands were arrested and shot, it was not terror which squelched the panic. It was the news, confirmed by fleeing peasants and soldiers from the most advanced lines, that the Germans were withdrawing under blows from the newly arrived Siberian and Far Eastern troops and apparently consolidating for a winter siege.

In Bolshevo meanwhile we received orders to evacuate. By order of the High Command we burned political books, military cards and archives. No sooner had we made ready to depart than the orders were countermanded. A few days later, however, the command for withdrawal eastward was renewed, this time in earnest.

My personal troubles were complicated by a gnawing toothache. At the military hospital a half-baked dentist filled a cavity in one of the molars with soaked cotton and sealed it with cement. That should hold me, he thought, until I reached my undisclosed destination. My experience in the next month, which included a horrible seventeen-day trip in a cold and overcrowded freight car, followed by a six-day trek on foot in rubber-soled canvas boots, transpired in a haze of torment that sometimes shot up to peaks of agony. My cheek kept swelling and pain sent its lightning through every nerve of my body.

2

Far East troops, hardened in border struggle with the Japanese, and Siberian forces inured to winter warfare were rushing westward across a continent to hold the invaders. At the same time other, much smaller, contingents from the west moved slowly in the opposite direction, across the Volga and beyond the Urals, for training and tempering. Most of them were fresh recruits; but among them were also troops salvaged from the smashing defeats on all fronts, hardened by disaster. All of them would be trained anew, equipped anew. The real preparation for resistance was just beginning!

The tragic delay in preparation which this picture revealed would enable Hitler to overrun more Russian territory than Napoleon or any other conqueror out of the West in Russian history. Literally millions would be slaughtered, millions more maimed. We would pay a horribly exorbitant price for the blundering complacency of our masters. But in the end the reorganized forces would turn the tide of the war—and the blunderers, by an irony of history, would receive all the credit. . . .

My engineering unit became part of the detachments crawling eastward, away from the danger zones, toward the retraining centers. The daily and almost hourly sight of long troop trains heading westward would be reassuring, but also distressing, since most of us smarted under an unreasonable sense of guilt. It would seem to us somehow shameful to be moving away from the fire, though we were under military orders. I had asked to be sent to the front; most of my comrades had done the same.

A battalion of officers despatched to the railroad station to prepare our train for evacuation found that fifty assorted freight cars had been assigned to us and that almost all of them were crammed to the roof with huge rolls of newsprint. A lot of qualified engineers sporting impressive military titles therefore spent the whole night, far into the next morning, heaving paper into the snow. Then we deployed into parties to seize stoves, lanterns, boards, anything we could find to make our journey more tolerable. Some of us were set to drilling holes in the roofs of the cars for smoke vents while others helped load equipment into the cars designated for the purpose.

In the evening wives, mothers, children, friends arrived to bid us farewell. There were the trite but ever heart-rending scenes. Irina was so

concerned for my swollen cheek and unseasonable clothes that she forgot to weep.

Normally, Soviet cars according to the wartime schedule accommodated twenty-four persons. Our cars were loaded with fifty or more, so that we could not all sit, let alone stretch out, at the same time. We had no bunks, no benches, no provisions for washing or answering calls of nature. We slept by turns.

In my own car a small stove gave feeble warmth in its immediate environs. We took turns in thawing out. There was not a single flashlight among us and the candle quickly gave out in the one lantern someone had commandeered from a Bolshevo cottage. Within a few days half our men were suffering with acute colds, digestive troubles and other illnesses; my own jaw kept getting worse.

That was how we traveled for seventeen days, to cover a distance made in twenty-four hours by ordinary passenger trains. Several times a day we were shunted on sidetracks to allow the passage of troops and heavy equipment hurrying to the front, or de luxe civilian trains filled with officials rushing to refuge cities on the Volga and beyond.

Only several of the top officers and commissars knew our destination. I was among them. I knew that we were headed for the small town of Menzelinsk in the Tartar Republic, of which the ancient city of Kazan is the capital. Menzelinsk lies on the river Kama, an eastern tributary of the Volga.

Twice, sometimes three times, daily we were fed at the larger stations. Though our train was always stopping for long periods at tiny way stations and even between stations, we were strictly forbidden to step out without express permission from the car commander. Permission was rarely given. This stupid and even insulting rule caused suffering and generated bitterness. We failed to grasp why officers bound for the interior of the country should be so rigidly guarded, and tempers grew shorter as the journey grew longer.

At one of the minor stops my friend Captain Numidov asked to leave the car for a minute and was refused. "This isn't a train for Soviet officers but a prison!" he muttered in stifled fury. The car commander did not hear him but a few others did. Some scoundrel among us—I suspected it was a Communist who coveted my job as political commissar—must have informed the higher authorities without, however, disclosing the identity of the "culprit." No doubt the denunciation was directed against me as Party organizer rather than against Numidov. In any event, at the next station I was hailed before the Senior Commissar L.

"There has been a counter-revolutionary demonstration in your car," he shouted at me. "Why haven't you reported it? As Party organizer that was your duty."

"I'm not aware of any demonstration," I said.

"Others are aware of it. You must denounce the class enemy who said we're traveling like convicts."

"I don't know who said it. Besides, we're only human. One says things in heat without meaning any harm."

"You're much too tender-hearted, Kravchenko. This is war, and the sooner you learn it the better. Come along to the car and we'll smoke out the rascal."

Comrade L. strode to my car with the air of an avenging angel. He made an angry speech demanding that the "German agent" be exposed instantly. I glanced at Numidov as the commissar fumed and threatened and saw that he was white as a sheet and that his face muscles were twitching. I was frightened that he might give himself up. I happened to know Numidov's story. His family, a wife and two children whom he worshipped, had fallen into German hands. He hated the invaders with a murderous hate. Yet he was in peril of being shot as a "class enemy" and "German agent" because he dared resent a senseless rule. Fortunately no one gave him away.

The following day the episode was repeated but with more serious consequences. A young lieutenant in our car, who had already been under fire at the front, lost his temper when refused permission to step off for a minute.

"This is outrageous!" he exclaimed aloud. "Out there I was trusted to lead a company against the Germans but in this car I'm not trusted to go out for my needs!"

At the very next station Lieutenant Colonel Sergeyev, to whom this "insubordination" had been duly reported, arrived to chastise the criminal. The young officer, a slim, good-looking boy with hair the color of straw, was placed under arrest, his insignia of rank and officer's belt were removed, and he was sentenced to stand under guard on an open platform for ten days. Anger surged through our echelon.

From five in the morning until midnight the "culprit" was forced to stand in an open car moving through the fierce Central Russian winter. His guards were changed at every station. When he returned to our car for the brief night respite, we showed our sympathy by massaging his frozen limbs, giving him food and pressing our warmest garments on him. In addition, we managed to warn the guards that if they valued their own skins they had better let the prisoner smoke and take shelter under the tarpaulin between stations, when the commanding officers could not observe.

After the second day of this inhuman spectacle I could no longer hold my tongue. I sought out Comrade L. and begged him to intercede.

"We all appreciate the need for strict discipline," I argued, "but shouldn't we also use a little common sense? We'll be expected one day to command troops in action. We'll need a feeling of authority and self-respect. Does it make sense to guard us so closely, as if we were looking for a chance to desert? Tomorrow is November seventh, the anniversary of the revolution. I'm sure everyone in our unit would consider it a holiday present if the lieutenant were released."

Under my urging Comrade L. finally consented to see Sergeyev. He returned to announce that the sentence had been postponed until we reached our destination.

"But please don't drag me into any such affairs again," he said. "This is war, not a picnic."

It was our commander's theory that to keep us from going soft on this long trip we must do calisthenics every morning, when the train stopped, preferably before sunrise, stripped to the waist despite the Arctic temperature. At the first morning stop we would therefore be roused by a bugle and would pile out, shivering with cold and groggy with sleep, to do exercises. The sick were not exempted. Even on days when strong winds turned the sleet into myriad whirling needles, the calisthenics routine was not called off. Clearly our notions of discipline were inherited from medieval Tsars.

Those of us who had some money in our pockets tried to buy things from local peasant hucksters at the stations where we were fed. We found, alas, that the prices, already inflated, had skyrocketed in the few months of war. The cheapest tobacco cost forty rubles a glass, which is the peasant measure; a pint of milk cost fifty rubles; a chicken, 1200 rubles or almost the equivalent of two months' pay for an officer. The ordinary private, whose pay ranged from eight to twelve rubles a month, would have to serve nine years to pay for one chicken at open prices in November, 1941.

At one of the junctions, before we reached Kazan, while our train was sidetracked to permit the passage of a long line of troop cars, we were allowed to stretch our legs. With several fellow-officers I wandered off toward a forest close by where we could see trees being felled. On approaching we surmised that the men and women at work there, a pathetic lot, were not Russians. Though most of them wore peasant *lapti*, the Russian bast shoes, the rest of their clothes had a foreign look despite the fact that they were already caked with dirt and ragged in the best Soviet manner. Evidently these people were not accustomed to this sort of grueling winter labor.

From an armed N.K.V.D. guard we drew the information that they were, indeed, foreigners—Letts, Lithuanians, Estonians, Poles, Jews, just a sampling of perhaps two million "class enemies" and assorted "undesirables" deported for hard labor from the areas seized by the Soviet Union under the shield of the Moscow-Berlin pact. We returned to the train in depressed silence; every reminder of that bargain with Nazism was a painful reproach to the *amour-propre* of Russians.

A group of *bezprizorni*, the homeless waifs, meanwhile had gathered around our freight cars. The unwashed, ragged, half-frozen children, with prematurely old eyes in their haggard little faces, were begging bread in their sorry singsong. They seemed tamer, sadder, less arrogant than previous generations of *bezprizorni*, perhaps because they were still so new to the rootless life. A group of the unhappy war orphans had gathered also around the embers of an idle locomotive. They were singing the song of the homeless children so familiar during the civil war days twenty years earlier, and now revived by the war orphans:

Oh, I'll die, I'll die—
I'll be buried
And no one will know
Where my grave is.

We gave the unfortunates what little we could spare. Luckily we had plenty of bread. Even when these roving groups, having no other alternative, turned mischievous or thieving, no Russian had it in his heart to be harsh with them. They were a living reproof to the inhumanity of the grown-up world.

Our destination, in the first stage of the journey, was a station named Agriz, where we arrived on the seventeenth day. We camped overnight on the grimy floors of an abandoned and unheated schoolhouse. In the morning we were instructed to report in Menzelinsk within six days. How best to get there? That was our own problem. In six days we should do it on foot; if lucky we would be helped with rides by friendly peasants. We broke up into groups, each of them under a Party commissar.

Our commanders, who went ahead in motorcars, evidently saw no contradiction in leaving us thus on our own in bleak, snowbound Tataria after guarding us like prisoners on the train.

3

Twelve of us set off, walking briskly to keep warm. Our equipment and six days' rations made a burden that grew bigger, heavier, by the minute. My canvas boots with their slippery rubber soles were hardly intended for trudging in snow and across ice, so that soon every step echoed boomingly in my sore jaw. But someone started singing a plaintive folk tune, profoundly Russian in its sorrowful nostalgia, and it soaked up a little of the fatigue and pain.

We were amazed to see great fields of wheat, unharvested, under the snow and now and then even sheaves of harvested grain. Later a peasant gave us the explanation: With all able-bodied men taken for the army and horses commandeered for the fronts, "only women, children and cows" remained to do the harvesting and immense quantities of produce could not be carried off.

After a time we were overtaken by a couple of peasant sleighs. Only ten of us could be squeezed in, and as Party commissar I insisted on remaining on foot. Dmitri, a man in his early thirties whom I had befriended in Bolshevo, volunteered to keep me company. It was a gray, cheerless day and the landscape, though varied, was covered in the same white shroud of snow. Only rarely a distant plume of smoke or the far-off bark of a dog broke our sense of isolation from the inhabited world.

Staggering wearily through the deepening dusk, towards evening, we talked of the war. Already in Bolshevo I had surmised that Dmitri was as disaffected politically as I was.

"I tell myself every day, Victor Andreyevich, that I'm in this war for Russia—for the good, simple, warm-hearted Russian people—not for Stalin. Otherwise I swear I could not endure it. Unless they're perfect idiots up there, in the Kremlin, they must understand this about all of us. Tell me, do they really suppose our boys are ready to die for Stalin and Beria and the rest of the N.K.V.D. sadists?"

"This is no time for nursing grudges," I said. "Whether we like it or

not, the Party, the N.K.V.D. and our country are all mixed up together. Until the Nazis are driven out there's no way of separating one from the other. Have you read Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Dmitri?"

"Of course."

"Well, do you suppose our feudal serfs, facing Napoleon's cannon, had much reason to love their Little Father in Petersburg? Yet they fought and died and conquered. We in our day don't have to love our Little Father in the Kremlin to fight, to die and to conquer."

"But Stalin doesn't care a kopek for Russian lives—"

"Yes, it would be ironical if history gave Stalin credit for another Russian victory."

After nightfall we reached a silent, huddled village. Too tired to care, we knocked at the first house on our path. A bearded peasant opened the door. In great distress, evidently fearful we might think him inhospitable, he explained that his children were laid up sick. He directed us to a cottage up the road where, he assured us, we would be both welcome and comfortable and would find good food.

He had not exaggerated. The two-room house was warm and cozy, with colorful curtains at the windows and potted flowers on the sills. A gaunt, cleanly-dressed peasant and his gray-haired wife received us as warmly as if they had long awaited our arrival. The rest of the family consisted of a son of twenty-two, another of perhaps fifteen and a shy ten-year-old daughter in pigtails. They all hastened to take care of the strangers. When the older boy removed his jacket we saw that his left arm was missing.

"Vanya got his near Kiev," his father sighed.

The younger children helped pull off our ice-caked boots while their parents heated up water and brought in a big wooden trough. We had our first bath in three weeks. As we soaped one another we saw through the partly open door how the woman was laying out fresh linen and her son's clean clothes for us; the little girl was setting the table for supper.

"This is what I mean," Dmitri whispered. "These are the people for whom I'm willing to die fighting the Germans."

The cabbage soup, though without meat, tasted like nectar after our long march, and the corn cakes with honey were ambrosia. But the bread was cut thin and small, always a sure symptom of hard times in a peasant household. Dmitri and I brought out a black loaf, as well as smoked fish, tea and sugar. Our hostess matched this with cucumbers and peppers and her spouse, not to be outdone, dug up a pint bottle of vodka to warm us. It was a feast to be long relished in memory.

"Here's hoping the plague gets Hitler, God forbid," our hostess said, lifting her goblet.

"But why 'God forbid,' mother?" I asked.

"Oh, I say that out of habit."

"No, mother, you let the son of a bitch off too easy with a plague," the old man said. "I'd take him alive and put him in a cage and show him around through the world. Let people look at that Herod." He hitched his chair closer to the table and addressed his guests. "What interests me is this: what do you good Russian officers think we're really fighting for?"

"For our country, for Russia, of course," Dmitri replied.

"Our country, Russia, of course. . . . I'd send my one-armed son to the front again and I'd go myself for that. But for *what* Russia? The one that took our land away and starved our children—or a new one?"

"I don't understand," I said, encouraging him to say more.

"What is there to understand? I was at the front myself in the first war against Germany. I fought, I was wounded, I was eaten alive by lice. Then the revolution began. Freedom, they said. Land to the peasants, they said. Everybody hollered his head off and told us we were the salt of the earth, because we had rifles in our hands. Twenty-two years pass but there's no freedom, no land—only another war. Now again they're talking softly and flattering us. . . ."

"But this time it's our own power," Vanya put in, "not Tsarism."

His father withered him with a look. There was no mistaking who ruled this household.

"Don't interrupt me with empty phrases, Vanya. I've kept silent for many years. *Our* power! Who was it, then, that took the bread away from us with all sorts of schemes and plain robbery? *Our* power! Who was it, then, liquidated every fifth family in our village and packed them off to Siberia during collectivization? What I want to know is simply this: Are we human beings or aren't we? I want to live as I like, not as they tell me!"

"All right, you have just grievances," I said. "But how did you live *before* the revolution?"

"A thousand times better," he shot back at me. "What's true is true. I had six *desyatins* of land, a good horse, a filly, a cow, a calf, pigs, geese. I kept bees. We were poor peasants, mind you, but we always had enough to eat and to wear. So I ask you, for which Russia did Vanya lose his arm? For which Russia are you two fine, intelligent men going to kill and be killed, the Lord forbid? If it's for the same old Russia of these recent years, there's not much good in it. I'm an old man and I blab too much, but it's good to sink one's teeth into the truth for a change."

The one-armed son, who had listened attentively, now said:

"You talk of the past, father, as if you wanted the landlords to return and exploit us peasants again."

"That's not it at all, Vanya. You're a Comsomol. You know nothing about the past life. I don't want the landlords to come back, but I don't want to work for a pittance for the *kolkhozes* either. Why should we have new masters on our necks? Those *kolkhozes* that work well should remain, but no one should be forced to join. It's not right."

We talked back and forth. All he wanted, our host repeated over and over again, was "to live like a man." He was sick and tired of being pushed around. Our hostess, who had kept her peace as befitted a good wife, finally could no longer hold out.

"Why were the churches taken away from us by force and turned into storehouses?" she exclaimed.

"I don't know, mother," Dmitri said, "but it will not happen again, I believe."

"If I were sure of it I'd pray for Stalin six times a day. Tell me, why does he want to convert everybody to *his* religion?"

We all burst out laughing, especially her elder son.

"Pipe down, Vanya," his father reproved him severely. "Your mother's wisdom is deeper than yours. If she hadn't prayed for you every day you wouldn't have lost your arm but your head. I suppose your Comsomols would have prayed for you."

"But dad," Dmitri put in, "the past is past. We can't turn back the clock."

"I don't give a damn about the past, boys. I don't need the Tsar. But I don't want new Tsars either. I want to live like a free person, to work my own land and worship my own God. Your Soviet god sits too far inside the Kremlin for me, behind too many locks and guards."

We slept cleanly and soundly that night, as if in our own beds. I dreamed, indeed, that I was back in Alexandrovsk, floating on the Dnieper, listening to grandfather's tall tales of the Turks and Kurds. In the morning a hot breakfast was waiting for us. The old woman, we discovered, had been up all night washing, cleaning and mending our clothes. Our shirts and handkerchiefs were washed and ironed and even my socks were darned. I was touched almost to tears by this solicitude. I embraced the woman, stroked her gray hair and kissed her on both cheeks.

"Thank you, dear mother," I said, "may you live long and happily."

Dmitri was no less grateful. Our host, climbing down from the top of the oven, called out in mock anger:

"Hey, there, you rascals, don't get too frisky with my old woman!"

We tried hard to give our hosts some money, but they would not hear of it. They did accept a cake of soap and a spool of thread. The whole family came out to see us off. It was like leaving your own home.

"I shouldn't be sorry to die at the front for people like you," Dmitri said with feeling as he kissed each of our new friends in turn. "You're a piece of what is called Russia, and it's good, very good."

We took our places in the sleigh which Vanya had prepared and were off to an early start. The old woman was still making the sign of the cross over us with her right hand and wiping tears with the left when a turn in the road shut her out of sight. About ten kilometers from the village we induced Vanya to go back. We gave him the key-and-hammer insignia of the army engineers, which he had eyed since our arrival, and enjoined him to thank his old foiks again for us.

Late in the evening of the third day we reached the small town of Krasny Bor on the river Kama. Before the revolution the place had been known as Piany Bor, "drunken forest," the fishermen family with whom we stopped for the night explained; now it was Krasny Bor, 'red forest," but drunk or red, life was no sweeter. Dmitri was coming through the ordeal in fairly good condition, but I was in extremely bad shape. My toes were frozen, my feet blistered and my whole body ached intolerably. The pain in my infected jaw was excruciating.

I did not sleep a wink. In the morning I walked through a cutting snowstorm to the district dispensary, about three miles from Krasny Bor.

Despite its high-sounding title it turned out to be a forlorn-looking set of wooden houses, presided over by a middle-aged woman doctor. Herself a Muscovite—I assumed she had been exiled to this region—she was overjoyed to see someone from the capital and eager for every morsel of news. At the same time she was distressed because there was little she could do for me.

"You have inflammation of the bone structure," she announced after a careful scrutiny. "The infection from the tooth has seeped through your whole system. You should get to Menzelinsk as soon as possible and go into the hospital right away for treatment. Here I'm helpless."

"But you will draw the infected tooth," I said.

"No, I have no anaesthetics. The ampules I found here are at least ten years old and, I'm sure, perfectly useless. Besides, I have no fresh hypodermic needles."

I pleaded with her, all the same, to draw out the tooth. She did, cutting into the inflamed tissue and working with a crude ancient forceps. I have no words to describe those fifteen minutes of boundless agony. Then I rested on a couch for an hour and, reinforced by a slug of alcohol, walked back to Krasny Bor. With the offending molar out, the pressure on my nerves seemed a little less cruel. Dmitri made me rest that day and another night at the fishermen's house, and the following day, the fifth since we left the train, we crossed the frozen Kama. We ran into several other groups from our unit and on the sixth day reached Menzelinsk.

It was a typical Tartar town, with its maze of narrow streets and its distinctive Oriental odor. We were housed in an old school, where there was neither light nor water. Several iron stoves were commandeered but they did little to relieve the cold. Practically all our men had frozen, blistered and in some cases bleeding feet. I was too exhausted to move, but Dmitri somehow dug up a straw mattress and a straw-filled pillow for me. My body, wracked by pain, seemed to me to have swelled to mountainous proportions. Dimly, through the haze of agony, I heard the men around me swearing at their food, their quarters, their sorry fate. The prospect of life in Menzelinsk made them all sulky and despondent. The commanding officers, for once, were too sensible to make arrests for complaints, and kept discreetly out of sight.

Two days I lay in torture on my straw pallet. On the third day I was transferred to the Menzelinsk military hospital. I had a high fever. Then the tide of pain ebbed and I was able to take in my surroundings. A woman doctor, with good features and kind eyes, was taking my temperature.

"You'll be all right, Comrade Kravchenko," she smiled at me reassuringly. "As soon as you're strong enough to travel, you must go back to Moscow for treatment. Meanwhile we'll make you as comfortable as we can."

I gained strength slowly. Dmitri, Numidov and others brought me good things to eat. The hospital itself provided the patients with only a chunk of black, sticky bread, tea without sugar, soup and gruel twice a day. We slept on straw mattresses under stiff army blankets. But the doctor in charge of my ward, Eugenia Vladimirovna, made up with her kindness and

understanding for most of the distressing physical conditions. We were an oddly assorted group in my ward—an old peasant soldier, a political commissar with the rank of Colonel, several privates—and we killed time by arguing every conceivable subject. But we all agreed in our devotion to the doctor

We were all in terribly low spirits—it was the December when the fate of Moscow seemed to hang on a hair. There were no newspapers and no radio in the hospital. But the commissar and I learned the news from friends who visited us; our ward became a kind of information center for the whole hospital.

Shortly before twelve one night, after I had been in the hospital some weeks, a servant brought a lighted lamp into our ward. A few minutes later the doctor came in. She was not only in civilian attire but dressed with a touch of elegance. Her dark hair, usually pulled in a tight knot at the nape of her neck, was now piled high on her head in a fashionable coiffure. The patients rose on their elbows and stared in astonishment. I even detected a whiff of perfume as she laid out platters of meat cakes and a bowl of fruit compote for us.

"Happy New Year! Happy New Year!" she exclaimed. Then, noting our surprise she added, a little embarrassed, "It occurred to me that for once you might like to see a woman dressed as a woman should be dressed! I mean, this being New Year's Eve . . . it might remind you of home."

"And it's a wonderful New Year's present for my eyes," the commissar said in a low voice, with deep feeling.

"My old woman back in the village never dressed like that," the old peasant soldier added, "but thank you, Eugenia Vladimirovna, and a happy New Year to yo: '"

Having greeted us each individually and distributed the food to those well enough to eat it, our doctor went to the next ward. The vision of this Russian woman carrying the gift of her womanliness to the homesick soldiers in the various rooms on this dawn of 1942, in a shabby, ill-equipped, understaffed hospital in Tataria will remain with me forever.

By the end of January a commission of the Military Hospital Service ordered my return to Moscow for further treatment. In the capital, I was not assigned to a hospital but merely reported daily to a clinic. While this process continued I took my meals at the Central Red Army Officers Home. Under Irina's affectionate care I grew well rapidly. My jaw healed and my body cleared. Discharged by the clinic with recommendation that I should rest to regain strength, I called on the proper commission for further orders. Here I was given a perfunctory two-minute examination and pronounced fit for service. My new papers indicated that I would be sent to the front.

I bade Irina farewell, fully expecting not to see her again for a long time, if ever. But when I reported at the Military Commissariat, I was informed that a new order had just been issued. Men with higher technical education would be exempted for pressing industrial work on the home front. It was a sensible order, yet I felt cheated of the chance to risk my life—for Eugenia Vladimirovna, for the peasants, the fishermen,

the workmen, my fellow-engineers of these last months. They were my people, my country, in a sense transcending politics and ideologies.

4

This was Moscow's worst winter since Napoleon had looked down on its charred bones one hundred and thirty years earlier. The invaders had failed to take the city. Caught on the frozen Russian steppes like flies on fly-paper, they were suffering and dying in great masses. Even in the backward, impoverished Balkans the Germans could live on the country to some extent, but in the scorched Russia there was miserably little the conquerors could plunder. The troubles of the besiegers, however, were small consolation to the besieged.

The blacked-out capital to which I returned was hungry, frostbitten, pockmarked by enemy bombs. It seemed broken in spirit and almost too weary to despair. Its people huddled amidst the sorry marbled splendors of the subway, in cellars and improvised air-raid shelters until the all-clear signals sounded. They dragged themselves from frozen homes to labor long hours in underheated plants and offices. The city's industries were partially evacuated. What remained was worked day and night at top speed. The loss of the richest Ukrainian and West Russian industrial areas and the overloading of the transport system meant difficulties in obtaining raw materials for normal operation. Yet the capital had been transformed into a mighty arsenal working heroically for the needs of the front.

The official rations were barely enough to sustain life but the shops could rarely meet these pitiful food requirements. Hunger and cold became more of a threat than the Luftwaffe. The war had been under way only eight or nine months, but already the citizens of the capital city of a great country were eating bread made in part of potato flour; they were killing and eating their dogs and cats, and such crows as they could snare. What a devastating commentary on its war preparations!

Just as in the worst days of the revolutionary period, Muscovites broke up furniture and tore down wooden fences in the desperate search for a little warmth. The death rate in the city kept rising and at the same time the military tribunals and the N.K.V.D. added to the toll by their panicky shootings of real and imaginary panic-mongers and traitors.

Irina had lost weight. Since she obtained one skimpy meal at the bureau where she worked, she had been sharing her rations with less fortunate friends. Our apartment was unheated; we wore heavy coats, woolen shawls and even gloves indoors. A large part of the time there was no electric light and often the water supply gave out. Sometimes, for days at a time, the pipes in the one toilet were frozen.

Life was difficult and joyless. Moscow was paying the price of a quarter of a century of bureaucratic confusion and political despotism.

Half the equipment of the Glavtrubostal factory had been evacuated; the other half worked day and night on mines and bombs. But the place was overstaffed. Neither Manturov nor Yegorov encouraged my return to its payroll. I reported to the District Committee of the Party and through

intercession was assigned to the post of chief engineer of Promtrest, a trust controlling nine different factories, most of them working on supplies for the front.

I was overjoyed with the designation, though the physical conditions of work were unappetizing, because it gave me a feeling of direct participation in the war. No less important, as a responsible worker I now had the privilege of eating in the special restaurant reserved for members of the District Committee of the Party. Some of the plants under my technical supervision manufactured hand grenades, mines and several other types of munitions. Several of them specialized in the repair of engineering equipment. I was constantly pushing through urgent war orders, without sparing myself or my staff. I actually felt and tried to imbue those around me with the feeling that we were "under fire."

Our workers were gaunt with hunger and haunted by the knowledge that their families were suffering. Nevertheless, they toiled grimly and devotedly from ten to sixteen hours a day. Frequently, when a rush order was involved, they remained in their factories for many days without a break, snatching some sleep on the premises. I marveled at the fortitude of these simple men, women and children—boys and girls from twelve to fifteen years of age were everywhere doing grown-up jobs—as I watched them working in one shop when the shop next-door had been turned into a blazing hell by a direct bomb hit. I know that these plain people were the real heroes and the real strength of the Russian war. They had no need for morale-building slogans. They were struggling to give all possible support to their sons and brothers and fathers at the fighting fronts. The outside world, in its blindness, might give all the credit to the Soviet dictatorship, but the job was being done by the victims of that dictatorship, and frequently despite its stupidities.

My new assignment brought me into intimate and almost daily contact with high military and government dignitaries concerned with the problems of war supplies. I had occasion now and then to deal directly with ranking officials in the Sovnarkom—the Council of People's Commissars—which, deriving its authority from the Supreme Soviet, was in theory the chief executive and control organ of the State Defense Committee. For the first time in my career I now attended several urgent production conferences within the crenelated Kremlin walls.

One day I found a message on my desk asking me to call a certain number without delay. I phoned and announced myself.

"Oh, yes, Comrade Kravchenko, please be at the Sovnarkom of the R.S.F.S.R. at twelve sharp. A pass will be waiting for you."

The R.S.F.S.R.—Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic—is the largest of the constituent "republics," larger, indeed, than all the rest put together. At best the autonomy of the so-called republics is a flimsy fiction; they have far less independent authority than the states in the United States. In essence they are administrative divisions to facilitate the government of a nation as gigantic as Russia, but totally controlled from the center.

In the case of the R.S.F.S.R. even the fiction scarcely exists. Its Sovnar-

kom is little more than an extension of the All-Union Sovnarkom. Its capital is Moscow, its activities are tied closely into the activities of the whole regime. It does not have an N.K.V.D. of its own as other Soviet republics have, or a Central Committee of the Party of its own. The R.S.F.S.R. is thus in practice though not in theory co-extensive with the U.S.S.R. It is the dominant political unit, where the strength of the regime is concentrated. The ordinary Soviet citizen makes no distinction between the main Sovnarkom and its subsidiary Sovnarkom of the R.S.F.S.R. and I was to learn that, in practice, the popular assumption was correct.

I had been in the building on business a number of times and was familiar with the extraordinary precautions taken to protect its officials. Having produced my passport and obtained a pass, I was relayed from guard to guard and finally found myself in a wide, hushed, heavily carpeted corridor, flanked by heavy oak doors. N.K.V.D. men of officer rank stood outside some of these imposing doors. Little did I guess at this moment that soon one of these offices would be mine and that I, too, would be among the precious ones elaborately guarded against vague dangers.

After a short wait in the reception room, a woman secretary admitted me to the vast office of Comrade Andrei Ivanovich Utkin, vice-chairman of the Sovnarkom of the R.S.F.S.R. Though he was a man above middle height, compactly built, with a protruding stomach and a self-important presence, he seemed dwarfed by the huge chair in which he sat, the field-like expanse of his desk and the immense oil portrait of Stalin on the wall behind him.

He motioned me to be seated.

"Well, Comrade Kravchenko, how are affairs with you?"

"I don't know quite what to say since I haven't any idea why you called me."

"I mean in general. How's your work, how are you helping the Party and the country in the war?"

I told him about the activities of my trust and outlined some of the production problems faced by the nine plants under my care. As I talked I recognized, among the papers in front of him, a questionnaire with my photograph attached which I had filled out on becoming chief engineer of the trust.

"You're talking to *the government*," Comrade Utkin interjected at one point. "There can be no falsehoods, no holding back of facts and thoughts."

"Of course, of course."

He asked questions and I made a series of speeches. Under the Soviet procedure we all became inured to orating about ourselves. I talked almost impersonally, as if I were describing an acquaintance in whose affairs I had merely a friendly interest. At the end of about three hours, Utkin cocked his dark head, looked at me hard through narrowed, cunning eyes and asked the climactic question:

"How would you like to work for the Sovnarkom?"

"That would depend on the work."

"Well, we need an engineer, a Party member, to head the Department of War Engineering Armament. I think you can fill the post. This doesn't

mean that the question will be decided today. I merely need your consent before taking the proper preliminary steps."

"I'm not at all sure that I can handle such an important job," I said.

"And I think, on the contrary, that you'll do very well. You have the necessary experience and we've watched your work at the trust."

"If that's your opinion, I should, of course, accept."

"In that case, good-bye for the present. Please report at the Personnel Department on the floor below."

I filled out a series of forms. In a few days I was instructed to report to Utkin's superior, the chairman of the Sovnarkom of the R.S.F.S.R. and one of the most powerful figures around Stalin: Constantine Pamfilov. His tremendous office, his throne of authority, his oil painting of Stalin were all a few degrees larger than Utkin's. The furniture and fittings were a few degrees more luxurious.

Pamfilov was a tall man in his middle forties, broad-boned and impressive. His head and face were clean-shaven and shone like a billiard ball. He wore foreign clothes. He stood behind his enormous desk, one foot on the chair, leaning his weight on his elbow. I was to learn in the following months that this was his natural working stance, even when he was alone. Comrade Utkin, looking even smaller in his chief's presence, was with Pamfilov when I entered.

Again I answered questions. My questionnaires and special reports about me were on his desk.

"Comrade Kravchenko," the chairman of the Sovnarkom finally said, "you have held responsible posts. But working in the government is quite another matter. We are the servants of the Party, and work in the government is, above all, Party work. It is the Party that rules the country."

I assured him meekly that I understood this.

"Comrade Utkin"—Pamfilov turned to his assistant—"has there been an answer?"

"Not yet, Comrade Pamfilov."

Pamfilov lifted one of the receivers in the forest of telephones on a little table behind him and dialed a number.

"Pamfilov speaking. How about the Kravchenko matter?"

He waited two or three minutes. The silence in the room was oppressive. Evidently something was being checked at the other end.

"Yes . . . yes. . . ." Pamfilov finally said. "There are no objections? Very good!"

He dropped the receiver. I had no doubt that he had called the Seventh Department of the N.K.V.D., without whose specific consent no important government positions are assigned. Subsequently I saw the proof that I had guessed right. By accident I came across the formal N.K.V.D. document attesting its approval of my entering the service of the Sovnarkom. Though the Party directs the country and its government, no important appointment for work in the Party or the government is ever completed without investigation and approval by the Seventh Department of the secret police.

"All right, Comrade Kravchenko," Pamfilov announced. "Now you can go. As soon as everything is ready you'll be notified."

Soon I was confirmed in my new position by the Central Committee of the Party. In a few days I was installed in an office next to Utkin's, after I had given the Special Department of the Sovnarkom a written pledge never under any circumstances to disclose anything about the work of the organization. The Stalin looking down on me behind my back was, of course, smaller than in the adjoining office. A special N.K.V.D. officer guarded the portals to my newly consecrated presence in the hushed corridor and two obsequious secretaries presided in my reception room. I was a member of the government in the technical sense of the word. I carried the special red card with gold lettering—a magic booklet, symbol of power.

This was at the end of May, 1942, just as the new German offensive was beginning to roll forward. It would swallow what remained of my native Ukraine, push deep into the Caucasus and reach the Volga River at a place called Stalingrad.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE KREMLIN IN WARTIME

THE RUSSIANS have a word for it. *Vlast*—"the power." It means the government, the supreme authority. But it means a lot more: Stalin, the Politburo, the secret police, Stalin's favorites, whether in official positions or courtiers without titles. In the mouth of the average citizen, moreover, the word has overtones of awe and undertones of resentment, implying "our masters" and suggesting the immeasurable distances separating them from common folk.

In the Sovnarkom I sat near the pinnacle of the *vlast*. For the first time I could look down on the world below from this privileged angle. Now I could observe (though I could not share) the feeling of the uppermost rulers that they were made of finer stuffs, moved in a different dimension of human existence and were, indeed, exempt from ordinary morals and sentiments, which they dismissed as "bourgeois prejudices" and "rotten liberalism."

Now I could understand the complacency with which these people used human life—shifting it, shuffling it, liquidating it—like so much inert raw material for their plans, experiments and blunders. Suddenly I found myself among men who could eat ample and dainty food in full view of starving people not only with a clear conscience but with a feeling of righteousness, as if they were performing a duty to history.

At the head of our Sovnarkom stood Constantine Pamfilov, a man so close to the inner court that when he died, within a year after I entered his service, his ashes were buried in the Kremlin wall on Red Square. Under his chief assistant, Andrei Utkin, there were five powerful departments, one of which I headed. Thus I was only two steps removed from the top. My department was subdivided into an array of specialized functions directed by my assistants.

In recording the fact of my brief eminence, of course, I am not bragging. I had been lifted by someone's whim. I could be pushed off with one polished finger by those above me who, in their turn, could be hurled to the depths without warning by their superiors. Again and again I would see Pamfilov or Utkin tremble in the presence of some Politburo chief or some court favorite of The Boss. I would hear them abused in gutter words like menials in disgrace. In a dictatorship the equilibrium is provided by a nice balance between unlimited power and unbounded fear.

The few of us who represented *vlast* in our Sovnarkom, perhaps thirty men in all, were set off from the middle layers of officials and the mass of employees below in a lot of ways. We had our own floor, as hushed as a church, policed by N.K.V.D. men of officer rank. Our spacious offices,

beyond the reception rooms, were insulated by double sets of doors to prevent eavesdropping. We were served good breakfasts and suppers at our desks, free of charge, and had our own dining room for other meals at ludicrously low prices. The Sovnarkom barbers came to the offices of Pamfilov, Utkin and others of their exalted rank, to shave and anoint them for the day ahead. We lesser executives went to the barbers, they didn't come to us. Those immediately below us had no right to the services of the official barbers at all. These subtle gradations mirrored the hierarchy of power. Most valuable of all privileges was represented by a little red booklet which gave me the right to attention at the Kremlin Hospital and to buy medicaments in the Kremlin pharmacy, at a time when doctors and medicines were almost unavailable to the large public.

We even had our own toilet, its exclusiveness watched over by the officers in the corridor. There was, likewise, a special toilet for the less important officials, not quite as comfortable or elegant as ours.

Once the Sovnarkom rang with a scandal. It appeared that a new functionary, not yet familiar with the class distinctions in this particular domain, found himself on our floor and under sudden necessity. As someone left the marbled chamber, he slipped in unnoticed by the guard. When he emerged, the negligent N.K.V.D. man seized the culprit in great alarm, examined his documents and, of course, reported the sacrilege to his superiors. A few secret agents, the "unsheathed sword of the revolution," searched the toilet for time-bombs or other mischief. Then charwomen came with pails and brushes and scrubbed the sanctum until all traces of the infidel intrusion were washed out.

In private life I might be negligible, but at my post in the Soviet *apparat* I was protected like a great national treasure. No outsider could visit me without my express permission. I would write out a pass for the caller, affixing my personal seal, and before it was issued the gate control would phone me for a second confirmation. To make sure that it was not some impostor at the phone, I had to identify myself with a password known only to the N.K.V.D. and myself. My password was "Lena number 17." Having received the pass, the visitor was obliged to run the gantlet of four inspections of his identity before reaching my reception room. Sometimes I was ashamed of this system of super-control introduced by the N.K.V.D., especially when the caller was an old and dear friend.

The same procedure, of course, applied to all strangers entering our portals. No one below my rank had the right to issue passes, no matter how urgent the business. Should one of my assistants require the presence of some outsider, he had to explain the problem to me and if I considered the visit essential I made the necessary arrangements.

And that wasn't all. In our organization, as in the Kremlin, the Central Committee of the Party and a few other places, a system known as *shakhmatki*—"chess board"—was in vogue. Its purpose was to checkmate any plot by treacherous guards to smuggle an assassin, spy or diversionist into the premises. This is how it worked: At irregular intervals, sometimes ten minutes, sometimes longer apart, the N.K.V.D. guards were shifted like pawns on a chessboard. They were moved without warning and

according to an intricate pattern by signal from a central control point. No guard could therefore know precisely where he would be stationed at a given time. In that way the collusion of four or five guards to pass an unauthorized visitor was made impossible.

As an additional precaution, only the automobiles of the chiefs of the Sovnarkom could drive through its gates, regardless of how important its occupants. Even People's Commissars had to park their cars outside the gates. The danger that someone might blow up our holy of holies by planting a time-bomb in a motorcar was thus obviated.

The real sign and symbol of my new dignity, however, was neither in this vigilance nor in my password. It was in a piece of furniture, outwardly commonplace but invested with peculiar significance in the life of Soviet dignitaries. It was a safe to which I alone had the combination. Well, not quite I alone—the secret was shared by the N.K.V.D. The point of this symbol of power was that none of my superiors could violate its privacy, thus enabling me to conceal things even from them. Only people high enough in the hierarchy to be entitled to secrets from their immediate bosses had such safes; and only one such safe in the country—namely, Stalin's—had a combination not known to the N.K.V.D.

My safe stood conspicuously, portentously, among my elegant furnishings. Even Utkin and Pamfilov, when they deigned to visit me instead of summoning me to their offices, eyed it curiously. They wondered what notes about their orders and verbal instructions I might have recorded and locked in the safe.

But precisely because it was barred to the rest of the world, the safe was the favorite hunting ground of the Secret and Special Departments. Their right to examine my papers during my absence was so matter of course that they did not bother to cover up their traces after an inspection of my safe or desk drawers. The most effective way to denounce one's betters, in fact, without risking a direct report to the police, was to write out the facts "for yourself" and to "hide" them in your private safe. . . .

Most vital was the fact that I now had the power to act in the name of the government. Within the sphere of my department's responsibilities, I directed the activities of local authorities and of commissariats throughout the R.S.F.S.R. I could request People's Commissars and their assistants to give me full reports on their work; I could order them and even reprimand them in connection with my assignments. I could summon them to appear at my office any time of the day or night, whereas they could not summon me.

It was mine to decide whether to cooperate with or to ignore a particular commissar. I knew from inside what the government thought of various officials—who would be rewarded, who would be "beheaded." Before long I had the feel of the government and the Party "kitchens" and "what was cooking." Often People's Commissars whose regalia shone resplendently in the eyes of common people seemed drab and even pitiful in the eyes of insiders who knew the truth.

I shall never forget my first day at the new post. I arrived at ten in the morning. My secretaries and assistants were already in their places. Docu-

ments requiring my attention were neatly stacked on my desk. I paused in the doorway to survey the large, elegant room; the portraits of leaders on its walls; the big painting of Stalin directly above my chair of authority. In a flash I relived the scene in a dingy Nikopol hotel, when I flushed the torn bits of a Stalin lithograph down a toilet drain. No sooner had I seated myself under this bigger and more artistic Stalin than the phone rang. It was an officer of the N.K.V.D. asking, so politely, so respectfully, whether I could receive him for a few minutes. For the first time in my life a representative of the dread organization was asking me for *permission* to pay a visit. . . . I invited him to come in.

"I want to give you this personal seal," he explained, handing me a rubber stamp, "for use on visitor passes and other documents. Please keep it always under lock and key. Now I'll take the liberty of acquainting you with other regulations, since you're new here."

"Please do. I'm listening."

He began by explaining the rules on callers, informed me about my password and warned me to keep it secret. For instance, I must never utter it within the hearing of another person, no matter how important he might be. He then solved the mysteries of the many telephones on my desk. One of them was on the special government circuit, connecting the Kremlin, the Central Committee and the main commissariats. Official business could be discussed only on this exclusive circuit, never on the ordinary phones.

"Also, every piece of paper in the Sovnarkom is a state secret," he went on. "You will be held strictly accountable if you leave any letter, document or carbon copy unprotected. Should you want to discard a document or even a carbon copy, don't simply destroy it. Write your instructions across its face and turn it over to the Special Department for burning."

Having finished the lesson in deportment, he had me sign a paper attesting that I was familiar with the regulations. Then he stood up, saluted, and marched out. He closed the door behind him quietly, considerately, not at all the way Gershgorn used to close the door on me.

At about eleven my secretary, an intelligent, pleasant-looking woman, knocked.

"Victor Andreyevich, will you have breakfast?" she asked.

"Yes, please. How about you? Have you breakfasted?"

"I'm entitled only to a glass of tea and a piece of sugar," she sighed. "I bring bread with me from home. War . . . what's one to do. . . ."

Soon a waitress arrived, carrying a trayful of food. She was a woman in her middle thirties, neatly dressed, wearing a starched white cap. She went about her job silently and efficiently, spreading a white napkin on a little table, laying out the meal: two eggs, some stewed meat, white bread, butter, a glass of hot tea, several lumps of sugar, a few cookies. Everything except the eggs and the tea was clearly of American lend-lease lineage. Though the woman's hands were work-worn, they were clean.

"I see that you keep manicured," I said with a smile.

"But of course. I serve *big men*," she said. "Well, eat in good health, Victor Andreyevich."

There was something in her pinched features which led me to curb my appetite. I left one egg, a little meat, some slices of bread and a piece of sugar, as if it were more than I could eat. When I rang, my secretary came, stacked the leftovers on the tray and carried it out. A little later, in bringing me some paper to sign, she fidgeted at the desk for a moment.

"I'm ashamed to talk, Victor Andreyevich," she said, "but you're an intelligent man and will understand. I took the liberty of eating what remained of your breakfast. Please forgive me . . . it's so hard to keep alive."

"That's perfectly all right. In fact, I'm glad you did. But frankly, I was thinking that the waitress . . ."

"But Lisa and I have an understanding," she interrupted. "One day I take the leftovers, the next day it's her turn. . . . Hunger is a terrible thing, Victor Andreyevich. It's stronger than shame."

And thus throughout my months at the Sovnarkom I ate only half a breakfast, leaving the other half for Lisa and my secretary. Lisa, I learned, took her share home for her two small children; her husband was at the front. Both these women subsisted on the office workers' rations: 400 grams (15 ounces) of sugar, 500 grams (18 ounces) of cereals and 400 grams of fats per month, and 400 grams of bread daily. What I left uneaten of my first breakfast, if translated into non-rationed market prices, was worth at least 100 rubles—an egg, for instance, cost 40 rubles—and Lisa earned 150 rubles a month. . . .

About noon I had another official guest—the man in charge of the Secret-Special Department, eyes and ears of the N.K.V.D. in every Soviet organization. He was a young man, every inch the police agent even in civilian dress. He was businesslike and a bit officious, behaving as though he were the real master in my office.

"Greetings, Comrade Kravchenko," he said. "I'm pleased to make your acquaintance. We'll be seeing a good deal of each other. You're new here and should learn some rules from the start. We're at war. The enemy is everywhere and we can't be too careful."

"Of course, of course."

"Well, here are the regulations for the protection of state secrets. Please read them slowly and carefully and ask me questions if anything is unclear."

He handed me a sheaf of ten or twelve closely mimeographed sheets. In the familiar Soviet mixture of orders and threats, these pages instructed me how to handle State, Party and military secret documents, how to guard my desk, my safe and the office against strange eyes, how to prevent even my private secretary from seeing certain types of official papers. I learned that there were two stenographic staffs in the Sovnarkom, ordinary and secret. Routine letters could be dictated to the ordinary variety but secret dictation must be given only to the secret stenographers, who must be summoned through the Special Department. Every order from my superiors, the rules emphasized, must be on record in writing.

"But what if Comrade Utkin or Comrade Pamfilov or someone in the Kremlin gives me *verbal* instructions?" I asked at this point.

"In that case, you must immediately enter their words in your personal diary. The same applies to the contents of important telephone conversations. Write things down without delay—that's your best protection in case of repercussions later. Comrade Stalin has taught us to trust people but at the same time to check and recheck."

After I had finished reading, my visitor enlarged on the theme. The essence of his lecture was that I must believe no one and assume that others do not believe me. There must be written proofs, detailed minutes, of every meeting or conversation. Mutual distrust was not merely a fact in the Soviet *apparat*, it was the recognized, obligatory way of life, the only chance of survival. Again I signed a paper declaring that I was familiar with the system and cognizant of the penalties for its violation.

Finally he asked me to read and ponder a thoroughly secret document bearing the signatures of Stalin and Molotov. It turned out to be a Politburo decision outlining the rights and duties of the Sovnarkom. It went into the most minute details and left no doubt that the government, as embodied in the Sovnarkom, was a blind servant and instrument of the Politburo. I signed the usual form about keeping my mouth shut. This subordination of the government to the Party was known to every intelligent Soviet citizen, yet it was treated as a secret.

"Well, good-bye, Comrade Kravchenko. As I said, we're sure to see a lot of each other."

2

Those layers of officialdom to which I belonged were in many respects the least fortunate in the Soviet heirarchy. On the whole we had more responsibility than authority. We did the toughest work and generally our chiefs appropriated the credit. We were too highly placed to relax, as minor officials and ordinary employees could, yet not high enough in the pyramid of power to shift work and blame on other people's shoulders.

Of all the crosses we bore, however, the heaviest was sleeplessness. The week when I averaged more than five hours of rest per day was the exception. The great mass of our office people and specialists worked from nine to five, though now and then I might keep some of them longer or instruct a few of my subordinates to report back in the evening. But my own workday ran from ten or eleven to three or four the following morning, often later. Only rarely I stole a few evening hours at home with my wife. Occasionally I risked an hour or two of uneasy sleep on the divan in my office, with the door locked and the telephone at my ear to avoid being caught in the act.

The schedule of the higher officialdom in Moscow is an extraordinary one, being geared to the peculiar work habits of one man. Stalin normally begins his day around eleven in the morning, working steadily until four or five. He then usually knocks off until ten or eleven in the evening, remaining at work until three, four or even later in the morning. Of these two sessions, the night instalment is by all odds the more important.

There were various theories about the dictator's strange hours. One had it that this schedule allowed him to keep in personal touch with his officials in all parts of the huge country despite four hours' difference in time between its most western and most eastern zones. Another theory was that he intentionally kept his top subordinates out of mischief by breaking their life into inconvenient day and night shifts; it did in fact reduce their opportunities and temptations for a private social existence.

Whatever the reasons, officialdom in the capital regulated its existence by the eccentric Stalin clock. As if on signal, the bureaucracy at its highest levels tensed for action when The Boss (as all of us called him in informal conversation) reached his office and relaxed again only when he went home. The rest of the country, being in continuous telephone contact with headquarters and sensitive to its moods, also reflected this schedule. In effect, therefore, the ebb and flow of official life in all of Russia were governed by the comings and goings of one stoutish, pockmarked Georgian. One organization, of course, worked 24 hours a day—the N.K.V.D. It had no need to conform to any schedule because it never slept.

Beginning about ten in the morning on working days the big bullet-proof Packards with their greenish windows roar down the suburban Mozhaisk Road, through the long Arbat Boulevard and thence to the various citadels of "the power." From the sound of the sirens, from the way in which excited policemen stop traffic to give these noisy speeders the right of way, Muscovites know at once that The Boss, Molotov, Beria, Malenkov, Mikoyan, Kaganovich and other such leaders are being convoyed through their capital. Each of the limousines is preceded by a car (usually a Lincoln) and followed by another, both manned by heavily armed N.K.V.D. guards in civilian clothes. The leaders, of course, always travel separately, not in a group, to reduce the dangers to their safety.

The routes are charted by the special branch of the secret police responsible for the safety of the highest officials. Every inch of the way is expertly policed. The inhabitants of every house on the route are known to the authorities and doubtful people are quickly removed. Thousands of men in civilian clothes and in uniform are posted at key points, their right hands on their revolvers ready for the draw; they know that their own lives will be forfeit if anything should happen to the Beloved Leaders behind the bullet-proof glass. Muscovites never stop to look as Stalin and his closest associates are whisked by. Sensible citizens get out of the way, make themselves scarce and inconspicuous, when their rulers pass.

Officials a cut or two lower—men like Pamfilov and Utkin in our Sovnarkom, for instance—made certain to be at their posts before Stalin reached his, and they remained there until he left. As for myself, I aimed to be at work before my immediate chiefs arrived, just as my assistants were always on hand when I got to the Sovnarkom. I never left without specific permission until my superiors finished their night shift, so that my day was usually seventeen or eighteen hours long. Utkin and Pamfilov took it for granted that I would be at the other end of the telephone when they called me, just as Stalin or Molotov took it for granted that Pamfilov would be on the job when they phoned him. Probably the official routine

of no great nation has ever before been so completely adjusted to the whims of a single man.

Our Sovnarkom was the executive and "control organ" for the all-powerful State Defense Committtee. Its chief function for the duration was to direct and check the carrying out of all orders for war supplies in the R.S.F.S.R. With the Germans in occupation of White Russia, the Ukraine and part of the Caucasus, our territory embraced nearly all the remaining productive facilities and population of the nation, so that in effect we were responsible for the largest portion of all war output at that time. A part of this colossal task was concentrated in the department I now commanded. "War engineering armament" was a term that covered supervision and control of output of supplies ranging from tanks, artillery, aviation and communications equipment, landing and camouflage equipment to items like gas masks, compasses, field telephones and even simple picks, shovels and lanterns produced by R.S.F.S.R. industry.

Literally hundreds of orders, decisions, complaints and threats signed by Stalin and his closest associates, by Beria and Molotov and Mikoyan, Vosnessensky, Malishev and Kasygin, came to my desk. I was in continuous touch by telephone with every commissariat, with factories, special industrial bureaus and regional offices throughout the country. In the course of a single hour I might check on production progress in Gorki and Sverdlovsk, in Novosibirsk and Cheliabinsk.

My life became a hectic struggle to find materials, fuel, labor; to push through output in specified periods of time: to stir commissariats and organizations everywhere from Moscow to Siberia into action. I was harked at and cursed by my chiefs and desperate executives of the State Defense Committee. There is probably more obscene swearing at the upper levels of the Soviet government than in the rest of the world put together. A lush, ripe obscenity is the most striking and sometimes the only reminder of the "proletarian" origins of our regime. The master in this domain was Kaganovich; we said that he cussed "like a corkscrew," spiraling up to magnificent heights of bad language. But Molotov, Voroshilov, Andreyev and others were close behind in this art and Stalin himself was no slouch. I can attest, however, that the great majority of the leaders with whom I came in contact were able men who knew their business; dynamic men deeply devoted to the work in hand.

There were weeks of my life embittered by efforts to arrange production of such simple equipment as barbed wire cutters, shovels for digging foxholes, lanterns as a makeshift for flashlights. I shall always remember the night when a Red Army General sat in my office begging, with tears in his eyes, for the barbed-wire cutters. Thousands of our soldiers, he explained, were being needlessly impaled and butchered for lack of this simple piece of equipment. In his presence I called commissars in Moscow and factory directors out of town. But what was the use of my storming and threatening when the factories did not have the necessary steel or tools or machines?

I was in continual contact with Marshal Novikov, Marshal Vorobiov, General Seleznev, General Volkov, Admiral Galler, dozens of other military

leaders at the procurement end of the great war effort. Too often, alas, we could do little more than combine our lamentations over the shortages in every direction.

Shall I ever forget the time when we commandeered thousands of the primitive school compasses and apportioned them sparingly to the various fronts? The order, over Stalin's signature, had called for fifty thousand military field compasses, but the proper magnetic steel simply was not available.

Shall I ever forget the conferences, the frantic telephoning, the piled-up threats and the heartbreaks that we invested during the summer in a search for horseshoes? Thousands of animals, and often the cavalrymen as well, perished for lack of this item but their manufacture, it turned out, was blocked by lack of metal and the limited capacity of the two Urals plants making horseshoes. The demand for the horseshoes came from Marshal Budenny and thus, incidentally, gave me the answer to the mystery of the whereabouts of this revolutionary hero. He had been removed from a high post of command originally entrusted to him and since then his name had disappeared; there were even rumors that he had been liquidated. Now I became aware that he had been shunted to a bureau dealing with cavalry supplies.

Day after day I had the direct and tragic proofs of my country's failure to prepare for this life-and-death crisis. I knew as a matter of simple fact that tens of thousands of our bravest fighters were slaughtered for lack of the simplest supplies. Neither Stalin's terse commands nor Beria's "strong measures" could squeeze adequate equipment from factories lacking raw materials and operated by workers on a starvation diet.

I came to know more intimately even than the ranking generals and admirals how valuable American lend-lease weapons, materials and machinery were in achieving victory. Americans may still have some doubts about this, but not the Soviet leaders. For them it is a fact. God knows we paid back in full—in Russian lives—for Allied help, but that does not alter the fact itself. Without the great influx of American airplanes, American motor transport, telephones, a thousand other things we lacked, what would have been the fate of Soviet resistance? Russian production, Russian heroism and sacrifice take first place in any estimate of the factors which made for Russian victory; the Stalingrad triumph was clinched before the great flow of lend-lease got started. But American and Allied help belongs immediately thereafter in the estimate.

The orders reaching me from above were often hysterical in tone. A demand for some essential tank part or vital aviation equipment, signed by Stalin and countersigned by one or another of his secretaries, was invariably barbed with a warning of ruthless punishment:

"Notify the People's Commissars that fulfilment of this decision is a military-political task of the highest importance. Obligate the Prosecutor of the U.S.S.R. to control this order personally and to call those guilty of non-fulfilment strictly to account regardless who they may be."

Or it might read:

"Control on fulfilment of this order is imposed upon the People's Com-

missar of State Control, Comrade Popov. Everyone guilty of breaking this assignment, regardless who he may be, to be held strictly responsible and to be reported to me."

Strict responsibility meant removal from one's post and trial before a military tribunal. Decisions carrying the signature of Beria, who spoke with the awesome voice of the secret police, might conclude thus:

"Obligate the People's Commissars to fulfil this order regardless of objective conditions. The guilty to be brought to my own attention. . . ."

This was the routine Stalinist style, aped by every bureaucrat in his relations with those below him. It was the language of fear and intimidation, crude, undisguised, frankly intended to remind us of concentration camps and firing squads. Though addressing powerful leaders, men whose very names sent chills down Russian spines, Stalin and his closest collaborators never failed to invoke the dread of arrest and disgrace.

Never before had I worked so hard, so long or under such an overwhelming sense of frustration. Soon enough I had the gray-green complexion, the bloodshot eyes, the edge of fever that come with chronic fatigue. Nearly all the men and women around me drove themselves as hard as I did. Without doubt some others among them hated the Soviet despotism as deeply as I did, but our political views did not interfere with our devotion to the cause of victory. Our country was in danger—nothing else counted against this supreme fact.

If we succeeded in saving a day, even an hour, in supplying the front with some sorely needed piece of equipment, we might be saving the lives of thousands of our people. None of us needed any other spur to action; the threats were wasted on us. The feeling that our efforts were tied directly into the life-and-death struggle of our people was always with us, though we said little about it. We dealt with concrete tasks, with materials, tools, machines, under difficult conditions that left us little margin for indulging our emotions.

The whole organization, from Pamfilov down to the humblest file clerk, was caught in the mighty surge of patriotism that came from the profoundest depths of Russian history and the Russian soul. The little publicity agents of the Stalinist machine, at home and abroad, who try to explain it all as a Bolshevik phenomenon do our Russia an ugly injustice. They are trying to explain an elemental, timeless force in terms of petty partisan ideas. It was not a Soviet but a Russian miracle. When I think of myself, toiling honestly and unsparingly under leaders I despised and distrusted, I see a kind of symbol of Russia at war.

My many months at the Sovnarkom coincided with the most harrowing phases of the war. They covered the soul-searing summer of 1942 when the Germans made their largest gains and their deepest thrusts. They covered the advance to the Volga and the climactic struggle which made Stalingrad a word to rank forever with Marathon and Waterloo in human history. At the core of a nation there is a hard, eternal and unconquerable element—it was this that was bared in Stalingrad, that survived blood-letting and disaster on a horrifying scale. It had nothing to do with Karl Marx and Stalin.

Official communiques continued to minimize the magnitude of our defeats. The starkest reverses were dressed up to sound like strategic maneuvers. The Russian masses knew less about the actual course of the prolonged duel in the Stalingrad region than the rest of the world. But at our level in the government *apparat* we could not afford self-deceptions. The appeals from the front for supplies and planes, for munitions and manpower, echoed panic and sometimes utter despair. We could not help knowing about the colossal outpouring of blood.

On one wall in Utkin's office there was a big map of Russia. Every morning the pins marking the German advances were moved deeper into our country's flesh and a thread the color of blood marked the extent of our losses. I found Utkin gazing at this map, his round, handsome face puckered with worry.

"I have some urgent business, Andrei Ivanovich," I said, placing some documents on his desk.

"The papers won't fly away. Come here, look what the German sons-of-bitches are doing."

The red line was only about a hundred miles west of Moscow, just beyond Mozhaisk. It cut off virtually all of the Ukraine and lay frighteningly close to the Volga in the direction of Stalingrad.

"What will we do if they grab our oil, Victor Andreyevich? We'll be lost!"

"The picture is awful," I conceded, "awful! All that any of us can do is to work and work and work. It's a good thing lend-lease should begin to flow faster now. . . ."

"Lend-lease!" Utkin exclaimed irritably. "A second front is what's needed! But the capitalist bastards keep dawdling. A lot they care how much Russian blood is spilled! We're paying plenty for their lend-lease. . . ."

Mobilization had long been in force on a total scale unmatched in any other belligerent country. Manpower in industry and on the farms was depleted just when the need for output was greatest. I sat at the precise point in the government where this calamitous picture was most clearly visible. Our fighting men ranged from sixteen to fifty-six. The last pretenses of genuine medical examinations and exemptions because of helpless dependents were dropped, by an order from Stalin himself which was never made public. Tens of thousands of veterans were rushed back to the front lines before their wounds were half-healed. Boys and girls of school age, the mothers of small children, even women from farms already stripped of their men, were rounded up for work in factories.

In this tightening manpower crisis, the compulsory labor of millions of prisoners was a vital, and often the most vital, factor in rescuing Soviet military economy. This truth must be faced, whatever its unpleasant implications. There was an ever-increasing output of war supplies by the evacuated factories, enlarged Siberian and Urals plants, newly built industrial units. But few of them were without decisive *cadres* of compulsory labor. Those people abroad who talk excitedly of the ultimate Russian victory as proof of "the success of the Soviet system" would be

closer to the truth if they glorified the success of large-scale state peonage.

With free labor drained by the armed services, our industry became more and more dependent upon the vast armies of prisoners, their ranks now swelled to unprecedented size by war arrests. In official circles twenty millions became the accepted estimate of this labor reservoir. The estimate did not include the boys and girls from 14 to 16 forcibly torn away from their parents and assigned to regions and industries in which manpower shortages were sharpest.

The war industries of the U.S.S.R., like those of Germany, rested primarily on slave labor. The main difference was in the fact that Berchtesgaden enslaved conquered foreigners whereas the Kremlin enslaved its own people. At a time when hunger stalked the land, the horrible conditions under which the prisoners lived and labored can readily be imagined. They were "expendables" and the N.K.V.D. did not have to account for casualties.

With the outbreak of war, the Armaments and Munitions Commissariats had been placed under control of Beria, Commissar of the N.K.V.D., who was also Assistant Chairman of the Sovnarkom and a member of the State Defense Committee. This amounted to putting them under control of the secret police. The nominal Commissars, Oustinov and Vannikov, knew what it meant; so did everyone else, down to the lowliest official. They would have preferred a quick death to the righteous anger of Beria and his organization. Everyone in the plants and offices and institutions directly or indirectly connected with armaments and munitions was gripped by dread fear.

Beria was no engineer. He was placed in control for the precise purpose of inspiring deadly fear. I often asked myself—as others assuredly did in their secret hearts—why Stalin had decided to take this step. I could find only one plausible answer. It was that he lacked faith in the patriotism and national honor of the Russian people and was therefore compelled to rely primarily on the whip. Beria was his whip.

That same lack of faith was manifest in most other industries. Their civilian leaders were superseded by military leaders, or at least persons clothed with military titles and authority. Railroad transport, for instance, was put under the direction of General Khrouliov, Stalin's deputy in the Commissariat of Defense. Acting in concert with the Transport Administration of the N.K.V.D., Khrouliov introduced complete military discipline, substituting unabridged fear for patriotic cooperation throughout the transport system.

In the same way Malishev, an Assistant Chairman of the Sovnarkom and an engineer by profession, was raised to the rank of General and put in command of the tank industry, over the head of the civilian commissar. Military titles were bestowed also on factory directors and other crucial figures in this industry, so that a military regime quickly displaced the normal administration.

The commissariats under Beria's direction, of course, absorbed the largest share of the available slave-labor forces. But there was enough to

spare for all departments of national economy. I know from extensive personal observation that few industrial enterprises were without slave contingents and that in dozens of them coerced labor was the principal or the sole reliance.

While in the Sovnarkom I heard a good deal about the special problems posed by the concentration camps and prisons in evacuating territory as the Germans gained ground. It was even more important to remove this slave population than the free citizens. Their labor power was an economic value worth saving, but more important, these prisoners could hardly be trusted to love the Soviet regime and might prove helpful to the Germans. Another consideration, without doubt, was purely political—the apprehension that through the prisoners the outside world might learn some of the monstrous secrets of the extent and nature of the Soviet slave system.

Some of us in the Sovnarkom knew of episodes in which prisoners were killed on a mass scale when it became clear that they could not be evacuated. This happened in Minsk, Smolensk, Kiev, Kharkov, in my native Dniepropetrovsk, in Zaparozhe. One such episode has remained with me in detail. In the tiny Kabardino-Balkar Soviet "autonomous republic" in the Caucasus, near the city of Nalchik, there were a molybdenum *combinat* of the N.K.V.D. operated with convict labor. When the Red Army retreated from this area, several hundred prisoners, for technical transport reasons, could not be evacuated in time. The director of the *combinat*, by order of the Commissar of the Kabardino-Balkar N.K.V.D., Comrade Anokhov, machine-gunned the unfortunates to the last man and woman. After the area was liberated from the Germans, Anokhov received his reward, becoming President of its Council of People's Commissars, the highest office in the autonomous region.

In pressing commissariats for speedy output, I was continually balked by manpower shortages at critical points. People's Commissars knew the situation better than I did; they frequently asked Pamfilov for additional manpower from the N.K.V.D. reserves and he in turn made demands on the N.K.V.D. for working hands to supply this or that key factory; sometimes he put the problems up directly to Vosnessensky, Molotov, Beria. The Central Administration of forced labor camps—known as GULAG—was headed by the N.K.V.D. General Nedosekin, one of Beria's assistants. Nedosekin received orders for slave contingents from the State Defense Committee over the signatures of Molotov, Stalin, Beria and other members and acted accordingly.

I recall vividly an interview which I arranged on Utkin's orders with one of the top administrators of GULAG. He was to supply a certain commissariat some hundreds of prisoners for a rush assignment. We were under terrific pressure from Pamfilov, who was, in turn, of course, being pushed from higher up and I had summoned the GULAG official for a showdown on this manpower.

"But Comrade Kravchenko, be reasonable," he interrupted my speech. "After all, your Sovnarkom is not the only one howling for workers. The State Defense Committee needs them, Comrade Mikoyan makes life miserable for us, Malenkov and Vosnessensky need workers, Voroshilov is call-

ing for road builders. Naturally everyone thinks his own job is the most important. What are we to do? The fact is *we haven't as yet fulfilled our plans for imprisonments.* Demand is greater than supply."

Plans for imprisonments! The fantastic, cold-blooded cynicism of the phrase still makes me shudder. What made it more uncanny was the fact that this official was entirely unconscious of the frightfulness of his remark —the seizure and enslavement of human beings had become a routine affair in his life. Of course, he did not mean that arrests were actually planned to meet labor demands. He was merely complaining, in Soviet lingo, about the fact that the multi-million armies of forced labor were not enough to meet all requests.

The magnitude of child labor in Russia has for some reason remained entirely unknown outside the country. Even within our frontiers it was surrounded with a good deal of secrecy and, of course, disguised in hypocritical slogans. The essence of the system, stripped of verbal camouflage, is compulsion. Millions of children are taken from their homes against their own or their parents' will and impressed into industries on a "mobilization" basis without consulting their preferences. It would be wrong to credit the development wholly to the war, since it was initiated in 1940 and, as is evident from dispatches, has even been intensified since the end of the conflict.

The first decree for the mobilization of children was issued in October, 1940. It provided for the immediate enlistment of from 800,000 to one million city and village children from fourteen to seventeen for industrial training. Besides the compulsory mobilization, volunteer enlistments were permitted. The fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds were mostly told off for more qualified jobs, requiring two years' training. Six months was the term for less skilled trades, for which children sixteen and seventeen were earmarked.

Having completed these terms, according to the decree, the young people would be assigned to plants, mines, building projects, other undertakings at the discretion of the Administration of Labor Reserves for a period of four years. Though surrounded with fine slogans, the procedure amounted to a conscription of child labor. Children were torn from the arms of their mothers and fathers, "for their own good," of course.

By 1943 the child labor contingents were raised to two million a year. The cruel scenes of separation, with youngsters sobbing and struggling, with relatives wailing and lamenting, became more and more familiar in the stricken land. The conscripts were put into uniforms, housed in government barracks and subjected to rigid discipline and a virtually military regimen. Their time was apportioned for work, study and physical training along lines calculated to turn them not merely into obedient but into fanatic servants of the Soviet superstate. Political indoctrination was naturally the important consideration in their training.

Even before the war, when I was still working at the Glavtrubostal plant in Moscow, I saw in various factories large groups of the children who had been forcibly wrenched from their homes. I came to know the whole system at close range. The young conscripts were awakened by bugle

call or drums at five-thirty for military drill. Then they had breakfast and by seven were at their work benches, girls as well as boys, in accordance with the spartan principles prevailing in their education as robots of the state.

A touch of macabre irony was added to this regimentation by placing the head of the All-Soviet trade unions, Nikolai Shvernik, a member of the Politburo, in political control of the undertaking. The chief of the Labor Reserve Administration, which was in charge of training the young conscripts and which assigned them to posts in various parts of the country in accordance with the needs of the state, was Maskatov, one of the secretaries of Shvernik's trade unions.

Five times in the course of the war the government made new mobilizations, bringing the aggregate of these uniformed boys and girls to nine millions. In addition, hundreds of thousands of boys, some of them as young as twelve and thirteen, were herded into newly established military schools, to be trained as career officers for the Army, in the same way that the others were being molded for proletarian careers.

The military trainees were largely volunteers, but hordes of war orphans, partly drawn from children's homes and partly from the *bezprizorni* or homeless waifs, were used to fill quotas. In addition, parents unable to feed their children are tempted to send the boys to the military schools: in effect an enlistment for life. Higher education as well as the three senior classes in high school are now open only to those who can pay the tuition fees; the decision imposing tuitions was made, if the Kremlin is to be believed, "in view of the heightened level of the national well-being of the toilers. . . ." Many families, unable to pay the fees, see the military career as the best chance for their sons to escape from the exploited ranks of the working class.

If the system of child industrial conscription continues, and there is every indication that it will, the Soviet state by 1960 should have at its disposal from thirty to forty million workers trained on this regimented basis. It will be a new kind of "proletariat." Home influences reminiscent of a freer past and intellectual influences beyond those prescribed by the authorities will have been reduced to a minimum. Fully indoctrinated with Communist tenets and the Stalinist theories of world revolution, they will be people without a memory of personal freedom, willing or unwilling, of the state. These morally and politically maimed Russians will represent a formidable force in the hands of the regime, whether for use at home or in foreign adventures.

This carefully conditioned body of citizens will be supplemented by perhaps twenty million N.K.V.D. forced-labor prisoners, and by a huge standing army of career soldiers and officers, trained from childhood on the basis of Stalinism solely for defense of the Soviet set-up, over and above the ordinary conscript forces and military reserves. Nor should it be forgotten that tens of millions of other children meanwhile will have been indoctrinated in the ordinary Soviet schools, where devotion to the regime and its methods holds first place in the curriculum.

The mental picture of this mobilized humanity, nightmarish in scale,

was constantly before me as I negotiated for manpower at the behest of various commissariats, in the effort to fulfill urgent production plans. It seemed to me the closest approach in human terms to the anthill or the beehive. The fact that it was embellished with hypocrisies about the dignity of labor and service to the "socialist" collective, and administered by "working-class leaders" like the slave-master Shvernik, made the picture even more monstrous in my eyes. My "rotten liberalism," clearly, was too deep to be cured.

3

I became conscious of our tragic deficiencies in war supplies almost at the outset. A conference in the Kremlin called by one of Stalin's most powerful assistants, Alexei Kasygin, underlined the facts for me. Because the agenda covered many items centered in my department, Utkin wanted me at his elbow, under instructions not to speak in that august gathering unless I was spoken to.

Kasygin represented the Politburo in the control of five commissariats and was also in charge of the problems of Military Engineering Armament. Long before one in the morning, when the conference was scheduled, the five People's Commissars are on hand in the large reception room. We are somewhat relaxed, the official masks dropped for the moment. These people know each other intimately, even too intimately; the *vlast*, after all, is a closely-knit world. There are pleasantries, some leg-pulling, an exchange of gossip.

Comrade Ginsburg, Commissar for Construction, a fat little man with a bald head and thick eyeglasses, sits in a corner, quietly drinking tea and chewing cookies. A tall man wearing a colored Russian blouse under his jacket is munching an apple; this is Akimov, Commissar for Textiles. I follow his example and dig into the large fruit bowl. Commissar Liubimov, head of Light Industry, winks at me. He is famous as a wit and practical joker.

"How long will you torture us here?" Liubimov addresses one of Kasygin's men. "I want to eat—bacon and eggs, for instance. And a glass of vodka to wash it down wouldn't hurt either."

"Yes, you'll need strength tonight," the other replies, laughing. "You'll get hell. Better prepare yourself."

Everyone joins in the laughter, except Comrade Sosnin, Commissar of Building Materials, a tall man with a gaunt and gloomy face. The gloom is understandable: his is a thankless job, his commissariat "gets hell" from the bosses as a matter of course at every conference. The contrast to Sosnin's chronic dejection is provided by the cheerful Okopov, Commissar of Machine Construction. Only a little while ago he had been merely the director of a factory in the Urals. Now he is a People's Commissar and reputed to be a court favorite of Mikoyan. His rapid rise in the official firmament is generally credited to his success in producing a new rocket gun, known as a *katusha* and still wrapped in great secrecy.

Okopov is an undersized Armenian with graying hair, a cunning little face and fine eyes.

Then Marshal Vorobiov arrives, accompanied by General Kaliagin. Vorobiov is Stalin's assistant on combat engineering troops and supplies. Since his problems also clear through my Sovnarkom department, we are already acquainted and he greets me warmly. We need one another and both he and Kaliagin are aware how earnestly I'm working to meet the needs of the front. In the midst of the chatter and the tea drinking, our minds are on the big oak doors leading into Alexei Kasygin's chambers. At last these doors are opened.

"Alexei Nikolayevich invites you to the conference," a secretary announces.

A hush descends. Smiles fade out. Everyone assumes his most official mask. In Kasygin's presence we are only one short step removed from the Beloved Leader himself. The room is vast and high-ceilinged, a perfect oval in shape. Portraits of the entire Politburo are evenly spaced around the cream-colored walls. A large radio receiver of foreign make attracts my attention; ordinary mortals are not allowed to possess radios during the war. The conference table, covered with green baize, is large enough to accommodate thirty people.

Kasygin, at the head of the table, wears foreign-made clothes. His expression is grim and his features are as eloquent of sleeplessness and fatigue as my own. He answers the greetings of the Commissars and the Generals with curt nods.

"Be seated," he commands. "The head of GVIUK will report."

GVIUK is the abbreviation of the department under Marshal Vorobiov, who stands up to speak. The fact that he has not been addressed by his name and his title is not lost on any of us, least of all on the Marshal. It's a gruff indication that Kasygin is in a bad mood. We can expect fireworks.

Marshal Vorobiov talks for about fifteen minutes, from a sheaf of notes. He cites figures, more figures. It's a black picture he draws of deficit supplies. There are no motorboats for river crossings, he says, and this is costing us thousands of lives. There are no prefabricated bridges, no mines to slow up the enemy advance, no motorized repair shops, no telephone wire and instruments, no plain stoves for trenches; there are even no axes and shovels for the infantry.

Kasygin's eyes are on the pad before him and he doodles in impatience and irritation. The muscles of his face twitch nervously. *Why is there nothing to counter a satanically efficient and mechanized enemy?* my mind keeps repeating. *Why did we squander those two years of peace?* As he proceeds with the statistics, the Marshal's feelings break through the military crust. There is a catch in his throat as he exclaims:

"People are dying by the thousand at the front this very minute! Why can't we provide them with ordinary shovels and axes, with cutters for barbed wire? Our boys make bridges of their bleeding bodies because they haven't the tools to cut the wire! Comrades, it's shameful, shameful! We have no lanterns—never mind flashlights, just simple kerosene lanterns.

Eight times in the last few months Comrade Stalin has personally ordered these lanterns, but the front still hasn't got them. We are without camouflage equipment. I plead with you comrades who stand at the head of industry, in the name of the simple soldier at the front."

"It's all very clear," Kasygin says in a tense voice, as the Marshal sits down. "What kind of lanterns do you refer to?"

A colonel sitting beside the Marshal lifts a primitive round lantern, a metal frame with glass windows.

"And we can't manufacture this trifle?" Kasygin exclaims angrily.

It happens that I am acquainted with this very problem. With Utkin's permission I speak up.

"Permit me to explain, Alexei Nikolayevich. Production of lanterns is slowed up because we have no sheet metal, no stamping machines, no glass of the proper size and quality. The big sheet-metal plant evacuated from Novomoskovsk is not yet in working order. The glass we can get only from Krasnoyarsk. Perhaps Comrade Sosnin can tell us why it isn't forthcoming."

"The lanterns will be made!" Kasygin suddenly shouts and pounds the table. "I tell you all this criminal inertia must be ended! If I have to rip the lazy hides off the back of scoundrels, war supplies will come through as Comrade Stalin demands! Sosnin—report!"

The lugubrious Sosnin seems crushed. He talks in a hopeless monotone. The machines in Krasnoyarsk are in bad shape, the power station doesn't work, there is no qualified manpower. . . .

Kasygin calls on Akimov and others. Hour after hour the conference grinds on. Every report deepens the prevailing despair. The "bottlenecks" in materials, machines, means of transport seem to grow more numerous—an impenetrable forest of "bottlenecks." Kasygin no longer talks, no longer ask questions. He shrieks, orders, fixes quotas and dates without consulting anyone—and all the People's Commissars, the Generals, fidget guiltily, like a lot of schoolboys being dressed down by a wrathful headmaster. We avoid looking at one another. We all know, and Kasygin knows, that the deficiencies are real, that none of us can perform miracles.

At one point, in the midst of a furious outburst against Commissar Ginsburg, a telephone rings. Obviously Kasygin recognizes the signal. His tone, his facial expression, his very posture change abruptly, become soft, obsequious. "Yes, Josef Vissarionovich. . . . Of course, Josef Vissarionovich. . . . It will be done! . . . Yes, I'll take immediate measures . . ." he says. Stalin! A tremor of awe and respect sweeps through the men around the table. We all sit as if frozen into statues. Kasygin replaces the receiver quietly, carefully, as if it were made of spun glass. It takes him fully five minutes to swing back into his angry mood of command and abuse.

It's four-thirty in the morning before we are released. Every one of us has been loaded with instructions: half a million camouflage uniforms, a million shovels, a hundred thousand field telephone reels—staggering numbers, dozens of them. We all know that the assignments are impossible; if they can be met only by 75 per cent, there will be rejoicing and

bonuses and Orders of Merit. We all know, too, that they are deliberately set higher in order to squeeze the last drop of effort from industry and that the needs are far greater than the plans.

At home, I climb the dark staircase to the top floor, feel my way in the dark corridor to our door. Irina stirs. Why am I so late, she asks sleepily; anything wrong? No, no, go to sleep . . . just another conference. The dawn is breaking. . . .

I would attend dozens such Kremlin conferences called by Stalin's deputies: Vosnessensky, Saburov, others. The procedure and the temper of the gatherings were almost exactly as in this Kasygin meeting. Stalin's orders, directives, demands, defying difficulties and insisting on results, dominated all of them.

CHAPTER XXV

THE TWO TRUTHS

As DEPARTMENT head in the Sovnarkom I did not earn half as much as I used to earn in industry, and I received none of the windfall bonuses which factory administrations awarded themselves. But money was meaningless in a time of fearful shortages. What mattered was the size of your rations and the shops in which you were permitted to buy.

And in these respects I was now in the highest, fattest category. I had access to the special stores ("closed distributories" in the pompous official lingo) as well as the shoemaking and tailoring establishments reserved for the *vlast*. In these places I met the *élite* of the Party, the government, the police, the Kremlin; sometimes their wives, chauffeurs and domestics.

Not one Russian in a thousand suspected that such abundant shops existed and, indeed, the authorities operated them discreetly, as far as possible out of sight of the masses. There was usually a line-up of elegant motorcars outside our "closed" food store, for instance, but few passersby knew what they were there for. No ordinary Muscovite got a glimpse, let alone a taste, of the lend-lease and home-made luxury piled up in that shop.

Our purchases, of course, were limited to rationed quotas. But these were far above the average and included items the very memory of which had almost faded out in the general population. I belonged to the category of families exempted from the pressures of *golod* and *kholod*, hunger and cold, which held our people in their merciless grip. The country suffered as cruelly as in the worst civil war years—this after a quarter of a century of "socialist construction" and several successful Five Year Plans.

My monthly *payok* or rations included bacon, canned goods, butter, sugar, flour, salt pork—all brought in from the United States—as well as Soviet fish, fowl, smoked fish, vegetables, vodka, wine, cigarets. Fifteen thousand rubles couldn't buy in the black markets what I carried off in my automobile for about 150 rubles from the "closed" shop, its entrance guarded by a militiaman. If, despite that, there were many days in which my wife went hungry, what was the plight of the average person? Special tailors, working exclusively for the highest officialdom, made suits to order for us out of American and British lend-lease cloth at a time when a second-hand garment fetched thousands of rubles in the open market.

Now and then Moscow clothes shops of the "open" variety—unrationed and therefore dizzily high-priced—had brief flurries of prosperity. The news that consignments of dresses, suits, children's garments had arrived spread like wildfire. Long queues formed instantly, despite the fact that the simplest cotton housedress might cost 500 to 1000 rubles,

a pair of socks 50 to 75 rubles, a quite ordinary suit or overcoat 2500 rubles and more. Provided with big bundles of the worn, ragged and often filthy banknotes, people stood for hours, praying that the stocks would hold out until their turn came.

Everyday goods like thread, soap, matches, electric bulbs, table- and kitchenware had virtually disappeared. A pint of kerosene cost 200 rubles in the open market. Even in the center of Moscow electric current was available in residential houses only two or three hours a night; those who couldn't afford kerosene—and that meant the vast majority of people—sat in total darkness behind their blacked-out windows.

In this winter of 1942–43 people burned their furniture, their books, their cherished music scores, anything that might yield a few minutes of warmth. They tore boards from their floors and beams from their roofs to keep their children from freezing to death. People knocked at the doors of starving neighbors of a morning to ask in weak voices: "Vanya—or Maria—are you still alive?"

Irina and I installed a good iron stove in our place, and through the Sovnarkom I obtained some wood. Now and then we spared a bit for our neighbors, though this was a breach of the rules.

Sometimes I wondered whether the evidences of my comparative affluence were not hard on the nerves and tempers of these neighbors. Irina did her cooking on a kerosene stove in the privacy of our own apartment. Though we shared the largesse with friends, we consumed our *payok* with a certain embarrassment. This, after all, was a time when the sight of men and women falling dead of starvation on Moscow streets became too commonplace to attract crowds.

But the dead were buried, the half-dead groaned in their cold homes and the living struggled on. In line of duty I visited a great many factories where output was lagging. Invariably I found that food shortage was one of the main reasons. Where the administration was able to provide at least one fairly nourishing meal, the difference showed up in the tempo of production. "Give us more food and we'll give you more goods," the executives always pleaded. "Our people haven't the strength to meet your deadlines."

Once Pamfilov sent me by automobile to the town of Solnechogorsk, not far from Moscow, to inspect two factories. The milling of plain flour was being held up by the lack of sieves, requiring extra-fine wire which might be manufactured in those factories. I was accompanied by a young stranger, introduced to me as an engineer but obviously an agent of the Economic Department of the N.K.V.D.—not an insulting lack of faith in my honesty but a routine procedure.

The drive took us across an area held for some time by the Germans and devastated by bombs and artillery fire. On both sides of the road we saw smashed German tanks and cars. We passed through villages and hamlets where not a single house was intact. Ghostlike women and children, tattered, vacant-eyed, crawled out of the ruins, and stretched out trembling hands. We had taken along a food package prepared by the Sovnarkom kitchen; but we gave away all of it long before we reached

our destination. At many points we encountered large gangs of prisoners under heavy guard working on road repairs.

Solnechogorsk itself had escaped undamaged. I was expected by the factory managers, who proved eager to cooperate. They agreed that their machinery could be converted to make the required wire, but all of them told me the same grim story of acute hunger.

"Our people are willing to work," one of them said. "As you see, we have only very old men, very young children and women who have no factory experience. But they're willing. They remain at their jobs for days at a time if necessary, sleeping in the factory here. But unless they get at least the ordinary bread rations, as in other cities, they won't have the strength to continue."

"Why don't they get the same rations?" I asked in astonishment.

"Because we're located in a farm district. Theoretically, we should rustle our supplies in the countryside. But that's theory. In fact, the peasants themselves are starving. Probably you've seen them along the roads."

My young companion was as disturbed by the picture of misery in those factories as I was. He agreed with me, as we drove back, that any proposal for extracting production from Solnechogorsk was worthless without solving the food problem.

The bosses were away for their evening siesta when I got to my office. By the time they returned, I had a detailed project of a government decision for the immediate conversion and exploitation of the factories drafted. Toward midnight Pamfilov received me. In the presence of Utkin he read my draft. "Good . . . good . . . excellent," he nodded his glistening head. But suddenly his face clouded.

"What is this? 'Five hundred grams of bread a day for the workers and their families. . . . ' "

"Yes," I said eagerly. "That's basic. Those people are plain hungry."

"Strike out this point in the project," Pamfilov ordered.

"But Constantine Gavrilovich, I beg you to leave that in the draft. I admit that a few of the workers may have their own gardens, or relatives among the peasants, but that doesn't help. Those people are doing work and should get the workers' rations."

"I'm as sorry for them as you are, Comrade Kravchenko, but the point must be crossed out."

Before the revised project was sent to Molotov for action, I made another plea to Pamfilov that we emphasize the need of bread to guarantee the operations of the Solnechogorsk factories. The head of the Sovnarkom looked at me with unconcealed irritation.

"Kravchenko, look here. Are you a social worker or a Bolshevik? Humanitarianism is a bad guide in making state decisions. Learn from Comrade Stalin—love the people but sacrifice their needs when essential!"

The fact that the two plants, though provided with sufficient raw materials, did not produce half the fine wire scheduled did not surprise me.

Another journey remains even more sharply etched on my memory. Only a modern Dante in a pessimistic moment could evoke in words that

picture of the secret underground factory of the Commissariat of Munitions, operated chiefly with slave labor.

Beyond Podolsk, deep in the Moscow province, only people with special permits were allowed on the train that took us through a thickly forested region. N.K.V.D. officers examined our credentials several times. The train moved slowly, and repeatedly we saw from the windows large numbers of prisoners—there is no mistaking the identity of these unfortunates—cutting and piling up trees and dragging them to the railway lines. Finally we stopped at a dead end of this new rail spur and alighted.

On a clearing stood a munitions plant. In the woods beyond it, invisible, the narrow entrances to their subterranean chambers elaborately camouflaged, were the vast underground shops where thousands of prisoners and free laborers filled grenades, bombs, mines and other munitions with explosives. The entire area embracing this subterranean world was cut off with barbed wire and policed by armed N.K.V.D. guards, some of them accompanied by fierce dogs especially trained for this job.

I had arrived, with a companion, to adjust a conflict between this secret factory and another which supplied some of its materials. After an evening conference with the officials, I was given a room for the night in the plant hotel. Wishing to catch a glimpse of the prisoners going to their work, I arose early. A chilly rain was falling. A little after six I saw a contingent of about four hundred men and women, ten abreast, marching under heavy guard towards the secret workshops.

Through the years I had seen these wretched slaves under all kinds of conditions. I did not suppose I was fated to look on creatures even more tragic than those I had observed in the Urals and in Siberia. Here the horror seemed to have been raised to a more satanic dimension. These faces—of a sickening yellowish color and drained of blood—were shocking death masks. These were walking corpses, hopelessly poisoned by the chemicals with which they worked in a foul purgatory.

Among them were men and women who might have been fifty or more but also young people in their early twenties. They walked in silent dejection, like automatons, looking neither to right nor left. And they were fantastically clad. Many of them wore rubber galoshes, tied to their feet with string; others had bound their feet in rags. Some were in peasant clothes; a few women wore torn astrakhan coats; here and there I noted what remained of good foreign suits. As the grim parade passed the building from which I watched, a woman suddenly collapsed in her tracks. Two guards dragged her off; none of the prisoners paid the slightest attention. They were beyond sympathy, beyond human reactions.

Other such contingents were marching to the underground hell from other directions, from the N.K.V.D. colonies concealed deep in those forests, probably miles away. In the evening I saw a column about twice as long trudging through the rain and mud for the night shift.

I was not allowed to go underground and, indeed, had no stomach for the sight. But from the officials with whom I dealt in the two days there I gathered a sufficiently sharp impression of the piled-up misery and the contempt for human life. The subterranean factory was badly venti-

lated, having been constructed in panicky haste and with total disregard of the health of its workers. A few weeks in its fumes and stinks were enough to poison the human organism forever. The death rate was high; human beings were shoveled in almost as continually as raw chemicals.

The director of the enterprise was a dour-faced Communist who wore an Order and a row of other decorations on his tunic. When I began to ask questions about his workers he looked at me queerly, as if I were inquiring about the health and comfort of a lot of condemned mules.

"Unfortunately there are not many skilled workers among these creatures," he said, "and I have a lot of trouble with them. You ask me what kind of people the prisoners are, politicals or criminals. That doesn't interest me; it's the business of the N.K.V.D. which provides me with work-hands. All I know is that they're enemies of the people."

For months I could not drive the impression from my consciousness. It colored my feelings even when my mind and my hands were busy with other things. And in the years to come, in a distant country, the memory sometimes would obtrude itself suddenly, persistently, when I heard Americans declaim about the wonders of Soviet communism. I could not help thinking to myself: *If only I could put you fools in that underground factory for two days, no more than two days, you'd be singing another tune!*

2

The one branch of national defense on which the Kremlin had lavished its best men, energies and rhetoric for a dozen years was aviation. Yet our backwardness in this domain became sufficiently clear to me from documents signed by Stalin and Molotov which passed through my department.

Mountains of steel, copper and aluminum had been turned over to Hitler under the economic agreement that accompanied the humiliating pact of "friendship." A large part of what remained had been captured by the invading armies. Aeronautical factories in Kharkov, Kiev, Zaparozhe, Taganrog and other cities had been only partly evacuated; the rest had fallen to the enemy. The result was that our aviators in some cases were flying in aircraft made of plywood. A few incendiary bullets sufficed to finish them off. The casualties in the Russian air forces were higher, I learned, than in those of any other belligerent nation. To make up for the shortage of planes, our pilots flew more missions per day than those of any other nation. The pressure on them was relieved, of course, with the arrival of lend-lease aircraft.

In the autumn of 1942 Stalin issued an urgent secret command for the immediate manufacture of a fire-retarding substance to be used to coat all planes. It was a resinous mixture, based on vinyl chloride, suggested by the Institute of Aviation Materials. Stalin attached the greatest importance to this undertaking which, at its productive end, was concentrated in my department.

There followed weeks of conferences with the heads of the chemical industries and with various aviation bureaus. The suggested formula, it

turned out, was highly tentative and incomplete. Ultimately the leaders of the Institute were publicly rewarded for their achievement, but if the truth were known the rewards should have been given to humble chemical engineers and ordinary workers who toiled day and night developing the process. The whole effort, unfortunately, was largely lost motion.

"Assuming that we do succeed in covering the planes with this stuff," I once asked an aviation general in my own office, "will it really help?"

He looked around, as if to make sure there were no strange ears, leaned closer and whispered:

"About as much as ice-cream for a dead man. . . . If hit by the newest German incendiary bullets, the plane will burn like down. Between ourselves, the whole thing is psychological. It may step up morale, for a while at least, among our fliers. They're heroes, every one of them, but they're only human; the use of reconverted civilian aircraft and planes with wooden parts for military purposes is hardly good for their nerves."

Dozens of kinds of instruments, special apparatus and materials had to be manufactured at a forced tempo and under the most unfavorable conditions to bring our aviation into fighting readiness for the impending winter campaigns. The magnitude of our losses made me heartsick.

"All our aviation will be paralyzed this winter unless these special apparatus and instruments are produced, quickly and in the right amounts," Marshal Novikov wrote to Molotov in a secret report that came into my hands.

When I was in charge of plants in the Ukraine, the Urals, Siberia, I used to be exasperated by the incessant calls and telegrams from Moscow and other centers urging speed and more speed. Now, by a turn of the wheel, I was at the sending end. I was continually phoning, telegraphing, begging and demanding. I knew too intimately how annoying this was and often how futile. Yet I persevered. Time was of the essence, and I was myself under relentless pressure from superiors.

Was production held up by lack of some vital material, equipment or manpower? I roused the commissariats which produced the material or equipment, the organizations which controlled manpower—if necessary I put the State Defense Committee, the Party organs, the proper Kremlin officials on the job—and somehow what was needed was provided.

The extraordinary part of it is that the apparatus for which Marshal Novikov pleaded did come through, in the quantity and of the quality prescribed in Stalin's order on the subject. Control of airplane manufacture was concentrated in Molotov's hands, but most of the orders were signed by Stalin himself. To speed up output I drafted plans for supplying workers in certain plants with bread and hot meals, and they were put into effect when Stalin signed them. We rushed oxygen balloons from Gorki to Moscow by automobile. We flew calcium carbide across the front lines from Erivan to Moscow. And in the end the necessary apparatus was produced. Soon, under Kremlin instructions, I was drafting the project of a decree on rewards for those who had contributed most effectively to the fulfilment of the task. The decree, essentially as I had composed it, was published in the press. In a few days Marshal Novikov called me up.

"Comrade Kravchenko," he said in a voice vibrant with feeling, "I want to thank you in the name of our aviators. I have told a lot of them about your devoted work and I want you to know we are all grateful."

The problem of reels for field telephones, too, was a chronic headache. The responsibility for the supply of means of communication at the fronts was centered in Comrade Saburov, one of Stalin's deputies, and my contacts were therefore largely with his office. Specific directives, however, were signed by Stalin personally. At a long night session in the Kremlin, presided over by Saburov and attended by an array of commissars, production plans were discussed and checked. Because there was no sheet metal, it was decided, after long arguments, to make the reels of wood, despite the heated objections of the military spokesmen.

About a month later, representatives of all the commissariats involved and the appropriate military officials, sat in my office. One after another they reported on results. Only one man, an assistant commissar, seemed cheerful.

"Our plans for means of communication," he announced, "have been over-fulfilled—105 per cent!"

That there was something askew with the picture I knew immediately. His commissariat had delivered only a negligible quantity of finished products and instruments. In perplexity not unmixed with anger I insisted that he explain the miraculous figure. He did. It appeared quickly that some parts of the apparatus had been produced up to 270 per cent of requirements, while other elements were available only to the extent of 30 per cent. His proud announcement referred to an *average*. It represented a typical bureaucratic statistical achievement. Actually, of course, the lowest figure determined the number of full sets assembled. His commissariat at best had done only 30 per cent of its job.

Everyone laughed at the man's discomfiture. But it was no laughing matter. As the generals present explained, inadequate telephonic supplies were costing us thousands of lives and sometimes losing battles. The "bottleneck," it appeared, was in the manufacture of those reels. The factories were far behind schedule even with the wooden substitutes decided upon in the Kremlin.

It was in this connection that I visited a wood-products plant on the outskirts of Moscow to check personally why the spools were not being delivered. The director explained that he did not have enough skilled labor; only a few people, I saw, were working on this order.

"And what's going on in here?" I asked, walking into another shop, where production seemed in full blast.

What I saw made me livid with rage. About a hundred and fifty men were engaged in making elegant furniture: divans, desks, mirrored dressers, capacious armchairs, mostly of the best mahogany.

"No skilled workers you say! But here you're wasting them on fancy furniture. Divans—while men are dying in the field! It's a crime and I warn you I'll make a scandal!"

The director did not seem alarmed. He shrugged his shoulders and I thought I detected a suppressed smile at the corners of his mouth.

"I don't blame you for getting mad," he said. "In fact, I'm pretty mad myself. But I'm only a little man. What can I do except obey *big men*? Come to my office, I'll show you."

In his office he produced the records. The furniture had been ordered by top Party, government and Red Army officials, among them, I recall, Vassili Pronin, chairman of the Moscow city Soviet; General Moukhin and Shcherbakov, Secretary of the Central Committee.

I rushed back to the Sovnarkom, still in a temper, and barged into Utkin's office. I began to lay the facts before him. He could hardly credit his ears.

"Making fancy armchairs instead of war supplies ordered by Comrade Stalin!" he exclaimed. "It's outrageous! Those responsible should be put into prison!"

"Agreed—and I'm happy you feel as I do, Andrei Ivanovich! But the director showed me he's making these civilian goods for Comrade Pronin, Shcherbakov, General Moukhin——"

Utkin's expression changed instantly. The brief fury faded out of his eyes.

"So? For Shcherbakov . . . I see," he muttered, squirming. "Yes . . . hmm . . . quite a problem. I suppose the comfort of our leaders is also a war priority. . . . Let me think it over."

He thought it over for a long time, while the factory continued to work on furniture, and the Red Army pleaded for telephone reels, butt ends for rifles, etc. Several times, not without a touch of malice, I admit, I revived the question, but without results. I did not dare to go over Utkin's head to Saburov, and Utkin obviously had no wish to make political enemies.

In the War Engineering Department it was inevitable that I should be initiated into one of the best-guarded and most distressing secrets of Russia at war. It was a secret that weighed heavily on all who shared it. Only the victorious end of the war makes it possible to speak of it.

The fraction of the Russian population equipped with gas masks was small. Even in Moscow only about every fourth person had one; in the rest of the country the situation was far worse; the great majority of villages and smaller towns had none at all. But that was only half the tragedy. The horrifying secret was that few of these masks, whether in the soldiers' kits or in the possession of civilians, were any good. The official estimate was that at least 65 per cent of the masks produced during the war were utterly useless. The principal reason was that, lacking rubber, we were obliged to use a rubberized canvas which failed to seal the wearer's face hermetically. There was also a serious lack of sheet iron, glass and other items entering into mask manufacture.

If the Germans had known this, it is not unlikely that they would have unloosed chemical warfare on a terrifying scale. If they did know it, then we must assume that the warnings of ruthless poison-gas reprisals issued by Roosevelt and Churchill saved millions of my people, on the battlefields and in the population centers.

Once, facing a high military official in the chemical warfare section, I asked him point blank why he accepted these masks.

"But what is the alternative?" he replied, shrugging his shoulders in a gesture of despair. "No masks at all! In this way we have at least the psychological or morale value."

Late one night I happened to be with Utkin as he was preparing to go home. I saw him go to the safe and take out several new, well-made gas masks. Apparently my face mirrored my thoughts.

"Don't look so accusingly," he smiled. "These are for my wife and children. Who knows when it will come. . . . There's no reason for panic, but common sense requires vigilance."

"But Andrei Ivanovich, why don't you use the masks being issued to the public?"

"Are you crazy?" he exclaimed, and then, placatingly, "I'll see about a couple for you and your wife."

With respect to gas shelters the situation for the general population was even worse. The few built could, in case of a gas assault, have accommodated only a tiny fraction of the people in the big cities and most of them were badly constructed, not hermetically sealed. The smaller towns and villages, of course, possessed no shelters at all.

In Moscow the Kirovskaya station of the subway had been converted into a gas retreat for high officials; and there were shelters in the various commissariats. In our Sovnarkom we had one complete with carpets, a buffet, a library. But this was not much consolation for the ordinary citizen. The picture was no brighter in the matter of anti-chemical war defenses, despite the fact that this phase of the struggle had been assigned by the Politburo to the Special Chemical Troops of the N.K.V.D.

But if we had difficulties with gas masks, field telephones, tank parts, mobile weapons, airplanes, we made up for it in at least one respect. One night, while I was working on a stack of reports, Utkin asked me to come into his office. There I found him engrossed in what at first looked like a strange game. Laid out on his desk, on chairs, all around, were strips of board covered with cloth of gold and silver.

"Shoulder straps!" he explained happily.

Scattered around the room, also, were artistic sketches of uniforms in all the services, from Marshals down to lieutenants, showing these items in their proper settings. The fact that the shoulder decorations, once hated as a symbol of Tsarist militarism, would be restored had not yet been made public. The decision had been made by the Politburo and in due time would be "confirmed" by the Supreme Soviet. But production of the item was already under way and these were a selection of samples.

"I'm taking them to the Kremlin," Utkin said. "Comrade Stalin personally will pass on them. Aren't they beautiful?"

He was in a playful mood. What would I like to be, he wanted to know—a Marshal? an admiral? He picked the proper epaulettes and put them on my shoulders.

"No, no, these don't quite fit," he said with mock gravity. "Maybe you'll settle for these—a mere colonelcy, but pretty."

"Andrei Ivanovich," I said, "will not this revival of shoulder straps and the new uniforms be accepted by many as a return to Russian imperialism?"

He laughed.

"What a silly notion! Who cares what some idiots at home or abroad think? The hearts under the gilded shoulders will be true Soviet hearts, beating in unison, just as our men are fighting in unison for Comrade Stalin's ideas." He paused and added slowly, for emphasis, "Besides, if some people do assume it marks a return to imperialism, even that may be politically useful. It will make friends for our country in certain circles."

3

The Party Committee in every Soviet organization, large or small, is the heart of the dictatorial power, just as the Special Department, representing the N.K.V.D., is its strong right arm. The Committee acts for the Party members (normally a tiny minority in any Soviet organization) and supervises their ideological purity; it controls the political activities of the organization and guides the political thought of all the employees. But its authority is also in large measure temporal, so to speak. The secretary of the Committee, though he may remain in the background, is the real master. In the final analysis the head of a trust or a factory takes his orders on all political issues from the highest Party functionary.

In the Sovnarkom, too, we had a Party Committee and carried on a great number of purely Party activities. But there was this difference: Since the Sovnarkom is itself the government, deriving its authority from the Politburo and the Central Committee, it was not subordinated to the Party Committee. At the head of our Party Committee stood a veteran Communist, Mironov. He ruled supreme in all matters of "faith," as it were—political morals, analysis of events and the like. But in the actual work of the organization he could not interfere with Pamfilov, Utkin and others who were the temporal chiefs.

Thus it happened that our Party meetings were conducted on a somewhat higher plane than in most places. We rarely touched on specific Sovnarkom problems, applying ourselves to discussion of larger policies and articles of faith. All the responsible posts, of course, were held by Communists and the proportion of Party members even on the lower levels was unusually high. The Party gatherings were therefore very nearly mass meetings of the whole apparatus.

Foreigners who try to understand Stalin's policies or "the Soviet mind" by studying the Soviet press and the Kremlin's public actions usually come up with a truckload of gibberish. Not one in a thousand among them has grasped the Bolshevik idea of "two truths"—one for the masses, for the world at large, and another for the Party faithful, the initiated, the insiders. At a time when a certain line of propaganda or action is being conducted publicly, Party people might be instructed to disregard it or even instructed to believe the exact opposite.

At this critical stage in the war, a "retreat from Leninism"—in form,

not in substance—was considered necessary. "Backward elements" at home and in Eastern Europe had to be pacified with a seeming restoration of religion. The morale values of old-fashioned national patriotism had to be exploited to the limit. Ultimately, though somewhat later, capitalist allies would be placated by "disbanding" the Communist International.

The outside world, and the majority of our own people, accepted all this eagerly as proofs of a change of heart by the Soviet leaders. I was to see articles and books in which this "retreat" was hailed as marking the Kremlin's break with the idea of world revolution. There were even "experts" who announced stupidly that the Soviet Union was edging away from dictatorship and closer to capitalism. They professed to see the democratic and the Soviet totalitarian ways of life moving towards a common ground somewhere in the middle.

Had any one of these experts sat in on our "closed" weekly Party sessions for the higher personnel, he would have been shocked. For us, the "retreat from Leninism" was simply *a temporary tactical maneuver.* The compromise with religion was a humiliating but indispensable concession. Precisely because our Party and regime, in this moment of travail, were forced to compromise, we were exhorted to fortify our devotion to Communism and our inner faith that these tactical retreats were moves in a strategy of Stalinist advance and ultimate victory.

No properly indoctrinated Communist felt that the Party was "lying" in professing one set of policies in public and its very opposite in private. He had no more conscience about it than a general in the field who misleads and disorients the enemy. Until the whole earth has been transformed into a single Soviet Union under the sun of Stalinism, the General Staff of the Revolution—meaning our leaders in the Kremlin—would have to maneuver, now attacking, now lying low, sometimes retreating to consolidate positions, always exploiting the contradictions among capitalist nations. Bourgeois moralizers who prate about double-dealing and perfidy are, to the Bolshevik "realist," just ludicrous leftovers from a dead past and hypocrites to boot.

In the Party work there was no trace of the "profound changes" that had supposedly taken place in the Soviet regime. Except for the fact that the war and its tasks were talked about, a meeting of Party activists was no different now in its political essence, its tone and obsessions, than before the war.

At ten in the evening we foregather for our weekly meeting. Comrade Mironov presides under a huge picture of Lenin; other important comrades are with him on the rostrum. Comrade Yudin, head of government publishing agencies but now representing the Agitation-Propaganda section of the Central Committee of the Party, is our guest tonight. Because we know that he is one of Stalin's foremost theoreticians, we are keyed up to listen attentively. His theme is world affairs. But what he says will not be merely "opinions," in the Western sense. It will represent prescribed beliefs and attitudes from which we dare not deviate—from which, in fact, it would not occur to a faithful Communist to deviate. Yudin will speak with the voice of Stalin, the voice of the Party and the Soviet dictatorship.

But before he begins, another comrade gives us a sketch of the military position. He does not deny the extent of our losses or the magnitude of the danger. Stalingrad is the test. We dare not and we shall not fail. Should Stalingrad fall, should the Germans cross the Volga, we would be cut off from oil; the whole war effort might be paralyzed. But that isn't all:

"Comrades, we must all understand that Stalingrad is not just another city. It is the city named for Stalin, the *vozhd* of world Communism. At Stalingrad two ways of life meet in a death grapple: capitalism in its fascist form and Communism. The armies of Hitler—and the force of the Stalinist idea. As Lenin put it: *kto kovo?* who will conquer whom? The city of Stalin cannot and shall not be given up, whatever the cost. We shall cling to every stone, every brick. Vast reserves of men and materiel are being prepared for this historical duel. The Germans will be drowned in their own blood. The world will know what the beloved name Stalin means. Stalingrad will stand through the centuries as a glorious monument to the genius of our Beloved Leader."

When the applause subsides, Comrade Yudin takes the floor. We listen with every pore of our bodies. Though a Marxist theoretician, he leavens his address with satire. It is his strong suit and he gives us plenty of it, at the expense not only of the Hitler clique, but of the whole rotten, degenerate capitalist world.

In England and America, Yudin tells us, a mighty tide of faith in the Soviet system is rising among the masses. He quotes from Priestley, Laski and others. Neither the Churchills, the Roosevelts nor their socialist and "labor" lackeys can stop it. In England the social fascist Clement Attlee is often the guest of the fascist Lady Astor. Make your own deductions, comrades!

"The English bourgeoisie understands that the war is revolutionizing the masses. It's more important to them to head off that horror than to beat the Germans. But how to do it? The so-called 'Labor Party' must divert the armed masses to keep them from taking power under the leadership of the British Communist Party and the Communist International."

The seeming struggle between Churchill and the Labor opposition, according to Yudin, is therefore just shadow boxing. Both groups are working together to hold down the proletariat and both are ready to sing *God Save the King*.

"As for their attitude to Russia," he declares, "the Laborite leaders love us about as much as we love Hitler."

The quip draws laughter and scattered applause. A thrust at Laborites and other such spurious "democrats" is always good showmanship at a Party session. Turkey and Japan then come in for instalments of Yudin's vitriol. We know, he shouts, that Matsuoko—the man whom Comrade Stalin honored by seeing him off at the railroad station—urged his Mikado to make war on Russia when the Germans were pressing for Moscow, before Pearl Harbor. Japan and its Matsuokos will get what's coming to them after we've disposed of the Hitler gang!

"In Turkey, General Erkilet and a gang of yelping journalists—with

the tacit approval of the government, of course—unloose a wild anti-Soviet campaign. A day of reckoning with these good, sweet neighbors of ours will come, we may be sure. . . .

"I come now to America, comrades. There the Roosevelt policy of playing along with the Soviets as long as it's useful has evoked a strong opposition, as is only natural in the greatest stronghold of capitalism. The opposition is led by former President Herbert Hoover and certain reactionary Senators and other people in the pay of Morgan, Rockefeller and duPont, supported by the fascist and semi-fascist press of Hearst, McCormick and the rest and a large band of mercenary journalists.

"Comical as it may sound to us, these people think that Roosevelt has sold out to the U.S.S.R. and to Communism. They don't understand that Roosevelt, like Attlee, represents the last outpost against inevitable Communism. They don't understand that his war alliance with the U.S.S.R. is just a marriage of convenience. We hate capitalism as much as they hate us. We will never, never retreat from the tasks set before us and before history by Lenin and Stalin!"

Loud hand-clapping confirms that if Americans don't understand it, at least we do.

"Comrades," Yudin resumes, "our war partnership with the capitalist nations must not breed illusions. We must hold fast to fundamentals. There are two worlds. Now and then it is possible to throw a bridge across the gulf that divides them, as we have done in this war. But we know that the bridge must collapse sooner or later. The two worlds of capitalism and Communism cannot forever exist side by side. *Kto kovo?*—who will conquer whom?—remains the great question, now as always. It represents the chief problem of the future.

"As long as we live in a capitalist encirclement we are in danger, comrades. Never forget that. Don't fall into errors of thinking on the basis of lend-lease. It's a bargain, in which we are paying dearly with our sacrifices of Soviet blood and Soviet soil. Do not exaggerate the new and unnatural 'friendship.' Remember always that we Party members are the soldiers of Lenin and Stalin and know how to judge the substance of capitalism."

When Yudin finishes, we all stand up and sing the *Internationale*. Whatever recondite meanings others may read into the "retreats" from Communist doctrine, we on the higher levels of the Communist faith know that they are temporary concessions only. They are changes in the forms of the international Communist movement, not in essence—only fools think they mean a repudiation of the movement.

Ideologically refreshed, we return to our various offices. But the "big boys"—Yudin, Pamfilov and a few others—betake themselves to the buffet for a little physical refreshment. With great relish they devour American lend-lease luxuries while, continuing to discuss the theme of the meeting, they enjoy in anticipation the downfall of the capitalist world.

On a subsequent occasion the lecturer was Vladimir Potiomkin, the well-known Soviet diplomat. His views, of necessity, dovetailed into Yudin's—no one in Soviet Russia, of course, has personal opinions; everyone embellishes or reiterates the prescribed "line." But Potiomkin, as a

specialist in foreign affairs, was more explicit about the future of various European countries. His "opinions," and those of all Central Committee speakers, reflected the theory of the Party.

Where we must retreat to rear positions ideologically, they emphasized, it is only to build new bases for new advances. They regarded it as certain that Communists would enter into the governments of defeated and liberated countries when victory was achieved. For that purpose the reserves of revolutionary force and personnel must be safeguarded and expanded. Capitalism would be attacked from above, through its own governments, and from below, through mass action.

The most galling of the compromises made necessary by war was in relation to religion. The clergy had been permitted to write and enabled to publish a book called *The Truth About Religion in the U.S.S.R.* in which they signalized reconciliation with the Soviet system. Though few people among us attached too much significance to the book, we heard that it created a sensation abroad. With a view to directing our thinking on this whole embarrassing subject, Mironov called the Party activists to his office.

"Comrades," he explained, "we have had to make some concessions to believers, especially as so many of the Red Army soldiers are drawn from backward villages where religion still has a considerable hold. Also, the enemy is making use of our anti-religious attitudes for propaganda purposes, and the improved relations with the Russian Church cuts the ground from under them. Then there is another important consideration: our armies soon will be moving into Slav countries which have not had the benefit of Communist education. Of what value will the Pan-Slav Committee in Moscow be if we continue the old policy with regard to the church?

"Our new religious policy will be valuable in smashing the anti-Soviet propaganda of the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and other religious groups. Therefore do not underestimate the wisdom of our Party's action. We must, in the next period, take a broad view of the problem. We have the chance to draw the Orthodox Church in other countries closer to Russia and make Moscow the Third Rome."

"But Comrade Mironov," one of the men present spoke up, "isn't there a danger that the new generation, which will one day take our place, may be spoiled by religious superstition?"

"Don't worry on that score," he replied, smiling. "There is neither soil nor sap on which religion can feed in the U.S.S.R. After all, the press, theatre, radio, schools, literature, all the forces of the mind are in the Party's sole control. It's clear to everyone that a young man with religious inclinations cannot possibly make a career. If he is not on our side spiritually and politically, there is no place for him. This is our supreme advantage.

"Remember, the Church is separated from the state—and the schools are in the hands of the state. The Comsomols, you may be sure, will be a stronger force than the priests. Are we such idiots that we will turn over the new generation to the priests?"

It was all clear to us—another stratagem for temporary tactical pur-

poses, at home and abroad. It was also clear to us that in discussing the subject with "the masses," we must present the turn in policy as genuine and permanent.

"Even the less developed Party members," Mironov cautioned us, "are not able to understand all that's involved. Great care must be exercised in talking to them about the subject."

When the Communist International was ostensibly abolished, in May, 1943, I was no longer working in the Sovnarkom. But the explanations at closed meetings of important Communists were consistent with what men like Yudin and Potiomkin had told us. Only in the *formal* sense had the worldwide organization been ended, we were given to understand. In fact, the apparatus and personnel and integration of the International must be strengthened now that it would have to operate underground. "Throughout the world, comrades, the forces of our revolution are preparing for struggle—and for victory."

In the fanfare around the supposed dissolution of the International, it was quite forgotten that Stalin's book, *Problems of Leninism,* remained the supreme guide in Communist doctrinal matters. And in that book Stalin leaves no doubt of his belief that the "victorious proletariat"—meaning the U.S.S.R.—has not only a right but a sacred obligation to use force to achieve revolution in other countries when the opportunity presents itself. The established revolutionary regime, Stalin declares, must provide help to the rest of the world, "*acting when necessary even with military power against exploiting classes and their states.*"

And the official Stalinist *History of the Party* likewise remained in force and is in circulation today wherever Stalin's followers and fellow-travelers exist. It is explicit enough. "The All-Union Communist Party," the preamble to that book declares, "took and is now taking as its guide the revolutionary teaching of Marxism-Leninism. . . . Studies of the history of the Party strengthen the belief in the ultimate victory of the great task of Lenin and Stalin, *the victory of Communism in the whole world.*"

Since these opinions have never been withdrawn, one is prompted to speculate, with a shudder, as to what might have happened if Stalin's state—rather than the United States—had been the first to develop the atomic bomb!

This is not a far-fetched speculation. Russian scientists and intellectuals generally, regardless of their political attitudes, worked loyally and ably to help achieve victory. They helped overcome shortages by producing new strategic materials and gave their country the advantage of surprise in a series of new weapons. It was an open secret that atomic research was being pushed hard under Stalin's own direction.

Toward the end of 1942 we heard the rumor that Stalin had received the head of the Academy of Science, Professor Komarov, and the director of the Physics Institute, Academician Kapitza, in a special conference devoted to atomic energy. Soviet Military Intelligence was exerting itself mightily to obtain secrets of the atomic problem in other countries. At the session of the Academy held in December, 1942, in Sverdlovsk, a lot was said about progress in mining rare metals, including uranium. In

Communist circles it was boasted that Kapitza was achieving amazing results in his work on splitting the atom.

If the Kremlin had possessed the atomic bomb before the world's leading democracy did, would Stalin have used it to promote revolutions of the variety he favored? My answer is only a personal opinion. But it is based on a life-long knowledge of the Bolshevik mind, its boldness, its amoralism when duty to the cause is involved. That answer is *Yes*.

At the very time when the supposed dissolution of the Communist International was announced, bringing joy to the hearts of more naive capitalist allies, I happened to visit the cellar storehouse of "International Book," an organization publishing foreign-language propaganda. There I saw great stacks of freshly printed Party-line literature for distribution in the countries which the Red Army was about to enter. In theory the International was dead; in fact the Central Committee of the Party was hastily preparing for the ideological conquest of Europe along with the military conquest. The personnel of the "abolished" International was being feverishiy reorganized for the immense jobs ahead in Germany, France, Poland, Hungary, Italy and all other countries.

The hoped-for conquest of Europe would be achieved by a potent mixture of faith and force. In an array of red buildings in the heart of Moscow, not far from the Kuznetzky Most, selected Chekists were being trained intensively for work abroad, in the liberated Soviet areas and non-Soviet countries as well. These men were all of officer rank and Communists. They were the cream of the police *élite*. They were being prepared for the historical task of "purging" the populations which had been under German occupation and influence—and in the N.K.V.D. lexicon "purge" is a word of terrifying import.

These newly-trained police contingents accompanied the Red Army and the N.K.V.D. troops in the triumphant drive westward. Usually they concealed their police identity by wearing regular army insignia instead of the crimson N.K.V.D. label. In particular they were primed for the arduous and bloody business of disposing of Soviet citizens, millions of them, who might be considered "undesirable" after their temporary vacation from Soviet control. The "loyalty" of countless millions who had already suffered under the Nazi heel had to be measured with the brutal yardsticks of Soviet policedom. Chiefly under the charge of collaboration with the Germans, thousands would be shot, hundreds of thousands exiled, in a fearsome reign of terror. Unspeakable horrors would be inflicted by these *élite* killers on the populations of Voronezh, Rostov, Smolensk, Northern Caucasus, every other region, as the Germans retreated.

Men, women and children who had worked under Germans simply to earn their bread, often under compulsion, were rounded up and put to death without a pretense of investigation, let alone trial. Vast armies of wretched Soviet citizens were herded into cattle cars and shipped to the rear, for slave labor in concentration camps and colonies. The total of these deportees to swell the forced-labor contingents without doubt reached many millions by the time the war was ended. The same sort of "cleansing"

took place, of course, in the non-Soviet lands which the Red Army penetrated.

Certainly there were real collaborators, real traitors, who merited punishment. But to assume that treachery had reached the gigantic scale implied by the N.K.V.D. repressions in liberated regions would be a cruel insult to the Russian peoples. With its characteristic disregard of human life, the police-state extended its definition of collaboration and treason to cover anyone who had uttered one imprudent word against the Stalinist dictatorship, expressed one doubt of the "socialism" imposed by the Kremlin.

Truth demands that we acknowledge the grim fact: millions of my people exchanged German enslavement for Soviet enslavement.

4

I became thoroughly acquainted with the system and organization of our government; with the mechanism of administration as it functioned in fact, which had little relation to the mechanism prescribed on paper, in Constitutions. This reality is hidden as in a deep pit, not only from foreigners but from our own people. Nothing short of a treatise on the Soviet power would suffice to convey that reality. Here I must content myself by stating the bold fact that the governing of the U.S.S.R., Soviet in form, is a Party affair in substance. Neither the Council of People's Commissars nor the Supreme Soviet is more than an extension of the Central Committee of the Party and of the Politburo.

Because my post was now so close to the pinnacle I heard plenty of what might be described as the higher inside information. Where the press is completely controlled, there is a ready market for word-of-mouth news. In Moscow, rumors spread faster probably than anywhere else in the world, if only because there was no machinery for overtaking and refuting them. Denials only served to fortify them. Unusual information, particularly if it was touched with piquancy and slightly illicit, was highly prized and shared only with one's most deserving friends.

A quarrel between top leaders, the rise of one official and the disgrace of another, the doings in Stalin's Secretariat, a piquant remark by The Boss himself—these were the raw stuffs of eager confidences. I came to know that Kaganovich and Andreyev, both in the Politburo, hated each other and intrigued continually for primacy in Stalin's favor; that Mikoyan and Molotov competed for preferred position in The Leader's affections; that the rising star, Vosnessensky, and the old star Kaganovich, were constantly at odds—Vosnessensky had treated Kaganovich with contempt at an official session; that Mekhlis, head of the Political Department of the Red Army, had been quietly removed from his influential post because, as a Jew, he had become an effective target of Nazi propaganda among our more backward soldiers; that Stalin's favorite son, Vassili, was in continuous trouble through drink, girls and reckless driving.

Just before leaving for his post as Ambassador to Mexico, the late

Constantine Oumansky, previously our Ambassador in Washington, suffered a shocking personal tragedy. His young daughter had been keeping company with the equally young son of Shakhurin, Commissar of the Aviation Industry. One night there was a jealous quarrel between them and the boy killed the Oumansky girl with his father's revolver. The higher official levels rang with the crime for days but not a word percolated to the Moscow press.

The most stimulating subject of off-record chatter, however, was Stalin himself. His every remark was chewed over and analyzed. His likes and dislikes, the state of his health, his habits and foibles excited more interest among his courtiers than the progress of the war or the fate of the world revolution. I learned that Stalin's hobbies were chess and billiards and that he played both games well enough to enjoy contests with the best chess masters and billiard champions. The favorite wines of The Boss, I was informed in tones worthy of such state secrets, were Kakhetinsky and Kagor, both Caucasian brands.

We were all aware that Stalin had a weakness for proverbs, both Russian and Georgian, and often employed them to cut discussions short. Having concluded his pact with Hitler, he was reported to have sat silently while its implications were being discussed in the Politburo. Finally he summed up the situation with one of his favorite sayings: "I don't guarantee the taste of the dish, but it will be hot!" Sometimes, when people talked too long, he would suggest softly, "Turn the goose over or it'll be over-roasted!" Or, when the speaker failed to come to the point, he might say: "You low like a cow in labor, but where's the calf?"

At a Central Committee meeting Stalin, addressing himself to the self-important dignitaries of his regime, declared: "If your work doesn't improve immediately, we'll spank you"—and after a pause for the threat to sink in—"not literally, but we'll spank you. That's all."

Stalin is reputed to like music but his tastes, alas, are not especially elevated and his understanding of it limited. This, of course, does not deter him from solving musical problems and judging musical creations. The story of how he pushed young Shostakovich into the outer darkness for a period is well known. Less known is the episode involving the young composer Tikhon Khrennikov. His opera *In the Tempest* was hailed enthusiastically by Moscow critics. Then The Boss saw the production and said he didn't like it. Instantly the critics reversed themselves. The opera was removed and hasn't been heard since.

There is one story about Stalin which I never quite believed but which is generally credited among his intimates. It is to the effect that when facing great decisions, he likes to "consult" the dead Lenin in the granite mausoleum on Red Square. According to this story he has been known to spend hours alone in the tomb with his thoughts. A high-ranking Chekist told me at one time:

"I don't dabble in spiritualism, but this is true: When the Germans were at the doors of Moscow, just before Lenin's body was secretly removed beyond the Urals, Stalin remained alone with the corpse for a few hours."

In those uppermost circles it was firmly believed that Stalin is deeply superstitious and has been known to alter plans because the "signs" were unfavorable. Perhaps uniquely among dictators and successful politicians, he is essentially a lone wolf, jealous of his privacy and given to locking himself away for long periods of solitary thinking. He goes into large gatherings rarely and unwillingly, only when political exigencies require it, and at such times he has a talent for behaving like "one of the boys."

I was told in great detail, by a colleague who was present, about a party which Stalin gave for flyers and others who had distinguished themselves in the fighting. When these men returned to the fronts they were able to report that the Vozhd—Russian equivalent for Führer—was a simple and unpretentious fellow. He had joined in their games, their drinking, their jokes and singing, besides loading them with presents.

Those who knew him long and closely, when they talked about The Boss, agreed that he was a "tough" man, trusting only force, and wile, which he regards as a type of force. He is extremely vengeful and has never been known to forgive or forget an offense. When he seemingly yields, in the course of a conflict, it is only to improve his position for a new attack from the rear. And he has tended to surround himself with men of the same tough stamp—forceful, unforgiving, devoid of scruples.

At bottom, of course, Stalin is a lonely man and knows it. In the course of the years he has felt impelled to kill nearly all of his closest friends and comrades—even men like Abel Yenukidze, with whom he had grown up and whom he had long counted as his most intimate friend. The murder of Kirov and the death of his fellow-Georgian Ordzhonikidze left great voids in his private life. His most intimate friends in recent years have been Mikoyan, Voroshilov, Beria and Molotov.

Stalin's distrust of those around him, however, is pathological and makes no exceptions even for the people in his good graces at any given moment. There is little doubt that he believes every one of them, if not now scheming against him, is potentially a schemer.

Such was the trend of the inside information. Stalin was perhaps the only one of the Kremlin leaders whose name was seldom touched by scandal. Tales involving ballerinas, actresses, drunken parties and the like were constantly being retailed about other leaders, but never about The Boss. His attempt to keep his fingers on every important phase of national life presumably leaves him no time for such indulgences. His reading is serious—Clausewitz, Chekhov, Saltykov—and his fund of information on economic and political affairs amazes people who come in contact with him.

Stalin's penchant for solitude and his aversion to public appearances, most of us believed, were not necessarily connected with his unprepossessing appearance. The court painters, and even photographers who have made millions of images of the man, have concealed the fact that he is short, squat and paunchy; that his complexion is darker, more Asiatic, than most people know; that his face is pockmarked, his left arm partly warped, his teeth uneven and half-rotted. If his physical shortcomings have given him an inferiority complex, it may explain why he swallows Byzantine flattery that would turn a normal stomach.

It may also help explain the fantastic fashion in which the facts of his early life, before the revolution, have been doctored to make them more glamorous. For instance, the Tsarist police archives list him often as a bookkeeper; I have personally seen such documents. To this day he has a remarkable professional competence with figures and statistical balance sheets. Yet this humble and in no way discreditable fact has never been permitted to see print.

A good deal of bitter truth could be heard about Stalin's supposed preference for Caucasians, that is to say Georgians and Armenians, over Russians. It was said that he trusted them and understood them better than Russians with whom, after all, he has nothing in common by race or early training. Caucasians are only a negligible fraction of the total Soviet population, yet they are ubiquitous in the regime. Beria, until recently at the head of the police system; Mikoyan the boss of all foreign and domestic trade, Pogosian and Kavtaradze as Molotov's chief assistants, Commissars Okopov and Tevosian, Deputy Commissars Dadyan and Aroutiunov, a hundred others—all Georgians or Armenians.

As November 7 approached, all minds in the organization turned to the holiday. The anniversary of the revolution would be celebrated in a generous spirit despite the disasters at the front, in defiance of the disasters. As usual it was expected that a big-hearted government would issue special rations to mark the occasion, and this year the prospect of something to eat naturally blotted out most other interests.

Offices were decorated, floors were polished, the prescribed slogans for the holiday were posted everywhere. A holiday spirit pervaded our building. Pamfilov toned down his abuse of his subordinates and each of us, in turn, toned down his abuse of those under him. On November 6 the lower employes, including charwomen, floor-polishers and errand boys, came to work equipped with shopping bags made of meshed string. Such bags were standard equipment for the Soviet citizen; one could put them easily into a back pocket in readiness for any windfall of edibles.

Finally the great news was disclosed. On the anniversary occasion, as tokens of Stalin's deep affection for his subjects, every employee in the Sovnarkom would receive one kilo (2 1/5 pounds) of white bread, five kilos of potatoes and three pounds of honey! Excitement ran so high that it was impossible to do any work. The munificence of the presents, of course, was an indication of the influence wielded by Pamfilov. The potatoes would mean a good meal for a whole family; and the honey was better than gold to people long starved for sugar.

"Ekh, you dear little potato, my darling . . ." the skinny, gray-haired Ivanov, floor polisher, sang all morning.

He seemed scarcely the same self-effacing little man whom we saw skating on the wooden blocks on our fine parquet floors. Upon him had been imposed the honor of weighing out the potatoes and he had blossomed forth under the great responsibility. Another man—bold, understanding but not weak, just yet human—had been hidden under the unassuming surface of the emaciated Ivanov. Now that inner man had

emerged and was presiding over the distribution of potatoes, weighing out five kilos without fear or favor. On such a day, what was Pamfilov compared with Ivanov, the god of potatoes?

"Andrusha, dear one," an elderly typist pleaded with him, "I have three mouths to feed at home. I don't ask more than five kilos. But at least not so many *frozen* potatoes. . . ."

But the new Ivanov was proof against bourgeois sentimentality. For this once he was an iron Bolshevik.

"Share and share alike," he replied. "Everyone gets some of the frozen, some of the good ones . . . if there are any good ones. Now move along, citizeness. Next!"

Poor Ivanov's one-day glory, alas, ended in tears and scandal. The victims said that the idiot ought to stick to caressing floors instead of weighing out precious food. Ivanov himself insisted that there simply had not been enough to go round at the five-kilo rate. However that may be, it is a fact that the supply of potatoes, frozen and otherwise, gave out abruptly while twenty-odd employees were still in line to collect their present. . . .

Officialdom fared much better. We received fat food packages, graded according to one's rung on the ladder of prestige. Besides, we were provided with special coupons which, when exchanged at a specified "closed" pharmacy produced two bottles of port wine and a bottle of vodka.

In the Kremlin Stalin's annual party was under way. Only the most important and influential people were invited, of course. To be asked to attend was higher distinction than being knighted by a king. The list was studied by the N.K.V.D. and every guest was investigated for weeks before the event. I observed the process in the Sovnarkom. I saw the profound care with which Pamfilov drew up his list of People's Commissars and Assistant Commissars who "rated" the supreme compliment. I saw how, having selected the deserving, he sent the names to the N.K.V.D. for study and confirmation.

But in the Sovnarkom, too, we had a party. There was no lack of pomp, flowers, slogans on streamers, music. Tables were set out in the large auditorium for the upper shifts of officials. Because food and drink were plenteous, we were reconciled to the inevitable holiday address by a Party stalwart; one must take the sour with the sweet. At every mention of The Boss's name, we all stood up and shouted hurrah, which broke up the speech nicely and made it a little less tedious.

When the ritual oration was ended, we all fell to. Heaping plattersful were quickly swept clean by the storm of holiday appetites. Then came the toasts: first to the Beloved Leader, of course, then to the beloved sub-leaders, Molotov, Mikoyan, etc., each in turn, down to Pamfilov. Comrade Mironov struck up a tune and we all joined in singing a familiar ditty:

Let's sing a song, comrades,
About the greatest of men,
About the greatest and most loved—
About Stalin let's sing a song.

5

For some time I had been pulling strings to obtain the most envied award at the disposal of an omnipotent government: a separate apartment. At last I succeeded.

The wide, straight Mozhaisk Road is the best-asphalted and best-kept highway in all of Russia, for it is the road that leads to Stalin's country villa and to the suburban summer places of many Politburo members working in the capital. Naturally it is under incessant surveillance and inspection, to protect the life of the Beloved Leader. Smart-looking N.K.V.D. men in leather jackets come and go on motorcycles.

A number of fine modern buildings had been erected along this road where it cuts into the fringes of the city. In one of these, through the intercession of the Sovnarkom, I was finally assigned an apartment: two rooms and a kitchen—which was incalculable opulence under Moscow housing conditions. It had a bath of its own, central heating, modern lighting fixtures and other glories. Its windows looked into the back yard rather than into the famous road, but that was a minor defect.

Armed with an order for occupancy, my Sovnarkom credentials, Party card and personal passport, I presented myself at the office of the house chairman. The house chairman (an important functionary in the life of every Soviet citizen) was a pleasant fellow, accustomed to dealing with people of consequence. In the statistics these were "workers' homes" but in fact only bureaucrats swinging sufficient political weight could use them, and that only as long as they were in the good graces of the higher powers.

"Victor Andreyevich," the house chairman said, "it all seems in good order. Now you must report to the assistant chief of the N.K.V.D. of the district, then come back here. It's a formality."

"But what has the N.K.V.D. to do with it? These papers would seem clear enough."

"They're good enough for me personally, but this is a government road. Politburo members pass here every day! This gives the residences along the road a special character, so to speak."

I saw the point. Even though my windows did not face the road, I would not be permitted to live on the Mozhaisk highway until the secret police ruled that my presence did not constitute a danger to Stalin's safety! I called on the appropriate N.K.V.D. official, submitted to a familiar line of questions, and was given the required approval.

But I was destined never to occupy this apartment. It was a new structure and not yet ready for occupancy. The problem of furnishing the rooms also ate up time. Meanwhile the chance of an assignment abroad had arisen—the blessed chance on which I had dared to gaze only in optimistic daydreams mixed with pain. Until that question would be definitely decided, there was no point in moving.

The expanding lend-lease operations made it necessary to send hundreds of people specialized in all branches of economy to England, Canada and especially the United States. More Russians were being

enabled to get a taste of the outside world than ever before in Soviet history. As a metallurgical engineer with versatile experience, I qualified for such a post. My political record, formally at least, was flawless, despite my long ordeal during the purges. Yet it would have been bad strategy, and in fact almost impossible, to take the initiative in the matter. The more anxious you were to go abroad, the more carefully you concealed the yearning, lest it be misunderstood—or understood—by the monitors of our Soviet allegiances.

One night I was discussing the lend-lease situation with an official of some standing in our foreign trade set-up with whom I was on most friendly terms. Carefully, skillfully, I guided the conversation. I did not dare suggest that here, before him, sat a man competent to help abroad; but I managed to coax that bright thought into being in his mind. It seemed to him a spontaneous inspiration.

"Victor Andreyevich, how would you like to go to America?" he said suddenly. "I know that we need more men there."

"Well, I'd never thought of the idea. Besides, I'm doing very responsible work here at the Sovnarkom, as you know. Still, if I could be useful to the war effort. . . ."

My friend was no simpleton. He was not fooled by my coyness.

"I'll see about it," he told me. "You can count on me to make the suggestion in the proper quarters."

I thanked him, never supposing that he would really keep his word, never daring to believe that his suggestion would prosper. This was at the end of December. About a fortnight later, Pamfilov summoned me for a private talk. For a moment I thought, with a flush of excitement, that it might have some reference to the American dream. But I was wrong.

Pamfilov said he wished to consult me about a problem that had been dumped in his lap. There was a group of metallurgical factories of various types working under an organization called Glavmetal. These plants were scattered—in Chaliabinsk, Novosibirsk, Molotov, Northern Caucasus and other places—but were administered as a unit from a Moscow headquarters. Their work was in dismal shape, Pamfilov explained, and a strong hand was needed to set them right.

"I need someone in charge whom I know and trust," he said. "I think you're the man. I want you to understand that it is in no sense a demotion. When you've brought some order out of the chaos I'll bring you back into the Sovnarkom. What do you say?"

I made my acceptance sound casual, even a little disappointed. Actually I was pleased. It was unlikely that a responsible department head in the Sovnarkom would be considered dispensable for service abroad. But as an official of Glavmetal my chances of being released would be immensely improved. . . .

Glavmetal had its offices in the long low building making one wall of Red Square, directly opposite the Kremlin: the flat-faced structure familiar to anyone who has ever seen a newsreel shot of the square. Here I was installed in an office and provided with a staff. In continuous personal and telephonic contact with the directors of factories in many parts of Russia, I conducted the affairs of the organization.

My hours were no longer quite as murderous as before. I began to catch up on lost sleep. I could see more of the life of Moscow and more of the friends whom I had neglected under the harrowing Sovnarkom regimen. Perhaps it was a premonition that I had little time left to savor things Russian and people close to me; but somehow I was anxious to crowd a lot into every passing week.

I had an intense impulse, too, to explore the minds of the people around me. What was the war doing to them? And what I found fortified my affection for my own people. I marveled at their amazing fortitude under the hammer blows of adversity. I marveled at their instinctive sense of the political realities. Simple Russians were rendering unto Stalin what was Stalin's and unto Russia what was primordially Russian.

The war was taking a more favorable turn, of that there was no doubt. In the long-drawn contest in the Stalingrad region the slaughter was fantastic, the suffering beyond calculation. But a conviction of victory gradually filled our hearts. The fact that the struggle was so prolonged was in itself an omen of victory. In a war of attrition the advantages were all with us.

The Germans were far from their supply bases and in the unaccustomed winter conditions found reinforcement virtually impossible. They were condemned to fight with such men and supplies as they had accumulated on the terrain—vast amounts of both, yet exhaustible. The Russians, on the contrary, were able to pour blood and metal into the area almost endlessly. Hitler's armies would have had to kill off half of Russia before the Kremlin would acknowledge defeat at Stalingrad. In preparation for the battle a new railroad line had been built along the Volga. It functioned smoothly throughout the contest, serving as a funnel through which new strength was fed incessantly into the mutilated and bleeding city. Supplies and reinforcements also flowed across the Volga.

The inevitable victory was achieved. The Germans had indeed been drowned in blood—their own and Russian. Besides halting the German advance, the triumph had another value which has been generally overlooked or underestimated. The Red Army in that campaign captured enough German armaments to equip thirty to forty divisions. It was a German military theorist, Clausewitz, who counseled generals to fight with the weapons of their opponents. This is precisely what Soviet generals were able to do after Stalingrad. The war materiel captured from the Germans must be ranked with lend-lease in explaining the success of the Soviet counter-offensive. From November, 1942, to November, 1944, my country's trophies of victory included over four thousand airplanes, seventeen thousand tanks, fifty-five thousand artillery pieces, 118 thousand machine guns, 1,500,000 rifles. Much of it, of course, required repair. Hitler's weapons were turned against him, literally.

I was watching the battle of Stalingrad with a deep longing for victory, like every other Soviet citizen, irrespective of his feelings about the regime. At the same time—such is the distortion of mortal perspective—I was watching the outcome of the investigations which would determine whether I would leave the U.S.S.R.

CHAPTER XXVI

PRELUDE TO AMERICA

THE IDEA of my going to the United States began to take shape in January, 1943, and a passport for the journey was actually issued in July. During those six months I felt like a rare beetle on a pin in a huge laboratory where legions of entomologists, zoologists, chemists and other scientists studied the specimen from every possible angle. I was prodded and tapped for hidden flaws. All the energies of an omnipotent state seemed centered on the one job of exploring my humble person and its extensions in time and space through kinsmen by blood, kinsmen by marriage and associates of every degree.

The inquisitive state was cynical in its infinite distrust. Week after week, with trained fingers, it probed my mind and nerves for the combination that would unlock my innermost soul. And amazingly, its vast searching came to naught. My tremulous secret—the decision to escape the U.S.S.R.—remained locked away, undetected.

The great exploration of Victor Kravchenko, son of the Russian masses, Communist Party member and Soviet engineer, began in the office of the Personnel Department of the Commissariat of Foreign Trade. Comrade Shtoob, a nondescript little bureaucrat in thick spectacles, was politely impersonal. To him one beetle was like another; his job was merely to catalogue the insects. The subtler differences would be defined and examined later by more specialized entomologists.

Comrade Shtoob ran through my personal history from birth to the current hour, then fanned out to take in the histories of my parents, grandparents, brothers and relatives in secondary branchings of the family tree. With blood relations put in their proper place, connubial connections were traced minutely and finally the pattern of my humble but shockingly extensive existence was filled out with questions about friends and professional associates through the years.

I had been through this autobiographical maze dozens of times in the past. Every fact had been put on record endlessly by the Party, the armed services, various commissariats, not to mention ordinary and extraordinary purges. Besides, what circumstance in my past was so utterly negligible that it could have failed to find a place in the fat files of the N.K.V.D.?

But the ritual could not be curtailed, let alone skipped. Comrade Shtoob proceeded on the premise that this was a first acquaintance between the government and one of its subjects. He did not even take my name, patronymic and age for granted. This periodical stripping of the Soviet citizen to ultimate nakedness, this unveiling of his most intimate

life, this turning inside out of his political thoughts, had acquired through the years a symbolic importance. It was the ceremonial humbling of the individual for the greater glory of the collective. It was man the meek and submissive, cringing and degraded in his nudity before the panoplied state. To retain a secret, to reach for a fig-leaf, was sacrilege.

And it was a rite bristling with dangers. The answers had to be consistent within themselves and consistent with answers given in previous interrogations, questionnaires, forms and reviews. The police-state brooked no evasions and confusions. A slip of the memory, a minor contradiction, and all its suspicious wrath was aroused. Many a Soviet citizen has wrecked his career on a mix-up in dates or some absent-minded confusion of relatives.

Having satisfied himself that my sister-in-law's aunt Vera, whom I did not know in person, was not a menace to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the near-sighted Shtoob took the next step. He provided me with a series of printed questionnaires to carry home and fill out by tomorrow. I must make no changes, erasures or crossings of words, he warned. Fumbling was presumptive evidence of a guilty conscience. The entomologists insisted on neatness and decorum.

I followed orders without deviation. I deposited the papers in the specified number of copies at the specified window. In a few days I received a message: "Continue on your present job. Should the need to send you abroad arise, you will be notified." In Soviet double-talk this signified that I was being thoroughly investigated and, if found worthy, would be investigated some more.

Nearly three months passed. I had all but relinquished hope. Somewhere, I thought dejectedly, an indelible stain had been found on my own or my family's escutcheon. But one slushy April night, arriving home after fourteen grueling hours at Glavmetal, numbed with fatigue, I found a mysterious message awaiting me: I must call a certain telephone number. The touch of mystery, too, was part of the ritual. It guaranteed a few palpitant minutes of fear alternating with hope, since it might mean anything from police trouble to a dizzy promotion.

It turned out to be merely a high official of the Commissariat of Foreign Trade. What was accomplished by the enigmatic anonymity of the message I shall never know. Despite the hour, I was ordered to come over at once. A pass would be waiting for me at a certain window. I rushed to the Commissariat, weariness erased by the new tide of hope. After long and nervous waiting, I found myself in another office under interrogation by a more shrewd and more important exemplar of the Shtoob breed.

For three hours we wandered through the jungles of my past, pausing now and then to rummage in the undergrowth of my political moods and opinions. Now he led me, now he chased me. He put trick questions to trip me up, he threw out false leads, he suddenly retraced his steps to take me unawares. My companion was a practised old cat but this time he was playing with a wary and experienced old mouse. The night courses of training under Professors Gershgorn, Dorogan and others were paying

dividends By two in the morning both cat and mouse were too tired to go on. I was instructed to return in a few days to fill out some super-special forms.

A few days later I was composing answers to questions in the longest and craftiest questionnaire I had as yet faced. It was a document so cynical in its assumptions, so acute in its cross-examination, that it made all other questionnaires seem innocent and amateur by comparison. It was a document starting from the assumption that every citizen was a liar and proceeding in a spirit of contempt for everything human. By the time I signed my name and Party number I was soaked in perspiration and utterly humiliated.

When I turned in the questionnaire, I was ordered to take the next step in the ceremonial, which was to collect letters of reference and estimates of my political and business activities from Party organizations in which I had been active and industrial enterprises where I had recently been employed. True, there was nothing any of these offices could say which was not already on record in the N.K.V.D. in great detail through formal reports and informal espionage sources. But the sacramental documents could not be skipped. This provided a good many officials and organizations whose paths had crossed mine with a chance to destroy me if they were so minded.

I addressed myself first to Comrade Mironov, chief of the Party Committee of the Council of People's Commissars of the R.S.F.S.R. I made the appointment by telephone and at the specified hour presented myself at the entrance. My Party documents and internal passport were examined and a pass was duly issued. Thus armed I crossed a courtyard to the building which housed the Party Committee. Here my pass was examined and my face was carefully matched against the photographs on the documents. On the floor where the Committee was situated an unsmiling N.K.V.D. guard studied my papers and features in even greater detail and finally I was told to go to room 503.

Only a few months ago I had held an important post in this very institution. These guards had seen me hundreds of times. But there could be no relaxation in the prescribed vigilance; I might have changed political color since then. In the corridors I ran into men and women who had worked with me and under me. A few were cordial but most of them met me with pointed reserve. I was no longer in the Sovnarkom, they did not know why I had left, and they could not risk a cordial greeting.

Comrade Mironov was courteous but stiffly formal. As a concession to our former intimacy he did ask why I was looking so haggard. To be frank, I said, I wasn't getting enough to eat since I left the Sovnarkom. He smiled in a pleased way at this indirect recognition that "his" Sovnarkom was a privileged place for deserving leaders. Yes, he agreed, these war hardships, but let's get down to business.

While we were down to business a little woman wearing a starched cap and a maid's apron came in, carrying a big lunch tray. It was loaded with crisp white bread, bacon and eggs, canned meat, butter, tea with sugar.

"All American," he said proudly as he dug into the feast. "Lend-lease, you know."

But he did not invite me to partake, on a lend-lease or any other basis. Between mouthfuls he continued to question me. Was I happy where I was now working? How was the Party nucleus at Glavmetal functioning? Crudely, even stupidly, he was going through the formality of testing my loyalty to the government and our Beloved Leader. Not that he cared, not that he thought me a lunatic who would confess some doubts, but simply in deference to ceremonial procedure.

"And so you want a letter of recommendation?" he said. "Well, I'll talk it over with Comrade Utkin. One must think it over. Come in tomorrow about noon."

The next day I went through the same routine of multiple checking of documents and after the usual wait in the anteroom was admitted into Mironov's official presence. I was handed a letter, a good letter, attesting my political and business talents. The fates were on my side. In the following weeks I obtained similar letters also from the head of Glavmetal and the Secretary of its Party organization. My documents were read and re-read, my features were scrutinized, my political probity was tested, a hundred times over. And all this, I knew, was only the surface, below which the real work of digging into my life and mind was being done by the appropriate departments of the N.K.V.D.

At last, however, I had the proof that all was going well. I received orders to report to the medical clinic of the Commissariat of Foreign Trade for a physical examination and to the Commissariat's staff photographer for an official record of my face. Two days later I was notified to report to Comrade Lebedev, Assistant Commissar and one of the right-hand men to Commissar Mikoyan himself.

2

Lebedev was flanked by two assistants, who made notes and handed him various papers during our first interview. He sat at an ornate desk which, for some reason, was planted in the very center of the huge room, amidst the billowing colors of oriental rugs. Stalin, Molotov, Mikoyan and other leaders looked down from their frames on the walls. A thick file, evidently containing copies of my multitudinous questionnaires and special reports from mysterious places, lay ostentatiously before him.

After a formal greeting Comrade Lebedev began to question me from the very beginning: my name, my birthplace, when I joined the Party. He could not conceivably propound a query which I had not answered dozens of times already but even Assistant Commissars must adhere to the sacramental rites. I replied eagerly, with enthusiasm, as if thrilled by the novelty of the questions and amazed by the shrewdness of their formulation. Then I waited while he leafed through the file, tasting a passage here and there, now smiling, now frowning. The two aides sat in dignified noncommittal silence. From time to time he dictated a few suggestions for what would evidently be his report to the Commissar.

Lebedev had a stocky, broad-shouldered figure and a thick double-fold neck. His face was pleasant, even handsome, and had a human quality which did not accord with his deadly official words and manner. He was not a clever man, I decided; how did he ever ascend so high? Then my eyes rested on his hands, their plump stubby fingers covered with a thick black fur. It occurred to me that these were cruel hands, capable of violence.

"Comrade Kravchenko," he finally said, solemnly, "do you appreciate the seriousness of an assignment abroad?"

"Oh yes, I have given it a lot of thought."

"You must justify the confidence the Party is placing in you."

"I shall try, Comrade Lebedev," I said humbly, eagerly.

"You will be informed of further developments. I hope we shall meet again soon."

Five days thereafter I learned confidentially, through a friend in the Commissariat, that Anastas Ivanovich Mikoyan, member of the Politburo, Vice-Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, member of the State Defense Committee, People's Commissar for Foreign Trade, with his own hands had signed a recommendation to the Central Committee of the Party that I be sent to the United States of America. I continued to manage my affairs at Glavmetal, but my thoughts were now far away. Before long a message was conveyed to me by the Secret Department of the Head Office of our trust. I was to call a certain number. Once more the mystery seemed quite superfluous, since it was merely a woman functionary at the Commissariat requesting me to report at eleven-thirty next morning.

"Have your Party card, passport, trade-union book and army documents with you," she said. "At precisely twelve you will be received at another place."

I followed the prescription to the letter. Having been passed by three or four guards and interviewed by an official of the N.K.V.D., I was directed to the offices of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party. That was the "other place" whose dignity required the extra touches of mystery and red tape. Provided with the necessary pass, I walked to the Party building. Here my documents were re-examined and soon I was walking up a broad marble staircase.

On the landing stood a marble Stalin on his marble pedestal, his Napoleonic mien rather comical in this loneliness. On the second landing another Stalin, no less lonely and ludicrous, looked into my eyes. On this floor I waited for a while and ultimately was ushered into a carpeted office where a third Stalin, this time on the wall, kept me company until the proper official arrived. Clearly Soviet sculptors and painters have no dearth of subjects. The official sat down behind his big desk, scrutinized me a full minute, then said:

"Tell me about yourself. Please don't repeat what I already know from your questionnaires. I'm interested in your outlook, your political state of mind."

I talked almost at random. I racked my brain for some facts or

thoughts which had not been worked to death in the previous interrogations and written forms. He interrupted. He got down to the point.

"Did you ever have any doubts about the wisdom of any Party policies?"

"Never," I said promptly. There was no point in going into nuances unless I had to.

"Not even during collectivization, and during the purges, when you yourself suffered some? Not even then did you have any doubts of the Party's general line?"

"No, not of the general line."

"But you had a rather unpleasant time of it in Nikopol in 1936 and '37. You were being checked, investigated, and all that. What was your attitude?"

"Well, of course, I was bewildered, even a little indignant. After all, I knew myself to be innocent. I felt hurt in a way."

"That's understandable. One can't hold that against you. There were excesses at the time; the enemies of the people responsible have been rooted out. But now, Comrade Kravchenko, is there anything left of that hurt, that indignation?"

"Oh, no, of course not." I smiled at such a preposterous question. Naturally I was grateful to all the Gershgorns and Dorogans who had beaten and humiliated me.

The dismal comedy ground on for perhaps two hours. This was presumably the heart-to-heart talk on basic political attitudes prescribed by the ritual. As if there were room for candor in our Soviet lives! As if any two comrades, meeting for the first time, would venture beyond the limits of the anointed hypocrisies and wretched pretenses! As the "chat" progressed I grew more certain of myself, I reeled off more cliches. I derived a certain perverse satisfaction from topping his every slogan, and all the time my mind was gloating over the scene: *I shall escape! Soon I shall be free of this monstrous make-believe, this boring horror! I shall be able to talk, to fight!*

My interrogator was apparently well impressed with me. My mind, he probably decided, had the proper configuration, no untidy doubts, no protruding thoughts. Probably he set me down as a man of few ideas but respectable ones, not too bright but dependable. I felt approval in the pressure of his clammy hand.

"Well, good-bye. You're likely to know the decision of the Central Committee in four or five days."

It was a favorable decision. Within a week Glavmetal was ordered to release me to the Commissariat of Foreign Trade. The following day I reported to the All-Union Raw Materials Import Administration of the Commissariat of Foreign Trade. Here I was given thick confidential volumes of reports and instructions to read and ponder by way of familiarizing myself with the Lend-Lease process, conditions in American industry, details about metallurgical firms with which I would have to deal over there.

Then I was summoned once more to the Central Committee head-

quarters. This time I was presented with two confidential pamphlets. I was told to read them carefully right there, then return them and sign a form attesting that I was familiar with their contents. The pamphlets outlined rules of conduct for Party members abroad and, more particularly, the penalties for their violation. The gist of what I read will remain with me forever, as a commentary on the grotesque Soviet version of the non-Soviet world.

After enjoining strict obedience to superiors, the pamphlets warned against the temptations, pitfalls and seductions of life in capitalist countries. They evoked a picture, at once frightening and alluring, of a strange, hostile, utterly depraved and lascivious world devoted to the one purpose of ensnaring Soviet citizens and extracting their state secrets. The principal business of foreign governments, I gathered, was to undermine the loyalties of visiting Communists.

Those about to plunge into the maelstrom of political vice, grafting businessmen and perfumed harlots were forbidden to talk with infidels unnecessarily on any theme, but under no circumstances to discuss politics. If approached with proposals to sell us "documents" or other secrets, we must steer the hucksters to the nearest Soviet Consulate. If questioned about life inside the Soviet Union we must assume that the prying ones are agents of counter-espionage.

The rules were especially forceful in warning against contacts with ex-Russians and with publications "unfriendly" to our country. We must eschew the printed matter put out abroad by counter-revolutionary emigres. The anti-Soviet devils were ubiquitous: there would be "unfriendly" harangues on the air, anti-Soviet pictures on the screen. These, of course, we must flee or be damned.

The rules implied that though capitalism was rotten at its core it was bright and seductive on the outside, so that our Communist virtue would be under unceasing assault. We must close our senses to the appeal of bourgeois fleshpots. The best capitalist hotels were but thinly disguised brothels where Mata Haras lurked in wait for innocent Soviet men. While traveling abroad, we must abandon the danger zone instantly should a comely female be assigned to our cabins or coupes. Should a woman, especially a Russian-speaking woman, attempt to engage us in conversation, we must flee forthwith.

Alcohol was described as only second to sex as a lure to Soviet innocents abroad. Never, unless it be for a specific business purpose duly authorized from above, must we venture into bars, night clubs or other dens of iniquity where tongue-loosening alcoholic beverages are on tap. Should duty require attendance at a private or public party, the good Soviet emissary must hold himself firmly in hand lest he betray some secret.

What, precisely, were those awful secrets we must guard and which the outside world would be conniving to squeeze out of us? The rules did not say. But the answer seemed to me evident enough. What the Kremlin feared so much was that we might bear testimony to the truth of the "anti-Soviet propaganda" being spread by "unfriendly" writers, speakers

and publications. The "secrets" to which it had reference were the facts about concentration camps, slave labor, pervasive oppression and human degradation in the U.S.S.R., anything which might spoil the picture of the regime painted by propaganda. The two pamphlets were in effect witnesses to the Soviet regime's bad conscience.

They ascribed to foreign governments every dirty trick which the N.K.V.D. and other Soviet agencies had ever played on foreigners. They warned that in America our baggage would be searched, our passports would be stolen for counter-espionage purposes, our telephones would be tapped, seductive women would be foisted on us. In America, the rules implied, we would be living on enemy soil, despite immediate diplomatic pretenses to the contrary; if we did not watch our steps we would be sucked in by the capitalist quagmires of greed, luxury and hatred of the Socialist Fatherland.

After I had guaranteed my understanding of these cautions and returned the pamphlets, I was delivered to the oratorical mercies of another Central Committee functionary in another ample office. His tone was severe.

"Comrade Kravchenko, you are about to undertake a foreign mission. You will conduct trade in a foreign environment, among the capitalists whom we rightly despise and distrust. We count on you not to have your head turned by the sight of consumer goods and the temptations of a society in the final stages of rotten degeneration. Never forget your historic mission as the representative of the new Soviet civilization.

"True, America is helping us now. But we must not lose sight of the fact that the help is given grudgingly, out of dire necessity. True, some of our war aims at the moment coincide with theirs, but the two worlds remain irreconcilable. Hold fast to the knowledge that as a Communist you are the sworn enemy of the capitalist society whose world center today is America. Communism and capitalism can never be reconciled!"

I composed my features in the serious expression suited to the occasion. It was silly of him to preach such an elementary sermon to a seasoned Party man. But that, too, was part of the ritual. It was what he was paid to do and no doubt had made the identical speech to others like me that very day.

"After you reach America, you will continue to take an active part in the work of our Party. But remember that so far as the American authorities are concerned you are not and never have been a Party member. You must insist that you're not even interested in politics. In America, the organization of the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R. functions on an underground basis. You will not take your Party card with you, but the fact of your membership will be known to the proper people. Outwardly you will be an engineer and nothing more. Is that clear?"

"Yes, I understand."

Next day I returned to Party headquarters. It was now the end of June. I was being "washed and rewashed," as the Soviet phrase has it. Another official, a grade more imposing, awaited me. Two other men—one of them obviously a police agent—were present. The Party official was a

heavy-set fellow in dandified foreign attire. A foreign watch on his wrist and a foreign fountain-pen protruding from his top vest pocket proclaimed that he had recently returned from the capitalist deserts, perhaps from London or Washington.

"Comrade Kravchenko, the Central Committee has confirmed your assignment to the United States," he scowled. "Do you realize the full meaning of the confidence placed in you?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Have you read the instructions? Do you understand the consequences of mistakes or misconduct?"

"Yes. I shall remember."

"Your best insurance against error is Bolshevik vigilance and whole-hearted devotion to our beloved Party."

"Yes, of course. I can see that."

"You are going to the country of the most highly developed and rapacious capitalism. The counter-espionage of the F.B.I. is subtle and inescapable. You may receive offers to betray your country. The native capitalists and the emigres will leave no stone unturned to compromise you. The counter-revolutionary and capitalist press, especially of Hearst and McCormick, will try to destroy your faith.

"Don't trust those who pretend to be friends of our country. Many of them are more dangerous than out-and-out enemies. Recently it has become the fashion among certain emigres, not only on the Left but among actual monarchists, to lick our boots. Don't trust them. Once a turncoat always a turncoat. The same applies to bankers, manufacturers and other capitalists who follow the new fashion of admiring the U.S.S.R. Their admiration isn't worth a damn. It can turn overnight to treachery."

I interjected monosyllables of understanding and approval. When would this farce be over, I kept thinking. But the sermon had not yet reached its peak. Having disposed of the government spies and emigre turncoats and two-faced capitalists, he came to the danger that interested him most. In a strangely passionate voice he went on to warn me about the capitalist pitfalls, bright lights, night clubs, ladies of easy virtue.

"These things are symptoms of the disintegration of bourgeois life, Comrade Kravchenko, but they are tempting all the same. I know"—his eyes sparkled and his tone grew lustful—"I know that the agents of capitalism will try to reach you by any and all means."

Released, I merely landed in the armchair of a third preacher. Evidently his department was more technical, concerned with my obligations and opportunities as an engineer rather than my risks as a male. One of my main duties, he said, would be to gather any and all information of an economic, and if possible military character that came my way. I must school myself to note technical details, the planning of factories in any city I visited, methods of production, innovations in machinery, new technical processes, anything not known to us.

"You will become the eyes and the ears of our country in America. Upon arriving in Washington, report to Comrade Serov. Give him the stub

you will receive when you surrender your Party card. He knows all about you. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear."

"One more thing: Don't spread the news that you are going abroad. You may tell only friends whom you consider politically reliable."

Why the sending of another purchasing representative should be treated as a secret I did not know. But, of course, I asked no naive questions. Before I left the building I received a stub in return for my Party card. I felt strange, almost naked, without the card. The right to possess the card had once seemed a noble dream. Now I surrendered it without any twinge of regret—I had become immune to political symbolism. At the Commissariat of War my military credentials were taken up and I was formally released from all military obligations. The Foreign Trade Commissariat provided me with a substantial sum in Soviet money and special coupons for the purchase of clothes suitable for emergence into the degenerate capitalist world. I was also given some American currency to see me through to Washington.

All these preliminaries attended to, I presented myself once more to Comrade Lebedev. Several others scheduled to go to America, all Party members, were also there. Now that we had taken the many hurdles and soaked up the graded sermons, Lebedev was smiling and cordial.

"Well, comrades, I'll be brief," he said. "You are all politically literate people. Let me tell you a little parable."

At great length and with evident relish he proceeded to recount the tale of a Soviet emissary to the United States who, alas, was not as circumspect as he hoped we would be. That unfortunate, it seemed, had allowed himself to be framed by American agents. Luckily the Russian had sense enough to take the Consulate into his confidence, and he was saved in the nick of time.

We all nodded our heads understandingly. We would guard ourselves against the wiles of the American secret police.

"Another word of caution and I'm through, comrades. Some of you are going out without your wives. In America there will be plenty to eat and drink. It's a false war prosperity, you know, and will soon be followed by another depression. Anyhow, you know how it is with a racehorse after he fills up with oats." Here he winked slyly and we laughed in obsequious appreciation, though many of us understood the cynicism of his words. "That's right. He begins to neigh. . . . Beware of the legs of American girls." He shook a warning finger. "Well, if you get mixed up with capitalist women, just remember that I warned you."

Then he dropped the bantering tone and applied himself to severe threats. America, he declared, was only a temporary ally. Our watchwords must be prudence and vigilance. One day the bogus friendship would be ended, dialectic realities would reassert themselves. "Learn all you can, observe everything—give nothing in return."

When I went home I carried the little red book, the foreign Soviet passport, in my breast pocket. Circumstances made it the most coveted piece of paper imaginable. I kept touching it to reassure myself that

it was no mirage. At home, Irina was expecting me. She saw instantly from my expression that everything was in order. I knew that she was struggling to suppress her tears. She had no inkling of my great secret. Her best protection, the one kindness I could offer in return for her affection, was to keep her totally ignorant of my intentions.

"It's a short-term assignment," I said, with a catch in my throat. "I'll be gone only a few months, a year at most."

3

Knowing in my heart that I might never again see my country and its people I gazed at them in the days before my departure with a sort of premonitory homesickness. I tried to fix their images indelibly on the retina of my mind.

There were, of course, dozens of friends whom I should have liked to see before leaving. The absurd secrecy thrown around my journey made it awkward. Nevertheless I risked a farewell call on Comrade Misha and other people close to me. I tried to make the good-byes casual, so that they might not guess my decision. When I flashed my passport, they stared in bewilderment. To leave the country, to shake oneself loose from Stalin's "happy life" even for a brief period, is the most difficult and therefore the most envied accomplishment.

One of those intimate friends whom I visited, and to whom I exhibited my little red miracle, was a chemical specialist who now held a high post in the government. He was one of those who had been persecuted in the super-purge, then "rehabilitated." Despite his "confession" of complicity in sabotage projects aired in the Moscow blood trials, he rose rapidly in the hierarchy after his release from prison. Now decorations for distinguished war services shone on his breast.

He shook my hand warmly, enviously I thought, and held it long in his strong grip.

"Congratulations, Vitya! You're one in a hundred thousand! If it weren't for my wife and children I'd find an excuse for a trip abroad myself. . . . Ekh, you'll see the strange outside world. How little we're allowed to know about it!"

He paused for a minute and his brows wrinkled, as if he were trying to make up his mind about something. Then he said impulsively:

"Let's drive over to my apartment. We'll have a farewell drink and . . . well, I feel the urge to talk. . . ."

He did talk. Was he made bold by my imminent departure to a distant land? Could he no longer hold his festering thoughts to himself? Whatever the reason, he told me that afternoon things which no sane Russian utters aloud in my country.

"Vitya, the fools imagine they've bought me off with these shiny badges. But they're mistaken. I'm pulling hard for victory against the Germans. I'm a Russian through and through. But I have neither forgotten nor forgiven the year of torture. Sure, I'm on my way up. They need competent people; even I, the ex-prisoner, stand out as a person of

ability. Maybe I'll be a People's Commissar one of these days. It's not at all impossible.

"But I've forgotten nothing, nothing! I remember every minute of anguish, every insult, and I cherish them like great treasures against the day of revenge. I was tortured months on end before I signed that foul and lying confession. There were long stretches of solitary confinement in dark wet cellars which I shared with big rats. Do you know, my friend, what it means to be tortured? Let me tell you—"

"Don't, Gregory, don't!" I pleaded. "I've heard enough from others. What's the use of opening your old wounds?"

"They've never been closed, Vitya. I've kept them fresh. I haven't let them heal. Every day I get up with a curse on my lips and every night I go to sleep with that curse. Listen, I have never told this to anyone, but I can no longer keep the horror to myself.

"You've heard about the torture by light, but I've been through it. You sit in the middle of a room with glaring electric bulbs shining in your eyes and you are not allowed to go to sleep. If you begin to nod or to close your eyes, the guards rouse you with blows. Once I sat that way for seventy-two hours, without sleep, without food, without drink. My body retched, my eyeballs burned like hot coals. And at the end of this torture I was questioned again by a fresh, robust sadist.

"Oh, they're clever, these 'socialist' monsters. They know how to squeeze 'voluntary' confessions out of you. I'm sure Hitler's Gestapo couldn't teach us a thing. Hunger, thirst, heat, cold—they play wonderful variations on these themes, our Paderewskis of the torture chambers. In our prison there was one official who prepared his victims for cross-examination in his own way: He had them fed salty foods, like herring, then denied them water. By the time he was ready for them, they were half insane with thirst. As he questioned them he helped himself to long cool draughts of water, or even beer, while the tortured prisoner looked on.

"I know of confessions drawn out of men after they had been hung by their wrists for twenty-four hours. I know of instances when a prisoner's hair was torn up by the roots, along with patches of his scalp. Yes, they're clever, our torture masters. They know when to inflict pain and when to resort to slow, nerve-racking varieties of torture.

"Yes, they beat me too, not once but a hundred times. Finally came the supreme horror. That's the part I have never before told anyone except my wife. She had to know. One night I was being whipped in the torture chamber, with long wet towels. There were three of them with me. First they stripped me mother naked, then they lashed me across my face, across my kidneys. Then I was thrown on the table. Two of the butchers held me down and the third swung the wet towels with all his strength across my thighs . . . across my genitals.

"Think of the worst agony you can imagine, multiply it a million times, and you may approach what I went through. Those brutes were sick men, perverted monsters."

"Don't, Gregory, please don't," I whispered.

"I didn't recover consciousness for many days. When I came to I was

in the prison hospital. Nothing seemed to matter to me any longer. I wondered why and how I had held out against them so long. I called myself harsh names for having been an idiotic idealist. I signed whatever was put before me, without reading, without caring. When they released me I was no good to my wife. . . .

"And the fools think they've paid me off with titles and badges. They actually imagine I have forgotten! The higher I rise in their service, the closer I get to the throne in the Kremlin, the more I hate them and curse them and thirst for revenge."

In America, in the next months, I would be obliged to listen to drivel about the "new civilization" in Soviet Russia, about our "socialism" and "economic democracy." Listening, I would sometimes think of what was done to Gregory. A kind of nausea would then begin to creep up on me, so that I hastily thought of something else, something pleasant, to avoid being sick.

Another curious encounter in those final days in Moscow remains sharply etched on my memory. Unfortunately I dare not mention his name. Suffice that he ranks among the most influential Communists and has connections in the upper ruling crust. Suffice that I had once risked my own freedom to save his and that he had not forgotten. I thought it best not to say good-bye to him, but apparently he knew of my scheduled departure and took the initiative. We agreed to meet, as if by accident, in the little park opposite the Bolshoi Theatre on Teatralny Square.

"So everything's in order and you're actually going?" he said when we were seated on a park bench. "Congratulations! Congratulations!"

"I thought it better not to make a farewell call on you," I said. "I knew you'd understand."

"But I felt I must talk to you, Victor Andreyevich. I know how you feel about things. You've never really told me, yet I know. That's why I wanted to see you and to warn you. Here we hold our tongues. But abroad you will be in constant danger of revealing your feelings. Freedom is intoxicating. You'll begin to feel yourself safe and one fine day you may spill over. Then you'll suddenly be summoned home, on some perfectly legitimate pretext, just for consultation perhaps, and when you get back —the end!

"Please don't let the new environment give you a false sense of safety. Bear in mind that you're surrounded by more spies, more informers, even than here at home. If you hold tight to that one fact, you'll come through all right. Our whole regime rests firmly on espionage and provocation. The system is not only carried over but intensified outside the country. It is constantly refined, perfected. Our masters know that we hide our real souls deep inside our shells, like spiritual snails. They want to penetrate this innermost retreat. . . .

"Here at home, I'd estimate, every fifth person in any office is a spy, working for one or another of the seeming control organizations. Where you're going, the ratio is closer to one in every three. And not only Russians. We have plenty of Americans on our payrolls, besides those who don't have to be paid, who do it for the cause. You will be asked innocent

questions, you will be provoked to speak out, to complain. Agents will comment on things they've read in the papers or heard on the radio, just to draw you out."

"I think I know this system, my friend, and I shall be careful. I'm grateful all the same. . . ."

"You will be under constant scrutiny from all sides, Victor Andreyevich. Many will be afraid of you, wondering whether you too are an agent. That's the diabolic wisdom of our system—that no man knows his brother. I know how tired you are of all this. If you want to survive it's not enough that you understand my warning. You must *feel* it in the very marrow of your bones. . . ."

We parted. Later, when I thought of him, I always saw with my mind's eye that strange scene on a park bench. I saw how carefully he pulled down the visor of his cap, how he sank his head deeper into his collar, to avoid being recognized. I think of this friend as a miracle—a profoundly decent, warm-hearted Russian who has not only survived the purges but sits smiling and efficient amidst the mighty ones.

Only Irina came to see me off at the Kazan Station. I consoled her, tried to keep up her spirits. Inside of me I wept, knowing what she did not even guess—that this was our last meeting. The knowledge made me wretched. But what could I tell her? Nothing. It was far better to leave her in total ignorance. There was no joy in the departure for America—only a sharp ache, a pervasive and inexpressible sorrow. It was not my fault that I was leaving my country. It was the fault of a corrupt and inhuman regime. The only thing left that I could do for my suffering people was to escape, then try to tell the world all I knew as best I could. Such was the dictate of my Russian heritage. Such was the logic of my whole life.

4

A gray-haired, soft-spoken man with an intelligent face and kindly eyes shared my two-bed compartment. Furtively, in the suspicious Soviet way, we became acquainted. We pooled our food, we discussed the war. I was going to Vladivostok, I said in answer to his friendly inquiry. His response to the same question was even more vague—"beyond the Urals," he said with a deprecating gesture.

During the night there was a knock at our door. A smartly turned out N.K.V.D. officer entered. My heart pounded in sudden apprehension. Though in my mind I was convinced that I was actually leaving the U.S.S.R., my nerves remained on the alert, unbelieving.

"Documents, please!" the officer said politely.

From my upper berth I handed over my passport. He examined it carefully, compared the photograph with the original, and returned the little red book with a snappy salute. To my astonishment my new acquaintance produced an identical foreign passport. Both of us were going abroad, both of us had lied—now both of us felt foolish.

"Tell me, Victor Andreyevich," he said when the officer had left, "why

must we lie to one another? Why must we fear each other? We're fellow-Russians, we know many of the same people and places, yet we fear one another. Politics don't interest me. I'm on my way to Outer Mongolia to raise cattle for our country and arrange for meat imports, nothing more mysterious than that. How sad that I should have lied!"

"And I'm going to America," I said, "to help select metal products for our country under lend-lease. Forgive me for lying to you! I feel ashamed."

"There's nothing to forgive; we're in the same boat. Ekh, this everlasting distrust . . . this childish secrecy. . . ."

The stock-breeder alighted beyond the Urals for a cnange in trains. His place was soon taken by a large man in a leather overcoat, with a thick brief case under his arm. He was loud, fussy and self-important, a man accustomed to attentions and instant obedience. Behind him came a younger man in military attire though without insignia of rank, a revolver at his belt. He was carrying the large man's baggage and busied himself to make his superior comfortable. It was a familiar picture: a high government official and his lackey extraordinary.

I recognized the newcomer at once as Comrade Borodin, former chairman of the Stalingrad Regional Executive Committee. He took off his overcoat, revealing the badge of a member of the Supreme Soviet and an Order of Lenin pinned on his chest. He was pot-bellied and his tiny eyes looked slyly out of a cold flat face. His fleshy hands were meticulously manicured. Demonstratively Comrade Borodin took a Browning revolver out of his pocket, demonstratively he placed it under his pillow. There would be no mistaking his power and importance. Then he deigned to scrutinize his new traveling companion.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere?" he asked.

"Yes, Comrade Borodin, at the Sovnarkom. I've sat in at a number of conferences where you were present. My name's Kravchenko, Victor Andreyevich Kravchenko."

"Splendid, splendid. Where are you bound for?"

"America, Washington."

"You don't say! Most interesting. Smart and strong devils, the Yankees. We must get to know them inside out. Good thing their industry is helping *us*."

Borodin was on his way to the Altai Territory on an official mission. He had started out by plane but had been forced down by "a cough and a sneeze in the motor," as he explained, and here he was crawling along by rail. Fortunately he had brought a lot of food along, and in addition he would see what the train restaurant could scare up. Oh, we'd have a fine trip, never doubt. Did I play cards? Did I like a little drink?

The uniformed orderly, whom Borodin treated like a serf, opened a knapsack crammed with good victuals and laid out a magnificent meal. I yielded to my companion's garrulous invitation to share the luxury, but insisted on contributing my rations. In addition, the cringing dining-car manager, awed by Borodin's ample presence, set up supper feasts for us and a number of other important passengers, including a General and an Admiral, every night after his dining car was closed to ordinary mortals.

Between meals we foregathered in one or another compartment, where some played cards and all reveled in disjointed discussion of the war, the scenery, the relative virtues of various Caucasian wines and other such problems. When we sat down to supper Borodin invariably offered a solemn toast to our Beloved Teacher and Leader.

Only the occasional sight of hungry, half-naked homeless children at stations spoiled our journey. At one station Borodin tossed some well-gnawed chicken bones out of the window. Instantly hungry children pounced on these treasures, fighting furiously for every scrap. Borodin scowled, his eyes narrowed to slits and he muttered something about the terrible war. The pot-bellied "proletarian" leader was annoyed. Nevertheless, he commanded his lackey to give the *bezprizorni* some bread. Then he pulled down the shades and finished his job on the cold chicken.

Our train, we learned, was carrying important foreign guests—a British trade-union delegation headed by Walter Citrine. They traveled in a special car with several Soviet officials and translators, served by their own kitchen and otherwise protected against direct contact with Soviet realities. There was no way, however, in which the famished *bezprizorni* and the ill-clad, starved looking people at some stations could be shut out of view. I could only hope that Sir Walter and his fellow-Britons drew some intimations of the bitter truth from those tragic sights.

There was a continuous flow of trainloads of equipment and armament westward, toward the fighting fronts. "Lend-lease!" Borodin frequently exclaimed as another train rumbled by our windows. "Wonderful American invention!" the General agreed. The closer we got to Vladivostok, the more impressive became this tide of American goods.

Before long Comrade Borodin got off the train, his meek orderly bringing up the rear, staggering under the luggage. The dining-car manager breathed an audible sigh of relief; I couldn't hear what he mumbled under his breath but I'm quite sure I guessed right. The vacated place in my coupe was taken by another member of the Soviet nobility, just as well fed and self-satisfied as his predecessor, though a lot more subdued. He turned out to he the chief of the Regional Department of Art and was on a "cultural mission" to Ulan-Ude in the Mongolian People's Republic.

I was in a highly nervous state throughout the trip. Every inspection of documents—and they were examined frequently—set my heart pounding with illogical apprehension. I slept badly and when finally I dozed off I dreamed that N.K.V.D. ruffians were dragging me off the train. In one such nightmare someone hissed in my ear, "So you thought we didn't know. . . . So you thought we'd let you escape. . . ." I looked around, recognized Gershgorn, and awoke in a cold sweat.

In Vladivostok I stopped at the Intourist Hotel. An orchestra continuously played loud dance tunes, wine and beer were plentiful, and women agents of the N.K.V.D. plied their trade. I visited the free city market, where food and clothes were on sale, at fantastic black-market prices, in greater profusion than I had seen anywhere in the U.S.S.R. Much of this merchandise was clearly American, no doubt stolen from lend-lease consignments or brought in by Russian sailors. I saw a simple pair of women's

shoes fetch three thousand rubles in this market. I saw a kilo of bacon sold for 1200 rubles. Small cans bearing colorful American labels brought two hundred rubles and more.

Vladivostok was very much alive. Uniformed sailors and civilian seamen were everywhere in evidence and the docks groaned under mountains of American supplies and equipment. The city was flushed with wartime activity.

Then came the morning when I was taken by automobile, along with others going across the Pacific, to the customs house in the port. We were admitted, one by one, into a closed, businesslike room, along with our luggage. Three Chekists, one in civilian clothes, the others in uniform, went methodically through every suitcase and package, digging into pockets, probing linings and in some cases shaking out shirts and other garments. Then they searched my person no less thoroughly. Every pocket was turned inside out. Every inch of the linings and lapels of my jacket was ruffled with practised fingers. The contents of my wallet were investigated, one of the uniformed men making notes of names and telephone numbers.

An envelope containing snapshots of various members of my family for some reason made the sleuths bristle with curiosity. I was asked about the identity of every person in every photograph.

"And who is this officer?" the civilian customs official pointed to one of the pictures.

"My brother Constantine."

"Where is he?"

"He was killed on the Caucasus front."

"Why are you taking so many photographs with you?"

"They're my folks. After all, I'll be alone, away from them all."

"But you're coming back to the Soviet Union?"

My heart skipped a bit. I swallowed hard before I could find my tongue. But apparently his remark was a shot in the dark, for I was duly passed and certified. Soon I was actually on board the lumber freighter *Komiles*, destination Vancouver, Canada. There were perhaps a score of passengers, men and women, all of us assigned to work in the United States.

Installed in a tiny but comfortable cabin in the officer's wing, I took stock of my thoughts. From the deck I watched the Russian soil recede. It was my last view of my suffering country, where unhappy millions groaned under the oppression of a regime with few precedents in history for systematized and ruthless despotism. To the indignities of an all-embracing serfdom were now added the horrors of war. Nowhere in the world was there such a fearsome concentration of wretched suffering and political despotism, nowhere else was misery so cynically disguised with "advanced" slogans. I could not remain long on deck. Gloomy thoughts and emotions overwhelmed me. Inwardly I was bidding a sorrowful farewell to my friends, my family, my past. Utterly depressed, I went to my cabin to be alone with my thoughts.

The decision to leave, to find the freedom in which to tell the bitter truth about Russia's privations and political slavery, in which to struggle

for the liberation of my people, had matured so slowly in the depths of my being that I did not myself know when it took full shape. But for years now it had been a conscious plan, awaiting only a propitious moment. Yet now that the moment had arrived, I was steeped in sorrow. I was poignantly aware of a separation as deep as death, and I felt as if I were being conveyed to my own funeral. At this moment I loved my country and my people with a fierce focussing of emotion that was almost unbearable.

I recalled scenes from my childhood, my youth, my mature life; moments of happiness no less painful, in this hour of total separation, than the scenes of suffering and humiliation. I thought of my experiences in the first famine, in collectivization, in the second and man-made famine, the purges, the hunger, the cold, the nights of torture in Nikopol. I thought of the concentration camps strewn through the length and breadth of the land and of dozens, yes, hundreds, of my closest friends languishing in prisons and forced labor enclosures.

Where was my gentle, high-spirited mother? Where was my incorruptible father, so dour and upright in his loyalty to a vision of freedom? Would they emerge alive from their German captivity? Would they be forced to suffer for my decision? And Irina, would she be punished for my actions? Would she forgive me for having kept her in absolute ignorance of my plans? What would my brother Eugene, a man entirely unconcerned with politics, think of my flight?

My friends, my loved ones, the living and the dead, will you understand why I was constrained to abandon you? Will you understand that I must leave you only in order to be closer to you, in order to attempt to speak of you and for you to a world made dizzy by propaganda and blinded by wishful thinking?

Sailing under the Soviet flag I was still, technically, on Soviet soil. The unreasonable unease still nagged at my waking hours and invaded my sleep. A radiogram, an unguarded word in the presence of the spies who, without doubt, were among us even on this small freighter, would suffice to wreck my passionate hopes and plans.

We passed the shores of Japan. Apprehensively we watched two Japanese destroyers in our wake and, the following day, a Japanese war plane circling us. Several days later we saw land on the horizon and were informed that it was an island where we might see Americans. This first glimpse of American-held territory stirred great excitement among crew and passengers alike. Coming close to the island I saw an American flag fluttering above a group of new houses.

A motorboat chugged alongside. Two American naval officers came up the gangplank and retired into the captain's quarters. Three sailors remained in the boat and we all crowded to the rail for our first close-up of those capitalist "class enemies" against whose wiles we had been so elaborately forewarned. They did not measure up to the role of capitalist menace, these tall, bronzed, smiling youngsters. Several of the girls in our party were English translators and we immediately plunged into conversation.

These American boys, blessedly unaware of their villainous role in Soviet eyes, asked not a single political question. It was plain enough that they were interested only in the Russian girls and that in a decidedly non-political fashion. Someone turned on a gramaphone in his cabin and played Russian records for the three sailors down in the boat. One of them asked us to sing *Ochi Chorniye,* but, alas, there were no singers among us.

After the motorboat had departed, we discussed our first sampling of Americans. Everyone was lyrically enthusiastic—the boys' looks, their friendliness, their humor touched our hearts. Then a fanatic Communist (there is at least one in any Soviet group) dashed cold water on our ardor.

"Hadn't we better moderate our admiration, comrades?" he said in a firm, authoritative voice. "Remember that these 'nice' and 'sweet' boys are the children and lackeys of a hostile capitalist world!"

His words recalled us to reality. Some of us looked positively shamefaced, to have been caught off guard so quickly by the temptations against which we had been explicitly warned.

On the nineteenth day we were within sight of Canada. A Canadian inspector climbed aboard, greeting us in dubious Russian but with an undubious smile. Soon we were in the harbor of Vancouver. In less than twenty minutes, without any shouting or confusion, we were docked. The Canadian customs inspectors came aboard, two civilians and one naval officer. We lined up, presented our passports, which were checked in the most cursory fashion and handed back to us. Nobody examined our suitcases, nobody turned our pockets inside out or searched our coat linings for hidden documents. Most incredible of all, no one questioned us about anything. There was, in short, none of the fear of Soviet citizens we had been led to anticipate, nothing to justify the "vigilance" to which we were committed.

In less than an hour after docking, we were free to go ashore! Even the most bigoted Communists in the group, including the comrade who had dampened our admiration for the American sailors, were amazed and, at bottom, disappointed—they felt like people laden with umbrellas, rubbers and raincoats on a sunny day. Where was the capitalist sense of class hostility? Why was there so little alarm in their friendly curiosity? Were these people naive or—distressing thought!—contemptuous of the germ-bearers of revolution? It seemed to us unreal, incredible, almost indecent to be turned loose so casually on Canadian soil, and this in time of war.

The Soviet Consul from San Francisco, a Comrade Lomakin, assembled us in the salon and, in a bored, unconvincing way, ran through another lecture on the perils of the capitalist jungle. The poor fellow was just doing his duty. Then we were on our own. Only two guards stood at the gangplank, one Russian, the other Canadian.

I paused for a few seconds before stepping off into Vancouver. I had a deep, earnest awareness of the significance of the moment. For the first time in all my thirty-eight years I was outside the bounds of my native Russian world. For the first time in my mature years I was, it seemed to me at least, beyond the reach of Stalin and his secret police.

CHAPTER XXVII

STALIN'S SUBJECTS ABROAD

VANCOUVER. My head was in a whirl. My thoughts were playing leapfrog. I was free! Who was it once said that only those who have been slaves can understand freedom? It seemed to me, walking through the main streets with a group of my shipmates, that I had never before seen so many relaxed, unafraid, happy people in one place at one time.

What excited us most was the shop windows. This lush abundance of things to wear, to eat, to use! We were like children at a circus, gaping and exclaiming over wonders that to grown-ups were commonplaces. *But this is as if the dream of socialist abundance had come true,* I kept repeating inwardly. *This is what we have been promised for the dim future after an endless chain of Five Year Plans!* There was also a tinge of resentment in my thoughts: These people, our allies, seemed so remote from the horrors and sacrifices of war which had inundated my unfortunate country.

We entered shops to make what was for most of us our first capitalist purchases. Could we really buy all the bread, all the shirts, all the chocolate, everything else we pleased? It bordered on the magical. And the prices seemed ludicrously low. The girls in our party talked in ecstatic whispers about a dress in the window. In Moscow or Vladivostok, if they could have found in war-time, anything so elegant and exquisite, they would have been glad to pay two or three thousand rubles, eight or ten months' wages, several years' savings. In Vancouver it was marked $14.98. . . .

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We decided to go into a shoe shop. We were met with smiles and ushered courteously into comfortable seats. "The son-of-a-bitch knows we're foreigners," a misanthropist in our midst growled, "and he's acting up." But we were not convinced, since we noted that Canadians, too, were being treated with the same courtly respect. The clerk, who was dressed as fashionably as the capitalist villain in a Soviet propaganda film, brought many pairs of shoes, different cuts, different materials, a whole museum of shoes. He seemed astonished by our astonishment and perplexed by the delight of the Russian girls.

My sociological interest came to the fore.

"Are you the proprietor of this establishment?" I asked, through an interpreter.

"Oh no, I'm just a salesman here," he laughed.

"Would you mind if we asked how much you earn a month?"

"Not at all. It depends on commissions. About 150 dollars, I'd say."

"A hundred and fifty dollars!" the misanthropist forgot himself long enough to exclaim in Russian. Like the rest of us, he was translating the sum into pairs of shoes at the prices we had just been quoted. "Why the son-of-a-bitch could buy thirty pairs of shoes with his monthly salary."

Next we decided to sample a haberdashery. Shirts, ties, kerchiefs, sweaters, topcoats, piles of everything at moderate prices. It seemed to us remarkable that the shop wasn't being stormed by frantic buyers, cleaned out in a twinkling.

These fantastic capitalists not only gave you all your heart's desire but packed it up for you and thanked you for taking it away! Carrying our bundles, we entered a restaurant. To the best of our knowledge no one was trailing us. Unless we informed on each other, not a soul needed to know where we had been, what we had done, what we had said. The food put in front of us completed the picture of abundance.

Intrigued by the excited group of jabbering Russians, an elderly man, immaculately dressed and smoking a long cigar, approached and introduced himself. He was the owner of the restaurant.

"You fellows are sure giving the Germans the licking of their lives!" he declared, shaking hands with every one of us in turn. "I tell you Russia is winning the war and your allies should be damned grateful."

"Yes, it is essential to destroy Hitler's dictatorship," someone in the group rose to the occasion.

"Right you are!" the proprietor said. "I admire all Russians from the bottom of my heart, though of course I'm opposed to Communism. After all, Mr. Stalin also runs a dictatorship."

A breath of frost passed over us. The misanthropist looked at me slowly and meaningfully. "There you are!" he said in Russian. "A fascist pretending to be friendly and under it all he hates our country."

I was about to defend our host's remarks but stopped myself short. I was still among Soviet citizens, there were still strings on my freedom.

Back on the ship, we compared impressions and purchases. We talked late into the night about the marvels of this rich, outspoken world, so far from the realities of war. We told each other, by way of political insurance, that this was merely the beguiling surface, under which were the horrors, the exploitation, the degeneracy and the future crises vouched for by our Stalinist view of the world. Maybe, we thought, those warnings we had received against capitalist fleshpots were not overdrawn after all.

In a few days we were transferred to a train. I walked through the length of the train, to observe people. Even in the day coaches, the passengers seemed to my Soviet eyes to be well dressed. I looked at men and women who evidently were merely farmers, clerks or working people, but they all wore stout leather shoes and good sturdy clothes. Such affluence still seemed to me unreal, a bit extravagant.

Next day an American in uniform, accompanied by another in mufti, came to our car. He looked at our passports, checked them casually, without a trace of decent suspicion, and returned them to us with a smile. Informed that the civilian was a customs inspector, we had all pulled out

our suitcases and opened them wide. He glanced negligently at one or two, as a matter of form, then said, "All right, fine, close 'em up."

We felt actually embarrassed by such absurd inefficiency and wondered where was the catch. Personal freedom is one thing, but didn't such lack of vigilance smack of anarchy, chaos? The two men lingered a few minutes, pleased to meet Russians. Then they wished us good luck and departed smiling. Somehow I had imagined that entering the United States would be a long elaborate process, requiring extensive inspections and perhaps interrogations behind closed doors.

We had a short stop-over in a city called Buffalo and used it, of course, to see the sights. I remembered the word Buffalo from having seen it on machinery in Russian factories and was fascinated by the tall buildings, the cleanliness and rectangularity of the place. A number of Buffalo Americans stopped to talk to us but not one, to our amazement, asked a political or economic question. It would take us a long time to become accustomed to people so indifferent to politics and ideology.

The journey to Washington was replete with excitement for me. I was feverishly curious about the new land and gazed in wonder at every new town, at the broad asphalted highways visible through the windows, at the American farmers in their fields, so different from our peasants. I was touched by the easy, open way in which men and women started conversations, asking and answering questions with a childlike frankness and naivete. From the novels by Dreiser and Steinbeck which I had read I was prepared for abject poverty and a deep bitterness of which, as yet, I saw no trace. I would come to know, in due time, that America had its share of misery and injustice. But a Russian fresh from the "socialist" land could hardly share Steinbeck's indignation; his Joads were, on the whole, no worse off than most of our peasants.

On August 19, 1943, I arrived in the capital of the United States, and was met at Union Station by a representative of the Soviet Purchasing Commission. A room had been rented for me with an American family. It was clean, sunny, comfortable, with a private bath, and my hosts seemed truly pleased to have a foreigner—one of those "wonderful Russians"—under their roof. They did not ask me for "documents" and apparently did not have to report me to any house committee. To a regimented conscience this laxness did appear rather disorderly, if not outright sinful. In time this family and I would develop a language of our own, composed of signs and garbled words, sufficient for our meagre social contacts. They accepted me, wholly on faith, as an expert on the war and on all things foreign, let alone Russian, and behaved as if every Soviet military achievement were my own handiwork.

The following morning I reported for work. The interior of our Washington headquarters on Sixteenth Street looked and even smelled remarkably Soviet. It seemed hermetically sealed against the American spirit. Though there was a scattering of native employes in the lowest jobs—typists, stenographers, porters, messengers—the place had an authentically Soviet atmosphere; one sensed something furtive, harried, almost conspiratorial that was uniquely ours.

Comrade Serov was a good-looking and impressive man, tall, dark, robustly built, and filled his new American clothes creditably. He received me coldly, a bit suspiciously, as becomes a vigilant bureaucrat. I handed him the coupon indicating that I was a Party member.

"Number?" he snapped.

I recited it glibly—2486475. For a Communist to forget his membership serial is a species of lese majesty, symptom of faltering faith. A few other questions satisfied him that I was, indeed, the specific Kravchenko assigned to his care, which allowed him to smile, to inquire about my trip and to make small talk about Moscow. But all the time he was studying me with a narrowed, piercing look.

As direct plenipotentiary of the Party's Central Committee, Serov was the ranking Communist emissary in the United States. He had no direct contact with Americans. He took little part in Soviet-American negotiations. As far as the official records went, he was simply another assistant in the Commission. But in fact he was the most potent agent of the Soviet state in America. His word was law for everyone from the most menial Soviet employe to the most important Soviet military, economic and other representatives. Serov spoke with the voice of the Party, which is the real government of the U.S.S.R., whereas even the Ambassador spoke only with the voice of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. As far as all Soviet subjects residing here were concerned, he was the Stalin of America.

He unreeled for me the boringly familiar lecture on the dangers and duties ahead of me and the magnitude of the faith lodged in me by the Party. Somehow the stale stuff annoyed me less than formerly. Now I could afford to be amused inwardly: the secret knowledge that soon I would shake off the totalitarian yoke made me immune to the insults implicit in patronizing instructions behind which lurked threats. I even had the boldness to refuse, on the plea that I was too tired, when he asked me to report on conditions in the home land to a staff meeting that night. What could I bring them, in this setting, except the official falsehoods?

My immediate superior, Comrade Serov informed me, would be Alexander Rastarchuk; I would be one of about ten metallurgical specialists in the Metals Division of which he was chief. Tens of millions of dollars in metal goods were being shipped to the Soviet Union under the lend-lease arrangement and it would be my duty to inspect much of this material, to certify its fitness for our purposes, to draw up specifications for myriad items, to select and reject materials of immense value. I would be held strictly accountable for all materials passing through my hands.

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Our Commission was, to all intents and purposes, a chunk of pure totalitarianism torn loose from the banks of the Moscow River and deposited intact on the shores of the Potomac.

In Washington, D. C., right in the heart of the world's greatest democracy, hundreds of us, men and women, lived the rigidly controlled

lives of citizens of the world's greatest dictatorship. Though we resided and worked among free people, we remained the terrorized subjects of a police-state. We did not share the free speech, free press, freedom of conscience and freedom from fear of our American neighbors, except secretly and at the risk of dire punishment.

What we thought, what we read, whom we dared to meet was as completely prescribed and supervised as if we were still inside the Soviet Union. Our every word and act was subject to an elaborate technique of spying. We had a Party Committee, Party nuclei, a Special or Secret Department—the complete equipment of political intimidation and N.K.V.D. surveillance under which we had writhed at home. Here, too, mysterious safes bulged with information and malicious misinformation about every one of us. But what had seemed natural, almost inevitable, in the U.S.S.R. often loomed grotesque and ugly against the American background.

At purely business and technical conferences it was General Belayev—later his successor, General Rudenko—who presided. But at meetings of the Party Bureau of the Commission, where the really vital policies were discussed, Comrade Serov sat in the driver's seat. Occasionally a session attended only by Communists might begin under the General's command and then, when the business phase was finished, he would relinquish his seat at the head of the table to Serov. The doors at that point would invariably be locked so that the Party meeting could get under way.

The same dual system of authority prevailed in every division of the organization. Comrade Rastarchuk conducted technical conferences of our Metals Division, but the nucleus secretary, Markov, took over and Rastarchuk became just one of the rank and file when Party affairs were on the agenda. No one who fails to visualize this picture of a one-party dictatorship pulling the strings behind the facade of government has begun to comprehend the nature of modern totalitarianism.

My basic salary was around three hundred dollars a month. Since I traveled a large part of the time, on an ample expense account, and was provided with extra funds for entertainment when business strategy required it, my real income actually was larger. The most galling restriction, from the outset, was the one imposed on our contacts with Americans.

The people among whom I now lived fascinated me. They seemed to me utterly different from the Russians, and for that matter from Europeans—not only a different race, but almost a different species. But we were strictly forbidden to cultivate their friendship, except for specific business purposes. Having made an American acquaintance, we were obliged to file a detailed report about him, covering not only the routine data of his identity but our impression of his political mood, his feelings about the Soviets. Whether the acquaintance was permitted to prosper depended on the higher officials. It was for them to decide whether the contact was "desirable" or not.

Unavoidably, however, I did come to know dozens of people, in the Washington agencies connected with the vast lend-lease enterprise, and among the handful who were employed by the Commission. I was end-

lessly embarrassed by their cordiality, their readiness to show me everything, their uninhibited talk. To a Soviet official long steeped in intrigue and saturated with fears, the American candor and lack of suspicion seemed almost childlike.

The risks of meeting Americans were vastly multiplied when they happened to be of Russian origin or descent. In that case there was always the fear that they might be supporters of some anti-Stalin faction. At the same time the temptation of making acquaintances among ex-Russians was greatest, if only because of the common language.

The tidal wave of pro-Russian sentiment sweeping the United States after the triumphs of the Red Army was a constant source of danger to Soviet citizens here. Americans were eager to show their good will and appreciation. They pressed us to come to their homes and their clubs, to join them at some bar for a drink. Evading their well-meant hospitality was not always easy. If we did yield to an insistent invitation, we were in line for trouble. We always protected ourselves by reporting the facts.

An elderly American lady holding a very modest post in the Commission asked me several times to pay her a visit. Knowing that I was without a family, her motherly heart was touched. On one pretext or another I avoided accepting her kindness. One evening, as hard luck would have it, I ran into her on the street. It appeared that we were quite near her home and that several friends would be dropping in. I felt that I could not refuse to come up for a cup of coffee without offending her. I remained at her house only an hour. Other guests arrived and we made small talk.

For weeks thereafter I remained in a state of painful alarm. My heart sank every time I was called into the Party Secretary's chambers. What if someone had seen me and "told"? What if the lady herself innocently blurted out the awful truth to the wrong people? Our American co-workers were for the most part ignorant of the pressures under which the Russians worked.

The taboo against mixing with Americans did not apply, of course, to those whom we wished to cultivate for business or political reasons. In that case, on the contrary, we were provided with special funds for lavish entertainment and encouraged to do things in a generous and even showy style. We had to demonstrate that we were "men of the world" representing a rich, powerful and open-handed country.

I have been told of valuable gifts, including expensive furs, presented to Americans whose good will we considered useful. The recipient may have thought it a personal and spontaneous gesture, but in every case it was the end-product of an official discussion and decision. This control of our relations with Americans was carried so far that even New Year's cards were sent to American officials and business acquaintances only with the consent of the proper authorities. We were each instructed to draw up a list of people to whom, in accordance with American usage, we wished to send cards, together with the text of the greetings. The lists and the texts were examined, edited and returned to us with formal permission to prepare the cards. To make sure, however, that we did not depart from the prescribed forms, the actual mailing was done by the Commission.

We were not above using sex appeal to obtain information or the inside track on some deal. Once I was called in by a top-shelf official of the Commission. He explained a "problem" with which he was wrestling. It was important to expedite a certain matter in the War Production Board and the key person in the particular bureau involved was a young woman.

"I want you to meet this woman, Victor Andreyevich," he said, "and get friendly. Take her to night clubs, buy her presents and turn on the charm. The rest will be easy, I'm sure."

He was shocked when I refused categorically to act as the Lothario in the plot. I pleaded a lack of talent in that direction and the difficulty of my inadequate English and in the end escaped the unsavory chore.

Back at my desk after a week or two on the road, chiefly in the company of American technical and business men, the life of the Commission always seemed to me doubly oppressive. I felt as if I were back in a prison compound after a furlough. I had to re-focus my attention on the onerous prison rules under which so many decent Russians suffered in the Commission. Even as in the U.S.S.R., we totalitarian subjects abroad had to keep our thoughts to ourselves, exposing a corner of our true minds and hearts only rarely to a few whom we trusted. Under such trust, at best, there was a palpitant uncertainty. We pretended that we were blind to the liberties enjoyed by Americans. To express admiration or even tolerance for the American way of life would be courting political suicide.

I know that it is not easy to make our attitudes credible to Americans. How could they quite believe my amusing, yet terribly tragic, experience with Mitya? He, too, was a Soviet citizen abroad—working for Amtorg, the Soviet trading organization. One day, while in New York on business, I dropped in unannounced at Mitya's hotel room. I caught him red-handed in the midst of a fearful crime; he was reading a radical Russian-language magazine, a "counter-revolutionary" publication we were forbidden to taste.

"So this is what you read!" I exclaimed, pretending to be shocked.

My friend turned pale. Tears came to his eyes. He knew that his fate was now in my hands. If I should report his blasphemy, his recall to Russia would be almost certain, and after that expulsion from the Party, disgrace, perhaps not only for himself but for his whole family. He tried to defend himself, he groped for words. In a panic of fear he implored me to spare him.

"Believe me, Victor Andreyevich, on my word of honor as a Communist, that I merely wanted to know what these scoundrels are writing about us. I beg you to forget my offense. We've known each other for many years. If you report me, you'll be wrecking my life."

Watching his discomfiture, I began to feel contrite. I assured him that I had no intention of reporting him and that, moreover, I read that magazine myself.

"What slaves we are, Mitya," I sighed. "How scared we are of each other and even of our own thoughts. What do they want to make of us? Spies, liars, stooges incapable of genuine faith and friendship. Why do our

bosses fear to let us read what we please? Are they afraid we'll learn some unpleasant truths? It's hard enough to be a slave in Moscow—here in America it's a thousand times harder."

But even this outburst of frankness did not assuage his alarm. On the contrary, it set him wondering whether I was trying to trap him, to draw him into making dangerous statements. He was not entirely quieted until I took him to my room at the Pennsylvania Hotel, opened my brief case and showed him that I had the same periodical in my possession.

Only then he opened up and I learned in the course of a long night session of spirited talk that he despised the Soviet regime as thoroughly as I did. Only the fact that he had a large family in Russia, he said, kept him from breaking loose and declaring his independence. I resisted the temptation of telling him of my own intentions, because I did not wish to burden him with such guilty knowledge.

Though we were not explicitly prohibited to read the New York *Times* or the Washington papers, it was not discreet to do so. Hearst and Scripps-Howard publications were looked on as contraband. The only way to play safe was to read the *Daily Worker*, the Russian-language paper *Russky Golos*, the New York tabloid *PM*, and pro-Soviet weeklies like *The Nation* and *The New Republic*. *Life*, too, was regarded then as ideologically acceptable—especially after it published a Russian issue which contained far more Soviet propaganda than truth; this favored status, I believe, it squandered later at one fell swoop with an article by ex-Ambassador William C. Bullitt on Soviet policies in Europe.

En route to Washington, in a Pullman car, I was leafing through a copy of the *Saturday Evening Post* when a colleague from the Commission walked in. He sat down and we talked shop for a while. Then I said something about the magazine, its illustrations and advertisements. I was especially interested in an article which, I judged, was critical of the government.

"These Americans," I said, "certainly don't hesitate to say what they think of their officials, from President Roosevelt down."

It was a casual, unthinking remark, which I forgot as soon as I had made it. Several days thereafter the secretary of my Party unit, Markov, called me into his office.

"What kind of a trip did you have?" he asked.

"Oh pretty good."

"You ran into Comrade B——, didn't you?"

"Yes, that's right, I did."

"What was the nature of your argument with him?"

"Argument?" I was perplexed. "I don't recall any."

"I'm afraid, Comrade Kravchenko, we're getting off to a bad start today. You're not being frank with me. Would you like me to remind you? Surely you haven't forgotten that you criticized the Soviet press and complained because we don't attack Comrade Stalin?"

"It's a lie!" I shouted. "I insist that you summon Comrade B——. I'll make him take his lie back."

Comrade B——, in my presence, did not have the courage to stand by

the report he had submitted about my "counter-revolutionary remarks." The nucleus secretary decided to drop the issue. But I remained more convinced than ever of the need to curb my tongue.

Another minor episode: Once I fell ill and was confined to bed for a few days. Several of the American employes sent me friendly notes, expressing hope of my speedy recovery. It was a human gesture which gave me a warm feeling of comradeship. When I returned to work I had good reason to regret their kindliness. My English having been unequal to the job of reading the letters in detail, I had brought them to the office and asked someone to translate them for me.

I forgot the whole matter until I was suddenly summoned by the same Comrade Markov. He proceeded to cross-examine me sternly about my relations with each of the Americans who had written me. What is at the bottom of this extraordinary fraternization of a responsible Party man with the "class enemies" around him? He ended with a solemn reprimand and an injunction to beware the pitfalls of our capitalist environment. I counted myself lucky to get off so lightly.

Correspondence was responsible for another crisis in my Washington career. A postcard addressed to me by a corporal in the American Army stationed in Florida was seen, by accident, by a high official of the Commission. I was promptly haled before the Party authorities on charges of unauthorized "communications with the American armed forces." It took a lot of explaining to convince them that the corporal was the son of the good people with whom I lived.

"It was just a friendly human sort of thing and without any political significance," I pleaded. "Besides, I abstained from answering the boy."

The last statement was a lie. Actually I had replied to his greetings. To do less might have made him think that all Russians were boors. A little white lie, however, is small enough price to pay for escape when a totalitarian subject finds himself on such a hot spot.

In the Commission building there is a library. One evening I asked the librarian on duty for two books: the novel *I Love* by Avdeyenko and a historical volume by a writer named Virt in which General Tukhachevsky was mentioned. Neither of the books was available. I borrowed several others and forgot the matter.

But soon thereafter I was called on the carpet by my Party superiors. It appeared that I had committed a whole array of mistakes ranging from simple sins to possible crimes. My presumed interest in the work of General Tukhachevsky, who had been executed as a traitor, was obviously alarming; and was I not aware that this Virt book was no longer read in the U.S.S.R.? My ignorance was no excuse—a good Communist knows who are the "enemies of the people." As for the novel, which once enjoyed great popularity in Russia, it seemed to have been banned for some reason and was now on the literary blacklist. Why had I wished to read that "counter-revolutionary" story at this particular time? In short, I stood deeply compromised in the eyes of the guardians of my Party purity.

The library, in point of fact, was one of the important instruments for supervising our thoughts. Cut off from contact with Americans, most of us

unfamiliar with the English language, we were forced to do a lot of reading in Russian. The kind of books and periodicals we picked was carefully noted by the librarian-spies. Even the books we browsed through were reported. These were all useful indications of our state of mind and therefore duly entered in our personal *dossiers*.

The library carried a lot of light reading along with the heavy tomes on Party history and other respectably ideological subjects. To help balance the record of my more frivolous reading, I often borrowed the more respectable books without the slightest intention of reading them. The obsessive fear of our monitors was that we were yielding to the soft bourgeois environment. Our problem, therefore, was to demonstrate continually that our faith remained firm and unspoiled. At Serov's suggestion, we studied again the *History of the Party*, Stalin's *Problems of Leninism*, etc. At closed Party meetings we spurred each other to exhibitions of faith in the Party and The Boss.

The margin of privacy was even narrower than it had been at home. The only address known to our friends in Russia was care of the Commission, where every letter was read before being turned over to us, notwithstanding the fact that it had already been stamped by the Soviet censors. Mail to anyone in Russia, if sent through someone going to the U.S.S.R., had to be delivered *open* for forwarding by the Commission.

We were forbidden to visit night clubs, to see "counter-revolutionary" films or plays, to listen to radio commentators considered "unfriendly" to the Soviet cause. We would sooner have been caught in the act of murder than reading an anti-Soviet book. Being human, we did many of these things—the temptations to political sinning are overwhelming in a democratic country—but always in fear and trembling; many paid with their careers for such transgressions.

The size and complexity of the espionage to which the Soviet official abroad is subjected are truly staggering. Every one of us was expected, as a loyal Party man and also in sheer self-protection, to report suspicious words and acts of the others. That much is taken for granted, whether in Moscow or Vladivostok, in Washington or Chicago.

But in addition the Party had an array of special agents scattered throughout the Commission, seemingly attending to divers technical jobs but in truth devoted to spying on the people around them. Beyond that and most frightening was the network of agents of the N.K.V.D., not known to us, of course, who spied on a more professional basis. Even the General at the head of the Commission and Comrade Serov himself were not exempt from this over-all police control.

Since we did not know who were the spies—normally the agent himself was ignorant of the identity of his fellow-informers—the only safety was in assuming that everyone but one's most intimate friends was an actual or potential tale-bearer. The remarkable thing, indeed, is that despite this demoralizing system many of us did become friendly and did under pledges of secrecy share our thoughts, discontents and despairs. Comrade Serov did not suspect how many of his subordinates had come from Russia in a state of complete disillusionment and how many more had been in-

fected by the democratic contagion in America. Most of these totalitarians abroad were decent human beings, hating the humiliations in which they were involved by a regime based on mutual distrust.

When a colleague showed unusual signs of friendliness, common sense demanded that we consider the possibility that he or she was trying to win our confidence for a purpose. We knew only too well that conversations on "dangerous" themes were often provoked by zealóus comrades or professional agents to test our immunity to the sinful American surroundings.

Because of my long years in the Soviet *apparat*, and particularly the period spent in the Sovnarkom, I was personally acquainted with a good many influential Soviet officials and leaders. A few of them I found, to my surprise, occupying strangely modest posts in Washington. I had no doubt that their ostensible jobs were not necessarily their real occupations in the United States. Under the Soviet-American arrangement only a limited number of Soviet officials can come in under ordinary diplomatic passports. Additional intelligence personnel are therefore imported under the guise of economic functionaries and specialists.

On one occasion, in the elevator of the Commission building, I found myself face to face with a fairly important official from Moscow. My mind flashed back to the time when I had seen him at the opening of the play *The Front* in the company of two N.K.V.D. generals. He now pretended not to recognize me. Later, however, he looked me up and warned me not to let on that I knew him and not to reveal his identity, since he was here on a special business assignment. To the American government, presumably, he was just a minor official of the lend-lease set-up, though in reality he was an important official of the Moscow Committee of the Party.

Whatever the specific work of a Soviet economic representative, a major part of his obligation is also to obtain all possible data about American business firms, technology, military affairs, scientific processes and the like. These were part of the explicit instructions which I received before leaving the U.S.S.R. and they were constantly reiterated by Commission officials. In the closed Party meetings we made no secret about the fact that accumulation of economic data and all other useful information must be paramount in our minds when visiting American factories and offices.

The exigencies of war had made us allies with England and America, I was constantly warned, but we must not trust any American. The plutocratic democracies would use the first chance to undermine our system. In our very first interview Comrade Serov had said:

"You should have no misconceptions about our relations with the United States. Today we regard our relations with capitalist America as diplomatically and militarily useful. This does not mean that our interests can ever coincide. In the war itself, and in the future peace period, our roads and aims are quite different. If you bear that in mind, you will understand why we must remain vigilant, suspicious and aloof."

One day the Communists in the organization, who made up about 90 per cent of our responsible officials, were called to a special meeting. When the doors were locked, Comrade Serov announced that he had some

important news. He looked solemn. The news was in the form of a very long document, which he read to us, slowly, impressively; then we all initialed it to attest that we were familiar with its contents.

The document was signed by Mikoyan, Commissar of Foreign Trade, but it was clearly the work of the N.K.V.D. in conjunction with Military Intelligence. In effect it was a detailed set of instructions on the kind of information about the United States we must look for, how to gather it, how to cover our traces, how to transmit it to the U.S.S.R. Although in general it merely repeated instructions already given us in the past, it was obviously intended as a refresher course and as a reminder that the highest authorities were depending on us to do our duty in this matter under the cover of lend-lease activities.

3

Everywhere I went in America I received more than my due share of the universal and unbounded admiration for "our brave Russian allies." The extravagance of the adulation sometimes made me wince. All the same, it was good to know that the sacrifices of my people were being appreciated.

But this adulation also became the source of my most irritating and sometimes mortifying experiences here, for it took a curious, even a grotesque turn. By a distortion of logic that had in it a touch of hysteria, not only the recent Russian victories but the shattering defeats that preceded were generally accepted in the United States as proof of the rightness of the Soviet regime. Hitler's offensive proved only that the beast was mighty, but Stalin's counter-offensive somehow confirmed the validity of Bolshevism.

The performance of the Russian people was magnificent. This I knew better than any American enthusiasts, because I was aware, as they were not, that my people were handicapped by a blundering, bureaucratized and despotic government. Yet I could not ignore the fact that we were fighting on our own terrain, with the advantages of almost inexhaustible manpower, full exploitation of our industries, and American technological support. Why Russia's tragically costly victories should be credited to the genius of Bolshevism was beyond me. As a Soviet official under almost constant surveillance I could not speak up, could not defend my countrymen against this monstrous perversion of the facts. A thousand times I had to listen in frustrated silence while the Soviet dictatorship was being given full credit for the achievements of the Russian people.

Inside Russia we had been so ashamed of the Hitler-Stalin pact that we rarely mentioned it at all. Official writings and oratory slurred over that period. But in America the pact was subtly transformed into one more proof of Stalin's wisdom. In one breath people booed the appeasement of Hitler in Munich and cheered his appeasement in Moscow. Somehow it was considered disreputable for the allies to gain time by directing Nazi energies eastward against Poland and Russia, but glorious statesmanship

for the Kremlin to divert Germany into a war in the west against France and England.

Americans seemed intent on explaining everything *in Stalin's favor*, to the discredit of the democracies. The Kremlin's every diplomatic blunder, its groveling bargains with the Nazis, its ineptitude in not preparing for the war, its every fumble—paid for with oceans of Russian blood—emerged in the American prints and American conversation as special, almost mystical virtues.

I had expected, naively no doubt, that the sacrifices of my people would make the outside world sensitive to their sufferings. I had expected to hear democratic citizens say: "The least these heroic Russians deserve is a measure of freedom and democracy." I found, on the contrary, a remarkable callousness to the tragedy of the Russian people. It was based in large part on ignorance, which was excusable, but also in part on indifference, which was plainly insulting. The democratic aspirations of Koreans or Hungarians found ready understanding and encouragement here, but the democratic aspirations of the Russians were outlawed and treated as a kind of treachery.

Even in the first weeks after my arrival I could see that someone somewhere had manipulated the surge of fellow-feeling for Russians for Stalin's benefit. What should have been a portent of Russian freedom had been twisted into a justification of Soviet despotism. Stalin's grip on the American mind, I realized with a shock, was almost as firm as his grip on the Russian mind.

"But the British, too, are allies," I recall saying quietly to a new American friend, "yet I've heard you criticize them bitterly. The other day you said that the English masses must revolt against the Tories and imperialists. Why not the same frankness in criticizing the Soviet regime?"

"Oh, that's different."

"You mean the Russians are the only ones in the world not entitled to a revolution?"

"Now you're pulling my leg, Victor."

I wasn't. But I tried another tack.

"We Russians," I said, "fought courageously and died by the million in the first great war against Germany. Did you Americans at that time turn into fanatical admirers of the Tsar and his tyranny? Did you say it was final proof that the Russian masses were devoted to their chains and their prison wardens?"

"Oh that was different."

His obsession was not susceptible to treatment by reason or analogy. Under it, of course, was that tinselly picture of a happy and successful "socialist" nation imposed upon the mind of the outside world by the best propaganda machine in all history. The slightest effort to scrape off a little of the tinsel, to expose the squalor and moral ugliness underneath, was resented by most Americans almost as if their deepest religious convictions were at stake.

An incredible thing seemed to have happened in the American mind: the Soviet dictatorship was fully identified with the Russian people. What

the Communists had not yet succeeded in doing in their own country—as the purges and the millions of political prisoners indicate—they had succeeded in doing in America! Freedom of speech and press were not curbed with respect to criticism of other allies—Britain, Poland, Czechoslovakia, China—and were even given full rein with respect to the American government and its conduct of the war. But a sort of moratorium on these freedoms was being maintained, by moral pressure, in relation to the Soviet dictator's interests and prestige. I saw men and women who themselves called President Roosevelt a dictator, grow furious when Stalin was called a dictator.

In the Soviet Union the war made little change in the anti-capitalist propaganda. Criticism of British and American war policies was continuous and often vitriolic. But in America, I found, there was a powerful taboo on any and all doubts of the Kremlin's conduct at home or abroad. A "liberal" publisher actually called for the removal from the bookshelves of all books distasteful to Moscow! I was informed that other publishers, whether on their own or at the behest of the authorities, were refusing to publish certain books solely because they might hurt Stalin's feelings. Only a few periodicals had the courage to print what Americans call "anti-Soviet" articles.

The "news" reaching the American press from its Moscow correspondents seemed to me worse than useless. At home we had learned through the years to discount, to interpret, to read between the lines in the Soviet newspapers. American journalists in Moscow in effect simply transmitted excerpts from the Moscow press; no other sources of information were open to them. But their readers at home were not equipped to see through such material. They accepted it literally, uncritically. Every Kremlin lie or diplomatic twist thus reached American minds with the seeming authority of an American by-line and found readier credence here than at home. How was one to make people raised in a democratic tradition understand that censored, controlled "news" was often worse than none?

The prevailing American notions about the wonders of Sovietism in practice were truly extraordinary. Great chunks of the Communist reality —like slave labor, police dictatorship, the massive periodic purges, the fantastically low standards of living, the great famine of 1932–33, the horrors of collectivization, the state-organized child labor—seemed to have completely escaped American attention. These were things of which everyone inside Russia was deeply conscious. Some of us might explain them as necessary or unavoidable or even noble, but it would not occur to us to *deny* them. Yet when I ventured to mention such things (at times when candid conversation was possible), Americans looked at me incredulously and some even hastened to enter cocksure denials.

The greatest Soviet triumph, it was borne in upon me, was in the domain of foreign propaganda. After a while my conviction on this score shook down into a kind of formula: *If the Soviet Union within twenty years should be half as good as its American admirers think it is already, then it would be the greatest social achievement in history. . . .*

Among those who did know some of the unappetizing truth about life

under the Soviets, I found a curious wishful-thinking eagerness to blame it all on Stalin. That enabled them to accept the horrors tolerantly as a kind of interlude before paradise is ushered in. After Stalin—and he's a mortal man, isn't he?—"socialist democracy" would begin to flourish. In Russia, too, I had met this tendency to blame all the piled-up evils on one man, but there was vastly more of this self-delusion in the U.S.A. Unfortunately these evils are inherent in the whole Soviet system, and the system assuredly will not die with Stalin. Some other dictator or dictatorial clique will carry on.

Once I found myself, in a small American industrial town, in the company of some thoroughly conservative anti-labor capitalists. In fairness, they said, they should tell me that they were opposed to the Soviet system, indeed that they hated it and feared its influence on American thought. What was their mental picture of this system they hated? I began to draw them out. To my amazement I discovered that they thought Russia a country in which "the workers ruled," in which the farmers "lived in a cooperative society," in which "everyone was equal"! Because another Soviet official was present, I was in the excruciating position of being unable to explain to these confused men that there is more workers' control, more trade-union influence, more truly cooperative farming, more personal freedom in America than Soviet Russians dare dream of.

In the Commission library I found several speeches of Henry A. Wallace. An interpreter read for me the marked portions about Russia. I could not believe my ears—the Vice-President of a democratic government was praising what he called "economic democracy" in Stalin's police-state! Our Secret and Special Departments in every Soviet factory, state-controlled trade unions, lack of true collective bargaining, the death penalty for strike agitations, the Stakhanovite and piecework systems, labor passports, laws punishing more than twenty minutes' lateness by starvation, and forced-labor colonies—didn't Mr. Wallace know these commonplace facts or did he, by some trick of rationalization, really look on them as aspects of "economic democracy"?

I struggled through Wendell Willkie's book *One World*. I had been working at the Sovnarkom during his visit and I knew, at the time, that no propagandist stunt was overlooked in the plans to impress him. Nothing just happened—everything was arranged. Now I was astounded and horrified by the success of our plans. How could any man, I marveled, be so elaborately deceived in such a short time? Reading his Russian chapters I had the sense that he was referring to a country which I had never visited, a country somewhere on the other side of the moon. The book was a signal triumph of totalitarian propaganda.

Mr. Willkie recounted how he had gathered a congenial group of Soviet journalists in a Moscow hotel for a frank, off-record talk. They locked the door and "took their hair down," in the American expression. If I were writing a play lampooning the gullibility of American innocents abroad, I would incorporate that scene without changes. Did Mr. Willkie and his American monitors really believe that they would get honest opinions by locking the door and excluding "officials"? Did they really fail to under-

stand that every Soviet journalist—or engineer or tourist guide—is an "official" living under continuous duress? The very idea of "off-record" hair-down discussion with a Soviet subject within earshot of another Soviet subject or a possible dictagraph reveals total ignorance of totalitarian realities. Every one of those journalists, of course, reported that session, with special emphasis on his own loyalty in defending the regime and filling Mr. Willkie with prescribed "opinions."

He had no alternative. Every journalist, high industrialist or other Soviet citizen whose work brings him in contact with foreigners is formally and officially "secretized"—that is, pledged in writing to report instantly to the N.K.V.D. all meetings with foreigners and full details on what was said and done. The "frank" exchange of views of which Mr. Willkie was so proud became known immediately and in extreme detail to the Foreign Department of the N.K.V.D., to the Press Department of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, the Foreign Department of the Central Committee of the Party and all other interested organizations. No better-recorded off-the-record conference, we may be sure, has ever taken place.

Perhaps my most harrowing evening in America was spent in a Washington motion-picture theatre. I was grateful for the dark, which covered up the distress that, I am sure, was written on my face. The other Soviet official who was with me, also a Party member, squirmed in his seat; I had no doubt he was as shaken as I was. It was the evening when I watched the unfoldment of a film called *Mission to Moscow*, based on a book of the same name by the former Ambassador to Moscow, Joseph E. Davies. What I saw was a brutal, heavy-handed insult to the Russian nation—a caricature of its revolution and a mockery of its long anguish.

The book was more absurd than evil, a hash of ignorance and double-talk and in large part plain silly; but it was mitigated here and there by a streak of truth. The film carefully steered around those streaks and added nightmarish inventions not in the book. Wherever the Hollywood "historians" faced a choice between fact and fiction, between reality and nonsense, they carefully chose fiction and nonsense. It happened that I was thoroughly acquainted with the Siberian factory that figured in one of the purge trials; a more ludicrous cartoon than the Hollywood version could scarcely be contrived. No Soviet propaganda picture would have dared twist facts so recklessly out of their sockets. The American propagandists evidently relied on the ignorance of their audience to "get away with" their fantasy. In that sense, incidentally, the picture was as much an insult to Americans as to Russians. Small wonder that the Moscow *Pravda* lavished praise on Mr. Davies and his book, quoting him to the effect that Soviet justice was flawless, that a fifth column had been wiped out by the purge, that the annihilation of the founders of the Bolshevik Revolution was fully justified. What strange reading it made for intelligent Russians!

Stalin killed off the founders of the Soviet state. This crime was only a small part of the larger blood-letting in which hundreds of thousands of innocent men and women perished. But in the Davies-Warner Brothers film all this horror was reduced to a petty *opera-bouffe* conspiracy by a

few comic Old Bolsheviks and foreign agents presented as a "fifth column." A political event which makes the St. Bartholomew's Eve Massacre and the French Terror and the Armenian atrocities look like street-corner brawls was here trimmed down to the dimensions of a parlor farce.

I had been through the purge. Though one of the least among the victims, I had suffered its indignities in my own flesh and spirit. Now in a Washington theatre I saw my own ordeal and that of my country being mocked in terms of caricature and falsification. I watched the macabre scene as Hollywood kicked the corpses around and *heiled* the murderers.

When I emerged from the hours of purgatory that evening I saw that I had drawn blood in my palms with my fingernails. My companion and I looked at one another—one look was enough, there was no call for words. I tossed all night in bed without falling asleep.

Another picture reflecting the American myth about Russia, which drove me to helpless despair, was called *North Star*. It was set in a comic-opera village in a never-never land where well-fed, picturesque and deliriously happy peasants live gaily and amply, singing, dancing and loving from dawn to dawn. It was a magic village, with all the fairy-tale trappings, where the roads were scrubbed by pixies and even the horses and cows were housebroken—at any rate there were no evidences to the contrary in this hygienic village. But we were not in the Land of Oz. It turned out, amazingly, that we were in a collectivized village in the land of Stalin!

This Hollywood view of collectivization had about as much relevance to the truth as the Hollywood history in *Mission to Moscow*. And there were plenty of other pictures, books, articles with the same other-side-of-the-moon quality. American propaganda was not content to present the unpleasant facts about Russia and to explain them away. It took the simpler course of denying the facts and building up a Russia that existed only in their ardent imaginations.

Why, why, I kept asking myself, did these Americans insist on fabricating a paradise and locating it in my tortured country? Why must they whitewash every Stalinist evil and explain away every Bolshevik horror?

There was apparently a group of men and women—Duranty, Hindus, Anna Louise Strong, Ella Winter, Albert Rhys Williams, to mention a few—who had built careers on this inexplicable American sweet tooth for Soviet propaganda confections; reading them was almost like reading the Moscow press. There was another somewhat larger and on the whole more honest group, actual Communists, for whom lying about Russia was a method of class warfare: their shortcut to power. But why did the great mass of Americans swallow it?

What struck me most was the profound ignorance among alleged "experts on Soviet Russia" about the nature and organization of power in the U.S.S.R., the mechanisms of administration of the country. But their propaganda has sunk deep roots in America. Once, in the library of an American university, I had occasion to consult the catalogue. I was amazed to find that the most *shop-worn* cards were those listing the works of Lenin and Stalin. Obviously some people studied them seriously, as

guides to a better world. . . . I was not astonished to discover, after this, that some American, Hindu and Chinese students in that university were devoted to the hope of transforming their own countries along the lines of the Soviet pattern. I could only hope that they might not be doomed to pass through the same bitter experience that I had suffered.

In many cases, I came in time to understand, Americans were accepting the myth as a substitute for reality. They were upset by the inequities of life in their own country and needed consolations, in the way that a child in pain is consoled by a shiny, noisy toy. They were not so much deceiving others as deceiving themselves. I was most conscious of this element of anxious self-delusion in the work of so-called liberal writers, in *The Nation, The New Republic, PM* and other such publications. Their attitude seemed to me a fearful waste of noble intentions.

If only such people could attain the intellectual clarity and the moral balance to realize that injustice in America must not be made an excuse for supporting injustice elsewhere! Shouting hurrah for bloody liquidations in Russia may give them temporary spiritual relief, but it hardly promotes the larger purposes of justice everywhere, including the United States of America.

Browsing in American libraries, I discovered eloquent books by Americans who, in the time of Tsarist terror, had dared to reveal the facts. There was, for instance, George Kennan's volume on Siberia. I know, also, that there were scores of Russian exiles, of whom Peter Kropotkin was typical, who escaped beyond the reach of the Tsar's Okhrana to expose and denounce those who kept their people in chains. I wondered whether, as a reward for their daring, they had been called "anti-Russian" by American liberals. Or did more logical, less frenzied, less propagandized generations realize that those men were *pro*-Russian, crying out their pity for the victims?

In America today, I was to learn slowly and incredulously, those who venture to tell some truth about the Stalin tyranny, who speak up *for* the Russian people and against their oppressors, are discounted and dismissed and sometimes pilloried as "anti-Russian." I became aware that my resolve to escape into the free world and to use the freedom to defend my people would not be as simple as it had seemed at a distance. I realized that I must expect to be denounced and ridiculed by precisely those warm-hearted and high-minded foreigners on whose understanding and support I had counted.

The Stalinist propaganda in the outside world had been more successful than any of us in Russia suspected. The myth of a happy "socialist" land is treated as a grim piece of totalitarian ballyhoo inside Russia; it is accepted literally, solemnly, in an almost religious transport of faith by a large part of those men and women who create public opinion in the outside democratic world.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FUGITIVE FROM INJUSTICE

THE NEWSPAPER reports of my break with the Soviet regime said that, having tasted American democracy, I became disillusioned with Stalin's Communism. It was my direct experience of American freedom, they said or implied, which led me to abandon the Soviet Purchasing Commission.

That made it a more dramatic story, as well as a pretty compliment to the U.S.A. But it wasn't true. The truth is that I had made up my mind long before to throw off the totalitarian straitjacket at the first chance, wherever and whenever it might present itself. Had I been assigned to China or Patagonia rather than the United States, I would have made the self-same attempt to achieve freedom for the task I had set myself.

It was a task I had assumed consciously, although I do not know the precise point in my inner existence when I had assumed it. It was the result of feelings that had matured within me, slowly but inevitably. I was under the compulsion of everything I had been and thought. I was moved by a childhood pervaded by the robust idealism of my father, the profound religious faith of my mother. Their goodness, their love of humanity, were different in kind, but somehow identical at the core. And it was this core, no doubt, that remained also in me.

I was moved, too, by the spirit of a nation which had produced rebels in its darkest ages, under the most despotic and ruthless rulers. This I know: had I believed it possible to fight for freedom within the Soviet frontiers, I would have remained there. . . . Had there been a real hope of change for the better—of the introduction of political and economic democratic freedoms, of the abandonment of their international Communist program by the leaders of the regime—I would have remained there. Unhappily the regime, with every year, was moving not *toward* the human ideals implicit in the revolution, but *away from* those ideals.

The hope for our Russia was always dimmer, the economic freedoms and the democratic guarantees were always more remote; even their memory seemed to be fast fading out. The depredations of arbitrary power were growing in magnitude and in recklessness. There was a moment, during the war, when some of us thought that the principles of the Atlantic Charter and the promises of the Four Freedoms would apply also to our country. But that illusion was quickly dissipated. As far as our country and people were concerned, we realized, these documents were merely scraps of paper.

Why did I continue to wear the straitjacket for seven months after I arrived in the United States? The answer is that I needed time to survey

the terrain, to assess my psychological resources, before making the terrifying jump. In the same way a convict, having resolved to try to escape, gives himself time to learn the habits of the guards and the geography of the neighborhood.

The Russian raised under the Soviet tutelage, emerging into the non-Soviet world for the first time, is a bewildered and almost helpless creature. The simplest adjustments to life become problems. He discovers that he thinks differently, feels differently, than those around him. He needs time to peel off layer after layer of his totalitarian conditioning; the process is a complicated one.

In America I was a stranger, without a single non-Soviet friend, without a language, without the means of economic survival. Had I possessed as many open and concealed friends in America as the Soviet dictatorship has, my problems would have been solved easily enough. . . . Ultimately, I trust, my engineering training and experience will enable me to make a living. But at the moment of cutting loose from the Commission I would be penniless, friendless, helpless against the awful machinery of calumny and vengeance at the disposal of my offended jailors. Seven months was actually a brief period to acclimate myself to America, to acquire a little vocabulary and a few human contacts.

For at least a month in advance I knew that I would take the irrevocable step at the end of March, 1944. I spent most of that month in travel: two trips to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and one to Chicago. My main preoccupation was to safeguard my friends and colleagues in the Commission as well as in Russia. I did not betray my plans to any of them, by word or gesture, though I needed confederates and naturally ached to confide in someone. I knew too intimately what it would mean to any Soviet citizen if there were so much as a shadow of guilt on his record, once the N.K.V.D. applied itself to my "case."

A secondary preoccupation was to give the Commission no excuse for making wild charges against my character. My record in the vital lend-lease work entrusted to me had been flawless; I was eager that it should remain so to the very end. Insofar as possible, therefore, I wound up the work assigned to me, leaving everything in such organized shape that another metals specialist could pick up where I left off. On my last morning in the headquarters on Sixteenth Street, I carefully straightened out my finances. Thirty dollars were still owing to me when I departed and I was pleased by this, though every dollar at the moment looked like a thousand.

I have told about the actual breakaway in the opening pages of this book. I had turned myself into a man without a country. I had made myself a target for the malice of American Communists and, what was a lot more terrifying, of their self-righteous fellow-travelers. I had made myself a target of the murderous hatred of the world's strongest and most implacable government.

My prospects were dark and disquieting. Deliberately, in full knowledge of the frightening consequences, I had chosen a precarious freedom as against a comfortable enslavement. Only the seasoned subject of a

modern dictatorial police-state can quite comprehend the fear that its power and ubiquity and amoralism can inspire in a man's heart.

At the time I left Washington I was aware that there was a formal decision of the Commission, ratified by Moscow, designating me to a permanent place on its staff. It amounted to a substantial promotion for me. I was to enter upon this new work a few days later, on April 3, with Moscow's blessings. Later I might have returned home with my foreign commercial experience, as a faithful son of Stalin who had weathered the storms of bourgeois temptations. There was no limit to the heights I might then have scaled in the bureaucracy.

But on those heights I would have remained, no less, a slave of the *vlast*, helpless to serve my people, in league with their oppressors. Deliberately I chose to remain abroad. I needed freedom for the fight against despotism, and to attain that freedom I was accepting a multitude of discomforts, economic risks, physical dangers. From now on, Victor Kravchenko was no more. His identity was blotted out. Now he was Italian, Yugoslav, Portuguese, anything but Russian. What names I've had!

In an obscure and depressing uptown hotel in Manhattan I prepared the statement, part of which appeared in the New York *Times* and other papers on April 4, 1944. Reading it now, when the war has been victoriously concluded, there is nothing in the statement I would amend. On the contrary, time, it seems to me, has confirmed my fears and my warnings.

I charged then that the Kremlin, while supposedly allied with Britain and America, was "pursuing aims incompatible with such collaboration." Ostensibly having dissolved the Communist International, I wrote, Moscow continued to direct Communist movements everywhere. Touching on Stalin's policies for Poland, the Balkans, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria and other countries, I sought to show that his objectives were purely Soviet and undemocratic. Then I added:

"While professing to seek the establishment of democracy in countries liberated from fascism, the Soviet Government at home has failed to take a single serious step toward granting elementary liberties to the Russian people.

"The Russian people are subjected, as before, to unspeakable oppressions and cruelties, while the N.K.V.D., acting through its thousands of spies, continues to wield its unbridled domination over the peoples of Russia. In the territories cleared of the Nazi invaders, the Soviet Government is re-establishing its political regime of lawlessness and violence, while prisons and concentration camps continue to function, as before.

"The hopes of political and social reforms cherished by the Russian people at the beginning of the war have proved to be empty illusions.

". . . I maintain that more than any other people the Russian people require that they be granted elementary political rights—genuine freedom of press and speech, freedom from want and freedom from fear. What the Russian people have had from their Government has been only lip service to these freedoms. For years they have lived in constant dread and want. The Russian people have earned a new deal by their immeasurable sacri-

fices, which have saved the country as well as the existing regime itself, and through which they have dealt such decisive blows to fascism and have determined the course of the war."

Nothing has happened since I wrote those words to alter the picture. The Stalinist dictatorship remains ruthlessly supreme and centralized, its methods of terror unrelieved. I cannot expect the average citizen of a democratic nation to understand the true character of a totalitarian tyranny. Those who drafted the indictment of Nazi war criminals came close to that understanding when they described the Nazi regime. Reading their document I could not help exclaiming: *Here, at last, is an adequate summary of the Soviet regime! We need only change a few names, substitute Soviet for Nazi, and we have a picture of the Kremlin set-up.*

That indictment of the Nazis shows the *Führerprinzip*, the leadership principle, as central in the fascist doctrine and practice. It is the Kremlin principle no less. The indictment declares: "The conspirators caused all political parties except the Nazi party to be prohibited . . . reduced the Reichstag to a body of their own nominees and curtailed the freedom of popular elections . . . established and extended a system of terror against opponents and supposed suspected opponents of the regime. . . ." Except for the identity of the conspirators and the victims, I was reading an indictment of the Soviet dictatorship and of all modern totalitarian police-states.

Yet some of the very people who condemn the Hitlerite conspirators find no words with which to condemn the Soviet conspirators against the liberties of the Russian people. The task of arousing the world's conscience on the Russian horrors still remains to be accomplished.

2

The forebodings with which I began my new life were quickly justified by events.

The Soviet Purchasing Commission, when the news of my action appeared in the press, at first pretended that it did not know me. Obviously it was waiting for instructions from Moscow. Then it acknowledged my existence and proceeded to issue the inevitable statements smearing my character.

Its most significant claim, and one that I had not foreseen, was that I was still a captain in the Red Army. Thus it sought to convert my political escape into a military desertion, setting up a legal basis for demanding my extradition to face Stalin's firing squad. Actually, my brief military career had ended in a hospital more than two years earlier. Thereafter I had been a purely civilian official. Before the Commissariat of Foreign Trade could or would send me abroad, I had been given a formal and total release from all military obligations.

The Communist and crypto-Communist press threw itself lustily into the battle. The *Daily Worker* attack on April 5, signed by one Starobin, was headed: *The Case of a Petty Deserter: Hitler Calls on His Last Reserves Here.* It was composed in the standard style of Party vitupera-

tion. But running through it was a note which the uninitiated might not detect but which rang loud in my trained ears.

It was the note of direct threat. Comrade Starobin reported a "disgusting bit of treachery from someone who calls himself an official of a Soviet trading commission." Such traitors, from Trotsky down to nobodies like this Kravchenko, he wrote, "deceive many people for a while." But—and then came the warnings:

"*The vigilant and avenging hand of forward-looking humanity catches up with them and finally erases them.*"

Reading these words, I recalled that in Trotsky's case the avenging hand had gripped a pickaxe, with which it pierced his skull in Mexico City. After a few more paragraphs of abuse, Comrade Starobin returned to his theme song. "Kravchenko evidently has been living on borrowed time," he declared. Then, referring to the fact that I had invoked the protection of American public opinion, he concluded as follows:

"Our country is not a no-man's land for enemies of our allies and our own war effort. . . . It would be a sad day if the United States became a hothouse for lizards of this kind, an asylum for characters who are not man enough to say to the people of the Soviet Union directly what they weep over their beers to the New York *Times*."

The *Daily Worker* thus gave the more stupid of its readers to understand that anyone who is "man enough" can talk to the people of the Soviet Union directly! This after conceding that I had been "living on borrowed time" because the Soviet thought-police had remained unaware of my views! I would be "erased"—not by the secret agents of Comrade Starobin's spiritual fatherland, of course, but by "forward-moving humanity."

I had no trouble in deciphering the message. Unless I sank back into silence, the "vigilant and avenging hand" would do its noble work; there was no dearth of pickaxes. Others might dismiss such warnings as mere rhetoric; unfortunately I knew too much about the methods and the agents of the regime which I had denounced.

Despite my elaborate precautions, Soviet intelligence in New York apparently had no difficulty in tracing my whereabouts. Its agents, unmistakably, were soon loitering on the sidewalk opposite my hotel. Several times I changed hotels and pseudonyms. Now and then I consoled myself that I had eluded them. But quickly enough the same men were keeping their vigil outside my temporary residences. Repeatedly I dived into hallways and grabbed taxis on the fly to evade men who were trailing me.

To free myself for a while from these nerve-racking attentions, I accepted an invitation to spend some time with new friends in the suburbs of a Midwestern city. These friends were Americans who had sought me out after an article of mine appeared in the *Cosmopolitan*. I told no one of my departure and supposed that I had succeeded cleverly in boarding the train without being observed. I was wrong. My friends, awaiting me on the station platform, were thoroughly alarmed. They pointed out three men who had been watching them closely, without disguising their interest, for the past fifteen minutes.

There was no doubt that the trio was waiting for me. One of them, I observed, kept his right hand in his pocket, never withdrew it and never took his eyes off me. When we piled into our car, the strangers hastily piled into another and followed us without effort at concealment. We drove at random through the city in a futile effort to shake them off. Only when we pulled up at a police station did the other automobile pass us and disappear. We succeeded in taking down its license number—subsequent investigations disclosed that it was a stolen license plate.

Several times in the following days the same sinister car patrolled the suburban house where I was living. In addition, there were long-distance telephone calls from New York in which mysterious voices warned me "as friends" that my life was in danger and that I must go into hiding. Evidently the scheme was to intimidate my hosts into driving me out of their home, and then to maneuver me into some obscure hiding place where I could be "erased" more conveniently. I felt as if I were again in the U.S.S.R. rather than in the free United States. Would I ever again, I wondered, be able to live and work without fear for my life?

My friends stood up courageously under these pressures and I shall be eternally grateful to them. My host went to bed night after night with a sharp axe close at hand—the only weapon in the house—for the expected emergency. Other Americans—and some Russians—in other parts of the country proved themselves immune to Soviet intimidation and willing to take a chance to safeguard my life while I was working on this book.

Now the book has been completed. I have told my story. The killers who profess to serve "forward-moving humanity" may in time succeed in "erasing" me. The borrowed time may be used up. But they cannot erase this record, dedicated to the long-suffering Russian people from whom I have sprung. I dare to hope that one day they may enjoy real freedom and real economic democracy.

When that day comes to pass, we shall in truth be close to the ideal of one world. As long as one-sixth of the world's surface, now greatly expanded by aggrandizement and the betrayal of small nations, remains under totalitarian slavery in an intellectual blackout, peace can be at best a precarious thing.

The next step toward world security lies not in a world organization—though that must come—but in the liberation of the Russian masses from their tyrants. One need only suppose that, by some miracle, Russia were suddenly democratized to realize that most of the tensions now threatening humanity's peace would be automatically relaxed and that genuine world cooperation would become possible. The liberation of Russia from its totalitarian yoke, I may be told, is a matter that concerns only the Russians. Those who think so are profoundly wrong. In many ways the safety of all civilization and the chance for enduring peace depend on that liberation.

I am not sanguine enough to expect the miracle in our generation. But this I know for a certainty: an understanding of the Russian reality by the democratic world is the pre-condition for my country's liberation from within. The weight of world opinion, the leverage of its spiritual support,

now serving to fortify the Kremlin's despotism, must be diverted to quicken and aid the Russian aspirations for freedom.

This book, in terms of the life story of one typical Russian whose sense of liberty has not been destroyed, is my appeal to the democratic conscience of America and of the world.

POSTSCRIPT

I BEGAN TO WORK on this book immediately after my escape from the Soviet Purchasing Commission and worked on it month after month under harrowing conditions of persecution and threats against my life. I was obliged to wander from city to city, continually changing hotels and private residences, living under assumed names and assumed nationalities, finding safe "hide-outs" in the homes of Americans or my own countrymen. To all of those who showed me kindnesses and gave me moral support I want hereby to express my deep gratitude.

Had the Soviet agents caught up with me during this period, I might have been "erased"; or worse, I might have been spirited to the Soviet Union for a "reckoning." Fortunately, this did not happen, so that today, for the first time in my life, I feel free to speak for my country, for my people, for myself.

When I left the Commission, war was still under way. The urgency of military cooperation between the Western democracies and the Totalitarian Soviet Union imposed great restraints upon me. I accepted those willingly; the need for a common victory took precedence over everything else. But now, with the war victoriously concluded, I consider it not only possible but my imperative duty to speak out fully, candidiy, as effectively as I can. Hence this book.

Another compelling reason for speaking my mind is in the fact that since the end of the war many peoples and nations—some of their own free will and others under external compulsion—have been "swinging left." This trend seems to me healthy and inevitable—provided that it does not present the first stage, or as in some cases, a finished model of Totalitarian Kremlin Communism. Unhappily that seems to be the case in large areas of the civilized world where Soviet force and Soviet doctrines have the right of way.

The people of my country are in the clutches of the police-state; they cannot possibly make their views and their hopes and their distress known to the world. In the measure that I can reveal the true physiognomy of the Kremlin dictatorship to the peoples and governments of democratic countries, I feel that I am helping in a small way to warn the world against self-delusions. For the building of a more decent world we need greater mutual understanding and deeper friendship *between the peoples of this globe*, and not only between the governments.

The Communist dictatorship in the U.S.S.R. is not a problem for the Russian people only, or for the democracies only. It is the problem of all humankind. The world dare not continue indefinitely to turn its back on the martyrdom of a great segment of the human race inhabiting one-sixth of the earth's surface. This segment is ruled by a deified group of leaders

resting on the Party apparatus of the Politburo and a gigantic police force. The hundreds of millions of people in the U.S.S.R. have no voice in shaping their own destinies and are completely cut off from the peoples and the streams of thought in all other countries.

Though the Kremlin leaders have denied their own subjects the rudiments of economic and political liberty, they and their fellow-travellers abroad seek to make the rest of the world believe that the Soviet system is a species of freedom—that it is *real* democracy as contrasted with the "old-fashioned" variety.

Naturally, I wrote this book in my native tongue, Russian, so that it had to be translated and the English text edited. This was done under the stipulation that all facts, incidents, political personal experiences, events, pictures and individual characteristics, down to the minutest detail, follow faithfully my original Russian manuscript. Moreover, when the English text was completed, I personally checked and edited the final version.

I tried to hold this book to the personal, autobiographical pattern. It was, therefore, necessary to leave out a vast amount of material dealing with the complex political, administrative and police forms, and other problems of the Soviet State. These and other related material I plan to publish later.

In some instances, in order to protect innocent people from the pitiless vengeance of the Soviet State, I was obliged to change some names, disguise some places, alter some circumstances. Where such changes have been essential, the episodes themselves have remained wholly truthful and their significance in the narrative unimpaired.

I dedicate this book to the people of Russia, of whom I am one. I dedicate it to the memory of those millions who have died in the struggle against Soviet absolutism; to the millions of innocents languishing in the Kremlin's numberless prisons and forced-labor camps; to the memory of millions of my fellow-countrymen who died in defense of our beloved fatherland dreaming of a better future for our people. I dedicate this book to the progressive and socially-minded people everywhere who help in the struggle *for a free democratic Russia,* without which there can be no enduring peace on earth.

Victor Kravchenko

New York, February 11th, 1946.