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Arrest, Interrogation, Prison Life

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The Arrest

THERE WERE no signs of trouble. On October 22, 1936, I came home after a concert and peacefully went to bed. I woke up immediately, however: Someone was searching under my pillow. I opened my eyes: The investigator was looking for a revolver. I also saw his assistant in the room, a witness, and a soldier with a rifle, the bayonet out. I was shown the warrant with the word "search," but the words after were covered by the investigator's finger. I demanded to see the whole warrant that the investigator would not show me. Then, at last, I saw the previously covered words, "and arrest." It turned out the words were covered so as not to worry me ahead of time. The whole story began with a lie; they wanted to convince me that the warrant was only for the search.

The search was carried out meticulously: Every bit of paper, every page of every book was carefully examined. The investigating intuition of the searchers helped them to select anything that would characterize my personality. Then the search continued in my mother-in-law's room. My father started to protest: So far the warrant for the search was valid only for me. The protest was registered.

Editors' note: In publishing this work and the following one, IJTS commemorates the extraordinary character of Professor V. V. Nalimov (1910-1997) and his many contributions to transpersonal and global understanding.

At last the search was over. Mother-in-law solicitously prepared winter clothes and underwear for me. The investigator summoned a car and we squeezed into it. The first piece of luck that occurred was that the investigator, dazed by the search, with heaps of books and papers, forgot to take away his loot. (Later, they were never demanded, an act of forgetfulness that could well discredit the investigator.)

The car arrived at the famous building on the Lubyanka square. Iron gates were opened.

A few formalities. Photos were taken that came out better than any before.

Then off to the Butyrki prison, this time by a prison car (called a "black raven" by the folklore). In the morning I entered cell N 70. A short conversation followed with the monitor of the cell. I was given a place in the middle of the plank bed, which turned out to be a privilege. Newcomers were commonly given places near the toilet pail. Only people with "true political charges" were an exception. I became a political convict from the start.

The first act of this absurd theatrical performance came when I was asked about the recent political news. I answered that I was not in the know. They started to reassure me, "Don't be afraid!" But I was not afraid. I simply had not read newspapers for a couple of weeks; we never subscribed to them in our family. The political quarrels did not interest us a bit. But who would believe it? I looked like a true political case, not a mere joke-teller. Later, only a few people

understood that this not reading newspapers was already a political challenge.

Interrogations

THE SAME evening, I was summoned for a short interrogation. The investigator read the information he had on me and informed me that I would be accused according to article 58, §10-11 (pertaining to counterrevolutionary propaganda and organization).

He immediately started to pretend that the case was not really serious: "It is a trifle, of course, you should confess everything, then you will only be sent into exile, you will practice your profession and will soon return to Moscow." He suggested that I sign the confession and indicate that Alexei Alexandrovich Solonovich controlled everything from exile, through his wife, Agniya Onisimovna Solonovich.¹ It goes without saying that I refused to sign this piece of absurdity. The response was, "So much the worse for you." That was the end of the first interrogation.

The information against the accused described a group of six people, five of whom had known one another from childhood or early youth, and four of whom (Ion Sharevsky, Yura Proferansov, Igor' Tarle [who died young], and myself) were intimate friends. Ion [Iosif] Ioffe was named as part of our group, being a younger cousin of Sharevsky; and Igor' Breshkov was a friend of his. It was obvious that some member of the group was an informer. But who? How could such a thing happen in a small group of people, well-acquainted since childhood? It was also obvious that the whole matter was somehow connected with the village of Kargasok, in Western Siberia, where Sharevsky and Solonovich had been exiled and where the repressive organs of the State were preparing a provocation.

A day later I was called to another interrogation: This time it lasted throughout the night. All in all, there were about thirty interrogations. All of them were held from evening until morning, every other day. The situation soon became clear: it was Iosif Ioffe² who turned out to be the KGB informer. For two years, he had informed the KGB about each of our meetings, including, for example, one lasting only a few minutes when we had come to a railway station to see Proferansov off, who, being a geologist, often used to leave Moscow.

The situation developed in a very dangerous way. The group was accused of belonging to the clandestine counterrevolutionary terrorist organization of Mystical Anarchists (see note 1) whose activities were said to be directed against the Soviet administration. Sharevsky refused to give evidence, that is, he refused to play the game. Proferansov and Breshkov pleaded guilty. They gave up without fighting.

I was the only one to start a defense. I demanded information about the charges. What kind of organization was this to which we were alleged to belong? Where were its statutes, its program, or goal? The investigator then changed the formulation: It was not an organization, but a political group. However, the Criminal Code deals with organizations, not with groups of people who come together informally to talk.

Next came the charge of spreading propaganda. Whom had I tried to persuade? I asked to have a confrontation with this person. The investigator retorted, "You campaigned for the kind of nonviolence, nonresistance to evil advocated by Gandhi." I denied this. "No, I never campaigned for that, I merely discussed a new successful way of nonviolent social action; I discussed it with my friends who were interested in this subject." The investigator remarked, "Also, you recited anarchic poems by Maximilian Voloshin." I had, indeed, done so; but these poems are not interdicted, they can be found in libraries.

Some facts I acknowledged in order to make them look neutral, nonpolitical. Indeed, I gave money to support the Kropotkin museum. In that epoch it was the only institution in Moscow not supported by the State.³ Its existence presupposed potential donations. I also gave money to the Black Cross to help repressed anarchists. But this foundation had existed since the beginning of the century, and was never prohibited. The Red Cross was a similar foundation.⁴

I confessed that we had buried books on anarchism. However, these books had never been banned by anyone.⁵ The decision to bury them was made because in those years of general suspicion, it was unnecessarily dangerous to keep them. We felt we could not possibly burn them; it would have been a shame.

Thus for thirty nights we repeated the same interrogation. The investigator's⁶ task was to make me acknowledge the existence of a clandestine counterrevolutionary organization. I would refuse

stubbornly. Sometimes he would start to threaten me saying that my relatives would be "repressed," to which I would answer, "Is it stipulated by the Criminal Code?" That irritated him; he would start to shout something about terrorism and Trotskyism, then he would suddenly switch back to my crime which, according to him, was my favorable attitude to Gandhi, Tolstoy, and Voloshin. Once, a small performance was even staged for my sake: A group of investigators came and scrutinized me. Then someone said, "Yes, it's him." — "Of course, it's him!" — "I recognize him." — "Stop playing the fool," I answered. After which all of them left, abusing me in the foulest language.

Some evidence against me was given by M. A. Nazarov, a senior member of the group, also arrested. For some reason, however, it was not registered in the protocols and remained in reserve. I insisted on having a confrontation with Nazarov. At last he was brought. I could hardly recognize him. He was completely broken. I only had time to tell him, "Mikhail Alexeevich, collect yourself!" and then he was taken away.

After about two months, the interrogations stopped. I was of no interest to the investigator, and stayed for months in the cell waiting to be sentenced. It was evident that the investigation had taken a new direction, and that Gandhi and Voloshin were now regarded merely as a nuisance.

Life in Prison

A PRISON IS a special world, an island of madness in everyday life. Not only are its inhabitants mad, but also its rulers. Butyrki prison was a Moscow threshold to the hell of a correction camp.

The Butyrki prison was a fundamental institution. It had been built by Christian guardians of law and order. It had large cells with large windows, over which the new order had installed special shutters (called "muzzles"), and long and wide corridors. At the intersections, there were big electric clocks, another novelty, each showing its own encoded time, in order to unbalance the psychical state of prisoners by giving them a sense of the instability of time. Small exercise yards were surrounded by high walls of brick, from which the guards watched prisoners. The punishment cell was in Pugachyov tower, so called because according to the legend, the great Russian rebel Yemelyan Pugachyov was held there. Many new small cells had been made for

interrogations, also a novelty, because there were not enough old ones. There was incessant motion in the corridors: Prisoners were convoyed to and from interrogations, to the toilets, to the exercise yards; all this, accompanied by the sound of keys clinking against the convoyers' buckles. On hearing this sound, prisoners must turn their faces to the wall, to avoid recognizing one another or, God forbid, exchanging a few words.

The cells were large. Twenty-four folding bed frames were fixed to the walls. The frames had been permanently unfolded and covered by solid wooden boards. On days when there were many inmates, these boards were also put down in the passage between two rows of bed frames. A toilet pail was placed near the door. The cells had originally been intended for twenty-four persons. Now, in the period of constructing socialism, sometimes a hundred or even a hundred and fifty persons were squeezed into each. This was the way in which the significant statement of the "Father of the People" [Stalin], on the "acute" stage of the class struggle in the transitional period, was reflected in life.

The first impression one had of the prison in the initial period of an investigation was of a tense, even an overtense, waiting and of the complete idleness of a hundred men. This idleness was very strange for me, who had always been an active and busy person. There was nowhere to hurry to, and nothing to take care of. All my previous aims, values, and worries lost their meaning. They were gone from my life in an instant, and, it seemed, were gone forever, like a dream. A new reality opened up that had only one aim: to fight against the demoniacal force of the crazy State.

However, life is apt to adapt itself to new circumstances. Quite unexpectedly, I discovered the fascinating aspect of being in prison: There were ceaseless talks with people of different backgrounds, with different pasts. Separated before, these now all of a sudden lived together: representatives of different parties and ethnic movements; those who simply liked to tell jokes; true spies; and representatives of foreign communist parties—the rigorous Persian one, the Bulgarian, the German. All of them turned into a uniform "enemy"; and there was no place for them in that glorious future which the "Father of the People" was preparing for humanity. Many of these people still worshipped this demon; they were still blind.

Here are a few interesting episodes.

1. A middle-aged stout man, very excited, was brought into the cell. He told us he had been “driven out”⁷ from another cell, which made everybody feel on the alert. But he explained, “It was not my fault. When I was taken to Butyrki I had to fill in the form. There is a question which asks whether I am a Party member. I indicated that I was. So I was put into the cell for Party members.⁸ But when I told them I had been a member of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries since the turn of the century, and had been in Butyrki under the tsarist regime, awful indignation was aroused. Those were members of the ruling communist party, and I was for them a cursed enemy. “Take him away, annihilate him!” This man also told us the history of the Butyrki prison. Every cell in it, every corridor, was marked by a certain event. “In this corridor in such-and-such a year we put a toilet pail on the warder’s head.” It is hardly possible to record a complete history of this prison. And anyhow it could only become a fragment in the history of the Russian fight for freedom.

2. Once a man of Oriental appearance was brought in. He was gloomy and confused. But after the first interrogation he came back happy: “They only wanted me to confess that I was a spy. Well, if they really want it, why not confess?” The following day: “Today they wanted to know my connections. This is a reasonable question; if indeed I was a spy, I had to have connections. So I named the man who sold peaches at the corner.” We were amazed and asked why he had betrayed an unknown man for nothing. “But what was I to do? I am in prison; let him also be put into prison; he is no better than me.” Quite a logical piece of reasoning, though the logic looks somewhat frustrating.

3. Another case was that of an odd-looking redhead. He introduced himself as “a citizen of the free town of Danzig.” His Russian was poor. We tried to speak other languages to him, but also failed. Then we asked him what was his nationality, his origin, and why he was in Moscow. “I did not answer these questions even when the procurator asked them. Why should I answer them now?” Soon he was taken away — for good. That one seemed at last to be a real spy.

4. All of a sudden, several dozen Germans were brought in. Far from being intellectuals, they were all members of the communist party, and

all had fled from Hitler, to their “brothers” — and got into a trap. They were indignant and irritated. Participating in a common talk one of them told us how they, the Germans, had won the battle in the Baltic Sea during World War I. A former Russian seaman, my neighbor, whispered indignantly: “Stuff and nonsense! What a bastard! We bombed and destroyed them!” — “Say it out loud! How does it look when a German in a Russian prison disgraces Russia?” — “I don’t care!” That was the spirit of internationalism of the epoch. There was also a Russian German in our cell, gentle and somewhat sentimental; his compatriots, the Party members, scared him to death.

5. Many of us had a prison account (based on money sent from home), and once every ten days we were allowed to order food from the prison store for a limited sum of money (ten percent of which was assigned for the poor of the cell, mainly to buy cigarettes). One day an old and sick intellectual said that it was hard for him (on his days of duty) to carry and empty the toilet pail and that he was ready to hire a poor cellmate for the price of his store share. One of the cellmates was willing to do that. But that provoked a real storm of indignation! “An exploitation of man! Hired labor in prison!” An acute discussion went on for hours, an aftertaste of socialist upbringing. Such was, indeed, the dominant attitude of those years, the attitude preserved even in prison. It is difficult to understand it now. The theater of the absurd can be truly appreciated only by those who were brought up in an absurd way.

Now I would like to present to the reader portraits of certain inhabitants of the prison.

1. Eyup Ibragimovich Akchurin; a Tartar, the son of a Kazan millionaire. His parents were educated in Paris. His own education was also affected by this. He was an intellectual, with a brilliant knowledge of foreign languages, and with an almost professional mastery of his voice. He and several dozen other Tartars were arrested in Moscow. They did not deny that they used to gather together, to respect their mullah. They were proud of their culture. And that was sufficient reason for arrest and incrimination for active nationalism. His personal case was based on the information given by an acquaintance. She conveyed the contents of a conversation she pretended to have overheard through a thin partition. Akchurin denied everything and

managed not to say anything dangerous at the interrogation. At the trial he demanded to see the document concerning when the notorious partition was built. It turned out to have been built a year after the conversation in question. The charge should have surely been removed, but no: He was condemned to seven years of imprisonment.

2. Nikita Ivanovich Kharus; a Ukrainian nationalist. He told us about the traditions of rural Ukrainian culture, intertwining his stories with memories of national heroes of the past. He saw his task in the liberation and revival of his people; so that "everyone had bread and fat." "We would make everyone work," he used to say, "including those whores of ballet dancers; we shall make them plough." He had already been to the camp, and escaped. He walked from the Komi Republic to Novorossiisk (near the Black Sea), visited by foreign ships, from where he was able to escape aboard a ship. He told us that Komi peasant women gave him food. He had a very common appearance. In Novorossiisk he pretended to be a worker and started to work at the shipyard. Someone wanted to marry him to an old woman. Thus he would be above suspicion, but a letter he sent to his relatives betrayed him. The secret police discovered him. At the first interrogation, he put down on the questionnaire: "uneducated." The interrogator showed him the letter and he understood he had been found out. "OK, then note that I have two higher education degrees." He had been in Butyrki for about a year already. He seemed to have been prepared for some special case. At present his dream seems to be coming true in the Ukraine. For me, however, it was clear even then, in Butyrki, what a huge force was accumulating in reaction to national suppression. It could not be annihilated by terror. It was the only force that could not be suppressed despite its archaic and obsolete nature.

3. A Menshevik, whose name I do not remember, had been a mechanical engineer in the Black Sea Squadron before the revolution. He had been in prison for a year under the tsarist regime for participating in the Menshevist movement. Under the new regime he had worked in polygraphy. But once an old friend came to see him. They had a talk, and discussed current events: They had both been brought up under Marxism, though of a different flavor. And later this conversation cost him five years of labor camps. I seem to remember that once, while being

deported, I met the son of the man who had informed the KGB about the contents of their conversation. It was not so rarely that a noose would close this way.

Now I would like to say a few words about the general arrangement of cell life. It was based on a mutual guarantee: The whole cell was responsible for the behavior of each of its members. All obeyed the orders of a monitor, who was honestly elected and respected by everybody. If, for instance, someone needed to contact another person in a neighboring cell, who was charged with the same case, by "knocking," he had to approach the monitor, explain everything, and get permission for knocking (in a serious case). If the knocking was discovered by the prison authorities, the whole cell could be temporarily deprived of a walk or of access to the store. The noteworthy fact is that the decision to endanger the whole cell was taken by the monitor on his own responsibility, and the nature of the request made to the monitor was guaranteed not to be disclosed.

The second important person in the cell was an "organizer of cultural leisure." He organized general discussions, and lectures on various subjects (including scientific ones). In the evenings, concerts were organized: recitations, the singing of opera airs and romances, or the telling of stories, usually of one's life. Those who left the cell for the camp or another prison were seen off with a chorus of the Solovki Anthem and the romance by Vertinski, beginning with the following words:

I don't know who needs that and why,
Who sent them to death with the untrembling
hand.

The prison had an excellent library. Once in ten days each prisoner could order several books, including those in foreign languages, together with dictionaries. For me this was a very important privilege.

The system of inter-cell connections was well developed. Almost every day someone was taken away to an interrogation in the Central Lubyanka prison, to a hospital, or to some other place. On their way these prisoners would meet many people. Thus, when I had to transmit a message, I would give the message after the interrogation, and it would be passed on by a chain of these brief meetings.

Here is an example: At the beginning of the investigation, the investigator hinted that the initial information had come from Sharevsky. It was important for me to know for sure if that was true. The message was sent. The result was: One day the peep-hole of the door was opened for a second and I heard, "Vasya, don't believe them!" Then the noise of a fight. It is true that for sending this message Sharevsky had to spend several days in the punishment cell of the Pugachyov tower. We learned that also by means of an inter-cell message.

I was lucky to be put in Butyrki in the epoch when the freedom-loving traditions of the Russian revolutionaries were still preserved there.

The Sentence

JUNE, 18, 1937. My sentence was announced: I was condemned to five years of corrective labor camps according to article 58, §10-11.⁹ The sentence was passed by the Special Conference, and it goes without saying that I was not present: Even the procurator expressed no desire to talk to me. In those days a sentence like mine was the maximum possible given in the absence of the accused. It was a miracle that I was not tried by a court. I would like to think that this was largely due to my resistance. I interpreted the material of the preliminary investigation in a different way, and at the trial many of the accused could have supported my interpretation. Another miracle was that our case was over before the Special Conference acquired the right to sentence for ten years, which happened soon afterward. I would surely have been given this sentence, and it would have complicated many things in the future.

All the prisoners involved in our case and sentenced by the Special Conference¹⁰ gathered near the room where the sentence was announced. After the sentence, we were all sent to the same temporary cell from which prisoners were taken to other places. Here at last we could talk to each other to our hearts' content.¹¹ My friendship with Yura Proferansov held despite the fact that he had given evidence against me, which made my resistance to the investigator all the more difficult. Certain events in his private life, however, extenuated his guilt. He had passed through a difficult unrequited love, and when this experience was over, and he had settled down

with another woman and was blissfully happy, he was arrested. It was natural for him to believe the interrogator's promise that he would be sentenced only to exile. That was his last hope. I am well aware that this justification of his behavior is rather insufficient, but it was inconceivable for me to break up our former friendship.

As for the elder participants of the movement, their position remained unclear; they avoided discussing this subject. I will, however, return to this later.

It can be imagined how much we talked and thought during the days before sentence was passed. We understood we were approaching death. What would be our lot?

In prison we were informed that the situation in the camps was becoming more dangerous every day. Those were the years of unrestrained mounting terror: terror directed against the people of the country in the name of a crazy idea.

We were aware that those in our group were the only ones in the cell to have chosen our lot back while we were yet free. We were even proud to have made this choice; to us that was a continuation of the tradition of the Russian revolutionaries. It was the awareness of the significance of our choice that enabled us to survive in the camps. The only one to perish (during the first year in the camp) was Yura Proferansov. Being a geologist, one would have thought he would be able to adapt to the new conditions more easily than the others. I believe it was the loss of his love that broke his resistance. It is not easy for a young man to suppress the first glimpses of mutual love.

The Siberian High Road

THIS ROUTE is famous in Russian history. It has seen the passage of many brave, unsubdued people. Now it was my turn.

We were taken by "black ravens" to the freight yard of Yaroslavsky railway station. The train that awaited us was composed of freight cars adapted for carrying prisoners. Inside they had two-story bed frames, a makeshift toilet, and a small window. The cars were packed to capacity and even beyond. The destination was Vladivostok, a town in the Far East, and the journey took a month, according to the schedule of freight trains. We got off the train only once,

in Krasnoyarsk. There we were taken to the baths; to get there we were marched across the whole city, accompanied by a convoy strengthened with dogs.

Quite by chance, I was lucky enough to get a place on an upper bed, near the window, and thus could see at least one side of the Siberian road. In the subways of Moscow, at small stations, deserted crying women were waiting for us: They knew the schedule of the prison trains. Some of us threw them messages to be sent to relatives.¹² The wind would blow these scraps of paper away and the women would run to catch them; and indeed, messages would finally come to the addressees.

The food was, of course, scant. We were often given salted herring (which is today regarded as a delicacy). Hungry people, though well aware there would not be enough water, ate greedily, and then at the stations would start screaming, "Water, give us water!" The cry would come in waves all along the train. We were badly fed, but well guarded. Every evening all the prisoners were counted one by one, and the floor was knocked by a wooden stick to discover any hiding-place. On the roof was a machine-gun.

These prison trains were running all over Russia. Some prisoners were taken to camps, others to new interrogations. The industry of prison transportation was well developed. Those in charge had their own cars,¹³ their own rules of transportation, food supplies, guarding. Prison transportation composed an essential part of the entire system of transportation of the country.

Golden Horn Bay

AT LAST we arrived in Vladivostok. It was a sunny day, as if in a Southern town. Again we were convoyed across the city.

Though the prisoners from each car were ordered to march separately, I managed to run through the whole column and to see familiar faces, to ask what was the accusation and the sentence.

The prison zone was situated on the shore of the bay. Calm, friendly sea was visible shimmering in the sun. This seascape was incongruous side by side with barbed wire and the now familiar sentry boxes. After the boring voyage the sea seemed to be willing to apologize for the madness of the country and to welcome us.

If I were asked what national emblem our country should choose, I would suggest a watchtower: to commemorate those who perished; and for the edification of posterity, so that future generations would never forget the past, and that the country would feel its guilt and never attempt to repeat it. That would be a real repentance.

The necessary formalities in the zone took a lot of time. We were treated as strictly accountable articles, therefore there were numerous searches, countings and re-countings, checkings, and so on. It grew dark and started to rain; at last we were assigned to different sections of the zone. I, and another person who was seriously ill, were directed to a special gate where we were passed on to the local administration. All the officials wore dark cloaks with hoods and had torches just like members of the Spanish Inquisition, the way we see it in pictures. I was ordered, "Take the sick person by the hand and march ahead!" While we walked, one of the hooded figures turned towards me, took off the hood and lifted the torch:

"You don't recognize me, Vasya?"

"Misha!"

Indeed, it was Mikhail Stepanovich Cherevkov, a painter, and in the not so distant past, the husband of Ion Sharevsky's sister. He used to belong to a different world alien to me, the world of exquisite Moscow Bohemia à la Oscar Wilde. But here our paths crossed. The amazing fact is that even in the pre-camp zone he really looked "artistic," unlike others; even his ragged clothes looked elegant and picturesque.

Thus I found myself in the special section of the zone: On the one hand, it contained gravely sick people; on the other hand, prisoners who registered those newly arrived and prepared papers for their further transportation to Magadan. Strange as it may seem, at that time political¹⁴ prisoners were still allowed to do office jobs. The team was headed by the former physician of the Bolshoi Theater, and he was also responsible for selecting its members.

That was a real "resort behind bars": Bohemian intellectuals,¹⁵ and the sea so close at hand, just a few steps down, that one could jump into the water. But no, we were taken to baths. That realm was already ruled by criminals. My boots were immediately stolen, and I walked in the zone in rubbers, and was still wearing them

when I arrived at Magadan. I was happy to have them; we were given nothing by the administration, and had to make do with what we had of our own.

The boat, "Zhurba," that took us to Magadan was a common cargo steamer adapted for the transportation of prisoners. In the holds (naturally, without windows) were built four rows of bed frames. The air could enter only from the upper hatches where the stairs began. This monster of a boat had to accommodate no less than three thousand people. The task of organization was assigned to a small group of prisoners, while the guards stood by grinning. I was a member of this group, which enabled me to spend almost all of the ten days of the voyage on the deck, not in this horrible hold. But we were responsible for everything that happened in the hold.

We were the first to reach the deck. We understood that many would feel sick in the hold and we had to leave places for them in the upper storey. But when the crowd rushed inside, everybody wanted to climb upwards onto the upper storey and we felt we were unable to control them. At this moment, a young man who was in our group, a slender youth with a sort of feminine grace, a former student of the Navy College, ripped off his buttonless¹⁶ uniform and with all his might struck the first burly man right across his face, ordering him to go downstairs. It helped: Nobody struck back, nobody rebelled. Everyone obediently went downstairs. I breathed a sigh of relief, remembering the lines of the Russian poet Gumilev:

When rebel on board alighted
Captain pulls a pistol out of a belt
Such that down drops lace gold
Of the pinkish Mechlin cuff

No, there was no gold and no lace, there was merely a violent blow, but it had been struck in time, and the rebellious man submitted. Indeed, in a critical situation that was the only way to control people; and though I am an anarchist by conviction, I have to acknowledge that. This is sad.

The steamer pushed off and I said goodbye, for long years, to the continent¹⁷ and to everything that was dear to me.

From the ship, I could see the Southern sea, the Southern starlit sky, the coast of a Japanese island and their black patrol destroyer. Then very soon we sailed out into the cold gray and stormy

Sea of Okhotsk. Water was pouring over the mid-deck. On guard at the entrance to the terrible hold, I suddenly forgot my slavery and humiliation. I felt in me a power stronger than that which brought me to this deck.

I also remember a tragic-comical episode. A man, mad with seasickness, rushed to the deck with a toilet pail, ran (for some reason) to the prow, and splashed out the contents in the teeth of the hurricane. It was next to impossible to wash off the filth. I feel the same thing keeps happening to us in the hurricane of political battles, when, exasperated and exhausted, we splash everything on ourselves.

That was the beginning of a new, savage and mutilated life. We were doomed for years of slavery to the brutal system, in a climate unfit for human existence.

And who could know or believe in that epoch that half a century later, I, a former prisoner of the Stalin camps, would again see the waters of the Pacific — but from the other shore, from friendly California and a cozy island near Seattle, with a still-existing Indian reservation on it.

Notes

This work is based on the author's personal experience and materials from the Central Archives prepared by Jeanna Nalimov-Drogalina. It is a chapter from V. V. Nalimov's autobiographical memoir, *A Rope-Dancer (A Wreckage)*, published in Russian in 1994. The chapter was translated into English by A. V. Yarkho and has been further edited for the present work.

1. See V. V. Nalimov, (2001), "On the History of Mystical Anarchism in Russia," *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 20, 85-98.

2. From his childhood, Iosif Ioffe had followed his older cousin; he was very enthusiastic about the ideas of Anarchism and could pass his enthusiasm on to other people. But he seemed to be less talented than his cousin and that could have been the reason for a secret rivalry. In 1934, a man who had been in exile in Kargasok brought greetings from Sharevsky. The man seems to have been an informer, and it was probably then that some contacts could have been made.

The noteworthy fact is that I was warned twice. Once, the warning came from a student from the college where Ioffe studied. It was just a warning; no explanations were given. Another time, it came from our former housekeeper, a retired woman who still lived in our apartment. She told me, "Why do you, Vasya, go to meet him? He will surely betray you." And again I did not listen to the prophetic voice.

I was later told that, immediately after my arrest, Ioffe visited my family. When my father saw him, he understood everything. Without uttering a word, Ioffe went away, confused and embarrassed. But what was done could not be undone. In the archives we found evidence to the effect that he had helped to concoct several such cases.

3. The widow of Kropotkin refused to accept a state pension on principle.

4. I remember that, for some time, cigarettes provided by the Red Cross were brought into our cell.

5. These were mainly the editions of the publishing house "Golos Truda" (The Voice of Labor). The shop of the publishing house existed in Okhotnyi Ryad (one of the central streets of Moscow) until the end of the 1920s.

6. The investigation was mainly carried out by a man called Makarov. He acted in a fairly professional way: He had at his disposal a prefabricated set of questions and standard formulations of answers. Now that we have access to the archives and can read the protocols, we get the impression that all those interrogated spoke a standard language, whether they accepted or rejected the accusations. The administration seemed to approve of such a standardization of the procedure — Makarov got his first promotion for the interrogations.

Sometimes, another interrogator would come, a certain Golovanov. In contrast to Makarov, who wore a uniform, Golovanov was always in civilian clothes. His interrogations sometimes even had a philosophical flavor. For example, he said to me, "You are a Stoic, that is why we cannot get anything from you." I had an impression that he was not a rank-and-file investigator but controlled the whole case.

7. That means that other prisoners in the cell required that he be expelled for an offense. Each cell was held collectively responsible for the behavior of all of its members, and it had the right to ask that a disobedient member be sent away. Such persons were very unwelcome in other cells.

8. In that epoch special cells for the members of the ruling party still existed. Even in prison they had privileges. That meant that even in prison all were equal but some were "more equal than others." The principle of Bolshevik "equality" was observed everywhere.

9. The sentence read as follows: "Condemned for counterrevolutionary activities" (denoted by the index CRA). The essential thing was not only the term of confinement, but the wording as well. Trotskyites were condemned with the index CRTA (T for "terrorist"), which carried a much graver sentence, even though the term was the same.

10. Some of the accused were tried by the Supreme Board of the Military Collegium.

11. These are the people who were together in the cell on that day: S. R. Leshchuk, a mathematician; P. A. Arensky, of the theater; G. V. Gorinevsky, an architect; and B. V. Korostelev, on the staff of the Central Aerohydrodynamic Institute (he was somewhat avoided). The members of the youth group, besides myself, were: Yura Proferansov, a geologist; and Igor' Breshkov, a teacher.

12. Despite meticulous searches, experienced prisoners managed to keep a stub of a pencil, a scrap of paper, and a razor blade.

13. Some prisoners were also transported in common "Stalin" compartment cars with barred windows; these compartments were usually unbearably stuffy, as the number of prisoners squeezed into them was fantastic. There were also the so-called "Stolypin" cars, with a big salon inside, which was rather comfortable. Even now, when I hear the name of Stolypin, I remember cars named after him: the severe Russian tsarist minister was a true humanitarian.

14. Officially, there were no political prisoners in our country. The notorious clause 58 belonged to the Criminal Code, and all people sentenced according to the Criminal Code are criminals. But as a matter of fact that was a sinister clause.

15. I learned later that the elite of the "resort" zone could by some means avoid being sent further. They had a secret life of their own; they even published a homosexual magazine. It is amazing that people remain themselves under all conditions.

16. All metal objects were cut off from our clothes.

17. People who lived on Kolyma called it an island, because then it was accessible only by sea.





V. V. Nalimov, Paris, 1989