waited to be loaded on barges and to be returned to Kotlas. The plan ended in a total failure and the estimated loss was about six hundred thousand roubles.

The bookkeeper met Sidorov on his arrival. "You shouldn't have started on Friday," he said, "but you ignored my advice, and now you see what it got you."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"THERE IS NO CONVICT LABOR!"

In February 1931, we were transferred to the new barracks where the temperature hung around the freezing point. At night it fell below freezing, and engineer A. once awoke in the morning with a frostbitten ear. The moment we reached the barracks, we climbed into our bunks, keeping on our felt boots and overcoats and covering ourselves with every available blanket or piece of clothing.

Members of the office staff lived comparatively well, but the lot of the ordinary prisoners was quite otherwise. They were still kept in tents and barracks fit only for cattle. They were given excessive working assignments, and became worn and ill with fatigue. The reports from the timber-works were deplorable. There the rate of mortality was as high as before, and scurvy, typhus and other diseases were taking their toll. The work was far behind schedule.

Analyzing the results of 1930, the administration came to the conclusion that the plan had failed as far as the construction of the railroad and the highway was concerned. The bad living conditions and undernourishment of the workers were clearly to blame. But as usual the blame was placed where it did not belong. The "directors" of construction were accused of inefficiency, lost their positions, and were sent to field duty. It was decided to continue building the railroad, but without a large staff of engineers: only one engineer, Alpers, was left in charge. Sienkevicz, the carpenter, took matters in his own hands. Drastic orders were sent to all superintendents to insist on the fulfillment of the planned objectives, threatening court-martial

in case of failure. The prisoners immediately felt the brunt of the new order. Sienkevicz also instituted the practise of assembling the prisoners for conferences in which plans and improvements were discussed. On one occasion the office staff was called to attend one of these conferences. Attendance was obligatory.

On the night of the conference, all the office workers assembled in the large administration hall. Our stalwart carpenter-commander sat at a table covered with green cloth, surrounded by his retinue. Speeches were made by chekists and by prisoners in favored positions who were making their way upward in the penal camps administration. The latter were especially zealous and proposed a high-sounding resolution to the effect that "prisoners failing in the efficient execution of their duties should be branded with shame." In his opening speech Sienkevicz had announced that all prisoners would be permitted to express their thoughts freely, without fear of consequences, but the prisoners sat there with an impassive expression on their faces, listening in silence to the loud utterances of the hypocrites.

Quite unexpectedly Wahl, the former chief clerk of the EKO office, rose from his seat to make a speech which proved a veritable sensation. It astounded us especially that it was he, of all prisoners, who had resolved to express the hidden thoughts of us all. He was usually so subservient to his chiefs and so mean to those fellow-prisoners who were dependent on him. And now he was the only one who had the courage to speak his mind. It was hard to tell what actually prompted him, as he must have known what the consequences would be.

Wahl started his speech by the statement that he had been a prisoner for over four years and that he had six months more to serve until the end of his sentence.

"I worked hard from the very first day of my arrival. I

shall not pretend that I did this because I wished to be of the greatest service to the penal camps. . ."

Indignant exclamations came from the ranks of the chekists and the presiding officials whispered to each other.

". . . No, I did this because we were given a solemn promise of commutation of part of our sentence if we worked well. But what have we now? I have worked efficiently in this camp for over a year and a half. Have I come any nearer to the commutation of my sentence? It is not even mentioned any more. You ask us honestly to perform our duties. To what end, we would like to know? For the success of socialism? It is foreign to us and we do not believe in it. All we want is our freedom. Announce definite rules governing the commutation of sentences, improve living conditions and your success is assured! If not, you are doomed to failure. You may publish a dozen resolutions a day, but that will not improve things. How can you demand that prisoners work efficiently if you do not feed them? Besides . . . "

"Enough!" cried Sienkevicz, jumping up and hammering the table with his fist. "You are a mercenary wretch, prisoner Wahl. We do not need men like you. We'll put you in the dungeon, and there . . . "

"I know what's there," shouted Wahl, pale as a sheet. "You asked us to say all that we thought, freely. Everybody here is of the same opinion as I, but they are afraid to speak. . ."

"Silence!" thundered Sienkevicz, furious and red in the face. "Get out of here at once."

Several chekists started towards Wahl. Without waiting for them, he quickly went out of the door. An awkward pause followed. The officials whispered among themselves, giving vent to indignant exclamations. Threats to punish Wahl for his insolence were heard. The prisoners remained silent.

Half an hour later the assembly unanimously passed the resolution "branding selfish mercenaries with shame" and expressing devotion to the cause. As usual in the U.S.S.R., the unanimous vote was achieved by the expedient of asking the dissenters to raise their hands. There was none. Then those not voting were asked to raise their hands. Again no hands were raised. Under the conditions which exist in the U.S.S.R., there is no sense in exposing oneself to the danger of dissenting from communist resolutions. This explains why the amazing number of resolutions, be they for home consumption or for effect on foreign public opinion, are always carried unanimously. No one familiar with life in Soviet Russia wonders at it, but politically-minded citizens of the Western democracies are surprised and come to the conclusion that the population of Russia is unanimously in accord with Bolshevik rule.

Three days after his memorable speech Wahl was attached to a group of prisoners being sent to the new penal camp at Syzran. When he arrived there, he was caught in a trifling transgression, thrown into the dungeon, accused of agitation against the Soviets, and sentenced to an additional five years in the penal camps.

Korolkov furnished another instance of breaking discipline, but he fared much better than Wahl. He had been commissioned as a specialist to accompany the penal camps' delegate to the district agricultural convention. He made certain proposals, but found opposition from the delegates of the Komsomol – Young Communists – who posed as peasants, but knew next to nothing of agriculture. Korolkov defended his theories, and then, turning to the Komsomol delegates, said: "As for you, my Komsomol comrades, all I have to say is that as farmers you would make good shoemakers," and he added an apt but obscene pun.

This gave rise to a veritable furor. The Komsomol delegates were indignant; the women demanded the immediate ejection of Korolkov, the peasants laughed heartily; the chairman frantically rang the bell, trying to restrain his mirth; the delegate from the penal camps howled with laughter. The conference was speedily adjourned.

The next day Korolkov was officially reprimanded. The pun made a big hit with the commanders and Sienkevicz repeatedly called Korolkov to his office and asked him to tell the story in his own words. Each time he was rewarded with the commander's Homeric laughter. Shkele was also present on one occasion and he proposed putting Korolkov in the dungeon. "Oh, no," laughed Sienkevicz, "no dungeon for him. Give him a reprimand, that's all."

In January, the supply department got busy securing materials for the repair of its tug-boats. Moscow was furnished the necessary requisitions, but did not send the materials and answered all our telegrams with promises, the worth of which we knew only too well. The camp's fleet consisted of four tugs, and three of them were in very poor condition. The fourth tug-boat had been transferred to the Vychegda River from the Volga, and a prisoner, sea captain K., was placed in command.

Imagine his surprise when he went to the tug to take command and recognized it as his own tug which had been taken from him by the Bolsheviks and nationalized in the early days of the revolution. He had not seen it since, and during the intervening years its name had been changed several times. It was now called the "Ufa," a name quite different from "Krasotka" (Little Beauty) which he had originally given it. Still, since Providence had brought it back to him, he took a proprietor's interest in it, which accounted for its good condition.

Special boiler plates were needed for the repairs. They could be obtained only in Archangel. I met with unex-

pected resistance when I explained to Zolotarev, the manicured chief of our department, the necessity of immediate purchase of the boiler plates.

"Why should we buy them?" he replied. "We have enough of our own iron."

"We have no such iron," I pointed out.

"This goes to show how you work! You don't even know what you have on hand. You have all the iron you need."

"I am sorry, but we really have none in stock."

"I am telling you that we have," he said, getting a little excited. "I have just received the stock-list. Here, you may see for yourself. One and a half tons of broken cast-iron kettles; * this should be sufficient for the repairs; let the captain select a suitable piece. . ."

This was too much, and I burst out laughing. It reminded me of Mark Twain's story of the editor of a provincial agricultural magazine and his unique advice to farmers. Life in the penal camps had its comic side.

From that time on my relations with my immediate boss were spoiled. He could not forgive my laughter. I explained why his suggestion could not be carried out. He turned crimson and did not lift his eyes from his polished nails. "You may go," he said.

Probably this incident would have had no further consequences had I not recounted it to my friends that evening. It was too good a story to be left untold, but one of the stool-pigeons reported it to his superior, and the next day I lost my position as head of the technical department. My friend, the engineer Tselikov, replaced me and I was made his assistant. Zolotarev began to take his revenge. My salary of fifty roubles a month was cut in half, I lost the privilege of taking my meals in the dining room reserved for the managing staff, my permit for free passage about town

* In Russian the same word is used for "boiler" and "kettle."

was taken away from me and, had it been possible, I would have been sent to do hard labor in the forest. Two considerations prevented this; first, I was indispensable to our department as a worker, and second, such a drastic measure entailed the risk of the incident becoming known to the higher authorities.

Zolotarev was ambitious. He had worked in the cheka and then in the OGPU since 1920, and was trying to attain the rank of an "Old Chekist." This honor was conferred upon chekists who had served the OGPU faithfully ten years or more. It opened the way to a more rapid advancement, a higher pension in case of disability, and other privileges. All the workers of the OGPU proudly called themselves "chekists" and were ambitious to become "Old Chekists."

Early in 1931 the Soviet press began printing more and more articles dealing with the agitation in New York and London against the importation of Soviet goods produced by penal or forced labor, particularly in the lumber industry. The Soviet papers had never once admitted that penal labor was actually employed. The government cared little that the employment of penal labor cast a shadow on its reputation, but was concerned with the threat that Europe and America might forbid the import of Soviet timber. Such an embargo would seriously affect the foreign exchange balance, needed to pay for the machinery bought abroad for the Five-Year Plan.

In the beginning of February, the situation became acute. An embargo by the Western countries on the import of Soviet timber and other products seemed imminent. The tension was transmitted to our camps. We could feel that important changes were impending.

Toward the end of the month a general meeting of all the administration office workers was called and the assistant commander Shkele read a report dealing with the unprin-

cipled agitation of the Western-European press against the U.S.S.R.

Shkele read his speech with a strong Lettish accent. He repeatedly referred to the sacred "Five-Year Plan in four years" and stated that the Soviet Union would not tolerate any interference in its internal affairs, that the agitation was carried on by Russian Whites living abroad in order to prevent the Soviets from finishing the construction of the railroad and the highway. He never mentioned the timberworks and loading of timber at Archangel, as if this did not even exist. We looked at each other askance: "What was he driving at?"

After the speech a resolution prepared in advance was read to us. The resolution referred to the shameful and baseless agitation against the Soviets, stated that the prisoners were satisfied with their living conditions, liked their food, were well treated, and were eager to give all their strength to the country so that it might successfully complete the Five-Year Plan. Again there was not a word concerning the timber industry; the arguments were confined to the railroad under construction. Shkele raised his hand.

"Tomorrow, citizens, this paper will be handed around for your signatures. Tonight we shall vote on it. Let anyone who opposes the resolution raise his hand. Nobody. It is carried unanimously," he solemnly declared. "Has anybody abstained from voting? Nobody again? That's fine."

With a look of importance, as if a real vote had just been taken, Shkele sat down and kept staring at the assembled prisoners with a self-satisfied air.

As we were told later, the meeting had been called in accordance with instructions from Moscow, but we did not know for what purpose. Similar meetings took place at all the work posts, identical resolutions were read, voted

on, signed by the prisoners, and returned to Moscow, to serve as positive proof, if occasion required.

A week after the meeting had taken place the real explanation of the existing tension was given. A secret code telegram was received from the head-office in Moscow instructing us to liquidate our camp completely in three days, and to do it in such a manner that not a trace should remain. Moscow faced the probability of having to admit a foreign investigating commission and had decided to erase all evidence of the existence of penal camps.

A veritable panic ensued. The usual Bolshevik methods were employed for the liquidation. After a short conference in Sienkevicz's office, telegrams were sent to all work posts to stop operations within twenty-four hours, to gather the prisoners at evacuation centers, to efface all external marks of the penal camps, such as barbed-wire enclosures, watch-turrets and signboards; for all officials to dress in civilian clothes, to disarm the guards, and to wait for further instructions.

In reply to these instructions, many telegrams were received stating that it was impossible to execute the orders in so short a time, that there were not enough horses to effect the evacuation, that the sick would have to be left in the forest, etc. Sienkevicz answered that whoever failed to execute his orders within the stipulated time would be shot.

Pandemonium broke loose. At the Kotlas Transfer Station the double barbed-wire enclosure was speedily removed, the shop equipment was packed. The crowded barracks were filled to overflowing by the influx of prisoners evacuated from the Uftug forests. At Solvychegodsk Karjalainen, the Finnish carpenter who had recently been appointed commander there, exhibited wild energy, the result of a triple ration of alcohol. He ran into the toy-making shop, which was manned by invalids, remonstrating

at the slowness of packing there, shooting at the ceiling and yelling so loud that the scared invalids took to their heels and ran out of the building.

"I'll kill you," yelled Karjalainen at the superintendent of the shop, waving his revolver. "I'll kill you if you don't have everything packed in an hour."

From all sides the forest-workers were marching in groups to Solvychegodsk. They carried government equipment in addition to their own belongings. Those seriously ill were crowded on teamsters' sleds, the sick who could still walk followed in the rear. Some of the sick died en route and were buried in the forest.

The situation at Archangel was even worse. The evacuation of the thirty thousand prisoners working there required eight hundred railway cars. None was available and the prisoners were loaded on old discarded freight and flat cars. Trains picked up groups of prisoners at the stations to which they had been forced to march from their remote outposts. While waiting for the trains, they spent several nights in the forest, hungry and freezing. Prisoners suffering from fever, scurvy or tuberculosis formed no exception, and endured the same privations. Many men died during the mad rush of the evacuation. There were also many attempts to escape, but the cordon of guards had not yet been lifted and most of the fugitives were caught.

In order to show his zeal and to merit praise by his superiors, Okunev, the commander of the Archangel camp peremptorily ordered all prisoners to leave the barracks, removed the barbed-wire enclosure, reversed the signboards and painted new names on them, calling the old penal camp buildings schools, clubs, rest-rooms, etc. His ingenious plan cost the lives of many prisoners. They spent many days in the open waiting for cars near the railway station and suffered great privations. At the end of

the year, it was learned that the evacuation of Archangel and Uftug cost thirteen hundred and seventy lives.

The administration itself moved its offices to Solvychegodsk in the record time of twenty-four hours.

We, the privileged staff of the administration, hired a large sleigh, got into it all together and set out about noon. We quickly passed the little gray houses, the yard for scrap iron, the half demolished mill, the shutters of the sausage factory run by the local cooperative which had remained closed for several years because of the shortage of raw material.

We stopped for a meal at Yakovlevskaya. Our peasant host, not seeing any men in uniform among us, brought out vodka. We spread our supplies of lard, preserves and fish, and went to it. Through the window we could see the unending line of prisoners marching and chekists driving by.

The administration office workers marched without escort. They were dressed in new uniforms which had been designed by Sienkevicz himself and consisted of black overcoats with an unnaturally high waist-band, and black caps made of the same material. Sienkevicz had grown tired of seeing poorly dressed people in his office and had ordered the new uniforms just before receiving orders for the evacuation. To save time the tailor shop had cut all the uniforms to one size, for medium height. Therefore the tall and the short prisoners looked very funny in their ill-fitting coats. The black figures looked like scare-crows silhouetted against the white snow.

Sleighs loaded with camp equipment followed groups of prisoners. Food, hay, boxes of all description, were all loaded together helter-skelter. Two little white cribs, belonging to Filippov, the second assistant commander, looked very incongruous, placed on top of a load of hay.

THE Kotlas Transfer Station was transfigured. The harsh-looking barbed-wire fence had disappeared, the old sign over the gates was replaced by a new one, telling the visitor that he is approaching the dormitories of "Severoles" workers. The new sign on the warehouses designated them as "Warehouses of the Penug-Syktyvkar Railroad Under Construction" ; to all telephone calls the Transfer Station's office responded : "Railroad construction office talking."

A telegram was received from Archangel stating that the evacuation had been completed on time as ordered and that no outward sign of a penal camp remained. The transformation was thorough and complete both at Kotlas and at Archangel. A commission of foreign investigators could now be freely admitted. In exactly the same manner the evacuation was carried out at the Solovetsky camp, both on the islands and on the mainland. All the timber which had been cut was abandoned in the forests.

During the evacuation of the Kotlas hospital, three of the typhus patients who had recently had fresh charges of anti-Soviet agitation in the penal camps brought against them, were dragged out into the nearby forest and there Nazarov, chief of the secret intelligence department, personally shot them. They were immediately buried in a pit which was dug at the place of execution.

Several days after the evacuation the newspapers brought the report of Premier Molotov's speech. Stalin's right-hand man expressed the indignation of the Soviet government at the calumnies spread by its enemies, to the effect that the government was using penal labor in the preparation of timber in the Northern area. He categorically denied this.

"There are no prisoners employed in the timber industry of the Northern area," said Molotov. He did not deny that penal labor was employed for other purposes, such as road construction. But even in the United States roads

were built by prison gangs, so where was the argument ? Molotov concluded his speech with the announcement that though the Soviet government would not admit any foreign investigating commission to its territories, it would not oppose visits to the Northern area by foreign consuls or newspaper correspondents.

Molotov did not lie. At that moment the evacuation continued and the exploitation of penal labor in the timber-works nearest the railroad line had stopped. He was very careful in his phraseology. He never once mentioned that the work at the timber-bases of the penal camps had been discontinued only a week before.

The foreign consuls knew the real condition of affairs and none of them visited our territories. Several foreign correspondents came to the Archangel region, where they were shown the camp buildings adorned with the new sign-boards designating them as "schools," "clubs," etc. These reporters were satisfied that all the reports about convict labor in Soviet Russia were false. They stated in their newspaper articles that the penal camps did not even exist and that no prisoners worked in the forests. The deception was complete.

In the same speech Molotov mentioned the wealth of the Ukhta oil-fields, from which large quantities of oil were being exported. He offered this as proof that the statements concerning the ruthless exploitation of oil in the Baku region were unfounded.

The prisoners of the Northern penal camps were well aware of the absurdity of this statement. The equipment for the eleven oil-wells to be drilled at Ukhta was still on the way ; the failure of the attempt to transport it by means of tractors was already evident and part of the equipment was irretrievably lost in the Vychegda River. Until all the equipment arrived the eleven oil-wells mentioned by Molotov could not be begun.

As a matter of fact, only one oil-well in the Ukhta region was producing and the production was so small that it barely sufficed as fuel for the single Diesel engine of the Ukhta penal camp.

Two weeks passed. None of the prisoners were allowed in Kotlas, for there was still fear of a foreign investigation. When this danger was past, all the former conditions were gradually restored, the Transfer Station was again surrounded by a double fence of barbed wire and though the signs still described the buildings as ostensible boarding houses of free workers, the men behind the wire were prisoners who were daily dispatched from the Transfer Station to their new destinations in the penal camps of the Southern and Central regions of the Soviet Union.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE EARTH BELONGS TO ITS CHILDREN

THE OGPU faced a dilemma. On the one hand, it was not allowed to send prisoners to the timber-works, while on the other hand, a large quantity of timber had been prepared for export and its abandonment in the forest would result in a serious financial loss. Moscow gave much thought to this problem. Finally a solution was found which served the interests of both the wolves and the sheep. It was the so-called "voluntary colonization" movement.

In his splendid book on the Soviet Union, the American professor, Calvin Hoover, states that he saw trainloads of peasants deported into exile, who told him that they did not know where they were being taken. These were the prosperous peasants or "kulaks" who were to be "exterminated as a class" and who were being taken to the remote regions of the U.S.S.R. as "voluntary colonists."

When the Central Committee of the Communist Party had decided to exterminate the "kulaks" as a class, it entrusted the OGPU with the execution of the plan. The latter immediately realized that extraordinary methods would be necessary, since approximately four million peasants, not counting their families, had to be arrested and sent into exile.

The whole business had to be done quickly and the OGPU did not bother about formalities. Mass arrests of peasants began simultaneously in all parts of the Union. In actual practise the procedure was as follows: the district agent of the OGPU collected his information from

the village soviets and made out lists of "kulaks." He then announced that all the peasants named in the lists were under arrest and must prepare to leave their village within one hour. The OGPU agent had at his disposal the militia and special detachments of the OGPU guards to overcome any resistance. Wives were ordered to follow their husbands, and likewise the children if there was no one with whom to leave them. As the mothers did not want to part from their children, they almost invariably took them along.

The arrested peasants strapped their most necessary belongings and some food supplies on their backs, formed in a column and marched under escort to the nearest railroad station. Each was obliged to take along at least one needful farming tool.

The houses, cattle and all the belongings of the arrested were either transferred to the local Kolkhoz (collective farm), or auctioned off, the proceeds going to the government. The old parents of the "kulaks" were chased out of the houses and ordered to leave their native village for good.

No specific charges were brought against the "kulaks" and no sentences were pronounced. They were simply exiled forever into remote regions of the Union.

On arrival at the railroad station, they were packed in freight cars and in this appalling manner transported to distant parts of Siberia, the Komi territory, Murmansk or the Northern area, where they had to march to their final destination.

Before 1931, exiling of the "kulaks" was entirely without system, but after that it was carried out strictly according to plan. The procedure was officially incorporated in an agreement of the OGPU with the colonization office in Moscow, dealing with the settlement of several million colonists in the remote regions, to be carried out by the OGPU. The exiled "kulaks" were designated as "voluntary colonists" and the OGPU assumed the duties of organizing settlement centers in distant localities, furnishing food to the colonists while they were en route, and supplying the necessary tools and materials after their arrival.

Of course there could not be even a semblance of a regular supply of the colonists' needs, considering the speed with which they were exiled. It is impossible to describe the privations and sufferings to which they were subjected. They were transported to their new territories like cattle. Upon their detrainment they and their families, including little children, had to make several hundred kilometers on foot. They carried their heavy bundles on their backs and were fed nothing or only scant rations of bread. Upon arrival at their destination they were told to clear some land in the forest and to build themselves huts. Their arrival was registered by the local soviets and as "voluntary colonists" they were listed as part of the population.

As soon as the "voluntary colonists" had completed the construction of their new homes, they were assigned work in the forest, to be performed in payment for their transportation and food. Refusal to do the work assigned was punished by arrest, separation from family and a charge of sabotage. By orders of the local soviets it was obligatory for all members of the local population to do their share of work in the forest.

The formal listing of the exiled peasants as part of the local population was required by the OGPU. The reason for this was simple. The foreign press had protested the import of timber produced by penal labor. Part of the prisoners from the Northern timber-works were transferred to penal camps in Southern and Central regions. The cut timber remained in the forest and the OGPU had no workmen to complete the job. Timber exports had to be continued, as it was part of the Five-Year Plan, but it had to be handled in a way to avoid foreign criticism. No inducements were

sufficient to make free workers move into the Northern timber region.

It was these considerations that led to the ingenious plan for the exploitation of the labor of "voluntary colonists." In point of time it coincided with the adoption of the policy of extermination of the "kulaks" as a class.

The scheme was diabolically clever and effective. On the one hand, it replaced the hundred thousand prisoners employed in the winter of 1930–31 with two hundred thousand "voluntary colonists" and thus stopped foreign protests. On the other hand, it helped to exterminate the more prosperous peasants as a class.

Among these exiles were also some parties of German colonists, of whom much was written in the German press and on whose behalf the German ambassador at Moscow had intervened, but in vain. They were descendants of the German farmers invited by Catherine the Great to settle in Russia on a grant of land provided for them on the Volga. They formed a prosperous colony and preserved their language and customs down to the time of the Bolshevik revolution.

I was in Solvychegodsk when navigation opened. Long caravans of barges went up and down the Vychegda River, some carrying winter supplies for the Komi territory and some loaded with sawn timber for export via Archangel. Many barges carried transports of "voluntary colonists," once well-to-do peasants who had been deprived of their land and possessions and deported from the central regions. Thousands of these unfortunates went by, men, women and endless numbers of pale, sickly children.

In addition to the natives, a goodly number of families of exiled German colonists from the Volga lived in Solvychegodsk. The families were crowded into little rooms which often quartered as many as ten people, the floor affording barely enough sleeping room for them. In spite

of the crowded conditions, German cleanliness and accuracy was fully in evidence; the patriarchal customs of the colonists had been preserved through all their trials.

The head of each family, "der Vater," was loved, respected and implicitly obeyed by all its members. Everybody worked hard, the women laundered and embroidered, bringing all their earnings to the father, who spent the family cash as he saw fit. There were never any quarrels in these families. They were a substantial, hard-working, thrifty people.

Some of us who spoke German were always welcome guests in these families. In spite of their poverty they asked us to come in for a glass of beer and opened their hearts to us. "Wir wollen heim," they constantly repeated, telling us of the bounty of their Volga colonies, of their fine horses, cows, pigs and the well-cultivated soil.

"Not a single boulder in my fields," boasted one of them.

"People came from afar to look at my horses," sighed another.

"Mine was the best house for fifty miles around," said the third.

"Wir wollen heim," came the general chorus.

"Why did they deport us? What harm did we do them? We worked quietly, did not interfere with anybody, did not riot or oppose the Reds, paid our taxes promptly. Why then were we exiled? True, we did not want collective farms. We colonists are not in favor of it; no good comes of it; and therefore we did not join the Kolkhoz. Then an OGPU commissar drove us out of our homes, made us get into railroad carriages with our wives and children, and here we are. Our houses and belongings were confiscated, our cattle transferred to the collective farms. We have lost all we had. We had no time to take anything with us, for we were given only twenty minutes to get ready. Our children were used to milk and

wheat bread ; now we have not even enough black bread to feed them. Oh, how many of them have died ! Look at those little ones, don't they look miserable ?"

Indeed, the thin sickly children with swollen bellies were a pitiable sight.

The colonists lived in harmony and followed events back home through correspondence with their former fellow-villagers. They hoped against hope for early repatriation. "Wir wollen heim," and nothing else would suit them. Make a new start in the North ? Here, on this land ? And then have it again taken away in a few years ? No, no. "Wir wollen heim," they repeated stubbornly, with tears in their eyes, "wir wollen heim."

Already in Kotlas I had often observed these so-called "voluntary colonists." There they lived at the "colonists' transfer station," which was situated on an island in the river, some six kilometers from town, and consisted of a hundred barracks designed as quarters for two hundred men each. These barracks were always overcrowded. The station generally sheltered more than forty thousand colonists with their families. Almost daily large parties of them came and went. The colonists were strictly forbidden to go outside the barbed-wire enclosure. As the only well in camp was emptied to the bottom quite early every morning, the colonists got most of the water they needed from the river, going there twice a day, escorted by guards. It was forbidden to fetch water without an escort, but no announcement to this effect was posted. It was only after nine colonists had been killed by the sentries on watch because they had crawled under the barbed wire to obtain water to quench their thirst, that the authorities decided to provide a better supply of water and to post an announcement forbidding anybody without escort to pass beyond the barbed wire.

When our penal camp was transferred to Ust-Vym, we found one of the "voluntary colonists' " stations of the Komi territory situated next to our barracks. It consisted of a number of large tents erected in an open field. They adjoined each other and were surrounded by a barbed-wire fence. Guards were constantly on watch in two turrets erected for this purpose. Within the enclosure a multitude of men, women and children swarmed about. They were never let out of the enclosure and all day long they moved about aimlessly in the limited space. The women sat in groups nursing their babies, the men talked to each other or sat about forlornly, while the boys and girls ran about and tried to play games.

The colonists were given four hundred grams of rye bread daily and nothing else. There were no stoves, so that those who had their own supplies could not prepare any kind of food. They subsisted on bread and water alone.

The station was under iron discipline. At seven in the morning the commander arrived, accompanied by the doctor's assistant. The women and children were driven into the tents and the men stood in line for inspection. The commander stopped here and there in front of the lines and from time to time we could hear his shouts and unprintable swearing. Then he would enter the tents and instantly the air would resound with the shrieking and howling of women and the crying of children. The doctor's assistant would carry out of the tents the bodies of children who had died during the night, the crying mothers would follow him to the gate where the cart was waiting. Some of them frantically grabbed the doctor by the arms, tore their hair, fell on their knees, begged, implored and, when they were finally dragged away by the guards, threw themselves on the ground and gave way to heartrending sobs.

The men stood in line a little way off and did not move. The slightest resistance was considered rioting and was punished by shooting. They knew it.

After the inspection tour the children's bodies in the cart were covered with burlap and were carted away, accompanied by the doctor's assistant, the weeping and shrieking mothers, several colonists armed with picks and shovels and by some armed guards. They were taken to a place about half a kilometer from the station. Quickly a hole would be dug and a little mound would appear next to the others. There were a great number of these little mounds in the field and from our window they looked like a natural undulation of the ground. The children died like flies.

Adult deaths were less frequent. When a husband was buried, the wife accompanied the cart up to the mound-covered field, the colonists dug the grave and lowered the body into it, covering it up quickly. The soldiers would forcibly remove the crying woman from the grave. When a woman died, the husband did the digging himself. No coffins or ceremonies of any kind were permitted.

It was strictly forbidden to go outside the barbed-wire enclosure, and sentries shot from the turrets without warning. In spite of this, many of the unfortunates were driven by hunger to brave the danger. During the night the exhausted faces of bearded peasants and the pale faces of their poor wives appeared at our windows and they would beg for a bit of food, "in the name of Christ." We shared what little we had. Alas, it was but a drop in the ocean.

Large parties of "colonists" were sent to the North regularly. Loaded with their packs, they trudged along heavily, the children clinging to their mothers' skirts. It was an appalling sight. These parties had to walk hundreds of kilometers, into the very depth of the Zyryan forests, where they had to break ground and start life afresh.

Judging from the letters received by the prisoners, conditions in the U.S.S.R. showed no improvement. There was widespread peasant opposition to the collectivization campaign, followed by the policy of the "extermination of the kulaks as a class." The Russian peasants without exception, be they of the "poor," "middle," or "kulak" classes, share the view common to peasants or farmers of all lands. They have always regarded the land as belonging to them, as their absolute property. They could not reconcile themselves to the communist land program, i. e., to the principle that the land is the property of the state and that those who cultivate it have only a temporary privilege to make use of it.

Already in Lenin's time the Bolsheviks had been forced to yield on this point in order to maintain themselves in power. Hence Lenin introduced the NEP and encouraged the peasants to "enrich themselves." After Lenin's death the NEP was abolished and the well-to-do peasants were gradually stripped of their property either by "lawful" taxation or by arbitrary confiscation.

When Stalin had firmly established his power, the Communist Party returned to its former platform and a long struggle with the peasant class ensued.

The communists believed that they were waging a successful battle but in reality the attempt to subdue the peasant was hopeless and brought about difficulties in the matter of food supply which threatened, in a few years, to take on the proportions of famine. It is difficult to wage a war against eighty percent of the population.

When the collectivization of the peasants' property was begun, strictly in accordance with the estimates of the Five-Year Plan, the well-to-do peasantry took a definite stand against it and opposed it in every way. The extermination of the "kulaks" was undertaken, but the results of their opposition soon became evident : almost all of the breeding livestock belonging to the "kulaks" had been slaughtered,

and common livestock had diminished to such an extent that there was a shortage of fertilizer.

The peasants joined the collective farms in spite of the fact that they were opposed to collectivization. They did this chiefly because they had no other alternative and because they had decided on the most effective form of opposition, passive resistance.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

PLANNING

At the time of our arrival at Solvychegodsk this lovely little town was still in its winter garb. Roofs were covered with deep snow which had not been removed since autumn. Boys coasted their sleds down the steep banks on to the river ice ; here and there men on skis were to be seen, evidence that winter sports had penetrated even these remote provinces.

There were no factories in the town. The institutions included the local soviet, a technical school, two cooperative stores, the OGPU, the fire department, the government vodka warehouse and dispensary, and the electric power station.

The local landmark was the little house in which Stalin, the present dictator of the U.S.S.R., had lived before the war as an exile. The owner of the house was a young man of swarthy complexion, with the features of a native of the Caucasus, contrasting sharply with those of his blond Northern fellow villagers. The local party headquarters had just sent him to Moscow, where a brilliant career probably awaited him.

Weeks went by ; the snow began to melt. Spring was coming. In the camp hospital ten to fifteen prisoners died daily. Dr. Jacobson, in charge of the hospital, shook his head sadly. He considered all of his patients doomed and referred to them as living corpses left behind by the February evacuation.

On the first of June the driving of logs down the rivers