

\*\* But if there is an atom of doubt, then send me, let's say, for twenty-five years to Pechora or Kolyma [in Siberia], to a camp. I would establish there: a university, a regional museum, a technical station, and so forth, institutions, picture galleries, an ethnographic museum, a zoological and botanical museum, a camp journal, a newspaper.

In a word, I would carry out pioneering, trail-blazing cultural work, settling there with my family until the end of my days.

In any case, I declare that I would work wherever required like a powerful machine.

However, to speak the truth, I do not place any hope in this, since the very fact of changing the directives of the February plenum speaks for itself (and I see that the case proceeds to a trial, if not today, then tomorrow).

Here, it seems, are all my last requests (also: *philosophical work*, having been left to me, I have done much that is useful).

Iosif Vissarionovich! In me you have lost one of your most able generals, someone really dedicated to you. But this is already in the past. I remember what Marx wrote about Barclay de Tolly [a general at the time of the Napoleonic wars], who had been found guilty of treason, that Alexander I lost such an aide to no purpose. It is bitter to think about all this. But I am preparing emotionally to leave the vale of life, and there is nothing in my attitude toward all of you and toward the party and toward the whole cause, nothing except a great, boundless love. I do everything that is humanly possible and impossible. I have written about everything to you. I have placed all the dots on the "i." I did this *beforehand* because I have no way of knowing in what state I will be tomorrow or the day after, etc.

Maybe I will have, like a neurasthenic, universal apathy so that I will be unable to move a finger.

But now, with my head aching and tears in my eyes, I write everything. My inner conscience is clear before you now, Koba. I ask of you a final forgiveness (a sincere one and no other). For this I mentally embrace you. Goodbye forever, and think kindly of your unfortunate one.

N. Bukharin

10.XII.37

[a seven-page appendix followed, but it was not deposited in the archive with the letter]

Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii, f. 3, op. 24, d. 427, l. 13–18; published in *Istochnik*, no. 0 (1993), pp. 23–25; translation by the editor.

### Mekhlis to Stalin and Ezhov

OCTOBER 28, 1938

*A long-time party and state apparatchik, L. Z. Mekhlis (1889–1953) reported back to Stalin on his fact-finding trip out to the Soviet East. The NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) had set quotas for the number of people to be arrested and executed, but local officials had exceeded these limits and requested that the limits be*

raised. By 1938, the terror was expanding beyond the Moscow's expectations, and the central authorities had to restrain the very local enthusiasts whose activities they had set in motion. That year Ezhov, the head of the NKVD, was arrested, and Lavrenti Beria, Stalin's Georgian client, was brought to Moscow to succeed him and wind down the terror.

I left Chita for Moscow on October 27. In Ulan-Ude [capital of the Buriat-Mongol Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic] the secretary of the regional committee of the VKP (b), Ignat'ev, and the NKVD of the Buriat-Mongol ASSR, Tkachev, came to see me. In our conversation they communicated that they had exceeded the NKVD's limit of 447, and in the prisons were over 2,000 arrested people, whose terms of detention have long since run out, among them participants in the bourgeois nationalist and Lamist [Buddhist] counter-revolution—kulaks, lamas, and White Guardists. The cases have all been worked up long ago; the prisons are filled to overflowing, but the *troiki*<sup>1</sup> have not received permission to examine them. I am reporting that they request that the limit be raised to 2,500 persons.

28/X No. 672 Mekhlis.

RTsKhIDNI, f. 89, op. 73; d. 157, 1.1; translation by the editor

### Conference of Musicians at the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party, Moscow

JANUARY 1948

*At the end of the war, many Soviet people experienced a sense that life would not only ease but become freer. The self-reliance of citizens and soldiers during the fighting in the early years of the war, when the party, state, and police structures could not enforce old rules and behaviors, has been characterized—by Soviet historian Mikhail Gefter—as an “elemental de-Stalinization.”<sup>2</sup> It was accompanied by the development of a patriotic civic spirit—a “civic romanticism” in the words of Elena Zubkova. The sense of freedom combined with a feeling of personal responsibility for the fate of the fatherland. Stalin was revered, the embodiment of the hard-won victory, and both memories and practices of surveillance remained embedded*

1. Set up during the collectivization campaigns, *troiki* were three-person panels that principally judged political cases. They became the major tribunal during the purges. Peter Solomon writes that “the failure of judges on the special collegia and the military tribunals to cooperate fully with the security police may have led Stalin to rely on alternatives to the courts for the conduct of the Terror. Most of the 800,000 political persecutions of 1937 were handled not by courts but directly by the NKVD, including its revived *troiki*.” [Peter H. Solomon, Jr., *Soviet Criminal Justice Under Stalin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 234] In December 1937, Andrei Vyshinskii, the Procurator-General of the USSR, ordered that local procurators use the *troiki* instead of regular courts “‘when the evidence of guilt will not allow its use at trial; that is when it featured denunciations or false testimony from provocateurs.” [Ibid., p. 238] The *troiki* were abolished by the decree of November 17, 1938 that essentially brought the Great Terror to an end.

2. M. Gefter, “Stalin umer vchera . . .,” in Iu. Afanaševa (ed.), *Inogo ne dano: Sud'by perestroiki; Vgliadyvasias' v proshloe; Vozurashenie k budushchemu*, p. 305