

Non-Target Communist Area Analysis Department
Background Information USSR

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STALINIST TERROR DEPICTED IN NEW SOVIET NOVEL

I.

The new Soviet novel Tishiná (Stillness) by Yurii Bondarev, which appears in the March, April, and May issues of the liberal Soviet literary weekly Noviy Mir (New World), represents the most dramatic and outspoken fictional description of life under the Stalinist terror yet to be published in the USSR. As such it is a new milestone in the Soviet literary thaw.

The form of the novel is less radical and interesting than, for example, Dudintsev's New Year's Tale, which made extensive use of symbolism. The style is simple and direct, departing in no important way from the stylistic dictates of socialist realism. There are several loose ends in the plot, and the novel has not entirely escaped from the Victorian air which permeates most Soviet literature. Neither are the characters profound or particularly well drawn. But if the novel is socialist realism in form, its content is something quite different. The protagonist is a war hero who is unjustly expelled from the Party and the mining institute where he is studying. His father, a loyal Communist, unjustly arrested for Trotskyite tendencies, subsequently perishes. The sub-hero is an admirable impressionist artist who is persecuted and expelled from the Artists' Union for "cosmopolitanism", sensitiveness to Western influence, and for supporting a Jewish art critic. The villains are an influential, low-level Party official, the majority of the mining institute Party bureau, the Ministry of State Security, and the Artists' Union. Although the Soviet system, the Party and even Stalin himself are not directly subjected to criticism, Bondarev engages in speculation on the battle between good and evil within the system and the Party.

The fictionalization of the Stalinist terror follows logically from the Khrushchev speech to the XXII Party Congress. Although the novel cannot be considered revolutionary in this sense, by its personalization of the evils and injustices which occurred under Stalin, it strikes a deeper human chord than Khrushchev's words, much in the same way that The Diary of Anne Frank moves the reader more than statistics about the killing of six million Jews. However, Bondarev goes further, to raise the question: "How can there be men in the Party like [the scoundrels] Uvarov, Sviridov, and that [MGB] first lieutenant?" The hero, Sergei, is not able to answer this question for himself. His teacher, Morozov, however, explains to Sergei that his family misfortune results from the ability of his enemy to manipulate the system to his profit, to take advantage of the tense internal situation to do his dirty work. Morozov makes the devastating remark that "in tense times in our country they often don't stop

to consider whom they...are slugging to death." This and similar remarks will surely have a particularly profound impact on the younger Soviet readers, who, it seems possible, may proceed to most unfavorable conclusions regarding the system and the Party.

With its attack on the Artists' Union and the support of impressionist painting, the novel enters a current and very active Soviet controversy.¹

The importance of the novel for Eastern Europe is underlined by the publication in Polish, (in the literary fortnightly Współczesność, 1 July 1962), of the novel's most dramatic chapter which describes in detail the midnight arrest of the hero's father. The Polish fortnightly comments that Tishinā, together with the Ehrenburg memoirs, constitutes the most important Soviet literary development of the year. Several sections of the novel, which is to be published in Poland in its entirety, indirectly lend support to the Polish criticism of Stalinism as a system rather than as the caprices of one man.

II.

The novel consists of two parts; Part I takes place at the end of 1945 and Part II in mid-1949. The hero, Sergei Vokhmintsev, returns bemedaled from the war to face the difficulties of adjusting to civilian life. He is reluctant to resume his studies and thinks of becoming a truck driver. All his friends but one, Konstantin, have been killed. He lives with his teen-age sister, Asya, and his father--a broken man who was wounded in the war and who suffers from a feeling of guilt for having contributed to his wife's death by carrying on an affair with an army nurse. Sergei's paternal image has been shattered by this knowledge, and it is only later, when the MGB is carrying his innocent father off to his death, that he can bring himself to utter the word "father".

Sergei meets his great love, Nina, at a Moscow restaurant where he has gone with Konstantin for his first night on the town after the war. Nina is a geologist and persuades Sergei to enter the mining institute.

This same evening at the restaurant Sergei sees Uvarov, a fellow captain during the war. Uvarov, the novel's villain, was responsible for the death of a detachment of men at the front. He had subsequently placed the blame for the catastrophe on a

¹ The Soviet playwright Smirnov recently attacked the conservative Artists' Union (7 July 1962, Literary Gazette), expressing bitterness and shame that he had to learn of the work of the Moscow impressionist painter Glazunov through two Italian acquaintances. Glazunov's impressionist painting of a female nude was a cause célèbre of Soviet art circles in 1957. Literary Gazette supported Glazunov at the time, but Soviet art conservatives were able to make use of the post-Hungary reaction to suppress these liberal trends. Now the question of freedom for artistic experimentation is very much open again, and Bondarev's Tishinā has joined in the fray.

wounded underling who died in prison. Sergei is the only person who knows the true facts--he confronts Uvarov with the accusation and knocks him out cold on the dance floor. Uvarov, a cunning type, refuses to press charges for the assault, and begins a ceaseless and unsuccessful effort to win Sergei's friendship. Although Sergei remains hostile, he does not reveal what he knows. Both he and Konstantin enter the mining institute, and Sergei begins a lasting affair with Nina.

Konstantin falls in love with Sergei's sister, Asya. When Asya asks him why his parents disappeared, Konstantin replies-- "People disappear when they die or when they are forced to die."

Part II opens in mid-1949. Sergei and Konstantin are completing their third year of mining studies. Sergei's affair with Nina continues and, although he wants to marry her, she reveals that she has a husband who is working in Siberia. Uvarov, also a student at the mining institute, has wormed himself into an influential position in the institute's Party bureau. He continues unsuccessfully to try to win Sergei's friendship.

This life is interrupted first by the Artists' Union's attack on Sergei's friend and neighbor, the artist Mukomolov. Mukomolov and his wife are good, loyal Soviet citizens who lost their only son, Sergei's best friend, during the war. As Sergei and Konstantin are taking tea with them one afternoon, Mukomolov reads them excerpts from a newspaper article which spells his doom, accusing him of "cosmopolitanism" and Western influence.

Mukomolov:

"Well, there's no need to read any further, from here on there are only unpleasant words directed at my family..."

'I don't understand. This is about you?', said Sergei. 'I read about cosmopolitanism last winter. But what has that got to do with you?'

'To do with me, Sergei? They are simply accusing me of cosmopolitanism, calling me a renegade. Of having views removed from the people... That's all it is. ...It all² began because I tried to defend the art critic Leichmann--they were throwing mud on him. None of it was true. One mustn't believe it. Noise, whistling, stamping--they wouldn't let him speak. They yelled at him 'your articles spit in the face of the Russian people'.

² Bondarev's choice of a Jewish name is not accidental. The Soviet anti-cosmopolitan, anti-Western purges of the late 1940's were much enmeshed with a wave of regime-induced anti-Semitism. Here Bondarev adds his voice to that of Yevtushenko in criticizing Soviet anti-Semitism.

But he is a cultured, honest man with refined taste, a Communist respected by our artists, I may say. And then he fell seriously ill after this meeting....'

Konstantin sat listening to Mukomolov with sad attention, with his legs crossed, gently moving the toe of his shoe.

Sergei, frowning, looked at Mukomolov.

'But why? What are they condemning you for? Really, what for?'

'I don't know, I can't understand. It's all monstrous. They shout at me that my landscapes are ideological subversion. That I worship Western art, that I imitate Claude Monet. But where, in what is there Western influence?...

'Fedya!', with a frightened entreaty said his wife, Elga Borisovna, covering her eyes with a dry hand. 'I beg you, drop this subject...Fedya, please.'

'Elga, I'm an old man and there's no reason for me to be afraid', said Mukomolov. 'Our silence and indifference will not bring any good. Very well, I won't say another word.'

Everyone fell silent.

'I know what will happen to you', said Elga Borisovna, scarcely audibly. 'For last night's performance they'll expel you...chase you out of the Artists' Union. Am I right?'

'Well, so what? I'm strong enough, I'll become a decorator. We don't need much--we'll get along.'

'Just look at the crazy man,' said Elga Borisovna quietly.

Mukomolov sat down at the table, stirred his glass of tea with a spoon...drank up the whole glass in a few gulps, and said, 'Ah, how I love cosmopolitan tea!'

III.

Immediately after this episode there follows the dramatic chapter which has already been published in Poland. In this chapter Uvarov accomplishes his revenge by instigating the arrest of Sergei's father by the MGB. The complete chapter is presented below in translation:

THE ARREST*

His sleep-confused consciousness was reached suddenly by unclear agitation -- was it the throb of a tank engine right under the window, or someone's steps, voices, a buzzing of windowpanes.

Still comprehending nothing, he opened his eyes and jumped up. Unmoving darkness spread in the room, rain rustled and bubbled beyond the window, tapping at the windowpanes and on the tin roof over the porch.

"The hell with it," he thought in relief. "What tanks? I must be out of my head. What time is it? Dawn?"

He rubbed an arm which had gone to sleep, reached for his watch lying on the table and drew back his hand at once: a strong rattling of glass made him turn toward the window whose blackness melted into one with the darkened wall.

-- Who's there? -- cried Sergei

-- Open up, at once!

Someone was knocking strangely, harshly, persistently, water splashed under someone's boots, but, a funny thing, the bell in the hall did not ring, the strange voice did not repeat, "open up" -- all fell silent again. Sergei jumped off his couch, turned the light on and, opening the door to the hall, hesitated for a second when turning the key; a lightning thought struck him about the robber gang of the "Black Cat," they said it had appeared in Moscow. But, somehow disbelieving, he quickly went into the hallway, stood at the door and asked loudly and angrily:

-- Who is there? For whom?

-- Open up! Identity check-up.

-- I'll try.

The latch jangled and he moved aside.

A cool wave of rainy air flowed over his chest. A sound of steps, movement, a hushed voice: "Mamontov, after you" -- and Sergei knew that this was not what he had thought about, although he could not yet see either faces or clothing. The sharp light of a pocket flashlight slid over his face, eyes, moved to the hall, brought out of the darkness a wet coat collar, an epaulet, a patent leather visor, a cap; their owner

* Our translation was made from the Polish version which appeared in Wspolczesnosc, 1-15 July 1962 and which was done by Andrzej Drawicz.

moved forward and the other person, stopping by Sergei with a flashlight, asked:

-- What is your name, citizen?

-- Whom do you want? Who are you? From the militia? Take your light away, do not shine it in my eyes, -- said Sergei furiously and, having thought against his will that they might have come for Bykov, asked: "Whom do you want?"

-- I have asked for your name! -- the reply sounded like an order.

-- Let us say, Vokhmintsev.

-- After your, Vokhmintsev. Put the light on in the hall. Go on, go on, to the room, Citizen Vokhmintsev, -- the authoritarian voice went on, and Sergei heard the alarmed voices of Asya and his father. Then the lights went on in the hallway and in the room and a soldier came up to the open door, with his big overcoat and an open peasant face; he came up, made an about face and stood correctly with arms at rest.

Sergei saw that and went into the room terrified, not believing his own eyes, trying to persuade himself that a terrible mistake was being made, that a shameful, burning injustice was being done. And, still disbelieving, he stopped and shuddered at the sound of words -- a short, slim captain in an overcoat with security service epaulets (raindrops shone on his epaulets) held a yellowed paper in his fingers and spoke to father calmly in a colorless, hoarse voice:

-- Vokhmintsev, Mikolai Grigorievich? This is the order for your arrest. Please get ready.

Father in his underwear, with a jacket thrown over his shoulders -- this made him pitiable and defenseless -- with his trembling eyebrows -- looked fleetingly at the piece of paper; his eyes searched out Sergei's eyes above the captain's head and the light died in them, uncomprehending. Twice, with small breaths he gulped some air, turned around and in an alien, elderly step walked into the other room. The captain followed him there and soon his voice, nasal, could be heard from that room:

-- Hurry, Citizen Vokhmintsev. Please, hurry up.

He could be seen through the open door, walking across the floor and leaving wet footprints, over to the desk, glancing at walls, the desk, ceiling, dialing slowly and saying into the receiver in a low voice:

-- Mamontov here. We are here. Yes sir. All right sir. Yes sir.

The fat janitress, Fatima, wrapped in a shawl, slid timidly into the room; called in as a witness, Sergei imagined. The second officer, a senior lieutenant, with a strong, peasant face, narrow lips and the light eyes of the steppes, stood on wide-spread legs and looked hard at Sergei.

"Father came back late, I did not hear him return," flashed through Sergei's mind and suddenly all this -- the muffled noises in the hall, the strange voices in the apartment, Fatima, the smell of the boots and the wet coats, the alien, thin neck of the short captain leaning over the telephone, the words spoken into the receiver, the whole mechanism caused in him a feeling of helpless fury, of fear of something which came inevitably to destroy his life, the life of his father, of Asya. And, at the same time, he could not get rid of the thought that this was some misunderstanding, that the captain would put down the receiver in a moment, would apologize, say that it was all a mistake... But the captain put down the receiver and, after a careful look at the paper-covered desk, ordered without raising his head:

-- Hurry up, hurry up now, Citizen Vokhmintsev. Please hurry.

Sergei rushed into the other room, to his father, hastened along, lashed by the alien voice. Father had always dressed slowly, but his hands had never moved so stiffly and clumsily, searching and stopping half-way -- as if they were trying to recall the movements which a man employs to dress. The fact that he began tying his tie, lowering his eyes and raising his chin -- these lowered eyes, this raised chin -- seemed suddenly pitifully dispensable to Sergei; and father's snow-white temples, tightly pressed lips, overgrown whiskers, suddenly seemed to him so close, so dear that he caught his breath and said brokenly:

-- Father...

-- What, son? -- asked father and his eyes filled with warmth, he repeated: -- What, son?

Asya lay on the couch, with the covers pulled up tightly against her chin, there was fear in her huge, bright eyes, in her pale, moving lips. She repeated, trembling:

-- Papa, papa, papa... What is it, papa?...

-- Ah, you, intelligentsia, look at them, tying ties, yet. That's enough! -- the harsh voice of the senior lieutenant with the peasant face and sharp eyes sounded from behind; he came up to father, tore the tie out of his hands, threw it on the chair: -- All right now, enough, get moving. Say good-by, come now!

-- Your work does not exclude politeness -- said father dryly.

-- Papa! -- screamed Asya and, shaking all over, she rushed to father so that the cover slipped off her naked shoulders and father, even more defenseless, leaned to her, kissed her on the forehead and said almost unintelligibly:

-- Goodby, my daughter... Do not think badly of me... Forgive me... I leave you two alone...

Then he turned to Sergei with his old, threadbare jacket, the shirt opened at the neck -- and a tie-clasp ridiculously shining on the shirt front -- with an apologetic smile and Sergei took him in his arms, pressed his lips against the prickly cheeks and said furiously:

-- Father, it is all a mistake. Everything will be explained. A mistake -- I am sure, father, a mistake, I am sure, sure, father...

-- You never loved me, son, I know -- said father in a full voice. -- I was a stranger to you, almost a stranger...

Father moved his head in a strange way, looked at the senior lieutenant, at the terrified Asya pressing her mouth into the coverlet, at the room, at the desk. He said:

-- Live as you should.

-- All right now, go! -- interrupted the senior lieutenant, pointing to the door with an impatient gesture -- and father moved quickly, stood on the threshold, made a movement as if wanting to turn around, but did not turn around and disappeared into the dark well of the hallway.

There was something humiliating, something shamelessly naked in this presence of uniformed men, in father's farewell, in his words, in the cramp which caught at Sergei's throat and did not let him cry out: "Goodby, papa!..."

-- Asya... -- said Sergei softly and broke off.

In the meantime, the short captain had carefully unbuttoned his coat and came to the book cabinet, opened it, took out a book, leafed through it, shook it, threw it on a chair, sniffed with his pointed nose, took out another book... Pale Asya, hugging the covers to her, looked in terror at the book cabinet, the captain who turned pages without embarrassment -- and after a while her eyebrows and her pale lips began to tremble, she pressed her face against the covers and shook with stifled weeping.

-- Asya, please put something on -- said Sergei dully.

But when he was taking her summer coat off the hook in the next room, he was stopped by a sharp shout:

-- Where to?

The senior lieutenant barred his way and tore the coat out of his hands, rapidly went through the pockets and the lining. Sergei suddenly felt the violence of hostile fingers tearing through the pockets and said unexpectedly through set teeth:

-- Please take you hands off.

The senior lieutenant held the coat with all his might. Sergei could see his swollen neck, pale cheeks, wide-open, glaring eyes. Overpowered with fury, he gazed into those eyes, bright and ready for anything -- and a thought struck him that he had certainly never seen before this pale face, clearly living a night life. He said with effort:

-- Please leave that. You have not arrested me yet.

-- Sit down, sit down in the room! Don't move! Sit here, see, here! -- the senior lieutenant rapped it out in a piercing whisper -- Is that clear?

-- Kniazev! -- the captain called faintly.

The man pulled himself together. He dropped the coat and, without taking his sparkling eyes off Sergei, by the force of habit drew the palm of his hand over a bulge in his tunic and nodded:

-- Wise guy! Go now, sit down!

Then Sergei sat helplessly on the couch, feeling spasms go through Asya, wrapped in her coat, pressed against the wall and holding onto his hand. He did not know how long the leaves of books thrown out of the cabinet rustled, how long strange people went about the rooms, moving cupboards away from walls for no reason, shaking books over the floor as if hoping for something to fall out.

He wanted to smoke, he longed to breathe in the bitter, burning smoke, he remembered that his cigarettes were in the right-hand pocket of his jacket in the next room, on the back of the chair, near the couch, but he did not get up, he did not want to show his nervousness -- so he went on pressing and stroking Asya's ice-cold fingers, trying to calm her down.

And they were obviously going through their routine, without taking off their coats or caps, without talking to each other. The captain, hunched like a bird on the edge of the chair, hung his pointed nose over the books, went through the pages with his tobacco-stained fingers, shook the books, threw them on the floor, sometimes would reach for a wrinkled handkerchief, blow his nose loudly, wipe his lips, his eyes were red-rimmed with his cold. Sergei felt that every touch of those yellow fingers left flu germs on the books, the cabinet, on all things.

The rain bubbled on the asphalt courtyard and it seemed strange and incredible that the same backyard lamp still shook in the streaming rain outside the window.

The senior lieutenant, with his feet spread wide like a farmer in his muddy, slightly wrinkled boots, sat behind the desk, his cap on the back of his head, glancing sharply at Sergei from time to time, and wetting his finger, went through father's papers, read them, turned them over with ostentatious noise, pulled out drawers, took out papers, letters, orders, Sergei's surveys and, frowning in incredulity, spread them out and arranged them on the desk. Sergei hated those greedy paws, broad back, strong neck, the fair hair of the steppes, the muddy boots with their fancy accordion pleats. The man went through the papers without haste, put them in a separate pile, cleared his throat, glanced at the orders.

-- All right, come here, you!

And he crooked his finger at Sergei with a little smile, holding a piece of paper in his other hand.

-- Come here, all right! This yours?

And pushing other papers carelessly aside, he began reading silently, moving his lips.

From his smile, the slow, nasty smile of someone looking at an indecent thing, from the small writing on the sheet of paper torn from a notebook, Sergei realized at once that it was Nina's letter and -- wanting to leap up and tear the piece of paper from the grabby fingers -- he sat still, gritting his teeth until his head hurt.

-- How is that, now? All lovey-dovey? Who is she?

Sergei managed to speak:

-- Don't touch that! None of your business. First wash your hands with soap and disinfectant and then read other people's letters!

-- How dare you! Aren't you ashamed! -- cried Asya through tears, pressing her fingers sharply into Sergei's hand.
-- And you are a Russian!

-- Get up!

-- Yes? And what next? -- said Sergei quietly and stood as in a daze, gazing into these white-burning eyes, ready to do something dreadful at the first movement of this man, strike him, whatever the consequences. He repeated: -- Well? What next?

-- Kniazev! -- called the captain in a hoarse voice; he raised his handkerchief and sneezed loudly in it, then leaned back over the book with an expression of sad exhaustion.

-- Get off that couch! What is all this? -- said the lieutenant in a normal voice, unexpectedly polite.

Asya stood up slowly, timidly, holding the coat against her. And the man swiftly threw off the coverlet and the sheets, moved the mattress with his foot, pulled a winter coat out of the moth balls. Then he stood up, his broad face turned red and suddenly, with an unexpected friendliness, he looked into Sergei's eyes:

-- Tell me now, where do you keep your Trotskyist literature, huh?

-- What?

-- Put something on and show me your shed. Let's go! -- with a false smile, the lieutenant pointed at the door.

And when Sergei went by the immobile Fatima, by the soldier petrified at the door, when he opened the front door and went out -- the senior lieutenant turned on his flashlight and repeated with ironic politeness:

-- Please, please, after you.

The rain was falling, but the night darkness had thinned, the approaching dawn could be felt in the air, the shapes of houses became apparent and the wet asphalt and the roofs glistened. Streams of water sloshed from rainpipes, the rain roared dully in the dark branches of lime trees near the fence which they were approaching, splattering through puddles -- then the rain sounded dulled and soft on the tar-paper roof when Sergei pressed with ill temper on the cold door handle and both, with the senior lieutenant, they went into the darkness smelling of wet birch wood.

-- Our shed -- he said.

Raindrops fell loudly on wood from the leaky roof.

The yellow light of the flashlight slid over the pile of white logs, jumped up, down, stopped for a while over a piece of kindling lying on the ground, lit up a wall grey with moisture and stayed on it, as if searching for something.

-- All right, heave the wood away from the wall! -- said the senior lieutenant.

-- What? -- said Sergei. -- I am supposed to heave wood? If you want, you can do it yourself. I am not crazy. Go on, look yourself.

The senior lieutenant threw a few logs away in silence; suddenly the light stopped at his muddy boots and Sergei saw close to his face a pair of eyes the color of quicksilver and felt a tobacco breath:

-- You don't take good care of yourself, boy, you talk too much. You are finishing at the institute, Sergei, aren't you... See, I even know your name. Let us talk like human beings -- he said with forced gentleness -- I also went to war. Think now: you want to finish at the institute, to be an engineer. But you may not finish... I fought, you fought, I am a Communist, you too. Don't ruin your life. I saw better men than you in camps. Where did your father keep Trotskyist literature?

Sergei remained silent. Large raindrops hit him in the face, one slid down his collar and flowed in a cold stream down his back. He said jeeringly:

-- Right here, under the woodpile, is a hidden cellar. If you throw the wood away and look closely, you will find it.

-- You are mocking, Sergei? You are laughing?

-- Not at all, I am crying.

The senior lieutenant brought his face even nearer to Sergei's and hissed, with meaningful pauses:

-- You...just...be careful...you don't cry other...tears!
-- And after a moment, raising his voice -- get out of this shed!

Back in the room, everything bore traces of strange hands -- books thrown over all the chairs, on the floor, on the couch, doors thrown open on cabinets, cupboard, linen cupboard -- all mixed up, broken, bared, submitted to hostile power.

The captain, hunched over the table, was writing something with a fountain pen, blowing his red nose, squinting his rheumy eyes in suffering, frowning and raising his eyebrows like a man trying to keep from sneezing.

On the tablecloth, in a pool of light, lay two golden wedding rings, saved by father for no known reason, the tiny, naive earrings which father gave mother perhaps back in the times of the NEP; in a separate pile lay the telephone books, documents, father's papers and letters.

-- Is there other gold and jewelry in the house? -- asked the captain, looking at Asya with tired eyes.

-- No -- whispered Asya. And she repeated: No, no, no...

The captain leaned over the papers -- a clear drop gathered at the tip of his nose and fell. He frowned, coughed with obvious effort, blew his nose thoroughly, his whole tiny figure moved and wriggled, his cheeks turned red -- it was painful to watch this sadly and carefully masked embarrassment. Still frowning, he pushed the soiled handkerchief back into his pocket and said to the senior lieutenant in a low voice:

-- Let's finish up. -- And he looked at his watch.

The other man continued to read slowly and carefully, as if he had not heard, thought intensively, licked his lips.

-- The china cupboard -- he said calmly, pointing at that piece of furniture with his eyes. -- It is on the list.

-- Please.

The captain lowered his dull eyelids, reached for the pen. The senior lieutenant carefully watched the movement of his thin hand, loudly marched to the next room, took Sergei's papers from the desk -- the notebook, the letters -- came back, placed it all before the captain and whispered in his ear.

-- All right -- said the captain after consideration and began putting the papers into a leather case.

He got up.

Sergei realized that despite his rank the captain was afraid in his heart of the bold aggressiveness of the senior lieutenant, that the senior lieutenant was the more important here and that both these men, working together, could not stand each other and watched each other. Having understood, he said, feeling a revulsion for them both:

-- You have taken my letters and my notebook, they have no connection with my father.

Neither answered.

The senior lieutenant looked obliquely at Sergei, and the captain buttoned up his coat, pushed his cap down to his collar and moved first towards the door, carrying the case.

-- Get out -- the senior lieutenant motioned to Fatima who seemed to have dozed away on the chair, she jumped up in a sleepy daze and ran into the hall, her fat body undulating.

As he was going out, the senior lieutenant took a deep breath, paused, stared at Sergei, saluted and said with conviction:

-- We shall meet again, Sergei Nikolayevich.

And he left, without closing the door.

It was all over. The light went out in the hallway. All the lawlessness and violence left with the receding steps. Only the door remained open onto the dark hallway.

Sergei jumped off the couch and banged it with fury, with all his might, so that the windows rattled and some plaster fell down. He began walking up and down the room, back and forth,

over the scattered books and papers, as if looking for something and failing to find it. He rushed to the window, opened a pane and took a draught of the cold wet morning as if he were gulping water.

-- Air it, air it! Air it, God damn it! -- he shouted. -- The hell with it all! Asya, give me my cigarettes, from my pocket there.' Or give me vodka, do we have vodka in the house?... Just a sip -- he said and his voice broke, with his back turned to Asya.

Asya cried through her tears:

-- Sergei, what's with you? Seryoza!

She reached for his jacket, could not find the pocket, she kept her large, terrified eyes on her brother's back.

-- Seryoza, sweetheart...

She brought him cigarettes, her teeth rattling, drawing her neck into the collar of her coat. She whispered:

-- Seryoza, sweetheart. What now? What will happen now?

A burning and prickly ball of humiliation and helplessness stuck in his throat, he could not swallow it, tears would not let him breathe, his lips seemed made of stone, he could not even smile at Asya. He touched his neck as if wiping something slimy and said with an effort:

-- That's nothing... I am here with you... I will stay with you.

And he put his arms round her slim, trembling back.

On the next day Sergei goes to MGB headquarters to inquire about his father, but is put off with the brusque remark that he is "under investigation".

"My father can't be under investigation. He is guilty of nothing. They arrested him by mistake. My father is an honest Communist."

"The investigation will show everything. We don't arrest people by mistake in the Soviet state, I must say. Come back again."

Sergei attempts to conceal his father's arrest from the mining institute Party bureau, but Uvarov uses this breach of Party discipline to have Sergei expelled from the Party. During the meeting of the Party bureau, Uvarov also charges Sergei with the World War II crime of which he himself was guilty. Sergei suddenly realizes that Uvarov is the cause of his family misfortune and reveals what he knows about Uvarov. But it is too late. Uvarov carries the Party bureau five to two, and Sergei is expelled from the Party and forced to withdraw from the institute.

Leaving the bureau meeting, Sergei speculates on the meaning of his misfortune:

"'...But why has human baseness lasted 2000 years--from the time of Judas and Cain? It is often more active than goodness, it stops at nothing. And goodness has pity, goodness forgives, forgets. Why? Socialism--that is goodness. And evil? It fastens its pincers into our feet. How can there be men in the Party like Uvarov, Sviridov, and that MGB first lieutenant? Perhaps because there are also men like Lukovsky and Morozov...?'"

His professor, Morozov, invites Sergei to his apartment for a drink. Sergei:

"I would be interested to know what you think of Uvarov?"

"I think that is a complicated question, Sergei... But tactically, if you will, he was more clever than you. More experienced. I don't know all about it, but I feel this fellow is arranging his life in a clever manner. Nobody believed him, but the scales turned in his favor. Do you understand? Everything was against you. He understood the circumstances and delivered a sure blow."

"What do you mean he understood the circumstances?"

"I don't know. That's a complicated question. Possibly it's the tense international situation, and perhaps there are internal reasons. I don't know. But a struggle is going on... And everything is very tense right now. And in tense times in our country they often don't stop to consider whom they are hitting in the face, whom they are slugging to death. And other scoundrels, taking this into consideration, do their

dirty work, covering themselves by the noise of the struggle. Small things blend with the large ones in these circumstances."

Professor Morozov relates that he has been warned to lecture less about new Western mining machinery. Sergei is incensed by Morozov's compliance and failure to fight. Morozov reminds Sergei of his greater experience, adding "Tactically, the moment to fight is not right... But the whole battle is ahead of us."

Just before leaving Moscow to look for work in the mines of Kazakhstan, Sergei receives a final letter from his father whose doom is evidently sealed. In the final chapter, Sergei arrives in the Kazakh mining town of Miltuk-ugol. He has no reason to believe that anyone will give work to a man with his record. He has an interview with the local raykom secretary, Gnezdilov, who subjects Sergei to a prolonged interrogation. However, Gnezdilov is a diamond in the rough and agrees to provide a job as a laborer in the mine. Sergei can't believe his good fortune:

"'But haven't you forgotten that I...'

'I haven't forgotten a thing,' Gnezdilov didn't allow him to finish... I shall study your affair, fellow, and I shall not take my eyes off you. I'll work you so hard you'll break into a hundred sweats."

On his walk to the hotel where Gnezdilov has arranged a room, Sergei gradually comes to realize that he can make a life for himself here, and that Nina can come to him. The novel's last line--"And at that moment he felt himself unconquered."

V.

We are left with the feeling that four years later, in 1953, Sergei will be vindicated and his father posthumously rehabilitated. The Party will right its own wrongs.

If the young Soviet writers of today such as Bondarev ask less searching questions and appear to have less intellectual spark than their Polish counterparts in 1956, for example, this can perhaps be explained in part by the words of Sergei's professor Morozov--"Tactically the moment is not right... But the whole battle is ahead of us."

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