

1962: The Novocherkassk Tragedy



An account of the workers uprising in Novocherkassk, USSR, which lasted from June 1-3 and ended in a massacre and mass arrests.

The Novocherkassk Tragedy, June 1-3 1962

by Piotr Suda

(Piotr Siuda was one of the participants in the workers uprising in Novocherkassk in 1962. After several years of imprisonment he devoted himself to investigating the tragedy and bringing information about it to the public. This became possible only after the beginning of glasnost. This article is part of a longer piece which appeared originally in 1988 in samizdat magazine, "Obschina".)

In the 1950's industrial wages in the USSR were arbitrarily lowered almost every year. These decreases allowed officials to publish statistics indicating increases in labor efficiency, automation and mechanization, decreases in the cost of production without corresponding new capital investment, and improvements in organization and in technology. In capitalist countries, if a corporation tried to improve its financial showings by lowering wages, the workers would respond with protests and strikes. In the USSR, however, the working class was unable for decades to struggle in defence of its own interests. The democratization of the late 1950's was really a way for the authorities to fool the working masses into hoping for a genuine dialogue with state and party officials. The Novocherkassk tragedy exposed the fraud and hypocrisy of the criminal totalitarian regime.

On January 1, 1962, wages were lowered by 30 to 35 percent at the largest electrolocomotive plant in Novocherkassk (NEVZ). The last shop in the plant where wages were scheduled to be lowered was the steel shop. By that time workers in the other shops had somehow become accustomed to the constant infringement on their rights but for the workers in the steel foundry the cut in wages was a fresh insult.

On the morning of June 1 the government radio announced that there would be a sharp "temporary" increase in the price of meat and dairy products (up to 35%). It was an unexpected and severe attack on the standard of living of all working people in the USSR and was bound to produce general discontent. But there were other circumstances which also contributed to the strike at NEVZ.

City and factory authorities had long been neglecting the severe housing problem at NEVZ. What construction that had taken place was grossly inadequate and the cost of lodging in the private sector amounted to about 30 percent of a worker's monthly wages.

Because Novochoerkassk was, at that time, considered a city of students, very little meat and butter were delivered to the government stores and they were too expensive at the market. The new increase in state prices led to an increase over the already very high prices for food at the market. On the way to the plant that morning the workers discussed the price increases with great indignation and in the steel shop the workers gathered in small groups and feverishly discussed the announced price increases but also the recent lowering of wages. No one, however, thought at that time of protests, meetings, or strikes. The workers had neither organization nor leadership and were afraid of the very idea of trying to liberate themselves from the political and social slavery imposed on the working people of the USSR by stalinism.

It is probable that the discontented grumblings of the workers reached the ears of the party committee and the plant director, because the director, Kurochkin, and the party secretary visited the steel shop to speak to the workers. It was not, however, a business-like dialogue but an arrogant, lordly monologue. As the director spoke to the group of workers surrounding them, a woman approached holding meat pies and Kurochkin, trying to be clever, said to the workers: "You don't have any money, so eat meat pies with liver." This remark was the very spark that brought about the tragedy of Novochoerkassk. This event concentrated and reflected the whole spectrum of the social, political and material situation of the working people of the USSR. The workers were outraged by the director's insensitivity and they divided into groups and began shouting: "Bloody swine, they are jeering at us!" One group went to the plant compressor shop and switched on the plant whistle. V.I. Tchernykh and V.K. Vlasenko were in that group. Another group went round the shops of the plant with appeals to stop all work and to call a strike.

It is necessary to note that neither at the beginning of the strike, nor during the ensuing events of June 1-3, were any groups formed that could have taken responsibility for the organization and direction of the workers' actions. All the events took place on the spot, spontaneously. The initiative bubbled up from below, from the mass of workers. No outsiders had anything to do with the events. This testifies to the absence of workers representation in the face of the unlimited power usurped by the stalinist officialdom. And from this we must conclude that a situation in which the working class lacks the will to struggle is intolerable. There was no need to campaign for the strike among the workers of the plant. It was enough for the group which called for a strike to appear, and work stopped immediately. The mass of strikers was growing like an avalanche. At that time there were about 14 thousand workers at the plant. The workers went out to the plant grounds and filled the square near the plant management office. The square could not hold all the strikers.

A group of workers removed some bars from the fence surrounding the square and used them to barricade the railway line leading to the plant; they hung some red cloth over it. Thus the Moscow-Saratov train was stopped, and railway traffic on that part of the line was interrupted. By interrupting railway traffic the workers were trying to spread information about their strike along the railway line.

On the initiative of the plant metal craftsman V.I. Tchernykh, his comrade, the shop painter V.D.Koroteev, painted posters with demands like: "Give us meat and butter," "We need apartments." These posters were fastened to one of the trolley posts at the railway which was being electrified. Someone wrote on the locomotive of the passenger train: "Make meat from Khrushchev!" This slogan also appeared in some other places. The second and third shift

workers and the inhabitants of the workers' villages began to flow towards the plant. Neither the party organs nor administration of the plant or the authorities tried to negotiate with the workers. The leading engineer at the plant, S.N. Yolkin, tried to speak to the workers on his own initiative; he had no authority to hold negotiations and made neither promises nor assertions, but only tried to convince the workers to stop the riot and begin working. The indignant workers dragged him into the back of a truck and tried to demand a real solution to the problems from him. I also asked him questions and this was later used against me at my trial.

At about noon the word spread amongst the strikers: "The militia has come!" All the people rushed to the railroad and towards the militia. I was at the front of the crowd and when I reached the railroad, I looked around. What I saw was very impressive. About 350-400 metres of the railway were submerged beneath a menacing and dense wave of people and about 200-250 metres beyond the railway line more than 100 militiamen were forming two ranks. The vehicles which had delivered them were turning around on the vacant lot. On seeing the menacing wave of people the militia ranks dissolved immediately. The militiamen rushed after the vehicles which were turning around and jumped in confusion into the moving trucks. Only two militiamen failed to escape; their knees were shaking, either with fear or from running. The wave of strikers did not overtake the militiamen who managed to make a cowardly escape and who left their two comrades at fate's mercy. But wrathful as they were, the workers were not violent; they did not even touch the remaining militiamen and saw them off with the advice not to poke their noses into strikes. I was an eye-witness, so I can confidently assert that the author of the article "Days of Darkness, Days of Enlightenment" is lying when he declares that "several militiamen were wounded". They could only have been wounded by themselves during their panic-stricken attempts to board the trucks. Neither should the strikers be slandered today. This episode showed both the unlimited cowardice of "the law and order service" and the working people's hatred towards them. This episode also showed the noble spirit of the working people who did not touch their enemies when they saw their impotence. We later learned that the militiamen were given plain clothes to wear instead of uniforms and they were sent into the crowd of strikers. These cowards are inevitably mean and insidious, so they were sent into the crowd of workers as to make better use of their nature. KGB men were also sent there; they were supplied with miniature cameras, built into lighters, cigarette cases, and who knows what else. Photos were also taken from the fire-tower. Later, during the inquest, I saw piles of photos of thousands of strikers. The well-oiled machinery of the police state worked almost perfectly.

Attempts were also made to provoke the strikers. June 1 was a clear, hot day. There were no sources of water near the plant grounds. I remember the painful thirst felt by everybody but nobody left the square. The people were united by their faith in their power and in the fairness of their demands. At that moment a truck heavily loaded with boxes of lemonade, approached the square. The temptation was immense for everybody but not a single bottle was taken from the truck. Railway traffic was paralyzed completely, but the truck with the lemonade was allowed to go through the whole crowd of many thousands of thirsty people. The provocation failed.

By the end of the work day the first military detachments of the Novocherkassk garrison arrived at the square but they were not armed. Having approached the people, the soldiers were immediately absorbed by the crowd. The soldiers and the strikers began to fraternize, to embrace and kiss each other. Yes, they kissed each other. It was difficult for the officers to separate the soldiers from the people, to gather them and to take them away from the strikers. After some time, the first secretary of the Rostov district CPSU committee Basov tried to speak from the balcony of the plant management office wing which was being built. He was

surrounded by officials. The cowardice of the party officials was not only obvious to everyone, but also insulting. Nobody wanted to speak to the strikers on equal terms, which testified to their extreme subjugation and lack of any rights. The strikers threw various objects at Basov and his toadies but they were, literally, high above the mass of the working people, so it was impossible to hit them.

Then the armoured carriers with officers began to arrive at the square. The authorities had determined that the soldiers of the Novocherkassk garrison were unreliable, and decided to rely upon the officers. It was a small-scale civil war. The officers literally felt the strength of the workers' hands. The workers were swinging the armoured carriers from side to side with amazing ease. The colonels and majors rocking on their seats and trying to keep self-control presented a pitiful sight. The confusion and fear on their faces showed that they could not stop the people's wrath either. The armoured carriers left the square. The unarmed, disorganized workers were so far winning one victory after another with seaming ease, due only to their numerical strength and the unity of their outrage, without any direct violence or extremism. This very fact frightened the "leaders" and rulers, the party and state officials, most of all. The people had risen from their knees! The strikers' enthusiasm did not decrease; on the contrary, it increased with each new attempt to suppress their actions. A spontaneous meeting sprang up. The peak of a pedestrian tunnel served as a platform. At the meeting there were appeals to send workers to other cities, to other enterprises, to seize the city post-office and telegraph in order to send appeals for support for the strike of electric locomotive builders to every city. It was then that we first heard that the roads to the city were blocked by the militia and the troops.

I did not intend to speak at the meeting but I was alarmed by the appeals to seize government offices. I remembered all too well the accounts of those who had taken part in the events in Hungary and in Georgia. Attempts to capture government offices in the city could have terrible consequences. Later the authorities characterized these appeals as calls to seize power in the city and this absurd assertion worked so magically that up until recently I did not even try to dispute such nonsense. On hearing the calls to seize government offices, I appealed to the workers to continue the strike and to maintain discipline. I suggested that the next day everybody should go hold a demonstration in the city, work out common demands and present these demands to the authorities. The appeal to seize government offices was rejected completely. It was decided to have a demonstration in the city the next morning. This fact alone shows that the events in the city were not accompanied by any kind of extremism or violence against the authorities. Later, neither the investigators nor the court could find (hard as they tried) any proof of extremism or violence aside from two insignificant cases. The first case concerned the chief engineer of the plant, S.N. Yolkin, who was forcefully dragged into a truck, but was not beaten. The second case concerned the communist Braginsky, who received a few earboxes from his subordinates; but they did not inflict any trauma and it was not necessary for him to see a doctor.

Late that evening, when the workers' wrath had reached its highest level but they still had no concrete means of expressing it, they took Khrushchev's portrait down from the facade of the plant management office. Then they went through all the rooms, took down all the portraits and threw them into a heap in the square and made a large, smoky fire. The crowd near the plant began to break up as it was beginning to get dark. At that time a group of workers headed by a wonderful man, Sergei Sotnikov, went to the gas-distributing station in order to block the delivery of gas to the industrial enterprises of the city but they were unable to do it.

At 5 o'clock in the morning I was awakened by the noise of tanks and left for the plant. About 400-500 metres from the railway, the villagers began to gather in small groups of 5- 15 people. I came up to the group standing nearest to the railway, about 300-350 metres from it.

We all observed that the railway along the plant and the plant itself were surrounded by soldiers with sub-machine guns. Near the plant and the Locomotivstroi railway station there were tanks. The people told me that at about midnight the troops and the tanks had been brought into the city, the village and the plant. They said that during the night the inhabitants had tried to build barricades from improvised materials in front of the tanks, but that the tanks had overcome them easily. Then the workers began to jump onto the moving tanks and to cover the observation slits with their clothes as to blind them.

An officer and a soldier armed with a sub-machine gun approached our group. The group dissolved quickly except for 5 to 7 people who remained. The wrangling with the officer began. He demanded that we go to the plant. We refused, saying, "let the troops which have seized the plant do the work". During this heated exchange we failed to notice that two sub-machine gunners had appeared behind us. We were arrested and delivered to the plant management office. Around us there were many soldiers from the Caucasus, officers, civilians, and KGB officers. The latter met me with malicious joy, saying they had long been "waiting" for me and were glad to meet me. I was soon delivered to the GOVD (City Department of Internal Affairs) by car, escorted by three men as well as the driver; there a large staff of officials was busily engaged in suppressing the uprising. During the drive the men in the car swung their fists in front of me, threatened me, and insulted me. More and more arrested people were brought to the GOVD. I was led to a room where about six officials were seated. A brief interrogation was held. They demanded a promise from me that I would not take part in the "mass riots". I answered that I would do the same as the majority of workers. They suggested that I think it over and dismissed me. I heard the tension and nervousness increase behind the door. The telephones were ringing incessantly. The order was issued that no large assemblies be allowed. I understood that I had made a mistake and gotten into trouble, so I asked to see the officials again and began to tell them that I had thought it over and would not take part in the disturbances. But, due to my young age, I failed to keep back a malicious smile, and that gave me away. I was brought to the cell, and after 15-20 minutes put into a Black Maria together with five other men and sent to Bataisk, a town 52 kilometres from Novocherkassk. From that moment my participation in the Novocherkassk tragedy ended. I spent long months and years under investigative isolation in the cells of the KGB, in the Novocherkassk prison and in a concentration camp together with the active participants of the further events. I did all I could to reconstruct little by little the course of the ensuing events. I checked and re-checked, compared all the facts, the smallest details, so I can vouch for the accuracy of this account.

In the morning the workers of the first shift, and of other shifts as well, came to the plant. The plant was crowded with soldiers. Tanks were standing near the gates. There were outsiders in the shops - soldiers and civilians, evidently KGB men. In spite of the demands to disperse, the workers were gathering in groups. Their indignation and wrath were growing. A group of workers began to leave the work area, to leave the shops. Everybody was seized by elemental rage. The small groups began to merge into large ones. This process could not be stopped by anyone. The larger groups began to move towards the entrance of the factory. The courtyard of the plant could not hold all the workers. The pressure on the gates was increasing. The workers swung the gates open by force and flooded the square. They remembered the meeting the day before and the appeals for a demonstration. Many thousands of people started for the city. The way was long: it was 12 kilometres from the plant to the city centre. Some of the workers went to other plants with appeals to support the strike. The appeals were readily answered by the builders, the workers of the electrode plant, the Neftemash (oil industry machine) plant and some smaller enterprises. Columns of marchers were converging on the city from everywhere and there appeared red flags, portraits of Lenin. The

demonstrators were singing revolutionary songs. Everybody was excited, full of belief in their power and in the fairness of their demands. The column of demonstrators was becoming larger and larger. While approaching the bridge across the railway and the Toozlov river, the demonstrators noticed a cordon of two tanks and armed soldiers on the bridge. The column slowed to a standstill and the revolutionary singing died down. Then the dense mass of people moved slowly forward. Outcries were heard: "Give way to the working class!" Then the shouts merged into a powerful, unified chant. The soldiers and the tankmen not only did not try to stop the column of marchers, but actually helped the people get over the tanks. The stream of people flowed on both sides of the bridge cordon. The excitement grew. The revolutionary songs grew louder, more harmonious and more powerful. The demonstration reached Moskovskaya Street, the main street in the city. I will not even try to estimate the number of demonstrators but everyone agreed that the large city square in front of the CPSU committee (the former palace-office of the ataman of the Don Army), the most part of Moskovskaya street, and part of Podtyolkov Prospect were crowded with people.

The demonstrators were seething in front of the city CPSU committee building. The building itself was full of soldiers from the Caucasus. The demonstrators exchanged heated remarks with the soldiers through the door. One Caucasian lost his temper, broke the glass of the door with the butt of his sub-machine gun and through the hole struck a woman with it. Under the pressure of the indignant demonstrators, the door of the building swung open. The crowd broke through and scattered the soldiers. The one who had struck the woman appeared under the staircase. According to some reports he was beaten black and blue. It was the only case of beating a representative of the state or of the armed forces that had captured the city. The City Committee building was completely occupied by the demonstrators. They rushed into one of the rooms. On the table there was cognac and rich refreshments, and the table was set for two. Nobody could escape from the room, although, according to some stories, during the seizure of the committee by the demonstrators many civilians jumped out of the second floor windows; evidently these were the KGB men. There was nobody in the room and the workers began to search it. Behind the sofa they found the public prosecutor from the district prosecutor's office and A.N. Shelepin was hiding in the bookcase. Wasn't it his guard that had jumped out of the window so courageously? The demonstrators began to drag Shelepin and the prosecutor to the balcony, demanding that they speak before the people but they refused. Then the demonstrators took the cognac and the refreshments and showed them from the balcony for everybody to see. A rally began.

Y.P. Levchenko spoke at the rally. She reported that at night and in the morning the arrests of the strikers had taken place and that the arrested had been beaten. She was telling the truth but she could hardly know that many of those arrested were already far from the city. The demands to liberate the prisoners became more and more persistent. A group of workers went to the offices of the city militia. It was also full of Caucasian soldiers. The demonstrators began to push themselves into the building. The door swung open and the demonstrators rushed into the building. At that moment one of the soldiers brandished a sub-machine gun at a worker in blue overalls. The latter grabbed the gun and a struggle began. The sub-machine gun appeared in the worker's hands but the soldier had the sub-machine gun's ammunition clip. The gun in the worker's hands could serve only as a cudgel but he did not use it even in that capacity yet the soldiers were commanded to open fire and the worker was killed on the spot. Not a single bullet is likely to have been wasted: the crowd was too dense. And the crowd in the city department building was seized with panic. One of the participants in these events who was later imprisoned, Alexander Teremkov, who was wounded in the shoulder-blade by a ricochet, told me in the concentration camp that they had been compelled to pile up the bodies in the cellar of the neighbouring State Bank, and that they were still alive,

jerking their arms and legs. Who knows, maybe some of them could have been saved. None of the participants could give even an approximate number of the dead.

The soldiers near the party committee building were also ordered to open fire, though there had been no assault, no violence there. Curious children were sitting high in the trees in a small public garden in front of the party committee. Behind them stood a monument to Lenin... Several witnesses reported that the officer who had been ordered to open fire, refused to give the order to the soldiers and shot himself in front of the formation. But nevertheless the soldiers opened fire. First upwards, at the trees, at the children who fell down, killed, wounded, frightened. In such a way the party, the state and the army were eradicating different trends of thought, asserting the unity of the party and the people, proving the democratic character of the socialist state. Then the machine guns were pointed at the crowd.

People have told me: an elderly man was running by a concrete vase on a pedestal. A bullet struck his head and his brains were instantly splashed all over the pedestal. A mother was walking by a store carrying a dead baby. A hairdresser was killed at her work-place. A girl was lying in a pool of blood. A dumbfounded major stepped into this blood. Somebody said to him: "You swine, look where you are standing!" The major shot himself on the spot. People have told me a lot but I will stop here.

Trucks and buses were driven to the site. The corpses were hastily thrown and thrust into them. Not a single body was given to the family to be buried. The hospitals were crowded with wounded. Nobody knows what became of them. The blood was washed from the streets by fire engines but dark stains of blood remained on the asphalt for a long time. I have heard about this shooting more than once. People have told me: the soldiers are opened fire, the panic-stricken crowd began running. The firing stopped - the crowd stopped too and crawled slowly back. The soldiers began firing again. Everything was repeated. Up till now the number of dead, crippled and wounded is unknown.

No, the uprising was still not suppressed. The crowd in the square continued to seethe. Terrible rumours were spreading all over the city. Some people were leaving the square, others were entering. Information was received that members of the Political Bureau of the CPSU and the government had arrived at the city. Among them were A.I. Mikoyan, and F.R. Kozlov. Without any elections, spontaneously, a delegation from the demonstrators was formed. The representatives of the Central Committee and the government were afraid of the working masses. They were hiding near the tank unit. The delegation went there. Delegate B.N. Mokrousov recited a poem by Nekrasov called "Who lives well in Russia" to the representatives of the Central Committee and the government modified so as to concern Khrushchev's rule, Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's. This was the main reason that the Supreme Court of the RSFSR, under the chairmanship of L.N. Smirnov, sentenced him to be shot.

It has been reported that on hearing about the tragedy Kozlov wept. Possibly, but these were crocodile tears. Mikoyan demanded that the demonstrators allow the tanks to leave the square, after which he would speak. When this demand was told to the demonstrators they answered clearly: "No! Let them look at their handiwork!" They did look at their handiwork - in the light of a helicopter which was flying over the square and the adjoining streets. Mikoyan spoke on the municipal radio station. The newscasters, even the local one, uttered not a single word about the events. A curfew was imposed. Rumours began to spread about a possible banishment of all the citizens. But the tragedy was not over. A period of trials followed. The most blatantly cruel was the trial of 14 of the participants in the strike and rallies. This trial was held in the military garrison KKUKS. Seven of the fourteen were sentenced to be shot - sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of the RSFSR with L.I. Smirnov presiding and with the participation of prosecutor A.A. Kruglov. They were

prosecuted for banditism according to Article 77 of the RSFSR Criminal Code and for mass riots according to Article 79 of the RSFSR Criminal Code.

The tendency of such prosecutions was obvious. People with previous convictions were picked out from the participants first of all. At another trial a person with evident mental defects was convicted. The only goal was to compromise the Novocherkassk uprising by any means. Already in the prison cells after the trials we made attempts to figure out the number of convicts by counting them by name. It amounted to no less than 105 people. The exact number remains unknown. The trials were lavish considering the sentences; the most common were for 10 to 15 years.

It should be admitted that in the KGB cells we were treated with extreme politeness but the isolation from the external world was absolute: No radio, no newspapers. In the carpeted corridors the warders' steps were noiseless and the dead silence was oppressive. An electric light was burning day and night. The food, however, was plentiful and substantial, better than we had outside where the situation with food was very hard.

At first they demanded evidence on the Novocherkassk tragedy, but they stopped on realizing that they would get nothing from me. Then they began to insist on a "little thing" - that I should admit that the events were criminal and that my participation in them was a mistake. But by that time I had already got to know about the terrible tragedy in Novocherkassk. It was impossible to give in then. It was I who had called for continuing the strike and for a demonstration, and I fully realized my responsibility for the deaths. Giving in would have been the vilest treason. I refused to be freed at such a cost. Then they began to work on me.

I repeat that in the KGB I was neither beaten nor tortured, they treated me with extreme courtesy and spoke in a polite manner. The other people under investigation were at first strongly convinced that their cases were coming to an end and each of them would soon be set free. Then the person under investigation who had been fooled in such a way was placed in my cell. Such neighbours could think about nothing but their coming freedom. And when they were called upon with baggage, they were happy. I must point out that the cells were designed for two. Then another fooled neighbour was brought. It is terrible for a young man to stay alone, completely isolated from the external world, and to see that all the participants of the Novocherkassk tragedy are returning safely to liberty, that liberty was quite accessible - it was enough to weaken one's resolve a bit. The only trouble was that all the dreamers who had believed the KGB appeared later as convicts in the prison cells and concentration camps where I met them. But at that time it was also hard on me; I also believed. I was in my 25th year and I could not bear it any more. In the cells we were allowed to have an abundance of cigarettes and matches. I had heard that it was possible to poison oneself with a sulphur match. Secretly, so that even my neighbour noticed nothing, I crumbled the sulphur from 20 match-boxes. I waited till he fell asleep, dissolved the sulphur in the water and took the mug to my lips. But the warders turned out to have seen what the neighbour had not seen. Before I managed to make a gulp, the door opened noiselessly and the mug was on the floor. I need not describe the further scenes. Let everybody imagine them in their own way. They stopped working on me and in order to give me a psychological rest, they sent me to the Novocherkassk prison, to a common cell. The meeting with the Novocherkassians was really a treat for me but the warders in the prison were boorish and rude.

One day a guard sergeant rushed into the cell. He began to insult all Novocherkassians in hysterical tones, shouting something about the troubles with the weavers from Ivanovo-Voznesensk before the revolution. I got indignant, refused to take any food and demanded to speak to a prosecutor. After dinner I was taken to the prosecutor and sharply protested our

treatment by the guard. After that I heard nothing more about boorishness and rudeness towards the Novocherkassians on the part of the guard. I was sent back to the KGB cells.

In September 1962 in the Lenin district court of Rostov-on-the-Don under the chairmanship of member of the board of the Rostov court, N.A. Yaroslavski, and with the participation of the prosecutor A.I. Brizhan, there was a trial of seven Novocherkassians including me. Formally, the trial was open, but nobody in Novocherkassk knew about it. That is why there was nobody at the trial except the relatives of the defendants and the witnesses. The court sentenced one of us to seven years, three to ten years and three, including me, to twelve years. Soon after the trial I was sent to the Novocherkassk prison again. This time I met a lot of acquaintances there.

I do not remember in which month the first transport of Novocherkassians was sent to the Komi ASSR. I was sent with the second transport in winter. The concentration camp to which the Novocherkassians were sent to serve their terms, was about 40 kilometres from the Sindor railway station in the Komi ASSR.

Our meeting with our fellow-townpeople was joyful but from the very first we were overwhelmed by the news that the first Novocherkassians had been organized by the guards into some kind of internal police force to maintain order inside the camp. This news aroused our extreme indignation. We (V. Vlasenko, V. Tchernykh, V. Globa, myself and others) managed to convince them that the existence of something like this and the participation in it of Novocherkassians was unacceptable. So the guards' plan failed. All the prisoners of our concentration camp worked at timber-cutting and the building of a narrow-gauge railway designed to transport timber. Camp life went its usual way. Periodically small and sharp conflicts with the camp administration sprang up. Once, a dispute with a guard resulted in sub-machine gun fire being directed at me but at the very last moment another guard struck the gun upwards and the fire went into the air. We managed to insist on dismissing a brutal officer from the organs of the MVD (the Ministry of Internal Affairs), and to open an evening school with the teachers from the number of prisoners. At the same time we did not listen meekly to the deceptive lessons on political science. Once the major in charge of these studies lost his temper and called me to his room and forbade me to attend these lessons.

Even among the officers of the guard there were people who were friendly towards the Novocherkassians. Once, on a day off, I was standing near the small camp football ground. A guard lieutenant stopped near me. When he was sure that there was nobody about, he told me through his teeth, without moving his lips, that a tragedy similar to the Novocherkassian one had taken place in Murom. In this way the Novocherkassians got to know about one more crime committed by the party and the state.

There were cases of the entire brigade refusing to work as a form of protest. They resulted only in prisoners being punished with solitary confinement.

After some time the cases of the Novocherkassians started to be reviewed in Moscow. I was one of the last whose term was shortened to 6 years. The Novocherkassians began to be freed in the spring of 1965. As for me, no freedom was in sight. I felt depressed and dejected.

My mother, who had passed through all the circles of the stalinist hell, who was sentenced in 1943 according to Article 58.10 of the Criminal Code of the USSR, part two, who had served her full penalty in the concentration camp in the Kirov district, had remained "stoic". In those years she lived in Novocherkassk less than in Moscow; she lived also in Sindor. She was a reliable postwoman for the prisoners; I remember not a single failure of communication, not a single misfortune with the mail. She bribed everyone possible, considering that everyone sold themselves cheap. It was due to bribery that she managed to get a good reference for me and I was liberated before time in July 1968.

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