Introduction

Mark Mrachny was the pseudonym of Yakov Yakovlevich Klevansky (1892–1975), born in Kovno, in the Polish region of the Russian Empire. He became an anarcho-communist in 1907 in Vilna. Reflecting later on his teenage activism, he recalled: "At that time I felt that Kropotkin, although a great person, was too moderate. Later I gravitated towards his point of view. I was young . . . and for romantic youth, emotion means more than knowledge. We were young and more interested in action than ideas."

Upon graduating from the gymnasium (high school) in Vilna, he went to Paris illegally and studied at the Sorbonne (1911–1914). In France he became an anarcho-syndicalist. Returning to Russia in 1914, he enrolled at Kharkov University. Joining the Kharkov Group of Anarchists-Syndicalists-Communists (1917–1918), he helped to edit their weekly newspaper ***Rabochaya Mysl*** (The Worker's Thought) while carrying on organizational and agitational activities among revolutionary students. When Kharkov was captured by German forces in 1918, he had to go underground for several months. At the end of 1918 he took part in founding the Confederation of Anarchist Organizations of Ukraine (Nabat).

Mrachny helped to edit the Nabat Confederation's flagship newspaper in Kharkov, starting in early 1919. Initially legal, the newspaper was illegal for most of its existence (it was finally suppressed at the end of November, 1920). In May, 1919, Mrachny briefly took part in the cultural-educational work of the Makhnovist movement. Driven from Ukraine in July, 1919, by the invasion of White forces under Denikin, he continued to work for the Nabat movement in Moscow, in the Urals, and in Siberia.

Returning to Kharkov in early 1920, he took part in reviving the Nabat Confederation, but was soon arrested. After a nine-day hunger strike, he and other anarchists were released. At the illegal Third Conference of the Nabat Confederation in September, 1920, he was elected to the executive. At the beginning of the following month, the Confederation became legal as a result of a treaty between the Soviet government and the Maknovist movement. It is during this legal period of activity that Mrachny's diary begins.

Prison Notes

by Mark Mrachny

From the author:
These "notes" of mine were laying around for a long time; in fact, I almost forgot about them. Now it occurs to me that it might be useful to publish them. Firstly, as propaganda, and secondly, as semi-historical material. That's why I have decided to publish them, even though I feel uncomfortable writing about myself.

— M. M.

Dedicated to Aron Baron and David Kogan, prisoners of the Bolshevik dictatorship.

November 18 1920, Kharkov

Maybe it's just my nature, but I'm finding it hard to get excited. On the surface it would seem that things are better: thanks to the pact between the Soviet government and Makhno, our organization has emerged in the arena of legal social activity. The Secretariat of our Confederation has received a mass of letters about returning to open activity by our organizations not only in such large centres as Odessa and Yekaterinoslav, but also in a whole range of towns and *volosts* [counties]. Comrades are arriving from various corners of Ukraine, enthusiastic and begging for work to do. Our organ ***Nabat*** is generating a huge amount of interest: it is read out loud and discussed. Our organization's club is packed with people from morning to late at night. Workers come to us with all sorts of problems, including complaints against the communist cells and generally speaking "the bosses." On December 1 we'll be

Mark Mrachny

holding a congress of the Nabat Confederation of Anarchist Organizations of Ukraine and we've invited many anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists from Central Russia and even from the Urals and Siberia. Things are expanding and on the upswing.

But I have to admit, I'm not optimistic. All this seems divorced from reality when you consider that the real basis of our legal existence is in the hands of a regime that suppresses and silences any sort of revolutionary voice. They have arrested Mensheviks before our very eyes, and they arrested the delegates of a Left-SR illegal conference which was taking place in Kharkov not long ago, most of whom are now sitting in the Kholodnaya Gora *katorga* prison. Meanwhile, anarchists are still being released from Ukrainian prisons. Is this a realistic situation? Rather it looks like one of the numerous tragicomic farces perpetrated by the jesuitical policies of the "communist" government.

Of course, the unnaturalness of our legal work is obvious not just to me. In the appeal of our Secretariat to all anarchist organizations and individual comrades (***Nabat***, No. 2, November 15 1920), we considered it necessary to emphasize that "the possibility of legalizing anarchist organizations should be viewed not as an advance in the revolution, not as a gain, but rath-

er as an anomaly brought about by the military situation."

That's why I'm not especially encouraged that we are being invited to the factories, to the workshops, and even to the villages to give speeches or lectures on any topic, etc. I'm not enthralled that masses of workers, Red Army soldiers, and ordinary citizens crowd into the premises of our little club and attentively listen to our speakers, and frequently enter into passionate discussions with the Bolsheviks, who sometimes try to defend their own views. This situation is, of course, quite understandable. Working people are worn out from the repressive regime of the dictatorship, from an unbearable life of hunger and cold, and the absence of the slightest possibility of venting their grievances. Hence they experience a sense of relief when they come to us and unburden themselves, at least for a few hours, in an atmosphere of friendship and freedom.

But many of the visitors to our club haven't the slightest interest in a serious study of anarchism. A lot of these kooks think that the Nabat Confederation and the Makhnovist Army are the same thing. And many don't give two hoots about any kind of theory. People are for the Social Revolution, for free soviets, and against the ruling party of communists—well and good. So what's bothering me? My room is so beastly cold that for the past two weeks I've had to sleep fully clothed, and as I'm writing now, I'm wearing an overcoat and worn-out *valenki* [felt boots]. My fingers are so stiff with cold that I can scarcely hold a pencil and the stearin candle barely illuminates the tiny writing table where I communicate with my notebook.

Go to bed, brother, sleep. Tomorrow you must run to the print shop and deliver material for the next issue of the newspaper. Then there's a meeting of the Secretariat, and there, look, it's already evening and you must go to the club to meet people. Tomorrow night you'll have to correct articles and answer letters. It would be great if the Bolsheviks give us some breathing space for a few months. Then we could hold our conference in a proper fashion, and possibly develop a platform of common principles and a unified line of tactics. In the meantime, it's work, work, work. The only bad thing is that we have so few people: we have to publish the newspaper, speak at workers' meetings, prepare reports, and now provincial organizations are complaining that the Secretariat is too focused on the work of the Kharkov organizations and is forgetting its main responsibility: visiting local groups and servicing the needs of the Confederation.

Yes, so few workers and so much to do.

In many of the enterprises and workshops of Kharkov, groups of workers have formed that are interested in learning about anarchism. For Kharkov alone we need at least five more politically literate anarchist propagandists, but our resources are woefully inadequate.

But for now, brother, I'm putting out the candle (it costs 850 rubles) and hitting the sack. But Lord, how cold it is.

November 27 1921, Central Prison of the Administration of the Extraordinary Commission of Ukraine

In spite of all my pessimism, I was shocked when they came to search my place the day before yesterday with an order for my arrest. It was hard at first to grasp that *Nabat* would not continue to be published, and that our organizing work, which had been expanding so well, had come to a brutal halt. It was hard to wake up from beautiful, but improbable, dreams and find oneself again in the reality of a Bolshevik prison. . . .

And the commissars present during the search were excessively rough-mannered, as my room was ransacked by a heartless bunch of rank-and-file Chekists[1] and soldiers from the security service. They must have been expecting bombs and shooting, but instead they had been sent out on a cold November night to search the room of a fairly innocuous-looking person, a room that was packed with books, newspapers, and papers.

How many people did they fit into that room! They probed the walls, looked inside the stove, squeezed the pillow, and rooted around in the books and papers for a long time. (I had been able to stick the organization's stamp and some important addresses inside a boot.)

The senior commissar sat down importantly to draw up a statement, but I told him that I had never invited him to make an inventory of my belongings, that I wasn't interested in getting to know him better, that I wouldn't give him my last name (they found several passports and ID cards with different names), and that I would not sign the statement. My answer irritated the Chekists. They muttered some sort of threats. But there was nothing they could do.

I wondered if they were arresting all of us now or if it was just me who had earned a visit from the Cheka. If this was a full-scale round-up of anarchists, it meant that the Soviet government had decided to renege on the peace treaty that their representatives had signed with representatives of the Makhnovist Insurgent Army. It meant that again there would be a bloody persecution of revolutionary insurgents who had just vanquished Wrangel and saved Ukraine from another invasion by the White Guards. And again: the anarchist movement was in the underground. Who had avoided arrest? Who was available to continue the work of organizing?

Four well-armed Chekists took me out of the house. Soft snow was falling in big chunks. The street was quiet under its white mantle. We soon arrived at Tsupchrezkom,[2] brightly illuminated

[1] Operatives of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (V. Ch. K.), commonly known as the Cheka—the Soviet secret police.

[2] Central Administration of the Extraordinary Commission of Ukraine.

by electric lights, where shadowy figures could seen through the windows moving back and forth. They took me into a large hall on the ground floor, where behind the numerous tables and desks sat people who looked overworked to the point of exhaustion but who were well dressed and had arrogant faces. Clerical workers pounded away on typewriters, chattering to each other. There were a fair number of arrestees in this hall. An excited Aron Baron cracked jokes in a loud voice, a worker arrested accidentally expressed his outrage, while an elderly woman wept as she tried to convince a Chekist behind a table that she had not taken part in any anarchist conspiracy, but could not answer for her boarders. It was very noisy and the lights were unusually bright. I was able to have a good look around, and exchanged a couple of flippant remarks with Baron, before learning that the majority of our comrades had been arrested, and that there were ambushes and raids "ongoing," as the Chekists put it. Some of the arrestees arrived in groups, others singly.

Meanwhile we were being sorted. Baron and I were assigned to Cell No. 14, but several hours later were transferred to an adjacent cell. This cell was small and damp. Evidently it had previously been a basement storage room. Now it was fitted with a small, barred window, a little stove, a pair of bunks, and—outside the door—a couple of young peasants with rifles: voilà—a prison cell.

An indescribable din reigned in this three-story, hastily-put-together prison. Evidently our numbers were growing. The soldiers guarding us were at first quite hostile, but they soon realized that we weren't White Guards (which is what the command has told them), and then they told us a ton of news: searches and arrests were continuing in the city, workers at the steam-locomotive works (who had previously gone on strike several times for economic reasons) were out again with a new demand—releasing the anarchists and Makhnovists. Rumours were circulating in the city that Makhno was going to attack Kharkov.

29 November 1920, Cell No. 10, Tsupchrezkom

Yesterday we were transferred to Cell No. 10, on the third floor. It's a tiny cell, with many people. Here we found our own folks, who had been sitting here since the 26th. The whole floor is packed with people arrested as part of the campaign against us. They told us that there was a mass of anarchists and their sympathizers being held in dungeons of the Provincial Cheka, in the convict prison, and in the [concentration camp] on Kholodnaya Gora [Cold Mountain]. And the stakeouts at our quarters, at our bookstore, and at our club had not been removed. To tell the truth, I'm not so upset about my arrest and the almost complete liquidation of our organization. I'm not even irritated by the mudslinging and ridiculous slanders aimed at us by the official press (***Izvestiya***, ***Kommunist***, ***Proletariy***, etc.). No, what really bothers me is what appears at first glance to be a trifling matter: our bookstore—"The Free Community," which we had saved from Denikin's agents, frequently risking our lives, had finally been destroyed by the Soviet government. Over a period of three days, the Chekists managed to rip up, cart away, and burn books and pamphlets by Bakunin, Malatesta, Kropotkin, etc. And this in a country where the hunger for books is endemic, in the Red capital of "revolutionary" Ukraine. . . .

In the dungeons of Tsupchrezkom

The atmosphere in the prison is becoming more and more tense. Anarchists on the outside are still being hunted down, the locomotive plant is still on strike, and the government press has thrown aside all restraint with its slanders and lies. In addition, there are various fantastic rumours floating around the city and reaching us through the guards (most of whom are young guys, harmless and even vaguely sympathetic towards us, since they took us for Makhnovists) and also from newly arrived arrestees.

Cell No. 10 was overcrowded and stuffy. Baron, myself, and a few other guys stood at the door and carried on a conversation with someone in a neighbouring cell through the Judas window.[3] The sentry in our corridor had along ago given up enforcing the relevant prison regulation and anxiously glanced from side to side so that the higher-ups couldn't sneak up on him.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, the Chief Warden of the Tsupchrezkom prison Sudakov appeared, a smug, dandified little guy.

"Good day, comrades."

No welcoming response from any of us. Someone asked him angrily:

"Please explain how it is that you consider us comrades?"

"It's like this, comrade anarchists. I myself am a worker and in fact, at the beginning of the revolution, belonged to an anarchist partisan detachment," Sudakov countered in an apologetic manner.

But our nerves were already shot because of the last few days. It's necessary to add that as a sign of protest of our unprovoked arrest, we had declared a hunger strike and had already refused food for two days. And now, unfortunately, this fat-faced jailer turns up who's trying to behave as if we are his buddies.

"There are former workers, just as there are former people. . . ," I reminded the "comrade" jailer.

And Baron added irritably: "What a big shot: a former worker, now a real cop."

[3] A Judas window is a peephole or very small window in a prison cell door.

Aron Baron

The jailer was speechless and foaming with anger from the insults.

Several anxious minutes passed. There was a sense that some sort of serious consequence was inevitable. The door of our cell opened suddenly and immediately there was a hush. The deputy warden of the prison entered, pale and somewhat flustered. A brutish-looking person, he wore a Circassian coat.

"Baron, come with me."

"Where are you taking Baron?" asked one of us.

"None of your business. Baron, are you coming?"

Comrade Baron, grim-faced and slightly bewildered, pulled on his coat and nervously crumpled his cap in his hands.

"No, boys, we mustn't just hand over Baron to these hangmen without a fight. They're taking him to a punishment cell and for sure they're going to beat him as revenge for profaning the honour of the warden. This is what they do in the Cheka," declared someone in our cell.

This acted as a signal. In an instant, the bunks were moved towards the doors, the table was "re-purposed," and we had a barricade.

"So you're going to resist? Damn you bandits, Makhnovists, cutthroats. . . . Do you think we're going to handle you with kid gloves? Remove the barricade now, damn you. . . and if you don't, you sons of bitches, I'll shoot you down like partridges."

Baron tried to reason with us, but it was already too late to retreat, and the jailer's swearing had upset everybody. We were all silent, but none of us made a move to dismantle the barricade.

Meanwhile the "bosses" continued to swear furiously and issue orders. We heard the tramp of soldiers who, with rifles at the ready, were drawn up in the corridor opposite the doors of the cell. The Judas windows of all the cells were screwed shut. An ominous silence reigned throughout the prison.

Sudakov stuck his hand with a Nagant[4] in the Judas window and, while continuing his violent cursing, ordered the door to be opened.

It's interesting to note that in our Cell No. 10 besides the anarchists (Baron, Biryulin,[5] Voline, David Kogan, and myself), there were several workers from the locomotive plant, a former district police chief, and some fellows whom we took to be "plants" (a special type of Cheka informer, embedded in a cell to ferret out secrets for the interrogator). No one moved to open the door for the enraged "bosses."

A shot rang out, and a bullet passed through the window.

"Lie down on the floor, boys, and don't let this cur shoot us," shouted the former chief of police.

Immediately we lay on the floor. Voline, who had slept through the whole commotion and only woke up when the first shot was fired, reclined on a trestle bed with a weak smile on

[4] The Nagant M1895 revolver, of Belgian origin, was widely used by both tsarist and Soviet secret police.

[5] Mikhail Vladimirovich Biryulin (1892–c. 1925) took part in anarchist activity in Siberia in 1918–1920, becoming the chair of the Irkutsk Federation of Anarchists. In the autumn of 1920 he traveled to Kharkov to attend the upcoming anarchist congress and ended up being arrested during the liquidation of the anarcho-makhnovshchina. From this time on he was either in prison or in concentration camps. In the summer of 1925 he was exiled to the Komi-Zyryan Autonomous Oblast in northeastern Russia where, according to unverified information, he soon died.

Vsevelod Voline

his face. (What I remember most about this episode is the smile of the semi-recumbent Voline and the business-like manner of the former chief of police, who installed himself under the trestle bed as if he were in a trench.)

Some more shots rang out, one of which narrowly missed us. It appeared that the mad fury of the shooter was making his hand shake and spoiling his aim.

"What's the matter with you?" Wait! We're not all in this together," screamed one of the non-party types in our cell. Gingerly he approached the barricade and removed the top bunk. Another helped him and in a minute a passageway was open. The Chief Warden Sudakov burst into the cell with his deputy and some angry Chekists with Nagants in their hands.

"Baron, come with us."

A pale Baron slowly left the cell, throwing off a quiet "Forgive me, comrades!"

It was dreadfully hard for us to let him go.

Again the cell door opened, and the deputy warden stuck his head inside, and yelled:

"Hey, you, the bearded one with the glasses, come with me."

Trying not to look my comrades in the eye, I quickly put on my overcoat and pulled on my cap (a fleeting thought: "if they beat me, this might protect my head") and left the cell, quietly saying goodbye to the others.

Fanny Avrutskaya

Fanny Baron

Liya Gotman

We descended from the second floor slowly, in a deathly silence. They took me along a corridor on the first floor where some comrade women were sitting: Fanny Avrutskaya,[6] Fanny Baron,[7] Liya Gotman,[8] Olya Taratuta,[9] Liza Tinovitskaya,[10] and others. Of course they didn't know anything yet. One of them was able to ask me where they were taking me, but my escorts roughly shoved me ahead and we emerged into the courtyard of the prison.

Immediately I was dazzled by a bright sunny, but cold, day. I saw an ordinary-looking worker who was fixing a fence while singing to himself, and some soldiers with peaked caps joshing about something. They immediately quietened down when they saw our group. I was conducted along the courtyard and taken down into the cellar, where an iron door was opened with difficulty and I was left in an underground closet, used previously to store coal for the furnace.

It was cold and damp in my closet. There was no furniture of any kind and it was no fun sitting on the stone floor. And—what the hell?—I didn't bring any tobacco along with me. Then there was also gnawing hunger—today was already the second day of our hunger strike.

Well, at least there was the stub of a pencil and a little notebook in my pocket. While standing, I'm describing today's troubling events and involuntarily listening for the slightest rustling noise in the dungeon:

"Are drunken Chekists coming to vent on me their sadistic nature and their craving for human torment?"

* * * * *

It was soon nightfall. It was so cold that I couldn't feel my feet any more. Oh, what I wouldn't give for a smoke!

Around midnight, I heard some steps.

Olga Taratuta

Liza Tinivitskaya

I was sitting in a corner of the closet, depressed and half-asleep, but hurried to stand up.

"You can go back to the cell," said some

[6] Fanny Avrutskaya (1888–after 1936) lived in Paris in 1913–1917 after fleeing Russia to avoid arrest for revolutionary activities. She was arrested by the Soviet authorities several times during the civil war.

[7] Fanny Baron (1886–1921) emigrated to the USA with her family in 1905 and became a factory worker in Chicago. Returning to Russia in 1917, she took part in battles with the Whites and Austro-German invaders in 1918.

[8] Liya Gotman (1896–after 1936) emigrated to the USA in the early 1910s where she was a member of the Union of Russian Workers. Returning to Russia in 1917 she was active in both the Nabat Confederation and the Makhnovist movement.

[9] Olga (Olya) Taratuta (1876–1938) spent many years in tsarist prisons for her revolutionary activities which began in the 1890s. Active in both the Nabat Confederation and the Makhnovist movement, she was a personal advisor to Nestor Makhno.

[10] Liza Tinovitskaya (1890--1940) fled abroad in 1908 to avoid prosecution for revolutionary activities. She emigrated to New York where she belonged to the Union of Russian Workers. Returning to Russia in 1917, she was active in the Nabat Confederation and was particularly concerned with combating illiteracy. Imprisoned by the Bolsheviks in the winter of 1920--1921, she shared her cell with her two children.

kind of official person.

At first I didn't believe it. I thought that they were preparing something especially hellish. But, apparently, the higher-ups had found out about the shooting into our cell and had ordered that the matter be disposed of without further action.

2 December 1920

There is renewed excitement in Cell No. 10. Numerous delegates to the congress of the Nabat Confederation are arriving from various parts of Ukraine and Russia, and most of them are ending up in Tsupchrezkom. Yesterday they brought us Nikolai Ch.[11] from the Poltava group of comrades.

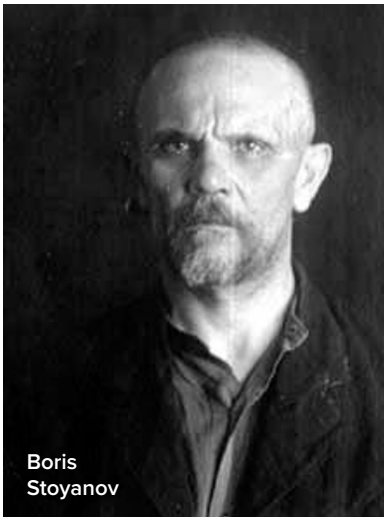
Nikolai and his wife and two children were arrested en route. He was sent to our Cell No. 10, which we jokingly referred to as the "credentials committee" of the congress. Frail and reserved, only rarely favouring us with a slightly irreverent smile, Nikolai produced an agreeable impression on me as being someone who knows what he wants and goes about getting it.

They brought us Yarchuk[12], the delegate of the Provisional Bureau of the Russian Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists. He had a heap of news for us about those comrades who have still not fallen into the hands of the Cheka and are trying to save the remnants of our organization from final destruction. Soon they also sent us B. Stoyanov,[13] arriving for the congress with lots of reports and plans. Comrade V.,[14] a delegate of the Anarchist Workers' Group of the Donetsk Basin, entered our cell looking quite pleased, as if he had just arrived at the opening of the congress. Some kind of despicable *shpik* [police informer] wanted to insinuate himself into our cell, but we declared to the warden on duty that there were already 21 guys in our cell and that there was no way we would accept any more.

In fact it was very hard to sleep. A bright electric light is on all night. We lie side by side so closely, that if a person moves their arm involuntarily, their neighbour is awakened. That's why part of our cell prefers to spend the night talking. We even decided to hold the opening of the congress here. At first reluctant, and then more and more enthusiastic, Baron climbed on a chair, which he placed on a bunk, and passionately explained the incompatibility of the dictatorship with anarchist ideology. B. Stoyanov began a long, interesting, in places paradoxical, report about inter-individualism, but someone disrespectfully interrupted, and he got pissed off and went away to read. And then Voline told a long and colourful story about his escape from France during wartime.[15]

. . . At times I get to thinking that all this is an illusion: our arrest, the death threat which hangs over the heads of many of us, the revolutionary songs which are frequently heard—first in one, then in another cell, and the slow death of the Left SR Karelin,[16] who declared a hunger strike to the death, demanding release. And the face of

Efim Yarchuk



Boris Stoyanov

Nikolai Dolenko (Chekeres)

[11] This is **Nikolai Dolenko** (1883–1944), whose pseudonym was Chekeres. An anarcho-communist from 1906, he lived abroad for many years before returning to Russia in 1917. A contributor to many anarchist publications, both in Russia and abroad, he was the husband of Liza Tinivitskaya. [Thanks to A. V. Dubovik for the identification of Dolenko.]

[12] **Efim Yarchuk** (1882–not than 1942), emigrated in 1913 to the USA, where he was active in the Union of Russian Workers. Returned to Russia in 1917.

[13] **Boris Semenovich Stoyanov** (1892–1938) was one of the ideologues of the anarcho-syndicalist movement at the time of the Civil War. An anarchist from 1912, he worked with underground student groups in St. Petersburg. In 1918–1922 he was chair of the Petersburg Federation of Anarcho-syndicalist Groups, and editor of the journal ***Volniy Trud*** [Free Labour]. He was frequently arrested by the Chekists.

[14] Tentatively identified as Grigoriy Vitkovskiy, a metal-worker and an anarchist from 1917. [Thanks to A. V. Dubovik.]

[15] Facing arrest for anti-war agitation in 1916, Voline escaped to New York from France by working as a coal-trimmer on the ocean liner SS Lafayette. See https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/8gtjf5.

[16] **Vladimir Aleksandrovich Karelin** (1891–1938), a founder of the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party, was a People's Commissar (cabinet minister) in the first Soviet government (1917–1918).

"Little Jesus," David Kogan—sickly, but with a wonderful personality—an almost otherworldly figure, doomed to suffer but willingly accepting his fate. Quiet and focused, he lives among us, smiling sometimes and a little strange.

Around 4 a.m., after falling asleep worn out from the noise and yelling, not to mention my own thoughts, I was awakened and called out for interrogation.

The treacherous attack on the Makhnovist army, the arrest of representatives of the Makhnovist peace delegation, and the simultaneous destruction of anarchist organizations was carefully planned in advance by the Bolsheviks. But so far, obviously, there is still no definite plan about what to do with us. Who knows what will happen? For the time being a preliminary investigation of our case has been assigned to Benedikt Ryzhin, investigator of the Ukrainian Cheka, a former anarchist. Early in the revolution, this Ryzhin belonged to the type of all-destroying (verbally, at least) anarcho-individualists, and was the editor or co-editor of an anarchist newspaper in Nizhin, it seems, and wrote articles of vital importance modestly titled "God and I," or something similar. He advocated expropriations, the destruction of everything, etc., was a cocaine addict and, in his own way, a parasite on the revolution. In 1919 he had an epiphany and joined the Communist Party and from there it was a short step to the Cheka. And now our "case" was assigned to this "anarcho-specialist."

I was quickly taken out of the prison and across the street to a nearby building where the collegium of the Tsupchrezkom was installed. My guards had to show their passes to a whole succession of sentries, until we reached the second floor. We came to a suite of rooms that were empty and absolutely spooky. In one room there was an on-duty official sleeping on a table.

We passed along another dark corridor. My guards knocked on one door and ushered me into a large, imposing room where someone was sleeping on a wide couch, snoring away under a fur coat, while behind a desk with an electric lamp with a green shade sat a tall, thin man with nervous, slightly effeminate movements. This was Ryzhin. I had run into him by chance in 1919 before he had joined the Party.

"Ah, Comrade Mark, sit down," said Ryzhin in a deliberatively affected manner. He made an attempt to start a normal conversation, but I interrupted him and asked why he had forced me to take such an early stroll from my cell to his office.

"It's well known to us that some of you are upset about being arrested. There was even a hunger strike of protest. Meanwhile, the Soviet government has pressed charges of a very serious nature against you. I've been assigned to interrogate you. What's your real family name, Comrade Mark?" He seemed somewhat embarrassed, as he fidgeted with a newspaper.

"When I was arrested, you seized several passports. You just need to copy all the family names from them."

Ryzhin wrote something down and asked: "How old are you?"

I refused to answer.

Ryzhin didn't get angry or flustered, but said, spreading his hands nervously:

"You see, comrade, I didn't want to mention this, but you're forcing me. In the event . . . well, in the event of an unfortunate outcome, it will be inconvenient . . ."

To be honest, I still don't understand what he wanted to get from me with this naked threat. I answered, trying to speak simply and calmly:

"Well, if matters go 'to the wall,'[17] it won't make much difference how old I am. I'll still be there."

Ryzhin began fidgeting on his chair, half getting up and glancing to the side. He said in a dull voice:

"Of course I understand you, comrade. You're refusing to give evidence on principle. But the accusations against you are serious: preparation to overthrow Soviet power, connections with Makhno, and sabotage of the economic life of the country."

To respond to Ryzhin, to polemicize with him, I considered an unworthy project for myself. At a meeting of the workers of the Nabat organization, held roughly a week before my arrest, it was decided that in the case of a treasonous attack by the Soviet government on our organization, that we would refuse to offer any testimony. I made a step towards the exit. Ryzhin made a phone call, the chief of the convoy appeared, and they took me back to the prison."To the wall," i.e. to execution.

Now, very likely, I can expect a proper summons "to the wall."

[17] "To the wall," i.e. to execution.

5 December 1920

The local communist press was still obsessed with us. The newspapers abused us, each in their own way, as if they were following orders. In the prison, there was an atmosphere of dread based on the fear that drunken butchers would break into the prison at night and carry out a bloody massacre. In the city anarchists and their sympathizers continued to be hunted down.

They are feeding us poorly. The cells are crowded and exercise walks are not permitted. Our only diversions are receiving parcels from freedom and reading newspapers out loud, accompanied by bursts of laughter at the "tough" passages. Occasionally someone can't restrain themselves and gives vent to an uncensored exclamation when the ongoing campaign of unrestrained slander becomes unbearable.

In the nighttime in our cell an improvised club has started up. Reminiscences, at times very interesting.

11 December 1920 On the Road

In the evening the investigator Ryzhin visited all of our cells and told us to get ready for a transfer. The majority of the arrestees (Kharkov workers and those arrested by accident) would remain in Kharkov. To be shipped out are only the most active workers of the Nabat Confederation, delegates, and representatives of the peace delegation sent by the revolutionary insurgent army of Ukraine (Makhnovists). Where are they taking us?

Baron, David Kogan, and I quietly discuss in a corner of the cell the possibility of being murdered on the road ("during an attempt to escape"). We send a note into the city through one of the guards.

Everyone is anxious, but each reacts in their own way: some concentrate on smoking, some talk loudly and cheerfully, and some lie down to take a nap.

At 1 a.m. a heavily armed detachment of the Cheka arrived and took away the Makhnovists. For some reason, Buryulin was included. It became even more quiet and stressful.

After an hour they came again and summoned Baron, Voline, Kogan, Vanya Tarasyuk,[18] and myself. We emerged on the street with knapsacks in our hands. On the street there was a mass of armed soldiers—both infantry and mounted—as well as Chekists who didn't appear to be Ukrainians.

We were surrounded by a detachment of foot soldiers, while the cavalry dispersed to the sides, and we quietly moved through the dark, snow-covered streets of Kharkov. Soon we were swallowed up by the dark night. I saw next to me the pale face of "Little Christ" and sometimes there emerged from the darkness the slightly stooped figure of Voline. We moved quietly, each of us fully expected that at the

Ivan (Vanya) Tarasyuk

first turn the Chekists would begin shooting at us, and that on the morrow the government press would inform the populace in brief fashion that five anarcho-bandits had been killed while trying to escape.

Now we were already on Yekaterinoslavskaya Street. Are they really taking us to the railway station?

But from a distance a heartrending, crazy-sounding howl wafts towards us. It was as if some lost soul had absorbed the whole hopeless sorrow of these snowbound streets and the treacherous blind alley which people had created supposedly in the name of the revolution. It was as if someone's eyes were opened to the whole abomination of desolation which prevailed everywhere—and could not restrain themselves. And uttered this wild, savage howl. . . .

"Someone can't stand the proletarian dictatorship, brothers," cracked one of our group, but nobody responded. Instinctively we stopped and crowded together.

"Infantry, halt! Cavalry, forward!" rang out the command of the chief of the detachment.

We waited for several long, stressful minutes. A thought struck me:

"Could this have been arranged according to a diabolical scheme cooked up by the Cheka bosses? Could this be a fabricated 'attack to free criminals'?"

The faces of the soldiers guarding us were impossible to see in the dark. Here and there was the flash of a bayonet, the flicker of a lighted cigarette.

Soon the riders returned, reported briefly to the chief, and we proceeded further.

Now we were nearing the brightly lit railway station. Not likely they're going to shoot us here. Does this mean they're going to transport us somewhere?

They led us by a roundabout way to the platform, snarling at any hapless passengers who happened to be waiting for the next train. Us they brought to some kind of unusual coach.

Standing on the illuminated platform was a tall, unusually erect man with a pointed cap, slightly resembling a caricature of a German "schutzman" [police constable]. He had a notebook in his hands. Upon seeing Voline, he made a grimace, which gradually changed into a smile. This was Popov, chief of the Internal Prison of the Special Section of the Cheka.

Our tiny coach had two internal grilles, behind which were armed guards. The windows were small and frosted. This paddy wagon, which dated from the tsarist regime, produced the impression of a cage in which a well-to-do peasant brought chickens to the bazaar. They crammed in a bunch of people: four children, arrested women (anarchists and two women who had accidentally been caught in an ambush), Makhnovists, and anarchists.

We left early in the morning. Our warders threatened and cajoled us to be quiet, but we all sang together the plaintive march of the anarchists:

> *We sing our song under thunder and fury,*
>
> *Under bullets and shells, under blazing fires . . . .*

I have to admit that I felt a lot better when the train actually left Kharkov in an unknown direction. Ukraine

[18] Ivan (Vanya) Tarasyuk, born in 1893, emigrated to the USA before World War I. Settling in Baltimore, he belonged to the Union of Russian Workers and helped to edit its newspaper ***Golos Truda*** (The Voice of Labor). Returning to Russia in 1917, he was active mainly in Kharkov, and was elected to the Secretariat of the Nabat Confederation in September, 1920.

is a perpetual volcano: so long as we remained within its borders, all sorts of things could happen—we couldn't feel safe for a single minute. It would suffice for Makhno to launch a raid on Kharkov or for the workers of the locomotive plant to aggressively press their demands, and they will shoot us like partridges. Of course in Moscow we will be under the thumb of the Cheka, whose celebrated executioners are responsible for the deaths of dozens of revolutionaries. And yet it seems to me that the atmosphere there is calmer. But are they really taking us to Moscow? Maybe they're sending us to some backwoods place or, even worse, they're planning some kind of trickery—with them anything is possible.

The mood among our arrestees is varied: some are convinced that we will soon be released and are stoically resigned to a short trip; the Makhnovists (except for Viktor Popov[19] and the young anarchist Vanya Charin[20]) have

Vanya Charin

gone a little soft. The latter are accustomed to look death calmly in the eye in battle, but prolonged incarceration in a dim cell with the perspective of being killed in the basement—this tries their nerves and reduces them to confused and helpless children.

Voline vividly and in detail described to us the regime and life in the Internal Prison, where spent several months not so long ago. We, active workers of the Nabat Confederation, know that, in the best case scenario we could be spending years in prison. Baron teaches us the cipher which he devised for conspiratorial correspondence. David is happy to be making the trip, as well as Lorochka, Nikolai's delightful little daughter. David spent part of 1919 in prison during Denikin's occupation of Ukraine, expecting to be shot, and was released by accident. In 1920 he was arrested a second time (this time by the Bolshevik police), languished in the same prison, escaped, hid in Kharkov, and, thanks to my insistence, led the life of a recluse. For a long time he had dreamed about our trip to who knows where and now he was happy, assuring me that he wouldn't mind being locked up until spring, "and then I will again escape, perhaps." Voline's fantasy was in a different direction: he enthusiastically described to us a broad wave of uprisings, which would embrace not only Ukraine, but part of central Russia and culminate in an attack on Moscow by Makhno, and "it will be the turn of the anarchists."

I grew tired of all this crowding, noise, and talk. I just wanted to hide myself in a corner and sleep, sleep, sleep. . . .

[19] Mrachny evidently means Dmitriy Popov (see footnote #22).

[20] Ivan (Vanya) Charin, born 1902), took part in both the Makhnovist movement and the Nabat Confederation. He helped to edit the Makhnovist newspaper ***Put k Svobode*** [The Road to Freedom] and was part of the delegation that negotiated a military-political alliance with the Bolshevik authorities.

14 December 1920 Internal Prison of the Special Section of the Cheka

Yesterday before daybreak they brought us to the Moscow railway station. First they took away a large party including women and children, followed by us "more dangerous criminals." We marched with a sufficiently strong escort, but without the same solemnity as in Kharkov. Any pedestrians we encountered along our route to the prison didn't even favour us with a glance; they were accustomed, evidently, to the sight of arrestees, batches of whom were harried by the Russian Communist Party across the long-suffering land of Russia.

We marched along long, dark streets covered with snowdrifts. Suddenly we arrived at the Lubyanka, famous from the time of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," which was irritatingly brightly lit. (I was reminded of the fantastic stories of Edgar Allan Poe.) We were brought to some kind of room in which some kind of harmless trade sign was still hanging—we were in the reception room of the Cheka. A squad of soldiers (from the troops of Internal Security) were on hand, sleek and dressed in dandified uniforms. Running to and fro were staff people with tired, impassive faces. They reminded me of the dead-tired clerks of a large department store, like "Muir and Merrilees." They gave us intake forms to fill out. None of us began to fill them out. Only Baron sat down and began to put down answers to the questions which caused the comrades looking over his shoulder to break out in friendly laughter. I surveyed the whole scene attentively. What struck me the most about all these staff people running back and forth in front of us in this setting of a dilapidated department store, was its terrible ordinariness, its banality.

The Warden of the prison entered swiftly, looked us over attentively, and whispered something to each of the pale-faced young people. With a significant look, he showed one of them some kind of list, then began calling us to order. First he shouted the names of two Makhnovists: Budanov[21] and Popov.[22] Both of them turned pale, shook hands with us, and exited through a designated door. Voline was

[21] Avraam Budanov (1886–1929) was active in the Makhnovist movement as a commander, propagandist, and diplomat. In negotiations with the communists in November, 1920, he tried to gain recognition of the independence of a sizable region of southeastern Ukraine for an anarchist social experiment.

[22] Dmitriy Popov (1892–1921), formerly a prominent member of the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party, became an anarcho-communist in the spring of 1920. In the Makhnovist movement he was a commander, propagandist, and negotiator.

taken away; he left, slightly bent over. It became terribly quiet. Then they called out David Kogan and myself. We passed along a weakly-lit corridor and emerged into a dark courtyard, where a lamp shone dimly. Behind us was a pale-faced young man with a revolver at the ready who ordered softly: "Forward, right, left, forward."

We reached a corridor where one flight of stairs led to the basement, and another went up. There was a slight hitch—no more than a few seconds. . . . Our escort was silent and we didn't know if we were going to be taken into the prison or down into the famous cellar of the Cheka, where they would finish us off with a bullet in the back. But our escort uttered lackadaisically: "Go on up." We went up to the third floor, where our escort knocked on a door. An armed soldier let us in. Sitting behind a desk nearby was a foppish-looking chap who reminded me of a lackey from a second-rate hotel. He stared at us lethargically, as if he were extremely bored, then moved quickly to open the door of one of the cells, let us in, and locked the door behind us. A five-candlepower electric lamp, hanging from the ceiling outside the door, illuminated the cell dimly.

David, in business-like fashion, placed his little basket with a pair of underwear in a corner of the cell, shed his coat and leather cap (which he finds quite irksome since he's a vegetarian), and, with a surreal look on his face, began pacing back and forth . . . . I started putting in order our "apartment": I set up two trestle beds, positioning them in opposite corners of the cell so that each of us could have our own corner. I arranged my overcoat so that it could serve as both a mattress and a pillow, and covered the overcoat with a worn blanket which I had brought from Kharkov and—my bed was ready. It was more of a bother to fix up David's bed. He had been arrested in the club and had nothing except the pair of underwear which one of our group had given him in the Tsupchrezkom's prison—he had nothing else. (On the other hand, he had "capital" of a different sort: at the last minute he had grabbed by chance the splendid book of poems by Valery Bryusov.[23]) He had to use the only straw mattress in the cell—rolled up in the corner and far from clean.

My eyes were hurting from a series of sleepless nights, and my whole body ached. I didn't want to get undressed, I only wanted to stretch our on the rickety trestle bed and sleep for a long time. I was in no hurry to go anywhere, but I dragged myself to the printed sheet of paper stuck on the door of the cell, in the manner of "Rules for Guests" in hotels. About these "rules for prisoners in the Internal Prison of the Special Section of the V. Ch. K." we had been told, while still in Kharkov, with unconcealed horror.

It looked like an ordinary notice. Everything was properly set out: at the top—"Proletarians of all countries, unite!"; at the left—the signature of the head of the Special Section of the V. Ch. K. Yagoda. What attracted my attention most of all was point No. 9, a masterpiece which should be included in the history of the Russian Communist Party:

"The reading of newspapers, books and brochures, playing games, walking, smoking, etc. is strictly forbidden."

I couldn't help laughing. I'd never laughed so hard as now at this splendid, astounding, inimitable "etc."

"Quiet, Citizen!" shouted a threatening voice from outside. But this outcry tickled me even more. This place is run by comedians. Did the absurdity of their instructions ever occur to them?

I couldn't finish reading the rules because I was overcome by drowsiness.

The doors of the cell opened and we were invited to use the lavatory. Then the Warden of the prison came for a visit, we were brought food, and I slept like a log. It's true that my bed was not very soft, but I stretched out full length and, putting a fist under by head for a pillow, slept, slept, slept.

It would be a long time before I would be in such a comfortable room again.

[23] Valery Bryusov (1873–1924) was a poet associated with the Russian Symbolist movement. Unlike many of his fellow Symbolists, he did flee from Russia following the 1917 revolution.

16 December 1920

Our cell was comparatively warm and sufficiently large: nine steps in length and five and a quarter in width. There was a big window, but it was painted over with a greyish paint so that we spent the whole day in twilight conditions. The bars were on the inside, which meant that the vent could not be opened. There was a large wooden table, but no chairs. The walls were covered with torn wallpaper. In the corner was the *parasha* [close-stool].

The order of the day for us was determined once and for all:

1. **Morning: "To the lavatory, Citizens!"**
2. **Some slightly tinted boiling water is brought in a huge kettle by a dim-witted, taciturn Latvian.**
3. **The door half-opens cautiously and a quiet woman holds out two pieces of bread (exactly one and one-quarter pound).**
4. **The door half-opens again and a female hand holds out a broom. We sweep any dirt towards the doors, and the woman sweeps it out quickly into the corridor and the door is immedi-**

ately locked. These "numbers," as we call them, do not always take place in the same order. Sometimes they give us the broom for sweeping up almost simultaneously with the boiling water, and don't invite us to the lavatory at all.

5. Visit by Chief Warden Popov or one of his assistants. He enters the cell, and instead of a greeting utters the standard formula: "Any declarations or complaints?" He says this in a perfunctory manner, while attentively surveying the cell, then hurries to leave and continue his rounds.
6. At about 12;30 pm the same woman (is she a deaf-mute?) presents us with lunch in wooden bowls. The first course has an indeterminate colour and tastes of cabbage. The second course is a rather tasty porridge. It's only to be regretted that the interval between the first and second courses is too long and tiring.
7. The bowls are collected. The woman opens the door and waits for us to hand them to her.
8. Around 5 pm supper is served: cabbage soup with fish or meat.
9. Bowls are collected.
10. More tinted boiling water.
11. Between 8 pm and 9:30 pm: "To the lavatory, Citizens!"

These 11 "numbers" provide the only chances we have to view the corridor. However, everything has been carefully figured out beforehand (it's not for nothing that our rulers are "scientific" Marxists): you will not see one arrestee and you will not hear any—or almost any. In going to the lavatory, which is on the same floor not far from our cell, we are accompanied by a guard who apparently considers it his duty to be present during our toilet. He carefully watches to make sure that no notes of any kind are left in the loo.

David walks back and forth across the cell on a diagonal for a long time before stopping near me and saying:

"You know, it seems to me that they have placed us in a well-designed lunatic asylum. The guards, apparently, are only allowed to say 'Quiet, Citizen' and 'To the lavatory, please.' And the Chief Warden also speaks only in formulas. We're all quietly going insane."

And again he began his interminable pacing. Then he stopped again and continued with a childish smile on his face:

"In January, 1920, I fell into the clutches of the Cheka for the first time and was again incarcerated in the same prison in which, a short time previously, I had been locked up under Denikin. In the morning the door of my cell opened and there was a guard who happened to be an old acquaintance. He was a guard during my Denikinist prison term, who solemnly announced: 'To the lavatory, comrade!' His invitation seemed so funny to me, that I burst out laughing. But now I'm so used to it, I don't feel anything. I wonder, when they shoot people in the basement, do they say: 'Stand against the wall, comrade!" Is this not really an insane asylum?'

"Now to me it seems that we're in a rather strange, but well-designed hotel. It's been a long time since I've been able to eat so regularly. During the last couple of years, when I was living in so-called freedom, I never had the opportunity to spend time in a comparatively warm room and think quietly. It's true, the quality of the food here is poor, we can't breathe fresh air, and there are other kinds of 'inconveniences.' You see, while I was free, I was responsible for myself and for our organization and, generally, for everything being done for good or bad in the real world. But now they've locked me up and thereby liberated me from any responsibility before the world and for the world. There are no government newspapers to read. Nobody's going to arrest you here. It's possible to sit by the hour, stare at a spot, and think deep thoughts. Good, brother! If only there was enough tobacco available, I would shout 'Long live the dictatorship of the proletariat.'"

"Quiet, Citizen!"

December 22 1920

We spent the whole day pacing from corner to corner, silently. Occasionally we would exchange a few words, then back to silence.

We are cut off from the world. There is no possibility of communicating with freedom: our Moscow comrades most likely don't even know we are here. I tried to talk with one of the guards, but he jumped away as if he had been stung by a bee and in an unnatural voice shouted the invariable: "Quiet, Comrade!"

Last night we had to endure several nerve-wracking hours. Some woman was screaming hysterically, and it sounded as if her head was being beaten against a wall. The hurried steps of guards sounded in the corridor; they turned on lights in the corridor and looked through the peephole in the

door (they do this at least six to eight times per night). Soon we heard someone being brought along the corridor with muffled noises. Where to? To the basement to be shot? To the doctor or to the investigator on the night shift?

With their centralization and dictatorship they have killed the creative spirit of the revolutionary masses. They have suppressed freedom of assembly, publication, and thought. They have driven all the revolutionaries underground or into the prisons. They have scattered the poison of distrust and denunciation widely among the workers. They have bound the whole of worker-peasant Russia with the red chains of the narrow-minded dictatorship of their own party. They have silenced the toilers and from region to region of this again-enslaved country is heard only the inexorable, menacing, and threatening: "Quiet, Citizen!"

December 31 1920, 10 p.m.

It's apparent that on the occasion of the impending holiday we have been given a morsel of "freedom": the guard doesn't run along the corridor, ordering in textbook fashion: "Time to sleep, lie down."

Today our quiet life was interrupted by an important, joyous, and cheerful event: around 8 p.m., when on the "order of the day:" remained only one "number"—lavatory time—the door of the cell opened once more, some kind of Chekist came running in and placed on the table two large pieces of bread (around six pounds), a piece of cheese, two herrings, and—the main item—two packets of tobacco and a box of matches. This even meant a lot to us not only because it brought us some more food. (And here we're painfully aware of the lack of sufficient nourishment, especially for David, who doesn't touch the soup since it has "pieces of carcasses" in it—he contrives even in prison to remain a vegetarian.) This anonymous gift signifies that our presence in the Internal Prison had become known to our Moscow comrades, and this is already a good thing. Moreover, out on the streets, probably cold and snowy today, the conditions of life of the Moscow anarchists are probably worse then those of us in prison. After all, we have a warm place to stay and a pound of bread per day. But out there are comrades who have deprived themselves of necessities in order to bring us an extra piece of bread, thereby risking being arrested themselves at the prison front office for their acquaintance with "anarcho-bandits."

Under conditions of the most complete isolation from the whole world, from our nearest and dearest, this act of comradely concern inspires and stirs us, almost as if the hand of a loved one were quietly laid upon our head. . . . Slowly, deliberately, I inhale tobacco and listen to David, who is animatedly walking about the cell, smiling with his "beatific" smile (it's not for nothing that among the comrades he is known as "Little Jesus"), and dreaming out loud.

December 31 1920, 11:45 p.m.

David tired himself out from pacing quickly back and forth, a result of the stimulation of this evening's unusual events. He lies on the cot, staring at the ceiling. He's probably thinking about his girlfriend and his six-month-old son, who bears the beautiful name Sigurd. David's face is noticeably pale and strangely attractive as he focuses intensely. Is he listening to the sounds of dancing taking place over our heads? (Who would this be—people in custody or prison personnel?) Or is he listening to the odd sounds that sometimes reach us from the street (which is so close and yet infinitely far away!) Or is he just pondering his own thoughts? I am entirely in the thrall of some extraordinarily solemn goodwill, my soul is filled to the brim with pure joy.

"Listen, David! Tonight drunken Chekists could burst into our cell and take us to the cellar to be shot. Human blood, spilled on a festive occasion, can be quite enjoyable for some sadist who is responsible for our fate. Faced with death, the threat of which hangs over us, we should at all costs avoid resorting to cheap theatrical poses and pathetic speeches. I'm speaking to you now with all my good-heartedness, with all my brotherly affection. It's inexpressibly sad to part with the always exhilarating course of one's life, to leave one's nearest and dearest, whose eyes are tenderly smiling at us in the menacing silence of our sleepless nights, in this half-dark cell of the 'hotel of silence and death.' You recall the words of Bryusov:

Every stone can be wonderful,
If you live in a slow prison.[24]

"But yet somehow I'm calm and I feel good. . . . In my life, like you, like each of my brothers-in-arms, I have endured much that is harrowing and inevitably bitter. I've always been acutely aware of the ineffable bitterness of the vanity of our human life, the anguish of disappointments, and the wormwood of melancholy in contrast to the bliss and happiness of this evening when the old year slowly dies. I could never understand how it is that people can be joyful at this time which so impassively reminds us of the inevitable fate that awaits each of us. But here's what seems good to me. The main thing is to go forward, to advance unceasingly along the difficult path towards those fires which illuminate the future, to solemnly create the legend of our own life. . . . Who knows, maybe this is what people call happiness. That's fine with me, because when I go down to the cellar, to fall clumsily at the hands of an indifferent slave, I will feel (and I

[24] From Valeriy Bryusov's poem ***Every Moment*** (1900).

feel now) that I am following my own principles, the principles of my internal life. I am here because intrinsically I belong here, because I can't not be here. And this makes me unusually happy.

"Accept, my brother, on this festive occasion, my greeting:

"Happy New Year, David!"

January 1 1921 Internal Prison of the Special Section of the Cheka

This morning something unexpected took place in our corridor. Someone began pounding on a door, screaming. The screws came running. We were glued to the doors but it was impossible to figure out what was the matter. David, smiling wanly, and said:

"You see, we are all quietly going crazy in this model insane asylum. But now our neighbour, who started making a row, has evidently recovered somewhat. . . ."

We knocked on the door, demanding an explanation from the guard. But though he was a little upset, he nevertheless responded phlegmatically: "It's nothing, comrades."

The warden of the prison, while making his rounds, told us that some prisoner had tried to hang himself. We couldn't get any more information out of him.

A strange person, this prison warden! The efficient sergeant-major type, callous and calculating. He comports himself in a polite but slightly aloof manner. He has a glassy stare and is probably a heavy drinker. Seeking, apparently, to impress us, he told us that he served for a long spell at the front against the Czechoslovaks. How quickly and masterfully, however, has Soviet power succeeded in transforming living people into pitiless, efficient mannequins for its political terror!

January 4

Early this morning they led us through the city to the baths. Accompanying both of us were two armed soldiers and one prison guard. On the snowy streets the usual hustle-bustle of a Soviet work day prevailed. People were trudging somewhere with briefcases under their arms, with knapsacks on their backs, or they were dragging sleds behind them. Driving by in dilapidated cabs were warmly and, at times even stylishly dressed people with the inevitable briefcases under their arms. Pale-faced kids, wearing unconventional outerwear and boots, hurried briskly to school.

How much quiet joy there is in the most mundane of human activities! I tried to walk as slowly as possible. Unhurriedly I absorbed, as if it were strong wine, the everyday noises of the still beautiful Moscow, the cries of schoolchildren, the scraping of sled runners, and invigorating steps in the frozen snow. . . . A gray-eyed girl in painted *valenki* [knee-high felt boots] flitted by and flashed a smile.

In our lives we are usually covered with such a thick layer of the detritus of everyday life, with mundane concerns, with debilitating annoyances and petty squabbles, that we are unable (nor do we have time) to take a fresh look at a close friend with an affectionate stare. And meanwhile, there is so much ineffable charm in all these streets which are immersed in the fog of this gray morning! It's true that I'm walking with an armed escort on my way to be cleansed of filth and the lice which lately have begun to torment me. And it's true that all around me this RSFSR [Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic], unwashed and lice-ridden, is groaning under the menacing watch of obedient slaves. Nevertheless, hurrah for life, which sweeps away obtuse dogmatists who are constraining life "according to the book" and seeking to build society "in spite of reason, in spite of the elements"!

Long live real life, in the name of which we are struggling and which will some day come about!

January 13

Today we were summoned to interrogation: first David, followed by me. A rather young soldier with a Nagant in his hand walked me there in the usual order: I first, and he behind. We went up to the fourth floor, made our way along a zig-zag corridor, climbed another staircase, and again bumbled our way along for a long time. Along the way we ran into some military types, a messenger boy came running by, and, with a cigarette between her lips, a *baryshnya*[25] passed us with her eyes cast down. Finally we arrived at Room No. 84, which had someone's name on the door. We entered. It was a large, untidy office which gave the impression of buffoonery. (However, all this "worker-peasant government" and "proletarians of all countries, unite"—high-sounding words, while the reality is: rules for prisoners, where "the reading of newspapers, books, and brochures; smoking; playing cards; walking, etc. is strictly forbidden"—really is this not the nightmarish buffoonery of Sologub's "petty demon"?)[26]

By the window, behind a large table, piled high with documents, question sheets, and copies of ***Nabat*** newspapers, sat a lively young fellow. His

[25] A *baryshnya* (literally, a "young lady") was a woman from a former petty-bourgeois or bourgeois family employed in clerical work in a Soviet administrative office.

[26] The Symbolist Fyodor Sologub's 1907 novel **The Petty Demon** was a satricial depiction of Russian provincial life.

eyes were shifty, restless, and searching. His face was hollow-cheeked. He greeted me in a friendly manner, even getting up as I approached. It was immediately apparent that he was trying to create the impression of a clever investigator with a penetrating mind. Moreover, he told me that he was a real worker.

I was slightly winded from climbing the stairs at a fast pace. His insolent, inquisitive stare pissed me off and I reminded him that I declined to give a deposition. Chistyakov (for this was his surname) was taken aback, drummed with his fingers on a massive silver cigarette case, and then, apparently, found a way out of this awkward situation by proposing that I set out in writing the reason for my refusal to give evidence. To this I agreed.

The fact is that up to that time arrested anarchists, in the majority of cases, had given testimony to "comrade" investigators and had even engaged them in discussion. But it was high time to put an end to this, and once you were in prison, the only means of doing this was a written explanation of one's refusal to talk to Chekists. Besides, another thought flashed through my mind: any minute now they could shoot me—our movement was being crushed by arrests and persecution, and there was no freedom of the press. Maybe the sheet of paper on which I was writing would somehow fall into the hands of an objective historian who would thereby possibly arrive at a better understanding of the tragedy of the Russian Revolution, stifled by the hands of "the most revolutionary," "worker-peasant" government.

I wrote, more or less, the following:

"Obeying the dictates of my internal sense of justice, I made my own way in the revolutionary milieu, carrying out cultural-revolutionary work and, as a member of the Secretariat of the Confederation of Anarchist Organizations of Ukraine "Nabat," I fought, to the best of my ability, for the complete and all-round liberation of the labouring classes. For all of my actions, I answer before my own conscience, before my organization, and before the revolutionary non-party mass movement which is coming into its own and for which we work. I consider it unacceptable to answer to people who are strangers to me and hostile to my ideals. Rather it's not me that should be held responsible. It's not me that should be giving testimony. Quite the opposite. J'accuse!

"I accuse the Soviet Government of using its agents to persecute and arrest members of an anarchist organization that staunchly and whole-heartedly struggled for the ideals of the Social Revolution against Petliura, Skoropadsky, etc. I accuse the Soviet Government for the fact that its minions carried out an official trashing of the only anarchist bookstore in Ukraine. And finally, I accuse the Soviet Government of tearing myself and my comrades away from our vital work and casting us into the dungeons of your prisons, stigmatizing us with false and absurd charges. For other than absurd how else can one name charges of disrupting the economic life of the country when the people making these accusations are offering capitalists—both domestic and foreign—privileges and lucrative concessions, and at the same time concentration camps, prisons, and firing squads to revolutionary workers and peasants, and to us anarchists who are trying to build a new life with the help of productive organizations on new, more just, and more economically sound bases.

"Still more foolish and absurd, as it would appear to any sensible person—even someone with little knowledge of our press (and it's the government's fault that our press is so weak)—is the accusation of being counter-revolutionary directed against us, the stalwart and dauntless knights of the Social Republic."

When I began to write the reasons for my refusal, it seemed to me that it would be appropriate to write only a few words, but in the process of writing it became clear to me that I needed to write my refusal so that it would have a collective character. In freedom I would have considered this naïve or unnecessary. But who knows what will happen? I didn't want to exit this life without tossing my own last words to my executioners.

And yet, while writing, I began to feel a vague dissatisfaction with the fact that I had written so much and, possibly, too much. But it wouldn't do to rip it up, or the interrogator might interpret this as faint-heartedness.

But Chistyakov was quite obliging; he tried not to intaserfere, smoking and gazing out the window which overlooked the courtyard of the prison. When I had finished writing, he said, almost regretfully, "Why so little?" and wanted to read it. But he, I suppose, couldn't decipher my handwriting and he asked me to read what I had written to him out loud. (It's also possible that he was asking for the benefit of those who, apparently, were sitting behind a thin partition, for I could hear a rustling sound from that direction.)

I politely agreed, but then soured on the notion, and began to read rapidly and indistinctly, slurring words and hurrying to finish so I could go back to my own cell.

Before leaving I told him that it was stupid not to give us newspapers to read and asked that my letters not be delayed (all my correspondence, of course, passed through his sticky fingers). Strangely enough, he agreed, and went even further, trying to find a newspaper for me, but then he promised to send newspapers tomorrow without fail. He accompanied me to the door in a rather curious manner, even slightly submissive (and who knows, maybe he was being derisive). The guard, looking very bored, was waiting outside. Back in the cell David was awaiting me impatiently. We began to exchange impressions and our conversation extended to long after midnight.

January 14

Today before supper ***Izvestiya*** was thrust to us through the bean slot.[27] Is that any reason to rejoice? The newspaper is bureaucratic in tone, its articles are written as if they are made to order. There is no sense of the pulse of the real Russia, you don't hear its groans, you don't see its everyday struggles. And yet we are extraordinarily glad to get ***Izvestiya***. We read the newspaper out loud. We try to penetrate its sparse chronicle and the heavily-censored news items and grasp the rhythm of the real life of the workers of the cities and villages.

There was only one bad aspect of this: in the semi-darkness of our cell appeared a disruptive visitor: Mr. Politics. During the whole time of our joint incarceration, David and I almost never touched on general political questions. Now, so to speak, we are deafened by the noise from the street, take a lively interest in what is going on in the world, begin to exchange opinions—and again, as earlier in freedom, disputes and differences flare up. In freedom disputes and differences weren't unusual; it was possible even to abuse one another, separate for a few days, and—what do you know—we're glad to get together again. And here we are in prison confined to a dark, damp cell without walks, without sufficient food or something to smoke—this, brother, is a nasty business, even without damned politics. The nerves of both of us are rather high-strung, David has heart problems (he suffers from heart disease), and I am miserable from rheumatism in my legs. Then you're arguing about some minor point and—you can't leave: the door is bolted from the outside. . . .

[27] "Bean slot"—prison terminology meaning the horizontal slot in a cell door through which the food trays are passed.

January 20

The most terrible thing about prison, in my opinion, is not the deprivation of freedom, the inadequate supply of food, or anything along those lines. Of course all this is serious, but it's not the main thing. What's bad is that a person is artificially and forcibly removed from life, from its real concerns and everyday struggles. The prisoner receives free food (whether it's good or bad—that's another question) and living accommodation. In such a situation the prisoner, like it or not, becomes unable to take an interest in his own people—family members, close friends, comrades, etc. In contrast, those in freedom, i.e. the same relatives, close friends, comrades, etc., concern themselves with the prisoner in one way or another. In such a way, little by little, a peculiar and unreal relation to life develops, which might be called prison psychology. Instead of the spirit of living life, we find beautiful but anaemic, sterile theory; instead of revolutionary practice and struggle, we find otherworldliness, romanticism, and phraseology.

Who knows, maybe the tragedy of our revolution is partly because its fate is in the hands of people with a groundless and inauthentic psychology. (And because inauthentic—reactionary: all that does not assist the fullest and most all-round development and flourishing of life is reactionary.) Of course a large part of the upper stratum of the communist party now in power served time either in prison, or in the underground (a voluntary form of seclusion and, like it or not, a form of alienation from life), or in emigration (where in cafés and in secret meetings and congresses they devised plans, programs, and projects). Many of these people, of course, were hard up and starving, but rarely did they take part in the struggle for existence, rarely did they earn their own bread with the sweat of their brow. The majority of them were the objects of concern either of the state (in the form of prison administrations), or members of their party, who risked their lives in carrying out expropriations, or who set aside part of their own meager earnings, to support their leaders, theoreticians, and members of committees, central or otherwise.

During the course of decades, there evolved a handful of dangerous visionaries, not knowing life—in fact long cut off from its life-sustaining breath—and, perhaps secretly or subconsciously, despising it. The February Revolution gave them the possibility of returning to Russian reality from prison, exile, or emigration, and the waves of revolution, thanks to a whole series of circumstances, carried them to the top. And they, supplied with plans, projects, and programs created outside of real life, and consumed by ambition, power-hunger, and the craving for activity, began to assault the spirit of revolutionary life in accordance with the points and paragraphs of their moribund theories.

The revolution was crushed long ago. Apathy, the older sister of reaction, took possession of the hearts of the working population of the formerly revolutionary land. Throughout the country: devastation, hunger, cold, and epidemics. The State long since put its lifeless paw on the labour organizations and twisted them into a ram's horn. The workers were exhausted, lost their confidence, starved, and were terribly tired. Villages here and there were still in a state of unrest, but they were crushed with cruelty unheard-of even in tsarist times. The prisons were chockfull of revolutionaries, as in the old days. And there on high, behind the Kremlin walls dividing them from the labouring masses, live dangerous maniacs writing decrees and orders, and cooking up plans for world revolution. While living in prisons or in the underground, they lost their feeling for real life. . . .

If I were to continue this discussion, it would be easy to prove that unreality, groundlessness, an aversion to real problems and the demands of the day, plus a predilection for empty-sounding phrases—these are illnesses from

which my own brothers sometimes suffer. These weaknesses are the offspring of an aberrant mother, isolated from life and direct participation in it.

But I'm getting tired. Moreover, it looks as if the guard has got his eye on me and I need to surreptitiously hide my notes.

February 2

I haven't written for a long time. That's because David and I received two large parcels of books bearing the signature of Olya Freidlin,[28] member of the "Commission for Aid to Imprisoned and Sick Anarchists Under the Auspices of the Russian Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists." We eagerly immersed ourselves in reading, and were able to obtain permission to have the light on in our cell as long as we want and now our days are spent more productively. This evening David succeeded in surreptitiously removing the hinge of the ventilation window; I helped him to place it noiselessly on the windowsill in such a way that we can now breathe fresh air. If you stand on the windowsill and bend your head, it's possible to see a little piece of the starless, amazingly blue, sky. Great!

[28] Olga (Olya) Freidlin (1894--1973) became an anarcho-communist in 1907. Two years later she was arrested for transporting anarchist literature and sentenced to eight years of *katorga*. In view of her "extreme youth," the sentence was changed to eight years of exile. From 1918 she worked at the anarcho-syndicalist publishing house Golos Truda [The Voice of Labour] in Moscow. In 1919 she became the wife of G. P. Maximoff.

February 3

On the first page of Izvestiya is a bulletin about P. A. Kropotkin's state of health. What hypocrisy! In the columns of any Soviet Pravdas, more often than not they abused Peter Alekseyevich, and they made his life in Dmitrov difficult with all sorts of trifles. His students, followers, and friends were mercilessly persecuted; and now for the greater befuddlement of the proletarians of Western Europe, they will touchingly concern themselves about his pulse.

February 5

hese days I'm reading with special attention **Memoirs of a Revolutionist**, which I hadn't read since 1908. The text is almost devoid of any intimate content, and yet what a wonderful person!

February 8

I was laying on my cot thinking about something. Then an unusual event took place: the new head of the prison Dukes entered quietly, greeted us politely, and handed a piece of paper to David. A thought flashed through my mind: "The Sentence," and, not wishing to reveal to the turnkey my interest in his unexpected visit, I, without changing my position, gazed at the sheet indifferently, as if it were nothing. But noticing that David was somewhat agitated and was attentively studying the sheet without completely understanding its content. I jumped off my cot and also began to read it.

It was a telephonogram from the commission for arranging P. A. Kropotkin's funeral to the Presidium of the V. Ch. K. with a request to inform the arrested anarchists about the death of Peter Alekseyevich. At the bottom was printed an order of the secretary of the Presidium to the head of the internal prison Dukes to inform all the anarchists held in his prison. To tell the truth, what struck me the most at first was that the Chekists were responding to a telephonogram from some anarchist commission and were even passing on the information from freedom to our prison cell/grave. And the prison chief continued to stand with his mournful face, as if he shared a common loss with us. Apparently he didn't know how to take his leave (or, perhaps, he had some kind of secret instructions) and he added:

"If you want to send something in writing to this commission, then I will stop by again today."

Without waiting for our answer, he left with an affected downcast demeanour of the sort which is assumed by undertakers when they are hoping for a big tip.

David and I talked for a long time, discussing the event that had disrupted our prison life—an event that seemed at times almost dream-like.

In the evening we wrote the following declaration to the Presidium of the V. Ch. K.:

"Having received, thanks to you, news about the death of P. A. Kropotkin, we, anarchists, imprisoned in the internal prison of the V. Ch. K., believe that it is possible to express our wish to absent ourselves from prison (under word of honour) to attend the funeral of our teacher.

"We would like to think that you would not view our brief absence as a danger for the Social Revolution."

We discussed this note for a long time. This type of declaration is generally the least intelligible sort of literature. Of course we had to write in this manner so that our request wouldn't be dismissed and, in addition, we had to mention our agreement to give our word of honour that we would not use our brief time of freedom to flee.

David said, "Of course, from our side

this is folly—to hope that they will release us from this kennel. Nevertheless, it was necessary to write this declaration. Firstly, if it remains in the archive of the V. Ch. K., and that's a good thing. And secondly, who knows? We have no idea what's going on outside."

We knocked on the door, and asked the guard to get the prison head for us. Instead the deputy head appeared and took our note.

February 11

So far we haven't received an answer. Both of us try to conceal our nervousness.

David and I began talking today about the revolutionary activity of P. A. Imperceptibly we shifted to painful questions about our theory and practice (anarcho-communism, anarcho-syndicalism, etc.) and our quiet conversation immediately took on a more exasperated tone. No, brother, this is something you must not do: while you are sitting in prison, locked up in a cell, you need to avoid discussions of those questions which can lead to unnecessary mutual friction.

Until evening we paced silently and in a slightly irritated manner from corner to corner. At night, when the light went out, we noiselessly opened the ventilation window and greedily inhaled the intoxicatingly-cold air. Then we held a "literary evening": I briefly recounted to David the biography of Paul Verlaine, including his pursuits and his ups and downs, and then I recited those Verlainian verses which I knew by heart. David, in his turn, with his quiet, slightly melodious voice, declaimed from the younger Russian poets. And I lay on my cot, closed my eyes, and listened to his melodious voice, and was carried far, far away. . .

You know how to smile
With a quiet tremor of eyelashes . . .
Sweetly fluttering in the sky
Flocks of birds in flight.

You know how to be desired
Through everyday words . . .
The wind blows over the savanna
Bending the grass enticingly.[29]

There are no more prisons. . . . I see a desert, parched by the sun, and a youth whose heart is filled with all-embracing love. I also see an innocent smile with gently quivering eyelashes. . . .

[29] *You Know How to Smile* (1900) by Valery Bryusov.

February 14, 3 p.m.

Extremely tired from the kaleidoscopic events of the previous day, from the unusual sensation which those in freedom experience from kisses, handshakes, etc. Nevertheless, I feel that I can't go to sleep until I update my diary.

Yesterday at 10 a.m., when we had already give up any hope of receiving an answer from the Presidium of the V. Ch. K., Dukes entered our cell and asked, without hurrying—as if it was a routine question:

"Are you agreeable to attending the funeral?"

Our eyes opened wide with amazement.

Half embarrassed, half-feigning indifference, Dukes pronounced: "If you are agreed, then you must hurry; they are waiting for you.

He left. It didn't take us long to get ready. A few minutes later the guard, always in a drowsy state, opened our cell. He took us to the fourth floor, to the office of the chief warden, where we found Aron Baron, Fanny Baron, Aleksey Olonetsky, Aleksandr Guyevsky, and Olga Taratuta. Each of us signed a form that we would return to the prison within 24 hours. Then they took us downstairs. We didn't want to talk in front of the Chekists, but there was a general feeling of excitement. Aron, Aleksey, and Sanya (Guyevsky) were especially run down—their faces were quite emaciated. Still worse was the appearance of the two women: Olya, apparently, had gone grey, while Fanny's face had acquired an unhealthy, sallow complexion.

They took us down to the courtyard and released us through the prison's main office. Waiting for us with an automobile was Vladimir Barmash[30] and another comrade whom I didn't know. We asked the comrades why there weren't other arrested anarchists with us, but they told us that the others are all in Butyrki and are on their way. The automobile took us in a few minutes to the House of Unions on Malaya Dmitrovka,[31] where there was a huge crowd of curious people waiting impatiently.

As soon as our automobile appeared, cries of "they're bringing the prisoners" were heard. And the doors of the auto were opened and—we were smothered with kisses. It was evident that I had grown weak from two months of incarceration without any outdoor exercise. My head was spinning from all this commotion, from the kissing, the cheerful exclamations, and the endless handshakes. Someone in the crowd was weeping. An annoying photographer "immortalized" us from every possible angle. And I myself felt childishly uncomfortable and was embarrassed. Embarrassed that we were the object of so much attention, and embarrassed because it seemed as if we had distracted people from the funeral. Embarrassed because I could hardly stand on my own two feet. . . . They took us into the Hall of Columns of the House of Unions, where P. A.'s open coffin was resting on a dais.

I don't have a clear memory of how we carried out the body and how we took it on its last journey. . . .

[30] Barmash was a founder of the anarchist-universalists, a tendency that supported the Soviet state and permitted its members to participate in Soviet institutions, other than repressive ones.

[31] The former Building of the Noble Assembly is actually located on Bolshaya Dmitrovka Street.

Photo taken at the funeral. In the middle are six prisoners on parole: (1) Fanya Baron, (2) Olga (Olya) Taratuta, (3) Aleksandr (Sanya) Guyevsky, (4) David (Little Christ) Kogan, (5) Mark Mrachny or Aleksey Olonetsky, (6) Mark Mrachny or Aleksey Olonetsky. The seventh prisoner, Aron Baron, is not in the photo. Thanks to Sergei Ovsiannikov for these identifications.

It was a beautiful, frosty, sunny day, one of those days when one most deeply senses the beauty of this unusual and semi-fabulous city—Moscow. The march was long and we stumbled along slowly. Over our heads hovered banners. There was a banner for the Nabat Confederation of Anarchist Organizations of Ukraine, there was a banner demanding the release of anarchists from prison torture chambers, and at the front there was a banner of the "Russian Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists." We sang the "March of the Anarchists" out of tune in such a mournful manner that involuntarily my eyes became clouded with tears. (It's more likely that this was due to my not being used to sunlight.)

Someone linked arms with me in an especially friendly manner and began to ask me questions. I didn't recognize the comrade; in fact it might have been the first time I saw him. But his arm supported me firmly, he looked at me attentively, and spoke with a deep, slightly musical voice. It seemed as if in this crowd of unfamiliar people I had met an old, close friend. I felt better and more at ease, answered greetings in a more confident fashion, and looked for close friends and comrades. And I looked at the people, the faces, the banners floating in the bright sunlight—beautiful and transparent, like Pushkin's verse and of the same discreet chastity.

I was tired from the unusually long march, from the dazzling snow crunching under my feet, from the light—and I fell behind. When I arrived at the cemetery,[32] I found myself completely alone among a crowd of strangers. Speeches were being delivered.

Funeral orations have always seemed unnatural to me: death, like love, conquers all without words of welcoming being necessary. Possibly speeches are necessary to the living. It's also possible that I am mistaken in my prejudice, but all speeches seem to me superfluous and pitiful bling in the presence of the Great Silencer—death. . . . Without waiting for the end, I quietly left the cemetery. For some time I walked, lost in thought. Then I looked around and noticed that no one was following me. It meant that I in fact was completely alone—and free. I was overcome by a wave of joy, gentle and pure, like this day. Like a young boy, I wanted to climb a steep hill with a sled and slide down at a dizzying speed. I wanted to stretch out on the soft snow and be saturated by the cold sun, which

[32] Novodevichy Cemetery, about 8 km. from the House of Unions.

so tenderly kisses the land dressed in white. . . .

I started running. Apparently I couldn't walk any more. I was being drawn somewhere. The infrequent passers-by on Moscow's sleepy Sunday streets could see a bearded, bespectacled man, wearing a soldier's overcoat and worn-out boots, running like a frisky colt in the direction of Strastnoy Boulevard. Stumbling, I fell, but got up cheerfully and continued awkward running.

I ran to visit a friend of my youth from whom I had long been fundamentally dissociated, but whom I loved to visit because of his splendid library and his fine taste for books. He greeted me quite warmly and even agreed to send to me in prison whatever authors I wanted. He fished around hesitantly in some poky little room, quite overflowing with books, then found some kind of bundle from which he pulled out some packages of cigarettes. (Apparently the poor man received them as rations and was hoping to exchange them for books or, possibly, food.)

He began to insist that I take the cigarettes. He had such a touching, pleading manner that I was afraid of offending him and took his cigarettes. We sat for a little while, without talking. I began choosing books. I looked for books that would be most appropriate for my monastic existence. In the end I chose a small batch: Montaigne's **Essays** (a good, old-fashioned edition), a little volume of Maeterlinck's shorter plays, Guyau's **Outline of a Morality Without Obligation or Sanction**, and—a Bible. In the quiet presence of these "constant companions" the time of imprisonment will pass splendidly.

Conversation with my friend was awkward. Words seemed unnecessary to me as they couldn't describe my situation. If a deceased person were to return for a few hours from the afterlife, to him it would probably seem that there wasn't much worth talking about. And he, like a stranger from a distant land, would depart without opening his mouth.

I simply pressed my friend's hand firmly, and left for the anarchists' club. In the front room, which was rather large, there were many people, both sitting and standing—workers, young people, and Red Army soldiers. One immediately noticed some gentlemen who were enthusiastically and loudly applauding the speaker, who was standing on a small stage and expounding Kropotkin's teachings. (Were they *shpiks*?[33] Or so it seemed.)

With difficulty I made my way to the next, less crowded, room. There behind a big table in semi-darkness sat various people, the faces of whom I couldn't make out, drinking tea with some kind of marmalade. They were talking excitedly about something; over in a corner a quiet conversation was going on.

Searching for familiar comrades, I went on to the third room. Sitting there were: Alexander Berkman, Alexei Borovoy, Emma Goldman, Grigoriy Maksimov, Aleksandr Schapiro, Olya Freidlin, and some other comrades, whom I either didn't recognize or whom I hadn't known previously. It turned out that a meeting of the "Funeral Committee for P. A. Kropotkin" was just underway. They were waiting for those of us whom they respectfully called "comrade prisoners." They gave us a warm reception and treated us to tea and sandwiches. And they looked at us with friendliness and compassion.

But this was by no means congenial to me. I was tired of the attention and the commiseration and the loud talking (of course I was used to a quiet regime) and some of the curious stares. I don't consider myself either a hero or an ascetic (I'm stating only my own case here) and, moreover, I don't think of myself as unfortunate. I let them continue their conversations while I sought out people I felt closer to in order to enquire about things and people about whom I had been thinking all the time. . . .

I was also affected by fatigue as a result of the unusually strenuous day. I listened in an absent-minded way to what was being said at the table where I was sitting, but had to make a great effort to grasp the content. It was as if a pane of thick glass was preventing the words from reaching my consciousness.

And there, in the second room, Aron Baron was passionately declaiming a loud and strongly-worded speech. At the cemetery he had been able to deliver a resounding rebuff to the Bolsheviks and the rest, but apparently fatigue didn't affect him—he again let loose for an hour. David approached me, hardly able to drag his feet along, encased in huge, ill-fitting boots. Half-plaintively, half-joking, he whispered: "No, brother, it's more peaceful in our apartment."

But he was soon called away. It seems that his younger brother Mark Kogan, who escaped not long ago from the Samara concentration camp, had arrived illegally and, upon learning of our one day of freedom, could not restrain himself and showed up at the club to meet his brother. I was touched by the unexpected meeting of these two prisoners of the dictatorship of the Russian Communist Party. What handsome faces both of them have, and how much bashful-repressed kindness there is in the looks they exchange!

In the evening we went by various routes to the apartment of one young comrade, where there was a meeting of some workers of the Nabat Confederation. A comrade, who had arrived recently from Ukraine, made a report to us on the situation of organizations at the local level. I'm glad to report that in spite of the cold-blooded, harshly-executed crushing of our organizations in the major centres and villages of Ukraine, the surviving comrades have still managed to resume their revolutionary propaganda and organizing work again. A few decisions were agreed on by us at this meeting.

Then another question was raised, one that David and myself found quite unexpected at this point in our vigil: some comrades began to propose to those of us who had been released from the Internal Prison of the V. Ch. K. for 24 hours under our word of honour, that

[33] shpik = police informer.

we go into hiding rather than return voluntarily to prison. Reference was made to the need for stronger organizational work, establishing connections with anarchist groups abroad, etc. Some passports had already been prepared, as well as living quarters, should we agree to abscond. A long and drawn-out discussion was required to prove to the comrades that while our freedom would be extremely desirable, it was imperative not to give our jailer—the Russian Communist Party—the demagogic means of accusing the anarchists of not keeping their word of honour. Secondly, we had to point out what would be the immediate consequence of our flight: the arrests of Moscow comrades and, in particular, the "Funeral Committee for P. A. Kropotkin."

Exhortations and arguments didn't lead anywhere. A generally binding decision on the question of flight was not adopted; instead each of us was given the right to decide this question personally for ourselves. The meeting came to an end. We proceeded to drink tea, and engage in private dialogues, reminiscences, and lively comradely conversations. Baron described his endless squabbles with the head of the prison. Fanny Baron and Olga Taratuta told us about life in Butyrki, where they spent some time in a "freer" prison environment. Jokes came thick and fast and we laughed merrily and light-heartedly.

But, meanwhile, light was fading in the room. The small electric bulbs were giving out a yellowish glow, creating a fantastical effect, and soon a grey winter morning began. Everyone quietened down, and the haggard eyes on emaciated faces affirmed involuntarily that soon, within a few hours, we would have to return to the prison, to the tomb of the Russian Communist Party.

We sat down to quickly write letters to relatives and close friends. We wanted to use the last minutes of our night of freedom to communicate with those who were not with us, but who were in our thoughts. Quietly each of us concentrated on writing in the bluish half-darkness of a February morning, Soon the window of our room was illuminated by the weak, almost apologetic smile of the anaemic sun. . . .

Noiselessly, attracting as little attention as possible in order not to disturb the residents, we made out way along Moscow's almost deserted streets.

When we came to the anarchist club, many of our comrades and friends were waiting for us. We sat with them for a little while, smoking, and exchanging some inconsequential remarks. It wasn't easy to talk—words seemed superfluous and unimportant. And the comrades made great efforts to keep things peaceful, and even cheerful. But the jokes somehow fell flat. The mood was somewhat like that in the cell of a condemned prisoner on death row. In essence our return to the eerily silent Internal Prison can be compared to a slow death. The V. Ch. K. is completely qualified to lay claim to that sign which, according to Dante, is displayed over the entrance to hell: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here."

Some people arrived, firmly shook our hands, and left. Others tried to crack jokes, even talking about a noisy send-off at the prison gates. But we had already decided against such demonstrations, which could only bring about still more arrests and, very likely, provide proof of our impotence. At the same time, there was work to do in freedom that was more necessary and important than sitting in prison. Some comrades insisted on treating us to bread with honeyed tea. Everyone tried in one way or another to express to us their affectionate feelings. And I already had the feeling of being completely absent, and wished to put an end to these minutes, which were distressing for all of us.

We quietly exchanged kisses with all the comrades who came and went out into the street. It was around 11 a.m., and we had already spent a day in freedom and we considered it best to act responsibly. A little snow had fallen and was now melting. We didn't walk hurriedly; most of us experienced shortness of breath as a result of our incarceration, and some of us had worse problems. Poor Guyevsky, in addition, is completely deaf. It seems that he couldn't make out what we were arguing about so passionately during the night. This tough guy, a worker at the Kharkov Locomotive Works, served many years in prison and exile during the Romanov regime, and is now very weak. Moreover, he is tormented by melancholy thoughts about his family: a wife and three small children.

"It's so sad about the little boy, so tiny and intelligent. He loves to read," he says.

In still worse physical condition is his cell-mate—Aleksey Olonetsky. Owing to inadequate nourishment or irregular heartbeat, he has swellings over his whole body. Only his eyes remain the same: childlike, clear, blue. And he has a beautiful, gentle smile. He took my arm and said in a half-joking, half-serious manner:

"You see, friend, doing time isn't so strange. Only it's a pity that I can't chat with anyone occasionally: Sanya (Guyevsky) is deaf . . . like the Soviet authorities. And, you know, curious thoughts occur. But we soon must part, and I'm embarrassed: you may well decide that I'm slightly off my rocker. Anyway, somehow, later, in freedom, we'll have to have a talk."

* * * * *

Now we're at Lubyanka No.2. A crowd of us approached the main door, but the sentry brusquely challenged us, and when we declared that we were returning to prison, he decided that we were either kidding him or had lost our minds. As a joke, I threatened that if they did not grant us hospitality, we would seek accommodation elsewhere.

Another Chekist in civilian clothes appeared and, looking somewhat bewildered, ordered us to go to another entrance. There it was necessary to summon the commandant of the prison; meanwhile, the sentry insisted on seeing our passes. We soon found ourselves in a dirty courtyard of the prison. We quietly shook hands with each

other and dispersed to our various corridors. The guard greeted us not with his usual official manner, but—oh, a miracle!—even began conversing with us. Evidently our one-day "furlough" commanded his respect.

David is sleeping now. As for me, I'm somehow not able to sleep. I'm recalling various fragments of the day that so quickly flashed by, I'm mentally experiencing once more this memorable day, with the funeral music and the singing ringing in my ears. It's as if I had taken with myself into the half-dark cell a little of that grief that brings us together, provoked by the funeral of Peter Alekseyevich, such a sincere, great, and genial person in life.

February 23

Again we are pacing from corner to corner. The silence is broken only by the occasional cry of the guard: "Quiet, citizens!" We don't speak sometimes for whole days. Only during the few minutes of reading the newspapers do we exchange a few words. And the newspapers are read with great interest now: the question about relations with the trade unions has precipitated a huge split (seriously!) in the Russian Communist Party. And sometimes there appear rather frank statements for which a mere mortal, not possessing a RCP membership card, would certainly get into trouble.

Afterword

After February, 1921, Mrachny was shuffled from one Moscow prison to another: from Butyrki to Lefortovo to Taganka. In July, 1921, he took part in a collective hunger strike which allowed him to gain his freedom on condition that he leave the country. He did so in January, 1922, together with eight comrades. (For details, see A. V. Dubovik and G. P. Maximoff, ***A Grand Cause: The Hunger Strike and the Deportation of Anarchists From Soviet Russia***, Kate Sharpley Library, 2008).

While based in Berlin, he engaged in support work for anarchists suffering repression in Russia. In 1927 he emigrated to Canada, then in the following year to the USA, where he supported himself as a teacher. In 1934 he qualified as a doctor of medicine, specializing in psychoanalysis and psychiatry. He continued to be active in the anarchist movement throughout the 1930s as a writer and editor but the defeat of the Spanish revolution brought an end to his activism. Nevertheless, he preserved his anarchist convictions till the end of his life.

Mark Mrachny's diary was serialized in the Russian-American monthly journal ***Volna***: No. 53 (May, 1924), pp. 42-48; No. 54 (June, 1924), pp. 38-43; No. 55 (July, pp. 39-44; No. 56 (August, 1924), pp. 40-44. ***Volna*** ceased publication with No. 58 and the diary remains incomplete, although more of it may turn up in Mrachny's papers, scattered through several archives.

Volna (1921–1924), published successively in Cleveland, Detroit, and New York, was an illegal publication throughout its existence with a circulation in the range 1,000 to 1500.

Translation and editing by Malcolm Archibald.

Biographical data in the notes draws on the research of Anatoliy Dubovik.

Appendix 1

Letter by Mark Mrachny to a Swedish Anarcho-syndicalist

December 3, 1923

Dear comrade![34]

I've received your letter with 256 kronas and newspapers. I thank you in the name of the Committee for the Defense of Arrested Revolutionaries in Russia.[35] For us, and still more for those arrested in Russia, it's important to know that our comrades in every country are thinking about us. And even a modest sum, despite the high cost of living in Russia, is probably sufficient to mitigate the lives of four or five comrades for several days.

Kharkov from Kholodnaya Gora (Cold Mountain) in 1916.

Several days ago our Committee petitioned the IWA[36] for help. In particular, we were concerned about two comrades, Ivan Akhtyrsky[37] and David Kogan, who have been missing for a year now.

I have known David Kogan for many years. In 1917 he edited the anarchist newspaper "Black Banner" in Samara. In addition, he worked in the anarchist federation of Samara. When the counterrevolutionary general Kolchak occupied the city, David Kogan spent a long time in prison and it was only thanks to a miracle that he avoided being tortured to death. In 1919 this comrade arrived in Kharkov (Ukraine). There he lived in the underground (due to persecution by the Bolshevik government) under the name of Lev Rubin. He worked at the anarchist publishing house Free Brotherhood, which published Kropotkin's **Mutual Aid** and [Jean] Grave's **The Society of the Future**, among other items. In June 1919 we had to flee under pressure from the Denikinists, and only David Kogan (Lev Rubin) with a few comrades remained there illegally in order to continue our work.

It's difficult to describe the horrible conditions under which our little anarchist group in Kharkov had to work during the terror of Denikin's bands. The prisons were filled to overflowing. Workers, peasants, and revolutionaries of all parties were imprisoned; almost the whole of our Kharkov group were arrested. Some of our comrades, among them Benjamin, Kostya Okonyevsky, the 18-year-old comrade Hershel Tsin, and others we still don't know about, died a martyr's death at the hands of the Denikinist butchers. David Kogan (Lev Rubin) was also in prison. Each day, each night, each hour, he expected that drunken officers would come to kill him. And yet a few weeks before the Bolsheviks again installed themselves in Kharkov, he succeeded in freeing himself.

When the Bolsheviks arrived in January, 1920, they were probably ashamed at first of putting a stop to the propaganda work of the anarchists, who had just recently been liberated from Denikinist prisons along with many communists. But this "idyll" didn't last long, and the Cheka set to work zealously. The whole membership of the anarchist club in Kharkov was arrested, including David Kogan, who again sat in prison, not knowing what would be his fate.

The prison still had its name from tsarist times: "Convict (*katorzhnaya*) Prison on Cold Mountain." When I arrived in Kharkov from Siberia in June, 1920, a small circle of comrades decided to liberate David Kogan, and they

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[34] It's not clear to whom Mrachny was writing since the envelope that goes with the letter was not preserved. Presumably it was one of the two Swedes who served along with Mrachniy on the editorial board of ***Rabochiy Put'*** [The Worker's Path], a monthly Russian anarcho-syndicalist newpaper published in Berlin in 1923. The Swedish editors were Albert Jensen and S. Berglund (probably Inga Sofia Berglund—thanks to Vadim Damier for this possible identification).

[35] This committee, formed in Berlin in June, 1923, was a joint effort by Russian anarchist, anarcho-syndicalist, and Left Socialist Revolutionary foreign bureaus.

[36] IWA = International Workers' Association, the anarcho-syndicalist International. Its founding congress was held in Berlin in December, 1922.

[37] The anarcho-communist Ivan Akhtyrsky was a veteran of the Kharkov anarchist underground.

were successful. In July, August, and September, he was living again in the underground in Kharkov, and took an active part in the work of the underground conference of the Nabat Confederation of Anarchist Organizations of Ukraine where he was elected to the new Secretariat.[38]

This was a time when limitless energy was required. Physically David Kogan was very weak—he could barely move—and yet he did everything that he could. Then there was a brief armistice. According to the agreement of Makhno's Insurgent Army with the Bolshevik government, anarchist organizations were allowed to conduct propaganda legally in Ukraine. The Nabat newspaper began to appear legally and we received invitations on a daily basis from factories and other enterprises to send our agitators and conduct large meetings. These were weeks of feverish educational work.

Then the Bolsheviks again broke the agreement. On the night of November 25, 1920, we were all arrested again. In the Kharkov prison there were around 300 comrades. In one cell were A. Baron, Voline, Tarasiuk, David Kogan, and myself. Several weeks later we were transferred to Moscow, where I found myself in a cell with David Kogan in one of the most horrible prisons. (I described one episode of this incarceration in ***A Cry for Help*** No. 1.)[39] On April 26, 1921, all the prisoners in Butyrki [Prison] were transferred to the provinces. David Kogan, along with around 12 political prisoners, among them Fanny Baron (who was later shot by the Cheka), were placed in a prison in Riazan. With the help of some comrades, David Kogan succeeded in escaping.[40]

Before I was expelled from Russia in December, 1921, I was able to speak one more time with David Kogan, who was then living illegally in Petersburg. In spite of his physical weakness and personal grief (his child had died during his imprisonment), he was still carrying on political activity. He was working on creating an association of workers in the field of economics.

After this I never saw David Kogan again. I knew only that soon after this he was again arrested and that he succeeded in escaping from Butyrki together with Ivan Akhtyrsky; then both comrades were again arrested. In October, 1922, they disappeared. We are very worried about the fate of these two comrades, and we are relying on the international support of our comrades in order to force the Soviet government to tell us the truth about the state of health of both comrades.

It's hard for me to describe what a popular person Comrade David Kogan was. Perhaps you get a notion of it if I tell you that among comrades he was known under the name "Little Christ." Being a strict vegetarian, he was often forced to starve both in freedom and in prison. His body was weak and he suffered from anaemia, but he possessed the rarest spirit that I have ever encountered. I hope that you will take an interest in the state of health of both comrades and do everything you can to find out something definite about their fates.

My fraternal greetings to you and to Sonya.

Mark Mrachny

P. S. Your last letter deserved a more detailed answer, but I see that my knowledge of German is too slender and that you misunderstood me on the organizational question. My letter is already too long and I hope you will forgive me for taking up so much of your time. I would be very grateful if you would be so kind as to write to me about what's happening now at the revolutionary syndicalist congress.[41]

[38] This conference was held in Kharkov on August 3–8, 1920.

[39] It has not been possible to identify this item, probably a prisoner support publication in the German language.

[40] This prison break took place on June 19, 1921, and was organized by the Riazan section of anarchist-universalists, The escapees included six anarchists, two Makhnovists, and one Socialist-Revolutionary.

[41] A conference of the International Workers' Association was held in December, 1923, in Innsbruck, Austria.

Source

Mrachny's letter has a complicated history. It was found in the Centre for the Preservation of Historico-Documentary Collections in Moscow (TsKhIDK) by T. Vasilyeva and V. Krivenkiy who translated it from the German, and published it in the popular magazine ***Rodina*** (No. 8, 1994, pp. 45-48) with copious notes. The TsKhIDK archive contained so-called trophy collections that had been confiscated in Western Europe at the end of World War II. At some point the letter had been donated to the Paris branch of the International Institute of Social History (based in Amsterdam). In 1940 it was removed to Germany by the Nazi special services, where it was acquired by the Red Army. The archival reference is TsKhIDK. F.1345. Op.1345. D.40. L.1-4. This archive was absorbed into Russian State Military Archive (RGVA) in 1999.

Appendix 2

The Fates of Ivan Akhtyrsky and David Kogan

Despite the efforts of the anarchists and their allies in the international labour movement, the Soviet government refused to give out any information about the fates of Ivan Akhtyrsky and David Kogan. But by 1924 it was clear to the anarchists that they were no longer among the living. It was only in 2022 that definite information was obtained from an official Russian government source. In response to a request by researcher Sergei Ovsiannikov, the following letter was issued:

Central Archive
Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation
Moscow, February 8, 2022

Dear Sergei Aleksandrovich!

Your request, submitted by email to the Central Archive of the FSB of Russia, has been reviewed.

We inform you that in the Central Archive of the FSB of Russia there is a criminal file N° H-1733 (generated in 1922) relating to Ivan Aleksandrovich Akhtyrsky-Averyanov and a criminal file N° P-46278 (generated in 1920) relating to Lev-David Mikhailovich Levin-Kogan (Rubin).

According to the materials in his file, Akhtyrsky-Averyanov was a Russian born in 1890, a citizen of the USSR, a native of the city of Kharkov with a secondary education, and an anarchist.

He was arrested on February 4, 1922, for "participation in the work of an underground organization of anarchists."

By a decision of a judicial collegium of the GPU dated September 30, 1922, on a charge of "carrying on anarchist underground work, homicide, and escape from Butyrsky Prison," Akhtyrsky-Averyanov was sentenced to the highest measure of punishment—death by shooting.

The law of the Russian Federation "Concerning the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression" did not apply to I. A. Akhtyrsky, as he was found guilty of committing a common criminal crime.

Lev-David Mikhailovich Levin-Kogan (Rubin) was born in 1890, had no fixed address and no definite occupation, was a professional revolutionary, and an ideological opponent of the Bolshevik Party. He was a member of the Secretariat of the anarchist federation Nabat.

He was arrested on February 9, 1922, and charged with "active participation in an anarchist organization and taking part in robberies."

A military collegium of the Supreme Tribunal of the VTsIK [All-Russian Cental Executive Committee] on December 12, 1922, on a charge of committing crimes . . . sentenced him to the highest measure of punishment -- death by shooting.

In accordance with the findings of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation, on October 28, 1996, [Kogan] was rehabilitated.

. . .

Deputy Head of the Archive

Ovsiannikov comments: It's gratifying that the curtain has raised on the fates of the Kharkiv underground activist Ivan Akhtyrsky and the Nabatsi David Kogan. Their comrades—who organized actions abroad in their support, wrote letters, and distributed leaflets—guessed about their sad fates. But the Bolshevik authorities stubbornly withheld information about them. The so-called law on rehabilitation is flawed. Some goons in the public prosecutor's office suddenly became experts in historical rehabilitation! Hence the idiocy that Akhtyrsky and Kogan were shot for the same crime, and modern "experts" decided to rehabilitate one and not the other. In principle you don't need this "rehabilitation"—just open the archives, the same as in Ukraine, and we will find out for ourselves whether there were "common crimes."