

Screenplay for the film "1929 — Kulaks of Russia. Historical Chronicles with Nikolai Svanidze" written by Marina Zhukova, translated by AI, and preceded by a summary also written by AI

Screenplay Summary:

The text portrays 1929 in the Soviet Union as a turning point where cultural repression, peasant destruction and the consolidation of the repressive apparatus all intersect.

It begins with the story of Mikhail Bulgakov's play *Flight*. Platon Kerzhentsev, deputy head of the Agitation and Propaganda Department and a former literary critic, writes a report to the Politburo. He fully recognizes the artistic quality and humanism of the play, but concludes that it will evoke sympathy and compassion for its protagonists—supporters of the White movement. That, by 1929, is politically unacceptable. He therefore recommends banning the play and stopping all preparatory work at the Moscow Art Theatre. A special commission including Voroshilov and Kaganovich later formalizes this decision. In the background stands the real-life model for Bulgakov's general Khludov: General Yakov Slashchev, a brilliant White commander in Crimea, who emigrated, lived in poverty, then returned to Soviet Russia to teach tactics to future Red Army marshals, only to be closely watched by the GPU and finally murdered in Moscow in January 1929.

The narrative then shifts to the countryside, focusing on the peasant Mikhail Ustinovich Malkov and his extended family in the Kurgan district of the Urals. Their ancestors had lived there since the mid-18th century. These peasants had never known serfdom: they owned or rented land, worked extremely hard, invested in tools, small processing ventures (oil, tar, tanning), and livestock. Under the New Economic Policy (NEP), they had rebuilt rural life; families were large, and, by village standards, reasonably well-off.

From the late 1920s, however, the state suddenly cuts grain procurement prices, piles on new taxes and forces peasants to subscribe to state loans. The villagers resist: they hide grain, reduce sown area, slaughter their animals rather than hand them over. The authorities respond with Criminal Code Article 107 (prison plus confiscation), with "self-taxation" campaigns, with village activists recruited among the poorest and most marginal, with systematic searches and a network of informers that corrodes the peasant family from within.

At the same time, Stalin formulates the doctrine of accelerated industrialization and the "sharpening of class struggle" as socialism advances. He openly describes the extra tax on the peasantry as a "tribute" to maintain industrial growth, and in December 1929 announces the shift to "liquidating the kulaks as a class." Dekulakization becomes a mass operation: social boycotts, seizure of property, brutal beatings and humiliations, rapes, torture in village reading huts, and finally the deportation of entire families in mid-winter to remote regions. The often fictitious debts attributed to kulaks are transferred to poor peasants entering the new collective farms, condemning them to work for years virtually unpaid.

Parallel to events in the countryside, the text recounts Maxim Gorky's visit to the Solovki special-purpose camp. The regime carefully stages a sanitized showcase: torture devices are removed, prisoners are given white coats, a fake reading room is arranged, a concert of classical music is performed. Gorky is allowed to speak to a fourteen-year-old boy who tries to tell him the truth; he

comes out in tears, but the next day leaves behind a glowing entry praising the “energy” of the camp authorities. As soon as his boat sails, the boy is shot. Prisoners dressed in rags are literally hidden under a tarpaulin so Gorky will not see them.

The fate of the Malkov family culminates in deportation: driven from their home under guard, their possessions looted under the slogan of “justice for the poor,” they are crammed into cattle cars, while local bosses ride in a passenger car with windows. Somewhere on a remote stretch of track, the deportees are dumped into the snow. In the wagon, Malkov tells his sons that what is being done to them is “a crime against humanity,” echoing the 1915 declaration by Britain, France and Russia about the Armenian massacres. The narrator concludes by noting how the living memory of hundreds of thousands of destroyed peasants has almost vanished, surviving only in a few village reminiscences about “a kulak who had a mill and a daughter who played violin in the club.”

Screenplay:

1929 – Dekulakization

In the first days of January 1929, the deputy head of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the VKP(b), Platon Mikhailovich Kerzhentsev, wrote a memorandum to the Politburo about a new play by Mikhail Bulgakov, *Flight (Beg)*.

Before joining the RSDLP in 1904, Kerzhentsev had completed four years at the Historical-Philological Faculty of Moscow University. Party work in emigration in England, the United States and France, and later service in the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, did not obscure his true calling. Platon Kerzhentsev was a censor by vocation. He did not suffer from the complexes of Leonty Vasilievich Dubelt, the gendarme colonel–censor from the time of Nicholas I, who rummaged through Pushkin’s papers after his death. As a young man, Dubelt had been connected with the Decembrists, and in 1837 he comforted himself with the thought that, in his censorial and police post, he was forced to atone for the sins of his youth.

Kerzhentsev in 1929 was free of such feelings. With the eye of a professional literary critic, he saw all the merits of Bulgakov’s play, accurately assessed its humanism, and with relish recommended that it be banned. He wrote: “The working-class spectator rejects this play”; “The Art Council of Glavrepertkom has unanimously spoken out against this play.” And finally, from himself personally: “Forbid the staging of the play *Flight*. Order the theatre to cease all preliminary work on it (discussions, readings, study of roles, and so forth).” The theatre Kerzhentsev had in mind was the Moscow Art Theatre.

The prototype of the main character of Bulgakov’s *Flight*, General Roman Khludov, was General Yakov Slashchev, who was killed in Moscow on 11 January 1929. When Kerzhentsev wrote his memorandum about the play, Slashchev was still alive. Yakov Alexandrovich Slashchev was one of the most active participants in the defense of Crimea against the Reds in the winter and autumn of 1920. He left Crimea before the mass evacuation of the troops of the Russian Army commanded by General Wrangel. Until the autumn of 1921, he lived in Constantinople. The émigré organization “Zemsky Union” gave Slashchev a farm where he raised turkeys.

He published a pamphlet entitled *I Accuse*. In it he accused General Wrangel of surrendering Crimea. An officers’ court of honor stripped him of his rank, the right to wear uniform, and his

pension. The farm brought in no income. The Cheka took an interest in him. As a result, on 11 November 1921, Slashchev returned to Sevastopol, where he was met in person by Dzerzhinsky. In Moscow, he was given a job corresponding to his profession—lecturer in tactics.

For seven years, Slashchev taught at the Higher Tactical Rifle School for Command Personnel “Shot”, named after the Third International. Among his cadets were future generals and marshals of the Great Patriotic War—Vasilevsky, Malinovsky, Tolbukhin, Batov. His memoir *Crimea in 1920* was written with the help of political worker and writer Furmanov, the author of *Chapayev*.

From 1927, Slashchev was under increased surveillance by the GPU due to the start of the campaign of repression against the old specialist officers. One of the possible charges against him was that he was “getting young Red cadets drunk.”

On 11 January 1929, the morning after his birthday, Slashchev was killed in his room in an outbuilding of house number 3 on Krasnokazarmennaya Street. His killer, Lazar Kolenberg, was taking private tactics lessons from Slashchev at home. Kolenberg said he had planned the murder long ago, out of revenge for his brother, who died in Crimea during the Civil War. Kolenberg was declared insane.

The final decision on Bulgakov’s play *Flight* was taken by a special commission consisting of Voroshilov, Kaganovich and Smirnov. On 29 January 1929, Voroshilov wrote to Stalin: “I inform you that the members of the commission have familiarized themselves with the content of the play and have judged it politically inexpedient to stage it in the theatre.”

Signature: K. Voroshilov.

It is a pity no artist painted a monumental canvas entitled: “The Voroshilov–Kaganovich Commission Discusses Bulgakov’s Play *Flight*.”

In reality, everything had been taken care of before Voroshilov, by the efforts of an excellent literary critic in the service of Soviet power. Platon Kerzhentsev had stated plainly: “Bulgakov’s play *Flight* will arouse sympathy and compassion for the heroes.” In other words, for the White movement. In 1929, the circle of those who under no circumstances were to arouse sympathy and compassion expanded sharply. From then on, it included the most able-bodied and responsible segments of the hereditary Russian peasantry.

In 1929, in the Kurgan district of the Ural region of the RSFSR, there lived, with his large family, a peasant named Mikhail Ustinovich Malkov. He was forty-eight. His ancestors had lived there since the mid-18th century. The local peasants had never known serfdom, that is, they were used to independent, free labor. They lived on the border between Russia and Siberia.

Before 1906, the word “Siberia” was understood as a place of exile, a special, separate territory of the Russian Empire. From 1906, with the beginning of Pyotr Stolypin’s agrarian reform, Siberia became a new land to be mastered by the landless peasantry from European Russia. Stolypin’s reform was interrupted by the First World War, the Revolution and the Civil War. In the Trans-Urals and Siberia, peasants who owned their land saw no point in Soviet power. For the right to work freely on their own land, they fought the Bolsheviks to the death during the Civil War.

After the announcement of the NEP, that is, with the first opportunity to run their farms sensibly, rural life calmed down and entered a normal phase. The first indicator of a return to normal life in the village was the growth of families. Over nine years, from 1922 to 1930, families typically had

4–5 children under the age of eight. If we count peasant children born before the war, families often had 7–10 children or more.

The Kurgan peasant Mikhail Ustinovich Malkov had six children. He ran the farm and lived together with his younger brothers. The main authority in the household and in the farm was their mother, Agafya Nikolayevna. With her own eyes she would not see the nightmare of dekulakization and the death of her family. At the end of 1928, she left to join her youngest son. He had graduated from the Omsk Forestry Academy and worked in Kazakhstan, at a technical school he had organized himself. In the early 1920s, all the relatives still lived in one house: 21 people, of whom 10 were children from one to fifteen years old. In 1925, the family of Mikhail Ustinovich moved to a separate house, but the big family cooperative continued. His son, Viktor, later wrote in his memoir *Dekulakization—How It Happened*: “For our family, this was a good time, and for us, the little ones, a joyful childhood. Of course, that’s from the point of view of a nine-year-old village boy.”

The family worked all year round. The land they rented lay 20 kilometers from the village. They went there every day for all kinds of agricultural work. In August, they even took the geese there to fatten on dropped ears of grain. Besides the rented land, there was also allotment land nearby, sort of their own.

By the time of 1929, during the NEP, strong Ural and Siberian peasants had practically regained the plots they had farmed before the Civil War. Some had up to 100 dessiatins under lease. A dessiatin is a bit more than a hectare. So there were families farming more than 100 hectares.

Peasant Mikhail Malkov had three horses. Some people had ten. There was livestock of all kinds in every yard.

They also had agricultural machinery. Mikhail Ustinovich bought a horse-drawn seed drill and a reaper–binder known as a “lobogreyka”. This tender nickname (“forehead warmer”) comes from the fact that working on this machine was extremely hard: the forehead got warm not after a day’s work, but after a single strip of cutting. Your shirt was soaked, your face dripping with sweat. One of the Malkov brothers set up the production of lubricants from resin extracted from pine roots. From birch bark he learned to make tar for greasing leather boots. They sold these products in the village, and sometimes took them to the market in Kurgan. The furnace where this production took place was built away from the village. Next to this mini-plant was a vegetable garden where they grew potatoes, so they would not have to haul them back and forth from home and waste time and effort.

Firewood and raw materials were procured by the whole family, including the children. That was in summer. Winter lasted up to half a year. In winter, the women wove cloth from the flax they had grown and sewed clothes from it. State textile factories were unable to provide clothing for the peasant population. Mikhail Malkov allowed himself to wear a calico shirt only on holidays. There were no blankets in the house: instead they had homemade woven coverlets and sheepskin coats made from their own sheep. Every kopeck was counted; everything was invested in the business. They did not dream of fancy clothes, they worried about good food. To work hard, children needed to eat their fill.

The Malkovs sowed everything—wheat, oats, rye, barley, poppy, flax, hemp.

From flax and hemp seeds, the Malkov family made oil. They set up an oil press. In fact, they had done all that even before the Revolution. In winter, peasants from neighboring villages came to the Malkov house for oil. In addition, after a family council, the Malkovs decided to take up tanning. They entrusted this to the youngest brother. At first they processed only their own hides, then they began to take in orders.

And the Malkovs also bred a special kind of turkeys.

People like the Malkovs are who were called kulaks. There was a folk explanation of this word: “kulak” (fist) because he slept on his fist—his fingers clenched in a fist serving as a pillow at night, and not unclenching by day while he worked. A kulak is a workaholic.

Under the NEP, in a period of free trade in their grain, an ordinary Ural village family supported itself and fed three townspeople. Those who were classed as kulaks fed fifteen townspeople. The Kurgan district, where the Malkovs cherished their cows, exported annually, through the district butter cooperative, 150–160 poods of butter to England during the NEP. The Kurgan bacon factory shipped up to 100,000 poods of bacon a year to England up to 1929.

Already in 1927, in place of the Union of Credit Cooperatives destroyed after the Revolution, there arose the Agricultural Credit Union. This organization united, on a voluntary basis, the financial strength of more than 100,000 individual peasant farms. It was precisely on these pooled private funds that, during the NEP, elevators, butter plants and processing factories were built. Among the plans for the near future was a farm machinery plant that would also produce tractors.

It was against this relatively prosperous backdrop that the state sharply lowered procurement prices for grain and introduced a new additional tax. Peasants simultaneously and across the country refused to sell grain at the low price. Peasants were running their farms without any state subsidies. Selling grain was the source of both their subsistence and the development of their farms. The task of the authorities was to squeeze money out of the countryside for accelerated industrialization and to take grain for export, again for the sake of the same industrialization. Stalin’s idea of accelerated industrialization was absolutely adventurist. The USSR had no economic levers to implement accelerated industrialization. Moreover, the idea itself was not original. Stalin borrowed it from Trotsky. Trotsky himself was expelled from Moscow to Alma-Ata in January 1928. When expelled from Moscow, Trotsky refused to go voluntarily. GPU officers carried him in their arms. On 18 January 1929, the Special Conference of the OGPU Collegium formalized the decision to deport Trotsky outside the USSR. On 22 January, he was taken from Alma-Ata to Frunze, put on a train, and informed of his deportation to Constantinople. Trotsky protested. He demanded to be sent to Germany. The train stood in the steppe for twelve days while they awaited a reply from Moscow. Germany, which twelve years earlier had ensured the Bolsheviks’ arrival in Russia, now refused Trotsky a visa. On the steamer *Ilyich*, Trotsky was taken to Constantinople—a city filled with refugees from the Russian Revolution and with officers of Wrangel’s army, the very characters of Bulgakov’s banned play *Flight*.

On 28 May 1928, at a meeting with students of the Institute of Red Professors and the Communist Academy, Stalin publicly announced for the first time that there was a correct and convenient way to seize grain from the peasants. He said: “It is the transition from individual peasant farming to collective, socialized farming.”

A month and a half later, at the July 1928 plenum, Stalin formulated his famous thesis about the sharpening of class struggle as one moves toward socialism.

At the same July plenum, speaking about yet another tax on the countryside, Stalin said: “The additional tax on the peasantry is something like a tribute that we take in order to preserve the tempo of industrial development.” Stalin’s use of the word “tribute” is telling. In one sense, tribute defines the financial relations between a victor and a conquered population. In another sense, it refers to a feudal system of taxation. In any case, the word “tribute” as used by Stalin meant that in many respects the country was returning to the Middle Ages.

The peasants paid taxes: income tax, land tax, agricultural tax, craft tax, an extra tax. In 1928, a self-taxation levy was introduced. Officially, the funds from this new tax were to be spent on the social and cultural needs of the village.

The men in the village reacted: “Probably the policy is that the muzhik won’t haul his grain, and that’s why they’re introducing self-taxation.” The amount of the tax was to be approved by a general village meeting. To collect it, thousands of plenipotentiaries were sent out. They were forbidden to return until the tax was collected in full. The general meetings rejected the idea of self-taxation. From the district, the plenipotentiaries were given the instruction: if the village meeting does not vote for self-taxation, sharply increase the number of “disenfranchised”—class-alien elements deprived of the right to vote. Village soviets drew up lists of the discontented and sent them to the district executive committee. At the district office, the lists were signed without being read. The village soviets were advised to rely on the poor peasant “activists.”

In reality, during the short NEP period, under market conditions, the countryside naturally and quickly divided into sober, hard-working, enterprising people and a half-drunk rabble that neither could nor wanted to work and was therefore inclined to envy. This rabble, which in the coming years would form the support of Soviet power in the village, and the poor peasants were not the same thing at all. The real dividing line in the village did not run between kulaks and poor peasants. The “poor” in the village of 1928–1929 were those whose income, for subjective reasons, was lower than that of middle peasants and kulaks. In the countryside, these reasons always begin with how many sons a family has and the state of the family’s health. Daughters in a family are always a loss. Malkov was lucky: he had three brothers and sons, although the sons were still small. The eldest had died. Twice a year, for the period of sowing and harvest, they hired five farmhands. In the NEP village, the use of hired labor had been allowed since 1922. Kulak farms accounted for 15 percent of all farmhands, poor farms for 9 percent.

Most hired labor was used in middle-peasant farms, which by 1929 formed the majority. Often, those who managed to become “kulaks” were peasants who had fought in the Red Army during the Civil War. These people, both kulaks and middle peasants, did not want and could not pay yet another tax. And to collect the tax, village assemblies, for the sake of formality, were held eight or ten times. Opponents of the new tax were arrested. In the plenipotentiaries’ reports, the phrase “an order was given to arrest” was the most frequent.

Mikhail Ustinovich Malkov, with his brothers and their wives, discussed what was happening. In a neighboring village, at the first meeting, of the 360 people with the right to vote, 33 came. The next day, 71 turned up. Forty-eight voted for the tax—that is, the majority. The minutes did not record the number of those present, only the fact that the vote passed.

In another village, a plenipotentiary met a drunken woman in the street, arrested her, and locked her up for the night. In the morning, under threat of prison, he found out who was distilling moonshine. Distilling was forbidden. All the moonshiners turned out to be absolutely destitute. They were all

promised freedom on the condition they vote for the tax and urge heavy drinkers to do the same. In that village, the tax passed on the first try.

Mikhail Malkov voted for the tax on the second try. He was not going to abandon his farm or leave the village. That meant there was nowhere to go.

Meanwhile, a forced subscription to state loans began in the countryside. They came to Mikhail Malkov at night.

In the memo for loan propagandists, it was recommended to come and talk about the loan at night. Mikhail Ustinovich already knew that at school his children were being told that every pupil must become an active propagandist for buying bonds in his own family. Malkov did not want to tempt his children's still fragile souls. He agreed to buy bonds. To pay for them, he slaughtered a cow. Everywhere, in response to the financial aggression of the state, livestock were being slaughtered. In statistics, this negative and extremely dangerous phenomenon was interpreted as "growth of market-oriented livestock production."

Many of Malkov's neighbors tried immediately to get rid of the government bonds. The massive dumping of bonds in the village and in the town was a characteristic feature of early 1929. In response, so-called "loan assistance commissions" were set up at village soviets. It was only possible to sell back your bonds with the commission's permission—in other words, virtually impossible. Two years later, people would be ordered to deposit their bonds in savings banks for at least three years. The results of this coercive measure would be presented as a rise in term savings of the population.

Mikhail Ustinovich Malkov did not sell his bonds. He lined the inside of a chest lid with them.

As early as 1928, Article 107 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR was being widely applied. It prescribed deprivation of freedom plus confiscation of property. The trick was that Article 107 was not addressed specifically to kulaks, so its effect could be extended to any peasant who refused to deliver grain at rock-bottom prices. Confiscation threatened everyone; only the terms of imprisonment varied. Hiding grain was a mass phenomenon.

Seed grain was hidden in a special way. Peasants guarded their seeds as, in wartime, they guard their children. Seed stocks were buried at outlying farmsteads, in the forest, hidden in wells. Door-to-door searches were already common by 1928. Officials carried pitchforks and metal probes. They probed everything in the granary, inspected the bathhouse, and at the same time made a list of anything that might later be confiscated.

A local plenipotentiary asked the district: "Can we search the families of Red Army soldiers?" "Yes, you can," replied the district party secretary.

The plenipotentiaries were unable to keep track of every peasant. So it occurred to them to recruit informers from within the families. Active work began to undermine the peasant family. Members of the Komsomol were indispensable in the bread-seizure campaign. They lived in the village, did not work, did not produce grain; they confiscated it. But there were few of them: village youth were put to work from childhood and did not think of politics. They fed themselves and the country. Women were not suitable as informers. They wanted real family well-being. You couldn't buy them with trinkets. In 1929, after the NEP was rolled back, there were no trinkets anyway: consumer goods were in total short supply. Mikhail Ustinovich's wife, Alexandra Nikiforovna, went to

Kurgan on some business and tried at the same time to buy some simple soap. She failed. At the shop they told her: "There are no prospects of getting any soap at all."

Back home, Alexandra Nikiforovna said: "They say the village soviets got an order from the district party committee to exchange grain for rotgut. Look what we've come to."

Already in 1928, there was no food for all those imprisoned for hiding grain and not paying taxes. New prisoners were added on new charges. Middle and poor peasants, unable to stand the total tax pressure, sharply reduced their sowing. For that too, now, the authorities were sending them to prison. Mass arrests took away a significant part of the village's labor force. Before the 1928 harvest, a decree of the People's Commissariat of Justice decided "to immediately free middle and poor peasants convicted for non-delivery of surplus grain." After the harvest, plenipotentiaries came back to the villages. This time, rural public commissions were set up under them, and their members also became responsible for the bread procurement plan. By 1929, the only people from whom grain could still be taken were the kulaks. Kulak farms, being stronger and better equipped, were still able to operate. The commission chose boycott as a means of pressure on fellow villagers.

In 1929, the boycott system against the bread-producing kulak meant the following: every resident of the village, under threat of criminal punishment, was forbidden to speak to the boycotted kulak and members of his family. Komsomol members bricked up his windows and gates, blocked chimneys, spoiled wells. Kulak children were expelled from school or forced publicly to renounce their parents. The kulak was forbidden to appear in public places; often he was forbidden to leave the village or meet with relatives. He was denied medical care.

In some villages, the population united against the authorities' actions. To suppress resistance, whole villages were placed under boycott.

Members of the commission, together with the plenipotentiary and a representative of the OGPU, went from house to house. They scooped up all the grain that remained. The problem already arose of bringing grain back to the village to feed completely cleaned-out poor peasants.

On 28 June 1929, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR adopted a decree "On Expanding the Rights of Local Soviets." The decree expanded the repressive powers of local authorities against the peasantry, which had nothing left to give the state. The soviets were now allowed to impose fines five times the value of the grain to be delivered. This measure entered village life under the name "the fivefolds." The property of debtors was sold at auction, without trial. A quarter of the proceeds went to the local authorities.

In 1929, the Trans-Ural and Siberian villages were in a state of war with the state. In fact, this last peasant resistance in 1929 was nationwide. From a secret report of the Secret-Operative Department of the OGPU: "The growth of mass actions in 1929 is seen clearly from a comparison of figures by year: 1927 – 63, 1928 – 709, 1929 – 1,190 peasant actions." Forms of peasant resistance included arson of party and Soviet buildings, wounding and killing of rural activists, anti-Soviet talk, and hiding of seed grain. Peasant resistance was unorganized. Until the autumn of 1929, the participation of the OGPU in suppressing the peasantry was insignificant. On 3 October 1929, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the VKP(b) issued a directive ordering decisive repressive measures against kulaks, up to and including execution. When speed was needed, these measures were to be carried out through the OGPU. The arrest of peasants became the first mass source of labor for the Gulag of the 1930s.

Solovki. On 20 June 1929, Gorky arrived at the Solovki Special-Purpose Camp. Through a few escapees, rumors of a most brutal camp regime had spread in the West. The American Congress and the British Parliament had decided to stop buying timber from the USSR. Gorky was supposed to lull public opinion.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, in his unparalleled work *The Gulag Archipelago*, writes: “They awaited Gorky almost as they would a general amnesty. The first Russian writer! He’ll give it to them! He’ll show them! He’ll defend us!”

From the Solovki Kremlin, convoys were sent into the forests every day to clear out the camp before Gorky’s arrival. A “boulevard” of fir trees without roots was stuck into the ground.

Gorky arrived together with his daughter-in-law, Nadezhda Peshkova. At that time, she was the object of passion of the future head of the NKVD, Genrikh Yagoda. Solzhenitsyn writes: “She is all in leather. A black leather cap, leather jacket, leather riding breeches and high narrow boots. She and Gorky are the living symbol of the OGPU shoulder to shoulder with Russian literature.”

They visited the infirmary. The staff were given white coats for the occasion. Then Gorky was taken to Sekirnyaya Hill, where the worst punishment cell was. The torture devices had been removed from the cell. A table and newspapers had been set out. A few prisoners of more or less healthy appearance were left there, reading newspapers held demonstratively upside down. Gorky went up to one of them, turned the newspaper right side up, and walked out. Gorky’s daughter-in-law left a note: “From Sekir Hill there is a marvelous view of the lake. Silence and astonishing beauty. In the evening we listened to a concert.”

The concert program, performed by Solovki prisoners, included music by Rossini, Wieniawski, Rachmaninoff, Leoncavallo.

Academician Dmitry Likhachev, then a prisoner in Solovki, recalls: “I stood in the crowd in front of the labor colony barrack. Gorky remained in the barrack alone with a boy of about fourteen who had volunteered to tell the writer the whole truth. Gorky stayed with the boy at least forty minutes. When he came out, he was crying in front of everyone. The crowd of prisoners rejoiced: ‘Gorky has learned everything. The boy has told him everything!’”

The next day, in the visitors’ book, Gorky wrote: “One does not wish, and would be ashamed, to fall into the stereotypical praises of the astounding energy of those who, being the vigilant guards of the revolution, know how to be daring creators of culture.”

On 23 June 1929, Gorky sailed away. As soon as his ship left, the boy was shot.

At the very moment when Gorky was boarding the ship, about three hundred paces away, prisoners dressed in sacks were working. Their overseer, a criminal, managed to hide them from Gorky’s eyes. The criminal shouted: “Form up! Close ranks! Squat down! Sit down, I said, on top of each other!” A solid mass of human bodies formed. Then he barked at the sailors to bring a tarpaulin from the ship quickly. They covered everyone with it.

Academician Likhachev writes: “Gorky stood on the deck, cracking jokes and talking familiarly with the camp authorities.”

After Gorky, a GPU commission came to Solovki to investigate the medical staff. It was recorded: “Dr. Pelyukhin sent one man who wasn’t dead yet to the grave. But the ‘corpse’ began to climb out

of the grave. The orderlies told him: ‘The doctor knows better than you whether you’re alive or dead.’”

From the recollections of Academician Dmitry Sergeyevich Likhachev: “The authorities left in the country only the gray and faceless—those who hid, or those who adapted.”

Back in 1928, Mikhail Malkov’s brother, Timofey-the-younger, had come from Kazakhstan, where he taught in a technical school. Timofey advised him to drop everything, leave the farm, get out of the village, go somewhere far away and get a job in town. Many peasants were doing just that—going deeper into Siberia, sometimes straight into the taiga. Both Mikhail Ustinovich and his brothers, with whom he jointly ran the farm, knew about this. They read newspapers, subscribed to the regional paper *Red Kurgan*. Viktor Malkov recalls: “Our father replied to his guest’s advice, ‘Where am I supposed to go with such a brood?!’” The “brood” was four sons, two daughters, and a wife who, from sheer work, had never learned to read or write.

On one of the last days of December 1929, in the evening, two men with hunting rifles walked into the Malkov house and sat down at the table.

For years, next door to the Malkovs lived the family of Tatyana Gasnikova with her four children. The Malkov and Gasnikov children grew up and played together. That December evening, there was a meeting in the local school. A man from the district arrived and announced that there was a party quota for dekulakization. Everyone began discussing the village men whose names were on the list. When they came to Malkov, a Komsomol member, Semka Yozhik, shouted: “We must dekulakize and expel from the village Malkov, Mikhail Ustinovich.” The proposal was passed unanimously. Malkov’s eldest son Sasha and Tatyana Gasnikova’s children, Grisha and Vanya, were eavesdropping at the door out of curiosity during the meeting. When everything became clear, Sasha asked his friend: “Vanya, does that mean your mother also voted to throw us out of the village?”

On 7 November 1929, *Pravda* published Stalin’s article “The Year of the Great Break. On the Twelfth Anniversary of October.” In section III, on agriculture, we read: “The last hope of the capitalists of all countries—the ‘sacred principle of private property’—turns to dust.” In other words, all the games with the revolutionary slogan “Land to the Peasants!” were finished once and for all. It was in 1929 that, instead of “October coup,” the phrase “October Revolution” became fixed in official historiography. The four-word phrase “Great October Socialist Revolution” would be introduced by Stalin in 1934. On 21 December 1929, the country-wide celebration of Stalin’s fiftieth birthday took place. Everywhere there were mass solemn meetings, rallies, telegrams. The 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty had not been celebrated with such pomp. In 1929, Stalin himself did not demand such festivities. The initiative clearly came from his inner circle. But not only from there. The initiative also came from below. People themselves—of their own accord!—fell into ecstatic hysteria. Kalinin said simply in the press: “Stalin is a genius who can do everything.”

Since February 1929, the country had already been living under a ration-card system for almost a year. On 27 December 1929, Stalin gave a speech at a conference of Marxist agrarian experts. Stalin said: “We as a party, as Soviet power, have passed over to the liquidation of the kulaks as a class.”

The armed men who came to Mikhail Ustinovich Malkov’s house arrived precisely on 27 December. They presented him with a paper: read and sign. Mikhail Ustinovich read it unhurriedly and signed. The men stayed in the house overnight. In the morning, the whole family was led under

escort into the yard. Outside there was a crowd of people. Someone was already driving out the livestock, rummaging in the granary. The paper *Red Kurgan*, which the Malkovs subscribed to, reported for the broad Soviet public: “The luxurious rooms of the kulaks, furnished with expensive furniture, have been taken over by farmhands and poor peasants.” More reliable information is found in the materials of the Ural Regional Committee of the VKP(b): “We were late with dekulakization. In most farms there was nothing left but the house and the pots.”

From a report of the Kurgan district GPU: “In kulak families, they take even copper icons. They’ll do for the tractor as scrap metal. They take soiled baby diapers.” Another Kurgan GPU report reads: “A complaint has come from poor peasants. Sixteen families were arrested, their property was looted, hauled to the village soviet, they began searching for money in shirts and trousers. The plenipotentiary started playing the accordion, and the activists began dancing. Then they went around the kulak houses, drinking vodka and baking pancakes. During searches, women and children were stripped naked.”

After the seizure of property, the men were usually driven into the reading hut. The reading hut was used everywhere for night interrogations. From the materials of the Kurgan Regional Archive: “The kulak Osipov was tortured in the reading hut, they demanded that he hand over gold. The village soviet chairman beat him with his fist; the Komsomol cell secretary, Fishchenko, took a gun and threatened to shoot him. Then they put the cord from his cross around his neck, tied it to a nail in the wall and kicked the stool out from under his feet.”

At the moment of dekulakization, the master of the house’s wife lay dead in the house—they stripped the corpse of everything down to the last rag.

From a Kurgan GPU report: “The party cell secretary attempted to rape Pavlova from a kulak family. After Pavlova, Khlopotov did the same with Vera Ezovskikh.”

All property and farm buildings of the dekulakized were transferred to the collective farm fund as the contribution of the poor. At the same time, the kulaks’ debts to the state were now shifted to those same poor peasants who were joining the kolkhoz. In the excitement of dekulakization, the poor lightly signed promises of future financial obligations. The kulaks’ debt was inflated a hundredfold and thus enormous. This meant that at the moment of joining the kolkhoz, its members were already registered as debtors to the state and would, in the coming years, work in the kolkhoz practically for nothing. For the time being, the poor did not think about this and hauled everything they could out of the kulaks’ houses, yanked apart and turned over everything that would give. Intuitively, they believed they were within their rights: after all, everything was going into state property, which meant it became nobody’s.

It was winter. That season had been chosen deliberately for dekulakization. Dekulakization was a measure of intimidation in support of collectivization. The deportations were to be mostly completed in winter. By spring, by the sowing season, those who remained were to be ready to work in the kolkhoz.

On 15 January 1930, a commission of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the VKP(b) was created to develop measures in relation to kulaks. It was headed by Central Committee Secretary, future head of government and later People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov. The commission dealt directly with the deportation of kulak peasants—that is, with the physical destruction of them and their family members. The authorities anticipated the possibility of mass peasant protests against the deportations. GPU reports recorded the mood in the countryside:

“They’ve taken someone as a kulak out of nowhere and are squeezing him, but in fact he’s just a muzhik.” In some villages, kulaks flatly refused to go, saying: “Shoot us, but we won’t go.”

Among peasants destined for deportation, suicides were noted. Some kulaks went to the registry office to divorce their wives in order to save their wives and children. Most families stayed together. Wives refused to divorce, saying: “Even into the grave, but together.” Within districts, collection points were set up where columns would be formed to move out to railway stations. Kulaks were required to pay for their own deportation out of their confiscated property—they were left a sum for the journey. From the remaining confiscated kulak money, a convoy and guards were formed from workers. OGPU forces were mobilized.

The Malkovs, together with other such families, stood on the square in front of the village soviet. They were ordered to load up onto sledges. Komsomol member Semka Yozhik appeared, riding in a cart. The cart was harnessed with the Malkovs’ mare, Vetka. Viktor Malkov writes: “How I cried. We, snotty village kids, had become unwanted by Soviet power, and it ordered us wiped from the face of the earth.”

A resolution of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the VKP(b) dated 30 January 1930 planned that in the period from February to May alone, 60,000 people were to be sent to concentration camps and up to 170,000 families were to be deported to remote regions. Once again, let us stress: in each family there were at least five children, plus adult family members of two generations.

Someone among those seeing them off threw a sack of dried bread into the Malkovs’ sledge. “Move out,” ordered Semka Yozhik. Mikhail Ustinovich Malkov set off on his last journey. His son Viktor recalls: “We didn’t know what our father was thinking at that moment. I’m not even talking about our poor mother. But she could hardly imagine what was really going to happen to her family. Right now her husband was still beside her—her support and the children’s.” In reality, her husband, Mikhail Ustinovich, and hundreds of thousands like him were the support and breadwinners of the country. And they brought up their children in honest peasant labor.

Mikhail Ustinovich Malkov would die a year after deportation, on timber-felling work, at forty-nine.

From their native village they were taken to the station in the district center. In some villages along the route, people came out and met the driven-off peasants with bread and salt. Around stations, people were driven into houses. Still, they came out. At the station there was a frenzied quota plan. Failing to meet the plan was equated with anti-Soviet agitation. Everyone was loaded into cattle cars. After train no. 1001 (echelon no. 503) passed, conductress Semakina found a note on the track and handed it over to the OGPU. It read: “We are being taken we don’t know where, they don’t let us out into the air, they don’t give us water, not even snow. Shame on you for imprisoning infants. Shame on you, ‘cultured’ people.”

Viktor Malkov writes: “On a sharp bend, through a crack, I saw among the cattle cars one completely different car, with windows. I asked my father what kind of car that was. Father answered: ‘In that car with windows it’s the bosses, people like our Semka Yozhik. Somewhere on a deserted stretch of track in the fields they’ll stop the train—they’re capable of anything—and start driving us out of the cars straight into the snow. It could happen, children.’”

And so it did.

Then, in the car, Mikhail Ustinovich said to his sons: “Everything that has been done to us is called a crime against humanity.”

This expression was first used on 24 May 1915. On that day, Great Britain, France and Russia adopted a declaration condemning the tragically notorious massacre of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The three powers called that act of the Turkish authorities a crime against humanity and civilization. So Mikhail Ustinovich Malkov was a politically educated man.

After the deportation of peasant families from yet another village, the district party secretary whispered to the district prosecutor: “You think Russia will forgive us this? They’ll drag us out of our graves, and throw our bones to the crows.”

The living memory of hundreds of thousands of destroyed Russian peasants has been erased. Although as little as ten years ago, in one village of Kurgan region, people still remembered: “There was a kulak who lived here. He even had a mill. His daughter graduated from the conservatory. She played violin. And he played the bayan. They gave such concerts in the village club...”