Screenplay for the film "1928 – Dmitry Likhachev. 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 follows the year 1928 as a hinge moment in Soviet history, where three key processes intersect: Stalin's break with the NEP and his offensive against the peasantry, the consolidation of the Soviet camp system, and the formative experience of the young scholar Dmitry Likhachev at the Solovki islands.

In January 1928 Stalin undertakes his only major "working trip" across the country, to Siberia. There he demands the application of Article 107 of the Criminal Code to peasants who refuse to sell grain to the state at the low procurement price. The targets are not only "kulaks" but also middle peasants, effectively criminalizing normal market behaviour. By 1928, 6% of farms – the most efficient – hold 60% of marketable grain and refuse to hand it over at a loss. Their economic rationality is rebranded as a "grain strike" and treated as political sabotage. A swollen, corrupt bureaucracy, a chronic shortage of manufactured goods, and the destruction of private trade lead to "deserts" without shops, endless queues, ration cards and widespread discouragement.

At the same time, collectivization is prepared not as a way to develop agriculture but as an easier mechanism to seize grain. The looming threat of war – sharpened after Britain broke relations in 1927 – is used to justify an exclusive focus on heavy and defence industry. Grain exports are seen as the main source of foreign currency to pay for imported industrial equipment. The state also uses the anti-NEP campaign as a pretext to arrest private traders and "nepmen" and to shut down key channels of food supply to the population.

Within this tightening climate, 22-year-old Dmitry Likhachev is arrested on 8 February 1928 just after graduating from Leningrad University. From an apolitical family, he is targeted for his participation in intellectual circles – philosophical, religious and the mock "Cosmic Academy of Sciences" – that refuse Soviet enforced unanimity. In his later memoirs he states one of his aims is to dispel the myth that the worst repressions began only in 1937: already in the 1920s thousands of officers, priests, professors and peasants were being shot or imprisoned, but this seemed "natural" to contemporaries as long as the party elite itself was untouched.

The text traces the evolution of the camp idea. The first concentration camps, created in 1918 in former monasteries, are replaced in 1922 by Northern Special-Purpose Camps (SLON), chief among them the Solovki islands. After several months in a Leningrad remand prison, where he shares a filthy cell with a shop-owner nepman who insists on cleaning, Likhachev is sent to Solovki. There, camp life is both extremely brutal and, to a large extent, self-organizing: the external guards are common criminals, the administrative spine is made up of former tsarist officers, and the key power centre – the Information and Investigations Section, in charge of censorship, denunciations and executions – is staffed by chosen prisoners. Corruption and "blat", sadistic punishments (punishment cells, staircases, freezing torture) co-exist with pockets of solidarity, particularly through priests like Father Nikolai Piskanovsky and former officers who set up a Children's Colony to rescue half-feral, starving boys known as "lousies".

Solovki also symbolizes the destruction of a historic monastic and economic culture. Within two years, a flourishing, diversified monastery economy is ruined: the special cattle herds, famous sweet herring, vegetable gardens, brickworks and workshops vanish. In their place stands a bureaucratic killing machine whose main symbol is the acronym USLON, laid out as an elephant in a flowerbed. Religious imagery is inverted: the Golgotha hermitage on Anzer island becomes a dumping ground for beggars, invalids and the dying, seemingly fulfilling an old prophecy of "innumerable sufferings."

At the same time, the system is being rationalised and weaponised for economic purposes. Naftaly Frenkel, a former businessman turned camp economic chief, formulates the principle "take everything from a prisoner in the first three months – after that he is useless" and designs incentive-based rations: those who work more eat more and may survive. His methods will later be applied on the White Sea–Baltic Canal and become integral to the Gulag's role in the Soviet economy.

The year 1928 also sees the first major Stalinist show trial: the Shakhty case against mining engineers, accused of sabotage. Staged in the House of the Unions and publicly commented on by Stalin, it legitimises a nationwide wave of "specialist eating" – hostility toward old technical experts – as an attack on internal enemies. And on the international front, the Sixth Comintern Congress adopts the "social-fascism" line equating social democracy with fascism, effectively sabotaging the possibility of broad antifascist coalitions and paving the way for Hitler's rise.

The text ends with the rapid expansion of the camp economy: Solovki prisoners are sent to Karelia, Vologda, the Northern Dvina and far beyond; new camps spring up along the Volga, in the Urals, in Central Asia and Siberia, working in logging, mining, construction, agriculture and major infrastructure projects like the Baikal–Amur Railway. The camp system becomes a pillar of the first Five-Year Plans. For Likhachev – who will later become one of Russia's leading humanist scholars – the time he spent on Solovki remains, paradoxically, "the most significant period" of his life, crystallising both his compassionate love for Russia and his understanding of the human cost of Stalinist industrialization.

Screenplay:

1928 – Dmitry Likhachev

In mid-January 1928, Stalin went to Siberia on a working trip. It was the first and last such trip he ever made around the country. It lasted three weeks. The route was carefully kept secret. Stalin convened meetings of the party activists and, in an extremely harsh tone, explained to party officials that the time had come to apply Article 107 of the Criminal Code to the peasants. This meant imprisonment with confiscation of property. The pretext: peasants were refusing to sell grain to the state at its low procurement price.

In Siberia Stalin made it clear that these extraordinary measures were to be applied not only to so-called kulaks, but also to middle peasants. Arguments from the local authorities that such measures might later worsen the grain situation were briskly dismissed.

Stalin's 1928 trip ended with the following episode. After one of the party meetings, he went straight to a village. The peasants gathered. Strong men. Most likely those who had come to Siberia

under Stolypin, not afraid to take land and build up their farms by hard work under free-market conditions. They worked at a profit for the domestic and foreign market alike. They had survived War Communism, stayed alive and started again. And now Stalin began demanding that these very peasants hand over their grain at a giveaway price. They listened. Then one of them said to Stalin: “Listen, Katso. Dance the lezginka for us. And then we’ll see if we give you the grain or not.”

Already in the autumn of the previous year, 1927, most of the active peasant farms had refused to sell grain to the state at the low procurement price, quite reasonably deciding that by spring the state price would rise. It could hardly not rise.

By 1928, 60% of marketable grain was concentrated in the hands of 6% of the farms. That is, these 6% were working most efficiently, more and better than the others. Their refusal to hand over grain for a pittance was labelled a “grain strike.” In so doing, the authorities imputed political motives to them – or, in the thieves’ slang then entering everyday speech, “stitched politics onto them.”

In reality, there was nothing political in the peasants’ actions. The peasant is not interested in political struggle at all. He is simply not handing over his grain because he is acting according to normal market logic and the deal is not profitable. Agriculture is costly, and they were working without state subsidies. If he sells badly, the farm will start to die.

Under the NEP, right up to late 1927, there was a free private grain market in the country. There, the price was more than double the state price. But it was not just about price. By 1928 the state apparatus was incredibly bureaucratized, officials were pilfering everywhere, and on top of that there was utter confusion. Even when peasants wanted to deliver grain, it was very hard to do so. They stood for days at the collection points; they were driven from one district to another. The illiterate state was unable to compete with the private entrepreneur.

In addition, there was a goods famine in the country. State industry produced little and sluggishly.

In late autumn 1927 the Politburo adopted a secret resolution to take grain in exchange for scarce manufactured goods: you hand in grain — you get a coupon for consumer goods. This method would also be used in the last years of the Soviet regime, when in village shops Italian women’s boots and Finnish quilted coats would be sold in exchange for meat and hay delivered to the state. But even in January 1928 it was clear that this kind of barter could not last long. There were pitifully few manufactured goods. The authorities had to cut supplies to the workers. That was dangerous.

Within this campaign, middle peasants and kulaks who agreed to hand over grain received these manufactured goods. The poor peasants, who had long since given up their grain cheaply, got nothing. One might think the authorities, by worsening the position of the poor, would ruin relations with them. Later events, however, showed that in the hope of minimal state support, the rural poor were ready to assist the authorities in many of their undertakings – and especially willingly in attacking their strong, efficient neighbours. That was the social base the state would rely on in dekulakization and collectivization, which were only a year away.

The essence of Stalin’s collectivization was not to develop agriculture. It was simply a convenient, low-effort way for the state to seize grain. Of course, in the end there would be less and less grain, because you can only take something for nothing once.

In June 1907, on Erivan Square in Tiflis, Stalin and Kamo robbed a bank. Back then, this was grandly called an “expropriation”, but in fact it was just a robbery for party purposes. Now, for the

robbery of the peasantry, there was also a goal: to obtain money for forced, that is, accelerated, industrialization.

The fact was that eleven years after the October coup, Russia had fallen into – and was sinking ever deeper into – catastrophic backwardness compared with the advanced capitalist countries. This backwardness would be passed on like a revolutionary relay from one Soviet generation to the next. And already in the spring of 1927, after Great Britain broke off diplomatic relations with the USSR, the Politburo began to steer its economic policy on the basis of the perceived threat of imminent war. For that reason, the exclusive development of heavy and defence industry was put forward as the main economic task.

The newspapers began talking about the threat of war. The urban population interpreted the information according to its own experience. The more the state talked about building up heavy industry because of the war threat, the more urgently people felt they needed to buy food. Shops were emptied overnight. Prices on the markets shot up. Naturally, the grain went to the market, not to the state at its low price. Yet the whole idea of industrialization rested precisely on grain. Grain exports were the main source of foreign currency to buy industrial equipment abroad. The grain had to be seized. And Stalin had already decided how. The population did not yet know this. But by early 1928 everyone did know what you had to have ready at home in case of arrest.

Quote: “They knew, for example, this detail: you’d have to lie on something hard, and then the pelvis hurt worst of all. So people sewed little mattresses, stuffed with horsehair. They gave me such a mattress – no bigger than a pillow – and a tiny child’s down quilt. I would wrap myself in it from corner to corner: one corner over my feet, one corner over my shoulders. I’d pull it over my head and see Petersburg at dusk – the view from the Palace Bridge to Palace Square and further to the huge half-circle of the General Staff arch.”

This is a fragment from the memoirs of Academician Dmitry Sergeyevich Likhachev, a scholar of Old Russian literature and defender of Russian culture.

He was arrested right after graduating from Leningrad University, on 8 February 1928. His family had nothing to do with politics, but they knew about the little mattress. There is nothing surprising in this. Arrests had never stopped, even in the relatively free years of the NEP. Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn, who earned everlasting historical gratitude for his work The Gulag Archipelago, gives striking statistics in Chapter 1 of Volume II. Camp overcrowding during the NEP years: for 100 nominal camp places there were 112 prisoners in 1924, 120 in 1925, 132 in 1926, 177 in 1927. Likhachev wrote a draft chapter on the Solovki camp for Solzhenitsyn’s Archipelago.

Many years after Solovki, in the 1970s, specially trained thugs would attempt to beat up Likhachev for supporting Solzhenitsyn and for refusing to sign a letter against Sakharov. He was already seventy, and an academician. He was saved by a thick wool coat and a lecture on The Tale of Igor’s Campaign in his inside pocket.

In his memoirs, Likhachev writes: “One of my goals is to dispel the myth that the harshest time of repression began in 1936–1937. In 1936–1937 began the arrests of the all-powerful party officials, and that most struck contemporaries’ imaginations. Meanwhile in the 1920s, when thousands of officers, professors and priests were being shot together with Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian peasants, everything seemed natural.”

On 26 March 1928, at a meeting of the Council of People's Commissars chaired by Rykov, they discussed the country's punitive policy and the state of places of detention. On the first issue – punitive policy – they concluded that it was insufficient. It was decided: make the camp regime stricter. Organize things so that prisoners become economically profitable for the state. On the second issue they decided: "Henceforth consider it necessary to expand the capacity of labour colonies." That is, to create more camps.

By 1928, in the tenth year of Soviet rule, the idea of the camp had already undergone a certain evolution. On 5 September 1918, by decree of the Council of People's Commissars, to implement Lenin's orders, concentration camps were created. The term was taken from the practice of the First World War.

Concentration camps had been places of isolation for prisoners of war. Lenin introduced them for the citizens of his own country. The concentration camps were directly subordinate to the Cheka. At first they were located in monasteries. Ordinary free life was right next door. Prisoners were called lishentsy – "the deprived", meaning deprived of freedom. Some of them were allowed out to work. Local people gave them alms, fed them, took pity on the "deprived".

In 1922 the concentration camps were abolished as insufficiently strict. They were replaced by Northern Special-Purpose Camps, or SLON. For such a camp, the Solovki Islands were an ideal place: about forty kilometres from the mainland, with stone buildings.

This is where the 22-year-old Dmitry Likhachev ended up, after six months in Cell No. 273 of the House of Preliminary Detention on Shpalernaya Street in Leningrad. Along with a professional thief, a Chinese boy, a peasant lad, and Count Rochefort, there was in that cell with Likhachev a nepman named Kotlyar, the owner of a shop. He immediately suggested cleaning the cell, in which you could hardly breathe. This nepman demanded a rag from the guards. Two days later they threw in someone's long underpants—probably from a man who had been shot. Suppressing their nausea, Kotlyar and Likhachev started washing the floor, soft from layers of dirt, the walls and, most importantly, scrubbing the toilet seat. After two days' work, you could breathe again. Likhachev writes: "The nepman Kotlyar, who initiated the cleaning, was arrested precisely during the period of NEP's liquidation."

This period was very rapid. Local OGPU organs, on orders from the OGPU's economic directorate, carried out intelligence work, gathered information, compiled lists and made arrests of private grain dealers and traders on the grain, meat and textiles markets. Big entrepreneurs were taken up by the OGPU Collegium's Special Conference; the smaller ones were dealt with by the prosecutor's office. Already in April 1928, OGPU agents' reports noted that "the nervous mood" among private traders and the arguments over whether it still made sense to trade had given way to a firm decision to close down their businesses. This meant one of the most important channels for supplying the population was disappearing.

People's Commissar for Trade Mikoyan noted: "We've twisted the private trader's head off. He has pulled out of the market, gone underground, and the state organs are not ready to replace him." At the July 1928 plenum of the Central Committee, someone was heard in the corridors saying: "The sign says 'Tea Room of Merchant So-and-so', and then – nothing. There's nothing else. No other shops at all."

The word "deserts" entered common usage. This is what they called areas from which the private trader had left and where there was not a trace of state trade.

The campaign against private trade blew up life in the countryside. The impossibility of earning money by selling grain meant death for farms. Peasants who for centuries had lived from their land and fed the towns now streamed into those towns to buy food and became consumers of state stocks.

Even Moscow, in the summer of 1928, was supplied with food to only one-third of its needs. OGPU summaries show that the food difficulties fed “politically unhealthy moods.”

At the initiative of party and soviet leaderships, ration cards began to be introduced in the regions. The July plenum spent four days discussing the country’s economic situation. It was said that procurement prices for grain needed to be raised and private trade allowed. In his report, Mikoyan said ration cards should be abolished: “Cards do not save bread; on the contrary, when they cash them in, everyone considers it his revolutionary duty to take the full ration.”

By autumn 1928, the state stopped selling flour to the public. People began drying breadcrumbs for storage. For the first time in Russian history, peasants started buying bread in shops to feed their livestock. There were fights and crushes in the queues.

From OGPU reports about talk in the queues: “All the grain’s been sent abroad, and we’re sitting here without bread. No desire to work – it’s no use anyway. The government’s gone mad.”

In November, Stalin spoke at a Central Committee plenum and put forward the task of catching up with and overtaking the advanced capitalist countries in industrial development.

The bulk of capital investment was to go into heavy industry. The initial draft of the first Five-Year Plan was increased in this sector by 20%. Implementation of the first Five-Year Plan was to begin the next year, 1929.

In Moscow, the influx of out-of-towners bought up everything they could and shipped it as baggage by train out of the city. Even for expensive white bread, the queues were endless. The cheap rye bread had already disappeared. By the end of 1928, it was permitted to introduce bread ration cards. By February 1929, rationing was in force throughout the USSR.

All this happened, more or less, during the period when Dmitry Likhachev was sitting in the remand prison. The guards there had a favourite game. When they noticed a rat running by, they would grab brooms and start driving the rat at each other and into imaginary goals until it died. They played with extraordinary zeal, screaming as they did so. It was a kind of field hockey.

By Stalinist standards, there were many reasons and pretexts to arrest Likhachev.
His own explanations of these reasons would themselves have been another pretext.

He writes: “Petersburg was seeing off its brilliant past.” Up to 1928 the city seethed with philosophical circles and student societies. Endless debates, lectures in private flats and in official places – at Leningrad University, at the Institute of the History of the Arts on St Isaac’s Square, at the former Tenishev School. At Leningrad University, along the windows in the corridors, the famous pre-revolutionary benches for free discussions still remained. One of the circles that Likhachev attended was called Helfernak, short for Artistic-Literary, Philosophical and Scientific Academy.

As state persecution of the Church intensified, the circle took on a religious character and began calling itself the Brotherhood of St Seraphim of Sarov. Educated young people categorically rejected the declaration of Metropolitan Sergius. In 1927, in his declaration, Sergius stated that there

had been and were no persecutions of the Church in the country, that the Church was ready to cooperate with the authorities, and that anyone who did not accept the declaration was in opposition to the Church. Metropolitan Sergius insisted that in this way he was saving the Church. Ninety percent of Orthodox parishes, on receiving the text of the declaration, sent it back.

Likhachev's friend Misha Shapiro, from a patriarchal, devout Jewish family, began from protest against the persecution of Orthodox priests to attend, from time to time, the house church at the corner of Gatchinskaya Street and the Malo- (Little) Street.

Later, an agent provocateur appeared in the circle. In 1992, Likhachev read this man's reports in his own case file.

In 1928, Likhachev also attended the "Cosmic Academy of Sciences", abbreviated KAN. There was nothing serious in it. It was a deliberate masquerade. And that, apparently, was its main danger.

They proclaimed the principle of "joyful science".

The joy of science lies in its enriching the world. If it makes the world boring, that is un-joyful science. Academician Likhachev writes: "Such is the doctrine of Marxism. It belittles the surrounding society, kills morality, simply makes morality unnecessary."

To crown it all, on the anniversary of the "Cosmic Academy" these students composed and sent a congratulatory telegram, supposedly from the Pope. It was this telegram that attracted the attention of the relevant organs.

Likhachev writes: "From the moment of its establishment, Soviet power strove to destroy any polyphony. The country sank into silence. Only praise, unanimity, deadly boredom – deadly in the literal sense. Unanimity is equivalent to the death penalty for culture and for people of culture."

At the time of his arrest, at twenty-two, Dmitry Likhachev was already a formed person. He had made his choice. Likhachev said: "Many are convinced that to love the Motherland is to be proud of it. No! I was brought up on love-pity. With this feeling of pity, I began to study Old Russian literature and Old Russian art. I wanted to preserve the memory of a disappearing Russia, as one wants to preserve the image of a dying mother, to collect its images and show them to one's friends."

The gate of the Solovki camp was Kemperpunkt – the transit point at Kem. The first thing the newcomer saw was people dressed in sacks. Solzhenitsyn writes: "Dressed in ordinary sacks: the legs come out at the bottom like from under a skirt, and holes are cut for head and arms."

Likhachev writes: "When we landed, a guard smashed my face bloody with his boot. They shouted at us: 'Here the power is not Soviet – here the power is Solovki's.'"

Under Soviet rule, the sentence on Likhachev was passed without trial. There was just one interrogation. But the investigator was Aleksandr Robertovich Stromin, the organizer of the trials against the intelligentsia in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

At Kemperpunkt, stages of prisoners were received in turn by two men – Kurilko and Beloozerov. Prisoners mistakenly called Beloozerov "Beloborodov", confusing him with the Beloborodov who had signed the order for the execution of the tsar's family. He swore like a trooper. His most decent threat was: "I'll make you suck the snot of corpses!"

Kurilko called himself a Guards officer. Many years later, in 1989, Likhachev learned about his past. In the Civil War, he served in the Red Army, then for about two months defected to the Whites. Later he passed himself off as a Guardsman.

Likhachev adds: “I write this so that people know: the real Guards officers I met at Solovki were honest men; they never served in the camp guard.”

They could not have served there. The guard was made up of common criminals – murderers and rapists.

At night in the transit barn, the bunks were taken by the criminals. The others stood all night between the bunks. The criminals would “shoot” volleys of lice at those standing. Those standing between the bunks were mostly metropolitan intellectuals: professors, engineers, priests. Solzhenitsyn groups them all together as people of Chekhov’s Russia, children of the Silver Age. He reproduces the malicious glee that sloshed around inside Kurilko as he received the stage: “Take this for your shitty neutrality.” These people had lived through the Civil War, had stayed in the changed Russia, but had preserved notions of normal human relations. And here, an engineer carrying an overflowing slop pail across the icy yard slips, spills it over himself, is not allowed into the barrack, and freezes to death in his own filth. Later they would drive them to Solovki on foot over the ice. They would drag boats behind them to cross stretches of open water.

The rest were taken there by the steamer Gleb Boki. Gleb Boki in 1928 was the sitting chairman of an OGPU “troika”, sentencing people to camp and to death.

Of Boki, Likhachev says: “A cannibal.”

Boki came to Solovki. He visited the camp theatre. Theatre had been an essential part of the zone since Lenin’s concentration camps. On stage they sang for Boki:

> All those who rewarded us with Solovki,
> We ask you: come here yourselves!
> Sit here for three or five little years,
> You’ll remember it with delight!

Boki roared with laughter. He liked it.

Likhachev writes: “Life at Solovki is so fantastical that your sense of reality disappears. Among the real ‘k.r.s’ (counterrevolutionaries) it was customary to stress the absurdity, the illusory nature of all life on the island. Jokes, gags, nicknames dulled the horror. The officer of the Life-Guards Horse-Grenadier Regiment, Georgy Mikhailovich Osorgin, when asked ‘How are you?’ would answer: ‘Ah, the laguerre like the laguerre,’ distorting the French phrase à la guerre comme à la guerre – ‘in war as in war.’

It was good form to treat the camp as an unreal life. Real life would begin after release. Prisoners of 1928 were still sure they would definitely get out. For his independence and cheerfulness, Georgy Mikhailovich Osorgin was especially hated by the authorities and was sentenced to be shot.

On the eve of his execution, his wife came from Moscow to visit him. Osorgin asked the camp administration not to tell her about the impending execution. He, for his part, gave his word of honour as an officer that the visit would last less than the time allotted. For all three days of the visit he remained buoyant, cheerful and ironic as always. She could have stayed longer, but he persuaded her to go. He saw the ship off, and ten minutes later he was undressing for the firing squad.

At that time, visits were still permitted in the camp. The writer Oleg Volkov, who would spend a total of twenty-seven years in camps, received a visit from his brother, who brought food and said: “Parcels, packages, waiting rooms on Lubyanka and Vozdvizhenka – all that is just part of a Muscovite’s working day! My wife looks after two exiled brothers, my sister – her husband in a camp. And it’s the same for most of our relatives and acquaintances. It’s a mass disease.”

The camp was so crowded that it was hard to push your way between buildings. Likhachev writes: “From our conversations I remember one thing: the population density on Solovki was higher than in Belgium.”

But the main thing is that camp society in 1928 still controlled itself. The guards were common criminals. They were killers, but not thieves. The main power in the camp was the Information and Investigations Section – IIS. The operations officers in the IIS were prisoners. They handled censorship, executions, denunciations. Informers were prisoners too.

Job assignments were made by the administrative section. There, former officers worked. They were capable of professionally organizing camp labour: of allocating, feeding people. The illiterate Solovki Chekists could not do this. In any case there were very few Chekists at all: for 60,000 prisoners there were only about fifty. It turned out you didn’t need more. Because confinement on the island organized itself.

The officers’ administrative section was in conflict with the Information and Investigations Section. Former tsarist officers tracked down informers. Informers hid in the IIS. The officers would ferret them out and send them to logging camps. There the exiled informers put out a wall-newspaper called The Stool Pigeon.

But there were fewer and fewer officers, and more and more criminals. Likhachev recalls: “Work details were handed out to us by so-called Chubarovites, participants in the gang rape in Chubarov Alley in Leningrad in 1927. The notion of blat appeared. Blat is a bribe to a small camp boss. This system, which later became the basic structure of Soviet life, was born in the Solovki camp.”

“I and many other engineers under the old regime were completely provided for. We were completely calm about our future. The October Revolution brought into our lives something that turned upside down all our habits, our entire way of life, which had seemed normal to us.” This is a fragment from engineer Matov’s speech at the Shakhty trial in May 1928. The Shakhty case was the first Stalinist show trial. It was directed against the engineering and technical intelligentsia among the old specialists. The case was heard by a Special Judicial Presence of the Supreme Court of the USSR. It was headed by the rector of Moscow State University, Professor Andrey Januaryevich Vyshinsky. For him this was an important step up on the ladder to the post of Prosecutor of the USSR. For the 53 convicted in the Shakhty case, it meant five death sentences and camp terms for the rest.

On 10 March 1928, Pravda published an official announcement that in the Shakhty district of the Donbass a counterrevolutionary organization had been uncovered whose goal was to wreck Soviet coal mining. It said the organization was directed from abroad. Mining engineers at the pits and mines were allegedly carrying out malicious sabotage and wrecking. The town of Shakhty became known all over the country; the word “wrecker” firmly entered daily language.

The number of accidents in the mines was rising, safety measures were non-existent, norms were raised, wages fell. The miners blamed the old specialists. For the authorities this was an excellent

way to deflect anger. All the more so since many old specialists did not conceal their negative attitude towards “storming” – the rush to meet impossible targets. Professional engineering experience clashed with party directives.

“Comrade ZONOV, an employee of OGLU, carried out a serious and extremely complex intelligence operation on the personal composition of the specialists. As a result of this work, Comrade ZONOV came to the conviction that a diversionary organization existed. Comrade ZONOV is the direct executor of all the most difficult stages of the case.” This is from the recommendation for a decoration for OGLU employee K. I. Zonov.

Most of those convicted in the Shakhty case had worked successfully in the Donbass before 1917. Some had gone from engineers to mine-owners. They were authors of articles on mining, staunch opponents of egalitarian wage policies. One character reference for engineer Boyarshinov simply stated: “Works like an ox.”

Stalin spoke about the Shakhty case before the trial, on 13 April 1928, at the Joint Plenum of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission. He said: “The Shakhty case shows that we have chosen our economic cadres badly. Now we have our own cadres. There is no fortress in the world that the working people, the Bolsheviks, cannot take. (Applause.)”

The Shakhty trial was held in the Column Hall of the House of the Unions. Thirty thousand people attended the session. Many journalists were invited. It would be the same at later trials. Not all the defendants admitted their guilt. In future, that would never happen again. Throughout the country a wave of so-called spets-eating arose – hatred of specialists. According to OGPU reports, communists and non-party workers alike demanded “that the specialists’ heads be torn off.”

At Solovki, behind the monastery’s “Kremlin” walls, everything was divided into companies – from the 1st to the 16th. The 16th company was the cemetery. The 7th company was the artists’ company. In the camp theatre at Solovki they staged Lermontov’s Masquerade. Prisoners covered in lice watched and wept. The 11th company was the punishment cell. Another punishment cell was at Sekirka. On Sekirnaya Hill, in the cathedral, thin poles were fixed from wall to wall in the cells. The punishments had to sit on them all day. Their feet did not reach the floor. It was hard to keep balance. If you fell, the guards beat you.

Or they would take you outside to the staircase of 365 steps. They would tie the person to a log and push him down.

Sometimes they put a man on “little stumps” – meaning naked, under the mosquitoes – or they tied him naked to a tree. In winter, they poured water over him and let him freeze. Later, in the Second World War, the same method was used in a Nazi camp to kill General Karbyshev. Or they tied a man by his legs to the shafts of a cart, the guard mounted the horse and galloped it, and the shafts dragged the man until his cries and groans stopped.

In this respect, Dmitry Sergeyevich Likhachev was lucky. For a while he worked as a “vrydl” – short for “temporarily fulfilling the duties of a horse.” Ten years later, the arrested wife of Nikolai Bukharin would watch in camp how women were doing that work. Bukharin, incidentally, had supported the death sentences in the Shakhty case in 1928.

In general, Dmitry Sergeyevich Likhachev was lucky in the camp. He ended up at Solovki at a time which, by Stalinist standards, could still be called relatively fortunate: the common criminals had not yet completely taken over, and decent people could still help each other survive camp life.

It was 1928, the system was not yet fully hardened. Likhachev was helped by a priest, Father Nikolai Piskanovsky, who was respected by all the camp bosses on the island. And this at a time when all priests and monks were forcibly given short haircuts, their beards shaved, and their cassocks cut short. Only the Chekists had long greatcoats – down to the ground, with special big black cuffs on the sleeves. For services, in the former monastery only one church was left, that of St Onuphrius, in the cemetery. For convenience, executions were carried out there as well. For individual executions there was a special place in the "Kremlin", under the bell tower, behind a low little door. They shot there in broad daylight. For "educational purposes", in full view.

The head of the cultural-education section was a certain Uspensky. He came from a priest's family. To avoid persecution by Soviet power, he had killed his own father. He was not punished, having killed a "class enemy". He volunteered to go to Solovki. He took part in executions. In the mornings he washed the blood off his boots under the tap. Likhachev writes: "They say he had a decent wife."

The 13th company – the quarantine company – was the worst of all. Everyone who arrived passed through it. There they broke any will to resist. Likhachev recalls: "At the exit, a Catholicos of some sort – Armenian or Georgian, I don't know – was on duty. His post was next to the slop bucket, which you reached by a short wooden stairway. He held out his hand and helped me climb. I have never forgotten that. I didn't forget it for sixty-five years and I won't forget it for the rest of my life."

Likhachev met Father Nikolai Piskanovsky – later canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad among the New Martyrs – in the quarantine company. On the top bunks there lay the sick; under the bottom bunks lived the "lousies". That was what they called children who had gambled away all their clothes, stopped appearing for roll call and received no rations. They lived on handouts. When they died, they were packed into crates and taken away. These children were street urchins who had lost their parents in the Civil War. They slept in asphalt cauldrons, roamed the country in freight cars. Later they were rounded up in the well-known campaign against homelessness, and many were sent to Solovki. Likhachev writes: "I felt such pity for these 'lousies' that I walked around as if drunk."

He was unexpectedly given a chance to help these children. After typhus, thanks to Father Nikolai's efforts, Likhachev was sent to the 3rd company. The company commander was the former commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress, Baron Prittwitz. Likhachev's immediate superior was Aleksandr Nikolayevich Kolosov, formerly a military prosecutor: an intellectual by essence, a "gentleman" in appearance. Morning and evening, in front of a shard of mirror, he would comb his beard and massage his face for a long time. He headed a nebulous unit called the "Criminological Cabinet". During the day, in the workroom, he would read a novel from the local library, holding a pencil in his raised hand – the pose of a man busy writing. When a boss came in, there was no doubt he was "working". It was he who had the idea of gathering the unfortunate "lousies" from all over Solovki and creating a Children's Colony for them. He persuaded the administration of the propaganda value of such a project. Barracks were built; the children were given bunks, linen, coats, shoes. At Solovki, Likhachev went around looking for these children, persuading them not to be afraid. When word about the conditions in the colony spread around the islands, they began flocking there. In that colony they had a better chance of survival.

They brought beggars from Moscow to Solovki. They were seized by churches and sent to the island of Anzer. There stood Golgotha, the Golgotha-Crucifixion hermitage. Besides beggars, there

were sick people and invalids. They lay there and died. They were not fed. Some dying men, at their own request, were given strychnine by the doctor.

According to legend, in 1712, the Mother of God appeared here to the hieromonk Job and said: “This mountain will be called Golgotha, and a church will be built on it, and it will be whitened by innumerable sufferings.” Solzhenitsyn writes: “For more than two hundred years, the prophecy seemed idle. After the Solovki camp, you can’t say that anymore.”

In the first two years of the Solovki camp’s existence, the exemplary monastic estate of centuries’ standing was brought to complete and irreversible ruin. The famous sweet herring disappeared, the many varieties of vegetables, the special cattle herds. They stopped growing roses, making shaped bricks, tanning leather. The forges, pottery workshops and bookbinding workshops vanished. Now, in front of the camp administration, there was a flowerbed. On it they laid out the figure of an elephant with the letter “U” on its blanket: USLON – Administration of the Solovki Special-Purpose Camps.

In 1928, they had not yet shot all the hares on Solovki. Both Likhachev and Solzhenitsyn write about the hares. The reason they survived was simple: there was a GPU order to save ammunition. Not a single shot except at a prisoner.

In 1928 or early 1929 – this is precisely known – a meeting took place in Moscow between Stalin and Naftaly Aronovich Frenkel. He was a Turkish Jew. Before the Revolution he had a successful business in southern Russia. In 1916 he took his capital to Turkey and went himself, but later returned during the NEP years. In the USSR he established ties with the GPU and organized the purchase of valuables and gold for paper roubles. Then he was arrested. In 1927, he was at Solovki, but lived separately, moved freely and became head of the economic section. There he formulated his soon-to-be famous thesis: “From a prisoner, we must take everything in the first three months – after that, he is no use to us.”

It was after this that he met with Stalin. He proposed to Stalin a system for exploiting prisoner labour that left no loopholes for anyone. He proposed abandoning equal rations for all prisoners and introducing top-ups to a minimal ration – whoever worked better would eat and might survive. Later, on the White Sea Canal project, Frenkel would hold a special post as “chief of works” and receive the Order of Lenin. His system of feeding prisoners would fit organically into Stalin’s system of governing the country.

The prisoner Likhachev would experience it himself on the construction of the White Sea–Baltic Canal.

In November 1929, arrests began among the prisoners at Solovki. It was exactly then that Likhachev’s parents came to visit him. He lived with them separately for several days. Someone ran up to him and said: “They’ve been for you.” They had come to take him to be shot. His first thought was: let them take me, but not in front of my parents. He said farewell to them, went out and sat down in the wood yard between the piles of logs. That night there was a mass execution. He writes: “It is clear that someone else was taken instead of me. And I must live for two. So that I won’t be ashamed before the one taken in my place.”

Dmitry Sergeyevich Likhachev is the author of 500 scholarly and 600 popular works on Russian literature and Russian culture. He was a corresponding member of the American, Austrian, British, Italian and Göttingen academies, and a member of the American Philosophical Society. He was the

first honorary citizen of St Petersburg. At the end of his life, in his memoirs, Academician Likhachev wrote: “My time at Solovki was the most significant period of my life.”

The day after the mass execution he was photographed with his parents.

But in the 1920s, many prisoners at Solovki still had no permanent work. Everything was cruel, but economically still senseless. No firm production plan was handed down to the camp. Up to 1928, the economy did not yet rest on the camp system. In 1926, USLON harvested timber worth 63,000 roubles; in 1929 already 2,355,000 roubles’ worth. Prisoners from Solovki began to be sent, via the same Kemperpunkt, to work on the mainland. At first to Karelia, to build roads and fell timber for export. Engineers were “sold” to work in other regions – their pay went to the camp. Then the camps spread to the Vologda area. Svirlag, Kotlaslag – logging, road building; then BelBaltlag – building the White Sea–Baltic Canal. On the Northern Dvina – SevDvinlag. After a successful expedition of imprisoned geologists and geochemists from Solovki to prospect for oil, Ukhtlag was created. It spread eastward, sprouting its famous branches – Vorkuta, Pechora, Inta. Coal mining, radium mines, agriculture. Further east appeared the Northern-Ural branch of SLON. Construction of the Berezniki chemical works was preceded by the establishment of a camp of the same name. The Potma camps did sawmilling and logging.

Camps sprang up on the Upper, Middle and Lower Volga; in Central Asia, camps were employed in cotton growing and also supplied slave labour to other sectors.

Siblag built railways and roads, worked in pig farms, at the Kuznetsk metallurgical plant, in Kuzbass coal mines. The Donbass had its own camps. BAMlag built the Baikal–Amur Mainline. Dallag built oil depots and railways and worked in mines and on fishing grounds. The camp system was the foundation of the economy of the first Five-Year Plans.

Stalin’s idea of accelerated industrialization was linked to his expectation of war. In 1928 Stalin made his own contribution to making that war inevitable. In July 1928, the Sixth Comintern Congress adopted a strategic Stalinist line. According to it, in the capitalist countries two equally hostile forces opposed the communists: fascism and social democracy. Communists were forbidden to enter electoral blocs with Social Democrats or to vote for their candidates. In so doing, the possibility of a broad anti-fascist coalition was destroyed, and Hitler’s rise to power was in effect ensured.

In 1928, Naftaly Frenkel opened a commercial enterprise at Solovki. Using hides that had accumulated in old monastic warehouses, he came up with the idea of making stylish women’s shoes and handbags. Prisoner furriers and shoemakers worked there. In Moscow, a branded shop was opened on Kuznetsky Most. The takings went to Lubyanka.