

Screenplay for the film "1932 — Joseph Stalin. Historical Chronicles with Nikolai Svanidze"
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Screenplay Summary:

The text portrays the year 1932 under Stalin as a crucial turning point where three major processes intersect: the sell-off of Russia's cultural heritage, a man-made famine tied to forced industrialisation, and the consolidation of a rigidly stratified, fear-based society supported and justified by a co-opted intelligentsia.

Culturally, 1931–1933 are described as the years of a massive liquidation of treasures. The Soviet state sells unique items abroad: the Codex Sinaiticus goes to Britain; rare books flood American libraries, including early Russian printed works. State agencies with names like "Gosfond" and "Antikvariat" systematically strip museums, especially those of Leningrad and its suburbs. Masterpieces by Rembrandt, Giorgione, Botticelli, Raphael and Rubens are removed from the Hermitage and other palaces and end up in the Louvre, U.S. museums and the private collection of oil magnate Calouste Gulbenkian. Whole palaces are sold or prepared for sale; the contents of Princess Paley's residence and other imperial ensembles are auctioned off in London. Morally shocking, the sales are not even particularly effective in funding industrialisation.

Economically, this period is dominated by Stalin's first Five-Year Plan, financed by exports of raw materials — timber, furs, flax, oil and especially grain. Despite the global collapse in grain prices, the USSR continues to export at dumping prices, provoking a catastrophic famine in 1932–1933. Millions die, particularly in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, the North Caucasus and the Volga region. Vivid memories describe skeletal or swollen bodies, people gnawing tree bark or eating grass, and mass graves at Babi Yar. At the same time, Stalin's "law of the three ears of grain" imposes the death penalty or ten years in a camp for even minimal theft of "socialist property", sometimes just a few potatoes or ears of grain. The famine reveals to Stalin the extreme exhaustion and passivity of society after fifteen years of civil war, repression, de-kulakisation and collectivisation — a level of obedience he could hardly have dreamed of.

In parallel, a brutally unequal system of material privilege is finalised. Special closed shops ("distributors"), categorised rations, reserved transport, luxury rail cars and sanatoriums feed and comfort about 55,000 elite families and strategic industrial workers, while the rest of the population often lacks even bread. Party plenum delegates feast on tons of meat, fish, caviar and cheese as the countryside starves. This inequality underpins the Stalinist repressive system: by distributing privileges, the regime ensures the loyalty of the bureaucratic and cultural elite and continually recruits people willing to do anything, including participate in terror.

*Politically and ideologically, Stalin keeps a relatively low public profile in 1932, attending conferences without speaking and spending three months on holiday in Sochi. Yet he is deeply involved in culture and historical narrative. He distances himself from Peter the Great and glorifies Lenin, but begins to reinterpret figures like Ivan the Terrible, admiring the oprichnina as a tool for crushing opposition. He directly intervenes in theatre: he has Bulgakov's *The Days of the Turbins* restored to the stage, watches it more than a dozen times, and seems to relish seeing refined, honest, "old Russia" types whose real-life counterparts his regime has largely wiped out. His meetings*

with writers at Gorky's house in October 1932 define "socialist realism" and coin the phrase "engineers of human souls", while in exchange he promises the literary elite dachas, sanatoriums and extra rations.

The text also notes the introduction in late 1932 of "nationality" as a mandatory entry in Soviet passports — a future instrument for deporting and punishing entire ethnic groups — and the suicide of Stalin's wife, Nadezhda Alliluyeva, after a banquet, likely influenced by knowledge of the famine and internal opposition documents. Stalin interprets her death as "betrayal". Altogether, the narrative paints 1932 as a year in which famine, cultural plunder, a hardened hierarchy of privilege, and the ideological domestication of the intelligentsia all converge to stabilise Stalin's dictatorship.

1932 – Joseph Stalin

The year 1932 in our history can truly be called the year of museums and libraries. In 1932, they receive exceptional attention from the authorities, and specifically attention to the most valuable and precious things kept in our museums and libraries. Precious in the literal sense of the word. 1932 is the year of record-breaking sales of Russian culture. The adjacent years, 1931 and 1933, complement it well.

In 1931, the English bookseller Maurice Ettinghausen came to the USSR. The deputy people's commissar of foreign trade arranged a tour for him in the Public Library in Leningrad. The bookseller noticed a leather box with the label *Codex Sinaiticus*. The deputy commissar had no idea what that name meant. *Codex Sinaiticus*, or the Sinai Codex, is the earliest and most complete Greek manuscript of the Bible, presented to the Russian emperor Alexander II by the Greek monastery of Saint Catherine. The English bookseller joked: "If Moscow ever needs money, this box should be wrapped up and sent to London by parcel post."

In 1932 the Soviet leadership made the decision to sell this precious manuscript, and began bargaining. In London, a Soviet representative met with Ettinghausen and asked him: "Could the Sinai Codex be worth a million pounds?" A few weeks later the Soviet side named a price of 200,000. Then it lowered the price to 100,000. The British government joined the effort to purchase this outstanding monument of Christianity. There were consultations with Prime Minister MacDonald and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The price of 100,000 was accepted. Half the sum was provided by the British government, the other half was raised by subscription. The Soviet side sent the Sinai Codex to London before the money was transferred.

The manuscript arrived by train in London on 27 December 1933. It was brought to the British Museum by taxi. The square in front of the museum was packed with people. When Ettinghausen stepped out of the taxi with the Bible in his arms, all the men took off their hats.

The years 1931–1932 were very successful for American libraries. The rare books department of the Library of Congress consists almost 80 percent of books purchased in the USSR. Among them is one of the first printed Russian books, *The Apostle* (1564), printed in the press of Ivan Fedorov. Books and manuscripts are sold abroad for next to nothing. The law code of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, father of Peter I, was sold for 45 dollars. A collection of Peter I's letters from the library of Nicholas II was sold for two and a half dollars.

In December 1931, Stalin received the German writer Emil Ludwig at the Kremlin, the author of biographies of great figures from Bismarck to Wagner. Asked by Ludwig, “Do you allow a parallel between yourself and Peter the Great, do you consider yourself the continuator of Peter’s work?”, Stalin replied: “In no way. I am a pupil of Lenin. As for Lenin and Peter the Great, the latter was a drop in the ocean, and Lenin is a whole ocean.” For Stalin, Peter I is the man who let foreigners into Russia.

Soon Stalin would actively demonstrate a new interest in history. The elementary class-based method would remain, but recede into the background. Stalin would show an interest in the individual in history. More precisely, in certain specific individuals. The first in this line is Ivan the Terrible. In 1937, during a conversation with the writer Alexei Tolstoy, Stalin would say: “The theme of Ivan the Terrible must be raised to the level of the state. We should pay less attention to his fondness for women. At the same time it is necessary to give a correct political assessment of the oprichnina as a means of struggle and liquidation of the opposition.”

In 1931 and 1932, in parallel with the libraries, the museums were also being cleaned out. Here is how it happened. A number of special state organisations were created, dealing systematically with the sale of exceptionally valuable, world-class museum exhibits. These organisations had various names: Gosfond (State Fund), “Antikvariat” (“Antiquariat”), “Mezhdunarodnaya kniga” (“International Book”). Employees of these offices would come to a museum, buy a ticket at the box office, put on the museum slippers, and join a tour group going through the halls. They listened, looked, took notes, and whispered to one another. A few days later, a document would arrive at the museum — an order to immediately hand over the following exhibits.

No museums anywhere were ever hit as hard as the museums of Leningrad and its suburbs were under the early Stalin. Certainly, they were the richest, but that is not the only reason.

Throughout his life, Stalin had a special feeling toward the capital of the Russian Empire. At first, it was the usual provincial complex in the face of Petersburg. Then there were his bad memories of Petrograd in October 1917. His, Stalin’s, role at the moment of the coup was completely inconspicuous. He could not compete with Trotsky’s Petrograd October glory. Now that Trotsky has been expelled from the country, Petrograd, Leningrad remains for Stalin an eternal reminder that his role in modern Russian history is more than modest, that he is not the father of that thermonuclear explosion that tore to shreds the life of a great country.

Only in 1934, after the 17th Party Congress, did Stalin stop emphasising his position of “general secretary” in documents. He would simply sign “secretary of the Central Committee of the VKP(b), Stalin.” True, in 1934 he would officially take upon himself one more duty — as Central Committee secretary he would supervise Kultprop, the department of culture and propaganda. Before 1934 Stalin dealt with culture not by virtue of his post, but informally.

Financial plans for “realising” (selling) works of art were sent down to the museums. These financial plans were the practical expression of the slogan “Museums are a lever of socialist industrialisation.” Since appetites were constantly growing and selecting individual items for export was troublesome, the idea arose that it would be easier to sell entire, established museum ensembles.

The experiment began with the sale of Princess Paley’s palace in Tsarskoye Selo. All the artistic furnishings of the mansion, a total of 11,606 unique items, were sold to the antiquarian Norman Weiss for 48,000 pounds sterling — that is, 4 pounds per item. The previous buyer had offered

46,000 pounds for the contents of the palace, which constituted an outstanding collection of French art. That sum did not satisfy the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade. Forty-eight thousand was deemed sufficient. In July 1929 Weiss put the collection up for auction in London. Protests by the former owners could not stop the sale. What Weiss did not take was sold on the domestic market. Surplus museum exhibits that did not go for export were often sold to the Leningrad branch of the joint-stock company "Hotel". Gifts from the Emir of Bukhara to Nicholas II — oriental silver and gold — stood for a long time in the lobby of the "Evropeiskaya" hotel. Then they disappeared.

In 1928, the secretary of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Sergei Fedorovich Oldenburg, tried to stand up for the museums. "There is no other way to describe this than as an orgy of selling," the academician Oldenburg wrote to the then People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Litvinov. Litvinov was upset, but said there was nothing he could do. Oldenburg visited the secretary of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR, Yenukidze, and then Kalinin. Kalinin said that he was categorically opposed, but didn't know anything about it, because he had been away. And that he had almost no influence.

Meanwhile, the success of the first sale of an entire palace encouraged the leadership. A specific plan was already drawn up for the complete sale of the Pavlovsk, Gatchina, Stroganov and Alexander museums. The plenipotentiary of the Council of Labour and Defence and the People's Commissariat of Trade for Leningrad wrote: "I am extremely reluctant to take anything for individual sale from Gatchina and the Stroganov Museum, because I assume that we will be able to sell these two museums in their entirety. They will have to go from us to America."

From the diary of Balaeva, curator of the Gatchina Museum: "I am lying down, my heart is bad. Urgent work is underway to compile the export list." Next on the list is Pavlovsk. It is being offered for 40 million roubles. The only consideration that saved these museums from being sold off "to the roots" was that the West might form an opinion unfavourable to the USSR in terms of obtaining further credits. The fact was that the entire Soviet export of the first Stalinist five-year plan did not even cover half of the purchases of equipment needed for industrialisation.

The external debt was growing and required new credits. Soviet exports were reminiscent of the situation in pre-Mongol Rus'. The USSR was exporting timber, furs, flax and grain — and, to be sure, some oil. Grain, however, was a special case. The world economic crisis that broke out in the early 1930s drove down bread prices. Under these conditions, the Soviet state continued to export and sell grain at dumping prices, that is, lower than low. Persistent grain exports provoked a monstrous famine in the USSR and continued despite this famine. Grain sales brought in a meagre percentage of foreign currency earnings. Yet half of the grain sold in 1932–1933 would have been enough to feed all the starving regions.

In such an economic situation, the Soviet leadership could not risk Western credits and had to save some face before the West. This saved the museums, but only to a certain extent. In 1932, icons, furniture, costumes were removed by the crate and the trunkload from the children's wing of the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoye Selo. The billiard tables of Alexander III and Nicholas II were taken to the Kremlin. Today the halls of the Alexander Palace are filled with sets from Gleb Panfilov's film *The Romanovs: An Imperial Family*, generously donated to the museum. Pavlovsk was sold by half. The unique tapestries from the Tapestry Room can now be seen in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. The furniture is in the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon.

The Soviet authorities had had special relations with the oil magnate and collector Calouste Gulbenkian since 1928. At that time he had offered to help the USSR, which had big problems in the oil trade. The Soviet Oil Syndicate stayed on the world oil market; Gulbenkian received huge dividends from this, and in addition the full confidence of the Soviet authorities. Personally, this man must have appealed to Stalin for his secretiveness. In selling him museum masterpieces, one could be sure of complete confidentiality of the deal.

In 1930, Calouste Gulbenkian felt that his dream of acquiring masterpieces from the Hermitage was closer than ever to coming true.

On 22 February 1931, a worker named Golovanov dropped a note in the suggestions box at the Hermitage. It read: “When a painting is taken out for an exhibition, there is always a note left: where it is, for what reason, and why it is gone. Now Velázquez’ *Pope Innocent X* is missing. Where is it, what has happened to it? The guides don’t answer. Some people among the public say it has been sold!”

The author of the note, the worker Golovanov, even left his address: Tuchkov Lane, 12, flat 8. The note was immediately forwarded to the OGPU along with a covering letter from the head of the Secret Section of the State Hermitage, Kulimanin: “I inform you that the painting by Velázquez mentioned in the note has been removed from the display on orders of the government and handed over to the state office ‘Antikvariat’.”

Today, this portrait is in Rome, in the Doria Pamphilj Gallery.

On 15 April 1932, the director of the Hermitage, Legran, received a document from the People’s Commissariat for Education: “Select urgently 2 paintings by Rembrandt: *The Denial of Peter* and *Landscape with a Castle*.”

At this time Anna Andreyevna Akhmatova wrote to her friend, the art historian Nikolai Khardzhiev: “Everything is as before with us, only it’s even worse. Yesterday I was at the Hermitage — a desert.” Akhmatova had been a regular visitor to the Hermitage for many years; she had something to compare with.

I have in my hands a guide to the Hermitage published in 1916. We enter the Rembrandt room. On 14 June 1932, a separate resolution of the Politburo, No. 104P73/15, is adopted regarding the sale of Rembrandts. In the Rembrandt room there are five sections. Let us look at the old guide. In the first section three works are missing. In the second section there used to hang the famous *Denial of Saint Peter*, a masterpiece sold exactly under that Politburo decision. Along with it went a portrait of the artist’s son. In the Netherlands, the acquisition of these works was, naturally, perceived as a national event. The purchase was financed through a state loan taken from the pension fund of Dutch colonial civil servants. From the third section four works were sold, two of which went to the aforementioned Calouste Gulbenkian. From the fourth section two more works left.

In the 1916 guide there is no *Landscape with a Castle* by Rembrandt. Its acquisition had been an extraordinary success for the Hermitage in the first post-revolutionary years. There are only fifteen Rembrandt landscapes in the world. Ours, the only one, was sold in 1932 by decision of the Politburo. It is now in the Louvre. According to a special list, Botticelli, Tiepolo, Raphael, Rubens also left. “I propose the immediate handover of the painting by Giorgione, *Judith*.” Signature: People’s Commissar for Education Bubnov.

If one abstracts from the obvious moral assessment of these actions, all the money obtained from the sale of these masterpieces simply did not correspond to the needs of accelerated industrialisation.

The end of the sell-off of museum collections has a purely economic explanation. The use of prison labour, after the mass repressions throughout the 1930s, made it possible to open up new and exploit old gold fields. A new export item appeared. Works of art were forgotten by the authorities as unnecessary and uncompetitive.

In January 1932, the telephone rang in the apartment of Constantin Sergeevich Stanislavsky, the founder of the Moscow Art Theatre. It was the secretary of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR, member of the Central Committee commission overseeing the Bolshoi and the Art Theatre, Abel Yenukidze. Yenukidze asked Stanislavsky: "Can the theatre restore the production of Bulgakov's play *The Days of the Turbins* within a month?" — "Yes, of course," Stanislavsky replied. *The Days of the Turbins* had been banned in the middle of 1929.

On 28 March 1930, Bulgakov wrote a letter to the government of the USSR, meaning to Stalin. Bulgakov wrote that the hero of his play *The Days of the Turbins*, Alexei Turbin, was being called "a son of a bitch" in newspaper articles, that according to the critics the play "stank", that "Misha Bulgakov" was "rummaging in stale trash", that the entire press of the USSR was proving that "Bulgakov's works cannot exist in the USSR." Bulgakov wrote to Stalin: "Now I am destroyed." He asked to be expelled abroad. Or to be given work at the Art Theatre. If not as a director, then as an extra, if not as an extra, then as a stagehand. Six days after Bulgakov's letter to Stalin, Mayakovsky shot himself. The day after Mayakovsky's funeral, Stalin called Bulgakov. Stalin said: "You're asking to go abroad? What, we have bored you so much?" Bulgakov replied that it seemed to him that "a Russian writer cannot live outside his homeland."

"I think so too," said Stalin. "Where do you want to work? At the Art Theatre?"

"Yes, but I was refused."

"Then submit an application there. I think they will agree."

The day after Stalin's call, when Bulgakov came to the Moscow Art Theatre, he was greeted with: "Why, of course! Please!"

After a pause of a year and a half, *The Days of the Turbins* was revived at the Moscow Art Theatre on Stalin's instructions. On the day of the premiere, the street in front of the theatre was packed with people. Extra tickets were being sought already at the beginning of Tverskaya Street. In that same 1932, Tverskaya would be renamed Gorky Street. This would be done on Stalin's personal instructions and during Gorky's lifetime. At the same time, the Art Theatre, born with the name of Chekhov, would be given the name of Gorky.

Stalin attended *The Days of the Turbins* 15 times, according to other information 17 times. Sometimes alone. Sometimes he was accompanied in the box by Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Kirov. Kirov would be with Stalin at *The Turbins* on 29 November 1934, two days before his death. In 1932, an older lady was seen with Stalin at Bulgakov's play. This was Lyudmila Nikolayevna Stal, a party member since 1898, an old acquaintance of Stalin from party work. According to one version, it was this factory owner's daughter and revolutionary, Madame Stal, seven years older than Iosif Dzhughashvili, who was the reason he chose the pseudonym Stalin in 1912, under which he entered history.

According to another version, Lyudmila Stal once introduced Stalin to a lady who would later be recalled to him by Bulgakov's red-haired Elena Vasilievna Turbina. But it is hardly for this reason that Stalin came so many times to *The Days of the Turbins*. He came there for something else. It is in the theatre, watching Bulgakov's intelligent, decent and naive characters, that Stalin feels, again and again, the deepest satisfaction from the fact that they, so spiritually noble, have been exterminated, destroyed forever. Every time, in the darkness of the Moscow Art Theatre box, he triumphs over these people, of whom in 1932 there are already few even in the camps. The last of these "Turbins", at the very time he is sitting in the theatre, are already on the White Sea Canal. And there, from every loudspeaker all along the construction site, day and night they hear: "The canal is being built on the initiative and according to the plan of Comrade Stalin!" Those Turbins are felling forest there without saws and axes. Saws and axes are not issued. Trees are tied with ropes, and brigades pull them — rocking them in different directions, then toppling them.

So the revival of *The Days of the Turbins* at the Moscow Art Theatre is not a sign of attention to Bulgakov, nor a whim of Stalin. In the theatre he does not distract himself from his work.

In 1926, at the premiere of Bulgakov's play, many former tsarist officers who had entered the service of the Red Army cried when the old Russian anthem sounded from the stage. On Stalin's orders, everyone who had shown emotion in the theatre was recorded by name in lists for the OGPU.

Stalin and Bulgakov had a long history of relations.

In the mid-1920s, Stalin and Bulgakov were courting the same woman — Olga Sergeyevna Bokshanskaya. She was the personal secretary of the director of the Art Theatre, Nemirovich-Danchenko, an excellent stenographer and a person absolutely competent in the life of the theatre. She was the wife of the Art Theatre actor Yevgeny Kaluzhsky. He was an off-staff collaborator of the OGPU and NKVD. When in 1936, after an article in *Pravda*, Bulgakov's play *Molière* was banned, Kaluzhsky wrote in a report to the NKVD: "Bulgakov keeps asking: 'Is it really a bad play?' When my wife told him that, fortunately for him, the reviewers avoided the political meaning of his play, he asked with feigned naivety: 'But is there a political meaning in *Molière*?'"

Kaluzhsky's wife, Olga Sergeyevna Bokshanskaya, was the sister of Elena Sergeyevna, whom Bulgakov would later marry and who would live with him through his last, most agonising years.

Stalin looks at the Moscow Art Theatre stage from his box. Of course, Bulgakov's independence with his Turbins in 1932 makes an impression — it cannot but do so. Elena Sergeyevna Bulgakova recalls: "Stalin told Khmelev, who played Alexei Turbin: 'You play well. I even dream about your black moustache, I can't forget it.'" It's boring without those Turbins. But without them, everything is going as it should.

1923.12th Party Congress. When Stalin appears at the rostrum, no greeting from the hall is recorded in the stenographic transcript. After his report — applause.

1924.13th Congress. After Stalin's report — prolonged applause, turning into an ovation.

1925.14th Congress. Stalin's political report. Stormy, prolonged applause, turning into an ovation. Everyone rises.

1926.15th Congress. Stormy, prolonged applause. Ovation from the entire hall. Cries of “Hurrah!” It should be noted that at this Congress Bukharin and Rykov are greeted in the same way.

1927.16th Congress. Stalin’s political report. Stormy, prolonged applause, turning into a stormy, long ovation. Cries of “Hurrah!” The Congress welcomes Comrade Stalin standing.

1928.17th Congress — the so-called “Congress of Victors.” The entire hall rises. Stormy, prolonged applause, turning into a long ovation. Exclamations: “Hurrah! Long live our Stalin!”

1929.18th Congress. The Congress meets Comrade Stalin standing, with a stormy ovation. In all the languages of the peoples of the great Soviet Union resound cries: “Long live Comrade Stalin. Hurrah! Hurrah to the leader, teacher and friend, Comrade Stalin! Long live our dear, beloved Stalin!” The chairman’s bell is drowned in the storm of applause.

In 1932, Stalin did not make broad public statements. At the beginning of the year he attended the 17th Party Conference but did not speak. At the two plenums of 1932 he did not go up to the rostrum. He only threw in remarks from his seat. Rumours arose about Stalin’s illness. Asked by a representative of the Associated Press agency about his health, Stalin replied: “However sad it may be, there’s nothing you can do against the facts. I am healthy.” After that, Stalin left for three months’ vacation to the south, to Sochi.

He travelled accompanied by Karl Pauker. Karl Pauker had gone from being a barber in Lviv to head of the operations department of the Cheka–OGPU–NKVD. This department was in charge of the protection of party and government leaders, as well as searches, arrests and surveillance. At the same time, Pauker was chairman of the “Friend of Children” society under the OGPU–NKVD, and deputy chairman of the Dynamo sports society. For a long time Pauker was a man very close to Stalin. He would be shot in 1937. In 1932 he was with Stalin in the south. A year earlier, in 1931, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, built by nationwide subscription to commemorate the victory in the Patriotic War of 1812, had been demolished. And in the south, in 1932, Stalin was busy with the project of the Palace of Soviets, which was to be built on the site of the cathedral. Stalin preferred the design proposed by Boris Iofan. He wrote from the south to Voroshilov, Molotov and Kaganovich in Moscow: “We ought to oblige Iofan to decorate the top of the Palace in the form of a tall column. If it is impossible to raise the column above the ‘Palace’, then place the column beside the Palace. If possible, of the height of the Eiffel Tower or a little higher.” At this same time, on vacation, Stalin personally wrote the decree “On the protection of the property of state enterprises, kolkhozes and cooperatives and on the strengthening of public (socialist) property.”

On 7 August the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars approved the decree written by Stalin. For theft of state and kolkhoz property, the death penalty was prescribed, which, under mitigating circumstances, could be replaced by a term of no less than ten years with confiscation of property. This law entered history under the name of “the law of the three ears of grain.” Theft of socialist property began, in the literal sense, with two potatoes or a few ears of grain. The law was adopted not earlier and not later, but at the height of the most terrible famine in the country’s history, a famine provoked by the authorities.

At the beginning of 1932, one of the so-called “twenty-five-thousanders” came from the Volga region to his home village in the Urals to visit his parents. Under this name were known the more

than twenty-five thousand party workers mobilised to help the OGPU organise work in the kolkhozes. This man arrived in his impoverished, starving village and began to reassure his fellow villagers. “You call this hunger? — he said — You haven’t even eaten children’s meat yet.” The famine would fully unfold, up to cannibalism, in the autumn and winter of 1932–1933, just at the moment when the results of the first five-year plan were being summed up.

Things were worst in Ukraine, in the North Caucasus, in the Kuban, in the Volga region, in the southern Ural, in Kazakhstan. With the exception of Kazakhstan, where the famine was provoked by the requisition of livestock, all the other regions were major producers of grain. The grain was everywhere confiscated and sent for export. According to various estimates, the country lost between 5 and 7 million people in the two years of famine.

“In the district centre, near the bus stop, in the little square, right on the trampled paths, on the dusty grass, lay those who were no longer considered human.

Some of them were skeletons covered with dark, wrinkled skin, skeletons with enormous, meekly burning eyes.

Others, on the contrary, were tightly swollen — the skin, bluish from the strain, was about to burst. And they behaved not like human beings either.

Someone was thoughtfully gnawing the bark on a birch trunk.

Someone had spread out on the ground like jelly, was not moving, only gurgling inside.

Someone was stuffing rubbish from the ground into his mouth. Those who looked most like human beings were the ones who had already died.

But before death, one of those who gnawed the bark and chewed the rubbish would suddenly rebel — would stand up to his full height, embrace the birch trunk, press his cheek against it, open his mouth, probably intending to shout a scorching curse, but only a wheeze came out, foam bubbled. The rebel slid down the trunk and grew quiet forever.

Around them, ordinary life went on. People hurried to work.”

So writes the writer Vladimir Tendryakov, recalling what he saw in childhood.

Those who survived that famine used to say: “Hunger is worse than war.”

From the memoirs: “In Kiev, those who died of hunger were brought to Babi Yar and buried. Half-dead people were brought there too, and they died there.” The burial of victims of the planned famine was the first mass grave in Babi Yar.

The second would appear eight years later, in September 1941, when Hitler’s forces would carry out the mass shooting of the Jewish population of occupied Kiev in Babi Yar.

In 1932, by law of 27 December, a “nationality” entry was introduced in Soviet passports. In the near future this would become an extremely convenient tool in Stalin’s hands for setting entire peoples against one another and for deporting entire peoples on charges of betraying the Soviet state system. The nationality of citizens came under state control in the USSR even before Hitler came to power in Germany with his Nazi idea of racial superiority.

In 1932, Gorky came once again from Italy to Moscow. During his previous visit he had been given the former house of the Russian businessman Stepan Pavlovich Ryabushinsky. In October 1932, within one week, Stalin appeared twice as a guest at Gorky’s. On 20 October a meeting took place between Stalin, members of the Politburo and communist writers. Sitting at the table, Stalin explained what the method of socialist realism in literature was and how it should be applied.

Stalin's words were taken down by the writer Feoktist Berezovsky, a party member since 1905. When forming the organising committee of the Union of Soviet Writers, Stalin would remove Sholokhov from the list but leave Berezovsky. At Gorky's table Stalin said: "The sea of non-party writers is growing, but no one leads them, no one helps them, they are waifs. At one time I was also non-party and I didn't understand much. But the older comrades did not push me away, they taught me how to master the dialectical method."

The informal atmosphere of the meeting, the references to his own experience, show how concerned Stalin was about relations with the intelligentsia.

Stalin personally carried out the artillery preparation among the intelligentsia. That meant he would soon be in desperate need of support from that side. The famous Russian intelligentsia, explaining and approving the leader's actions, was a result worth working for.

On 26 October 1932, again at Gorky's, another meeting took place. This time party and non-party writers were together. Voroshilov, Molotov, Kaganovich, Stalin. At the first meeting, Bukharin had been there instead of Kaganovich. The writers chosen for the second meeting received telephone calls, invitations; they were told the place and time and asked to keep it secret. This created a feeling of being chosen. Sholokhov, Fadeev, Kataev, Seifullina, Vsevolod Ivanov, Lev Nikulin, Mikhail Koltsov — about fifty people in all. It was at this meeting that Stalin called writers "engineers of human souls."

Stalin's meetings with writers were accompanied by excellent food and drink. The poet Vladimir Lugovskoy proposed a toast to the health of Comrade Stalin. The writer Georgy Nikiforov, tipsy, stood up and shouted across the room: "I'm sick of it. A million one hundred and forty-seven thousand times we've drunk to the health of Comrade Stalin. He must be sick of hearing it too." Stalin stood up, reached across the table, shook Nikiforov by the fingertips and said: "Thank you, Nikiforov, that's right. I'm sick of it too." In 1937, Georgy Nikiforov would be shot. In 1932, at Gorky's, people made noise even while Stalin was speaking; they clinked glasses, argued with him, sang songs, dealt with everyday problems. Sitting at Gorky's table, Stalin himself raised the question of writers' living conditions and promised to take care of them. He knew what he was doing. Eighty percent of the letters Stalin received from cultural figures came from the literary nomenklatura. The highest Soviet literary general staff asked for collected works, creative leaves, sanatorium vouchers, dachas and rations.

Stalin met them halfway. The fear for one's own life, against the backdrop of terror, and the craving for material well-being, against the backdrop of famine, are stronger than any ideology. The task of the authorities is to build a clear hierarchy, a rigid ladder for the privileged estate, and to point out how to climb one step higher. Under Stalin's leadership, this task was solved brilliantly and for all the years of Soviet power. Moreover, the system built on privileges is, in its own way, even democratic. In the sense that unquestioning obedience and mindless executiveness really do allow a man from below to break through to power. For him, power is always firmly and naturally associated with material privileges.

That is why the separate, special life of the highest party and Soviet nomenklatura, apart from the hungry country, is perceived by the population as something normal. Marx said: "The bureaucracy has the state in its possession. It is its private property." When you own the entire state, down to the guts, you can walk around in a modest tunic.

The famine, which was the expected result of adventurist industrialisation and collectivisation, and in this sense planned, opened up prospects for the authorities that they had not even imagined. Although at the beginning of 1932 the prospects were doubtful. Stalin's three-month stay in the south in the summer of 1932 was a panic akin to the one that would seize him in the autumn of 1941, when the Nazis reached the outskirts of Moscow. In both 1932 and 1941 the reason for the panic was the same — fear for his power and for his life. It was a state of extreme panic. In the summer of 1932, realising that the country was entering a terrible famine, he expected a social explosion. Stalin's "three ears" law was a game of intimidation born of his own abject fear. That is why in early autumn 1932, having returned from the south, Stalin rushed in a direction quite uncharacteristic for him — he rushed towards the intelligentsia, as toward a new Soviet Cinderella who could perform the impossible for the wicked stepmother, that is, justify her in all her sins.

On 19 and 22 November 1932, a candidate member of the Central Committee of the VKP(b), Saveliev, sent two letters to Stalin. Saveliev wrote to Stalin that a party member, Nikolsky, had had a conversation with the People's Commissar for Supply of the RSFSR, Eismont. Nikolsky had asked Saveliev to tell Stalin what Eismont thought. Eismont told Nikolsky that the current economic and political situation was driving the country into a dead end, that Stalin would lead to peasant uprisings. Life showed that People's Commissar for Supply Eismont was mistaken. Neither in 1932 nor in 1933, despite the most terrible famine, were there serious peasant or worker uprisings. Fifteen post-revolutionary years — with civil war, repressions, de-kulakisation and collectivisation of the countryside — had finally, by 1932, produced a result: deep social exhaustion, a national fatigue that took the form of complete non-resistance by the population to the actions of the authorities.

From a letter by participants in the 5th All-Union Congress of Engineering and Technical Workers, held in Moscow at the end of November 1932. It was addressed to the head of government, Molotov:

"Citizen Molotov!!!!

We listened to you fully aware that you can't break through a wall with your forehead. We applauded you, hating you in our souls and mentally showering you with curses. A ruined, starving people is incapable of a mass uprising. Let the devil himself come — if only we have bread and potatoes."

Stalin would not realise until the spring of 1933 that everything would be quiet and that he would get away with everything.

That spring was awaited in the Soviet villages as never before. Nettles appeared. People rushed to eat them. And other wild grasses. From the memoirs: "The neighbour boy Petya died in the street: he was eating grass, and he died just like that, with the grass in his mouth." When people quietly began to eat grass, Stalin saw the true results of fifteen post-revolutionary years. Such obedience of society Stalin could not have dreamed of. It was impossible not to use it.

Already in 1931, a number of decrees were issued regulating the provision of food to responsible workers of the central party-state apparatus. In accordance with these documents, a network of special closed distributive shops was created for supplying these officials. The main distributive centres were in the "House on the Embankment," in Komsomolsky Lane and in Granovsky Street. The highest category ration was labelled "A". This applied, for example, to secretaries of the Central Committee of the VKP(b) and of the Central Committee of the Komsomol, to members of

the government and the highest trade-union leadership. The list was long. Plus the families of all those mentioned.

Employees of central institutions of lower rank, the editors of central newspapers, received “B” category rations.

Clothing and shoes were sewn in special ateliers and workshops. Orders for tailoring were issued depending on the position occupied. Soap and linen were also dispensed by order.

Naturally, the highest command staff of the army was on special supply. The scientific elite was attached to distributive shops not according to scientific qualifications but by position. From 1936 on, the list of the most valuable scientific cadres was approved by the Central Committee of the VKP(b). This system extended to the creative intelligentsia.

In the autumn of 1932, at the height of the famine, an official received per month at the distributive shop in the “House on the Embankment” 4 kilograms of meat, 8 kilograms of fish, 4 kilograms of sausage, 3 kilograms of sugar, and 1 kilogram of caviar. Poultry, dairy products, vegetables, fruit and confectionery were sold without restriction.

In addition, there was a special “public catering” system — special canteens. Sanatoriums were also separate. There was a huge difference in food norms between sanatoriums for the nomenklatura and those for ordinary citizens. What we see in the film *My Love with Lidiya Smirnova* could only have been a special sanatorium. In 1932, in ordinary Crimean sanatoriums only 600 grams of bread per day were issued. Nothing else. For Soviet and party officials there was free transport and special rail carriages with special meals. In 1932, in the hungriest year, the menu in the special carriages included Swiss cheese, meat, game, caviar, chocolate, fruit and imported cigarettes.

The system of food privileges was clear, simple and effective. It covered 55,000 families. In addition, 14 million industrial workers, that is, workers in the largest, strategically important enterprises, received a guaranteed ration. However, by the end of 1932, food norms for them were cut in half. Their family members were not provided with food. Workers in other enterprises in the country fed themselves as best they could. Teachers, doctors, office workers, students were not guaranteed even bread. Less than 20 percent of the population received a state ration. And of course this ration had to be paid for.

In the hungry September of 1932, to feed the delegates of the plenum of the Central Committee of the VKP(b) for 15 days, a range of 93 types of food was requested. Namely: 10 tons of meat products (meat, sausage, brisket, ham, chickens, geese, ducks), 4 tons of fish products (zander, sturgeon, sevruga), 300 kilograms of caviar, 600 kilograms of cheese, as well as vegetables, fruit, berries, mushrooms. Funds were also allocated for provisioning the delegates on their return journey.

It is on the basis of the harshest property inequality that the Stalinist repressive system was built. The system of handouts in a beggar country ensured loyalty to the leader, corrupted people and endlessly replenished the ranks of those ready for anything, including terror. The executors of terror had to be shuffled, among other things, because it was simply impossible to feed all the willing ones at once.

In the autumn of 1932, Stalin’s wife, Nadezhda Alliluyeva, went to visit her sister Anna in Kharkov. Anna was the wife of Stanislav Redens, who headed the Ukrainian GPU. Kharkov, at that time the capital of Ukraine, was the third city, after Moscow and Leningrad, where an open anti-Stalinist

manifesto written by the former secretary of the Krasnopresnensky district committee of Moscow, Martemyan Ryutin, was actively circulating from hand to hand. In Redens's household, they could not fail to talk about it. There is information that Stalin's wife read this document. Information about the famine in Ukraine also flowed first of all to Redens. Trotsky writes that Nadezhda Alliluyeva's mother told her about the catastrophic situation in the countryside. Alliluyeva tried to talk to Stalin about it.

On 8 November 1932, after a banquet dedicated to the 15th anniversary of the Revolution, Nadezhda Alliluyeva shot herself. This was an uncharacteristic, singular case of expressing personal disagreement with Stalin. After his wife's suicide, Stalin said: "She betrayed me." Sixteen years later, in 1948, Nadezhda Alliluyeva's sister Anna would receive ten years in the camps.