

Lost in Memory: Memorial Society and the Battle for the Russian Past

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Introduction. A broken promise

1

After Alexei Navalny, Vladimir Putin's main political opponent, died in a penal colony far above the Arctic Circle in February 2024, people across the country spent days and days carrying flowers to monuments to victims of political repression. They were arrested, the flowers were broken and thrown in the garbage. But people and flowers continued to appear at the monuments again and again.

These memorials were erected to commemorate crimes organized and committed by the Soviet state. For many years, they were monuments of warning and, at the same time, a symbol of the informal agreement reached between the state and society: an agreement to recognize the crimes of the past and not to repeat them in the future. As I write this text, the Russian state has been at war in Ukraine for more than two years, while killing and imprisoning its own citizens. We return to these monuments as if they were a broken promise.

In the second half of the 1980s, the idea of installing a memorial to the victims of repression united thousands of people. The idea quickly evolved into something more — a social movement that was named “Memorial”. The memorial ceased to be seen as something static and became a process. “Memorial”'s task became the restitution of memory and the reconstruction of lost human stories: searching for and publishing the names of victims of repression, researching state and family archives, working with the experiences of the survivors and civic education for the next generations, disseminating information about dictatorial past, and defending contemporary political prisoners.

The logic of the same work has been carried over to the present day, although several decades have passed since then. A "real", large, main monument to the victims of repression has never been erected. The debate about it has gradually transformed into a

new discussion: not only and not so much about the Soviet past, but about the basic principles of mutual coexistence between man and state in the post-Soviet world. In 2024, Memorial is working with contemporary issues as much as with history. For better or worse, 35 years after the first meetings at which the idea of the monument was discussed, Memorial, as a historical and human rights society that unites dozens of organizations, remains the living embodiment of the struggle for human rights in Russia, and its own fate is part of the battle for history and memory that has been going on all these years.

2

My grandfather's name was Vladimir Alexandrovich Smirnitsky. He was born in Moscow on January 25, 1924, 4 days after Lenin's death. According to a family legend, my grandfather's mother, Odessa doctor Mary Mendelevna Lifitz, went to look at the dead Ilyich, whose long farewell was just about to begin that day - but felt that she was in labor, and turned to the nearest maternity hospital. So my grandfather became Vladimir, Volya.

When Grandpa was 14, on the night of May 16, 1938, they came for his father. As in thousands of other similar stories, he recalls some isolated details, like flashes. He was awakened by a noise. Uniformed officers were rummaging through things in his father's office. Grandfather was allowed to move "textbooks and books" from there - under this pretext he saved a part of the family library, which we still have. The NKVD officers confiscated his favorite camera: grandfather and his father were very fond of taking pictures and the night before they had just been sorting them out. In a shed next to a three-story house in Leontievsky Lane, where grandfather's family had two rooms with a shared corridor, they found an old brass gun among the firewood. It was added to the case as "material evidence" that Alexander Smirnitsky, grandfather's father, was going to participate in an assassination attempt on Politburo member Vyacheslav Molotov.

I had heard this story since my late teens. Much later, I figured out how to make an audio recording of it - to preserve my grandfather's voice. In the winter of 2016, when

Grandpa was 92, we tracked down his father's file in the FSB Central Archive and went to read it together. It was one of the most important events in my life. We sat down in a small room that looked like a school after-school program room - desks, an aquarium, some KGB memorabilia - and began to read the same story told from the opposite side. We saw the record of the seized camera and shotgun. We saw the signatures of the witnesses, the questionnaire of the arrested, filled out from the words of grandfather's father. We learned that the investigator who made him do the "stance" during interrogations - to stand on straight legs facing the wall for hours on end - was named Vladimir Ivanovich Vertiporokh. There was also a certificate about the sealing of a room in grandfather's apartment, his father's office.

I asked my grandfather what happened next: who was put there when the seal was broken. "And nothing happened," he replied. - It remained sealed until the war. So for three years, Grandpa and his mother and younger brother lived next to the closed door to the world of their closest person. What was left in that room? Is it possible to quietly sneak in there to take something needed? Or maybe, if one dares to break the seal, it will turn out that the father never left, that he is there, in that room.

"During the Finnish war, in 1940", my grandfather recalled, "it suddenly became very cold: apparently a window opened in the sealed room. But even then they did not dare to open the door - they just put a blanket under it to make it at least a little warmer". In 1941, the whole family left for evacuation to Kazan, and when they returned to Moscow at the end of the war, they soon moved out of this apartment.

Grandpa's father survived. He was lucky. In the camp he was a doctor - a rare and privileged profession. In addition, he was over fifty, and it was almost pointless to use him for general labor. Many old men, however, were used anyway - but not him. In 1946 he was released, his grandfather went to see him, to help him decide on a new place of residence: to return to Moscow and settle a hundred kilometers from the capital convicted on political articles was forbidden. They chose Alexandrov, a town on the 101st kilometer. In 1949, when grandfather's father was arrested again and sent into exile in Siberia, to the village of Berezovka in the Krasnoyarsk region, grandfather went

to see him there. That exile was called indefinite, but it also ended. Stalin died, and Alexander Smirnitsky returned home.

I keep thinking about that closed room even now. I find the story enchanting, almost gothic. And archetypal at the same time. There is a room in your home that you must never enter. You have to stop being afraid, but you can't touch your fear, it's too dangerous, too painful. I don't know if it's possible to inherit this nightmare or get subliminal restitution from the state so that the room can still open. I only know that I will always want to look into it, if only for a second, not to run, not to hide. Although I don't think it's possible to fully come to terms with what's inside. I feel like this: you can't live without opening this room — but you also can't live with what's in this room.

My grandfather died on August 21, 2022, six months after Russia invaded Ukraine and started a new big war. I couldn't make it out to his funeral, I was far away. This story is for him.

3

I hope it is already clear from what has been said that this book is by no means an ultimatum, an academic history of the Memorial Society.

First of all, it focuses on the work of a group of people who, for most of the last three decades, were called "International Memorial" and were based in Moscow (yes, and I worked there). From the earliest years, there were many "Memorials" - at one point they formed a federation, some of them were completely independent. Over the years, Memorials have both worked together and divided their functions and powers between history and human rights. International Memorial formally and informally united most of these organizations, without fully overlapping with them or directing them. In Moscow alone, the Memorial Scientific and Historical Educational Center, Moscow Memorial, Russian Memorial, and the Memorial Human Rights Center were registered and operated. This list could go on and on. But this book is not about that.

To my great regret, this book hardly covers the many Memorial's branches that have worked and are still working outside Moscow. I try to see this huge omission as a form of respect for their work: at different periods, there were dozens of Memorials in Russia and beyond, organized in a democratic horizontal structure, and each of them deserves its own separate study. Nevertheless, various aspects of their work, embedded in International Memorial's projects and programs - Books of Memory, the "Return of Names" campaign, a large archive of repression victims, human rights activities, and a school essay contest - will appear in the book one way or another.

Many of the people I have been fortunate enough to be around over the years have agreed to talk to me. These interviews became the basis for my story. I started recording these conversations over seven years ago. First and foremost, it was important for me to listen to the founding fathers - those who, with few exceptions, left Memorial in its early years. Vyacheslav Igrunov pursued a political career. Nina Braginsky pursued a scientific path. Yuri Skubko went abroad and then, when he returned, by the early 2000s, went to work in one of Putin's ministries. I spoke to those who remained at Memorial many times, not only and not so much about specific events and memories, but about the meaning of their work, their own ideas about why all this was necessary and why it is still important to them. Among these people were Irina Shcherbakova, Elena Zhemkova, Boris Belenkin, Yan Rachinsky, Nikita Petrov, Nikita Okhotin, Oleg Orlov, Oyub Titiev, Alexander Guryanov, Andrei Blinushov, Alexei Babiy, Alexei Makarov, Irina Ostrovskaya, Nikita Lomakin, and more than a dozen others, who time after time listened to my questions and explained to me in detail where I was wrong again, what I did not understand, and what else would be good to see or read. Of course, as they always say in such cases, my mistakes and misconceptions are mine alone.

Finally, my own position in this world inside and outside Memorial plays a significant role. I have a history degree. From the first years at Memorial, there were not very many such people, for obvious reasons: only an accomplished careerist, an ideological communist, or an idiot could study the history of the twentieth century in Soviet times. I am younger, I studied at university in the first half of the 2000s, and I came to volunteer and work at Memorial in 2008. By general Memorial standards, my seniority is quite

short - most of the staff have been working much longer than I have. In the short time between the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine, I was elected to the board of Moscow Memorial. At that moment, I felt for the first time my opportunities and privileges: now I too could be imprisoned as a board member of an oppositionary organization! With the outbreak of the war, they have lost all meaning: everyone I know and love is either already in jail, or going to meetings with those who are being imprisoned, or sitting at home, fearing for their children and loved ones and cursing themselves for not doing enough, or they have packed up and left Russia. And this means that we are all together, in the same boat, and, as best we can, we are trying to figure out what needs to be done, how to do the right thing, day by day, right now. Working at Memorial, writing and thinking about it is my attempt to invent a way of acting for myself.

4

An old court tale: a man accused of murdering both his parents asks the jury for leniency on the grounds that he is an orphan. I have been working at Memorial for almost 15 years - and I don't know if I can judge him after that.

The story of Memorial does not lend itself well to a linear retelling. For more than thirty years it has been in direct connection with the history of the Soviet Union and Russia and with the stories of the people - living and dead - who inhabited these territories. I think it is important not to turn this history into a mythology, a story about "gods and heroes" who worked at Memorial and fought evil. In a sense, it is an even more universal story: to a much greater extent than it is about people, it tells us about their system of values, their specific view of the past and, in this regard, of the present.

In this sense, Memorial was never founded by anyone. It existed in various forms long before its official registration in the late 1980s. Before people with dissident experience appeared in it. Until the death of Academician Sakharov, its first symbolic leader. In many people around and inside Memorial lived that very system of values, that special

type of reasoning about the past and the present. And, as I now think, it was also a special form of grieving about life and history. Right now, in the third year of the great war between Russia and Ukraine, few things occupy me as much as the permanent need to grieve.

5

The Dutch historian Frank Ankersmit, who wrote the book "The Sublime Historical Experience" about the problem of sensual perception of the past, once admitted to his translator in a casual conversation that his book is not really about "big history" but about the experience of impossible, unrequited love. The central thesis of his study is that in the moment of breaking with the past, of losing it, we become what we are no longer. Only at the moment of loss do we realize what we possessed, who we were. We lose a large part of ourselves, let it go with the past, and gain an experience -- to realize which, according to Ankersmith, is in many cases more important than trying to distill the degree of its "truth".

In my book, I would like to tell the story of Memorial through such moments of experience. I am not trying (and I am not even sure I would want to) to understand "how it really was," who is right and who is to blame. In the words of the participants in the events, I want to feel their current perception of the experience. To understand how they live and understand what happened to us and what did not happen, what happened and what could have happened if we had been in a different state, in a different position at that moment.

Therefore, each chapter asks roughly the same question - can we see from a single point, a single symbolic event, the possible paths of development of the big themes and big problems that Memorial undertook to solve? How can we make visible the history of state terror? How can we learn to work with the memory of it? How can we name the names of the victims and those responsible for the crimes without simplifying the problem or making categorical judgments? How do we apply these principles in the present, not as moral incantations, but as guidelines for action? What do we do when,

along with changing times, we have to apply many of the principles we have developed to defend ourselves? The whole book is organized around these questions and tries to look at possible answers from different angles - and not only to tell how Memorial has answered them and where it has led, but also what possible answers have not been forthcoming and why.

And back to love: I came to Memorial because I wanted to impress the girl I fell in love with. It worked out just fine: she got married and I stayed at Memorial for the next 15 years. Despite all the difficulties, frustration, and probably defeat that Memorial has endured over the decades, I am certain that everyone who has gone to work there has done so out of love for the world around them - out of a sincere desire to do the right thing, to give themselves and others the opportunity to express their feelings about the past and present. It was from that same perspective that I undertook to write this book.

1. Theatre of Life

The past appeared here from behind a wall, a door, a window: inside, no one remembered anything.
Varlam Shalamov, "Brave Eyes."

The curtain rises and we see ourselves on the stage. We are sitting right in front of the stage, in the front row. Somewhere in the depths, among the scenery, a poster appears: "Memorial" - a warning for the future. Today is February 9, 2022, and the play

"Memoria" is playing at the Meyerhold Centre Theatre in Moscow. That's almost the end. That's where we can start.

By this point, Memorial had been in existence for 35 years. Organised by a group of activists, historians and informants at the height of Perestroika, by the beginning of 2022 it had almost become a monument to itself. Many of those who continue to work there sit in the auditorium and watch "Memoria", "a play about the history of Memorial".

The actress playing Irina Scherbakova -- a Germanic philologist, a young woman who in the late 1970s began recording her grandmother's friends' stories about their camp past -- takes the stage.

There was no such thing as "oral history" as a discipline in the Soviet Union at that time, and therefore the method of recording itself was a logical continuation of two fundamental practices of metropolitan intelligentsia: family and friendly kitchen conversations, too dangerous and therefore impossible in public life, and the experience of reading forbidden literature, especially Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, the main underground bestseller, for the possession and distribution of which one could get a big prison sentence.

Solzhenitsyn collected dozens of accounts of arrests and camps and reworked them into an author's text, demonstrating to the world the scale of Soviet repression. His book reopened a subject that had been closed with the end of the political thaw and the ouster of Khrushchev as General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1964. A decade and a half later, people talking among themselves in their kitchens were tormented by the lack of conversation outside them.

"The end of the 70s was a difficult time for me," Irina Scherbakova recalls. - Despite the fact that outwardly there was complete well-being - against the background of many stories of that time, and even today: a happy marriage, a small child.... My parents were cheerful, energetic, they always meant a lot to me and supported me. But this lack of cause for concern, for longing, had the strongest effect on me. I was not yet thirty, but I

began to feel literally physically that something was wrong with me. I lived all the time in an atmosphere of some imaginary fears, constantly waiting for something to happen to someone close to me, standing at the window for hours if someone was late. I can't say now how and why, but at some point I suddenly realised that I had to stop focusing on myself. And it was the past that really interested me - that's what I took up. And the main thing is *people's fates*"¹ .

2

In the late Brezhnev years in the Soviet Union, talking about political repression was a subculture, the memory of it a secret language. The philologist and poet Elena Mikhailik writes about it thus: "The country invisibly disconnected in layers according to a new criterion: what past a person remembers -- and in what language he remembers it."² . The same events could be called "violations of socialist norms" or "illegal methods of investigation"; only a few could say aloud that they were torture and mass murder. In most cases, however, nobody said anything about them.

In 1979, the Georgian director Lana Gogoberidze's film *A Few Interviews on Personal Issues* was in the Soviet box office. Its plot is based on two dramatic events: the arrest of the protagonist's mother, who is orphaned in her early childhood, and, many years later in the late 1970s, her husband's departure from the family, which resurrects her repressed childhood memories. Flashback scenes of her mother's disappearance are almost frame by frame replayed in scenes of endless waiting in an empty room for her husband to leave her for his mistress - the experiences of loss resonate with each other.

But the mother did not die in the gulag: in the middle of the film, she and her daughter are reunited. "Mum, mum is coming back from the North!" - the heroine addresses the audience. Throughout the film, she never once utters the words "arrest" or "camp", and actress Katevan Orakhelashvili, who plays the role of the mother, has almost no lines.

¹

<https://www.colta.ru/articles/society/28912-sergey-bondarenko-intervyu-irina-scherbakova-memorial-rasskazy-zhenschiny-gulag> (interview with the author, November 2021)

² Mikhaylik E. *Illegal Comet*. Varlam Shalamov: the experience of slow reading. M., 2018. p. 165

The context-savvy local audience did not need them: the audience remembered that only a few decades ago Orakhelashvili was "a member of the family of a traitor to the motherland" - her husband was shot and she spent several years in the Akmola camp in Kazakhstan.

In Soviet distribution, this Georgian new wave cinema was positioned as a family drama about midlife crisis, a feminist film about strong women. So why did Mum disappear? Where did she come back from? What happened? The reasons are hidden, remain figures of silence that only add to the tension and misunderstanding. It is this tension, the mismatch between the past and the variegated memory of it, that became the basis for the emergence of "Memorial".

3

The playwright and theatre theorist Nikolai Evreinov (a famous person with the life dates of another famous person: 1879-1953) worked with the problem of symbolic, artistic resolution of tension in the 1920s³. He suggested replaying events from their own lives in front of people bruised by the experience, thus allowing them to relive everything that happened one more time, detached, somehow differently⁴. The triumph of his method was the retaking of the Winter Palace in 1920, a reenactment of the third year of the revolution. Although the reenactment ended with the same result - the Bolsheviks won again - the image of the revolution itself was successfully theatricalised: later visual representations of the October Revolution relied primarily on Yevreinov's performance rather than on the actual historical event. Whether something changed within the participants and spectators themselves, no one knows. Soon it became unsafe to try to relive the great historical events of the recent past, even in the format of a replay -- they had to be remembered and known in a strictly defined way, adjusting one's own life to that knowledge. Rightly fearing persecution by the new authorities, in

³ Years of Joseph Stalin's life (ed.).

⁴ Chubarov I. "The Theatricalisation of Life" as a Strategy of Politicisation of Art. The recapture of the Winter Palace under the leadership of N.N. Evreinov (1920). p. p. 281-296. 281-296 // Soviet Power and Media. St. Petersburg, 2006.

1925 Evreinov left the USSR for good. In exile, he continued to stage Russian-language plays in Parisian theatres, joined the Masonic lodge - and remained in the history of European theatre as a possible link between Oscar Wilde and Antonin Artaud.

The audience in the CIM hall watches as "Irina Scherbakova" plays fragments from her old interviews in front of them. They were recorded on a small white Philips cassette recorder that fit comfortably into a lady's handbag, a gift bought in the West with the money from the Nobel Prize to the Solzhenitsyn Foundation. The tape recorder meant freedom - the technical possibility to record interviews "from the voice", but Shcherbakova preferred to hide the cassettes herself and, just in case, did not sign them: no one could rule out an unexpected search of her home among people in her circle. Some of these tapes later found their way into the archives of the future Memorial.

On the tapes, women in their 60s and 70s, arrested in the 1930s (and some in the 1920s), tell of husbands shot, separated from their young children, imprisoned, interrogated, raped, sentenced, sent to camps; of losing faith in themselves, in the Soviet government, in the world around them -- and, in some impossible way, of coming back. These are stories, if not with a happy ending, then with an open ending -- their heroines survived, returned home, kept a part of themselves that can tell about what happened to them. Irina Shcherbakova describes what happened to her as a form of therapy: through their stories she experienced her own crisis and rethought it.

4

One of the heroines of Shcherbakova's interview is Paulina Myasnikova⁵, "Pavochka", a young Trotskyist who spent a total of almost 30 years in prison. In the second half of the 1930s, in one of the transit prison wagons, she met Yevgenia Ginzburg, the future author of "The Cool Route" - the main women's camp memoir, another underground Soviet bestseller. Irina Shcherbakova began her conversations with some of her interlocutors by discussing this book as a key to understanding their own stories. Shcherbakova didn't

⁵ <https://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/auth/?t=author&i=791>

ask them to talk about the arrest, but simply asked, "What do you think of Eugenia Ginzburg's book?" she said. ' And the man would start telling me his life story."

After it became possible to talk publicly about Shcherbakova's home recording project in the late 1980s, many of her characters gained local fame. Director Galina Volchek, who decided to stage a play based on *The Cool Route* at one of Moscow's main theatres, the *Sovremennik*, invited Myasnikova and her friend Zoya Marchenko, a "Kolyma woman", to advise on the production.

The production was finished, Myasnikova and Marchenko were invited to the premiere. Irina Shcherbakova sat next to them, in the front rows. This is how she recalled that day:

"I'm there - and I'm somehow ashamed to look at the stage. Not that it's completely false, but so traditional and flat, so much weaker than Ginzburg's text.

Asking them afterwards:

- What do you think?

And they reply how shocked they were, how much they enjoyed everything.

Let's start discussing:

- But that's not what happened here, you told me yourself.

They're for me:

- No, no, of course it wasn't like that.

(That's what they certainly should have put up, filmed - those comments of theirs).

- Then what is it? Why? What do you like so much?

- No, no, it's all the same. It was with us anyway!"

"It seemed to them that this is a beautiful artistic refraction," Shcherbakova explained many years later. - That it should be like on stage - as they can't tell it themselves. With the removal of all the roughness, all the complexities that were in reality. That's how the

magic power of art and memory works. And I realised that I don't have to fight it. And you can spit on my aesthetic sense"⁶ .

The play "Steep Route" became a sensation: it was shown on television and taken to America; it was in the repertoire of Sovremennik until the first months of the war with Ukraine. At one point Galina Volchek introduced Pavochka herself into the production as an actress. Myasnikova could not play herself, she was already too old - for many years she had been on stage as one of the nameless old women in a prison cell. Almost wordlessly playing a reflection of her own life, the 80-year-old Myasnikova toured the world -- from New York to Tel Aviv. Shortly before her death, she took in his film "Khrustalev, car!" director Alexei German. She played the main character's mother, who returned from the camp.

5

The play "Memoria" includes Irina Scherbakova's story about how in the mid-60s, in high school, she played in a production of Bertolt Brecht's "The Threepenny Opera". The play seemed too provocative to the ideological authorities -- soon after the premiere, the director of the German language school was investigated by the "party," and one morning the students found him hanging himself in the director's room. Shcherbakova says she has since memorised The Threepenny Opera by heart.

In Butyr prison, Karola Neer, a star of German theatre and silent cinema of the 1920s, a friend of Brecht, who played the lead role in the first film version of The Threepenny Opera, shared a cell with the author of The Cool Route, Evgenia Ginzburg. In 1933, she became one of the few left-wing women to openly oppose Hitler and was forced to flee to the Soviet Union, where she was arrested as a "spy" a few years later and died of typhoid

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<https://www.colta.ru/articles/society/28912-sergey-bondarenko-intervyu-irina-scherbakova-memorial-rasskazy-zhenschiny-gulag>

fever in Sol-Iletsk prison. In 2017, Memorial hosted an exhibition about her fate and the tragedy of the German Left in the USSR, The Theatre of Karola Neer's Life.

Now, on the stage of the CIM, they all find themselves in the same time and place. The actress playing Irina Scherbakova comments on the events of Karola Neer's life, reconstructing her story from records and archive documents. The actress playing Karola Neer reads excerpts from her own prison interrogations and also sings songs -- musical interludes typical of Brechtian productions. It is a kind of dance of permanent change of social roles: today you are an actress - tomorrow a prisoner, yesterday you are a historian - today a character on stage and a spectator. What was someone else's suffering today turns out to be theatre therapy.

6

An important part of Evreinov's method was based on rethinking the very idea of repetition. Like Freud, Evreinov attached great importance to the desire to "experience something twice", to return, to replay a painful event from the past. This past teetered on the edge of history and memory: the theory proposed working with time as an instrument, placing life in a new, theatrical context. Like Freud, Evreinov believed that repetition always implies change⁷.

In the auditorium of the Meyerhold Centre, the staff of Memorial see their own history being lived anew. The second part of the performance is interrupted by the reading of excerpts from a court chronicle from the end of 2021: now Memorial itself is being tried for distorting the image of the Soviet past.

"'Memorial', speculating on the theme of twentieth-century political repression, creates a false image of the USSR as a terrorist state, whitewashes and rehabilitates Nazi criminals on whose hands the blood of Soviet citizens is on"⁸," the voice of prosecutor Zhafyarov says.

⁷ REFERENCE

⁸ <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2021/12/28/sud-pobeditelei>

This is also one of the elements of Brechtian theatre, which, unlike the Jewish theatre, presupposes detachment, the possibility of seeing all circumstances from the outside, without getting involved, without worrying about the characters on stage. Brecht believed that a real influence on the spectator can be achieved by ceasing to regard him as a spectator and making him a co-participant in the production: he must see the theatre as theatre, and the text of the play as a political address, a commentary on reality. There is no need to suggest anything, the spectator must remove himself, return to the real world and see everything for himself. No tricks: actors are actors, and a play is a play.

In real life, "Memoria" will be performed on stage only one and a half times: after a closed general run-through, to which "Memorial" employees were invited, only the official premiere will take place the next day, 10 February. Exactly two weeks later, war would break out, the play would be withdrawn from the programme, and CIM's director Elena Kovalskaya would publicly refuse to "work for the murderer"⁹ and resign. That same spring, the Meyerhold Centre will be closed. Before the end of winter, the Supreme Court will decide to liquidate Memorial.

7

Before Memorial came into being, the subject of repression, of state terror against its own citizens, in the Soviet Union was primarily material for art. This memory could only exist in a hidden, underlying way, and it was a strange, exhilarating experience of inconsistency, of shifting scales of reality. To belong to the heirs of this memory was to have a social, cultural responsibility - but also the privilege of knowing, of thinking about what others could not think about. Akhmatova did not write down Requiem, asking a limited circle of people close to her to memorise fragments of the poem by heart. "The Gulag Archipelago" had the subtitle "an experience of artistic research" (that is - not scientific) and hid in its various fragments in "schemes" and safe places among trusted and dedicated people.

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/elena.kovalskaya/posts/5265468000130397>

When the future founders of Memorial appeared on the scene, their main task was to stop the process of forgetting, to bring the memory of state crimes and attempts at resistance back into the public sphere. For the first time, work on this topic began to acquire the character of scientific knowledge.

"We were a little bit fish, a little bit ichthyologists," recalled one of the heroes of the pre-Memorial dissident movement, who himself had served time in a camp for his "anti-Soviet activities." Over the course of its existence, Memorial has evolved from fish to ichthyologists and back to fish.

8

The real Irina Scherbakova appeared on stage in November 1988 at the House of Culture of the Moscow Electrolamp Plant. At the height of perestroika, she, author of well-known articles on the fate of women in the Gulag, was invited to give a free talk about her writings. The performance was part of a large, week-long historical festival, which in terms of genre balanced between stand-up, a political rally and an evening of reminiscences.

Right in front of Shcherbakova was Mikhail Zhvanetsky, the main Soviet satirical writer who sold as many records a year as the most popular local rock bands. It was rare for anyone to perform after Zhvanetsky -- he was usually the headliner, and his performance closed the programme.

Once at the microphone, Shcherbakova looked into the front rows of the audience - there sat many of her interlocutors who had survived to this day: among them, the heroines of the "Cool Route" Marchenko and Myasnikova. And then Shcherbakova began to lift them from their seats, calling them by name and telling the audience their stories. The audience greeted them with applause, and what was happening seemed neither inappropriate nor painful - at last the man-on-stage was telling the truth about the people in the audience.

Zoya Dmitrievna Marchenko: arrested the first time following her brother, the second time following her husband, German communist Hermann Taubenberger¹⁰ ; both were shot - but she survived, played in the camp theatre, returned almost 20 years later.

Paulina Stepanovna Myasnikova: in 1927, the year of the last open speech of the Trotskyist opposition, she was in ninth grade and was arrested; ten years later her husband and brother were sentenced to death; after dozens of years in prison and camps, she received "permanent exile" in the early 50s; she was released after Stalin's death.

For this short time, the boundary between stage and auditorium was erased. The festival itself became one of the informal starting points for the beginning of Memorial's work. It was called Week of Conscience.

2. The Week of Conscience

1

Almost forty years later, the chief organiser, Alexander Weinstein, proudly claims that "The Week of Conscience" had been among the three most significant events in the history of the House of Culture of the Moscow Electric Lamp Plant. "It was as cool as the 'Assa' film screening with a concert by Viktor Tsoy and the first breakdancing festival in the USSR. Before that, we had only amateur art and hobby groups and factory evenings"¹¹ .

Termed both an exhibition and a festival "The Week of Conscience" took place at the House of Culture of the Moscow Electric Lamp Plant from 19 to 26 November 1988.

¹⁰ Transcript of Zoya Marchenko's interview with Irina Scherbakova in the International Memorial's memoir archive - <https://memoirs.memo.ru/memoir/show/id/1007>. Carola Neer's son was raised in the Taubenberger family as a child; after his adoptive parents were arrested, he was sent to an orphanage.

¹¹ Here and below quotes from Alexander Weinstein are from his interview with the author, 27.03.23

Earlier at the same venue, the public stormed the premieres of 'Assa' (a film by Sergei Solovyov, based on songs by once semi-banned Soviet rockers Boris Grebenshchikov and Viktor Tsoy), or flocked to the "Break Marathon". The new culture clearly resonated with the spirit of Perestroika, sketching the contours of a free future, being, after all, part of the youth culture, legal at last in the USSR. At first glance, an event commemorating the victims of Stalin's repressions, offering no dancing or music, was not likely to draw a comparable attention.

Nevertheless, the turnout was immense. Throughout the week, starting at 10 a.m., crowds of visitors from all over the Soviet Union gathered at the exhibition. Those were weekdays, but that didn't stop anyone - more than a thousand people came to the House of Culture every day. They brought the memoirs of their arrested loved ones, rehabilitation documents, and cast their votes in a contest to design a future monument to the victims of political repressions.

Dozens of photos from the lobby of the House of Culture show people wearing fur hats, cockerel hats, and pie hats¹². There are so many hats that the cloakroom can't cope with them, and most guests don't even try to hand them in. Passing to the next halls, people take off their hats as if they were in an Orthodox temple and carry them with them, in their hands and under their arms. It's as cold as winter in Moscow in November, but no one protests in the queue (a traditional Soviet phenomenon, just like a poorly functioning wardrobe). "It's worth standing in such a queue, people shared." recalls Sofia Rosenblum, who took her two small children to the festival¹³. And only when, on 26 November 1988, despite all pleas and threats, the exhibition was eventually closed, the crowd in the street started chanting in the face of the old cloakroom attendants and a few volunteers guarding the entrance: "Fascists! Fascists!"¹⁴.

¹² Photo Collection from "The Week of Conscience". See "Russia in Photos" (<https://russiainphoto.ru/exhibitions/486/#1>)

¹³ Interview with S. Rosenblum, 15.06.23

¹⁴ Interview with A. Weinstein, 27.03.23

In public life Gorbachev's Perestroika manifested as a series of public democratic gestures. In 1988, not a month passed in Moscow without the premiere of a previously banned, "shelved" film or the publication in magazines and books of texts previously considered anti-Soviet. In this sense, "The Week of Conscience", a festival-memorial, was a kind of installation of Perestroika. As an artistic project it combined various forms of expression: from a homemade map of the Gulag in the lobby to models of the future monument and open discussions in the concert hall. What only a few years ago seemed politically unthinkable and would have brought a prison sentence now entailed virtually zero political opposition. With a chuckle, Weinstein now recalls the exhibition organisers overcoming party censorship commissions and the local bosses periodically grabbing their hearts and swallowing Validol pills. None of them could ban anything anymore. Nor could any of them allow it for that matter. What was happening was beyond their power and understanding.

Either jokingly or seriously, someone wrote in the festival's review book: "I wish us all never to have such exhibitions again"¹⁵. The fact that "The Week of Conscience" took place at all was beyond the comprehension of both reformers and ideological communist-traditionalists. In one of dozens of similar reviews, both of these feelings come together: "I am 65 years old. I had no hope of living to see this day"¹⁶. But my father Levitman Yefim Zakharovich, who died in the camps, was sure of it. This was the main thing in every letter he wrote: 'This is a terrible mistake that will one day be clarified.' He was rehabilitated posthumously."

The festival was coordinated at the party level by Vitaly Korotich and Yegor Yakovlev, editors-in-chief of the major Perestroika media outlets the *Ogonyok* magazine and the newspaper *Moskovskie Novosti*. The link between them and Weinstein was their mutual

¹⁵ Hereinafter, quotations are taken from the Book of Reviews itself, which is still preserved in Memorial's archives.

¹⁶ Highlighted by the author of the review.

friend, also a journalist, Valentin Yumashev, the youngest in the company; Weinstein still calls him Valya. A few years later, Yumashev would become an adviser and son-in-law to Russia's first president, and then one of those who would choose a former KGB colonel named Vladimir Putin to succeed him. But then, in 1988, Yumashev was writing columns on culture and football in *Ogonyok* and helping the director of the House of Culture of the Moscow Electric Lamp Plant to get through the red tape at the authorities' offices. Weinstein claims that even now, after everything that has happened since, "Valya" still considers the organisation of "The Week of Conscience" his lifetime achievement. On saying this, Weinstein pauses a while and chuckles ruefully.

"Back then, everything depended on a person's inner censorship and courage," he concludes. "If you felt you had to do it, do it. The time was such that it was politically suicidal to prohibit."

3

"The Week of Conscience" was first mentioned in newspapers in the summer of 1988. At the same time, an open competition was announced for the design of a monument to the victims of political repressions, which received several hundred applications. The mock-ups and designs were to be exhibited in the lobby of the House of Culture of the Moscow Electric Lamp Plant for an open public vote. "Time was extremely short," Weinstein continues. "We didn't have six or even three months to prepare. We'd been having a new event at the House of Culture of the Moscow Electric Lamp Plant every few weeks, so we had a month and a half to organise 'The Week of Conscience', no more."

Even the idea of the Victims' Monument project was like a classic Soviet long-stalled construction undertaking. The first talk about it began in the mid-1950s after Nikita Khrushchev's report to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In a closed part of his speech, he accused Stalin of exceeding his authority and destroying loyal members of his own party (omitting the fact, known then by many, that he himself took an active part in repressions). The revision of Stalin's legacy quickly

became a public matter, and that was when the public discussion about the Monument to those perished in purges began so that what had happened would "never happen again"¹⁷.

There were still political prisoners in prisons and mental hospitals in the Soviet Union thirty years after the purges with no official memorial or monument dedicated to the theme of state terror in view. Among those who worked on their version of the monument in the 1960s were renowned sculptors Vadim Sidur and Ernst Neizvestny¹⁸. But by 1988, Sidur had already died, and Neizvestny had long lived in exile. The very idea that the monument would ever be erected had long seemed buried. Fears that everything would terminate at the stage of projects and ritual incantations ("I would like to name everyone by name!" wrote Akhmatova. So we would but then what?), are felt in the exhibition Book of Reviews. After a series of compliments to the participants and organisers, one reviewer bluntly reminded: "The negative feature of Russian intellectuals has always been 'to talk a lot and do little'".

The authors of the new, Perestroika manifesto about the monument were geologist Yuri Samodurov and engineer Vyacheslav Igrunov. Both of them were members of an informal group that called itself "Monument", one of dozens of Perestroika public initiatives and interest groups that initially met within the Perestroika club¹⁹. In 1987, the members of "Monument" decided to collect signatures for a new design of a monument to the victims of repressions.

One of the concepts was to create a kind of underground "cryptorium" beneath the ground, where rehabilitation lists and other state documents confirming the innocence of the victims would be kept. Every year on certain dates young pioneers were to take

¹⁷ At the official level, this was first proclaimed by Khrushchev as well: at the XXII Congress of the CPSU, he declared the need to "build a monument in Moscow to immortalise the memory of comrades who were victims of arbitrary rule" (for more information, see project.memo.ru).

¹⁸ See, for example, the famous photo by L. Ivanov from Neizvestny's workshop of this period: https://static.tildacdn.com/tild3138-6365-4333-b630-353139316565/ernst_1.jpg

¹⁹ On the debates in the first Perestroika circles and clubs that emerged in a variety of places, from the halls of scientific institutes to children's clubs, see, for example, A.V. Shubin, *Devoted Democracy. The USSR and Informals (1986-1989)*

out the lists and solemnly read aloud the names of the innocent victims, accompanied by mournful music. This is how the geologist Yuri Samodurov saw the monument²⁰.

In his turn, Vyacheslav Igrunov, his co-editor and opponent, presented an alternative project that also included the idea of an archive, museum and library on the history of terror. Igrunov, an Odessa dissident, still on the record at a psychiatric hospital, was the organiser of the largest library of uncensored literature in the USSR, but few people knew him in Moscow. He would come to the capital for a few days or weeks at a time and sleep in the kitchen of his friend Gleb Pavlovsky (the future author of Putin's first presidential election campaign); he also edited some of the texts Igrunov wrote at the time²¹.

Depending on the location and capacity of the site, the meetings of the informal group that discussed the monument projects were attended by dozens to hundreds of people, but there were few regular participants, no more than 10-12 people. Most of them are still alive, but none of them directly associate themselves with “Memorial”. Among them were the philologist and classical scholar Nina Braginskaya (in 1987 she worked as a concierge in the entrance hall while finishing her PhD thesis on Aristotle), the economist and Africanist Yuri Skubko, the physicist Lev Ponomarev (who later went into politics and human rights, founding the organisation For Human Rights), the mathematician Dmitry Leonov, and the lawyer Viktor Kuzin.

As it often happens with young organizations, they soon had to change their name. "Monument" <Pamyatnik> echoed a side-project of the neo-fascist society "Memory" <Pamyat'>, which had already existed for several years. So, the title “Monument” was compelled to undergo westernization and became “Memorial”.²²

²⁰ <https://ed-glezin.livejournal.com/1007677.html>

²¹ Igrunov's interview with the author from the “History of Memorial” series, 12.05.2017 // <https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/biblioteka/dokumentalnyj-proekt-istoriya-memoriala/intervyu-vyacheslava-igrunova/>

²² On this see, for example, Boris Belenkin's interview in the podcast "Zarubezhnye" on Radio Svoboda // <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBtfKpZAQdg>

In 1989, Boris Belenkin, an active reader of Samizdat since the mid-1970s, whose last job was choosing the repertoire and coordinating public lectures at a youth cinema, joined Memorial where he was called to supervise the creation of a library. Thirty years later, he referred to the first members of Memorial as "spring men":

"In the absence of liberty, they were compacted tightly, like springs. Kept a low profile. The 'spring' is compressed, you can't say anything about it. The 'spring' goes to work from ten to seven, shows up the id; you know nothing more about it. Maybe it reads some anti-Soviet stuff. And in 1987, these springs were released. They were the type of people who instantly uncoiled.

"And you yourself, Boris Isaevich, were you with a spring?"

"Me? Not me, of course not. I didn't need it; people like me had already undergone all kinds of initiations"²³.

With few exceptions (like Igrunov), the first members of Memorial were not dissidents. There might have been repressed people in their family, as in the case of Jan Rachinsky, a Moscow programmer from the Gosplan and chess teacher who grew up in a house that once belonged to a society of political prisoners; his grandfather, the Socialist Sigismund Rachinsky, was shot. But some did not have any repressed relatives at all, as was the case of Elena Zhemkova, a mathematician from Odessa. Zhemkova was noticeably younger than the other participants. But as a rule, they were people over 25 with higher education, city dwellers and intellectuals, quite well-off by Soviet standards. A peer of Zhemkova's, physicist Sergei Krivenko, admitted that at the time he joined the initiative group, he knew extremely little about Soviet terror²⁴.

²³ B. Belenkin interview with the author from the series "History of Memorial", 6.03.2017 // <https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/biblioteka/dokumentalnyj-proekt-istoriya-memoriala/intervyu-borisa-belenkina/>

²⁴ Interview with S. Krivenko, 4.4.23

By mid-1988, Memorial's public influence was already so significant that the movement's activists were invited to "The Week of Conscience" to collect archival information and answer visitors' questions. By that time, Memorial had a public reception room in a tiny ten-metre flat near the Aeroport metro station. The first questionnaire of a repressed person was issued there, which was filled in by visitors, victims of political terror and their family members, and the first archive of testimonies and memoirs began to be collected as well.

"I don't remember anyone from Memorial at "The Week of Conscience"," says Alexander Weinstein. "That doesn't mean they weren't there. Surely they were; there were archivists sitting in a separate room, interviewing those who came, copying some documents. But one wouldn't introduce you to someone saying, 'Meet this is Memorial', no, there was no such thing. It wasn't Memorial, it was Dima Yurasov.

5

In November 1988, Dmitri Yurasov, a former student of the Institute of History and Archives, was 24 years old. He wore his hair in the spirit of early Depeche Mode and could easily pass for the lead singer of one of the most popular Perestroika pop bands, Laskovy May. "Yurasov was Laskovy May," says Nikita Petrov, another Memorial participant and expert on the history of the Soviet security services²⁵. While the Laskovy May band, made up of orphanage children, performed their orphan hits to packed stadiums, Yurasov's performances in the late 1980s drew full halls of regional Houses of Culture, sometimes several thousand people. He travelled to dozens of Soviet cities giving lectures on political repression, where he displayed cards from his huge collection: Yurasov claimed that as "The Week of Conscience" commenced, his home archive contained some 200,000 names of victims of Soviet political terror²⁶.

²⁵ Interview N. Petrov, 9.08.23

²⁶ It is difficult to judge the accuracy of these figures as in the documentary film "Damn You, Kolyma!" (1991) Yurasov speaks about 500 thousand records.

By his own admission, Yurasov became interested in the subject at the age of 11. He liked to read Soviet biographical reference books and encyclopaedias, where he often noticed the same dates of death for people of different generations: 1937 or 1938. These handbooks were published during the Brezhnev era, when the window of opportunity opened during The Thaw closed and it became impossible to write openly about arrests and shootings again. New generations of Soviet citizens, unprepared to read between the lines, often did not understand why some heroes' last years and deaths were described in great detail, while others, on the contrary, seemed not to have "died" at all. Boris Belenkin said that this style of biography existed "in the absence of death"²⁷.

For Dmitri Yurasov, the transpired scale of state terror was a revelation. Like many enthusiastic teenagers, Yurasov became a collector: some collected gum inserts, stamps or beer caps, while he searched for and archived data on Soviet repressed people. "While I pay tribute to Yurasov's fanatical work in those years, I wouldn't call him a historian," says Nikita Okhotin, an archivist who has worked at Memorial for more than 20 years. - Yurasov is such a special, characteristic type, and we've seen quite a few of them. He's a card-file compiler."²⁸.

Back in the mid-1980s, Yurasov got a job as an archivist at the Central Archives of the October Revolution. While occasionally going down to the vault to retrieve requested files, he would gradually abstract data from other, neighbouring folders. A few months later, during a routine check, a notebook with those extracts was found in his desk and he was immediately fired²⁹. After receiving a "black mark" and having served in the army, Yurasov managed to get a job in the archive of the Supreme Court during the Perestroika years, where, among other things, materials on the revision of political cases and certificates of rehabilitation of the repressed were kept. In 1987-1988, discussions about Yurasov's card files became public, and he himself was invited to topic-specific meetings, including at Memorial.

²⁷ Belenkin B. In the Absence of Death // <http://www.cogita.ru/nko/nic-memorial/10-e-biograficheskie-chteniya-pamyati-veniamina-iofe/b.-belenkin.-v-otsutstvie-smerti-iz-materialov-biograficheskikh-chtenii-pamyati-v.v.-iofe>

²⁸ Interview N. Okhotin, 30.06.23

²⁹ V. Chalikova. The Young Archivist // *Neva* No. 10, 1988 (<http://chalikova.ru/arxivnyij-yunosha.html>)

Illegally copied information³⁰ from archives became the basis of Yurasov's collection of names presented at "The Week of Conscience". The reception, organised by Yurasov and his two assistants, worked at the exhibition in a separate room, with its own separate queue. All day long, together with the visitors, he would run his fingers over the printouts of names hanging on the wall - looking for the missing, interpreting their sentences. Some of the visitors admitted that in the room with Yurasov they felt "like at the Last Judgement"—after decades of ignorance and oblivion, they were finally spoken to with honesty. Sophia Rosenblum and her family heard the real reason for her grandfather's death for the first time from Yurasov. "He told us that the sentence *10 years without the right of correspondence* means 'being shot'," she recalls. We tried to object, doubting: "But maybe still...?" - It means 'being shot'," he repeated.

Yurasov turned out to be right. A few years later, after sending a new request to the archives, the Rosenblums learned the real date and cause of death of Alexander Yakovlevich Katz: he was shot in Zaporozhye on 30 December 1937. "We have three death certificates for my grandfather in our family: with a dash, with a false date, with the cause of death made-up by NKVD (it was issued in the 50s) and the present one."

In the book by American journalist David Remnick *Lenin's tomb. The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* on the last years of the Soviet Union, Yurasov is presented as one of the heroes who personified the fledgling Memorial. Although it is not explicitly stated, Yurasov appears in it as a direct successor to Solzhenitsyn. Both came "out of nowhere," "from the people", in the old tradition of *Narodnaya Volya*". Both embodied the beginning of a new era of liberalisation: Solzhenitsyn represented the period of The

³⁰ Critics of Yurasov's work (among them Elena Zhemkova) later claimed that he was not just illegally copying information, but was tearing out rehabilitation sheets from the original cases - that is, in essence, stealing archival documents (albeit out of a need to publish them). "Even if this is true," mitigates Nikita Okhotin, "strictly speaking, it is not too important: the Supreme Court archives kept only copies of rehabilitation resolutions."

Thaw while Yurasov symbolized that of the Perestroika. Both were blessed by the memoirist and writer Lydia Korneevna Chukovskaya, one of the main dissident figures³¹.

6

The room with Dmitry Yurasov's records was just one of the many spaces during “The Week of Conscience”. The lobby housed an exhibition of models of the future monument to the victims. No complete catalogue of all the designs has survived; several hundred miniature monuments and their descriptions stood in the House of Culture of the Moscow Electric Lamp Plant for exactly one week. Then they were moved partly to the archive of the Union of Architects and partly to the future archive of Memorial³². Every visitor could leave a comment and vote for their favourite project, but officially the decision on the winner rested with a special commission made up of professionals from the Union of Architects and the Union of Artists, which was a very typical Perestroika mismatch between the declared procedure and the actual decision-making mechanism. No final decision, however, was ever made.

It was not, however, the mock-ups that had the strongest effect on visitors, but the hall with the Wall of Memory, which was modelled by theatre artist (and in the future, director) Dmitry Krymov. Being a cross between a columbarium and Jerusalem's Wailing Wall, it consisted of empty posters about the size of A5 sheets, and grew up and wide due to the photos and references that visitors themselves brought to the Week of Conscience. By the end of the second day, it was already filled with "looking for a person" notices, appeals to those present, and old photos from the 1920s and 30s.

That wall itself was the first monument, a DIY monument. People approaching it were crying, asking forgiveness from their loved ones, cursing the authorities and themselves for the long wait, for the forced silence. Many people remembered an elderly woman

³¹ "But remember," <Elena Chukovskaya, Lydia Korneevna's daughter> said to me at parting, "even Lydia Korneevna has hope. She adores one young man, Dmitri Yurasov. She just adores him. Try to get acquainted with him." (Remnick D. Lenin's Grave. M.:Corpus, 2017. - p. 50)

³² Some time later, in 1989, some of the old projects and new proposals were exhibited at the Donskoy Monastery, but even this preparatory exhibition did not help the organisers to select the winning project.

who fainted; the only case during the whole week when the exhibition organisers needed the help of doctors. Although the wall could hardly hold more than a few hundred names and biographies, it was the first time that it visually reassured many that they were not alone, that their fate was part of a larger, shared history.

The festival part of the Week of Conscience took place in the concert hall of the House of Culture of the Moscow Electric Lamp Plant, which had a capacity of 800 people, where, according to Weinstein's calculations, at least 1,200 people gathered every evening. Each of the seven days was taken over by one of the organisers: the *Moskovskie Novosti* newspaper, the Union of Theatre Workers of the RSFSR, the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* and the Union of Cinematographers. Each of the speakers could choose their own format of performance, from stand-up to a political rally. It was then that Irina Scherbakova took the stage with stories about women who survived the Gulag.

Poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, comedian Mikhail Zhvanetsky, and the main Soviet clown and film star Yuri Nikulin also performed here. They delivered speeches, improvised, and answered notes from the audience, as if those were their own shows. From time to time Alexander Weinstein had to come on stage and call the audience to order: he knew that there were KGB officers in the audience, and he was worried that if things started to get out of hand, the festival might simply be dispersed.

One of the most memorable moments for both the visitors and organizers was Nikulin's performance on the first days of "The Week of Conscience". The public knew him primarily as a comic artist, but his career also included great dramatic roles. Director Alexei German in his film "20 Days Without War", a free adaptation of Konstantin Simonov's story, filmed Nikulin in the role of war correspondent Lopatin - a not-young exhausted man, a frontline journalist. On the stage of the House of Culture Nikulin combined several of his roles - he played a comic skit, but spoke in the first person, about his own, personal experience. Many knew that Nikulin himself went through the war, was an artilleryman, and suffered from night blindness due to malnutrition, like many soldiers. However, on the stage at the House of Culture he spoke about the

humanistic, carnivalesque side of the war in a manner that was not customary to discuss publicly, neither before nor after.

Nikulin told a story about how he and his fellow soldiers, being on the line of contact, in a trench, found a German who had lost his way and lost his men. He had no weapons, but it was impossible to shoot him (the noise of the shot would attract the attention of the enemy in the German trench), and it was dangerous to take him prisoner. Then Nikulin and his comrades decided to literally throw the soldier out of his trench. Right in flight the frightened German farted loudly and thus defused the situation. Everyone in both trenches laughed, and no one died that night.

Nikulin and his listeners probably felt it strange and inappropriate to talk about farting Nazis at an evening in memory of the victims of repression. However, this inconsistency only emphasised the main mood of "The Week of Conscience": we must speak openly about the full extent of our experience, not hide the "shameful" and unheroic stories from the past. There was nothing surprising in the fact that the themes of war and repression were intertwined; hence the chanting of "Fascists!" on the last day of the festival. But while many people - either out of inertia or out of the goodness of their hearts - were lapsing into tragic pathos, Nikulin was consciously working to debunk it.

7

For the first year of Memorial's existence, the group did not seem to the dissident community as something worthy of special attention, even to those who had attended its meetings from the very beginning.

I didn't like nonconformists <neformaly> in general, largely because I was a dissident to the bone," Vyacheslav Igrunov recalled his impressions of the memorial meetings. "There were Komsomol guys who saw the renewal of socialism, socialism with a human face. As for rehabilitation of the victims of Stalin's repressions and condemnation of Stalin's dictatorship, those are all bygones. Why should I take part in it? Here, the

country is falling apart. We should be engaged in something more fundamental"³³.

Arseny Roginsky, the future head of Memorial, who was released from the camp after serving a political sentence, had similar feelings; a combination of sympathy and a certain prejudice towards the neophytes: "I can't say that I liked them very much. They were technocrats, ignorant of history. But they were well-intentioned and sympathetic."³⁴.

People who in one way or another considered themselves involved in the Soviet cultural underground were irritated by the enthusiasm of the newcomers whose activism was often seen as too Soviet. Those who had fought against the political regime in various forms for decades were very suspicious of Perestroika. The Thaw, the only experience shared by all, had ended, barely getting under way. For many, Gorbachev's reforms looked like another form of strategic retreat, yet another "easing" undertaken by the regime to shift some of the responsibility for the crisis onto its own citizens deprived of any influence on political decision-making for decades. The growing public activism of 1987-1988 generally passed by dissidents, still upholding an alternative position of not having anything in common with this regime, earned painstakingly in years of clandestine practice. In addition, some future Memorial activists, such as Roginsky or Sergei Kovalev, had only just made it out of the camps.

In November 1987, when the first Memorial activists were already taking to the streets to collect signatures and the foreign radio stations had not been jammed anymore, Mikhail Gefter, an important figure for this circle, the historian and philosopher visited Igrunov and said: "Revolution? Take a look outside. Nothing is changing"³⁵. The situation that such people had planned to "survive" or "sit through" did not imply any complicity.

³³ Igrunov's interview with the author from the "History of Memorial" series, 12.05.2017 // <https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/biblioteka/dokumentalnyj-proekt-istoriya-memoriala/intervyu-vyacheslava-igrunova/>

³⁴ Roginsky. Book. C. 330-331

³⁵ Igrunov's interview with the author from the "History of Memorial" series, 12.05.2017 // <https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/biblioteka/dokumentalnyj-proekt-istoriya-memoriala/intervyu-vyacheslava-igrunova/>

"The Week of Conscience" and the resonance it generated changed the perspective for many of these people. Yet not for all. Vladimir Bukovsky in his book *The Moscow Trial* described the feelings of discontent and even disgust among the most radical part of dissidents. One of the most famous Soviet political prisoners, he was exchanged for the Chilean communist Luis Corvalan in 1976, and was subsequently exiled abroad to observe Perestroika from afar.

"It was an incredible time, a time of falsehood to the power of three, where deceit had become so twisted that even plain truth turned into deception. Those who wrote or presented information lied, pretending to be courageous pioneers; those who read or watched lied, pretending that only now did they learn all this. What captivated them was not the novelty of the information but the fact that now it was permissible. Without the slightest irony and amid universal enthusiasm, they suddenly began to speak of the "white spots in history," of the past crimes of the regime. But hadn't everyone known about the repressions, the destruction of peasants during collectivization, the Great Terror of the 30s, Stalin's pact with Hitler before the war, or the relocation of entire nations after the war? There wasn't a single family that hadn't suffered or at least been involved in these events. It used to be forbidden to speak about them, yet now it was allowed. And, holding their breath, everyone watched with inflamed eyes, wondering, what else would be allowed tomorrow?".³⁶

This feeling of deception was shared with Bukovsky by the Stalinists who also came to "The Week of Conscience" at the House of Culture of the Moscow Electric Lamp Plant. In one of the texts in the Book of Reviews, entitled "Judgement of Conscience", the author, a doctor by profession, essentially repeated radical dissident claims to the festival participants: "Now you are pretending that you don't know any of this, just acting a play". "This" from her point of view was repressions, which was the result of a series of espionage plots, the infiltration of "enemies" into the ranks of the NKVD and the highest organs of power. Stalin defeated them too, but only after the hostile forces had had time to massacre innocent people. In the Perestroika years there were not so

³⁶ Bukovsky V. *Moskovskiy Process*. M., p. 197

many supporters of this schizophrenic version, but paradoxically their confusion and dissatisfaction with the new wave of "revelations" had somewhat likened them to the most ardent fighters against Stalinism. To radicals on both sides, the festival at the House of Culture of the Moscow Electric Lamp Plant seemed like a theatrical production, a political game.

8

So what were people crying over in the exhibition hall of “The Week of Conscience”? What were they fainting over? How could they not know? Vladimir Bukovsky would hardly have liked the answer: Dmitry Yurasov, Elena Zhemkova and people of their generation who did not live The Thaw were genuinely amazed by the "truth" that was revealed to them in the 1980s. Ambiguities, silences, and nuanced hidden references to banned authors in the cinema and literature of the stagnant times had safely escaped their attention. And even for those who "knew", this knowledge underwent a long and difficult internal evolution.

The huge, perhaps central, problem of state violence against its own citizens had already divided society into parts, including even like-minded people across generations, but not in terms of their views on the repressions, but in terms of the very recognition of the problem. Thirty years had passed since the late 1950s. For some, as Varlam Shalamov wrote back in 1972, "the problematic has been resolved by life"³⁷. Some, like the Stalinist visitors at “The Week of Conscience”, preferred to explain what had happened by an endless cycle of conspiracy theories. Repressions were not just outright denied as such but the topic was discredited, hushed up, and entwined with the unsuccessful socio-economic reforms of Khrushchev. The topic went underground.

³⁷ For the text of Varlam Shalamov's letter to *Literaturnaya Gazeta* in which he denies his own stories, see <https://shalamov.ru/library/24/73.html>.

In his lectures³⁸ on the history of Soviet terror, Nikita Petrov, another historian from Memorial, specifically emphasizes the time factor: the yawning gap from the end of The Thaw to the beginning of Perestroika. During this time, the discourse about repressions, initiated in the late 1950s, gave way to censorship, silence, and even a backlash. Stalin reappeared on cinema screens in war films, and it became possible to speak neutrally or even positively about him in the press. This shift prompted another group of dissenters to emerge, disagreeing with yet another "return of the Mustached one." For them, it was crucial to remember not only Stalin's crimes but also the discussions surrounding them in the early post-Stalin years. Members of Vladimir Bukovsky's circle pointed out the amorality of forgetting, stressed the importance of labeling evil as such, and advocated for ongoing studies to understand its essence. With caution, it can be suggested that the memory was not solely about the terror itself but also about its initial unveiling and the effort to initiate a public discourse about its origins.

Few of these people could have imagined that someday the texts they distributed in Samizdat in hundreds (in exceptional cases, thousands) of copies would be published in millions of copies in *Ogonyok* magazine and inspire "The Week of Conscience". That people around them will suddenly rediscover their own history, start looking at their own family albums and the faces of their parents and grandparents in a different way.

"Hadn't they seen them before?" The radicals from the dissident circle repeated one after another.

"You learn all these things, and you become infinitely ashamed that you lived next to these people - and knew nothing," Elena Zhemkova answered them in absentia³⁹.

In a way, this was Memorial's strength – its founders knew just as much about repressions as any educated Soviet citizen, and could therefore discuss it in a language comprehensible to others. However, it was also a weakness as their initial action plans

³⁸ См., например, публичную лекцию для «Партийного университета» Партии Прогресса, 2015 г. For instance, here — Party of Progress, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tllY-lkk3U>)

³⁹ E. Zhemkova's interview with the author from the series "History of Memorial", 7.9.17 <https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/biblioteka/dokumentalnyj-proekt-istoriya-memoriala/intervyu-eleny-zhemkovo/>

stayed within the confines of the most general and often abstract formulation of the problem.

9

"I am afraid that with the erection of the monument an illusion will be born that the past is exhausted, a point has been reached," wrote historian Vladimir Karlovich Ronin in the Book of Reviews. In the year of the exhibition opening he had just turned 30. A specialist in the history of the Middle Ages and a Slavic philologist, in three years he would leave the new, post-Soviet Russia for exile. The monument in the form presented in the projects during "The Week of Conscience" will never be erected. But many years later, in 2017, President Vladimir Putin would unveil the Wall of Sorrow monument on Sakharov Avenue, designed by sculptor Georgi Frangulyan.

Appearing in a completely different era, in a strange place (the monument stands at a busy road junction, opposite an office building, with virtually no pedestrian access and no space organised around it⁴⁰), it looks at best like an afterword to Perestroika projects. At worst, it looks like what Ronin wrote about in 1988: the state is closing the subject and doing so on its own terms.

During "The Week of Conscience", visitors were asked to determine not only the appearance of the monument, but also its place on the map. Dozens of authors and commentators agreed that it should be erected in Lubyanka, right on the site of the main KGB building. The building itself should either be destroyed "like the Bastille" or, on the contrary, "preserved intact" as a ready-made artefact placed in a new context. A man who introduced himself as a "KGB employee" left a response in the Book of Reviews in a form of an artistic (?) gesture: "I am categorically opposed to the KGB building being demolished or having a museum in it. We will still need it for further work". As of 2023, this is one of the few ideas expressed at the "The Week of Conscience" that has actually been realised.

⁴⁰ Office workers at the nearby "Sogaz" insurance agency mainly use the memorial area as a smoking area.

Other contributors to the Book of Reviews offered their own ideas for the monument. Many of them were solved in the tradition of socialist realist Soviet monumental art. A way too large Eternal Flame in memory of the victims of terror next to the Eternal Flame in memory of the fallen in the Great Patriotic War. A way too large sculptural composition with a man being taken away from his home to an unknown destination with his hands clasped behind his back. A monument with a symbolically toppled Stalin's body lying on the ground, before whose eyes (and with whose permission) all this is happening. The borderline between parody and naive art was nearly indistinguishable. Consciously or unconsciously, many of the proposals were in the style of culture jamming—a sarcastic reinterpretation and duplication of the Soviet image system, akin to the Soviet conceptualists who worked in the genre of Sozart.

"I propose a cheap project for a "monument to the victims": Mukhina's "Worker and Collective Farm Woman" should be placed on its knees. At the back, there should be the figure of Stalin with a hammer, breaking the head of the peasant woman, and cutting the throat of the worker with a sickle." "I propose as an epigraph to the memorial the gravestone words: *No tale more chilling on this earthly stage, / Than the narrative of deeds, a KGB outrage.*"

Today, the Book of Reviews stands as a kind of apotheosis of the Soviet tradition of complaint books which were one of those few feedback mechanisms from citizens to "bosses", albeit formalised and ineffective. The Book has an aura of a "monument", an artistic installation, and a material for anthropological research. Writing "I propose", the contributor to the book most likely senses that his suggestion will never be accepted; rather, he suggests reading, laughing, crying—and, in doing so, at least for the duration of others reading it, he regains his right to exist in the form of text. Thousands signed the appeal of one such anonymous author: "A big request to publish all the reviews in a booklet with many thousands of copies".

The organizers of "The Week of Conscience" themselves acknowledge that, in practical terms, nothing substantial resulted from it. The monument was not erected. The building on Lubyanka was not demolished. Stalin's body was not removed from Red Square⁴¹. Alexander Weinstein and Dmitry Krymov wanted to publish a photo album and a Book of Remembrance with the names of people commemorated during "The Week of Conscience", but never got round to doing so. The Book of Reviews survived only in the form of scans and photographs in the "Memorial" archive.

In 1990, an outraged Dmitry Yurasov told American historian Stephen Kotkin in an interview that the people's money collected at the festival to pay for work on the monument had been "frozen" by the state⁴². Paper rubles and metal kopecks could be thrown into a camp wheelbarrow that stood in the lobby of the House of Culture next to a map of the Gulag hanging on the wall. The money, which was taken away every evening by bank collectors and placed in a specially opened account, was soon simply expropriated. As early as January 1989, Alexander Degtyarev, one of the chief ideologists of the CPSU Central Committee, "aggressively" declared to the representatives of Memorial that "the creation of a monument to the victims of Stalinist repressions was entrusted to the Ministry of Culture of the USSR, which means that the money collected by Memorial belongs to this department."⁴³ Soon a radical monetary reform was carried out, followed by hyperinflation, and the money disappeared completely.

The philosopher and cultural critic Boris Groys has always emphasised the projective "incompleteness" as one of the main features of the Soviet state. Moreover, the endeavour to "finish" and complete something can be considered a "betrayal of the very

⁴¹ In the main Perestroika film about terror, "Repentance" by Tengiz Abuladze, released in 1987, the body of a deceased party boss is thrown into a rubbish pit.

⁴² Terror, Rehabilitation, and Historical Memory: An Interview with Dmitrii Yurasov: Stephen Kotkin // Russian Review, Vol 51, No. 2 (Apr., 1992), p. 242

⁴³ Sakharov A. Gorky, Moscow, hereinafter // Sakharov A. Memories: In 2 vols. Moscow: Human Rights, 1996. T. 2. C. 338.

essence of the project"⁴⁴. The best ideas here should always remain in the register of plans and utopias as the most valid form of their existence. Nikita Khrushchev in 1961 promised to build communism in 20 years. The dissident Andrei Amalrik alternatively predicted⁴⁵ that the Soviet Union might not survive until 1984. Characteristically, neither came true.

In this respect, "The Week of Conscience" was a very Soviet arrangement, and its participants and organisers were very Soviet people. Perhaps it was this sense of "Sovietness" and "permissiveness" that initially repelled non-conformists and radicals. The festival and the attitude towards it signalled a discrepancy in positions. This disagreement, while changing its forms, will persist throughout the entire history of "Memorial" and will continue as an ongoing conversation about the methods and boundaries of permissibility that should guide attempts to implement the Memorial's programme of action. Is it possible to work with the memory of political repression without "engaging in politics"? To what extent is it possible and necessary to engage with the current authorities? Can issues of history and memory be subject to compromise?

The "incompleteness" in question had another side pointed out by Vladimir Ronin. The work of memory is a process that can never be considered complete. The organisers of "The Week of Conscience" and their supporters were caught in a time trap between an infinitely postponed future and an infinitely acquired past. Any attempt of a compromise between them in the present will certainly seem incomplete, and any "completion" is dangerous because it freezes the status quo. What remains is the question of distance, the general direction of movement. Of course, 1988 in this sense was still extremely far from the promised future. But the year of 2023 is by far further away.

In October 1988, the utopian sociologist and publicist Viktoria Chalikova published an article in the magazine *Neva* entitled "The Young Archivist" about Dmitri Yurasov, a

⁴⁴ B. Groys. *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin*. I'll find the pages (!)

⁴⁵ Amalrik A. *Will the Soviet Union survive until 1984?*

text that won the Leningrad Literature Prize for that year, impressed the visitors of “The Week of Conscience”, and made her hero known throughout the country. From now on Yurasov received not only family documents, but declarations of love as well. A few more years later, director Arkady Kordon made a documentary film “Damn You, Kolyma”⁴⁶ with Yurasov in the lead role. But in the early 90s, the “young archivist” disappeared: a hero of his time, he remained in it. Yurasov tried politics, joined the right-wing populist the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, scandalously left Memorial⁴⁷ and still continues to claim⁴⁸ that the remaining members appropriated part of his archive collection. “Now, looking back, I think it's clear that Yurasov never had any plan, any idea of developing his work,” Nikita Okhotin suggests. “And, of course, he was not ready to work together with anyone. He was an absolute lone hero.”

Viktoria Chalikova did not live to see this conflict; she died of cancer in the autumn of 1991. Her entry in *The Book of Reviews* reads: “Those who prepared the exposition really did a feat (D. Yurasov worked round the clock). But the club [The House of Culture of the Moscow Electric Lamp Plant] can't let everyone in. You can provide for order or selectivity in anything, but the right to tears cannot be taken away from anyone. Without mourning and cursing, our people will not get up from their knees”.

A couple of years later, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's party, where Dmitri Yurasov would be searching for his true self, would come up with this same motto of “rising from the knees”. Another decade and a half later, the same line would become the informal slogan of the former KGB officer's rule. At the time of writing this book, the “rising” is still ongoing. And perhaps the key question is not when and how it will end, but, as Stalin put it, “who organised it”⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ Looking at this film from the year 2023, one can't help but notice the similarities to a much more popular and well-known documentary by Yuri Djud's “Kolyma”, built around the same trope: a young handsome neophyte is sent to the site of a forgotten camp hell,

⁴⁷ Some Memorial employees still continue to claim that Yurasov was never part of their organisation or even the first Initiative Group.

⁴⁸ Yurasov's Facebook page

⁴⁹ On the symbolic meaning of Stalin's words regarding the ovation for Anna Akhmatova (“who organised the rising?”), see, for example, A. Zholkovsky. Who Organised the Rising? // *Znamya*, No. 10, 2015 (<https://magazines.gorky.media/znamia/2015/10/kto-organizoval-vstavanie.html>)

3. In the Ring <Encirclement>

1

Everything was agreed upon. Nevertheless, on the morning of October 30, 1989, Jan Rachinsky and Oleg Orlov went to Lubyanka to check that everything was in order. There they walked round the four-storey house, originally belonging to the “Rossiya Insurance Company”, which had been rebuilt several times since then. In a Soviet anecdote, the headquarters of the State Security Committee had been called “Rosgosuzhas,” (‘Russia’s State Horror’) though outwardly there was nothing terrible in it. A moderately pompous administrative building, the creation of several titled Soviet architects; it certainly fell far short of the Bastille. And it was not even the only headquarters of the Soviet secret police: the KGB owned almost the entire neighbourhood, among whose inconspicuous mansions were the Firing House (the building of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court on Nikolskaya Street, where tens of thousands of people were sentenced to death during Stalin's time), the garage in Varsonofievsky Lane where people were shot in the courtyard, and the Lubyanka inner prison with underground cells for political prisoners.

On the afternoon of October 30, the alleyways near Lubyanka Square were quiet. No plainclothed agents flocking around, no police cordons or special vehicles. Orlov, a biologist by training who in the late 1980s gave up his academic career to join Memorial, approached his task with the meticulousness of a scientist. He drew a diagram of the Lubyanka streets on a piece of paper, added up their lengths, and calculated the number of people needed to close a human ring around the main KGB building.

In the evening of the same day, the KGB was surrounded. About six hundred people came to the action invented by Memorial. They stood with their backs to the building, thus encircling Lubyanka.

Activists handed out candles to those who came, many of whom had brought them themselves. Dmitry Borko, one of the main perestroika photographers, went round the building several times, taking pictures of everything that was going on. This is how we see this event from our time: a chain of people around Lubyanka, a memorial action on a day that has not yet become the official day of political prisoners⁵⁰.

The faces of the people in the black-and-white photographs change, distorted depending on the angle and the brightness of the inconstant light source—the candles they hold in their hands. On the corner stand two little twin girls as if from Kubrick's film "The Shining", next to them—somewhat in the shade—their parents. According to the few eyewitness accounts (probably due to a small report about the event shown the same evening on central television)⁵¹, at some point the crowd was joined by KGB officers who had left their workplaces and, without additional instructions, acknowledging this day as their professional holiday. No matter how one looks at it, they definitely had their own special attitude to it.

The human ring stood around the building for exactly half an hour—at 18:30 the action ended. Either side, both the surrounded and the surrounding could consider the performance a success—the symbolic action had been accomplished, no one had been arrested, and the people inside the building had demonstrated their goodwill and openness to a conversation about the past. At about the same time, not far from Lubyanka, on another Moscow central plaza, Pushkinskaya Square, participants came

⁵⁰ Astrophysicist and dissident Kronid Lyubarsky came up with the idea of a general day of solidarity for political prisoners in 1974. While in the Mordovian Dubravlag, he suggested that on 30 October, those sitting in camps across the Soviet Union should solidarise in a common action of mutual support: strike and refuse to eat, drawing the attention of the outside world to the situation of political prisoners in the USSR. Since 1991, 30 October has been the official Day of Remembrance of Victims of Political Repression in Russia.

⁵¹ For Oleg Orlov's account of that TV report (and why he doesn't believe it), see <http://prequel.memo.ru/#12>. Dmitry Borko's photos from the action are partially posted on the Memorial's photo archive website: foto-memorial.org

out in an unsanctioned rally of the opposition party Democratic Union, which opposed political repression of the present. There, the protesters were dispersed by force.

The human ring around Lubyanka obviously claims inclusion in the larger political tradition of building chains of people. Just two months earlier—in late August 1989, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact⁵²—some two million Soviet citizens stretched into the "Baltic Way": a chain linking the three Baltic capitals of Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania demanded independence—and soon won it. What could have changed the half-hour encirclement of the Lubyanka? Its organisers did not propose any clear manifesto; the overall mood required no such document. It was necessary to take Lubyanka under external control, to neutralise it, to draw a magic circle around it, shielding the world from the danger emanating from it. One could only argue about the right way to do it.

The action with the chain, however spectacular, could only proclaim the intention. The next day was October 31, and all the Chekists returned to their workplaces. They worked on the 1st and 2nd of November, until the next day off, the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. At the end of the Lubyanka performance, its participants could only repeat, following the hero of Ken Kesey's novel "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest", which had just been published in Russian⁵³, "At least I tried".

2

The history of the confrontation between the secret political police and dissenting groups in Russia has neither a clear beginning nor an end. Even counting it back to 1918, when the VChK (All-Russian Extraordinary Commission) was created—an organisation that, through a series of renaming, became the KGB—seems an obvious

⁵² In European tradition, it is more commonly referred to as the "Stalin-Hitler Pact": a non-aggression pact between the USSR and Germany concluded in 1939, which was accompanied by secret protocols on the division of spheres of influence in Eastern Europe. It was as a result of these agreements that the Baltic States were occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940.

⁵³ In the Soviet Union, Ken Kesey's novel was first published in 1987, but its film version—Milos Forman's 1975 film starring Jack Nicholson—was extremely popular.

modernisation of the issue. Prior to that, for most of the 19th century, the Russian Empire had been under a watchful eye of the Third Department, a political police force with a wide range of repressive powers. Exiles and political convicts were part of everyday life in Russia, especially in the second half of the century. Both traditions of the oppressors and oppressed had their giants on whose shoulders to climb.

Perhaps in the case of Memorial, it would be wise to begin the story with an archival find made by the future head of the organisation, Arseny Roginsky, a local celebrity in the humanitarian circles of Leningrad in the 1970s. The son of a repressed man who died in prison, a Jew by birth⁵⁴, Roginsky did not have the opportunity to receive a higher education in the big metropolitan city, but was admitted to the small University of Tartu, an academic outpost near the western border of the USSR, in Estonia. There, his supervisor was Yuri Lotman, arguably the most influential Soviet humanist of the second half of the 20th century, who developed his own, original version of structuralism.

However, Roginsky had little contact with Yuri Lotman the structuralist; his mentor was Lotman the scholar of nineteenth-century Russian culture. At university, the future head of Memorial studied an alternative political tradition in the staunchly conservative Russian Empire: the Decembrists and the members of People's Will movement (Narodnaya Volya).

Roginsky was interested in the figure of Yakov Stefanovich. In the 1870s, after the "great reforms" of Emperor Alexander II, who freed the peasants from slavery but did not give them land, Stefanovich's group—among many other revolutionary-minded urban intellectuals—started "going to the people". They travelled to the Russian countryside and agitated its population to form a peasant army and fight despotism, but they were not successful: the revolutionaries were often turned in to the police by the villagers themselves, out of harm's way. Stefanovich managed to emigrate, but after some time he returned home and was arrested.

⁵⁴ In the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union, state anti-Semitism was a very common practice—in particular, Jews were informally denied access to many of the country's leading universities, primarily in the humanities.

For almost 100 years since then, there has been an ongoing debate about his behaviour during the investigation—did he not collaborate, did he not betray his comrades? Searching archives, Roginsky and his friend, the historian Lev Lurie, managed to find a letter from Stefanovich to his friend, the Social-Democrat Lev Deitch, which was thought to be lost. Thus it turned out that Stefanovich did not directly betray anyone, but entered into negotiations with the secret police, demanding mutual concessions to stop revolutionary activities: "All right, we will not attempt to assassinate the Tsar, but you will release such-and-such and such-and-such..."⁵⁵.

Much later, in an interview with the Polish magazine *Karta*, Roginsky described how important it was for himself and people in his circle to realise that Stefanowicz was wrong. "Revolutionary generalship" led to the fact that some people considered themselves entitled to speak on behalf of the entire movement or group in certain situations without any authorisation from the collective," Roginsky explained. "This never led to anything good"⁵⁶.

The ethic of non-cooperation and collegiality in decision-making has been hard-earned by generations of political prisoners. Situations in which the accused could not stand firm and colluded with the investigation proved extremely destructive—both in the case of Stefanovich, who was sentenced to hard labour along with 16 of his fellow nationalist prisoners, and 100 years after him. In 1973, arrested dissidents Viktor Krasin and Pyotr Yakir agreed to co-operate with the KGB in exchange for their own lenient sentences and promises of leniency for their own surrendered comrades. After their public "repentance", dozens of people found themselves under new investigation. Unable to withstand the betrayal of their loved ones and the pressure of the law enforcers, one of them, Ilya Gabay, threw himself out of a window. A few years after his release, Yakir drank himself to death, and Krasin, having left for exile, wrote a penitential book, "The Judgement", in which he confessed exactly what Roginsky saw in Stefanovich's actions:

⁵⁵ Cited in Roginsky's paraphrase, interview with *Karta* magazine <https://hro.org/node/5665>

⁵⁶ Roginsky, interview with *Karta* magazine—<http://hro.org/node/5665>

he had assumed the right to bargain with the common existential enemy and speak on behalf of all.

In 1981, the arrest came close to Roginsky himself. He and his friends were preparing a Samizdat almanac called *Pamyat'* (Memory) in Leningrad and publishing it abroad, collecting documents, memoirs and testimonies on the history of anarchism, Tolstoyan philosophy, Menshevik parties and other political movements alternative to the Soviet one. The authors and editors of the collection were hunted down for several years and by the early 1980s were under close surveillance. Then, Roginsky said, he recalled an old discovery: "At the height of the hunt for Samizdat periodicals, one of the most talented publicists excitedly suggested to me: 'We should write them a letter. If they let Yuri Orlov⁵⁷ and others on our list go, we will stop publishing *Kroniki*, *Poiski*,⁵⁸ and *Pamyat'*. This is reasonable for them and for us.'" In response, I told him about Stefanovich"⁵⁹.

It is a sad irony that when, eventually, Roginsky himself was arrested⁶⁰, his colleagues at *Pamyat'*, under pressure from the investigation, decided not to continue their work and not to publish a new issue, so as not to harm their friend.

3

The idea of refusing to communicate with the investigation had its opponents. Vladimir Albrecht, a mathematician and dissident, son of a shot father, gave underground lectures in the 1970s based on his self-published book *How to be a Witness*. It was centred on the ethical imperative to testify to the essence of the case—to tell only the truth, while avoiding all investigative tricks, in accordance with a strictly structured system of answers that would make it possible not to harm anyone involved in a political

⁵⁷ Not to be confused with Oleg Orlov. Yuri Orlov is a physicist and human rights activist, founder and first chairman of the Moscow Helsinki Group.

⁵⁸ "Chronicle of Current Events, the first Soviet human rights bulletin, published and distributed in Samizdat, intermittently, from 1968-1983. *Poiski*, a literary and human rights magazine published in Moscow and distributed in Samizdat in 1978-1980.

⁵⁹ Roginsky's interview with *Karta* magazine (quoted from <http://hro.org/node/5665>)

⁶⁰ For more on Roginsky's arrest—see Chapter 4

case. This was the position of a witness, but in political cases the line between witnesses and accused was often blurred, or at least seriously tested.

Albrecht, despite all the reservations obvious to his reader and listener, suggested that the investigator sitting opposite should be seen as a representative of the law, which, for all its injustice, is still the only defence for the accused. If, of course, it is consistently observed.

Thus ethics became a consequence of almost mathematical logic. More clearly than others, even before Albrecht, in the mid-1960s, this was said by another dissident mathematician, Alexander Esenin-Volpin, who strongly influenced the first public speeches of dissidents⁶¹ : A lawless state is absurd. The goal is simply to ensure that the state adheres to its laws—whether they are good, bad, or anything in between."⁶² The formula "obey your Constitution", born of this value system, echoed the French slogan of the same time: "Be realistic—demand the impossible", and was equally utopian. The Soviet constitution, in the finest traditions of the greatest communist ideas, never implied that it would be literally adhered to.

Vladimir Albrecht's books were precisely a guide to action, a manual for establishing communication. All questions must be asked correctly, all answers must be recorded. If everything is done correctly, the witty lyrical hero will invariably emerge victorious from the dialogue with the investigator:

“Where did you get the Gospel?”

⁶¹ Alexander Esenin-Volpin was the organiser of the Glasnost Rally on Pushkin Square in Moscow on 5 December 1965, the first political protest since the 1920s. Its participants demanded that the authorities "respect the Constitution" and a public trial of the arrested writers Sinyavsky and Daniel (Daniel's son Alexander had been working at Memorial since the late 1980s). Esenin-Volpin prepared for the rally a text of a civic appeal built around the same idea: we must compel the official authorities to enforce their own laws.

⁶² *From underground to legality. Starry Hours of a Soviet Dissident (together with Y. Daniel)* // Moscow—Berlin / Berlin—Moskau. Chronicle 1950-2000. M., 2004 // quoted in Roginsky. Book. p. 239

“From Matthew”⁶³ .

An outstanding satire in the genre of selfhelp, these guidelines didn't help Albrecht much when he himself was eventually arrested—almost simultaneously with Roginsky. Albrecht ended up spending five years in the camp, from 1983 to 1987⁶⁴. About halfway through his term, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the USSR, but this did not affect Albrecht's plight. The administration repeatedly imprisoned him in a "press-hata"—a special punitive cell where, the *blatnie*, the inmates charged with criminal offences collaborating with the camp authorities, organised a torture conveyor belt for the dissident threatening to rape him, and did not let him sleep⁶⁵. Like many other late-Soviet political prisoners, Albrecht eventually signed a plea for mercy which meant a confession of guilt and gave Gorbachev a formal opportunity to let most of the remaining political prisoners go free while saving face. Roginsky, who was imprisoned under a non-political article due to the intrigue of the state security officers, did not sign any papers.

4

By the end of the 1980s, the endless game of cops and robbers between the KGB and dissidents was clearly losing its political relevance. The staff of the Fifth Chief Directorate, which was responsible for combating dissent within the country, as well as their superiors, no longer understood where the boundaries of this dissent lay.

These people spoke little about themselves, but sometimes they did. For example, KGB colonel Evgeny Grigorievich Semenikhin described his views and those of his entourage

⁶³ Albrecht W. How to be a witness. How to behave at a search. SPb., 2013. —c. 3. URL: https://imwerden.de/pdf/albrecht_kak_byt_svidetelem_kak_vesti_sebya_na_obyske_2013__ocr.pdf

⁶⁴ Albrecht was arrested for holding underground lectures on the topics of his own books and keeping Samizdat—"anti-Soviet activity". He himself commented on these circumstances with a typical paradox: "If I had been wrong in my book, I would never have been imprisoned" (<http://old.russ.ru/journal/travmp/97-11-05/alpavl.htm>).

⁶⁵ Albrecht spoke about his experience of political imprisonment shortly after his release in an interview with Gleb Pavlovsky: <http://old.russ.ru/journal/travmp/97-11-05/alpavl.htm>

in the last years before the collapse of the USSR. His book, published in 1997 under the pseudonym Evgeny Grig, was called *Yes, I worked there*.

In Grig's version, by the beginning of Perestroika, most of his "thinking" colleagues had already been infected with enemy ideas in one way or another. Many, like him, sympathised with the thoughts and theories being constructed by their suspects; they understood that the ideological incantations about the moral superiority of the USSR over the West and about some special socialist anti-bourgeois values were lies that nobody believed in any more. Worse still, many did not believe in the necessity of pretending to believe. Grig, in his own words, did not believe it himself, but he still pretended. There were simpler people in his office: they made do with tunnel vision and tried to move from task to task without asking questions. And even those like Grig had important limitations in solidarity with his enemies. Like Albrecht, his opponent also appealed to the laws and rules—though he obviously interpreted them somewhat differently:

"While sympathising with them in many ways, accepting much of what they said and wrote, I could hardly share their views and worldview entirely. They were **opposed to the state**⁶⁶ in which they lived and of which they were citizens. Under the statutes and laws of the time, dissent was discouraged, to put it mildly. These laws were not written by the KGB—the KGB, as a "tool of the party", implemented them and forced others to implement them"⁶⁷.

The 'with-or-against-state' divide, with very few exceptions (such as General Pyotr Grigorenko, a party member and high-ranking military officer, who became one of the founders of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group), remained absolutely insurmountable. Ideology could change; the state as the supreme value and measure of all things remained unchanged. Sturdy KGB statesmen survived any ideological and political turns relatively unnoticed, from the shake-up of the party under Khrushchev to the attempt to build and freeze the nomenklatura status quo under Brezhnev. By 1990, Nikita Petrov

⁶⁶ Highlighted in the original.

⁶⁷ Eugene Grig. *Yes, I worked there*. M., 1997. C. 315

asserts that a consciously planned decision to leave the party was absolutely logical for a KGB officer. They left the Communist party as easily and "systematically" as they had once joined it. As another sarcastic cliché put it, they successfully swayed along with the party line—and, when needed, were able to find state expediency elsewhere.

Dissidents, outsiders, and lone fighters had a hard time also because, as a rule, they were fighting not against ideological opponents, but against power-wielding bureaucrats who had almost unlimited opportunities to dispose of their rights and their freedoms, nor did they have any clear views to appeal to. What in Eugene Grig's interpretation sounds like loyalty to duty was read quite differently among his opponents:

"The most common way of self-justification for KGB officers in the 1970s was to appeal to state ideology in its most concentrated and even cynical version," Roginsky wrote. "We remember well that in 'confidential conversations' with dissidents they were most fond of repeating: 'Well, communism, Leninism..... You and I understand perfectly well that it's all rubbish. We serve the state, not Leninism. And we will send you to prison not because your views are 'not Marxist', but because your activities undermine the foundations of the State.'"⁶⁸

In turn, Grig complained that the emasculation of communist ideology led to a decline in operational work. His personal experience of confronting the "enemy" was that he, a neat-looking officer, was sent on a "special assignment" to the Berezka shop. He had to pretend to be a foreigner and buy expensive foreign alcohol and send it to the address of Pyotr Yakir, who was actively drinking. Thus, as Semenikhin-Grig assumed, two goals were achieved: Yakir was discredited in the eyes of his friends and his drinking was prolonged. Grig was not informed by his superiors about the higher, strategic goals of this action.

⁶⁸ Roginsky. Book. C. 235

Just a few years later, reports on these kinds of operations were read in departmental archives by Nikita Petrov, a member of Memorial. "In parts, it really is a humorous read," he recalls. "All these operational wordings from the reports describing the Chekist way of looking at things. 'Suspicious moments in behaviour', 'the matter has been made clear', 'the matter has been implemented through prevention', and 'further development is not advisable'. And all this with utter seriousness. What nonsense." Describing the operational language of the KGB, the philologist Irina Levontina captures the sense of tension, of existential deadend that a Soviet person gets when confronted with the word "inexpedient". In such documents it meant a universal and ultimatum ban. It is "utterly false and slippery, both irresistible and threateningly concise. It propels a person into a state of impotent rage, creating an almost physical urge to break through a wall with their forehead."⁶⁹

The reality of political arrests in the last years before Perestroika was as commonplace and as devoid of practical sense as the paperwork that formalised it. Those under the watchful eye of the Fifth Chief Directorate continued to serve very real and effective terms in camps and prisons if they had not passed the "expediency" selection.

Before Gorbachev dared to grant amnesty to political prisoners, the most famous of them, Anatoly Marchenko, had to die during an indefinite hunger strike in Chistopol prison in Mordovia—he declared it, demanding the release of all political prisoners in the USSR. Political censorship carefully perused all prison letters, but in the summer of 1986 Larisa Bogoraz received a note from her husband explaining his position. Those close to him knew that the hunger strike had no finite term and the radicality of the demands probably meant that it could have only one end⁷⁰. Arseny Roginsky, who had recently been released, went to the funeral in Chistopol among few others. Marchenko's death and the international reaction to it⁷¹ finally forced the official

⁶⁹ I. Levontina. Inspirator of hostile manifestations. On the Language of KGB Documents on the Sakharov Case // Object of Surveillance. KGB against Sakharov. C. 46

⁷⁰ Interview with Alexander Daniel, historian, one of the founders of Memorial, son of Larisa Bogoraz, stepson of Anatoly Marchenko (2.10.23)

⁷¹ In the first days after Marchenko's death, the world's largest newspapers, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, reported on it. A year and a half later, he posthumously shared the first-ever Sakharov

Soviet authorities to come up with a form for releasing political prisoners. Whether this death served as the actual trigger for mass amnesties or simply accelerated the inevitable changes, coinciding with a growing need to mend relations with the West—either way, Marchenko came to epitomise the central ethical imperative for Soviet dissenters: he did not cooperate. He did not make tactical concessions, and he died trying to save others.

However, the subsequent amnesties and the accompanying official recognition of the fact that there *were* indeed political prisoners in the Soviet Union did not close the issue. There were fewer political prisoners, arrests under the main article on "anti-Soviet activity" stopped, but the problem itself did not disappear—the ideological monopoly of the authorities remained in place, new cases were opened, operational work continued, and the "mill" (this was the name given to the work of the political investigation by state security officers back in Stalin's time) continued to grind. The last Soviet political prisoner, Valeria Novodvorskaya, was released from prison on the day the reactionary coup d'état failed, August 22, 1991. Having seen the democratic revolution with her own eyes, she was disappointed by the favourable, conciliatory mood of the victors. Paradoxically, the Chekist Grig agreed with her: for him, all the Perestroika compromises and concessions made by the Soviet authorities meant that "the ivory tower [built by the KGB] was already a bit tarnished"⁷².

5

Between 1988 and 1989, Memorial activists worked continuously on drafting a charter in order to officially register the organisation. The Soviet laws in place at the time did not provide a clear answer as to whether this could be done even in a purely technical manner.

Prize, which the European Parliament awarded to his widow and, at the time, to Nelson Mandela, who was still in prison in South Africa.

⁷² Eug. Grieg, p. 482

In his autobiography *The Flight of the White Crow*, Sergei Kovalev, a former dissident and future Commissioner for Human Rights under President Yeltsin, explained the overall situation: "Since the late 1920s in the Soviet Union, any association of citizens not authorised by the authorities was automatically considered anti-state, with all the ensuing consequences. This approach is reasonable and correct for a regime that strictly guarded its monopoly on social activism. <...> Of course, the right of citizens to freely form associations is written in the Constitution. But in 1936, when the Constitution was being written, no one imagined that anyone would think of using this right without the prior approval of the district party committee, let alone for the establishment of a philatelist club."⁷³ Since Memorial's work was considered by the authorities to be something more dangerous than stamp collecting, its founding conferences were permanently postponed, its status changed on the fly, and it drowned in bureaucracy. A voluntary public organisation needed official founders. The founders themselves could only exist if they had official status, so the role of founders could be implemented by already registered creative or scientific unions and institutions. However, the Soviet unions that had previously agreed to take on this role—film-makers, architects, designers, journalists (represented by the editorial board of the main Soviet political weekly *Ogonyok*)—were in one way or another deeply rooted in the existing power order and acted only in agreement with official authorities. This tightened the bureaucratic deadlock.

Even if we set aside bureaucratic problems, the same life-building questions remained unanswered. Who should Memorial ask for credentials, or perhaps a "work permit"? Should it seek them from the direct heirs and perpetrators of the very political crimes it intends to study and prevent in the future? In early 1989, an open letter to Memorial was written by Aleksandr Podrabinek, an activist and journalist who had served his time and who at the time edited the human rights weekly *Express-Chronicle*: "Whose hands do you prefer to receive a monument commemorating the victims of Stalin's repressions? From the hands that perpetrated these crimes, advocated for them

⁷³ There is no Russian-language edition of *Flight of the White Crow*; the original text is quoted from Roginsky. Book, pp. 424

yesterday, and still uphold the totalitarian system?"⁷⁴ Podrabinek stipulated that Perestroika had already gone so far that he had no doubts about the legal status of Memorial—nothing would prevent it from dealing with the past even without official registration. Moreover, he feared that the state authorities and the KGB were deliberately "surrendering" Stalin's past in exchange for compromise and refusal to make radical changes in the present—and that it was necessary to fight for the rights of living people.

In an attempt to gather all potential founders and activists to approve a programme of action, Memorial scheduled a conference at the House of Cinema for October 1988. A few days before it began, it became clear that the "establishment" would not be possible, and the meeting was renamed "preparatory", which only radicalised the speeches of some of its delegates.

Yuri Skubko, one of the participants in the early Memorial meetings and at the time a member of the Democratic Union burst to the microphone (Like Memorial, the Union was also unregistered; but unlike Memorial, it even bragged about it). Skubko stated two demands, without the fulfilment of which the possible registration of Memorial seemed pointless to him: the return of Soviet citizenship for Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and the opening of a museum on the history of political repression in the KGB building at Lubyanka. The deputy chairman of the House of Cinema cut off the speaker's microphone and publicly called him a "KGB provocateur". In response, Skubko, a certified Africanist, came down from the stage and hit the host of the evening in the face with his fist.⁷⁵ They were separated. 30 years later, Skubko's biggest regret was not the fight, but the fact that he was never heard: he did not seek to provoke anyone and spoke quite seriously⁷⁶.

One blow, however, was not going to solve the issue. What to many radicals seemed a natural, inevitable requirement of the times, to their more pragmatic opponents looked

⁷⁴ A. Podrabinek. Open Letter to the "Memorial" Group // Posev No. 1, 1989, p. 35

⁷⁵ Skubko interview from the History of Memorial series:
<https://stg.old.urokiistorii.nppsatek.com/article/54589>

⁷⁶ Ibid.

like an ultimatum that could destroy the nascent co-operation between Memorial and the state. Architect and philosopher Vyacheslav Glazychev, who chaired the conference at the House of Cinema, recalled later that even before it began he had met at the Budapest Hotel with KGB deputy chief Philip Bobkov, who for many years had headed the Fifth Chief Directorate and was the best-known fighter against dissidents in the USSR. Glazychev took the outcome of the conversation as a "wave" of permission to hold the conference⁷⁷.

The frightened functionaries at the House of Cinema were most likely genuinely disturbed by what they had heard from Skubko. And they were not the only ones—the head of the Union of Cinematographers, the director Andrei Smirnov, who had a lot of difficulties with the Soviet authorities throughout his career in cinema, also believed that there could be "stool pigeons" and provocateurs among the radicals⁷⁸. The same Glazychev stipulated: "It seemed to us that any careless word could disrupt the event and lead to its closure"⁷⁹. In this world, having direct contact with the Party and the KGB was not only a necessary evil, but also an operational need.

6

It took another death to officially establish Memorial. Many months of public and underhand struggles were resolved with one symbolic gesture. On 14 December 1989, Andrei Sakharov, the long-time leader of the Soviet human rights movement, a great physicist and Nobel Peace Prize winner who had been a member of all the public committees associated with Memorial, died suddenly. At the funeral, Mikhail Gorbachev addressed his widow, Elena Bonner, with the usual words of condolence on such occasions and the question, "What can I do for you?" "Register Memorial," Bonner

⁷⁷ A. Shubin. *Betrayed Democracy. The USSR and the Informals*. 1986-1989. Europe. Moscow, 2006. p. 358

⁷⁸ See Smirnov's final speech on the second day of the conference, where he said, for example: "You have sometimes allowed yourselves to denounce us as if we were snitches. I will allow myself to question whether you, dear friends, are not snitches."

(<http://igrunov.ru/cat/vchk-cat-org/memor/hist/docum/podgotovit-memo-partII.html#smirnov>).

⁷⁹ Ibid, pp. 358-359

replied. This soon happened⁸⁰. Memorial became the first all-Union voluntary human rights historical society.

The fact that for Gorbachev this decision was difficult and not entirely voluntary became clear decades later, after the publication of transcripts of CPSU Central Committee meetings of this period. At one of them, for example, the General Secretary said: "This Memorial is pushing, you see, badly. Its latest actions testify to an attempt to become more than a society."⁸¹ Behind the collection of signatures and the design of the monument, museum and library—all of which remained part of the official Memorial programme—Gorbachev saw a larger mission: "To speak in the name of the people and to judge in the name of the people, and to control in the name of the people, to present that they are the conscience of the people"⁸².

Memorial itself was indeed rethinking and reassessing its mission. In the time between 1987 and 1989, many new people had joined the organisation. The most influential among them were those who had experience of working with history and had been involved in one way or another with the subject of repressions before the beginning of Perestroika. Now the main role in the movement was played by Arseny Roginsky, Alexander Daniel, and Sergei Kovalev—people who had been involved in the dissident world since the late 1960s-70s. Nikita Okhotin, Irina Shcherbakova, and Boris Belenkin also found themselves in the organisation in one way or another through friendly or professional ties with Roginsky. With their arrival, the balance of power in Memorial changed. Those, whom Belenkin had called "springs" and whose activism and political innocence had been derided by Okhotin, were relegated to the background. Of those who first gathered around the idea of erecting a monument to the victims of repression in 1987, only Elena Zhemkova remains in Memorial. While there was little age difference between the groups, a distinct division into "older" and "younger" was quite noticeable in the subcultural hierarchy that had developed over the several decades of

⁸⁰ Arseny Roginsky. What is "Memorial" <https://www.colta.ru/articles/specials/1872-cto-takoe-memorial>

⁸¹ Meeting of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee chaired by M. Gorbachev, 24 November 1988. RGANI. Ф. 89. Оп. 42. Д. 23. Л. 2- 5 // quoted in E. Lezina. XX century: working through the past.

Practices of transitional justice <...> M., 2021. С. 530

⁸² Ibid, p. 532

the human rights movement's existence. Roginsky, Bogoraz or Kovalev were somehow "their own" in this recently semi-underground world. Those who came into it at the beginning of Perestroika were not. Nina Braginskaya recalled how authoritative memorialists addressed both her and people of much older age, calling them "boys" and "girls."⁸³ "Roginsky would utter the sacramental phrase: Each of you represents yourself! But I represent the Movement. Behind me is the Movement." "I couldn't quite figure out what 'Movement' was," recalled Vyacheslav Igrunov, who also didn't fit into the new hierarchy within Memorial.—And then it turned out that it was a dissident movement"⁸⁴.

Electoral politics became the alternative to Memorial. For people such as future MP and human rights activist Lev Ponomarev and that same Igrunov, this was a choice incompatible with Memorial's "historical" work. There were other options. Nina Braginskaya became an academic scholar. Yuri Skubko, after spending several years in the Democratic Union, also withdrew from direct political action, going abroad. The process of generational and ideological restructuring of Memorial took several years, but its foundation was laid as early as 1989-1990.

The most controversial was the departure of Yuri Samodurov, the author of Memorial's original manifesto, who was considered by many to be the founder of the organisation. He himself recalled that he "felt superfluous among former dissidents"⁸⁵ and lost a purely political power struggle. Opponents, for their part, reproached⁸⁶ Samodurov for his desire for sole leadership—Igrunov recalled how they had to argue and demand that he withdraw the signatures that Samodurov gave on behalf of Memorial.

Formally, Samodurov left after his colleagues rejected his proposal on the procedure for accepting new members. He had suggested that this be done—even in the many new

⁸³ Braginskaya interview from the History of Memorial series:

<https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/biblioteka/dokumentalnyj-proekt-istoriya-memoriala/intervyu-niny-braginskoj/>

⁸⁴ Igrunov's interview from the Memorial History series:

<https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/biblioteka/dokumentalnyj-proekt-istoriya-memoriala/intervyu-vyacheslava-igrunova/>

⁸⁵ Samodurov's Memories of the Memorial, quoted in <https://ed-glezin.livejournal.com/1007677.html>

⁸⁶ Zhemkova, Braginskaya and Igrunov, among others, talk about this in their interviews.

units of Memorial established across the USSR—through the central organisation in Moscow, in order to have more control and establish links between the various regional branches. When the federalist version of free regional membership won out, Samodurov announced that he was leaving. Braginskaya and Igrunov thought he was counting on being called back. No one, however, called or even came to apologise, although, according to Elena Zhemkova, everyone she spoke to at the time was in one way or another "sorry" about the departure of one of the founding fathers.

The perception of what Memorial might have been before official registration and what it became once it received it also changed over time. Gleb Pavlovsky, a friend of Igrunov's who edited his first texts associated with Memorial, has repeatedly returned to try to determine what these changes were. In the early 2010s, at a meeting with Samodurov, he described Memorial's trajectory as a movement from direct political participation, building an alternative party, to more vague plans about "working with the past." "It was an attempt to create a civilian 'general contractor' for Perestroika,"⁸⁷ Pavlovsky reasoned. "Before 1989, the idea of turning Memorial into something like the Soviet Solidarity"⁸⁸ seemed natural to many people. I talked to Senya Roginsky about this at the time. His plans were much more moderate, he was no longer a "dissident", he was manoeuvring"⁸⁹. In 2021, when the trial over the liquidation of Memorial was underway, Pavlovsky was much more complimentary: "His <Roginsky> ambition went beyond politics. Current politics was cramped until it became the past. Senya didn't treat the state with disdain, nor was he afraid of it. He had his own business, running parallel but intersecting somewhere in our non-Euclidean space with human rights. Senya wished for people to cleanse their hands well before delving into history."⁹⁰

⁸⁷ The very choice of the word "general contractor" probably refers to the persistent expression "foremen of Perestroika", which in the late 1980s was used in relation to the main ideologists of Gorbachev's reforms: Alexander Yakovlev, Vitaly Korotich and others. As in their case, the "general contractor" personifies the figure of an active implementer, one of the leading agents of the new policy.

⁸⁸ By the late 1980s, the Polish trade union Solidarity had become the political party that won Poland's first free elections and nominated the country's first post-communist president, Lech Walesa.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ G. Pavlovsky. Memorial and Strategic Bombing //

<https://www.colta.ru/articles/society/28911-gleb-pavlovskiy-memorial-idei-arseniy-roginitskiy-likvidatsiya-voyna-ne-politika>

In one way or another, both supporters and opponents of Memorial's registration, while recognising the significance of the event itself, saw in it not only a public victory, but also the result of a compromise: Memorial "washed its hands of it", distanced itself, as a "historical society", from direct participation in opposition and street politics, but, speaking of the past, could somehow work as a mechanism for social reform. From the perspective of 1990, however, it was not necessary to look for contradictions between direct and indirect participation. Nikita Okhotin, who has never been involved in electoral participation or party building, insists precisely on the political dimension of Memorial in that period. Working with the history of repressions and returning to the theme of the crimes of the Soviet state was for him, above all, "the most effective way of pushing the situation through, and the right public tactic" to fight against Soviet power as such. From this point of view, perhaps Gorbachev was worried for good reason.

7

The main task of Memorial was to study the crimes of the Soviet regime with the aim of preventing the repetition of these crimes in the future. The direct perpetrators were known to everyone—the CPSU and the KGB. While the party in late Perestroika actively insisted on its own reform and "purification," things were not so obvious with the KGB. Even ardent supporters of the operational practices adopted by the state security service acknowledged that at various times in its history this organisation had worked far beyond its mandate. The KGB had organised political assassinations, participated in the work of parallel quasi-judicial bodies (the so-called "troikas") during Stalin's terror, and, after the "crimes of the personality cult" had been recognised, it monitored, provoked and imprisoned thousands of Soviet citizens on political grounds.

In addition, the KGB exerted informal and very significant influence on the main decision-making body, the Politburo. Decades remained in the memory of their witnesses not only by the names of the general secretaries, but also by the heads of the "competent bodies": Lavrentiy Beria, Yuri Andropov or Viktor Chebrikov. Even in the late 1980s and early 1990s, discussions continued about the extent to which the head of

state was capable of controlling the KGB, and the extent to which the KGB itself was keeping Gorbachev under close surveillance. When the anti-Gorbachev coup took place in the Soviet Union in August 1991, KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov was one of its architects.

In retrospect, it seems that the natural and essentially the only way to somehow reconstruct the existing system would have been to conduct lustration: along with the reform of the KGB, strip state security employees of the right to work in the public service (as well as participate in public politics)—up to criminal liability for committed crimes. However, neither in the late 1980s, when the KGB made concessions and admitted some of the crimes of the past, nor after 1991, when the system of state power itself collapsed, did Memorial support the idea of lustration.

"Back then <in 1988-1989> we had no idea what lustration was. I probably didn't even know this word"⁹¹, admits Serhiy Krivenko, one of the first memorial activists, who is still working in the organisation in 2023. Meanwhile, in the disintegrating socialist camp, lustration was gradually becoming a reality. In various forms, it was applied to officials in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and eastern Germany and in Lithuania from the former Soviet republics. After 1991, lustration was openly discussed in Russia as well.

The question of why Memorial and its supporters didn't lend institutional support to the idea of lustration has multiple answers, none of which is entirely satisfactory. The most prevalent among them, ethical, was voiced from various perspectives right from the earliest discussions. "I remember very well the reaction of those who had served their terms—Kovalev, Roginsky," says Elena Zhemkova. "They said, 'We don't want revenge.'"⁹² Any form of collective punishment seemed to people who had faced political persecution and studied the logic of repression as a direct continuation of it. They

⁹¹ Interview with Sergey Krivenko, 4.04.23

⁹² Cf. with what Vladimir Bukovsky wrote about the early 1990s in *The Moscow Process*: "We, former political prisoners and dissidents, contrary to popular opinion, do not seek revenge at all: my proposals are not motivated by it, but by interests much more important and not at all personal. All the more so because I did not lie: I really do not live by hatred and do not feel the slightest desire to take revenge on anyone, because I have never been anyone's victim, and I chose everything that happened to me myself, quite voluntarily and with full consciousness of the consequences". (Bukovsky. *The Moscow Trial*, p. 46)

described lustration as a new cycle of the same violent practices: punishment without individual trial, punishment based on the fact of belonging to an organisation, albeit terrible and probably criminal, but established by the state (and therefore formally legitimate).

This point of view was best problematised by the book *"How to Get Out of Terror"*, first published in 1989⁹³, which was kept in Arseny Roginsky's office. Its author, the Czech Bronisław Baczko, studied the Thermidorian period of the Great French Revolution, when the Jacobins, who had previously organised revolutionary terror, were themselves put on trial and guillotined. The preface and afterword of the book were devoted to the present day and the experience of the Soviet Thermidor⁹⁴. Baczko's focus was precisely the moment when the repressive system is replaced by a new system of power. Is it necessary to punish the guilty, to start the wheel of persecution anew? If not, how to recognise the crimes committed as crimes? If yes, how to get out of terror? In 1794, the Jacobin leaders were executed, and before the end of the year many of their local supporters were tried and sent to prison. But was this a way out if repressions and war soon spiralled with renewed vigour? If the arrival of Napoleon and the restoration of the monarchy followed? On the title page of Roginsky's copy of the book was Baczko's autograph: "Arseny, read it!"

Punishing everyone en masse is both irrational and unfair. Where do we set the boundary for categorizing those deserving punishment? Many have written about this issue as well. For example, the famous philosopher Grigory Pomerantz, who himself served time in Stalin's camps. In his article "Ethical Aspects of Lustration" he explained to readers how responsibility for a crime can be spread between very different people, who are often drawn into the repressive process through violence, threats and blackmail: "I know of many cases where individuals, teetering on the edge of suicide, resisted [cooperation with state security agencies or working as informants]. There are a

⁹³ The Russian translation was published later: B. Baczko. *How to get out of terror?* M., 2006.

⁹⁴ There were several Soviet thermidors in different variations: for example, Trotsky considered Stalin the "main thermidorian" because of his rejection of the idea of world revolution; many in the West also assessed Khrushchev's actions as a "thermidor" in relation to Stalin's terror.

huge number of involuntary informants"⁹⁵. Wouldn't lustration of such people—in any form—be an even more unjust, double punishment? People familiar with the practice of the KGB, like Roginsky and Bogoraz, insisted that the mentioning of certain names in a certain context in operational and investigative cases does not constitute direct evidence of a crime. Not all "collaborators" co-operated. Not all "informants" were informing. "Only in the course of discussions around 'lustration' would it be realised what a dangerous force is embedded in the KGB archives, how easy it is to manipulate not only individual citizens, but also power structures with its help,"⁹⁶ wrote Roginsky in 1992.

8

But what is to be done with the regular staff? With real people with shoulder straps, with passes to the Lubyanka canteen and a full KGB social package?

Nikita Petrov, who knows the structure of the law enforcement agencies inside and out, describes himself as a staunch advocate of lustration for regular KGB officers—and claims to have held this view in the early 1990s as well. Another matter, he continues, is that not everyone in the Memorial circle agreed with him, and, ultimately, none of them had the opportunity to practically influence the lustration process. The most they could insist on was the full publication of all the names of staff directly involved in the earlier repression, as a symbolic reckoning with the past. But even 30 years later, this has still not been completed in full.

The few public supporters of lustration spoke at their own conference, which even in the mosaic and pluralistic political space of the early 1990s looked rather marginal. It was called "KGB: Yesterday—Today—Tomorrow" and was organised by people, many of whom were sympathetic to Memorial's ideas—but Memorial itself was not among its organisers. Paradoxically, the transcripts of these speeches, once deemed radical and unconstructive, now appear to me as the most balanced and adequate from the perspective of 2023. In one report after another, simple truths are stated: lustration

⁹⁵ G. Pomerantz. Ethical Aspects of Lustration // Memorial-Aspect, 1993

⁹⁶ Roginsky. Book. C. 33

does not equal terror at all.” The fear of losing highly skilled professionals among those employed in the KGB is unfounded. “They are professionals in the field of political repressions, and we really hope that we will never need their experience again. And even here they are unprofessional. What they were guarding has fallen apart”⁹⁷ .

Only one finalised lustration project has made it to parliament—it was proposed by MP Galina Starovoitova. She first introduced the bill to the Supreme Soviet, the old Soviet parliament that continued in the new Russia, in 1992. The document⁹⁸, which proposed a 5 to 10 year ban on holding public office and full publication of the list of KGB officers and informants, was not supported by most even pro-democracy deputies. Starovoitova later formed her own party, Democratic Russia, but it too did not agree with the draft law. In this case, too, Memorial remained on the sidelines.

Not actually implemented, lustration as a form of legalised repentance, imposed as a symbolic punishment, was nevertheless discussed in the KGB and by the potential lustrators themselves. Petrov and Okhotin, who worked for several years in various commissions at Lubyanka, recall Volodya Goncharov⁹⁹, a full-time KGB officer, who in the mid-1990s told them that he felt responsible for the crimes committed by his office and the need to do something about it, to somehow “cleanse himself.” “We offered him an option,” Okhotin continues, “we dressed their entire company in loose overalls and led them in a column to the Moskva swimming pool (the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour had not yet been restored in that place). The water in the pool is pre-consecrated by the patriarch. We bathe them all—and there will be repentance for them. He was, of course, embarrassed.” A churchgoer with an interest in the topic of persecuted Christianity, Goncharov started working at the St. Tikhon's Institute in the early 2000s. Since 2014, he has been administering a database of martyred Christians repressed by the Soviet authorities, “Those Who Suffered for Christ”.

⁹⁷ Boris Pustyntsev. KGB yesterday-today-tomorrow // <https://grigoryants.ru/kgb-%20vchera-segodnya-zavtra/sbornik-dokladov/>

⁹⁸ http://starovoitova.ru/rus/texts/06/books/10_let/29.htm

⁹⁹ <https://pstgu.ru/people/goncharov-vladimir-aleksandrovich/>

Another type of "our little lustration" is described by Nikita Petrov. Sergei Kovalev, as the Presidential Human Rights Commissioner, was already involved in the re-certification of former KGB officers in 1994. "Sergei Adamovich didn't know what the criterion for his evaluation should be and asked me," says Petrov. "I replied, partly in jest, but actually in earnest: 'All those who worked in the Fifth Chief Directorate—not to be taken'." Kovalev was indignant that this was wrong, that it was impossible to judge everyone in such a way, to generalise. And then, as it turned out, at the commission meeting, he said exactly that. Of course, many representatives of the 'law enforcement agencies' were indignant and offended.

Memorial itself, with its open system for admitting new members in the late 1980s, had many former and current KGB-affiliated employees. Eugenia Lezina, a researcher of transitional justice in the former socialist countries of the socialist camp, writes that the work with Memorial was the result of a conscious policy of the state security agencies, pursuing the same ultimate goal: to smooth the edges, depoliticise the conversation about repression as much as possible, and relegate it to the past tense. Some of these considerations were even described in a special article in the KGB's guild journal *Sbornik KGB SSSR*: "KGB—'Memorial': the practice of co-operation".¹⁰⁰

"Neither then nor now did it [the participation of people affiliated with KGB in Memorial's work] seem like a big problem to me," says Nikita Petrov calmly. "Some of the 'employees' who wrote reports to the agencies came to us through the creative unions involved in the foundation of Memorial. What could they have reported to their superiors? "Memorial was not engaged in anti-state activities, then or now."

Timur Atnashev, another researcher of the public agenda in the period of late Perestroika through the early 1990s, also highlights the significance of the 'non-interference' theme, a liberation from the need to break the "correct", natural course of events again and again. Lustration against the backdrop of fundamental reforms already underway could seem like another attempt at a revolutionary onslaught,

¹⁰⁰ Uimanov V. KGB—"Memorial": practice of co-operation // Collection of the KGB of the USSR. 1991. No 156. C. 19.

a knee-jerk reversal of history, of which both convinced state activists and recent dissidents are very tired¹⁰¹.

"It was necessary for Soviet society to get off the wrong track, and, abandoning all forms of organised coercion, to let the natural course of events lead it on the right road," Atnashev explains this system of views. "This formula, inspired by the idea of the superiority of natural-historical evolution and the rejection of the pathos of making history, reflected not so much the opinion of liberals, nationalists or neo-Soviet conservatives, but rather the general attitude towards politics in the 1990-1991s"¹⁰².

This sentiment is clearly discernible in the responses from many participants involved in the events, in the intonation with which they say: "Everything happened by itself. The time was like that." There is no need for lustration, because time will put everything in its place. Democratic transformations will naturally protect society from outdated terrorist practices of state security.

9

Almost two years after the Lubyanka encirclement, in August 1991, a much larger crowd gathered outside the main KGB building. On the second day after the failed conservative coup d'état, during which the KGB supported the coup attempt, several thousand people filled the square in front of the committee's main building. People on both sides of the Lubyanka walls were unsure of the future scenario. Grig recalls how his colleagues were issued combat weapons for the first time in years¹⁰³—Nikita Petrov, who discussed these events inside the KGB a few months later, adds how most of the staff admitted to him that they were "terrified" at the mere thought of how they would have to use them. Memories of the sacking of the Stasi headquarters in Berlin (in January 1990,

¹⁰¹ The film director Andrei Smirnov probably had something similar in mind when, at the opening of the Memorial Preparatory Conference at the House of Cinema, he reminded its participants of the need "not to drive the nag of history down" (<http://igrunov.ru/cat/vchk-cat-org/memor/hist/docum/podgotovit-memo-partl.html#rybakov>).

¹⁰² T. Atnashev. Utopian conservatism in the era of late perestroika: letting go of the reins of history // *Sociology of Power* Vol. 29 No 2 (2017), p. 42

¹⁰³ Eugene Grig. Yes, I worked there, p. 502

demonstrators stormed the GDR Ministry of State Security building) were still very fresh, and KGB officers could easily imagine themselves being torn apart by the mob or, if weapons were used, being tried for it later. "Fire hoses were put into all the entrances of the House, as if they could stop the crowd with them; near each guard hung an OMON shield and a rubber truncheon—'shield and sword'," Grig recalled¹⁰⁴ .

However, the assault did not happen. None of those who were in the crowd that day or speculated about it afterwards can say exactly why. Sergei Krivenko, one of them, has changed his attitude to what happened over time: "Now I feel sorry for myself. The crowd was not small—not huge, but not small either. Suddenly there was talk of "let's go smash Lubyanka!". At the time, it seemed like anarchism, and I stopped them myself, saying: "Why? It will all be ours soon enough. But now, of course, it is clear that we had to do irreversible things. To stake it out. Like they destroyed the Bastille. So that it would remain in the memory.

Eugene Grieg also had his own version. "People were chanting something that sounded like 'murderers'". The crowd grew thicker and thicker towards evening, and soon it became clear that they were going to take down the monument to Dzerzhinsky. The crowd was skilfully led, they explained to it that without a crane and specialists, the statue could not be toppled—it could damage the underground passages, or even the underground station. Stankevich¹⁰⁵ persuaded the crowd especially convincingly—the crowd in response chanted—"Seryozha, Seryozha".... Seryozha and others like him did not want the crowd to break into the building—they were worried that the files on the "democrats" might be found, and there would be a lot of interesting things to read there...".¹⁰⁶

In the afternoon, the monument to Dzerzhinsky, the founder and first head of the future KGB, was painted with slogans. The most memorable of them—"Khunte khana!" ('Down with the junta')—looked like a statement of fact at the time; in retrospect it seems rather

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ A deputy of the democratic Interregional Deputy Group in the Supreme Soviet, in 1991 Stankevich was also deputy chairman of the Mossovet, Gavriil Popov—that is, in effect, vice-mayor of Moscow.

¹⁰⁶ Eugene Grig. Yes, I worked there, p. 503

wishful thinking. Dzerzhinsky was then picked up by a crane and plucked from his seat to the cheers of the crowd, leaving an empty patch in the middle of Lubyanka Square. As it has been noticed by many researchers since then¹⁰⁷, the emptiness on the place of the monument became a monument itself. A monument to what? As in any other well-made work of contemporary art, freedom of interpretation remains part of its interaction with the viewer.

4. Archival restoration

1

In the very early 1990s, when memorial historian Nikita Okhotin began working regularly in the KGB archives, there was very little left of the former status of this organization. "The meaning of their existence was gone," he recalls. - The privileges were gone. Everyone hated them, everyone cursed them. And they sat there, getting a miserable salary. And ate the same humanitarian aid as the rest of the Soviet people."

I remember in 1991 tons of wonderful Swiss cheese were brought to Moscow and distributed to state institutions," Okhotin continues. - And the KGB-people ate their miserable canteen food, horrible, with some additives of this cheese. And they begged us for disposable lighters. "I'll put in it a valve, I'll have my own lighter", this was their idea of happiness. I had nothing but nasty pity for them"¹⁰⁸.

The KGB was going through its own crisis of faith. There was public talk about the need to open the committee archives and accurately record the scale of state crimes committed. Former political prisoner Vladimir Bukovsky personally met with KGB

¹⁰⁷ On this see, for example, Nanci Adler. *Victims of Soviet Terror. The Story of the Memorial Movement*. London, 1993, p. xvii

¹⁰⁸ Here and below -- quotes from Nikita Okhotin are from his interview with the author, 06/30/23/13

Chairman Vadim Bakatin and, it seems, even shook his hand (previously such a gesture would have looked unacceptable within each of these subcultures — "dissidents" and "Chekists")¹⁰⁹ .

"I liked Bakatin himself, in general," says historian Nikita Petrov, who has devoted his entire academic career to the study of Soviet secret service officers ("Nikitka pricks his executioners on needles like butterflies," Okhotin says of him affectionately). "Bakatin just wasn't like them. We were already very used to these identical gray faces. And this one -- look: for some reason he reminded us not of the Party Committee, but of some American senator."¹¹⁰ .

Bukovsky was encouraged by his meeting with Bakatin. A former construction worker and Soviet interior minister who had been appointed head of the KGB in August 1991 after the failure of the GKChP putsch orchestrated by the previous head of the secret police, Bakatin promised to reform the Committee and rid it of "reactionary forces."¹¹¹ . Together with Bukovsky, they outlined an immediate plan of action. After living in exile for almost 20 years, Bukovsky hoped to return to his homeland as one of the members of an international commission to study state terror and intended to invite major foreign historians and "the guys from Memorial"¹¹² .

Okhotin and Roginsky also went to the same office for a meeting with a similar agenda. The KGB chairman also seemed surprisingly accommodating to them. However, notes Okhotin, they did not meet alone: a young officer, who was clearly more critical, was Bakatin's desk officer. To the surprise of the visitors, he slightly besieged his superior and in general gave them the impression of a man who had been placed under Bakatin's supervision by other "comrades."¹¹³ .

¹⁰⁹ Bukovsky writes about his meeting with Bakatin in the second chapter of *The Moscow Trial*, "The Night After the Battle Belongs to the Marauders," p. 43ff.

¹¹⁰ Here and below - quotes from Nikita Petrov are from his interview with the author, 27.07.23

¹¹¹ <https://reform.io/encziklopediya-reform/organy-gosbezopasnosti/>;
https://imwerden.de/pdf/prensa_digest_kgb_1991__ocr.pdf

¹¹² V. Bukovsky. *Moscow process*. p. 47

¹¹³ Nikonov himself later claimed that his work with Bakatin was an initiative of the KGB chief himself - after he had supported Bakatin during the GKChP putsch by opposing the coup. On this, see: <https://holod.media/2023/12/04/nikonov/>

Recounting it more than 30 years later, Okhotin doesn't immediately recall his last name, but looks at me as if I could have guessed it myself.

- Well, grandson... Nikonov!

- Vyacheslav Nikonov? Molotov's grandson?

- Yeah, that ghoul.

Next to Bakatin sat a 35-year-old descendant of one of Stalin's closest associates, Vyacheslav Molotov, a member of the Politburo, who before the 1917 revolution had performed musical numbers in pubs¹¹⁴, signed death sentences for thousands of his fellow citizens at the zenith of his fame, and lived until the mid-1980s on an honorable pension, without any charges or trials. In the same 1991 first published a book of dialogues with Molotov, in which the latter discussed the necessity and inevitability of mass political terror under Stalin as well as made some sentimental sighs for the good old days¹¹⁵. Subsequently, his grandson made a great career - Nikonov became a successful political technologist and a State Duma deputy from United Russia. Bakatin lost his post as head of the KGB with the collapse of the USSR and went into political oblivion along with all the major figures of Gorbachev's team. All the plans and hopes for "international commissions" and reforming the security services from within did not live much longer than disposable Biko lighters.

2

Having avoided anarchy and the takeover of Lubyanka, in August 1991, in the first days after the putsch, the new democratic authorities made several important practical and symbolic gestures (it was extremely difficult to feel and understand the difference between them at the moment). The buildings belonging to the Central Committee of the

¹¹⁴ Vyacheslav Nikonov, among others, told about the fact that Molotov played in restaurants in the Vologda exile (in different versions on violin or mandolin). He quotes Khrushchev's memoirs: "Stalin, however, when annoyed, would throw Molotov: "You played in front of drunken merchants, you face smeared with mustard"." (quoted by Nikonov V. Molotov in the Vologda exile : [Chapters from the book "Molotov"] // <https://www.booksite.ru/exile/st-190.html>)

¹¹⁵ One hundred and forty conversations with Molotov: From the diary of F. Chuev. M., 1991.

CPSU, the operating system of Soviet power, were sealed. The activities of the party itself were suspended. On August 24, RSFSR President Boris Yeltsin issued two decrees: they announced that the CPSU and KGB archives were being transferred to state custody. Until then, they had remained departmental - that is, they belonged to the party and the KGB and were effectively closed to outside access.

Less than a year later, Arseny Roginsky, who was in the thick of the archival revolution, said that the decrees seemed identical only at first glance. "The motives for the appearance of these decrees were in many ways different," he explained. - The transfer of the party archives was an additional weighty confirmation of <Yeltsin's> firm intention to put an end to the CPSU issue. At the same time, the decree on the KGB archives was more of a tactical and symbolic nature, combining both the Russian President's response to public calls to "open the KGB archives" (thus satisfying at least partially the radicals' demands to "do away with the KGB") and his lively reaction to the participation of KGB leaders in the putsch (most likely, he thought that the archives would contain important evidence about the preparation of the coup)".

"Thus," Roginsky concluded, "the decree on the KGB archives was based on the desire to solve immediate political problems; there was no further strategy in it, unlike the decree on the CPSU archives. This is natural: Yeltsin did not intend to liquidate the KGB at all"¹¹⁶.

Nevertheless, during the chaotic changeover of the two state systems (until the end of 1991 the new country was de facto ruled by Yeltsin, but Gorbachev continued to be the president of the USSR), the Committee was in a state of fever: it was in those months that Nikita Okhotin observed the inner world of the GEB in a disassembled and humiliated state.

Three representatives of Memorial - Okhotin, Roginsky, and Petrov - were part of a special archival commission whose task was to conduct an audit of KGB departmental archives and help draw up a roadmap for further action: which funds and documents to transfer first, according to what regulations, in what mode of publicity, and so on. At

¹¹⁶ A. Roginsky. KGB archives: a year after the putsch // Russland heute: von innen gesehen : Politik. Recht. Kultur. Moskau; Bremen, 1992. Collection of articles by Russian researchers for the 10th anniversary of the Institute of Eastern Europe at the University of Bremen, P. 30 (<https://lib.memo.ru/media/book/27181.pdf>)

first glance, the absolutely bureaucratic work promised its performers incredible opportunities. They were given a pass to the cave of Ali Baba, where the archival treasures of the state robbers were kept. It was assumed that there, somewhere between the terrible protocols recording the process of extermination of millions of their fellow citizens, they would be able to find some "truth about the past" - to make a complex composition of ideological causes and political consequences, which would explain to both researchers and the entire post-Soviet society the mechanism of state violence that lasted for many decades¹¹⁷. It will explain - and help this violence not to repeat itself.

This is what Roginsky and Okhotin went to talk to Bakatin about - but they discussed not only and not so much "history," but the present and the future. "I will not give you the agents!", Bakatin immediately made his position clear¹¹⁸. Both Roginsky and Okhotin later wrote that neither of them had much hope for "agents" (i.e., a list of names of KGB staffers and unofficial informants), but that the firmness of the last KGB chief in this matter had impressed them. The representatives of Memorial were counting on much more - clear, organized, documentary evidence of state crimes. For several years now, the main political plots in the country have, as Roginsky wrote, "gone through history." "There were two main questions: which period of the Soviet era is the period of mass repression and who is the perpetrator of political terror. The answers, from society's point of view, were to be provided by the KGB archives - witnesses to the crimes committed by the authorities"¹¹⁹. Having properly clarified the first two points, it was possible to get to the third - the right of the state security system to exist and govern the country; in the long run, the result of the trial could be the dismantling of the entire state-terrorist system.

In a more pragmatic sense, making the archives open access could finally deprive the state of its monopoly on its own history and the possibility of analyzing it independently and scientifically. This, according to Nancy Adler, a professor at the University of Amsterdam and author of the first book on Memorial, is exactly what memorial

¹¹⁷ Vladimir Bukovsky, who published his chronicle of the struggle for the archives in 1996, described it through another fairy-tale image: "The archives were the essence of the KGB, the dragon's soul hidden behind seven seals. It was possible to finish with the dragon only by getting to it" (V. Bukovsky. Moscow Process. p. 49).

¹¹⁸ A. Roginsky. KGB archives: a year after the putsch // Russland heute: von innen gesehen : Politik. Recht. Kultur. Moskau; Bremen, 1992. Collection of articles by Russian researchers for the 10th anniversary of the Institute of Eastern Europe at the University of Bremen (Roginsky. Book, p. 27)

¹¹⁹ Ibid, see (Roginsky. Book, pp. 11-12)

historians of the early 1990s were fighting for: "The attempt to gain control over how the history of the past is told is the main subject of the struggle between the state and Memorial."¹²⁰ .

3

For historians who entered the KGB archives, they were more than just a structured collection of documents on the chronology and drama of terror. The very possibility of working in the archives was, for a humanist who grew up in the Soviet Union, something like a specific form of initiation, an initiation into state secrets. Historian Francis Blowin and archivist William Rosenberg, who wrote the book *The Origins of the Past*, in which they describe, among other things, examples of rethinking work with Soviet archives, draw attention to the almost sacred attitude toward the archive in the USSR as an outpost of social order, a formative state enterprise¹²¹ .

The typical Soviet paradox was that the "archive", the source of true knowledge about the past, was usually permanently closed to those who wanted to establish this truth¹²² . The general public had only partial access to the scrubbed and ideologically safe materials. This applied to virtually any archive in the 20th century -- the departmental archives of the State Security, of course, were out of the question. State archives were only allowed into them on the basis of "relations" issued by scientific institutes¹²³ , the level of access to documents was strictly regulated. Sooner or later in his or her academic career, almost every Soviet humanities student encountered the concept of "special storage": this was the name of a special department in a library where books "for official use" were kept - primarily non-Communist publications from the early

¹²⁰ Nancy Adler, interview by author, 11.04.23.

¹²¹ For more information see: Blowin, Rosenberg. *Origins of the Past*, p. 22

¹²² On what happens to the idea of "truth" when confronted with the materials of the already partially opened Soviet archives, see first of all I. Halfin: *Poetics in the Archives: The Quest for "True" Bolshevik Documents*. Halfin: *Poetics in the Archives: The Quest for "True" Bolshevik Documents // Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge*, Bd. 51, H. 1 (2003), pp. 84-89

¹²³ In order to work in a number of archival collections, a Soviet citizen had to obtain a special paper from his place of study (or work), which justified the scientific/working necessity of access to archival materials. The level of this access could be different and was regulated both by the importance of the archive and the influence of the institution that wrote the "attitude".

Soviet period, books written by or dedicated to "enemies of the people," and a large volume of political literature in Western languages. For many, this was a barrier that could only be opened by passing a multi-stage test of loyalty, joining the party, making a career, that is, in fact, moving from the position of a critical researcher of archival materials to the position of an accomplice, a beneficiary of the system. All other interested Soviet readers "were forced to take their scientific history, as it is called, at their word"¹²⁴.

Not everyone could bring themselves to believe without looking in the archival folders. At the same time, it was proven experimentally that it was impossible to engage in "real" Soviet history bypassing official institutions, censorship and ideology¹²⁵. Arseny Roginsky was arrested and convicted for attempting to illegally access the archive. In 1981, he was caught forging official relations to the manuscript department of the Public Library in Leningrad, where Roginsky needed materials related to the work of the underground editorial board of the almanac *Pamyat'*. And although it was obvious to everyone who knew Roginsky and his friends that the formal charge was just an excuse to send the historian and dissident to prison¹²⁶, it was important to the community at large that Roginsky went to jail for his "archive," for his history. His last word in court, published in *samizdat* and *tamizdat*¹²⁷, read like a manifesto on the position of the historian and citizen who demands access to his own history from the state.

I will not discuss here - as, indeed, in any other place - the question of whether or not I had anything to do with any publications of historical documents abroad," Roginsky said. - I will not talk about it not at all out of a desire to hide something; it is just that for

¹²⁴ Blowin, Rosenberg. *Origins of the Past*, p. 95

¹²⁵ It is no coincidence that all the most important Soviet humanities scholars, even those with official status, usually worked on topics far removed from the 20th century and the history of the USSR: Aron Gurevich wrote about the Western Middle Ages, Dmitry Likhachev about ancient Russia, Yuri Lotman about the 18th and 19th centuries

¹²⁶ The fact that Roginsky's arrest and imprisonment were virtually inevitable was known outside the USSR. In 1981, Nancy Adler, then a student at Columbia University, was one of the organizers of a public campaign to invite Roginsky to the United States as a professor - to save him from the KGB. Nothing came of the initiative. Roginsky was arrested the same year (Nancy Adler interview with the author, 11.04.23)

¹²⁷ The newspaper "Russian Thought", 17.12.1981.

me publications in domestic editions are not opposed to publications abroad. A document accurately reproduced and impartially commented on remains a document regardless of where and by whom it was published, because there is a unified Russian culture, and there are historical and literary archives that are the heritage of this culture. And only the free study of these archives and their free publication will help us learn the truth about our past"¹²⁸ .

The new, official access to KGB documents for Memorial's staff wrapped up the story. Having served his time in the archives, Roginsky was finally getting a chance to look into them properly. Sociologist Viktoria Chalikova, who created a hero of the time out of "archival youth" Dmitri Yurasov, also wrote about the importance of this mission and how it could change the world around him:

"It is not because of laziness, not because of cowardice that people hesitate to part with the life they inherited from the past era, but because they do not have a criterion for the authenticity of criticizing the past. Archives can help to establish this criterion, to tell the truth about the past, to destroy stereotypes of lies and half-truths"¹²⁹ .

4

The first person Okhotin remembered when he started working at the Lubyanka was Major General Alexander Ivanovich Fokin, head of the 10th, the KGB's archives department: "An old wolf... Angry. Obviously hung over. Heavy look. "What have you come for?" and so on. Soon he was taken down - not without our help."

Toward the end of 1991, Colonel Anatoly Afanasyevich Krayushkin became the new head of the department. The members of the commission had a mutually beneficial relationship with him: the career of the cadre KGB-officer depended directly on the progress of reforms and the opinion of the new people at Lubyanka, while it was

¹²⁸ A. Roginsky. Last word at the trial // <https://vgulage.name/books/polozhenie-istorika-v-sssr-poslednee-slovo-a-b-roginskogo-na-sude/>

¹²⁹ V. Chalikova. Archival young man // chalikova.ru

important for Memorial to gain maximum access to documents, bypassing the endless internal regulations and secrecy regimes.

The historians' work was gradually divided into several semantic and plot parts. On the one hand, Roginsky, Okhotin, and Petrov had to figure out a rough plan for declassifying archival materials and making them available to the public, and on the other hand, they had to try to get to the main thing: documentary answers to the most difficult questions about terror. It was necessary to work in such a way as not to lose the opportunities we had just gained before the time was up - and at the same time not to allow the materials to leak or disappear.

"We made a pleasant impression on the staff of the Moscow KGB Department when we arrived there: the first thing we did was to ask for the regulatory documents"¹³⁰ , - Nikita Petrov recalled: the general archival notions of order and professionalism consisted in not rushing straight to the most "secret" and socially interesting materials, but first to dismantle the internal structure of the repository in order to understand the system from within. There were also more spectacular tricks - having received the seal of the unofficial "People's Archive"¹³¹ , Memorial's historians sealed with it their own archive of the Moscow Department of the KGB: investigative files, operational files, files of agents and informants ("for the sake of bravado," admits Okhotin). Every working day, one of the memorial commissioners would unseal the doors upon request; at times," Petrov continues, smiling, "the bewildered kagebeshniks had to call him at home and ask him to 'come to work today,' because the KGB archive simply could not function in his absence.

Both Petrov and Okhotin describe a routine day of ordinary employees of the KGB archive in much the same way. A precisely calculated dose of cognac in the morning. A long lunch break. Cards and backgammon in the afternoon before continuing the

¹³⁰ CPSU: agony... interview with Nikita Petrov // <https://gefter.ru/archive/19034>

¹³¹ The documentation center "People's Archive" was established in 1988 by the staff of the Moscow State Institute of History and Archives headed by Professor Boris Ilizarov. The People's Archive, which existed officially until 2006, aimed to collect and study materials that, as a rule, do not end up in large official archives: the history of family, everyday life, social psychology, informal and underground organizations.

banquet toward evening. The three memorialists had their own office in the Lubyanka building, where they could read and sort out cases, smoke, and openly discuss what they had read among themselves - so that most of the time their work went on without outside supervision.

On the lower floor of this Lubyanka building, in a room architecturally reminiscent of a rotunda or Jeremiah Bentham's panopticon (archive shelves with materials diverging from the center), it was possible to request and receive documents. In the most successful periods, Petrov recalls, it was even possible to pick up the materials oneself: the staff was "having lunch" and did not want to be distracted by formalities - "well, you know where it is, don't you?". In the fall and winter of 1991, while the world was collapsing and being permanently rebuilt, the commission worked in the archive three or four times a week - and that was a lot.

In addition to visits to Lubyanka, members of the commission traveled to other cities - to the KGB file depositories in Chekhov, Omsk, and Saratov. A general review of what was in them was completed in a few months. The next step was to act practically: some of the documents had already been decided on within the commission, while others were "suspended" - their status was to be determined in the future.

Of what has been found, read and comprehended over several years of open access, the most important for all participants remains "1937". The most studied and described period of mass state terror in Soviet history actually lasted from the summer of 1937 to the late fall of 1938. Just over a year of a factory conveyor belt of arrests - over a million 700 thousand throughout the USSR, over 750 thousand death sentences and shootings. By the early 1990s, thousands of journalistic articles had already been written about the "37th" and many memoirs had been published, but its internal state mechanics remained unclear. Because of this, the "37th year" turned into a kind of quagmire, a myth of either an Old Testament execution or a collective psychosis. There was a lot of emotion in this myth, but little concrete content. This feeling was well captured in a samizdat anecdote:

- I'm sorry, Father, I'm here to see you again," Felix said as he came in. - So, was it the thirty-seventh year or not? I don't know who to believe.

- "It didn't happen," replied the father fatherly affectionately, "It didn't happen, son. But it will¹³² .

"For us, a huge discovery was exactly how the Great Terror took place. Because according to human documents it looked like chaos, an element, an explosion¹³³ . But when we quickly realized that it is quite systematic, although choking periodically, because of the "influx of clients", a system of operations, quite ideologized and distributed, that's where we became interested, - says Okhotin. - As a matter of fact, this is what we started to do. That is, to identify documents, orders, and publish them. To analyze the structure - who made decisions, how it was formalized, produced. Statistics, what contingents, groups of people were first of all under <repressions> - somehow we collected all this geology work for ourselves". The materials on the Great Terror, partly published and partly included in Memorial's own archive, have become the scientific result of the archival revolution, which no one could take away or cancel.

5

If archives were seen as the source of truth about the past in the early 1990s, then the long-awaited trial of the Communist Party was to restore justice. The fact that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union needed to be tried was written in the reviews of the monument projects during the Week of Conscience; after August 1991, the starting

¹³² Zinovy Paperny. "What does he feather?" In the official press for the first time: Krokodil, No. 29, 1988. A short text by literary critic Zinovy Paperny mocked the style and content of one of the main official anti-Western and neo-Stalinist novels of the Brezhnev era, "What Do You Want?" Vsevolod Kochetov (1969). Nikita Petrov calls this novel "the only official attempt to write an apologetic novel about 1937".

¹³³ Soviet writer Leonid Panteleyev, whose short memoir about the terror could not be published in the USSR for censorship reasons, wrote about the impossibility of seeing and understanding the scale of terror from the situation of his own time. It was first published by the almanac "Pamyat' (the same almanac in which Roginsky participated) in the late 1970s: "The sword hung over everyone, but we did not see it - everyone lived as if in a black shroud, in a sack. And your fate was decided not by your behavior, not by the degree of your loyalty, your devotion to the revolution, the party, the people - no, it was not on this that life and freedom depended now, but on that strange roulette, that crazy lottery, the circulation of which had been going on non-stop, without weekends, for a year and a half or two years, somewhere in a large gray building on one of the central streets of the city. Or maybe not there. Maybe further away. Higher up. Out of the bag we did not see, could not see." (L. Panteleyev. Two Meetings // Memory, No. 3, p. 311)

point for the trial was the failed coup attempt, formally carried out with the participation of Communist Party leaders.

The obvious model for the new trial was the Nuremberg trials of Nazi criminals, which gave rise to a whole series of political trials of National Socialism in the second half of the 1940s¹³⁴. The first (and most important) difference was immediately apparent: in (post)Soviet Russia, communists were essentially invited to try themselves. Moreover, they had to do it according to the laws once written by the same Communist Party. One of the participants in President Yeltsin's trial, Mikhail Fedotov, who became Press Minister in 1992, later argued that: "If the Constitution says that the CPSU represents the guiding and directing force of society, it is a very difficult task to prove its unconstitutionality."¹³⁵

The first step towards the court was taken by the orthodox Communists themselves, who survived the putsch with a party ticket in their pocket: they questioned the constitutionality of the decree banning the activities of the CPSU¹³⁶. Formally, they had every reason to do so. President Yeltsin did not have the authority to close the Soviet Communist Party at that time. The Soviet constitution included many formal incantations of political freedoms, many of them implying quite democratic forms of governance - they were just never implemented. The absurd comedy of the situation was that the Communists were demanding compliance with the very Constitution that they themselves had never really complied with.

This is exactly what President Yeltsin's supporters decided to prove: a group of Democratic deputies filed a counterclaim with the Constitutional Court to recognize the activities of the CPSU itself as unconstitutional. This was the logic of the counterclaim: if the Communist Party itself was acting outside the law, the decision to dissolve it was a

¹³⁴ On Nuremberg as a point of reference for judging the past, see, for example, the speech of Vitaly Korotich, editor-in-chief of *Ogonyok*, at the Founding Conference of Memorial, 28.01.89: "And let us judge Stalin not as a dead man in clean boots, but as a man who left behind a treasure trove of documents equal in level to those that were leafed through at Nuremberg" (<http://igrunov.ru/cat/vchk-cat-org/memor/hist/docum/uchredit-memo-1.html>).

¹³⁵ A conversation with Mikhail Fedotov. Trial of the CPSU // <https://web.archive.org/web/20101116183121/http://www.polit.ru/analytics/2010/11/10/fedotov.html>

¹³⁶ The decree was signed by Yeltsin on November 6, 1991.

legitimate act. Such a trial required historical expertise, and Anatoly Kononov, who had recently been a Democratic deputy and was now a judge-rapporteur at the trial, and in this capacity was to prepare materials for the trial, invited three acquaintances to help him: Roginsky, Okhotin, and Petrov. By that time, all three of them were simultaneously trying to analyze the Moscow (the mayor's commission) and all-Union (the Supreme Soviet commission) KGB archives. By all parameters, they were perfectly cast for the role of historical witnesses at the Last Judgment.

The youngest of the memorialists, Nikita Petrov, recalled the entourage of the court almost like a trip to the movies: "The hall was familiar to me, it was where the Party Control Commission met during the Soviet era. When I first entered the court, I was surprised at the way they had rearranged the judges' chairs -- in a semicircle, very solemn. Where did they get that? Well, obviously: in Hollywood courtroom dramas."

A special time slot was prepared for each court session on the evening news, 10-15 minutes each night. This referred not so much to Nuremberg as to the tradition of late-night TV shows.

6

In the end, the trial was more than anything like a production in the theater of the absurd¹³⁷. The full transcript of the trial has never been published, and from the fragments that we know, as well as from memoirs and interviews of participants and eyewitnesses, it is impossible to understand anything.

The court interrogates witnesses from both sides. None of the interrogations keeps to any clear line. Time and again there are temporary jumps, jumps into different events. Attempts to focus on the legal side of the case, to clarify the problem, only confuse, the participants of the process literally begin to count angels on the tip of the needle. In this short fragment, the questions are asked by Oleg Mironov, a lawyer and future member

¹³⁷ This comparison was used, for example, by Fyodor Rudinsky in his "Notes of a Participant of the Trial" (M., 1999), the same reference is quoted in Toymentsev S. Legal but Criminal: The Failure of the "Russian Nuremberg" and the Paradoxes of Post-Soviet Memory // Comparative Literature Studies. 2011. Vol. 48. No. 3., p. 297

of parliament from the Communist Party. Alexander Yakovlev, a former member of the Politburo and ideologist of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, one of those who, after a distinguished party career, radicalized with Perestroika and by the early 1990s had become completely disillusioned with the Soviet version of socialism:

Mironov: But then we have an interesting situation: the structure is unconstitutional, but every person in this structure has behaved in a very law-abiding manner. This is incomprehensible to me as a lawyer. We are lawyers.

Yakovlev: Don't distort my position and what I said. I said: the actions are unconstitutional.

<...>

Mironov: But the actions of the Politburo were made up of decisions that were taken collegially at the Politburo.

Yakovlev: Yes, of course.

Mironov: If every member of the Politburo acted constitutionally, then the entire Politburo must have acted constitutionally.

Yakovlev: You want to say with your questions that I am not an angel. No, I am not an angel, I inform you officially¹³⁸.

The documentary materials for the trial at the time of publication amounted to six volumes. Most of these documents were retrieved from the archives by invited experts at the request of Judge Kononov and supporters of the President's position. This was at times extremely impressive and spectacular, but rather fragmentary work. In addition, the demonstration of documents could cause emotional reactions of the participants in the process, but often did not change the essence of the case in any way.

¹³⁸ <https://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/personal-archive/lifedoc-doc/1010449/1010453>

Nikita Petrov recalls how they managed to calculate the exact date of the document that confirmed an already obvious fact for everyone - Beria's note to Stalin from March 5, 1940¹³⁹ with a proposal to shoot Polish officers prisoners of war in the Katyn forest and its vicinity. When historians told about it at the court session, "the Communists in the front row clutched their hearts: ah, it can't be!". Evidence was presented that the Politburo had made a lot of illegal decisions without any authority to do so. This is how Solzhenitsyn was exiled abroad, and this is how Sakharov was sent into exile. All of this was hardly big news for the audience and participants, but at least formally the abuses were finally being recorded as such in the legal field.

Sturdy idealists from the CPSU side - among them the future head of the Russian Communist Party Gennady Zyuganov, who spoke a lot at the trial - defended two theses in parallel. First, "you yourselves participated in all this," so what now - to deny the CPSU, denying with it all the successes and achievements of the Soviet Union? Secondly, if the party was wrong about something, it was the party itself that undertook its own "perestroika", and the collapse of the USSR and the banning of the Communist Party only cut off its development at the point of ascent¹⁴⁰.

In preparing their expert opinion¹⁴¹, which was eventually filed with the court decision as an addendum, Roginsky, Okhotin and Petrov emphasized systemic violations and the most extensive Stalinist crimes. In response, court chairman Valery Zorkin suggested that they should not force the court to deal with the "Dead Sea Scrolls"¹⁴². By declaring the events of Soviet history as the Old Testament past¹⁴³, the court finally left the Nuremberg track.

¹³⁹

<http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/232754-zapiska-l-p-berii-i-v-stalinu-s-predlozheniem-rasstrelyat-pol-skih-ofitserov-zhandarmov-politseyskikh-osadnikov-i-drugih-iz-treh-spetslagerey-dlya-voennoplennyyh-i-zaklyuchennykh-tyurem-zapadnykh-oblastey-ukrainy-i-belorussii-moskva-ranee-5-marta-1940>

¹⁴⁰ On the renewal of the party in Perestroika - see, for example, the commentary of the CPSU representative Boris Kurashvili at the trial:

<https://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/personal-archive/lifedoc-preface/person/1010573>

¹⁴¹ Formally, the opinion was added to the case file after the case was finalized. The full text of the opinion is available on International Memorial's website:

<https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/history-of-repressions-and-protest/punitive-agencies/case-kpss/>.

¹⁴² Interview with A. Roginsky and A. Daniel. Birthmarks of Soviet History // Znanie - Sila, No. 11, 2007. C. 36

¹⁴³ Dozens of manuscripts containing Torah texts -- some of the earliest versions of sacred texts in the Judeo-Christian tradition -- were found in the Qumran caves near the Dead Sea between 1947 and 1956.

By mid-summer 1992, it was already clear to me that the process was over, nothing more was going to happen there," Petrov recalls. - The verdict would be in Yeltsin's favor, that's clear, but nothing significant would happen." He was right. The court recognized Yeltsin's decisions regarding the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as legitimate, but allowed the Communists to re-legitimize its successor, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. The court declared the activities of the party's leadership illegitimate and unconstitutional, but exempted all of its "primary and grassroots" organizations. The Communist Party was saved. In the end, however, the Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts were remembered by them as well: a group of activists who split from Zyuganov and his team came to re-register with documents about the first congress of the RSDLP in Minsk in 1898 - that is, they claimed to re-establish the original Leninist Communist Party, but they were only laughed at and refused¹⁴⁴. Thus, the CPRF became the spiritual successor of the CPSU, but not its literal rebirth.

To some extent, the result satisfied everyone and fixed the new status quo. The former property of the CPSU was transferred to the state, but there was no "appropriation" or "seizure": most of the party space was taken over by new ministries and agencies, a new model of the same state machine. The Communists performed with consistently high results in the new elections, while continuing to criticize the "liberals" in power.

On the other hand, the legitimacy of the new government was rooted in an empty court decision that had no practical consequences. "It could not have been different," Petrov decisively cuts Petrov off. - By definition, this court could only decide the legality of Yeltsin's decree." Not everyone agreed with him: since the trial took place in a legal vacuum, the court could have operated many categories quite freely, reasserting the boundaries of the possible - it could have, but it did not.

Both Okhotin and Petrov, thirty years later, speak of those events calmly, not attaching too much importance to the results of the trial. After all, in 1992, the severe economic crisis and the "shock reforms" of Yegor Gaidar's liberal government had in any case

¹⁴⁴ Nikita Petrov, interview to the author, 27.07.23

shifted the focus of attention from questions of history to questions of survival. By the end of the trial, few people needed it anymore.

The historians consider the expert opinion to be their main achievement. This text, written in strict terminological language, concisely summarizes many of the theses of the memorial informal "creed". It characterizes the CPSU as follows: "The Communist Party, which was in power from 1917 to 1991, was the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Communist Party in power from 1917 to 1991 was not a party in the conventional sense of the word. Having seized all the levers of control over the country, the CPSU lost the signs of a political party and turned into an extra-legal supranational structure. Having eliminated de facto the people's representation, this structure usurped all branches of state power - legislative, executive-administrative, judicial, and carried out total suppression of rights and freedoms in the country. The CPSU used its power primarily to preserve and strengthen its own political monopoly. It turned the army, state security and internal affairs agencies, the prosecutor's office and the courts into instruments of protection of this monopoly"¹⁴⁵.

The text of the opinion was included in the official decision of the Constitutional Court of November 30, 1992, but it was never replicated and never became the basis for a new generally accepted assessment of the Communist Party's activities. Something worse happened: the trial of the CPSU did not become a terrible trial, but formally took place - and thus took the place in history of another trial that Memorial and its supporters had hoped for, one that never actually took place.

7

The declassification of the KGB archives and their release to the public followed a somewhat similar pattern. By February 1992, the archival commission, which in addition to the memorialists and their supporters included employees of the "organs" and archival officials, basically agreed with the first conclusions of Roginsky's group. They were as follows: most of the KGB archives were ready for transfer to state storage -

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/history-of-repressions-and-protest/punitive-agencies/case-kpss/>

there were no state secrets there. There was a lot to "transfer" - but where to? The participants agreed that no one would give them money for the construction of a new archive building (or rather, even a complex of buildings), which would be needed to transfer the materials into public and open access. However, it was necessary to take some action. "After all, everything will be revealed at the Last Judgment and all the names will be known, and they are not afraid of the Last Judgment," said another member of the commission, dissident and church representative Father Gleb Yakunin, looking at the intelligence representatives sitting opposite him, "so we will open it now."¹⁴⁶ .

Do what? - What can be done. In the same February 1992, two agencies - the Ministry of Security (as the KGB was called at that time) and the Committee on Archives¹⁴⁷ - had already proposed to divide the whole process of declassification and transfer "into two stages"¹⁴⁸ . First of all, completed criminal cases on political charges were ready for transfer. The transfer of the rest of the material to the state archives was to be the second stage. In his notes for the same year, Arseny Roginsky drew attention to how the reverse evolution was taking place before his eyes, how the apparatus for replacing notions was beginning to work. It had already been decided not to "transfer" most of the archives, but to create public halls at the KGB archives, where, according to the developed regulations, everyone would be able to read these documents. In this way, "not the letter of the <President's> decree, but its spirit" would be observed¹⁴⁹ . Roginsky himself and many others considered the approach itself deeply unethical: people should not be forced to ask for documents from the same agency that committed the crime and then obey its rules and regulations, but their position was ignored by officials. Nikita Petrov was disappointed at how little had been achieved, but believed that the situation remained favorable: what was left of the State Security could be taken away in the

¹⁴⁶ CPSU: agony... interview with Nikita Petrov // <https://gefter.ru/archive/19034>

¹⁴⁷ Not to be confused with the Archives Commission. The Committee on Archives was to operate as a permanent body under the government dealing with legal issues related to archival affairs.

¹⁴⁸ A. Roginsky. KGB archives: a year after the putsch // *Russland heute: von innen gesehen* : Politik. Recht. Kultur. Moskau; Bremen, 1992. Collection of articles by Russian researchers for the 10th anniversary of the Institute of Eastern Europe at the University of Bremen, p.23 (<https://lib.memo.ru/media/book/27181.pdf>).

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 32

coming years. Vladimir Bukovsky, in hindsight, was much more skeptical of the whole process:

"An interdepartmental commission on the transfer of archives was appointed, in which employees of the same KGB discussed the "problems of transfer" with an important look and, of course, could not solve them. They also created a commission of the Supreme Soviet headed by historian-general Volkogonov - you need a "legal basis", you need a "law", how can you do without a law? The question is not an easy one: how many years to classify everything - 30 or 70?"¹⁵⁰ .

In addition, the position of the commissioners gradually deteriorated under the influence of external political circumstances. It became noticeably more difficult after October 1993, when, as a result of the constitutional crisis, Boris Yeltsin forcibly terminated the work of the opposition parliament, which was resisting liberal reforms. None of the memorial trio sympathized with the Supreme Soviet - for Roginsky, Petrov, and Okhotin, as for most people in their circle, it looked like an atavism, a stump of the Soviet past that had not been completely severed. However, formally, the archival commission was attached to the parliament. With its dissolution, its status became quite shaky. In addition, Petrov says, the law enforcement agencies supported Yeltsin in their confrontation with the deputies and received in return the right to defend their past and present.

The final crisis came with the fall of the head of the archives department, Krayushkin. By that time he had already received the rank of general for his success in archival work, but this did not save him: Sergey Nogin, a subordinate of Krayushkin, was caught taking bribes, in which the head also had a share, and in 1995 Krayushkin was dismissed - and his deputy was put on trial, eventually receiving a suspended sentence¹⁵¹ . Without him, the commissioners lost both their office and their special powers. What remained was

¹⁵⁰ V. Bukovsky. The Moscow Process, p. 49

¹⁵¹ On the case of Nogin and Krayushkin, for more details see. V. Popov. Conspiracy of scoundrels. Notes of a former KGB lieutenant colonel. The book was published in the internet-samizdat in 2020 and since then periodically appears in full version on different resources: <https://coollib.net/b/509186-vladimir-konstantinovich-popov-zagovor-negodyaev-zapiski-byivshego-podpolkovnika-kgb/read> (date of access: 6.12.23).

the ability to receive documents and work virtually on a common basis - for research purposes Nikita Petrov continues to go to the FSB archive even in 2024.

In the end, the main success of the archival group was the move of almost a hundred thousand political investigation files of the former Moscow KGB from the old, crumbling Rostopchin mansion in the same Lubyanka neighborhood to the State Archive. Thanks to this, the documents were literally saved. "[The conditions in the mansion] were really terrible," Okhotin recalls. - Water was dripping from the ceiling, and rats were gnawing on cardboard and paper. That was partly the argument for the transfer. We convinced them that it would all just go to waste here. The same operation was carried out in several other Russian cities, where city archives had available storage space¹⁵². At the same time, thousands of files - those kept not by the city, but by the all-union NKVD department - remained in the departmental storage of the former KGB. The reading room of the central FSB archive in Moscow, with its 10-12 workplaces and four working days a week, was always full.

The declassified files were extremely important for the still living participants of the events and their children: they were used to read the testimonies of their relatives, to learn the sentences for the first time, to get the last photos of their murdered relatives, and sometimes their letters and diaries. At the same time, they represented a new social and scientific problem, and required complex cultural decipherment. How to read them? How to interpret them? All of the most terrible things that happened at the time the documents were created," Roginsky reminded us time and again, "were not included in the minutes. Thoughtful reading of these texts (and talking to other readers of them) became one of Memorial's most important tasks for the coming decades. A student of famous semiotician Lotman, Roginsky compared this work to the way seventeenth-century historians studied the annals: both then and now, the methodology of analysis and verification procedures had to be invented simultaneously with

¹⁵² Some of the investigation files were transferred to regional archives in St. Petersburg, Barnaul, Irkutsk, and Perm. Nevertheless, even in the state archives, access to them remains incomplete and not fully open - as of 2023, some documents even in them can be requested only through local archival departments of the Federal Security Service (for more information on access problems - see dostup.memo.ru).

reading¹⁵³ . And many years later he publicly admitted: "Nothing came out of our expert work"¹⁵⁴ .

8

In total, Nikita Petrov spent about eight years in the office in Lubyanka, which was provided to the commission members. "Changes in the surrounding and internal life could be observed without leaving the men's room of the Lubyanka corridor on the same floor," he says.

All KGB officers drank in their rooms. At the end of the working day, they would take the empty bottles to the only common space on the floor, the toilet. There, these bottles, displayed on the window sill, were turned into material for ethnographic research: by the end of the week, according to Petrov's recollections, there were several dozen of them.

In 1992, it was mostly cheap vodka bottles or even spirit containers. But the further you go, the more you get -- cognac, bourbon, whiskey; "here comes Jack Daniels, Johnny Walker!". By the second half of the 1990s, the KGB was renamed the FSB, and its officers once again became the elite of the security services. The era of free cheese and Bic lighters was over. Along with it, the archival restoration ended. The grandeur of Lubyanka was restored.

Chapters 5-10 are not included in the English sample of the book. You can request full Russian manuscript per email: rights@straightforward.foundation

¹⁵³ Nanci Adler. Victims of Soviet Terror. The Story of the Memorial Movement. London, 1993. P. 136

¹⁵⁴ A. Roginsky. Interview for Karta magazine // <https://hro.org/node/5665>