H. J. TOURYANTZ

SEARCH FOR A HOMELAND

No experience is ever a complete failure. It can always serve as an example not to repeat the same mistakes.

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SEARCH FOR A HOMELAND

By

Hagop Jack Touryantz

Is destiny a man made situation, or an outcome of environment and circumstances?
This specific case is an attempt by this writer to dissect the anatomy of his destiny.

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Dedicated to my wife Mampil, my companion in my days of happiness, my comforter in my days of distress.

New York, New York 1987

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SEARCH FOR A HOMELAND

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APOLOGIA

There are periods in life, so deeply engraved in the memory of a person that they can be recalled with the same accuracy and depth as a scrupulously recorded diary. Owing to an itinerant life, and strict Soviet censorship, it was hard and hazardous for me to keep a written diary, let alone smuggle it out of the country. Therefore, it is largely by way of metaphor that I describe the lines that follow as pages at random from the diary of a man who lived on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Having been taken from a diary (even though imaginary), these pages are bound to be intimate and candid. Diaries are seldom destined for publication. Therefore, they are not written to accommodate the sentiments and views of prospective readers. The selections presented here are no exception. At the outset I never contemplated the eventuality of making my inner world public by setting down my story and thoughts on paper, if for no other reason but that at no time have I dreamed that one day it would be possible to return to freedom. So, what we have is a unique personal story. Unique, since censorship in that "inhibited land of the mind" entails such risk, nobody would dare write with any amount of objectivity, while back in the Free World, very few having suffered the experience have had their "wounds" sufficiently healed to be able to relate without some amount of bitter prejudice and vengefulness. I believe that after so many years in the West, I have recovered enough to speak objectively and honestly, revealing also some occasional bright spots in the midst of an overall darkness that shrouds the future of our people.

A writer must have courage and spirit of independence to express his views and beliefs without "a priori" counting down in his mind how many proponents he can win or how many critics he can avoid. If convinced that his is the objective truth, the best he can do is to ignore not only his critics but also his proponents, and thus avoid both griefs or temptations of vanity.

It is sometimes said that the function of medicore books is to comfort, or worse, to titillate, and the function of good books is to disturb, perhaps even create polemics and activate the minds. With no pretentions whatsoever, I aim to disturb those prospective readers who fear the truth, challenging them to approach with open minds, and draw their conclusions with honesty and fairness.

PREFACE

At the aftermath of World War Two over one hundred thousand Armenians living in dispersion repatriated to Soviet Armenia. I was one of them. This book lays emphasis on the day-to-day life of an ordinary Soviet citizen which in all aspects differs from western life standards. It is a personal experience, written by an insider.

The existing books written by foreigners: historians, journalists, investigative reporters; amateur writers, casual visitors, tourists, cannot penetrate beyond a certain depth because, as one admits: "...you can reach out, you can live here among them and not really know how they live. The controls are so tight they shut you out. The odds against foreigners finding about such things are formidable, for Soviet authorities raise many obstacles to normal, easy open contacts between Russians and foreigners."

Besides, the books authored by foreigners portray only the day-to-day life of the ethnically Russian element. The Soviet Union is not one dimensional society, despite of the fact that Russia and Soviet Union are used interchangeably. Actually, the Russian Republic is one of the fifteen republics that constitute the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). There are other peoples, other races, other nations, other ethnic groups in the Soviet Union, who differ in many ways from the Russians by languages and race, traditions and mores, interests and aspirations.

As an Armenian repatriate living in a provincial and ethnically non-Russian republic as a full fledged Soviet citizen for two decades, I was free to penetrate into areas which are out of bound for all foreign authors. I was exempt from the obstacles to which foreigners are subjected. Furthermore, having lived in both sides of the Iron Curtain, I am able to compare the two diametrically opposed social systems with more discernment and depth.

The book describes, first the lure which drove so many like me to repatriate to a land which we only knew through our history books. The many disappointments in face of Soviet realities: deprivations, imprisonment, exile; and finally the struggle of some of us to return back. Back to freedom. It is the description of a life we felt deep through our skins.

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French, inspite of having their own independent countries had chosen to live in dispersion as minority groups, and for that matter, felt no discomfort as a result of their status, why then should the Armenians, or the Jews who then did not possess homelands of their own, be disturbed by the same kind of predicament? So, over the years the multi-national society, including the Armenians had acquired a *"modus-vivendi"* considered normal for people living as natives in their own lands. As a matter of fact, no one felt any uneasiness about the predicament.

The *"lingua-franca"* being French, most of us also learned how to speak Arabic, and some Engiish besides our own national languages. In addition, many of us, in the course of our day-to-day relations with members of other communities, learned Greek or Italian and very often both languages. Not necessarily by virtue of our intelligence, but rather by virtue of the circumstances, we were a bunch of accomplished polyglots.

During those years, aside from some sporadic political outbursts by the natives demanding full independence, we had on the whole a quiet, peaceful life within a cosmopolitan society, holding fast to our respective identities and yet living harmoniously with our neighbors, in the midst of this mosaic of races and national groups. Yet, a sad exception was that incident of which the Armenians became the victims, the scapegoat. It was the aftermath of World War One, in 1919, some circles still having fresh in mind the Turkish call to their fellow Islams, the Arabs, for a *"Jihad"*, a holy war against the Christians, and under this guise attempted to rise against the British occupation forces. When the ignorant mob rioted, the most vulnerable of the Christian communities, the Armenians, became the target of their frustrations. The British reaction was deliberately slow. Their politics required a pretext of a palpable nature before they would interfere.

After graduation from high school in the summer of 1931, my poor knowledge of English was the main reason my father decided to send me to England to learn the language at its very source. It was a period when British economic and political influence increasingly caused the English language to be used not only in the business world, but also in the international arena of politics and diplomacy.

In England I lived in Manchester because my father had a friend there who would keep a close watch on me. Under the circumstances, the best possible way for me to socialize was to join the

local YMCA. And, as I found out, I was not the only foreign member of the club. There were young men from Germany, Holland, Denmark, and also a Frenchman and a Greek. Of them all, I felt closer to the Frenchman and the Greek, because with one I could converse in French, while with the other I shared similar customs and mores. At night, when we did not have dates or other attractive amusement, we often gathered around the fireside to chat, reminisce and tell stories about the countries we came from. Each in his turn had a proud nostalgic feeling talking about his homeland.

For me it was indeed a perplexing situation. I felt embarrassed for I could not be one of them. I was born in Egypt. But was I an Egyptian? By virtue of my birthplace I carried an Egyptian passport, I was an Egyptian subject. But ethnically, and by virtue of our religion, the language spoken at home, customs, traditions, way of life, educational background, I was different. I was an outsider. I was not sufficiently fluent in Arabic, the language of the Egyptian natives. This, of course, was a mistake. The learning of the native language was not encouraged under the British protectorate. We went along in life, if not totally ignorant of the language of the natives, learning it with real fluency was not compulsory.

Egypt is a beautiful country. It has a brilliant historical past. It has an ancient civilization of which one can be proud. And whenever fanaticism and xenophobic feelings do not play a role, the Egyptian is an individual full of warmth, compassion and hospitality. I have no doubt that I would have been proud to be one of them, had I been raised as an Egyptian, had I been racially of the same stock. But I was different. Born in Egypt and yet feeling above all Armenian. What else one can say? I was cheated by destiny... I'd been had.

It was during one of those fireside chats that I decided to discover myself. As it appears, the final acceptance of a satisfying identity is a task appropriate to late puberty. It is in this period of shift and flux that ideals can be grasped and kept with an intensity which seldom appears at other stages of growth. And indeed, I was at that very stage in my life when the burning faiths of the past and blazing hopes for the future became the impetus which actuated my thoughts and behavior, the day I decided to discover myself.

To resolve this predicament I read as many books and articles I could about Armenia and the Armenians. Depending on the nature

of the literature and the susceptibility of the reader, familiarity with the subject matter and knowledge of the facts may generate either sympathy and love, or hate and repulsion. In my frame of mind at the time, it generated profound love. From an apathetic cosmopolitan I became overnight an enthusiastic Armenian nationalist.

Armenia was and still is under a communist regime. I was deluded by their ideological facade and ignored the realities of communism as practiced. My Armenian nationalistic feelings drove me closer to the ideals of communism as it was being preached in their literature and propaganda media. I could not realize then that for the Soviets nationalism was tolerated for the Russians, in pursuance of their policy of russification, but not for the non-Russian peoples. Nationalism was interpreted to be a primary element in bourgeois ideology, a divisive force which may have an impact on the world labor movement backing the communist experience, supposedly international in character. It also was a threat to the unity of the multi-national Soviet State, the power behind the new version of a Russian Empire.

From the very beginning I was in conflict with Soviet realities. I was attracted by the theories professed, but above all I was a nationalist, and the source of my lure was Armenia, which is part of the Soviet system.

At the YMCA there was an underground group with leftist inclinations. I began to associate with them. They took me to their meetings. They were more than amiable. Probably many of them had been enticed the same way I had been by high ideals. And I was young, gullible and impressionable. At that age most people are vulnerable to utopian ideas. It is an age of eager quests after new ideals and excitement. It is a young person's direct statement of disgust over the current ways of world affairs.

I was an energetic young man, dynamic, who under a set of unfortunate circumstances was at a loss; trying hard to discover myself, and in that process was confronting situations totally different from previous experiences. I was a young man with the tragedy of the genocide of my kin by the bloodthirsty hands of the Turks still fresh in my mind. This prompted a normal reaction, to revolt against the injustice of destiny, and because of my age, I leaned erroneously toward what I believed to be the side of justice, the side of salvation.

At that point in 1931 my interest in Armenia, and my love for

the land of my forefathers grew in such intensity that I dreamt to become part of it one day. I became an ardent nationalist. For years I looked forward for the day I would go to Armenia.

The period from 1931 to World War Two nothing was significantly eventful to fit in this narration, except perhaps the fact that my nationalistic feelings slowly yet steadily decreased in fervor, if not quite faded. I pursued my education at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. After graduation in 1936 I went back to Egypt and my father and I, established an insurance brokerage business in Alexandria. In February 1943 I was invited to Beirut by my former classmate from university years, Pakrat B. to join him in the management of their family business. The elder of three children he managed the business since the death of his father in the summer of 1937. The other two were not of age. They owned the largest and most modern flour mill and macaroni factory by Lebanese scale. During the war years the total production of the flour mill was sequestered by the government for distribution under a system of rationing. But Pakrat B. was already contemplating plans for expansions for the post-war future, and that was the reason I assumed he had asked me to join him in his efforts for the materialization of his projects. Before even we could establish a working plan, his sister and I started to court, and by May of the same year we were engaged, and by July we were married. From 1943 to 1945, while the flour mill was still under sequestration my wife and I commuted between Beirut and Alexandria, waiting for the day when with the end of the war the flour mill freed from government control we would be required to establish permanent residence in Beirut.

At the aftermath of the war, affecting our initial plans was the announcement made by the Soviet government of its decision to start a repatriation by the summer of 1946 for all those peoples in dispersion whose countries of origin were part of the Soviet Union. This included the Armenians. It was then that my old nationalistic feelings rekindeled and I started to think seriously about the eventuality to immigrate to Soviet Armenia. As the announcement went, this was to be substantially larger in scale than previous attempts. In early and late 1930's there had been some sporadic groups of Armenians from the Diaspora who immigrated to Soviet Armenia. But nobody heard much about them, and nobody knew what later became of them, especially during the Stalinist purges

of the thirties. Because of ignorance of the true situation, the news of the Soviet government's decision was received by the Diasporan Armenians with great joy and enthusiasm.

Subjugated and dispersed for centuries, the first call to our people for immigration instead of emigration was received with tremendous verve. The movement was baptized most suggestively "repatriation". This widespread enthusiasm was heightened by the fact that at the end of World War Two the Soviet Union enjoyed the prestige of a victorious nation, having played a major role with the Western Allies defeating Nazi Germany. The victory added considerably to the esteem of the Soviet people.

As it appears, however, in face of the depletion of its human resources, the Soviet government embarked on a temporary policy of opening its doors to those people of its component nations. The doors were only open inward. "The Fatherland welcomes back its children with open arms". Such was the appealing slogan that attracted so many people living in dispersion, most of all our own people, the Armenians. For the Soviets it was a convenient propaganda opportunity to counter the prevailing world opinion that the communist experience was a failure.

Taking advantage of its post-war prestige the Soviet government considered this an opportune moment to manipulate the sentiments of the people in dispersion, originally from countries of the old Russian Empire. People who for one reason or other had never totally adjusted to the environment of their adopted countries, and still to a much lesser extent assimilitated. This appeal was very effective with the Armenians, which almost instantly created tremendous enthusiasm. Deprived for so many centuries of a homeland, they sincerely believed that the time had come at last for them to end their itinerant life.

While this was the major motivation, there were a number of other reasons that impelled many of us to embark on such a venture, a one-way venture with so many unknowns. The growing political uncertainties in most of our adoptive countries; post-war emergence of nationalistic feelings in these lands, and an increase in fanaticism and xenophobia. An obvious consequence of such developments was the unpleasant prospect of discrimination, perhaps to the point of menacing the security of the minority groups.

This was the amalgam of complex factors which motivated thousands upon thousands of us to decide departing from countries we were living, from countries where we had been born. There even

were those who did not speak Armenian. Culturally, and by their mores and customs alienated, but influenced by the general trend of enthusiasm, they remembered their origin and wanted to return to the bosom of their nation. One typical example was a large group of Kurdisized Armenians[2], with their chieftain-sheiks, customs, traditions, dresses, and even their Arabian horses. All of us, regardless of our backgrounds, economic conditions, education, political affiliations, regardless of all our differences, thought, hoped, and believed, the land we were about to go to would be our homeland. We were fed up with being on foreign soil, members of an often despised minority group.

All the elements for a successful venture were present: tremendous enthusiasm, abundance of promises, attractiveness of the proposition. The repatriation movement under those conditions was bound to succeed and with time would have acquired widespread recognition and increased momentum, had it not been for the irresponsible behavior of the organizers, the poor reception by those considered our native brothers and sisters, and most of all the source of all these negative factors -- the prevailing political regime, the Stalin era. Most distressing was also the impatiently distrustful attitude of government authorities toward the newcomers, often to the point of penalizing or punishing an individual whose only crime was his ignorance of the local laws and customs, his lack of Soviet life experience.

Parallel to its announcement the Soviet government set about opening embassies and consular agencies in countries till then had no representations, in that number the Middle Eastern countries who, by the end of the war, had acquired political independence. With the establishment of Soviet diplomatic representatives the announcement for repatriation became official. Soviet delegates were sent to different countries where Armenian communities existed, to organize the repatriation. In the meantime leading community members of the Armenian Diaspora, including representatives from different political parties came together to organize local Repatriation Committees to cooperate with the Soviet official delegates. Only the Dashnak Party refused to join the organization. The Dashnak Party was ousted from Armenia when the Soviet one party regime was established in November 1920. Hrant Devejian, editor of ARAVOD (Morning), a progressive daily with leftist inclinations, one time a Dashnak leader converted to

communism, was the person approved by the Soviet Embassy in Lebanon to be the first president of the local Repatriation Committee. Pakrat B., my brother-in-law, politically neutral, yet as an influential community leader, financially affluent, became the first treasurer. He was an acceptable compromise between moderates and the left. I assisted Pakrat B. in the Committee's financial matters, and was appointed at the same time head of the transportation department, whose function was to secure transportation means to the prospective repatriates.

Besides Pakrat and I, there were a few other Committee members politically neutral acting mainly in an advisory capacity. The rest of the members belonged to different parties. Under the Soviet Embassies indirect pressures the left wing prevailed in the decision making process, while the rest of us became the unwitting accomplices of their periodical machinations. They took advantage of the prevailing mood of enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm to an excessive degree becomes a malady which disrupts the normal functioning process of the brain. It affects our capacity to reason. Enthusiasm is also a malady of highly contagious nature. And this was indeed the very catalyst which in face of all these new events the gullible side of my character prevailed once again over my power of cool reasoning. I spared no effort for the success of the movement, with my ultimate aim to be included, my wife and I, in one of the earlier groups repatriating to Armenia.

The repatriation was also an unprecedented event which resulted in a rapid and deep change in the normal course of the day-to-day life of the Armenian Diaspora. It was an event of major historical significance, generating in most of us earnest enthusiasm, often to the degree that emotion dominated our power of reasoning, and the resulting reaction, spontaneous as it was, sparked general and unquestioned approval of the idea of repatriation.

The more moderates without being against the movement continued their normal course of life and felt a certain amount of pride and satisfaction, watching from a comfortable distance as their fellow Armenians repatriated. Perhaps deep in their thoughts, they were entertaining hopes that the forerunners might pave the way for them. Still others found the event a good opportunity to obtain from the prospective repatriates such assets as houses, stores, businesses, and even some personal belongings, which due to lack of time and sufficient means of transportation could not be

taken with them, or liquidated before their departure. It was even suspected that some of the members of the local Repatriation Committee, hand in glove with the delegates representing the Soviet government, were deliberately issuing visas the very last minute to create the kind of confusion destined to produce the above described predicament. According to some gossips the delegates received their share of the "booty".

The whole picture was not, however, altogether that dim. The vast majority of the repatriates were moved by their feelings of genuine patriotism. Those who stayed behind were also earnest in their enthusiasm. Many of them were impatiently waiting for their turn to come. The enterprise was vast and complicated. Time and means of transportation were short. But, after the first years of repatriation came the bad news. Many of those who had planned to repatriate had second thoughts, and still many others renounced their plan altogether.

For many of us our first encounter with Soviets were the delegates who were sent to organize the repatriation. In many instances their incomprehensible statements and incoherant behavior would have raised suspicions right from the start, had it not been for our benumbed mental state. Those of us who assisted the delegates as local representatives of the Repatriation Committee noticed that the interviews during the registrations were of an investigative rather than a routine informative nature. We later realized, that among other things this process of registration was also destined to gather data regarding ideological inclinations; political affiliations and past activities; religious beliefs and extent of devotion, and other details about each applicant. All this information were to be used later to compile lists of candidates for possible exile.

Over months of collaboration, some members of the local Repatriation Committee became more closer with some of the delegates. Our infatuation led us to believe that their friendship was earnest and sincere. As a consequence we often became the credulous tools of their intrigues and manipulations.

As an active member of the local Committee, I was in constant contact with some of the representatives and became very close with the first secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Beirut, Victor Kh., and the consul general Rubin A., as well as with the acting head of the Soviet delegation for the Repatriation Committee, Misha G. As we later became aware, they all were high ranking officers from

the organization, MGB[3]. Misha G. was an MGB colonel and head of the Department in Leninakan, the second largest city in Soviet Armenia. In the list of his dismal achievments mention was made of a great number of victims of deportations. In recognition of his diabolical services to the Soviet government he was lavishly decorated with medals, too many in number for his diminutive chest. While still in Lebanon, in his oversized civilian clothes, he gave the impression of much warmth and humor, and we never suspected that behind the facade that friendly little fellow was hiding his real nature that of a petty-monster.

During a trip to Ainjar, an Armenian village south of Beirut, the delegates' car overturned. In spite of their tendency to interpret all such incidents as planned conspiracies, this time, however, they did not. The accident was too evident, and the driver and the group accompanying them were all members of the local Communist Party. In this accident the most seriously hurt was Misha G., with a broken leg. He was transferred to the hospital of the American University of Beirut, where due to some complications, he had to stay for quite a prolonged period. Suspicious as they always are, with their obsession of possible conspiracy, there were signs of uneasiness. A Soviet citizen of a certain rank to be treated in an American hospital was the last thing they would have wished. They immediately arranged to keep him under surveillance and place reliable bodyguards in three consecutive shifts. The bodyguards were all members of the local Communist Party. Actually there was no ground for suspicion for a possible conspiracy. The majority of the staff of the hospital were Armenians, almost all supporters of repatriation. Couple of bodyguards were Arab communists, who in their view were more trustworthy than non-communist fellow Armenians.

I volunteered to visit him on almost a daily basis. It was during this period that I became more inclined to listen and give credence to what Misha G. had to say, than the unfavorable news starting to pour out fron different sources. And indeed, after the 1946 repatriation letters poured back explaining the real situation, warning what was awaiting us. But most of the people in the Diaspora, still under the spell, ignored the warnings many of the first settlers were trying to convey at the price of high personal risks. These warnings were dismissed by many as reigidity in adjustment, unwillingness to endure reasonable amount of sacrifice, and lack of patriotism. Blamed were those who with a spirit of high altruism were

cautioning the rest of us left behind.

In many instances there were humor and wit in those warnings. Due to strict Soviet censorship and the risk involved, these were expressed in a variety of ingenious ways. One of the letters enclosed a family photograph with one member lying on the floor. As we later found out the agreement was that -- if happy and satisfied, everyone would be standing in the photo. If unhappy, they would be sitting. Nothing had been said about a lying position, but it clearly became an obvious and witty signal conveying utter deception. In another instance there was a suggestion that as soon as the daughter of the family gets married, without further delay join the repatriation. The daughter in question was two years old. Still, in another letter there was a tip that Mr. X's profession is the one most lucrative. Mr. X was a pickpocket.

We ignored all these warnings and our enthusiasm remained unaltered. Came the second year, and then the third year. Caravans were formed one after the other.

There were many other indications to warn us what was in store once trapped behind the Iron Curtain. For one thing it was no secret and we knew at the outset, that once inside there was no way out. This should have been the best inducement to prompt us abandon our resolution to repatriate, but only if we were still in possession of our right mind. We were still in the grip of our initial burst of enthusiasm and to our awareness that we could never leave the country, our self-deceiving counter-argument was that, the Soviet Union is such a vast country that if one desires to move or travel, there always would be ample room and opportunity to visit even the furthest confines of its huge territory. None of us knew, of course, that even within the Soviet Union people need special permission to move from one town to another; in a town, from one location to another, and more specifically so, if the areas are located either near the border, or industrial areas of strategic significance, or military camps.

Still other signs to thrust us to have second thoughts. The queer reactions of the delegates in face of certain specific situations indicating their pathologically suspicious minds. For example, some of them expressed disquietude at being followed and spied upon by local authorities, the Dashnaks, and agents of American, British and French intelligences. We could not detect any sign to substantiate their obsessions. Either their suspicions were unfounded, or if they were being watched for our untrained eyes this was not visible. The authorities never interfered in their operation. Yet their obsession led them to suspect every one around them. I had close relations with some of the delegates, still felt at certain instances that I also was the object of suspicion.

One incident typifies their state of mind. Between departures of the repatriates there were periods of recess when the delegates and the members of the local Committee relaxed, organized receptions and parties. It was during one of those parties that Rubin A., the consul general of the Soviet Union in Beirut, having had too much drink accused me of being an American spy. Immediately the more sobers of his colleagues apologized trying hard to explain that this was one of his routine jokes. I, at first, was stunned, but then gave no significance to this incident.

My devotion to the idea of repatriation, and my active part in its organization irritated the anti-repatriation elements led by the Dashnaks. At several instances I, and many of the other non-communist, neutral members of the Committee were approached at first amicably, later under threats, to resign from the Committee and stop our collaboration. The Dashnaks surmised that with the resignation of the non-communist elements from the Organization the movement might crumble. They also feared that its success would ultimately disintigrate the Diaspora -- the flourishing Armenian communities in Syria, Lebanon and elsewhere leaving no ground for the Dashnak Party to survive. But our immutable commitment to the cause of the repatriation wouldn't let us listen to them or to any kind of intimidation.

One day the news was that I, with many others of the activists, were included on a Dashnak hit list. We were to be harassed and terrorized if we persisted in ignoring their warnings. How reliable was this news? I had no way of knowing. This information had been conveyed to us by the leftist co-workers of the Repatriation Committee. Looking back I have to admit that I have my doubts about the veracity of that threat.

The Committee supplied me with a gun. Up to that time I had never used any kind of weapon. It became more and more cumbersome in my pocket. After a short while I got rid of it. The Committee even assigned two bodyguards to protect me against any eventuality, or maybe to watch me. One can never tell what their real motives were. With their suspicious minds it was in fact very likely that these supposed bodyguards were primarily assigned

to spy on me.

Toward the end of fall 1946, the then President of the local Committee of the Repatriation, Hrand D. was stabbed by an unknown person. Despite the lack of conclusive evidence proving a conspiracy, the prevailing mood was such that the incident was outright attributed to the Dashnaks. The wounds inflicted were not fatal. He was hospitalized, and as soon as he recovered he was coerced to resign from his post as President of the Committee and repatriate to Soviet Armenia, allegedely to protect him from repetition of similar attempts upon his life. Hrand D. was considered more vulnerable than the rest of us because he was a former leading member of the Dashnak Party, who later had defected and converted to communism. By a cynical twist of fate, not much later, in the summer of 1949, almost on the eve of the massive deportations, Hrand D. was murdered with a strong whack of an axe, in his almost completed new home in Erevan, allegedely by a mentally deranged person, and for no apparent reason.

During the winter recess of the repatriation, all the delegates, with the exception of Misha G., left Beirut for Erevan to report to their government the first year's results and receive new instructions for the following year. Misha G. remained in Beirut because he was still in the hospital and not yet completely recovered. During his convalescence after leaving the hospital, he began preparations for his departure. Indubitably he knew that he would not return to Beirut. His accident may have led him to suspect such an eventuality. He started a frenzy of shopping, buying whatever his two hands could grab, and his pocketbook could afford. He even borrowed money from a number of us, and asked for advances from the Committee's treasury, with promises to pay them back. He never cleared his debts.

He bought such trivalities as combs, toothbrush and shaving cream by the dozen; towels, bed sheets, shoes, socks and stockings, suits, women's dresses, underwear, and a whole lot of other items in unusually large quantities; also toys and gift items. He even advised me to follow his example, and in particular to take with me gift items, as these could become very handy in my day-to-day relations, and of considerable help in establishing the necessary connections. In other words, this was a tip implying that bribery is an accepted way of life. Even this sort of downright tip did not awaken me from the torpor I had been immersed in. At certain moments during the course of his frantic purchases, noticing my dazzled look, he tried to explain that with the country just recently emerging from an exhaustive war, these items were temporarily in short supply. Adding that in the very near future, due to the vitality of its economic system, the Soviet consumer would enjoy an abundant supply of all needs, and that the "junk" he was purchasing would soon find its way into the trash basket. The reasoning once again sounded fair.

As a leading figure in the Armenian community of Lebanon for some Machiavellian reasons, my brother-in-law, Pakrat B., in spite of his social and economic status -- a bourgeois capitalist, despised by Soviet principles -- had become the subject of special consideration by the delegates, as well as the high ranking personnel of the Soviet Embassy. He was considered a useful link between the Lebanese authorities, with whom he had good connections, and the Soviet representatives.

While still in Beirut, in late fall 1946, Misha G. managed to arrange an official invitation from the Soviet authorities for my brother-in-law to visit Armenia. In league with each other, each side having its own reason to lure us into the trap, Misha G. and Pakrat B. asked to borrow our new car to drive overland across the Syrian dessert, Iraq, Iran to Soviet Armenia. My wife and I lent our car without hesitation. They had our blessings for a safe journey.

The winter of 1946-1947, when all repatriation activities had temporarily ceased, became a period of faltering and vacillation within the community. The people who were becoming more and more aware of the bad news were waiting to see what would my brother-in-law's reaction be upon his return. Would he advise his sister and me to go to Soviet Armenia? This became the question tormenting all minds. Presumably it never occurred to those people who followed our example to repatriate that we could have been deceived by Pakrat B. who perfidiously was planning to loot his sister's share in the family business.

While Pakrat B. was still in Soviet Armenia, in a moment of despondency we cabled him with the suggestion that he drive back with our car. He not only ignored our message, but also on his way back through Moscow he arranged a meeting with the former consul general Rubin A., who had been back home and assigned to a new post, to plan a new stratagem to pull us finally into the trap.

Rubin A. was immediately reinstated to his old post in Lebanon. He came back to Beirut and promptly arranged a meeting with me. We had a long, long talk. He dwelt at length upon the inevitable repercussions, underscoring at the same time that my name might pass on in history as the big spoiler. I was too sensitive to ignore this prospect. Rubin A. played also a manifest role in persuading us to reconsider repatriating.

There were others, besides Pakrat B., other community leaders who were invited to visit Soviet Armenia and Moscow in one capacity or another, before the start of the repatriation. They all came back expressing their admiration in private and public speeches. It is hard to tell, however, whether they were more candid with closer friends and relatives. For so far as I knew them, they were not naive people, they must have been aware of the true predicament. Except for one, none of them later repatriated in spite of their fervent praises of the homeland.

The exception was Hovhanness M., an active member of the Armenian community in Paris. When he stopped in Beirut on his return from a visit to Armenia, he was profuse in his praises during public appearances, and his private conversations with us. Unlike the others, he kept his promise. He repatriated with his family, but not before securing from the Soviet authorities written assurances of special privileges, which to his great disappointment were just empty promises so common in Soviet reality, and nothing more. During my second encounter with him, this time in Erevan, it was not hard to notice a 180 degree retraction from his initial tenet. He had ceased to be the propagandist of days past, and had become the most vociferous of the complaining repatriates.

Our departure became the big event of the day and was widely reported and publicized by the Diasporan press. Apparently it also appeased some of the disquietened minds, and seemingly answered some of the moot questions resulting from the adverse news flowing from the pens of the discontended repatriates. Beirut harbor was full of well wishers waiving goodbye. The ship was slowly moving away from the quay where an enormous crowd was gathered standing and watching us with great emotion -- some of them with genuine hope that their turn would also come, some others, perhaps behind their cynical smiles, were bidding good riddance to those they wished to cast off their lives.

1-Azerbaijan is one of the Transcaucasian republics forming part of the Soviet Union. It is populated mainly by Turkish speaking people, and in spite of its atheistic government, they profess the religion of Islam of the Shiite sect. There is a large minority of Armenians, largely in major towns, numbering more than half a million. The region of Karabagh is essentially Armenian, more than 80%. Ethnically, traditionally, historically and geophysically Karabagh is a natural part of Armenia, which continues to remain under the political tutelage of Azerbaijan despite the promise at the aftermath of World War One that this was a temporary arrangement to be revised.

2-These were the children of some of the survivors from the Turkish massacres who had found refuge among the Kurdish tribes living in the north-eastern region of Syria, in Jezirah. Under that environment these remnants, survivors of the Genocide, had over the years adopted the customs and language of the Kurds.

3-The forebear organization of the MGB, the "Cheka" which was the acronym of the Extraordinary Commission for Combating Speculation (meaning profiteering) and Sabotage. Formed on Lenin's initiative on Dec. 20, 1917, headed by Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky (a Pole, strangely enough of aristocratic origin) for the objective to suppress political opposition and curb the profiteers soaring out of the shortages and confusion of the economy. Lenin had considered the Jacobin terror of the French Revolution as a necessary step towards the success of the Revolution. From this standpoint the Secret Police was the inevitable outcome of the very essence of the Proletarian Revolution. The Secret Police, under various names at different times (more often remembered with their acronyms), function to this day and occupy a prominent position in the Soviet hierarchy. On Feb. 1921 the "Cheka" was renamed State Political Directorate, commonly known by its acronym GPU, and its powers were extended. On July 1934 was integrated to form a subdivision of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs = NKVD. The present MVD, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and MGB, Ministry of Government Security, are the new names of NKVD and NKGB, when the appelation of Commissariat was replaced by Ministry after World War Two.

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At the Beirut harbor checking the visas of the departing repatriates. In the left: the Lebanese government representatives (one sitting, two standing); the author and a member from the local Committee.

So long as the caravans continued, many were those who volunteered gratuitously and with dedication their services to their fellow Armenians who were departing, and assisting the Repatriation Committee in different capacities.

The author in the center, with his assistants, interviewing the prospective repatriates. The list of the interviewed was then submitted for the approval of the Committee, who then was submitted for the final approval of the Soviet representatives.

An Armenian catholic nun repatriating, was asked by the Soviet delegates to board the ship with her habit, for propaganda motive.

S/S Rossia, a former German luxury liner, seized by the Soviets at the immediate conclusion of the war, transporting the repatriates. Leaving Beirut harbor July 12, 1946. This was the third caravan of repatriates from Syria and Lebanon.

During a trip to Ainjar, an Armenian village south of Beirut, the delegates' car overturned. In this accident the most seriously hurt was Misha G., with a broken leg. He was transferred to the hospital of the American University of Beirut.

Misha G. surrounded by the members of the local Repatriation Committee. Left to right: Hrant Devejian first President of the Committee. Murdered in Erevan. Next to him Nahabed Nahabedian, Misha's private nurse, Misha himself, the author, and Pakrat B., author's brother in law, and second President of the Committee.

Between departures of caravans of the repatriates there were periods of recession when the delegates and the members of the local Repatriation Committee relaxed, organized receptions and parties.

The author in the center with the Soviet delegates and some members of the local Repatriation Committee.

2

ON OUR WAY TO THE HOMELAND

Departures, almost always, generate some amount of tears -- tears of sadness or tears of happiness -- depending on the nature of separation. In our case, my wife's and mine, this departure teemed with feelings of joy and sadness. While we believed our kin would ultimately follow our example and join us, we, also nurtured some doubts about the future. We still were not totally convinced that this was the wise step to take at that juncture of our lives. Deep in our minds the unfavorable news coming from our predecessors refused to fade. But on the other hand, we were in a joyful mood, since this was in fact the first step towards what we had been craving for so many years -- we were going home. These were such overlapping feelings very hard to describe. The quays at Beirut harbor swarmed with well wishers waving goodbye to all those embarking on this return journey to the homeland. The atmosphere was on the whole one of intense joy both for those on their way to the homeland, as well as for the ones remaining behind, most of whom sincerely hoped that their turn would also come.

July 4th, 1947, which was coincidentally our fourth wedding anniversary, was the day our ship left Beirut. On board ship, I was appointed head of the caravan, and thus my wife and I, were assigned a first class cabin with private bath. This was more a cause for embarrassment than comfort, since all the rest of the repatriates except the sick, the pregnant, and some of the elderly, had to travel on decks, with inadequate sanitary accommodations. As I was busy trying to help everyone with their needs, I had very little time to take advantage of the comfort of my first class cabin.

Performing my duties, I noticed a group of young men playing cards, gambling. I took upon myself to reprimand them in the most severe terms. I went a step further, I confiscated the cards and threw them overboard to float back over the waves to be washed up on the shores of the capitalist countries. I could not bear the idea that people going to Armenia with the intent to live a new way of life would carry with them remnants of bourgeois-capitalistic decadent mores. I was still a firm believer in the moral purity of Soviet society. In retrospect, when I recall this and similar incidents, I myself wonder at my naivete. Years later, when I met these young men again, we recalled this incident with some amusement. I felt, nevertheless, most embarrassed about it, since

from the first days we set foot on Soviet soil we witnessed so many examples of moral degradation that they could easily compete with any "decadent" capitalistic society.

On the second day on board the ship the political officer instructed me to hand over a list of names of those who would be suspected as spies, placed deliberately within the ranks of the repatriates by American, British and French intelligences. I was appalled. This was the first real shock that undermined confidence and awoke me for good from the trance I had been in. I was deeply upset. I recalled all the negative comments I had heard about the Soviet Union and the communist regime, which I had stubbornly ignored, and claimed to be slanderous accusations spread by the capitalists' propaganda machine. A feeling of terror came over me, as I began to realize that the terrible things I had heard might well be true. I was stunned and didn't know how to react. Since I was instructed to keep this "request" secret and not tell even my wife, I had to endure this torment alone.

I did not give that officer the satisfaction of complying with his request. Maybe it was not quite a request. Probably it was a demand. It might even have been an order. At that point in time I had not yet acquired the insight to know exactly what it was. It was clearly noticeable, however, by this officer's arrogant behavior that he was used to giving orders and being obeyed. Even with the captain of the ship, officially his superior, his haughtiness was distinctly discernible.

Nearing Batumi, our port of entry, I was called to meet officials from Armenia who boarded the ship before we docked. I was led to an interior cabin on the lowest deck of the ship. They locked the door. There were two grim looking men sitting at a table. The lights were turned to glare into my eyes. With constrained politeness I was asked to sit. The whole set up looked as if I was going to be questioned, prosecuted and judged. For what? I could not figure it out.

A deluge of questions poured upon me. They wanted to know who in our group attended American, British, or French schools. They wanted to know who had been employed or had business connections with companies and firms serving those interests. It was obvious that such people were to be singled out as potential suspects. They asked me to cooperate and provide a list of names, in much the same manner the political officer on board the ship had instructed me to do. As if I personally knew the life stories of

the three thousand or so repatriates forming part of my caravan. This was such a loathsome demand that I decided to outdo them in their cynical game by providing a "list" with only one name on it. It was my name, since I had received part of my high school education in a French school, my college education at the American University of Beirut. Since I had business relations with French, Swiss and British firms. I might have been a double agent, better yet a triple agent, according to their pathological perception. Fortunately, this being my first days under Soviet quandary, they ignored my sarcasm.

From their questions I realized that they had a great deal of information about me. They dredged up trivial events in my life that even I had forgotten. They knew that I was carrying a letter that had been handed over to me on board ship at the very last minute of our departure from Beirut, by the Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Beirut, Victor Kh. . This letter was to be delivered in person to his colleague in Erevan, Misha G.. So far as I remember, during that short meeting no third party was present, and Victor Kh. delivered the letter very discretely. I have since learned that it is against Soviet law to carry personal letters. Letters should be mailed through the regular channels. They have to be censored.

The questioning went on, and on. At times, it was confusing and incoherent, perhaps deliberately misleading, beguiling. I was not able to grasp the ultimate motive behind all this. Was it that these functionaries of the MGB had an assigned plan to fulfill, and I, as head of the caravan became unwittingly the natural object of their target? At any rate, it was an irritating experience, especially for the first days in an environment so new for me. My frustration had no limit. Whatever their motive was, my first impression of life behind the Iron Curtain was lamentably distressing. First the repugnant "request" of the ship's political officer; second, the near inquisition like questioning. And when, shortly after these depressing encounters a fellow repatriate came to me and said that they were questioning him, asking information about me, the picture became still more disheartening.

Batumi, the capital of Abkhasia, an autonomous region under the tutelage of Soviet Georgia, was our port of entry. Some of the members of the Reception Committee and representatives of the local authorities, delivered long, boring and incomprehensible

speeches heralding our arrival. We listened patiently to the welcoming speeches filled with praises of the Soviet government and its "almighty" leader Stalin for permitting us to repatriate and become fellow members of the "only progressive" society in the world. We were instructed to applaud at intervals and with special vigor at every mention of Stalin's name. To make sure we responded at the right moments prompters were there to give the cue for applause. Some of us whose sense of humor was still intact turned each round of applause into a real cacophonic uproar. The natives mistook this for genuine enthusiasm. We had our fan.

The head of the physicians of the Reception Committee was the Minister of Health of Soviet Armenia. He asked me to hand over to him the medical supplies we had on board the ship. Apparently he had plans of his own for these medications were in short supply in the Soviet Union and commanded a very high price on the black market. When he learned that these medications had been handed over to the ship's doctor, to my great astonishment he mumbled: *"koghuh kogheetz koghatzav, Astvadz desav zarmatzav",* an Armenian popular saying meaning: "a thief stole from another thief, even God was bewildered".

Later that day, my wife and I were invited to dine at the table of the President of the Central Committee of the Reception Organization. Present were also a general who was an official of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, known by its acronym MVD, the Minister of Health, and a few others, all high ranking officials.

Our dining room was a small cubicle within a spacious hall, in all appearance an old warehouse refurbished to serve as refectory for the rank and file staff of the Reception Committee. Yet the boundary separating the elite from the rest was not tight enough to prevent the bugs and flies from penetrating the exclusive sanctuary. Meanwhile the repatriates had to eat their rations in a covered fenced area at the harbor with benches facing the latrines. For obvious reason very few took advantage of this facility.

The dining room boasted the distinction of a tablecloth on the table, even though it was full of grease spots and wine stains. Apparently it hadn't seen any soap for a considerable length of time. The forks had hardened bits of food between the prongs remnant of a previous usage, and the spoons and knives were not much cleaner. However, the food was of a better quality than that served for the rest of the staff. We had meat, white bread and an abundance of wine. The rest of the ordinary mortals had not meat,

their bread was dark brown and they had no wine. Inviting us as special guests to dine at their exclusive table was their way of honoring us. We did not feel that way.

There was a window looking at the backyard. All of a sudden a woman appeared close to the window. She was emaciated. She had only the remains of a soul, wrinkled skin, and bones. The woman's eyes were deeply sunken and yet so expressive. Even with her lips sealed they told the whole story, as she hungrily eyed the food on the table. One of the officials at the table nearest to the window noticing our bewildered expression, jumped up and shut the shades, depriving the starving woman even from the pleasure of looking at the food. This was so disturbing that my wife and I could not eat anymore. I could not help but wonder what other surprises were in store for us to see and experience in this "paradise of the working class".

The warehouses within the harbor were to serve as our dormitories. Here and there we could still smell a hodgepodge of odors reminiscent of the previous presence of tar, cement, iron, timber, hay, and human and animal waste hastily cleaned. Our lavatories were wooden boxes, or rather crates with many cracks and holes. No doors. Men and women shared the same set of "conveniences". Was it that as a "progressive society" the Soviets allowed equality of sexes to extend to the toilet area? Or, was it that government surveillance was required even in the most intimate areas of people's lives? Shower and bath facilities were non-existent. Whenever the transit period exceeded a week or two, those wishing to take a bath were loaded on trucks and transported to the city's public baths. The only facilities for daily use was an extension pipe from a hydrant with a dozen or so water taps to be used by over three thousand people.

Tired and exhausted, my agitated mind plunged into a chaotic series of thoughts and reflections, and in a flash my eyes went towards the ship, still at anchor. "Pobeda" was the name of the ship, which in Russian means victory. I could not stop pondering that S/S Victory was the ship which took us to our doom, to our defeat.

Having unloaded all of the belongings of the repatriates on the quays, at one point the representative of the Reception Committee asked me to climb back on board the ship to check whether there weren't any cases left behind in the holds. As I approached the

gangway the Soviet soldier on guard, a young Russian looking more like a teenager, pointed his rifle with a bayonet to my face. Apparently he had strict instruction not to let anybody back on board the ship for fear that one might stow away hoping to return and defect. But then this was a Soviet ship. Yet orders are orders. A Soviet soldier is not supposed to think. This incident increased my mounting frustration and disappointment.

In Beirut, the local Repatriation Committee had succeeded in obtaining permission not to have the personal effects of the repatriates to Soviet Armenia be inspected by the customs officials. This gave a chance for many of the repatriates to carry with them valuables: jewelry and gold coins. We expected that upon our arrival in Batumi the Soviet customs would do the same. But this was not the case. The Soviet customs officials apparently made it a special point to sniff out meticulously all the cases and personal effects of the repatriates. As we later became aware, the Soviet government's main concern was the import of reading material of a propaganda nature. Any colorful magazine or print, despite of its otherwise innocent non-political contents, was considered a threat to the system. As to the gold coins and some valuables which were not well concealed, they were confiscated on the spot.

This action, plus their particularly harsh unaccommodating behavior, aroused much discontent and at moments considerable irritation, with signs of some potential outbursts. The cases were tightly packed and nailed, and the search by the Soviet customs officials turned the whole area to shambles. It did not take long for us to realize that the customs officials, who were for the most part Georgians, not having communities overseas as the Armenians have, were envious and fearful that the incoming of fresh elements might enhance the culture and economy of Armenia and increase its population in number relative to their own. Taking advantage of their prerogative as customs officials, they were indirectly though deliberately interfering with the normal course of the repatriation by creating artificial obstacles, doing their utmost to exasperate the newcomers. Due to its geographical position, Armenia lacking a sea-port was compelled to use Georgian port facilities, actually Abkhasian. In view of this Georgian resistance, one wonders how and why Stalin, a Georgian himself, conceded to the idea of repatriation of the Armenians from the Diaspora. The assumption is that, in his pathological mind and satanic soul, Stalin was contemplating the horrendous plan of ultimately trans-

ferring the newcomers to the far limits of the Siberian steppes.

The customs functionaries by creating uncalled for obstructions were forcing the repatriates to bribe them with items in short supply. Items such as: cigarettes, and the American brands were the ones most in demand; cigarette lighters; lighter's flints; razor blades; women's stockings; socks; shirts, and what have you. They accepted almost anything to skip and minimize the search. This way from the very first days, before even stepping on Armenian soil, our repatriates learned the name of the game.

The inspections went on for two days. As head of the caravan I was acting as liason between my fellow repatriates and the local authorities. Both sides preferred to deal with each other through me, probably because I was succeeding in avoiding friction between the irritated repatriates and the incredibly tactless and rude Soviet customs personnel and some members of the Reception Committee.

It was after midnight of the second day. I was under the regular ration, like everybody else, and hungry. Yet, I was feeling uncomfortably full, since I had to restrict my visits to the lavatory to a minimum. The unpleasant odor and the nauseating sight of those facilities caused me to repress my urges as much as physiologically possible. Exhausted, debilitated, and while my exasperation had reached its peak, finally, my turn came to have my cases examined. Under this physical and mental strain, I suddenly ran amuck. My spontaneous reaction was not to allow the customs agents to search my cases and personal effects, and I threatened a physical confrontation with whoever dared to approach.

Over thirty in number, our large and heavy cases were packed tightly and nailed shut by professional movers. With my old convictions still intact, and my abhorence of the idea of bribery, I was not ready to give up and offer kickbacks for expediency's sake. Neither was I prepared to let my cases be ransacked. This outburst of mine was not in line with the kind of restraint I had shown up until then.

In fact, more than once I had succeeded in cooling down an over-heated situation, calming down the most irritable of my co-repatriates. Neither was it befitting the function I had been called on to perform as head of the caravan.

This unexpected sudden egress of rage from my part created a lot of commotion and hurly-burly among the confused officials of the Repatriation Committee, who perhaps because of my position and prestige, showed considerable patience and diplomacy. The

situation otherwise could have created an incident between the Georgian customs officials and members of the Repatriation Committee of Armenia.

The local head of the Committee in Batumi, Yeghish O., a rather gentle and resilient person, shuttled to and fro with no respite between the customs officials and myself, attempting to find a solution acceptable to all. However, in spite of his attempts, I, stubbornly, refused to let them search my baggage let alone my cases, on top of which I sat with an iron bar in my hand ready to confront anyone who dared try. Confident of my physical capabilities, apparently this undernourished bunch of customs agents were scared, as they did not dare to force the issue. The negotiations lasted until the early hours of the next morning. We stood face to face with each other for interminable hours. Finally we reached a compromise.. My cases were to be transported in a sealed wagon to Erevan, our final destination, and would be searched at that spot where I had to open them anyway. By this arrangement, they saved face and I had what I wanted.

This incident was of course an act of insubordination on my part, intolerable under ordinary circumstances. No doubt it would have been considered a serious offense punishable by the laws of the land, but it was, however, our first days on Soviet soil. Evidently they were anticipating some friction, and had orders to show a certain amount of tolerance. They were lenient with me. I never felt any repercussions directly linked with this particular incident.

Finally the day of our departure for Erevan arrived. My fellow repatriates were constantly asking me about the means of transportation, since there were some unimaginable rumors circulating. I contacted the head of the Reception Committee to ask the point at which we had to board the trains. We had already noticed run-down and war damaged freight cars on the tracks, but not one of us in his wildest imagination was ready to believe these would be our means of travel. These boxcars, before being assigned for our transportation, had carried cattle and flock of sheep. We became aware of this when we noticed leftovers of hay and some remnants of animal waste in the cars. Those among us who still possessed their sense of humor, boarded the boxcars and started to bleat in unison.

There was one passenger wagon, a real antique, destined to transport the sick, the pregnant, the staff of the Reception Com-

mittee who were to accompany us, some artists -- musicians, actors, writers, etc. -- who were entertaining us during our stay in the premises of the harbor, also a number of "public relations" workers, who actually were informers on the payroll of the MVD. And, as a favor, in my capacity of head of caravan, my wife and I were included on this list.

All through the journey this favor kept me in an uneasy mood. At regular intervals when the train made stops, I climbed into the boxcars to join my fellow repatriates. Being in the same boxcar with them, for even short whiles, was the only heartening and moral lifting act left in my power to show my concern. Yet I myself was in terrible need of someone to comfort me and give courage.

Before leaving Batumi, we encountered some of the repatriates from the preceding year who had come to meet relatives and friends. As people who already had a full one year of Soviet life experience, they warned us about what was to be expected on our way to Erevan. From them we learned that in transit on Georgian territory there were bands of thieves who were assaulting the trains at each stop. They advised us to take precautionary measures to protect ourselves. Apparently the guards on the previous convoys did not protect the repatriates from these marauders. We had reason to suspect that there were some kind of a complicity between the thieves and the guards. We, therefore, took our precautions. We organized groups of young men with a leader assigned to each one. We armed ourselves with whatever was available within the premises of our transit quarters -- small bars of rusted iron, wooden sticks, rocks, and also some cement dust leftover here and there in the warehouses, which we intended to use to blind the eyes of our prospective assailants. All these formed our arsenal, and we felt ready to wage battle against any possible attack. We were more fortunate than our predecessors, our train was not attacked, maybe news got around that we were well armed and determined to fight back. Perhaps also the authorities became aware of our determination and wanted to avoid the kind of confrontation which would create repercussions and bad publicity once the news leaked out to the Diaspora.

Because of the post-war disruption of the transportation system, the distance between Batumi to Erevan by regular passenger train took anywhere from twenty-eight to thirty-six hours. If the passenger trains took that long to reach their destinations, it is not

hard to deduce how much longer the trains carrying merchandise took for the same distance. Ours was a train of human cargo. Our journey lasted five days. We were provided with food for a four day duration, quality and quantity in accord to Soviet standards of nutrition. After four days we were out of supplies, some of us run out even before that time. We fasted. The food supply consisted of brown bread made of grains and seeds hitherto unknown to us, while the wheat minimal in proportion. We were supplied also with amorphous pieces of broken rock sugar, presumably to provide us calories, and cheese, to provide protein. That was the total ration for the duration of our journey. The odor of the cheese reminded us of a rotten piece of French Camembert, to put it mildly. The boxcars had no seats or sleeping facilities. The passengers had to sit on the bare floor. Only those who had the foresight to carry blankets or rugs could sit or lie down with some small amount of comfort.

It is a known aphorism that even in painful predicaments one can find moments of humor. This journey was no exception, in spite of the hardship and pain. One such instance was the fact that for the relief of our natural urges we had to wait until the engineer saw fit to stop for his own needs, or anytime he had to yield the right of way to an oncoming passenger train. We never stopped at regular intervals and very seldom did these stops coincide with the general need of our passengers to relieve themselves. In other words, we had to synchronize our inner timelocks with those of the engineer. Everytime when the train started to move without warning, men had to hastely pull up their pants as they run to catch the moving train, scrambling into the cars at some risk of falling under the wheels. The women, aware of their feminine handicap, either cut short their duties or had to show the same kind of dexterity as their male companions, speedly boarding the moving cars. The more courteous men lent a helping hand and pushed the ladies up into the car with a thrust or a shove, wherever their hands happened to fall. The ladies appreciated the help and under the circumstances did not seem to mind compromising their modesty.

The caravan was composed of young men and women, children and the elderly. This situation was uncomfortable for all but especially for the children and the elderly. Luckily special attention was given to them and they were permitted to relieve themselves nearer to the train. Under those conditions, there was no room for

embarassment.

We arrived in Erevan extremely fatigued, some of us sick, and all of the men unshaved and smudged with coal dust and dirt. We could not even tell how bad we smelled; our nostrils had become insensitive to the filth of our bodies we had been subjected to the stench so long. Yet, in spite of all, some of us still found heart to kneel down and kiss the soil of the homeland. I was one of them.

As head of the caravan, I was instructed upon arrival at the station in Erevan to deliver a speech to the crowd of locals who had been ordered to gather on the main platform of the station to bid us welcome. I was required to convey our thanks on behalf of my fellow repatriates to the Soviet authorities and in particular, and with expressed emphasis, the "great leader of all common peoples", Stalin, for the opportunity bestowed upon us -- "the oppressed people from the capitalist world", to immigrate to the "paradize of the proletariate".

I mumbeled a few words, apparently to the great disappointment of the local delegates present. My speech was very inadequate by Marxist standards. They were expecting unreserved glorification of the leader, lauds and praises of communism, and criticism and vituperation of the capitalistic order, flavored with all the abusive terminology imaginable.

I was not trained to deliver the prescribed style of a speech. To my great surprise on the front page of the next day's official daily, SOVETAKAN HAYASTAN, my photo appeared with the purported text of my recitation. It had been so extensively altered that I could not recognize a single sentence as part of my original speech. It was editorialized to conform to their Marxist theories as they understand them or as they are compelled to interpret them. Speaking of interpretation of Marxist theories, the primary objective has always been accommodation. Accommodation to the politics of the day. Accoommodation to the policies of the leader of the day.

The appearance in the paper of "my speech" unrecognizably retouched and altered according to the approved tenets, and my photo shot at the appropriate moment when my hand was raised above, were to give the impression to the general public that I was one of those followers of Soviet version Marxism who had to be respected. This was the kind of deference and prestige, which at that point already aware of the gloomy situation, I was not too

eager to acquire. It had, however, its "beneficial" effects in a couple of instances, inasmuch as it aided solving a few problems I had encountered from the very first day I stepped on Soviet soil. Problems my fellow repatriates had during their routine relations with the Town Hall bureaucrats and the functionaries of the resettlement Committee. The first days I was spared from the usual routine of delays and denials and rejections due to red tape, whenever and wherever I was recognized as the fellow of that day's paper. Influence or bribery are the key for prompt solution. The "eminence" that I had acquired as a consequence of a speech editorialized beyound recognition, was, of course, of very short duration. It faded as soon as I was out of the actuality.

The day of our departure -- July 4th, 1947. At the Beirut harbor. Relatives and friends bidding us goodbye. Third from left: Pakrat B., the brother-in-law; fifth from left the author readies to board the ship; next to him a member from the Committee, Haigashen Ouzounian.

As head of the caravan, my wife and I, on the fore front with two of the Soviet crew members to our sides.

The ship was slowly moving away from the quay where an enormous crowd was gathered standing and watching us with great emotion -- some of them with genuine hope that their turn would come.

3

THE INITIATION PERIOD

At the station, as soon as the reception ceremony was over, our train parked in a passenger unloading zone was pulled back with its human cargo to a track where merchandise is unloaded, near the main warehouses. The idea was that the repatriates with their personal effects and cases were to be transported from that point, in small groups, by antiquated and crumbling trucks to their respective "residences". These were mud-huts or former stables consisting mainly of one room with no running water neither toilet facilities. The water was to be carried in pails from a public fountain often more than a couple of hundred yards away, while the toilet was usually located in the yard -- a wooden cabin -- to be used by the whole neighborhood. Always crowded, during early mornings and late evening there were long lines of people waiting their turn. Whenever the hole dug in the ground under the cabin was filled with human excrement, it was simply moved to another site a few yards away and the hole covered with earth. It never was a problem locating the new emplacement, the emanating odors provided the sense of direction. There were of course no facilities for bathing. Everyone used public bathhouses. Running water and inside toilets were luxuries only found in the newly built apartment houses mainly in the larger cities.

Theoretically the sorting of the repatriates was to be based on the specific character of each family: the number of family members; the number of children of kindergarten, high school, or college age; the number of working hands; the nature of work they could perform, specialty, profession, educational background, etc. In practice these instructions were seldom followed, and not always because of the indifference and apathy of the functionaries assigned to perform the task, but because the authorities did not take into consideration the local conditions and availabilities. Plans are uniformly established in the offices of the central government in Moscow by office bureaucrats, who very often ignore local needs and resources. The directives given were impossible to comply with. For one thing the housing conditions were lamentably poor, especially when considering the relatively higher standard of living of most of the repatriates compared with that of the native population. It is true that some of the repatriates in Syria and Lebanon were living in slums -- tin-city -- but many had left behind rather decent dwellings. Consequently the mud-huts assigned to everyone provided another reason for discontent, and strange as it may sound those coming from tin-cities were more vociferous in expressing their disappointment.

Compared with the dwellings provided for our fellow repatriates, ours was better. My position as head of the caravan, my past services to the cause of the repatriation, and my record with the Repatriation Committee in Lebanon, were taken into consideration. Most of all the "prestige" my brother-in-law Pakrat B. had, helped a lot. We were thus better treated the first days than the rest of our fellow repatriates in this supposedly classless society. Yet, these privileges provide no comfort to our dispirited souls.

Far from being comparable with the houses we lived in, in Lebanon and Egypt, at least, the one alloted to us was not a mud-house or a former stable like those of the rest. Ours consisted of two connecting rooms in an apartment house with four rooms, housing two other families. The kitchen and the bathroom were for general use, to be utilized by all three families. In the kitchen each family had its own corner to store utensils. By common agreement we each had one day per week assigned to take baths. We complied with these rules without any serious friction, with understanding and mutual respect and consideration, and a lot of patience. They were lenient with us whenever we took an extra bath during the week. Often under such conditions of cohabitation arguments and disputes are generated. Fortunately, until the time we built our house and moved out, during two years we lived in this apartment we never had any reason for confrontation with our neighbors. The credit for that belongs to each and every one of us -- co-habitants.

One of the rooms was occupied by a young Russian couple with a small child. The husband was an officer in the frontier guards, "a green hat", as these people are usually known, because of the color of the kepi they wear. The other room was occupied by an Armenian family: the mother, grandmother, and three children --a son in his early twenties, and two daughters, one late teens, the other early teens. All five members of this family were stuffed in one average size room, which had to serve as a bedroom, dining room, and living room. To the credit of that gentle woman, she was able to keep her home neat and clean. Being alloted two

rooms, even though with two co-habitants, in an apartment house, was a sign that we were treated still better than the natives.

Because of a language barrier we could not communicate with the Russian family, except the exchange of greetings with our broken Russian and they, with their broken Armenian. For a short period at the beginning we could not communicate freely with the Armenian family either. The husband of this woman, the father of the children, was absent. He was one of the many victims of the Stalinist purges of the 1930's. He was exiled to a distant corner of Siberia. At first this woman was suspicious with us, reluctant to talk about her husband. Because of the special treatment we received she must have had her doubts and suspected of our possible connections with the authorities. Mutual distrust being the common psychological pattern, we not only did not blame her but gave ample time to convince her that we were not a threat to them. Later when she gained confidence, she told us how one terrible night "chekist" officers stormed into their house and led her husband away without any official warrant and explanation; first to prison and then without any trial to exile. The first couple of years she did not even know where her husband was confined -- whether he was dead or alive. The reason for his exile, as she later gathered bit by bit, was that one night while at a party having had too much drinks, he had expressed, in a narrow circle of "reliable" friends, his doubts about the official propaganda reports of the achievements of the "Five-year" plans.

The first few weeks crowds of friends and fellow repatriates poured into our house. Some of them to express their disappointments, others who had preceded us by a year bidding welcome or asking news about relatives and friends left behind, still others feeling sorry for us for having fallen into the same trap. There were some who under their cynical smile were not quite able to hide the inner satisfaction that they were not the only victims in this mess.

One of our close family friends, who was at the same time our family physician back home, Doctor Leon A. and his wife were the first to visit us. He, with his family preceded us by one year. We had made plans to repatriate with the first caravan in the summer of 1946 the two families together on the same ship. However, because of my duties in the Repatriation Committee in Lebanon, the delegates requested me to stay a little longer and postpone my

departure till the end of the season, and take the last boat with them. Winter came much earlier than anticipated, and the last caravan of that year was canceled. This was perhaps fate's warning to desist..., which we stubbornly ignored the omen..., once again.

As we learned, Dr. Leon A. with his wife and two sons, upon their arrival in Erevan, were alloted a one room mud-hut. One of the sons in his early twenties, the other a teenager. The roof of the hut was a reinforced mixture of mud and straw, the floor plain dirt. They had a dismal winter with a leaking roof, very little heat, insufficient food. However, just a couple of days before our arrival, they had been suddenly moved into an apartment house with two rooms and conveniences. A luxury by Soviet standards, alloted only to people of relatively on high position or as a reward for special services rendered. He, the doctor, could not give us a convincing explanation for this sudden change in the attitude of the authorities towards them, neither did he admit that this was in compensation for services rendered. It was not hard for us to deduce that it was as a recompense for agreeing to write letters to us, while we were still in Beirut, insisting not to desist from our initial plan to repatriate. The doctor's deceitful letters became one of the factors playing an important role in our final decision. We had too much confidence in the integrity of this "friend". We couldn't imagine he would betray us. We had once again been deceived. He was rewarded for his vile action. He gained an apartment as a compensation. We gained one more bitter experience. He lost a friend. As it appeared he didn't care less. We lost our freedom. If ever we learned a lesson, it was already too late.

According to Soviet requital system, some of us who were useful before we repatriated by helping to organize the repatriation had to be rewarded. But once on Soviet soil these rewards were stopped when they realized that we were reluctant to be of any further use to them. There were some others, however, who actively continued to serve. They were rewarded again and again until they were not needed any more. These were the opportunists, the cynics. It is often said that the cynic is the one who knows the price of everything, but never would he know the value of a single thing.

Dr. Leon A. served before the repatriation, because presumably he was then an idealist-patriot as many of us were. Then he continued to serve after repatriation because, disappointed like most of us, he must have reasoned that it was to his advantage to cooperate with the local authorities. For many idealism, integrity became

outmoded virtues, losing propositions. And indeed, looking from a pragmatic angle, Dr. Leon's deviation from his initial principles led him to obtain better housing, and a lot more privileges. Circumstances had induced him to adopt the path of opportunism as an alternative practical solution to his problems. He thus lost at one stroke all the moral values we, till then, believed he possessed. Because of that, as well as for the subsequent services he performed, he was abundantly rewarded and permitted to work in private practice for years thereafter without interference, in spite of the restrictions imposed by Soviet laws on the private exercise of any profession. He continued for years to reap the benefits and enjoy Soviet "benevolence" and "generosity" until the day of his surprising defection, after more than eighteen years of special privileges. On a touristic visit in Lebanon he chose not to return, leaving behind his two sons, his wife was by then deceased.

From the very first days we had innumerable shocking experiences. Housing conditions were dreadful, and there was a scarcity and often total lack of even the most common staple goods. The supply of food was deficient and unwholesome. Long hours of breadlines. Long lines in front of all stores was the most common of the daily sights.

I still remember vividly that one excruciatingly freezing cold winter day my wife had to wait in line for eight long hours hopping from one foot to the other to keep herself warm, in order to buy six pounds of flour which was that day's ration. Ironically back in Lebanon, she was part owner of a flour mill with a daily capacity of production of one hundred tons. Her share was 25%, in other words twenty-five tons per day as against six pounds so painfully acquired. The cynicism of fate. She came home back frozen and in tears.

My wife and I have seen worse days, yet we both feel the pang of that particular experience. This incident is deeply imprinted in our minds and hearts, maybe because it was one of the earliest of our dire experiences, and the contrast between the two situations was most poignant. It must have been the realization that what we had in abundance elsewhere we now had to acquire with so much hardship and pain. To make matters worse, we were not supposed to complain, afraid of the risk of an accusation that we were bourgeois agitators. We were all, and all of the time under strict surveillance, and as a consequence the mutual distrust and suspicion

was continuously growing to reach despicable proportion. Even closest friends started to avoid each other. The natives feared to befriend with us, and we felt more alienated in our "homeland" than in the countries we came from.

Brainwashed as they were the natives on all occasions insisted that everything Soviet was the best, the right, the progressive with such strong conviction that one could discern signs of deep faith on the righteousness of the professed ideology and their veneration to the leader, who they believed to be infallible. Infallible most the same way as a most religious person would believe the leader of his faith to be. Perhaps some of them were not sincere, and they were expressing and acting out of fear. If so, in their role they were superbly convincing actors. But the rest of the crowd, especially from within the ranks of the brainwashed new generation of the "pioneers" and the *"komsomols"* were sincere in their convictions and in their devotion to the *"Vojd"* (the leader), and ready to believe whatever he chose to preach regardless of the fact that he often contradicted himself.

By character subservient, by tradition conservative, in the absence of the Russian Church, plain atheism without an ideology to replace it would have created a vacuum which would have threatened the success of the revolution from the outset. Marxism became the vehicle which replaced Russian Orthodoxy and claimed from its followers the same degree of fanatical devotion and veneration as they had for the Old Church. Fanaticism, in all domain opens the door to cult. And once the cult of personality established the materialistic element in the philosophy of Marxism faded to be replaced by a new kind of mystic in line with the tradition and character of the Russian people. And, the Russian political and cultural dominance over the non-Russian elements imposed them to follow the same path of thoughts.

For us, the newcomers, still outsiders, not yet influenced by this culture, it became hard to comprehend as to how a powerful country as the Soviet Union, emerging victorious from a horrible war, was governed by a set of rigid, yet odd, doctrines and led by a psychologically deranged mind. Had we known that, we certainly wouldn't have embarked on such a venture and plunge ourselves in an abyss which none of us would have wished to tread.

To survive, we, the newcomers, had to concede. To cope, each of us in our own way. Some became too complacent, some others less so. Still others non-compliant at all. It did not take much time

for those falling in this category to disappear from the scene. Were these people the real heroes? Was their action interpreted as an expression of the highest integrity or rather a useless and meaningless sacrifice, a manifestation of stupidity? The few of us who remembered them had each his own evaluation. Experience taught us that if we had to survive without injuring other peoples and without hurting our own conscience, restraint and pretense were morally and pragmatically the only acceptable course to adopt. As we became more and more aware of the situation, we started to elude each other. We thought that by so doing we would reduce the risk and protect ourselves from becoming the victims of slander.

Most of our fellow repatriates who dropped by seeking help, advice and moral support soon realized that my influence was fading and I was not much of use any more. There were some repatriates and natives though who continued to visit us. Soon we became aware of their real motives. They were assigned to spy on us. We used diplomacy to allude our awareness and to let them know that they were not welcome any more. These cynics were the more flexible ones from among the repatriates. They realized from the first that to secure a good life under Soviet reality it pays damn well to be an informer. But for how long? That, they did not know, neither had they the farsightedness to percieve that instant collaboration is a trait that even the party exploiting them would become suspicious of an eventual betrayal.

Those from among our co-repatriates persisting to visit us pretended to be our friends and carried their conversation in a manner to catch us in a *"faux pas"*, constantly expressing their disappointments and expecting us to agree with them. The natives visited us in their official capacity of "public relations workers" or "social workers", according to their own terminology "agitators", which in the Soviet lexicon has a positive connotation, it means propagandist-instructors of the teachings of Marxism-Leninism.

I remember quite daintily how we got rid of one of these agitators. This propagandist was a history instructor. He taught the history of the Communist Party in a *"technicum"* (professional school) not far from our home. A mandatory course for all, the history of the Communist Party is taught even to those majoring in science and technology, which actually has no direct bearing with their subject. It is a Soviet variant of communist "catechism".

One evening I came home after a full day of hard work and a lot

of frustrations, trying to relax and forget the day's disappointments and enjoy quiet moments with my wife, when all of a sudden this fellow, the agitator, dropped by. Noticing our bitter humor, the leftovers of our unapetizing meal on the table (which actually was one of our cases) with the intention to cheer us up, he started to list all the positive aspects and the good opportunities the Soviet reality could offer its citizens. He, specifically, emphasized what he metaphorically referred to as the "intellectual nourishment" which was freely and abundantly provided by the Soviet government: free schooling, free university education, free medical care, free this, free that, etc. He did not realize, however, that his timing was bad and our terrible mood could not tolerate his propaganda efforts. My spontaneous response was: no brain can function normally without the proper body nourishment, in fact, I added, Lenin himself had expressed this very same idea. I even remember quoting a passage from Lenin's earliest works which said: you cannot propagate an ideology to people with empty stomachs. At this point I cannot remember precisely the source to which I referred on such short notice, when I, still, was lacking the conventional training of the teachings of Marxism-Leninism, but the effect was overwhelming. Speechless, the fellow left our home never to return again. There remained, however, others who continued their visitations for a while longer, and still some others who continued almost indefinitely.

Our immediate reaction was an emotional decompression, a loss of moorings. Every sight around reflected the sort of trauma that attends a spiritual amputation. It was also not hard to see in the impassionate faces of the natives a visible apathy we never expected to be the response to our elated and yet gradually fading patriotism.

Were they to be blamed for their lack of a paralleled enthusiasm? Were they intrinsically bad by nature? After all, in all other aspects they were as human as anybody else from our camp. They had their feelings, these were apparent. There were even some who showed compassion and concern, in spite of the risk involved. Becoming too friendly or too involved with an outsider was openly discouraged by the authorities. The authorities feared that the knowledge gained about the outside world from the newcomers would disturb the minds of the natives. There was another factor also which enlarged the gap between the natives and the newcomers. This was the chronic shortages of all essentials: food, clo-

thing, housing, and many other items of daily consumption. Drained to the lowest limit as a result of an exhaustive war, at the immediate aftermath of the hostilities there remained so many wounds -- physical and psychological -- unhealed. It was to some extent natural, therefore, that the natives were reluctant to see additional mouths to be fed, especially when they knew from past experience that despite promises from the government to increase the rations proportionately, shortages would worsen.

One of my first acts after our arrival was to write a short letter to my parents in a furtive language suggesting that they renounce their plan to follow our example. The ciphered letter was, naturally, all praise for this "wonderful land". However, I was trying to convey our disappointment by suggesting postponment until the construction of our home was completed. The idea was that, having renounced our initial project to build a house their repatriation would be put off indefinitely. But it was to no avail for people elated by the event to understand. The repatriation continued with the same enthusiasm, and my parents followed us just about a year later.

In the meantime, a few months after our arrival, towards the end of September 1947, we received a telegram from my wife's folks in Beirut that, as initially planned, they were sending the 35 cases and crates of building materials. Our ciphered letter, and then our prolonged silence, presumably had not conveyed our disappointments to them either. But then my brother-in-law Pakrat B. was well cognizant of the true situation because of his prior visit. But ostensibly he did not want our discontent to be aired and affect the course of the repatriation now that he had succeeded to get rid of us, now that he had been appointed President of the Repatriation Committee in Beirut.

The cases consisted of all kinds of building materials imaginable. Everything necessary to build a comfortable house, a luxury house by Soviet standards. These were sanitary and bathroom appliances -- toilet bowl and flush, basins, sinks and faucets, shower, bathtub, water-heater, pipes, connections; electrical wiring, switches, prongs, outlets; steel bars for concrete; doors, windows, shutters, jalousies, window glass; boxes of nails; cans of paint; central heating system, and so on and so forth, except cement and building stones not quite practical to transport, and of which the country possessed a good supply.

The underlying intention was to avoid being a burden on the government, and build the house without much delay. We became not only subject of envy, but at some point even the laughing stock of others who were aware of the coming consequences. In fact, some time later, we were told by some natives quite discretely, that at many instances envious MGB men had arranged the imprisonment and exile on some slanderous accusations whole families in order to seize and occupy their victim's houses. Although a violation of the basic principle of Marxism, for all practical reason the possession of a private house is permitted, but the land built upon remains State property.

Upon receipt of that unwelcomed telegram, I had to rush back to Batumi to take delivery of the cases, to save them being ransacked by customs officials, or stolen on their way to Erevan. Traveling to Batumi was quite an adventure. First of all I had to find a "middle-man" who would provide me a ticket for the train to Tibilisi. There was no direct connection to Batumi. In Erevan I did not have the language barrier, but in Tibilisi buying a ticket to Batumi was a much more intricate proposition. I did not speak Georgian, and my Russian was too poor to be of much help. As a general rule traveling in the Soviet Union was and still is an onerous undertaking, an intricate process of, first, securing a ticket, and then upon arrival, finding a place to reside. It requires a lot of connections, experience, knack and dexterity. Necessity is the mother of invention, so they say. Turning my deficiency with my broken Russian to the stationmaster, who was a pretty looking young woman, as being a *"Sovietophil"* foreigner visiting Soviet Armenia, rushing to Batumi to catch a boat. The ruse paid off. I got the ticket to Batumi. As I was short of money and had to count each and every *"kopek"* (penny) in my posession, I bought a third-class ticket.

The existence of different classes in the transportation system and in hotel accommodations in this classless society was one of the many perplexities we experienced right from the beginning. For me, however, a third class travel, in spite of all the discomforts, was indeed a worthwhile experience. I traveled an entire night and a good part of the day with people at the lower social level. They were backward and primitive, narrow minded and completely ignorant of life beyond their immediate limited horizon. At each stop there was a huge crowd rushing into the cars pushing each other to grab a seat, or make room to place their amorphous

bundles. While the ones already in the train, after asking their companions to watch their seats and belongings, they jumped down racing towards the station's tap, shoving each other to fill their canteen with drinking water before the train moved again, often without warning.

The uninterrupted hullabaloo of the passengers mingled with the screeching noises of the wheels of the cars did not seem to disturb any of my "fellow" travelers. Foul language was apparently the regular style of conversation. Periodic polemics would escalate into an unending war of words, breaking the noisy chain of one monotony to usher another "harping" still more deafening. It was remarkable how the Soviet people so restrained and reticent when politics is concerned, were so unmeasured during their ordinary interlocutions.

From my attire, my lack of fluency of the Russian language, and overall comportment, they soon realized that I was different from them, a total outsider. While I realized that they were not aware that in one of their southern Republics an unprecedented event was taking place. With the help of my broken Russian and sign language I had already started to converse with some of the passengers. Their astonishment had no limit when with some hardship I succeeded to explain that I was an Armenian born in Egypt who had recently immigrated to Soviet Armenia. Some of them could not understand how a person born in Egypt could claim to belong to any other nationality than Egyptian. Some of them even didn't know where Egypt was. A few cut short their conversation with me, presumably fearing that I might as well be a spy.

In Batumi, finding a room in hotels was as intricate an undertaking as was buying a train ticket. Fortunately the head of the local Reception Committee Yeghish O. with whom during my first stay I had established friendly relations, came to my rescue. He had some connections with the manager of the local Intourist hotel, who provided me with a moderately comfortable room. The Intourist chain of hotels is the purveyor of mainly foreign tourists visiting the Soviet Union, and high level local officials. However, as in many other areas there are exceptions to the rules, and whoever had the means to grease the palm of the manager was also welcomed.

It took about ten days before I could arrange transportation for my thirty-five heavy cases and crates containing building materials. And, only after having devoted a considerable amount of time canvassing, pleading, supplicating did I succeed to secure space in a

boxcar. The prostration was extremely painful. Yeghish O. was of great help and complaisantly so. With the rest of the staff I had to grease their palms, again and again. To load my massive and heavy cargo in the boxcars I had the help of fellow repatriates newly arrived, and in turn I helped them to load their own cargo.

It took five days to reach Erevan. This time, not being head of the caravan, I was treated in the same manner as the rest of the repatriates. We traveled in boxcars in the same way and under the same conditions as our previous trip. Since there was not enough space left on the floor because of the considerable number of cases, I had to sit or lie on top of my cargo, striving at times to find a comfortable position to rest. The conditions of this trip were as poor as the one I had first described. The reaction of the people was the same kind of general discontent, the same amount of wail and grumble.

Back in Erevan with my heavy crates, I was saddled with new problems. I had to unload my cargo before the boxcar was pulled to a departing track. The first day I attempted to do this by myself single handedly. It did not take long to realize that this operation claimed more than my strength could manage. The second day I hired help at inflated rates. My next task was to secure warehouse space to store my cargo. After a few days and a number of solicitations without any result, I finally decided to ask Kevork Kh. for his help. He was assigned to us from the first day of our arrival to attend to our needs: to procure living quarters, to supply coupons for food and other necessities. Our first impression of the man was not favorable. Disappointed and frustrated with all that we were experiencing we did not grant him much more than a glance when he came to meet us at the station the first day we reached Erevan. Besides, a person of some authority and arrogance, he addressed us in the same conceited manner he used with his subordinates. The first day we met at the station, I was in a foul mood and could not tolerate his haughty attitude.

Few days later I had to call at his office to be briefed about our rights and obligations, and the provisional privileges we were entitled as repatriates. An impressive office in an impressive building. He was the head of *"Ushosdor"*, the acronym of Administration for the Construction of Strategic Highways. An engineer by profession, a colonel by military grade. As head of the department, which was a division of the Ministry of the Interior, his position was considered equivalent to a minister. He was of the new generation of

leaders after the purges. He had an educational background superior to many of the rest of Stalin's appointees. As my impression during our first encounter was not so ecstatic, my stupefication became still greater at the sight of the imposing decor of his office. Much larger than ordinary offices, his was furnished with old fashioned 19th century style furniture: drapes hanging by the oversized windows; here and there pedestals supporting large vases and classical sculptures; an unusually large desk covered with a green color cloth, and perpendicular to it a long table also covered with a green cloth, to be used by his subordinates during their frequent meetings.

This second encounter had a much more friendly tone, and the atmosphere impulsively became warmer. The effort came from both sides, if any. Perhaps it was due to the fact that I had realized that he was not such an ordinary person after all. Assigning him to us was a sign of special consideration, which, I have to admit, titilated my ego to some extent. I also realized that in the future I might need his help. Was it that I was already losing my basic principles and turning into a pragmatic opportunist? But then I tried to convince myself and calm down my troubled conscience by the thought that I'll see that nobody would be hurt from the outcome of this new relationship.

Kevork Kh. in his turn realized that I was not a bootlicker as most of subordinates were, and instead of being offended by my initial outburst, apparently he was more pleased to see someone for a change who would show a manly attitude. He was quick to realize that even though I had no position, I had the kind of personality people could hardly abuse. We became friends. But what bothered me was his wicked reputation of being ruthless. According to some rumors, he had taken an active part during the purges. Were they the truth, or just plain gossips by his jealous rivals? I had no way to know. But if they weren't the absolute truth, his position in an administration so close to the MVD would have implied that there was some ground for these rumors.

As I later became aware, he had some ulterior motives and interest in winning my friendship. On that score we were even in our hidden motivations. He provided storage space and transportation for our cases, and a garage for our car. When later, during the construction of our house he supplied us with building stones, cement, sand, etc, I paid back generously for his supplies and services. The materials he supplied were State property, while the

hard cash we paid went directly into his pocket. These sort of transactions were so prevalent and widespread that it was virtually an institutionalized practice. It does not mean, however, there were no risks involved. Those caught in the deals were severely reprimanded, punished, jailed, exiled. In this respect the law is very specific. The unlawful appropriation of public property is a punishable felony. But the application of the law depended on one's connections, or the kind of dexterity one demonstrates in discreetly greasing the palms of higher ups.

Service for service, Kevork Kh. also borrowed our car for which he showed a special attraction, and took fancy riding, and did so even more often than we, ourselves, had the opportunity to use it. As a VIP he had at his disposal more than one chauffeured limousines. A couple for his daily inspection trips, and one special for the members of his family: for his wife for her errants, and his son to be driven to school. A typical example of the Soviet elite in action. So, it wasn't out of need that he borrowed our car, but rather for the glamor of riding an American car, a Buick, a luxury car by Soviet standards then.

While us, everytime we drove with our car down town we felt embarrased. There was always a large crowd of unlookers gathering around us asking unending questions. A typical one was: "how come a citizen could possess a private car of his own?" These were the years when private ownership of a car was unheard of. We, and a couple of our fellow repatriates were the exceptions. We were allowed to own one, because of our specific status of newcomers, and because these were purchased overseas. However, the atmosphere became at one point so tense that it did not take for us any longer to be convinced that this will excite the jealousy of many, and that the sooner we got rid of the car the wiser we would be. This was also the advice of some of the natives who showed some concern for our safety. Finally we sold our car to academician Alikhanian, a prominent physicist, the director of the Institute of Physics, a division of the Academy of Sciences of Soviet Armenia. Later the car was shipped to Moscow where his brother Alikhanov lived, also an academician and prominent scientist. They had the pecuniary means and the ground of justification, being both on the highest bracket of the Soviet compensatory scale, and had no fear to buy high priced items. There were wealthier people, the Soviet millionaires, who had the desire and the means to buy, but were fearful of eventual repercussions.

These were the warehouse managers, store managers, and the black marketeers who were speculating on goods and produce in short supply.

There was a story circulating about the manager of the central storehouse of a particular brand of cheese. The sort of cheese which has to be cured in brine for a period of time. By simply extending the time for curing, the cheese absorbs a higher proportion of water increasing its weight. By this process the trickster manager increases his stock of cheese. And this was the safest procedure to cheat the consumer, which was hard to prove its illegality. This operation on a centralized nationwide scale secured the cheat annually millions of rubles. Certainly he had to make some payoffs here and there, but then there always remained a good portion of the bounty in his pocket.

A couple of months after our arrival, my wife and I were invited for a dinner party at Kevork's house. I am not sure whether the party was given in our honor, or it was a routine dinner offered to his colleagues and fellow ministers, to establish new connections, to strengthen old ones. It was discernible, however, that there was a concerted effort to impress us with the lavishness of the table --a great variety of delicacies, caviar and the best vintage wine pouring abundantly. We became the focus of attraction, and to all questions pouring from all sides about the capitalist world, we tried hard to be heedful in our answers. One of the favorite questions of our host was whether their table could ever be compared with any setting of high society dinner party of the capitalist world. Comparison set aside, theirs was indeed fascinating. This table had no resemblance of any sort with the one we were first invited in Batumi. The tablecloth and napkins with hand embroideries were immaculate clean. The dinnerware finest china, and the flatware sterling silver. The wine glasses were in crystal imported from Czeckoslovakia. We saw in this party a living example of Soviet high society, a living example of the anachronism existing between the lavish luxury inside the ministerial house, and the misery outside.

During the dinner the first and foremost toast was made to the health of Stalin, followed by words of glorification. According to the rules of Soviet etiquette, everybody had to empty the glass with one gulp to the last drop, or else it would be considered a deliberate affront, and risk repercussions. Then to the health of the other

top members of the Party and government. Then the local tops. At last we had to drink to the health of each one of the guests. Although the rule of the same etiquette was not applied with equal rigor, it was nonetheless considered a sign of good courtesy towards the next guest. Except for the toast to Stalin, women were exempt from this form of stern etiquette. Between each toast there was always someone of more servile character to propose additional toasts to the health of Stalin. In this array of toasts each member of the Politbureau would be remembered once and more again, as well as the local secretary of the Party and government officials.

For our unexperienced eyes -- my wife's and mine -- this took the appearance of a drinking orgy. I had neither the experience nor the ability to absorb that quantity of alcohol. I think, if I am not mistaken, I was the first one to succumb. Intoxicated as I had never been before, and to my wife's and my great embarrassment, I went to the bathroom and vomited everything including the toast to Stalin. Embarrassed as we were, the next day as a courtesy we called the host and hostess to convey our apologies. They assured us that I was not the only one intoxicated and in bad shape, and that this sort of thing happens so frequently that they are used to it, it goes with the game and we don't have to worry, or feel embarrassed.

Our relationship with Kevork Kh. continued to be cordial, yet we had mixed feelings. For many a ruthless man yet he was so kind with us. We felt obligated for the services he rendered, and yet wishing that we had never known the fellow. Before long his lavish life style irritated the jealousy of some of the higher ups who were more moderate. And indeed he had lost track of a prudent limit. At that point no one from his wide range of connections dared to interfere in his favor for fear of being implicated in complicity. They disavowed him, they ignored him. Some went still further in denouncing him. In a short trial he was convicted in bribery and unlawful acquisition of public property. He was sent to a labor camp in Siberia. The family was evicted from their beautiful "villa", almost all the furnitures were confiscated.

On the eve of his demotion, when they already suspected of the outcome, late after midnight his wife knocked on our door. She hurried in furtively with a bundle on her shoulder. The bundle was full of valuables: a box of jewlery, crystal sets, silverware, and numerous other items of value, as well as a large sum of cash. We

were to hide all these valuables until the time one of the members of the family would come to reclaim. We consented to help them without second thought, in spite of all the risks involved. It was not prudent, but we could not refuse in their hour of adversity. These valuables remained with us for a couple of years before the grandmother of the family came to claim them. They had close relatives, they could have entrusted to them. They either feared that the authorities might investigate relatives and friends as well, or perhaps they did not trust them. Mutual trust is a quality missing in Soviet society. As newcomers not yet vitiated they, apparently, had more confidence on our integrity.

A few years after, I met Kevork's son in one of the streets in Erevan. He did not look depressed at all. I asked about his father. He was doing well, and the son added that his father was appointed head of the construction department in one of the important cities in Siberia, with the same privileges he enjoyed in Erevan. He had under his supervision gigantic projects: dams, electric power stations, large factory complexes, etc., etc. In spite of all his transgressions Kevork Kh. was a tremendously enterprising character. Before his exile, everybody agreed, that he was a very useful person for the country. Always able to acquire additional funds from Moscow to improve the roads of the country, even though his specific assignment was primarily building highways of military-strategic significance. His weak point was that he wanted a greater share than that fixed by the Soviet compensatory system. He deserved that, since he was much more efficient than the rest of his colleagues. Every morning, long before any of his subordinates were even awake, he used to go in person to select laborers from the labor camps, and prisoners of war camps, the ones, according to his judgement, best suited for the specific type of work. And, in spite of his outwardly austere appearance, and disciplinarian attitude, he knew how to entice the workers by granting additional retribution over their normal daily rations. Even under this exploitative system he knew how to appreciate a good worker. He was feared but they liked to work under him.

I always maintained mixed feeling about this man. He was a top Party member, head of an organization very close to the MVD, yet I had my doubts about the sincerety of his conviction to the system. In moments of candor, very confidentially he liked to ask my opinion, whether he could have succeeded in the capitalist world. Ambitious as he was, with the kind of his enterprising spirit chances were that he could have succeeded. My affirmative answer titillated his ego.

The prisoners of war were not the only category subjected to forced labor. There were also contingents of Soviet citizens who for one reason or other were incarcerated in prisons or labor camps. The most serious offenders, as per Soviet strict laws, were deported to the furthest confines of Siberia. The least offenders were held in local labor camps. According to various unofficial estimates the number of camp inmates in the Soviet Union varied between 10 million to 30 million at peak periods of extensive purges. These were: persons of bourgeois social origin; others from national-minority groups who persisted to remain faithful to their beliefs and traditions; still others from the one time elite high ranking Party members who happened to fall in disgrace and become in their turns victims of the Stalinist purges, from the rural population: the *kulaks* representing the middle class landowners; even some of the ordinary landless peasant laborers who either complained for the harsh measures of work imposed on them by the *Kolkhozes* or government owned and operated *Sovkhozes*. From among the military: the Soviet prisoners of war (WWII) for not having resisted the German enemy till death; and those from the army who had returned home and having seen life abroad and dared to compare unfavorably the conditions in the Soviet Union. From among the intelligentzia: those who at certain points during their scientific career had dared to question some of the ideological directives from above.

Before Stalin's death it was a common sight through the streets of the city to witness early every morning and late every afternoon, except on Sundays, convoys of trucks full of prison camps inmates being transported to and from to the construction sites. What amazed us most was the fact that the groups of the inmates were watched and guarded so very often by another fellow inmate with a rifle bayonet on. Some of the trucks were loaded with female inmates transported to the same sites and destined to perform the same kind of hard labor as their fellow male prisoners.

Roving through the history of the Soviet judicial system, one cannot stress enough the varigated-iridescent and all-embracing nature of its Penal Code, from the political offense, the most serious, to the felonious, to the misdemeanant, to the mischivious. Considering the tremendous number of persons imprisoned at one time or another in their life, one might wonder about the rea-

son why and how this could happen in a society claiming to be the ultimate true path for economic and moral progress.

Kevork Kh.'s incrimination fell presumably under the section of Crimes by Public Officials, and under the rubrics of Abuse of Authority, Embezzlement, and Bribery. The punishment was deportation. Kevork's crime was not political, and that was the reason why, and taking into consideration his professional experience, his past performance, his credentials as an efficient and enterprising person, even in exile he was assigned from the first to a supervisory position. An example of Soviet style pragmatism.

We had already noticed run-down and war damaged freight cars on the tracks, but not one of us in his wildest imagination was ready to believe this would be our means of travel. These boxcars, before being assigned for our transportation, had carried cattle and flocks of sheep. We became aware of this when we noticed leftovers of hay and some remnants of animal waste in the cars.

The author in front of these boxcars and sewer pipes.

4

THE ACADEMIC CIRCLES

In spite of the fact that the first days we were, relatively speaking, better treated than the rest of our co-repatriates, however, as the red tape and bureaucracy are so deeply ingrained in the Soviet social structure that it took three full months before I found a job congruent with my educational background and aspirations. Before leaving Beirut a number of us had come together to form the nucleus of an "artel", the Soviet equivalent of a cooperative union, an accepted economic structure for small trades, business and profession.

The objective of our "artel" was to establish a trucking service which we learned was desperately needed following the war. We hoped eventually to extend our line of activities to include a repair service and a chain of gas stations. This was not a blind decision nor a baseless project. Our plans were discussed with the Soviet representatives and the delegates of the Repatriation committee before leaving Beirut, and their approval was secured. Many from our group bought more than one truck, some others, auto mechanics by profession, bought equipment and tools for repairs. The trucks and equipment were transported on board the ships carrying the repatriates. To comply with the law of the land, and to avoid an unintentional blunder prospective members agreed to make the "artel" official only after we had reached destination.

But after our arrival we found things totally different from the way Soviet representatives in Beirut had described them. Once on Soviet soil we were discouraged from forming the planned "artel" by a series of deliberate obstacles, arranged by the lower echelon of the authorities. Our original plan was disrupted by the cunning and divisive manipulations of government stooges who succeeded in creating suspicion, distrust and animosity among the prospective members of the organization. As a result, the participants of this ill-fated project were compelled to disperse, each taking with him the truck or piece of equipment which was to have been his contribution to the "artel". The trucks and the equipment were ultimately sold to the state at a price fixed by the authorities. Their offers were accepted without questioning for fear of the risk of eventual confiscation.

What was the real motive behind this disruption? It was hard for

us to comprehend. Was it perhaps the fact that the members of the "artel" coming from a capitalistic environment, would be perpetuating their previous mental mold and style of life, as owners or co-owners of a business venture? Or perhaps our "artel" reminded them of the ill-fated collectivization period, which they had been forced to accept, but now coming from a group of newcomers, they had the luxury to refuse? If it were indeed repugnance to every thing reminding them the dismal period od collectivization, they should have realized that the similarities between our "artel" and in the agricultural area the *"kolkhoz"* did not go beyond the basic principle. In practice, while the largest portion of what was produced by the *"kolkhoz"* went to the government at set minimal prices to be marketed by the government stores at a much premium price, products or services provided by an "artel" descended directly to the consumers' market and the price commended was based on the law of supply and demand, much the same way as any capitalist market.

In face of the disruption of our "artel" while still in its embryonic stage, no other alternative was left for the members but to look elsewhere for a job. Frustrated and discouraged as most of us were, we grabbed whatever was available or offered at that point and time. We had no much choice.

I had become aware that bribery and kickbacks were rampant and considered as the natural, routinely accepted mode of life, and that once a person is engaged in it, it was not only impossible to resist, but was too risky to go against the general current. To avoid further disappointment, I asked the advice of some of the natives who seemed to be, relatively speaking, more trustworthy than the rest, and genuinely disposed to be of some help. They pointed out areas where such compelling temptations did not exist, or were minimal.

At their suggestion I sought a position in the academic field. My knowledge of a number of foreign languages (a rare phenomenon then, since very few of the natives knew foreign languages), plus my educational background as an economic major, helped me to secure a position at the Academy of Sciences of Erevan. More exactly in one of the divisions of the Academy, the Institute of Economics. A few years later, I was transferred to the newly formed Institute of Middle Eastern Affairs. This latter Institute was established by local initiative with the blessings and support of the All-Union Academy of Sciences in Moscow. The influx of the new

comers from the Middle East with the necessary background and knowledge were considered as the useful resources to train and prepare Soviet cadres in an area increasingly in demand, since their interest in the Middle East was rapidly growing and they needed knowledgeable experts.

When I joined the Institute of Economics the head of the department was a very impressive scholar Serguey Kh. He was the one with the secretary of the Institute, Emmanuel N. T., who interviewed me, and had agreed to hire me. But their decision could not be final. I had to be confirmed by the Political Department (Secret Section) of the Academy of Sciences. A sector sponsored by and staffed by the MVD, Ministry of Internal Affairs. Economics is considered one of the disciplines of fundamental importance, one of the basics of their ideology, so much intermingled with the science of politics that they continue to teach the course under the *"rubric"* of Political Economy. It is one of the main disciplines in the complete course of program in conjunction with other subjects taught at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, the *"sanctum-santorum"*, the *"ecclesiastical"* Seminary of Marxism, the basis of communist ideology.

It is, therefore, implied that in order to conform with the requirements of enrollment at the Institute of Economics as a researcher I had to be either a Party member, or a graduate from the Marxism-Leninism Institute. Conditions a newcomer could not fulfill. Yet I was admitted as a junior researcher, which in my case meant as an assistant to a senior researcher. I had to promise, however, that I would enroll in the night courses of the University of Marxism-Leninism. This was one of the three obstacles to my admission, which ostensibly they helped me bypass on that basis. As to the other two obstacles: one, not being a native; two, not being a Party member? They made an exception on the hope that being the first and only one admitted to this restricted area would have a positive reverberation of propaganda nature once the news reached the Diaspora. Additionally they leaned upon the eventuality that they would succeed in inducing me to collaborate with their secret organization. There were two other factors which played important roles in favor of my approval: one, my past record in the Diaspora as a fervent backer of the repatriation movement and a former member of the Repatriation Committee in Lebanon; two, my proficiency in a number of foreign languages, which during those early years was a rare phenomenon, and the Institute had urgent need

of that for their projects related to foreign sources and materials.

At the beginning all benefits from my labor were being reaped covetously by a co-worker, a senior researcher, a certain Yervand S. to whom I had been assigned as an inexperienced junior researcher who needed to be trained. The assumption was that he had to train me and guide me interpreting socio-economic phenomena according to Marxist principles. In actual fact our so-called collaboration turned me to a mere assistant in his search for foreign material sources, in which area he was totally lost because of his ignorance of foreign languages.

At first, I earnestly helped the fellow in translating huge amounts of material from French, English and some Arabic, and in return I was expecting some minor appreciation, assistance and training. But I was not only denied that, to make matters worse I had to withstand in silence all of the artificial hurdles he constantly raised in my path to become an independent researcher myself. He needed a translator, not a competing researcher, and one proficient in foreign languages. He kept me under pressure as long as he could, cunningly exploiting my status of a newcomer, my ignorance of the rules of the game, his position as a senior researcher, and most of all his influence as a Party member. For years he used all the means he possessed to interfere with my attempts to make headway.

It took a great deal of effort and perseverance, a lot of patience and diplomacy to finally be delivered from this fellow's grip. I had periods of discouragement and frustration, because I did not know where I could turn for help and advice, since as a repatriate I was not accepted in the intimate circles of the natives. Eventually, I found a few compassionate natives who very discretely gave me some useful advice and guidance. With renewed vigor I succeeded in obtaining an assignment of my own, free and independent from a disparaging patronage. It was gratifying.

I worked doubly hard on a project the theme of which was in essence more or less my own choice and liking. This, I later developed further to turn it into my dissertation. In spite of the obstacles, most of them deliberate attempts to discourage me, I finally succeeded. Some of the difficulties I encountered emerged from the rigid standards and guidelines set by the pseudo-theoreticians interpreting Marxism at different times differently as it suited them best. The exponents of the official Party line remodeled the theories to bend to their self-serving policies and follow the path

of the politics of the day, and most of all to please the vegaries of the dictator. Through a tailored ideology the Soviet oligarchy justified all deviations and violations of the original tenets of Marxism.

With my non-Marxist background, especially during the early years of my Soviet life, I had hard time understanding the complexities of their doctrines, let alone complying with them. Gradually, however, with a lot of perseverance, adroitness and some occasional resignations to their crackbrained conformism, which I never before would have imagined capable to do, I finally succeeded in overcoming all obstacles. I must admit that the two-year night courses of Marxism-Leninism contributed in my acquiring the art of demagoguery. My dissertation was accepted and I obtained the degree of Candidate of Sciences from the University of Erevan, which was officially approved by the All-Union Board of Higher Education of the Ministry of Culture in Moscow.

The year I got my degree was 1953, the month was July, my age exactly 40. This acceptance was a recognition of Soviet style maturity. Stalin's departure from the scene was of significant help. My work did not reflect a total compromise and conformity with precepts of the Stalinist era, evidently because of my subconscience resistence to their doctrine. My quotations from Stalin's works were rare while the "Leader" was alive, this by itself was a blunder to the extent that it would have interfered with the approval of my dissertation. As strange as it first seemed, immediately after Stalin's death, we were soon instructed to limit the use of quotations and references from the classics of Marxism. It was not hard to recognize that this was a covert strategy directed primarily towards the gradual reduction of Stalin's influence. Till then he was the most quoted author from among the "classics".

While many of the dissertants at that particular period had to revise their works and substantially reduce their lavish lauds to the "Almighty", this new turn hastened acceptance of my work over those of the Stalinist "worshipers". Owing to the relative scarcity of references and quotations from the "classics" my work conformed with the requirements of this new instruction.

My dissertation, which was later published in a revised version by the Academy of Sciences was titled THE STRUGGLE FOR OIL, sub-title, DISTRIBUTION OF OIL RESOURCES, AND THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE ANGLO—AMERICAN OIL MONOPOLIES FOR HEGEMONY IN THE MIDDLE EAST. I chose a topic in the interpretation of which my personal convictions did not differ much

from the official line of thought. I didn't think well of monopolies. Hidden in my heart and thoughts I had the same kind of aversion, if not quite more, towards the Soviet economic system which is a State monopoly. Therefore, even my exageration criticizing monopolism did not bother my conscience. This exemplifies how Soviet writers are forced to work. How they choose and use their sources. How they cope with abstractions. How they reconcile their own personal beliefs with the imposed official ones, some more than others. This also sheds light on how writers' literary style, talent and inspiration are affected by official directives. How the intellectuals are pushed and pulled by the exigencies of Soviet ideology.

As a newcomer and a non-Party member of the Academy, I had to overcome a few more barriers. I was constantly blamed for clinging to remnants of bourgeois thinking. Disturbing as it was this criticism gave me an inner pleasure not to have completely conformed and adhered to their percepts. Still this kind of discrimination was disquietening and frustrating.

Discrimination towards the repatriates was the general attitude from the first day of our arrival up to the day some of us returned to freedom. This kind of discrimination persists even today almost four decades after the first repatriates arrived in the summer of 1946. Even the new generation born on Soviet soil of repatriate parents is not immune to this kind of discrimination.

Discrimination is not a casual fortuitous one-time-one-case phenomenon limited to Soviet Armenia under the circumstances of an influx of extra mouths to feed. This is rather a practice of a wider scope in Soviet society as a whole. There exists an impulsive discrimination between the dominant race, the Russians, and the non-Russians; a passionate discrimination between the Party members and the non-Party peoples; a clannish discrimination between the MGB and the MVD officials and the common civilian citizenry; and a variety of all sorts of major and petty discriminations in all other areas in Soviet society, ostencibly due to the hardships of an unending struggle for survival.

We, the newcomers, very often compared ourselves to the discriminated blacks of USA. Maybe it was even worse. A repatriated was not even trusted to become a militia man (policeman), or occupy any (even second rate) responsible post in government. Never ever a position in the Party organization. Native Party members needed special permission to marry a repatriate, and often

the request was turned down. When and if permitted, the Party member thereafter during his career ran the risk of encountering obstacles for advancement and promotion in Party position or government office. His determination to marry an "outsider" when the Party objects would often cause him to be reprimanded and even demoted. The big irony lies in the fact that while intermarriage was discouraged between native Armenians and newcomers, the practice of intermarriage between natives of different races and nations, and creeds were deliberately encouraged. As a result native Armenians would wed Russians, Georgians, even Azerbaijanians of the Islamic faith with the blessings of the government. So the bigotry in this case was intra-racial rather than inter-racial.

Once I had been granted the degree of Candidate of Sciences I felt more confident and experienced enough to overcome the discriminatory barriers which persisted because of my status of a repatriate-outsider, like a stigma impossible to efface. Having tactfully refused to become a Party member and condescend to their multiple demands, in spite of all the finesse I had used, they still were disatisfied of my persistent stand, and I continued to encounter hinderances in my endeavors. However, at the price of tremendous efforts and stubborn determination, with moments of discouragement and frustration, I, nevertheless, succeeded publishing a good number of studies and articles which appeared in leading Soviet publications. As the number of my published works increased, stirred interest and acquired recognition in circles unbiassed, I became known as an accountable expert in Middle Eastern Affairs. Some of my works were listed in the Commemorative Volume of the Academy of Sciences of Soviet Armenia, published on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of its establishment. Having left the country a short while before the date of its publication, my name was omitted, except for one of my works, which was in circulation in the Diaspora and translated into Arabic.

Commenting on some of my works, in the Commemorative Volume the reviewer states; "based on a wealth of statistical data these studies: 'The Struggle for Oil', 'Arab Oil Conferences' and still many others, demonstrate the increase in strength and determination of the Arabs in their struggle to acquire economic independence and further develop the prospects of growth of their own economy..."[1]

Before this, at various times, for their own ends, for their own

propaganda objective, some of my achievements were echoed, and perhaps in an overly complimentary tone, in releases and reports destined to appear in the Armenian press for Diasporan consumption. And, each time this was done they particularly emphasized "special patronage" granted to the newcomers by the Soviet government in promoting their "talents". This was intended to make a point, that the newcomers under the capitalistic regime were denied of the opportunity to expand their skills.

Pursuing this same objective of propaganda, in a book devoted to the 40th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, and entitled SOVIET ARMENIA, THE OFFSPRING OF THE GREAT OCTOBER [2] the author Souren Tovmassian who was in the 1950's the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Soviet Armenia, in the chapter describing the great successes of the program of socialization, he also underscored the successes registered by the repatriates in their new homeland. On the list of repatriates who had achieved success my name was mentioned as one of the select few. This was done, I was certain, not because of his appreciations of my accomplishments but rather on the assumption that my name as the other ones mentioned in the book would create favorable reverberations in the Diaspora. In this Machiavellian scheme special consideration was given to the popularity, influence and prestige commanded by each of the selected in the communities of their origin.

The snarling irony in this whole situation was that just about the same time I was being complimented for my achievements in the First Secretary's book, I was being severely criticized and reprimanded for my ideological blunders in my book THE STRUGGLE FOR OIL, and reproached sternly for not having yet set myself free from the remnants of bourgeois thinking, after so many years of Marxist training. To make matters worse, the critical review appeared in the May 1953 issue of the most influential official organ of the Communist Party of Soviet Armenia, LENINIAN UGHIOV (With Lenin's Path), a publication expressing the official views of the Communist Party, and as such, considered to be infallible. As a result, from the very outset it became clear to me that I would be denied the right of recourse, to defend my stand and respond to the criticism. This gainsay, popping up from the same source, the Central Committee of the Communist Party, could possibly be explained by the fact that while the complimentary appreciations in the First Secretary's book was destined for

external consumption, the criticism in the Party's Organ was a local attempt to build a case for a specific purpose. This is the kind of society where so very often the logic, the rationale, the relevant, the germane are ignored when there is the evident dimension of personal animosity or rivalry, or again some other Machiavellian consideration, as there was in this case.

In the absence of serious specific ideological errors the criticism dealt with trivial generalities. The whole review consisted of a series of unsubstantiated formulations, in which the Soviets are so expert, and a vast number of epithets poured upon me, ending the onslaught with their favorite cliche of the existence of "bourgeois influence". A reproach, which according to their pathological imagination is invariably befitting to all newcomers. What was most irritating about this shallow review was its author's arrogant pretension of an omniscient perception of the theories of Marxism, and biased presumption that the newcomer must be deficient, no matter how successfully he had completed the courses at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. If he had in mind the ambiguous nature of Marxist theories, then the natives would be as vulnerable to errors as much as the newcomers. But then who from among the native Party members would dare to admit the ambiguity of a theory which is considered the basic "catechism" of their ideology. This is the kind of stand which implicitly rejects the normality of debates of dissenting views, it breeds a malaise when one dares to disagree with set doctrines.

This was the core around which pivoted, in this case the mounted scenario of this unspirited group who were instructed to set upon me, no matter how diligently I had forced myself to comply with set guidelines of Marxist principles in my writings.

One flaw presented under a magnified lens, which was not of a political nature, was a certain lack of smoothness in style. This was due, of course, to the fact that there exist two main dialects (better yet branches) in the Armenian language, each highly developed and having its own grammatical rules and highly calibrated literary expression. They are: Western Armenian, spoken and written in all areas west of a line spread from the valley of Ararat north-west to the shores of the Black Sea, and further west to the shores of the Mediterranean; and the Eastern Armenian, spoken and written mainly east of that line, in present Armenia and Persia. In Persia (Iran), from time immemorial there existed a large and active Armenian community. Because of the fact that Wes-

tern Armenia was under the yoke of Turkish usurpers, and as a result of their atrocities and the 1915 genocide, the survivors who had emigrated to foreign lands and their offsprings use the Western Armenian vernacular.

The reviewer in his attempt to point out errors of a political nature, having not found a serious one, in a roundabout manner mentions a paragraph from my book which discusses the role played by the Burma Oil Company in the early days of Middle East oil exploration. This company's main center of operations in those years was in Burma. The mere reference to the name of the company operating primarily in that country, in a book destined principally to the study of oil resources in the Middle East, apparently stirred the pathological imagination of this demagogue reviewer to use it as ammunition, in the absence of more substantial ones, for his assaults. Here is how he reasoned: "if the author (referring me) of this book mentions Burma when the subject under discussion is the Middle East oil, and finds connection between these two areas, why then he (referring me) is making that political blunder by ignoring to mention the Chinese Peoples' Republic"? Evidently his assumption was to fabricate a connection if even it did not exist. With this criticism, the reviewer himself committed blunders, not one, but two. First failing in his geography lesson; second, ignoring the facts. This was still the period when the love affair between these two major communist countries was in full swing.

These sorts of lame conclusions filled the review and it became still more puzzling when it was clear that the criticism was signed by a certain John Guiragossian, a young Party member from the staff of the editorial office of the magazine. It was in actual fact an assignment dictated by higher placed sources. These were not stupid people, well educated and intelligent, they had a hidden motive, yet they did not wish to identify themselves with this parody, for the mere sake of proving a point with the use of demagoguery. They prefereed to remain behind the scene, leaving the "honor" of authorship to their rookie Party member.

The review appearing in the prestigious Party magazine was a serious covert signal to serve notice that my stubborn resistence not to yield to their demands would ultimately lead to the destruction of my career. In line with their traditional policy of intimidation this was an attempt to create an atmosphere of fear and uneasiness to force me to concede to the pressure. It was, however, the Khrushchevian period of relative liberalism, the risk of being mowed down was substantially reduced. And there was no doubt in everybody's mind that we, my editor and I, would have found our way to Siberia, possibly even physically destroyed, had Stalin been still alive.

Later events came to confirm our doubts that there was a hidden motive in the minds of the schemers. Eventually it became clear that it was a two-prong assault targetted: one, towards my person. After my prolongued resistence to cooperate with the MGB operatives, they became so exasperated that evidently decided to warn me once and for all about the upcoming punishment. For, each time they had attempted to give me an assignment, I, in the most urbane and suave manner, and without outright refusal, tactfully avoided becoming a participant in their morbid game by manipulating with empty promises, outwitting the experts in their own turf. My limited weaponry, pretense and restraint, irritated them all the more. Out of patience, they ceased buying that guise any longer. They were particularly enraged at my audacious refusal, during a final encounter, to collaborate with them. Since then my tactful avoidance had created a sort of *"modus-vivendi"*, which was saving face, and apparently they were not so eager to force me, as they still believed that my influence in the Diaspora was not yet totally tarnished.

The second target for their assault was my editor, Ardavazt Y., who in the early days after the revolution when idealism was still the attracting force (when the Soviet regime hadn't yet externalized its blunders) was assigned to the post of Commissar for Cultural Affairs (equivalent of Minister of Education). The First Secretary of the Communist Party of Soviet Armenia was then Aghassi Khanjian, who was later murdered by order of Stalin. Ardavazt Y. too, as all the other unbending officials in high position, in turn, was not spared from the Stalinist purges of the thirties. He had done time, seventeen years, in a Siberian camp. After Stalin's death and Khrushchev's advent, Ardavazt Y. back from exile had been reinstated in the Party and commanded respect and high esteem in the higher circles of the government as a victim of the purges. However, there existed an old personal feud between him and the editor in chief of the Party Organ, Ato Atoian. This parallel assault directed against a native and distinguished Party member with an impeccable past (in spite of his time of exile, since he was a victim of the purges) generated controversy and dissension among the

Party intelligentzia and created a partisan division, an imbroglio never seen before. Our adversaries, even though from the Central Committee circles, did not command the exclusive support of all Party members, specifically those from the Academy of Sciences.

John Guiragossian, the author of the critique was a young Party member on his way up. Ostensibly very ambitious. Through his overall behavior one could have safely guessed that at that early stage he was one of those who entertain the weird surmise that the means justify the end. Under Soviet bureaucratic structure merit plays only a minor role. To succeed, one must have connections. Nepotism is the name of the game. Or else, one has to be a dull careerist, and every so often a conscienceless informer.

It wasn't clear to me in what category should I have placed John Guiragossian, but with successive and uninterrupted promotions, he eventually reached to the top position of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Soviet Armenia. A historian by educational background, he did not pursue his vocation as such. Was it that he had not the academic competence? My own impression was that he had. But as it seemed he chose the easier and more promising path and upon graduation he became a Party worker: an agitator, a propagandist. After a short period roaming around and fulfilling petty Party assignments, he then found his way into the editorial office of the Party Organ. Temporarily assigned on minor duties, the review of my book, was an opportunity for him to come to the fore, as, having been instructed from above to blast on my work, he was doing something really important for his sponsors. As later it became crystal clear the whole scenario was mounted by the MVD, MGB system. To add a last note to the "biography" of John, in the late 1970's he was appointed as one of the Soviet government representatives at the United Nations. During his stay in New York part of his activities consisted reaching the Armenian-American community. He organized conferences, lectured on Armenian history. He, often, turned the lectures into propaganda functions. However, having read some of his most recent works I was very much impressed. These were important contributions in the study of the events in Turkish-Armenian relations of the nineteenth century and early twenties. Apparently over the years he had matured intellectually and morally. The last years of his life his position as a high Soviet official and Party member evidently did not interfere to become a respected scholar of the Armenian Question. In the past he had hurted me, but I have no rancor. For

what he did later in his life, I have but deep respect.

As has been said, this was a transitional period from the Stalinist era to the Khrushchevian of relative liberalism. A good omen for us, my editor and me. The fact that the assault came from above and the criticism aired through the Official Organ of the Party did not deter some of the objective thinkers and audacious ones from the Academic circle to side with us, and to our surprise a polemic started which lasted for quite a while. And perhaps because of that the impact of this "explosive" criticism did not go beyond the calibre of a popgun. All their seemingly "earthshaking" disclosures of "errors" evaporated in thin air when a favorable review appeared in a Moscow magazine, a no less prestigious bimonthly of a more academic character and of a wider -- All-Union -- readership, the SOVIETSKOYEH VOSTOKOVEDENIEH, (Soviet Orientalism).

The authors of this review, two researchers from the Academy of Sciences of USSR (All-Union) in Moscow, by virtue of their academic credentials and specialization, were considered to be more competent and expert in the subject matter than John Guiragossian and his sponsors. The Moscow reviewers having no knowledge of the real motive behind the scenario of intimidation and having no personal reason to discredit me, were far more objective in their evaluation, and evidently were basing their comments on the merits of the work. The abundance of statistical materials attracted their attention. Since the study was based on primary sources, largely foreign materials a feature lacking in the works of the native researchers due to their deficiency in foreign languages, this became in the opinion of the reviewers the most significant advantage of the book over other similar works.

The Institute of Middle Eastern Affairs was organized in early 1950's at the initiative of the then vice-president of the Academy, academician Meguerdich N., and with the joint participation of the then only Turcologist, actually a misnomer, senior researcher Yervand S. and myself as a junior partner during its inception. Immediately after, we started hiring from the new graduates of the University of Erevan, mainly history majors who had specialized in the Middle Eastern countries. The first one hired was a young repatriate from Iran with the unusual name Hamlet. He was a shrewd character, better yet a very skilfull cunning feline. He had that innate aptitude in the art of intrigue, seldom seen in individuals

who had not had the special training that professional cabals would have. He served well, and apparently to the complete satisfaction of his "master", the head of the Department, vice-president Meguerdich N. Although because of his two-faced character at certain times he even harmed his sponsor, Meguerdich N.

The vice-president by nature was not that bad a fellow after all, but he did have a weakness, the fear of losing his position, for rivalry between high placed government workers and in the academic area was rampant. In his efforts to safeguard his office he could not afford remain passive. Hamlet had all the qualities to become his personal informant. Even though I had no conclusive proof I always was wary with Hamlet lest he might have had connections with the MGB organization. He, every so often, was too bold expressing his views, and showed no fear of repercussions, leading many of us to suspect that he was setting a trap to catch the most gullibles from among our co-workers. Within the lapse of a short time he was promoted to the position of administrative secretary of the Institute of Middle Eastern Affairs, an unusually high position for a repatriate. The latest I heard about this person was that after having obtained his doctoral degree, apparently continuing his intrigues, the amount of harm he caused to his colleagues eventually boomeranged back and he lost his position, and his dire activities came to an end.

Among my native friends from the academic circles, there was a history professor from the University of Erevan who paid frequent visits to our Institute. He had an enormous sense of humor and an unusual temerity for a native and a Party member in expressing his views with complete candor. Every time we met he had a new anecdote, often critical of the system. For quite a long period I couldn't decide how to react with him. I enjoyed his company very much indeed, and had the intuition that he was not attempting to catch me in an unguarded moment. Besides, whenever I was reprimanded by the MGB operatives for my failures to serve them, nothing came up during our discussions to suggest that this friend had ever reported a slip of my tongue or an uncautious indiscretion.

When Stalin was still alive in all aspects of life everybody was put in a strait jacket, contacts with the outside world was nil; foreign literature, films, etc., so strictly censored that they were almost unavailable. The films in the movie theaters depicted mainly life in a kolkoz or sovkhoz, the hero being invariably the kolkhoz

nik while the vilain a descendant of the kulak, former landowner. In the factories it was the triumph of the common worker over the engineer or technician of bourgeois origin. On the battlefields it was the victory of the Soviet army over the Nazi intruders, and earlier in history the victories of the Red army over the Western interventionists in the aftermath of the October Revolution. Redundant and painfully boring movies. Beyond doubt this was the reason why the number of cinema goers was not very impressive during those days.

Rarely, whenever there was a foreign film running, which certainly had passed the strictest censorship, the number of cinema goers jumped up. The lines at the box offices were so long they could be compared with those of the breadlines. It was during one such occasion that all the cinemas in town were running a French production of Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables". As expected, my friend, who never hid his dislike for local productions, didn't miss this show. But he was utterly disappointed. Not because the production was poor and the actors inept, quite the contrary, on that score he was impressed. He was disappointed because the tragedy pictured was less sinister than the tragedies Soviet people were experiencing in life almost on a daily basis. After the show he rushed back to see me. His first words were: "Our government's attempt to use outside evidence to persuade us that the capitalist world is oppressive and unjust to the poor is not a smart move". He paused for a minute and added: "we are not that dumb. We know very well by our own personal experience that worse injustices are committed daily right here in front of our eyes".

Obviously my reaction was a restrained smile. In spite of the fact that he already had inspired confidence, I still preferred to be cautious. At hindsight, I believe my good friend had found in me a mooring, a safe anchorage whenever he was on the brink of desperation. He needed to cool his nerves. Apparently I had inspired confidence. Besides, the fact that as a non-Party member myself, my credibility would be questioned if I ever reported against him, was the key of his security.

In the aftermath of Stalin's death, even before Khrushchev's historical speech denouncing the dire crimes of the one-time venerated Leader, in that interim period of complete uncertainty in the political atmosphere, this friend of mine, before anyone else bursted in exultation and expressed his feelings with an unprecedented boldness. This poor credulous fellow in his jubilance was too

and asked us to call. It was Stepan who came to the phone and informed that the party wouldn't start unless we joined them. There was no way out. We went and were given the red carpet treatment. The reason? The Georgians, having not had quite the same dire fate as the Armenians, they did not have communities of their nationals dispersed all over the world. So for them, the newcomers from foreign lands became object of their curiosity.

The reception was warm and friendly, the table epicurian. We were literally pampered. The abundance of food and the elegant culinary presentation equalled what we had experienced in the early days of our arrival in Erevan when we were invited at Kevork Kh.'s house. Mores, traditions, lifestyle being very similar for all of the people in the Caucasus, the party proceeded in much the same manner as those we had the occasion to see in Armenia when we were invited by the same "class" of people.

According to the best of their tradition the drinking competition started as soon as we sat at the table. At such parties drinking becomes an exercise for the male table partners to outdo the next person. They believe it enhances their macho image. As always it was not hard to find a reason for an additional toast. Despite Stalin's *post-mortem* official demotion by the then reigning leader Khrushchev, the Georgians remained faithful to the memory of their native son. So the dinner started with a toast to the memory of Stalin. This was no more permissible. And, we could have ignored it. But in deference to our host we drank to the memory of the man we hated most. Cheerful people and frivolous by character, the Georgians to show their superiority over the Armenians they try to compete in an area they excel most. They are proud for their ability to resist to the effects of alcohol. And they make it a big deal. Perhaps this was the reason why our host was so insistent to fill and refill our glasses with a variety of the most potent liquors: wine, vodka, brandy, etc. mixing them at times. Stepan became aware of their intention and whispered to our wives in Armenian to fill our glasses with fruit juices or soda diluting the liquor we were forced to drink. We used our Armenian ruse to match them. By the end of the dinner party the Georgians were all knocked down. Stepan and I, could still stand on our feet with some help from our wives. If we ignore for a moment the traditional mutual animosity between our two peoples, the Georgians are very pleasant to feast with.

In his early forties, to all appearances a healthy, physically

strong man, Stepan a few years later died of a lung cancer. He was not even a smoker. A good person, his image remains vivid in my memory.

I had another native colleague, G.H., a good friend too. In all probability he is still alive. For understandable reasons I have no contact with him. We are living in different, mutually inimical worlds now. He was a Soviet army veteran from the Second World War. Wounded in one leg, he had deep scars from his ankle up to the hip, and suffered intermitent pains, especially in the winter. I had a slipped disc having carried heavy weights during the construction of our house. We were both receiving hot mineral mud bath treatment. Every summer we would go to one of the health spas, in one of the resort towns of the southernmost region of Russia, where there are numerous sanatoria, most of them from czarist times.

Complexes of graceful mansions and buildings located in beautiful parks, and surrounded with parterres full of colorful flowers, reminders of the splendors of the old aristocratic Russia. Soviet propaganda pretends that under their regime these facilities are serving the working class. One more lie in the pile of other lies. In actual fact these facilities are avilable and reserved for only a select few: high government and Party members, academicians, professors, artists, writers, musicians, etc., and also some of the outsiders from this "caste" having either high connections or the dexterity, the pecuniary means, and the know-how to grease few palms. My friend and I were senior researchers at the Academy of Sciences, but still we were not part of those highly privileged who could easily acquire free or inexpensive *"putyovkas"* (special vouchers), which according to the rules and bylaws we were entitled to. These *"putyovkas"* are procured by the Trade Unions, which are also responsible for arranging and purveying tickets for Soviet tourists wishing to travel abroad, whenever permission is granted from the higher authorities. In this sense they act as travel agents. In many other aspects also they differ fundamentally from the Labor Unions of the capitalist world. The Trade Unions in the Soviet Union are very much centralized and structured upon the model of the Communist Party, and in actual practice they are totally subordinated to the rules and orders of the Party. In that sense they represent and protect the interests of the Party and the government rather than the interests of the working people. Under

the situation, strikes are forbidden, and in those rare circumstances when such unrests occur they are invariably crushed in bloodshed, while the Trade Union operatives join the government's action.

For the treatment of our ailments we had the choice of three famous health resorts: Pitigorsk, Zhelezhnovodsk, or Kislovodsk. All our efforts to obtain *"putyovkas"* in Erevan ended without success. We assumed that as senior researchers from the Academy who hadn't thus far received any benefit from our long time membership in our Trade Union, we were by that time and by that virtue already entitled to some service. As a last resort my colleague, more experienced than I in such matters, suggested to go to Pitigorsk over the other health resorts, where he had been previously treated and had acquired some connections who might possibly help us to buy a couple of *"putyovkas"* on the black market for a higher price than the official rate. The first day in Pitigorsk, my friend G.H., after having secured lodging spent much of his time finding the middle man on whom all his hopes rested. In spite of his resourcefulness it took the whole day long. He procured two *"putyovkas"* for a two-week course of therapy in one of the spas of the city. The tickets were, however, issued in Moscow and the names of the legitimate bearers were Russian, while our identification cards and our physical features showed plainly that we were Armenians. We never knew how our contact had procured them, whether he had stolen, or purchased from the owners? But then we cared less. We had what we wanted.

We started our treatments, and for the first couple of days the process of our therapy went smoothly with no hindrance. We were rubbed and coated with mineral mud having curative qualities, so hot we could barely stand. We were then wrapped tightly with a sort of impermeable padcloth. We had to lie immobile in the same position for a good fifteen minutes.

In the middle of the first week the head of that section of the sanatorium became aware of our subterfuge and dashed suddenly in our cubical loudly reprimanding us for having cheated the system by using *"putyovkas"* that didn't belong to us. The head of that department, a nurse by training, was a woman as most of the rest of the staff were. At that point we had just removed the mud packs and were taking showers to wash away the remains of the dirt that persistently adhered to our naked bodies. It is true that we were

being attended by female nurses, and were gradually becoming used to the idea, still quite odd for us people of Caucasus, but then being reprimanded by such an arrogantly clamorous woman was too much of an affront. We instinctively tried to cover some parts of our nude bodies with our hands. In Russia it is a very old tradition in the spas to be attended by female nurses. This is such an accepted routine that in the process of therapy, contacts between opposite sexes is no reason to be bashful, or... In that awkward position of complete nudity we were dumb struck by that unexpected outburst. We could not retort. Blushing and humiliated we didn't even attempt to explain ourselves. We had been denied from our rightful claim to obtain *"putyovkas"* through the legitimate channels, consequently we were coerced into this sort of a deceitful action. Now so many years have passed since that incident, every time I recall I can't help retaining my laughter.

When we finally escaped that woman's harangue and dressed ourselves, we rushed right back to the middleman's home. He took our fury calmly and promised to repair the damage. And so he did. We didn't figure out how, but it worked. We went back to the same sanatorium and continued the remaining course of our therapy without further interference.

As a general rule the restaurants in the Soviet Union were, and probably still are dirty, and the service perfunctory. Each time we went to a restaurant my resourceful friend would improvise a superchery to have better food and service. One day we went to the restaurant of the railroad station of the city. This was known to be the best one in town, because it served foreign tourists traveling by train on their way south, who would make a brief stop at this health resort of which the Soviets were very proud.

In spite of all my years in the Soviet Union, apparently, I still retained that air of an outsider. Perhaps my gestures, my overall demeanor, manners, possibly my lack of fluency in the Russian language, my accent, and above all my accoutrements, remnants from my Diasporan past, were enough to impress people. Not yet quite settled down, G.H. suddenly left the table to go to the kitchen of the restaurant. I immediately suspected that he was up to something, on his way to smooth-talk someone. And indeed that was what he did. He came back from that expedition rubbing his palms in a satisfied manner. He had told the chef that I was a communist delegate from overseas, and it would be politically wise to serve me

with a special menu. The result? The food was succulent, the wine a good vintage, the service impeccable. At my friend's signal, the chef approached to our table to ask whether we were satisfied. I responded in French to express my enchantment, and G.H. played the role of an interpreter, feigning to understand my "discourse". He didn't know a word of French. Mine was a casual recitation. His, was an improvisation suitable to the situation. Yet, I felt somewhat embarrassed, but in face of the *"fait-accompli"*, I had no choice but to play my part in the game as best as I could.

The following summer we went back to Pitigorsk for the same kind of therapy, accompanied by our families. We drove by car all the way from Erevan to Pitigorsk. The distance from Erevan to Pitigorsk is not that great. Perhaps, if my memory does not fail me, not more than 400 to 450 miles. But then the topography and as a consequence the climatic variations of the regions we crossed was so treacherous that the roads are very often impassable even during the more clement seasons of the year. In the Soviet Union and especially in the minor Republics, they do not have the same kind of uniform interstate and intrastate highways as we have in the USA, with rest areas and service stations. For military-strategic purposes the best maintained segment on our route to our destination, was the one extending between the northern boundary of Georgia and southern region of Russia, crossing the Kazbek chain of mountains, known as the *"Voyenieh Gruzinski Doroga"* (Georgian Military Highway). Even so, the severe winters on top of these mountains every year leave their tolls. And, so very often, the snow thaw and torrential rains wash down entire segments of the roads, small bridges, and the entrance of tunnels and passes are blocked with rocks and boulders falling from higher elevations.

The month was July. That portion of our journey from Erevan to Tibilisi and thence to a small town not far from the Georgian capital, Mtzkhet, went without major incident, except, perhaps, for a couple of flat tires. We drove the winding roads of the mountainous region of Dilijan, still in Armenian territory, with no specific hardships, at that segment the weather was sunny and clear. In Mtzkhet, we spent the night in a small hotel. The town is not in any sense worth dwelling upon, except, perhaps, for the beauty of its nature, surrounded by small hills with an abundance of variegated vegetation. Early the next morning we continued our journey northbound towards the mountains of Kazbek. On our way,

we either had to pass through, or whenever possible, bypass a number of small towns and villages. Some of them inhabited by Georgians, yet still many others by the innumerable small ethnic groups of people spread all over these regions of Northern Georgia, peoples indigenous to these regions from historical times, having their own separate centuries' old traditions and mores, their own languages, and very often their own religious sects, so different from the domineering Georgians, under whose political jurisdiction they remain. Just to mention a few of them, these are: the Osets, the Ingushes, the Chechens, the Kabardina-Balkars, the Mengrels, etc. *"En passant"* let me mention that Beria, that long time head of the political police, was a Mengrel.

In spite of the fact that we were already in the middle of the summer, the snow accumulated on some of the highest elevations of the Kazbek was still firm on the ground, forming high walls or cliffs, of perhaps ten to fifteen feet high, on both sides of the roads, which were not totally freed from snow, except for the narrow paths shoveled open by the army corps of engineers with the help of reconditioned tractors. At certain points so narrow were the paths it was only possible for one vehicle to pass through. Oncoming trucks and cars had to take turns. Once in a while, a vile, licentious truck driver wouldn't wait his turn and would drive right at on uncoming vehicle, heedlessly endangering both the passengers of the opposite car and himself, jamming passage, creating unnecessary aggravation and delay. Fortunately the traffic in these almost deserted regions is so sparse that such incidents are relatively rare. In fact, and in most instances in case of need, most of the drivers courteously lend a helping hand. And indeed, for large distances on top of the Kazbek the serpentine roads are but frail reminders that some sort of a civilization neighbors not far from this huge mountain wilderness.

For hours, very long hours, we saw not even a single village, let alone a human being, and the distant prospects of human habitations were veiled by a shade of mist. The barrenness of the surroundings were eloquent proof that no human hands had dared to disturb the natural order of these primeval regions beyond that narrow strip of road, which in the midst of these gigantic masses were like a finespan thread. Yet one would never tire of looking with admiration at the mighty wild beauty and the grandeur of these surroundings. In this wilderness, even the total absence of traffic competing for roadspace did not in anyway ease the pace of

our journey, because the roads at these elevations became more and more brutally torturous, and our solitude frightening. Gnawing at our minds was the dire prospect of an accident or malfunction of our car, in which case the chance of a rescue or help would be hours and hours away, perhaps even days away. In the Soviet Union there are no traffic patrol cars, neither do they have tow trucks or service stations to rely on in case of emergency. In such cases the driver is left to his fate. For long journeys one has to carry canisters of extra gas in his trunk. One has also to carry a kit of tools, and be handy enough at least for small repairs. Truck drivers are required to be their own mechanics. There are no "triple A" like organizations to call for help or rescue. However, as is very often the case, congenial truck drivers often come to the aid of bereft drivers. At lower elevations where we would sporadically meet a shepherd or two with their herds of sheeps grazing on the slopes, or again when we noticed a distant lonely habitation we did not suffer that feeling of fear.

We were lucky. Other than that couple of flat tires as I mentioned earlier we did not have any serious problem with the car, in spite of the fact that on the eve of our departure, we had been told there were torrential rains in some parts of the Kazbek chain of mountains flooding the rivers, washing away the asphalt roads. As we continued to our final destination we had to overcome not only all of these obstacles but also our fears of a mishap. This was, at moments, excruciating experiences, but once we reached our destination, I who had done all the driving without help, forgot my fears much sooner than the others and, in fact, felt a sensation of pride for having successfully overcome nature's obstacles as well as the many other inconveniences of Soviet life hardships. I was young, and this became for me an adventure I did not regret. My friend, a couple of years younger than me, and a well hardened war veteran for that matter, was afraid, and did not wish to join us on our way back. He and his wife and son made the journey back by train. I had never been in an army, neither in a battle situation, perhaps this was the reason why I was less fearful of accident or injury, having not had the personal experience of that kind of serious physical hurt.

This second year of hot springs treatments, our therapy went without any particular incident worth dwelling upon. We had acquired the experience and connection from our first visit enabling us to purchase the *"putyovkas"* in the black market, and this time

without a bearer's name. We had to add our names on them. How did the middle man this time succeed in providing us this sort of open tickets was beyond our comprehension. But then we didn't care to know neither his source nor his method of operation.

Our therapies took away a good portion of the first part of the day. In the afternoons when we were free the two families joined in one of the parks of the town to rest, to chat, and for the kids to frolic. As a general rule we spoke together in Armenian. One day a dowdy middle aged Russian woman sitting next to us on the bench suddenly bellowed at us, reprimanding in the most vulgar terms, so typical of some Russians, for not speaking together in Russian. My friend and his wife, both well educated and very articulate in the Russian language, even more than that turgid yet underbred woman, tried to explain that we are a Union of different races and nationalities, who under Soviet constitution have equal rights including the right to speak our own languages, to promote our own cultures etc., etc. But to no avail. She didn't want to listen. She didn't have the intellect to understand. These kind of incidents happen quite often. Chauvinism flavored with some amount of arrogance is every wit a phenomenon among the domineering Russian people. The intellectuals, more sophisticated, express themselves in a more sly fashion, while the plebeians expose their feelings in a coarse and brutish manner.

On our return journey south to Erevan I preferred to proceed nonstop with only short rests. It took us a good fifteen hours. Considering the torturous conditions of the weather and terrain, not too bad for a distance of 400 to 450 miles. We arrived late at night in Erevan, all of us completely exhausted. Fortunately my ailing back did not cause me much trouble. Apparently my therapy at the spas have had its curative effects. This time only the three of us, my wife, my son and I. As suspected by my quitting friend, conditions were still more forbidding. The month was August, much warmer even at the highest elevations, and the thaw of the masses of snow we had encountered on our previous journey, had started unremittingly giving rise to violent torrents. On a couple of occasions we had to be towed out by helpful truck drivers, once from a muddy pool formed by the erosion of a whole thick layer of the road, while at another time we were aided in passing through a cascade like torrent which had cut a portion of the roadway into separate distant halves. Crossing the elevations of Dilijan, in Armenian territory, on our way north to Pitigorsk in the

month of July the roads were relatively speaking, more yielding, and facile, the day pleasantly cool, crisp and sunny, while on our way back, this was the segment where we had the hardest time in our entire journey. These elevations were covered with a thick layer of descending clouds, forming tense tiers of fog unusual for that season of the year, with visibility at its lowest, perhaps ten feet at best. The serpentine road, with abrupt spirals at certain points, with most of the roadsides dropping off sharply on one side, made driving with such poor visibility not only dangerous but also extremely wearisome. I could make headway only by following closely, perhaps even dangerously closely, a truck preceding us, with its rear red light serving as a faintly visible beacon. I assumed a truck driver would not only have more experience, but also be much more familiar with the roads of this region.

Before embarking on this venture we were cautioned by some friends who knew by previous experience how toilsome our trip would be, especially considering the unusual rigor of the preceding winter. Yet, neither I nor my friend took the warnings seriously, losing sight of, even, our precarious physical conditions -- both of us undertaking this voyage with the objective of receiving special therapy. Words never can be persuasive enough as personal experience itself. The French have a saying: *"Si la jeunesse savait et la viellesse pouvait"*, paraphrasing better than translating this would mean: "if the youth would know (would have the experience, H.J.T.) while the elderly would have the strength...", life would be easier.

Over the years, and especially during the Khrushchev era of relent, the natives no longer feared becoming friendlier in their involvements with the newcomers, and increasingly more outspoken in confiding their true feelings, views, volitions, hopes and aspirations, which were not in essence different from ours, without being apprehensive anymore. There was a visible desire from their part to show us that they were not the bunch of stolids they had appeared to be, without a logic of their own, incapable to commiserate, to befriend. But then when Khrushchev was forced to leave the scene, we gradually sensed that the momentum for reform generated under him had petered out, and there were menacing signs of the perspective of a nascent neo-Stalinism, a step-by-step return to the old order.

There were others with whom I became quite close. A few

commiserated with us even during the dire days of the Stalinist era. One of them was a fine compassionate lady colleague, Arpine B., who during the dark days of the summer of 1949, when mass deportation was in full swing, she helped us avoid panic, and showed genuine concern about our fate. Another one Serguey Kh. who, whenever the two of us were all alone, used to say with a pungent tone: "Hagop! why did you come? We were born here, we had no choice, while you were born in freedom, you definitely made the mistake of your life." He wasn't less Armenian in his feelings than the rest of us, but then he wasn't the kind of brainwashed dopey either, who would think that life at the other side of the "red walls" is an unbearable sequence of misery, as the poundings of Soviet propaganda had succeeded to implant in many minds.

As I, earlier, said, Serguey was the director of the Institute of Economics when I first joined the Academy of Sciences. Inconsistent as it may seem, in such a scornful society where Party haughtiness plays as much a primordial role as racial discrimination and chauvinism, Serguey, though head of the Department, was not a Party member. The only reasons one could surmise were: one, the lack of appropriate cadres. The Stalinist purges of the early 1930's had not spared even high placed Party members, and the rest of the intellectuals from the old order. Result an unprecedented dismemberment of educated and trained professionals. The ones who had till that point outlasted the initial revolutionary storms were the only availables. Two, the Second World War had wiped out the rest of the trained cadres.

Serguey was one of the rare survivors of the sweeping tempests. In spite of his unapprovable social origin they needed his intellect, his knowhow, his experience and services. He was by education and training both an engineer and an economist. Well versed in both of his professions. And when the Academy of Sciences was being organized they couldn't find a better candidate to head the Institute of Economics. Even so, he didn't last very long in that position. After a couple of years he was replaced by the Party secretary of the Institute who was younger. A post revolutionary cadre with not quite the kind of educational background as his predecessor, and still lesser in experience. Yet, he had the advantage of being a Party member and was a former political agitator in the army. The new director of the Institute Ararat M. was not a fiendish person in spite of being a product of the new order. Still

he could not be compared with the former in more than one aspect. In all fairness, during the whole course of my stay at the Institute of Economics under his stewardship I didn't have any reason to suspect him of causing me harm, even though I did not have complete support either. He was inoffensively apathetic towards the newcomers.

Serguey Kh. continued to work at the Institute as a senior researcher and also in his function as member of the Science Committee of the Department. They had taken away his directorship but needed his knowhow and experience. I could not understand, however, why he finally applied to become a member of the Party. It seemed strange that after he had resisted the temptation for so many years, hectic and sanguine years for that matter, he unexpectedly decided to join the Party of a regime he so much abhored. This was too personal a question. I did not dare to ask him the reason for this sudden metamorphosis. A last minute conversion, it was not. That I could be sure. I knew him well enough. Perhaps it was the need of an accommodation, better yet a pressure he could no longer resist with an ailing heart condition and his age approaching sixty. Under Soviet predicament, already an advanced age.

Although not as ceremonial as the ordination of a priest in a church, the procedure of admission into the ranks of the Communist Party reflects some elements of ritual. It was my first experience to be present to this sort of a "consecration". As a general rule the Party meetings are closed to non-Party members. But every so often there are exceptions, particularly when there are specific instructions to be communicated to the citizenry in general -- Party or government official policy, or official interpretation of a specific international political situation. Usually open Party meetings become boring repetitions of propaganda cliches. In an effort to keep pace with the policies of the day, they turn the meetings into sessions of unconvincing analyses of world events based on the percepts of Marxism, which actually means rationalization of the policies of the day according to the whims of the top man at the Kremlin.

Inviting non-Party members to this rituals had, certainly, hidden motives. One of them must have been to underscore the advantages and by that luring many of us to apply for Party membership. Speaking for myself, the effect on me of this ritual was more repulsive than attractive. I saw with my own eyes a respectable

man like Serguey Kh. humiliating himself by admitting past political errors, and being reprimanded by a bunch of stump orators, who because they were Party members were arrogant enough to force him to ask forgiveness. Although it was a curious experience to watch, I was disgusted witnessing the self-abasement of a man I so much respected. And if anyone is to be blamed, it, definitely, was not him but the system itself and its sponsors.

Speaking of rituals, as earlier mentioned, the Russian common people had always been fanatically religious, to the extent of considering the Czar as God's representative on earth. With the advent of communist rule and the outgrowth of atheism, religion had to be replaced by a new form of a "worship" which would require the same amount of dogmatic zeal. Marxist ideology filled the gap. The new rulers took advantage of the naive Russian character to exploit the common peoples stolid ductility by diverting their eagerness for a devotion to a cult towards the ideology and the man at the top. First Lenin and then Stalin, were deified in turn and many became devoted followers, either by virtue of genuine conversion, or out of fear of repercussions. Suchwise Lenin's Mausoleum became the most visited shrine of pilgrimage, next to that, and before Stalin's admonition, his birthplace, the hut he was born in, within the perimeters of the town of Gori, and some other abodes, reminders of his revolutionary past in Tibilisi, Georgia.

Whenever we visited Moscow and had the opportunity to be in the vicinity of Red Square, we witnessed tremendous lines of "pilgrims" waiting, docile and submissive, for their turn to see Lenin's embalmed remains. The view of this herd of people waiting in long lines, for long hours, in the winter under a falling snow or torrential rain, in the summer under a burning sun, with so much resignation, inspired more pity than disgust, and the only incentive we had to visit the Mausoleum, which was mere curiosity, faded instantly. Mere curiosity was not enough of a reason to withstand long hours of waiting to see the cadaver of a person we so much abhored. So we made a point that even if we had the opportunity of easy access, we would not visit this monster's shrine. But it so happened that at one point I had been compelled to visit the second monster's, Stalin's, "fane".

It was in the early 1951, I was still working at the Institute of Economics, when the Academy of Sciences had received a dozen or so tickets from the Central Committee of the Party to be distributed among the different departments for use by its members.

The tickets were for a free tour to Stalin's abodes of his pre-revolutionary days. All the members of the Institute expressed their eagerness to get a ticket and there was a keen competition among them. After long deliberation they all agreed that, I, as a newcomer, would be the best choice to have the opportunity to visit Stalin's birthplace and revolutionary hideouts, and draw from this the edification the natives already possessed. I am not sure though, that their eagerness was genuine, and that their offer was an altruistic gesture. Most probably they had visited the place a number of times, and the whole process was a scenario well played to hide their lack of interest.

A group was formed of over a dozen members, almost an equal number of men and women, all fellow researchers from different Institutes of the Academy of Sciences. It was early in the morning of a spring day with pleasant seasonal weather, when we boarded the train from Erevan to our first stop in Tibilisi, where we had to be transferred to the train heading to Gori, not much distant from the Georgian capital. We arrived at our destination sometime late in the afternoon or early evening, I can't remember precisely the exact time. But at any rate the sites we were intending to visit were already closed. We spent the night in a hotel not too distant from the abode.

The next morning the members of the group were excited and very vocal to show their enchantment for having been given the opportunity to visit the house where the "beloved" (sic) leader was born. This was a hut, a kind of log-cabin with rustic furnitures: a couple of hard wood chairs; an archaic table; two sofas covered with old rugs serving for beds; a kerosene lamp on one corner of the table; kitchen utensils, many of them hanging from the walls; a tin stove which was used to heat the hut and cook the meals; and a few personal articles: a small mirror; a comb; a brush; a few dresses; books, etc. No sanitary conveniences whatsoever: no plumbing, therefore no toilet, no bathroom. As a matter of fact these facilities are lacking even to this date in most of the homes.

When upon the initiative of the Society for the Preservation of Historical Monuments the site had been declared by government decree a historical monument, funds were granted to the Society to undertake the construction of a huge canopy superimposed on the hut to shelter it from the effects of weather and time. This canopy was an imposing Grecian temple-like building, with columns in white marble. The hut received its electric light from this

superstructure. All around the walls in the hut as well as in the superstructure were a row of cabinets containing books, letters and manuscripts, pens, pencils, photographs, all items used by Stalin himself, during the revolutionary period of his life.

On our way back we stopped one day in Tibilisi to visit the hideouts of the Bolshevik activists of pre-revolutionary Russia who had established their center of action in the Trans-Caucasian region in this Georgian capital. While Baku, in Azerbaijan, was then the center of the oil industry, with its own proletariat and steadily rising self-consciousness of the working class, Tibilisi had become the center of finance, commerce, and culture, where the oil magnates of Baku preferred to establish their main residences. Yet Tibilisi, still more than Baku was where a class of intellectuals who came to the fore with socialist "penchants" and Marxist ideas, and as self-assigned leaders of the proletariat took the helm of the movement in both of these big cities.

In Tibilisi, the most interesting of these hideouts was the secret printing house. This was located in the sub-basement of a little house in the outskirts of the town. A most ordinary house not much different from the rest of the dwellings of the same neighborhood, which had as a general rule a surrounding garden with a deep well hidden under thick vegetation and trees. By sub-basement, what I mean is a stretch of space, which is much deeper than the regular basement. A basement under a basement. The entrance of this sub-basement is through the well, a couple of meters over the level of the water. The well also serves as an airshaft for ventilation. The only means of ingress in those days was to sit on the bucket astride the rope and hold tight while the person outside lowered the bucket turning the pulley. Today a special staircase has been built from the regular basement through which the tourists and visitors can step down to the sub-basement. All of the original outfit of this clandestine press are well preserved and religiously kept and cared by the curator of this underground museum. This printing press served in its time to print the then prohibited literature: pamphlets, notices, instructions, appeals, etc.

The potable water of the well was used on regularly and in much the same manner as the people of the neighborhood did with their own for domestic needs, by the "decoy" inhabitants of the house to keep the appearance of an ordinary well. In the art of camouflage this was indeed an ingenious set up. Eventually it was discovered by the Czarist police, but only because an informer

from the inner circle had tipped off. According to our guide, a historian from the Georgian Academy of Sciences, the police had been sceptical that such a set up was possible. To avoid ridicule, before sending anyone into the pit, they lowered a lighted candle tied to a rope. As soon as the lighted candle reached the level of the ingress of the sub-basement, the air current flowing towards the aperture the flame tilted gently inward. The Czarist police also deserved credit for its ingenuity. Throughout this whole tour, this clandestine print-house was for me the most interesting one of the sites we visited, and for that alone the trip was a worthwhile experience.

I cannot recall exactly the date, yet certainly it should have been during the Khrushchevian era of relative relaxation, when the head of the "Secret Division" of the Academy of Sciences, Aghajan M., called me in his office to ask information about a fellow repatriate, Gasbard G., a researcher like myself, but from the Institute of Social Sciences. There was a rivalry going on for some time between him and a fellow researcher from the same Department. This individual, a native researcher, taking advantage of the prevailing overbearing mood towards the repatriates and their vulnerability, in a moment of exasperation filed a slanderous report about the Diasporan activities of Gasbard, as being a former Dashnak sympathizer. Dashnak, as it has been referred to at various instances, is the Party which was ousted from Armenia after the Bolshevik takeover, and still is active in the Armenian Diaspora. I hadn't known Gasbard from Lebanon. But what I did know at that time was that he was a brilliant young researcher who had provoked the jealousy and rivalry of his fellow researchers because of his successes. I knew the head of the "Secret Division" for his fairness and objectivity. I used this fact to give, without fear of repercussion for myself, a favorable report about my fellow repatriate. The gist of my report was that, although I did not know Gasbard that well, I had never been aware of his involvement in anti-Soviet activities abroad. By so doing, without complete involvement, I was at the same time trying to counteract the general discriminatory bias of the native researchers towards their repatriate counterparts. I was determined at that point of relative relaxation to be more bold in my actions, and in this case to exploit Aghajan's favorable disposition towards the repatriates, a quality so incredibly unusual for a man in his position, an MGB man. This was a

tactic I had adopted whenever I was coerced to give a report, whenever I had no other way for escape. My reports were all invariably evasive yet favorable. This was my own battle, my way of militating against the general trend of antagonism towards the newcomers. A hostility much encouraged by the top brass of the Party and the government with their determined objective to build a barrier of "safety" between the repatriates and the natives. By all means they tended to intensify that communication gap which had developed as the natural consequence of the difference of backgrounds, and this because of their paranoic fear that too much contact would open the eyes of the natives about the realities of the outside world.

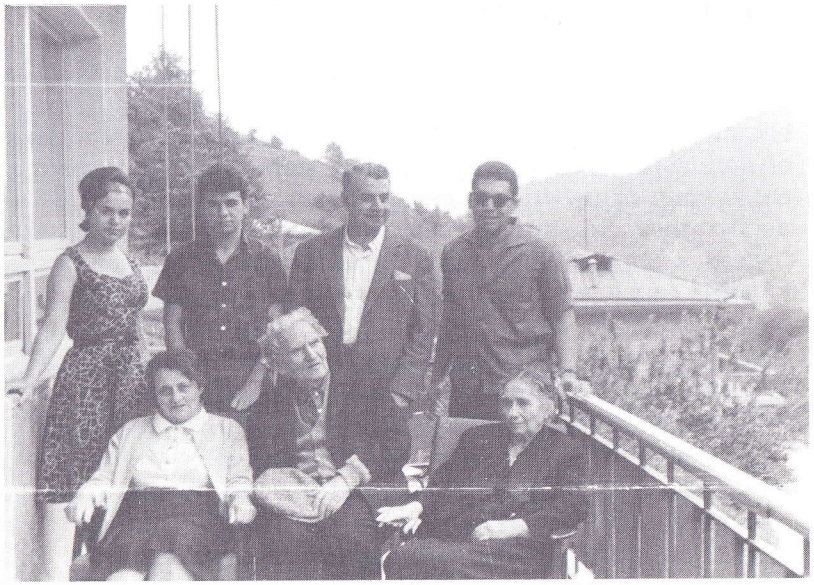
Some months later Gasbard paid a visit to me to express his thanks for the favorable report. I knew the head of the "Secret Division" of being objective and sympathetic towards the newcomers. But I did not know, and never could I realize in the wildest of my imagings that his benign feelings would have reached that extent. Ordinarily, disclosing a report to the subject was risky. This action came to prove that even in such an arrant post there will be, sometime, people with human feelings. It was a rarety, but then they are exceptions to all rules.

There were also a number of other co-researchers with whom, over the years, I had established good relations, with some I became closer than with others, which meant at different degree of mutual trust. And, when I had to leave the country permanently, none of my friends demonstrated ill feelings towards me, neither they did express reprove for the decision I had taken. Instead, a couple of them, used the occasion to exhort me furtively to get in touch with the Diasporan leaders with the suggestion to mount a campain asking the return of our lost territories, starting with the ones in the Soviet Union -- Karabagh and Nakhichevan. The first, 80% of the people being ethnically Armenians, the second, territorially part of the mainland. Because of the aloofness of our Diasporan leaders, I failed to accomplish the mandate.

1-Published in Russian by the Academy of Sciences of Soviet Armenia, under the title of ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF THE ARMENIAN SSR FOR 25 YEARS, (Akademia Nauk Armyanskoy SSR Za 25 Lyet). See page 510.

2-S. N. Tovmassian, SOVIET ARMENIA THE OFFSPRING OF THE GREAT OCTOBER, published by Haypethrat, Erevan, 1957. See page 142. (Sovyetakan Hayastan Medz Hoktemberee Dzenunt).

3-SOVIETSKOYEH VOSTOKOVEDENIEYEH, bi-monthly, issue No. 4, year 1958, page 196; published by the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of USSR, Moscow.



The famous Soviet Armenian painter Mardiros Sarian surrounded by some members of his family, in his villa at the summer resort of Dilijan. At the background the author and his son visiting the Sarians.

5

EVENTS HARD TO FORGET

The intermittent fears of the risk of deportation, and the monotony of the indoctrination were broken off with intervals of some joyous occasions. The happiest event in our lives since our arrival was the birth of our son. Yet it was an unexpected event, never planned for. Before our repatriation, during the first four years of our marriage we were in constant move between Lebanon and Egypt, and wanted to enjoy each other free of the responsibilities of parenthood. We were not against the idea of becoming parents, but rather we felt having ample time still ahead of us. After we repatriated, in face of a predicament when nobody was feeling safe from the risk of deportation, with our hopes shattered, our future perspectives ruined, our initial plans collapsed, so we decided with great reluctance, to desist from our resolution of parenthood. It was no more a postponment as we originally were contemplating but an ouright resolute decision of renunciation. Yet, in spite of all precautionary measures, our son came to life on a Thursday morning at 7a.m., July 15, 1948, unexpected, but all the same, the most welcome uninvited "intruder" in our lives, causing us tremendous joy, giving new meanings to our purposeless lives.

The first four months, in spite of all the regular positive signs, we were not quite sure of my wife's pregnancy. We were so certain of the measures we had taken. They had been effective for so many years. And then, there was the wrong diagnosis of Dr. Leon A. suspecting that an abdominal fibroma was being developed. This erroneous diagnosis became a cause of many sleepless nights of worries for me. Fortunately my wife lighthearted by nature, didn't take it as hard as I did. The prospect of losing my best companion was such a gruesome feeling that I could not figure out how I would be able to cope with the situation.

To some extent I felt relieved when our neighbor's grandmother insisted that my wife's symptoms were all signs of a pregnancy. We, finally, decided to ignore Dr. Leon A.'s diagnosis and go for a second opinion to a creditable gynecologist. The gynecologist was positive, he was even able to determine the approximate month of pregnancy. And indeed it was the fourth month. The doctor even heard the heartbeat of the baby in the womb.

Five months later our son was born. Contrary to the doctor's

prognosis he came to world a week or so earlier. He was perhaps too impatient to see the "rosy" world of the Soviets, as we once were. As a consequence of his haste we hadn't made the necessary arrangements for a quick transfer to the hospital. The emergency service was late, the gynecologist refused to assist the delivery at home, since by Soviet law all deliveries should be made in the hospital, and left my wife unattended. He wanted to be on the safe side at the price of the endangerment of two human lives. When belatedly the emergency ambulance arrived, it was too late and a young emergency personnel attended the delivery most successfully. She was a young nurse as liable as the doctor by the same medical codes. We were fortunate, the process went easy and normal, and no complications incurred. During the delivery I was absent from the scene, the neighbors only present were of tremendous help. I was roaming the streets, panicked in search of help, running from one emergency service to another, back again to the doctor's house begging him to change his mind and come for help. We owe much more to that young nurse and our neighbors who assisted her, and God knows they all did a mighty splendid job, perhaps better than it would have been in a hospital where the nurses are often less compassionate doing their job as a daily routine.

The same year, a few months after our son was born, we were unpleasantly surprised to receive a cablegram informing us that my parents were on the next boat on their way to Batumi. This was too an unexpected news. Apparently my codified letter had not edify them about the true situation. We were convinced that our prolonged silence would have served as an effective pointer indicating our disappointment and discontent so visibly contrasting with our initial feelings of enthusiasm. While at the same time our suggestion to wait until the house we had planned was built were clues explicit enough for them to grasp what we were in a covert manner trying so hard to convey. They certainly knew, being my parents, that by nature so communicative in the past, I had never failed to write my letters with regular frequency whenever away from home.

It also was an upsetting surprise to learn that just before boarding the ship my sister and her husband had already obtained a divorce on the grounds of incompatibility after a series of heated disputes about whether they should or should not repatriate. Apparently my mother and sister were the only ones who had grasped the meaning of my letter, and were insistently opposing the idea. While my sister's husband, being one of the blinded enthusiasts, as I once was, chose to sacrifice everything, including a happy family life over his uncompromising decision to repatriate. Ironically, on the final count they all repatriated, and to make matters still more nonsensical they all boarded the same boat, on the same date, with the same caravan.

The damage was done, there was no way at that stage to divert them and still less sense in lamenting over the havoc. So my first reaction was to find the best way to warn them about the possible abuses they might expect to encounter during their transit period in Batumi. I was busy with my work, and was not able to take a leave of absence to go and meet them. I, therefore, requested a friend, a fellow repatriate himself who was still unemployed to go and meet my parents in Batumi, and pass them the necessary warnings and instructions to be able to cope with their new situation.

My folks, after an exhaustive journey, arrived in Erevan sometime in mid October 1948. I had hard time to find them a decent room. The Reception Committee had assigned for them one room in a refurbished former stable located in a remote area at the outskirts of the city. One room for four persons: my father, my mother, my sister and her nine year old daughter. One room separated from the next by a thin wooden panel with many cracks wide enough to be able to see the next door tenants, at times in their most intimate situation. No running water, no toilet, no kitchen, just a room with two main walls, two separation panels, a small window, and a crooked door. The facilities were located in the yard for the general use of all the neighborhood. There were always at certain hours long lines in front of the toilets and water taps, people waiting for their turn. This often caused confrontations. Needless to say, I could not let my parents live under those conditions, especially when mine were by comparison more comfortable. As a last resort I again had to ask Kevork Kh.'s help who once again came to our rescue by disposing a room in his own dwelling, one with all the comforts. My parents stayed with the Kevorks for a few months until we moved to our house still not quite yet completed. They in turn moved into the rooms we had occupied since the first days of our arrival. The transfer became a long tedious process of struggle with the superintendent of the

building who was claiming that by our moving out we were losing our rights over the rooms. We were compelled to grease a couple of palms to resolve the problem.

According to this new arrangement my father had to live with us while my mother lived with my sister and her daughter. Father and mother had at certain times their little disagreements, and these were still more intensified as a result of their differences regarding the question whether they should have repatriated or not. After their arrival, in face of all the deceptions they experienced, the magnitude of their discord reached the quarreling point. A point that by mutual consent we all came to the conclusion that it would be best to have them live separated, for at least a short while. This "short while" lasted till my father's death, two years later.

A few days after their arrival, we suddenly noticed that my niece had an itching spell, scratching her scalp uninterruptedly with unusual vim. The unwelcomed discovery was that she had caught lice. The idea in itself was repulsive, the experience disconcerting. Measures were promptly taken to get rid of them. The lice were imported and had traveled with her all the way from Batumi, the point of origin. It wasn't that Armenia was free of these vermins, neither the other republics. In those days this was a widespread predicament all over the Soviet Union. During the war and few years thereafter soap was scarce, while insecticides were completely non-existant. A very auspicious footing for parasites to reproduce undisturbed. As it appeared to us the Soviet people were taking the plight as a matter of ordinary course. It wasn't for them as shocking an experience as it were for us. Out of fear of being infested, for quite a period of time we avoided crowded gatherings. To evade contact with people who might be infested we preferred to walk long hours rather than use public transportation to reach our destination. It was perhaps an overreaction from our part. Having had the delivery of our child at home, in spite of the risk involved, my wife and I considered a blessing. She, throughout her pregnancy was weary with the fear that in the hospital she might be catching a good handful of lice.

Some of my readers might ask why did I dwell at such a length on this unpalatable event. Should I say because of my "penchant" for realism, or better yet my attempt to show one other aspect of the onerous casualties wars and revolutions are apt to produce. Casualties which are not conspicuously visible, are not the result

of direct hits, yet they are enormously frustrating, disgustingly annoying. Casualties which have no heroes but only humiliated victims.

Speaking of casualties, the periodic purges and deportations were other forms which some of our repatriates painfully experienced, while others mournfully watched them being inflicted. We witnessed the purges before even the lapse of one year from the date of my parents' arrival. The waves of arrests and exiles intensified to soar to the level of mass deportation in the summer of 1949, reminding many of the native oldtimers of the horrifying events of the "great purges" of the 1930's. While the repatriation was still in full progress, between the years 1946 to 1949, there was a period of relative lull, if we take exception of the sporadic arrests and deportations carried in a rather veiled manner. Once the decision passed to stop the repatriation, there was no more inducement to restrain.

The purges of the summer of 1949 was not an isolated first occurence for the natives of the country, but for the repatriates it was a totally unanticipated dismal experience. Most of us the second generation after the great national tragedy of the genocide, and many of our elderly past victims and survivors of the Turkish deportations and massacres of millions of Armenians, another banishment or exile was the last thing we could have expected to happen in our fatherland. We repatriated with not only the intent to bring an end to our itinerant life, but also to find sanctuary, establish permanent and deep roots in the land of our forefathers, and carry a normal existence in peace and security, where we would have no more that feeling of being aliens to the country. Instead in the summer of 1949 we witnessed the deportation in the course of one night of over 40 thousand innocent Armenians to the far confines of Siberia. In that number much over half of them were repatriates.

Attracted by the high sounds of the drums of Soviet propaganda, during the years 1946 to 1949 already around 100 thousand Armenians from the Diaspora had repatriated and settled in Soviet Armenia. Before long after their settlement many of them were labeled suspicious and formed part of the convoys of the deportees. Even though this was on Moscow's order and initiative, but then the so-called Armenian government not only did not budge a finger to make some attempts to prevent the deportation of the

thousands upon thousands of innocent peoples, it did not even raise a timid voice to protest and to protect. The leaders of this pseudo-government, the Kremlin's puppets, insensitive and unabashed not only witnessed the operation, but what was worse, cooperated in the operation and followed meticulously the instructions emanating from Moscow.

The members at the top of the Soviet Armenian government bent under the heels of the Kremlin and the Communist Party, of its leaders and mini-leaders, devoid of any human feelings and national pride, followed the instructions to the letter, and at certain points, overdid, overreacted by exceeding the assigned quotas, by deporting indiscriminately the elderly, the young, the children and grandchildren, some of them but only a few months old, to oblivion. These people were deported for life, without any justifiable reason, with no proven crime, without a court decision, and with no hope whatsoever that one day they might return, without even the hope of a quick death, and instant end to their sufferings.

Under these circumstances it was most natural to expect a deep emotional muddle among all repatriates who had to undergo the experience either as participants or witnesses. For the outsider, therefore, it is his or her imperative duty to examine these circumstances, repeated over the years, before blaming in treachery those who have chosen to expatriate when later on, this became the only possible alternative escape valve for them.

If my memory does not betray me, this tragic event occured during the night of July 14, 1949. And, to underscore the irony of destiny I would have to point out that among the victims of the deportation were a number of repatriates from France. These people, for years having lived in the French way, had celebrated each and every year at this very date the official anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. The celebration of the anniversary date of the French Revolution. The one which served as a model to all subsequent revolutions of modern times. The one whose ideology was a source of inspiration and became the loadstone to Karl Marx's basic philosophy. The one which stimulated Lenin who referred to its ideals and was inspired by its strategies. The one which proclaimed the very appealing slogan of "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité". This coincidence turned to a mockery the spirit of the revolution; rendered meaningless the promises of the preachings; exposed the lies of the slogans. This coincidence turned the event even more painful for having to commemorate "Le Quatorze Juillet" in 1949

in boxcars heading deep towards the Siberian steppes, rendering that, otherwise, happy occasion into a cortege of mourners on their way to oblivion.

What was the crime of these people? Nobody knew then, nobody knows now.

Having been spared from this tragedy, the morning following that dreadful night, on my way to work I came across a fellow repatriate who with a gloomy look approached me to whisper: "tell me what, on this damn earth, is going on?" In total bewilderment I, in turn, asked him what does he mean? At that point I did not yet know that, the preceding night over fourty thousand innocent people had been banished from their homes to be deported far away to the furthest confines of Siberia. Ostensibly the operation was executed in such an expeditious and swift manner, that only the most experienced MGB experts could have carried out. And, since in our immediate neighborhood that sinistre night nobody was hit by this tragic blow, I was not, at that point, aware of the disaster. Besides, even in those neighborhoods these dire operations were carried, under vicious threats of physical harm, the prospective deportees were forced to follow the instructions constrained, muzzled and silent. My unawareness of the incident, apparently did not convince the fellow. Perhaps even deep in his inner feelings he suspected me in faking. Mutual distrust being the prevailing mood, we departed, each towards his own destination, suspecting each other of foul play. He, apparently, thinking that I was pretending ignorance to grab more out of him. I, suspecting him of trying to pull me into a risky conversation. And this, in spite of the fact that in the near past we both were unsuspicious people.

After Stalin's death when the situation had to some extent relaxed, some of the civilian members accompanying the MGB agents during the operations whom I knew confessed to me that many of them endured the sight of these horrendous actions with genuine consternation, and for days they could not escape the dire image of that experience. Some even had nervous breakdown.

At the Academy of Sciences one could not fail to heed an unusually increased air of reticence. Elusive as a general rule, that particular day or the more conspicuously people avoided each other. Yet, human nature is such that after a while even in an evasive society curiosity supersedes. Before long there were some whispers floating around, indubitably between trusting peoples. As usual I

was being left outside of these intimate conversations, not because of fear that I might divulge the nature of their whispers as they knew I was more vulnerable than they, but rather because of the apprehension of my reaction to such news. The natives were used to such periodic mass deportations. As dreadful as they were for everybody, over the years they had acquired some sort of immunity. I was a newcomer, unaccustomed to these sort of periodicity. Presumably the well intentioned did not want me to panic, while the others who didn't care about my feelings, for them I continued to remain an outsider not worthy of any consideration or compassion.

When the whispers snowballed, the higher ups aparently becoming aware and fearing that this might reach a point out of proportion hard to handle and restrain the Central Committee of the Party issued directives to all the secretaries of the Party cells, to call for meetings and instruct the Party members and the non-members alike, to put an end to the malicious gossips and continue their normal activities. And, under the pretense of clarifying the situation they read to us the official version. As one might have guessed "the government was secluding a group of dangerous elements to curb them disturbing the minds and the tranquility of the general public. These people were unmasked", the report went on, "thanks to the vigilance of our mindful and observant citizens who put the welfare of the State above everything else. It has been discovered", the incrimination continued, "that within the ranks of our citizenry antagonistic elements have been infiltrating: remnants of the old bourgeoisie and the class of the kulaks, who persistently continue to carry their vicious activities against the public with the help of outside agents. While among the repatriates it has been detected peoples with foreign intelligence ties."

As had always been the case, these accusations were consistently fabricated by the MVD operatives to implicate people, even though innocent, to meet their annual quotas of deportations. The repatriates from the USA were labeled CIA agents. The ones from France were labeled as agents of the "Deuxieme Bureau" or "De Gaulists". Ironically when De Gaule visited the Soviet Union he had been received with all the honors a Head of State is entitled to by the Soviet government. And, those originating from the Middle East were imputed as "Dashnak" sympathizers.

Hardly a couple of days had passed from the date of that horrid event, when one of my colleagues at the Institute approached

me to whisper some very useful advices. A gentle lady in her early fifties, a person of great integrity, Arpine B. She had herself in the past felt the pangs of the regime, having not only witnessed the purges of the 1930's, but also having had a short term personal experience. She was a widow, and never had she told us what had happened to her husband. Was he also one of the casualties of the "great purges"? We never knew. But under the prevailing circumstances chances were that he was. She was a former member of the Communist Party, from the earliest days, when the Party was still underground, and when the majority of the members were still the enticed idealists from the ranks of the progressive intelligentzia under the Czarist regime. Later, as she told me in confidence, she was ousted from the Party, for her outcry against the excesses and abuses of those Party members in high positions, and as she confessed, to her great relief. The Party by then had already attracted the filth: adventurers, rogues, careerists.

Perhaps it was by intuition, which later proved to be correct, I had much confidence in Arpine B. She advised me above all not to panic, we might otherwise lose control and react in manner to further harm ourselves. Floundering would be self-destructive. Under the circumstances the best thing to do is to be prepared, calm and collected, and by so doing to eliminate the element of surprise which would be devastating. And, as it was impossible to carry with us all our belongings, she added, to avoid last minute confusion, best would be to have the most necessary personal items packed in advance, and ready. According to her past experience these are waves lasting a week or two before the sanguinary man at the top and his acolytes become satiated and calmed down.

That same evening back home, it didn't take long to explain the situation to my folks who were already suspecting that something was going on, having heard some rumors. Neither did it become hard for me to persuade them to be prepared for any eventuality. Fortunately, my people at home took this new turn unruffled, imperturbed. My task became easier. We started packing our things, most of all warm clothes to be able to endure the severe winters of the Siberian steppes. Curiously enough the mood was as if the preparations were being made for a casual trip.

On the eve of the mass deportation of the summer of 1949, Hrand D., the former President in Lebanon of the local Repatriation Committee, was murdered with a strong whack of an ax, in

his new home in Erevan, allegedly by a mentally deranged person, and for no apparent reason. The coincidence was, however, too conspicuous not to suspect that this assassination had been arranged to eliminate a former "Dashnak" in compliance with Stalin's order to deport or destroy former members of alien political parties or organizations, an stigma perpetually stuck to them, and by that virtue labeled "enemies of the public" regardless of their present new status.

Soviet history is full of murders of people whose deportation would have been difficult to justify, there being no palpable proof of political blunder. Deporting Hrand D., even though a former "Dashnak" but already in the public eyes a member of the Lebanon's Communist Party, and one time active member and President of the Repatriation Committee in Lebanon, a former editor of a progressive paper, "ARAVOD", would have assuredly raised a number of thorny questions, which might have reached to scandalous proportions in the Armenian Diaspora.

To dispel any doubt about the assassination, Hrand D. was given a state funeral. A long cortege of mourners was organized, which traversed the main streets of Erevan, with the participation of government and Party representatives. Many of us, repatriates, followed the cortege with grief, while pondering what else was in store for the rest of us.

For years the Soviet people either out of ignorance or fear tried to deceive themselves by believing or pretending to believe the official government version that a vast conspiracy existed led not only by outside forces, but also by former members of the leadership who had betrayed the Party line, and in conjunction with foreign agents, who had already infiltrated all walks of Soviet life, were trying to disrupt the economy of the country. The idea behind this scenario was to convince the people that some members of the Party, up to the top echelon, whom Stalin was intending to purge, were indeed on the payroll of foreign intelligence.

The truth of the matter, however, was totally different. Yet even we, the repatriates, the least brainwashed, were at certain moments led to believe some of the official lies, if not all. It was perhaps due to the fact that these lies were officiated and served to the public by such well trained and experienced professional deceivers, so redundantly, with such cynical assurances, while on the other hand the risk of expressing doubts was so effectively curbed that the people out of fear were accepting the whoppers without questioning their validity. Besides, a lie persistently and coercively repeated, in the long run, will inevitably have an impact on a person's mind, on his manner of thinking, in conditioning his convictions and surmises. However, the fact that in almost every family there was at least one member who had fallen victim to the purges at one time or another, led us to ponder and question why there are so many sinners and public offenders in a State and under a regime claimed to be immaculate and on the threshold of creating the perfect society.

With the kind of confusion we found ourselves immersed in, the process of recovery of our ravaged souls was slow. Gradually we learned that our suspicions were well founded, but were afraid to express them. It was years later that our suspicions were openly confirmed by dependable and official sources. Dependable not because the authors were people we could confide. There past records did not justify such confidence. Yet we were inclined to believe, because the circumstances had been changed and theirs, were no more mere declarative statements, nor attempts to vindicate themselves, but at times even self-reproach, confessions. And, all the pieces put together, most of their assertions fell in line to match with our initial suspicions and surmises. The backbone of this turnabout was Khrushchev's secret speech, the full text of which was not available to the general public except for the titbits leaked out by unheedful Party members. From the meager information we learned that the alleged conspiracies were programmed frame-ups by Stalin and his acolytes to establish unchallenged leadership by eliminating the top cadres he suspected as obstacles in his path to total power. Enraged as he was, Stalin could not or did not wish to restrain the momentum of repressions which spread to choke the mass of the population. There is no doubt in anybody's mind that his objective was to keep them under terror as subdued dastards.

We were lucky, the sombre weeks had passed without the redoubtable hand knocked our door. Then months had slipped by. With the extreme heat of that summer, the extreme heat of our fears had dispelled. Then came the fall. The fall in Armenia is the best season of the year. Nature smiles. Even the leaves of the trees falling, paint the earth all over with colorful images. Our confidence was restored. We began to unpack, jubilant. Not because a happy event had occured, but rather because the worst hadn't

happened. The unpacking became an occasion to celebrate. The best and happiest jubilation. And, in spite of the prevailing scarcity of so many things, we managed to celebrate the occasion with a homemade cake and champagne. While bread and other staple foods were scarce, strange as it may seem, during those days liquors including champagne were in ample supply and at affordable prices.

During that tense waiting period we had to take also one other very important precaution. We had to destroy and burn all of the literature we had brought with us. These consisted of books and a wide range of magazines in English and French. My wife had brought with her fashion magazines. I had a great number of books, periodicals and magazines of various nature. Under the prevailing official mood ostensibly all of the books and periodicals published abroad would have been considered politically reproachful. Particularly mind disturbing were, according to their pathological reasoning, the fashion journals which were meant to detract the tastes and wearing habits of the Soviet female population with bourgeois decadent and immoral styles. As to the home decorating magazines, and in that number "The American Home Journal" would have been interpreted, as we suspected, a perfidious tool to praise the American way of life. They all were materials of incriminatory nature. Everything American, regardless of its content and character, was considered provocative and inflamatory. We burned all of these materials in the firestove of the bathroom, where we usually boiled water in a pail to take our bath or do our laundry. Three consecutive days we pretended to take our bath and do our laundry. Were the neighbors aware of the true reason? Perhaps yes, perhaps not. If they were, they pretended not to be. Ostensibly they did not want to harm us, not even our other neighbor the Russian officer from the frontier guards. Not all of the Soviet people are bad. Not even some of the ones on official position and duty.

A couple of months after the tragic incident, we packed once again, but this time to move to our new house. Built of stone and concrete, with the interior woodwork still unfinished, and the plumbing and central heating system even though installed were not yet operable, our house still wet and humid, it was not quite in a condition to protect us from the coming winter cold. And, to make matters worse, the winter of 1949-1950 was excessively severe, with temperatures falling to record low of minus 29 Celsius (minus 20.2 Fahrenheit).

A one-family two-storey building, it was originally projected to include all modern conveniences. The first floor opened on a foyer quite sizeable to contain to the left a staircase to the second floor. To the right of the foyer was a large living-room, at the rear was the kitchen and under the stairs the toilet. The second floor had two bedrooms, a study and a sizeable bathroom, with a stallshower and a bidet. There was also a corridor leading to a veranda type balcony. Half built, the concrete floors still uncovered with the projected wood parquets, the caulking of the windows and doors defective, we were naturally not able to use all of the conveniences. The first floor living room became my father's living quarters, serving both as a bedroom and a living room. While a smaller room on the second floor served for the three of us: my son, my wife and I, in its multiple purpose function of a bedroom, dining room, kitchen and living room. We deliberately chose the smaller rather than the master bedroom, first, because of its position facing the east and protected from the cold currents of the northwest; second, because of its small size, easier and cheaper to heat. As it has been mentioned, the central heating system which we had installed with great hardships and expenses was from the very start defective, therefore not operable. The installers were incompetent, and then the coal, which we procured with tremendous hardships, was of such a low grade that from the beginning it left at the bottom of the firebox an incredible amount of unburnable material, coating with soot the furnace and the smoke pipes, blocking the chimney base.

Our successive failures convinced us that we had to give up and abandon the idea of having a comfortable central heating system, which apparently, for a private one-family home was an unaffordable luxury, even though we had all the equipment installed, and in spite of the fact that under normal circumstances and sane economic structure where fuel would have been more readily available, the system would have operated with total efficiency. We therefore settled by buying from the black market two crudely built woodburning tin stoves, one for my father the second for us. These served to heat our rooms, and at the same time to boil water for our various domestic needs, and cook our meals.

Initially projected to have a central heating system, no one room was provided with a flue exhaust outflow. We had to improvise an exhaust in each habitable room by extending smoke pipes out

through one of the panes of the windows. But this method, besides its ugly and unesthetic appearance and clumsy performance, had the very dangerous disadvantage of causing gas flue leakage, while at the same time the carbon dioxide of the fumes from the smokepipes were blown back into the rooms each time there was a strong wind outside. During the day it was more or less manageable. We immediately aired the rooms by opening wide the windows and the doors. But at night, in our sleep, this was not possible, and we ran the risk of asphyxiation. We had no other alternative but to sleep at nights in unheated rooms where most often the temperature fell below zero Celsius. On occasions, when inadvertantly we had left a glass full of water on the table, the next morning it would be frozen.

Under the dismal conditions that we were in, the severe winter took its toll. Our son became ill. His extremely high temperature and his difficulty breeding were the kind of symptoms that terrified us. Noticing my wife's fears and tears in her eyes, she who by nature is so calm and collected, I became all the more alarmed. To call the doctor or emergency help, I had to walk to the clinic or hospital, one or more hours distant from our home. Late at night and very early in the morning the clinics were closed and public transportation were not running. Taxis were not existent. I had no car of my own. The telephone, in those days, was a luxury available only to the select few. We were compelled to wait till morning. These were the most agonizing hours, watching our son's condition worsening. I decided not to wait any longer.

It was one of those very cold February nights of the year 1950. There was on the streets an accumulation of snow to knee level. It was perhaps six o'clock, or perhaps still earlier in the morning. I started to walk on my way to the doctor's house, one we knew, a repatriate himself. The workers had not yet shoveled the snow clear from the streetcars' tracks. My steps were heavy. The snow was so deep and the wind so biting cold, it took over an hour and a half the distance we usually could cover in even less than half that time, despite my rush, painfully racing against the time to reach the doctor before the worst happened. The distance seemed to me an unending one, the doctor's house unreachable. Like the horizon as you try to approach it goes further away. Shivering, from both the cold and my fear, I felt large drops of tears falling from my eyes. Were these tears of grief or else the result of the cold wind blowing on my face? Or both? I was all alone in the dark

of a wintery early morning, and the few people I encountered in the street were like me, in such a hurry to reach their respective destination, wherever and for whatever reason they were rushing to, that they wouldn't have noticed the mood I was in neither the tears falling from my eyes. These early birds perhaps might have had their own reasons to be as deeply chagrined as myself. Even in the dark the one thing most visible was that none were in a cheerful mood.

Doctor Sh., a reputable surgeon repatriated from Egypt, could not, however, give the right diagnosis. He suspected a case of diphtheria. But the trouble in breathing and his high temperature led my wife to suspect that this was rather a case of pneumonia. As it turned out, she was right, the doctor was wrong. Our son had a severe case of pneumonia. The surgeon who wasn't given the opportunity to practice his own specialty, as a general practitioner was he incompetent? Or perhaps, frustrated and discouraged, losing self-confidence he was a confused man. He ultimately agreed with my wife's diagnosis. Embarrassed as he was, but then as a family friend he sacrificed his pride to save our son. At that point the major problem to surmount was to find the needed quantity and quality of penicillin.

Even with a doctor's prescription it was very hard to procure penicillin. A scarce drug, it had become an item in high demand, an object of speculation, blind bargain, available only to the highest bidder. And then only, either from under the counter when one was lucky enough to have a pharmacist friend, or through an intermediary, a professional blackmarketeer, when one failed to have the necessary connections. I used all these means to secure the needed quantity. Yet the effect of the medication was too slow, almost indiscernible. Soviet-made penicillin, diluted in the flask, took a yellow brownish color. Presumably, still a new line of production in the Soviet pharmaceutical industry then, they were lacking the necessary experience and proficiency. The sinister irony was that, among all the other most essential medications we had brought with us, we had a substantial quantity of the best American and British brands of penicillin. But then, exploiting our naive generosity, our one time "friend" Dr. Leon A. had gradually gleaned with despicable shrewdness all of the medications in our possession to use on his patients. He convinced us by attesting that these medications as time passes by will lose their potency anyway, and promising to supply us with the same when need be.

It sounded reasonable. We handed over our medications gradually as he asked for them. When we needed them most urgently he was no longer available.

With great pains and efforts and the lure of high price I finally succeeded to procure the required supply of the best brands from fellow repatriates from the USA. We had to sell some jewelry for a trifle to pay the value at black market prices. Our son was saved, that was the most important. The day of his complete recovery was the best occasion to rejoice. We were as happy as the day when we realized that we were spared from the 1949 deportation wave.

The same year, the night of December 23, 1950, my father passed away at the age of 74. He had a mild form of diabetes, but it was rather the shock of his utter deception which had reflected on the deterioration of his health, and hastened his death. He endured his disillusionment in silence and with no complaint. Ironically the date coincided with Stalin's seventieth birthday which was being celebrated not only all over the Soviet Union, but also in the rest of the communist countries of Eastern Europe, Asia, as well as by the communist Parties of the Free World. In the Soviet Union the preparations for the commemoration had started as early as the first months of the year. Telegrams of congratulations with lavish compliments were pouring forth with great exuberance and wishes of a long long life. The main streets and government buildings were extravagantly decorated. There was an air of joy, all over. A freakish coincidence, I had lost my father, I had to mourn.

How genuine was the rejoicing of the people? It was hard to tell. The gullible mass was sincere, there was no question about it. But then, for the discerning eye it was visible the rest of the people were acting. Yet, so much convincing in their performance that nobody would have been able to detect, especially so since the high brass of the MVD was too jubilantly busy in that jumble of mass euphoria. It could also have been that even the skeptics were happy -- after all, Stalin was growing older, and the end of his days was fast approaching.

During these celebrations the cult of personality was still more soared to reach its paroxysm. And if we ignore the existence of that minority of skeptics, and the hurt of the dreadful deeds of the mad leader in the minds of many, the incredible mass of the "worshippers" were jubilant. There was a short recess of the oppressive routine.

In the midst of all these brouhahas I went back in my thoughts to days past. The consensus is that between parents and children there exist a generation gap. In our case, between my father and I, that gap was not so wide. The reason perhaps was that, by character jovial, youthful for his age, broadminded, and with an immense sense of humor, in a word a *"bon vivant"* in its most positive sense, he could better communicate with the younger generation than most of the rest seniors of his age. And, this is not a subjective delineation of a last minute repentent filial love, for whatever of my failures as a son. He had that reputation with whomever he related. So, the assessment is impartial and objective. When we became partners in business, strange as it may seem, I, more frugal and provident by nature, he, an incorrigible spendthrift, we amazed the outside onlookers, I, in my role of a provident father, while my father in his role of an extravagant son. He had an easy life. He secured a good livelihood, and was a good provider. And what he knew best was to spend all his earnings. When I grew up, in business with him, this was the main area of our differences and our contradictions, the source of our occasional arguments. But our love for each other was very deep. He, in his own way, I, in my own. Yet under the predicament we were in, seeing him discouraged, disappointed, prostrated, with a failing health, I have to admit, even with some embarrassment, his death became a relief. Incredible as it may seem that was my feeling of the moment.

WHY? It was during the dark days. Days full of uncertainties. We were under the constant threat of being singled out for whatever crime the pathological minds of the operatives would incriminate us to justify a prompt deportation. In such a climate of fear and material deprivations, watching my father an elderly diabetic who had an easy life, now destitute, miserable and pensive, fearing a possible exile, the perspective of being pushed in a boxcar for a long and exhaustive voyage to the depths of the Siberian steppes, his death became a blessing.

I had another qualm. The fear of caving in, which I did not want my father to witness. All around me people I very well knew for their integrity and high moral values, witnessing them surrender, one after the other under the tremendous pressures and physical tortures inflicted upon them, in face of such a possible perspective, I gradually fell into a state of terror. An obsession that one day I might, under torture, succumb in my turn and be forced to

commit acts against my will and principles, hurt my conscience, tarnish my self-esteem, for which in later years I would never be able to forgive myself. I was not sure of my power of physical resistance. I never had that kind of an experience before. At hindsight, I must say with some pride that I did a better job than I suspected I could have done.

On the eve of my father's death I had hard time struggling with these turbulent thoughts and my conscience. During his agony I could not stay much longer in his room. I ran away. I secluded myself in another room and started to cry. To cry like a small child, with tears and moans. Was I weeping still more mournfully because of a kind of guilt feelings for my dreadful thoughts? It was obvious that under normal conditions I would never had that despicable feeling of "palliation" as I did then. A feeling so unnatural to human nature. I would have wished him to live, to live much longer. My love for my father was very deep. I enjoyed his company not only as a father but also as the best of my friends.

The next day my cousin and I went to town to make the burial arrangements. In the Soviet Union there were no undertakers, the kind we have in this and other western countries. We had to take care of all the details ourselves. The first step was to secure a plot in a cemetery. In those days there was only one well cared cemetery, where everybody wished to have his beloved dead inhumed. The others were open spaces, unattended, with no fences and no guards, and nobody could be sure that one day these wouldn't be reclaimed to build factories or residential quarters, and the tombs desecrated and the remains removed. So, my concern was to secure a plot in the cemetery where I had to be sure that my father's remains would lie undisturbed.

The name of this cemetery was "Tokhmakhan Guoel". A most distasteful appelation. It was in Turkish, hence a reminder of an oppressive past. We often wandered why after so many years they still used this alien name? Still, this was were the selected ones were buried. Securing the plot was a very intricate and tedious process. It required the intervention of influential people, besides a couple of bribes at lower levels. My boss at the academy of Sciences and a couple of other influential people that I knew came to my rescue. A plot was assigned on a remote corner of that cemetery.

The second step was to find grave diggers, who, despite the fact that they are on the payroll of the cemetery administration, they

never are available until they smell the scent of bribe. The third step was another devious process. As a general rule they never have a coffin available for the asking, or rather they pretend not to have. In this respect, in all fairness, we have to admit that the exploitation of the emotions and griefs of the mourners is the same all over the world. While in the Soviet Union under an economy of scarcity they tend to abuse the client with the general cliche "we don't have the material", in the world of capitalism, including the USA the undertakers exploit by fawning over the emotions and griefs of the client, pushing him or her to squander. After considerable time spent bargaining, the price we paid was well above the one fixed by the government. That was the only way we could procure a coffin. After a long wait, the coffin was delivered to us with the crude paint on still wet. Ostensibly this was the common practice, as their evidence that indeed there was no available coffin in store. The casket delivered, my cousin and I, had to carry it on our shoulders through the streets of Erevan until we came across a truck driver passing by, and succeeded to bait him to transport to its destination, our home where my father's remains were still lying. The wet paint had stained our hands and our clothes as if to imprint a more durable mark on our afflicted souls.

The fourth and last step was to secure transportation to the cemetery for the deceased and the mourners. This too was a tedious and frustrating process of solicitations, supplications and promises of kickbacks. After exhaustive efforts we secured two antiquated trucks provided by the construction department of the Academy of Sciences. The trucks had carried building materials, such as stones, cement, lumber, etc. There were some leftovers which we had to clean and wash down. One of the trucks was intended to carry the coffin and the immediate relatives of the deceased. The coffin would be placed in the center of the truck in a raised position surrounded by the relatives. We had to improvise a support. We used a couple of cases left intact from our repatriation days which we covered with rugs. My father's coffin was placed over these cases. The second truck was destined to transport the rest of the mourners, friends and co-workers from the Academy of Sciences, who had come to pay their last respects. In those days hearses were something unheard of. It was even considered by some communist fanatics as a bourgeois tradition. The custom was that the deceased had to be carried in a coffin with its

cover open, on shoulders for a short procession before placing it on the truck, which would then drive the deceased and the group of mourners to the cemetery. According to local tradition the longer the procession the higher the respect would be for the deceased. However, for me, the idea of a procession with an open coffin carried on shoulders sounded loathsome, a lugubrious display, the expression of a primitivism which would have increased the extent of our afflictions. I decided to skip that part of the procession, and we drove from our home directly to the cemetery.

During the inhumation a colleague from the Academy of Sciences approached, apparently with good intent, and said: "aren't you glad that your father is being buried in the homeland?" I could not answer. Even though infuriated, I looked at him with no expression on my face. My father died out of grief, out of deception, perhaps also out of remorse for having instilled in me the kind of patriotism which led me to my life's big mistake.

The years which followed were successions of aggravations and fears, constantly gnawing our minds the threat of an eventual deportation. Under the predicament, we found no time neither the will to visit my father's grave. When, relatively more propitious conditions permited us to think visiting our father's grave, we could not find the emplacement in spite of all searches and inquiries. The numbered plaque on his grave had been removed, perhaps by vandals in need of scrap metal, or by the cemetery personnel to bury another body above my father's remains. This fact rekindled, once again, my feelings of guilt. Considering the circumstances, perhaps unjustifiably so. But all the same it seethed for a long while my too sensitive conscience.

When my mother died in May 1963, we were then better off. The deceased were carried by hearses. No more by trucks. I made a point to have her inhumated in a much better plot in the same cemetery. I erected a tombstone of basalt with a carved inscription with the names of both my parents. By so doing I tried to absolve myself for my failure to attend my father's grave. After all they both were lying under the same estate. I then surrounded the grave with a rail enclosure and a hedge, spread a lawn and planted flowers, and paid more regular visits to water the flowers and express my respects. Now that we have left the country, and two decades have already elapsed, this is now one of the many other abandoned graves. More than half of the Armenian people, having an itinerant life, constantly on the move from one country to

another, it is part of their destiny that their parents' graves should remain unattended, forsaken. Yet, it is part of our national character to preserve their memories deep into our hearts.

These were days of mournings for me and for my family. These were days of joy and celebration for the rest of the Soviet people. Whether genuine or not it was the most solemn of all celebrations -- Stalin's 70th birthday. Twice a year they celebrate with parades May 1st, the equivalent of our Labor Day, and November 7th, the anniversary of the Great October Revolution, with still greater display and pageantry. But then Stalin's birthday celebration was more of a ritual.

One of the many unwanted experience, for us the repatriates, was also the compulsory participation of the citizenry to the parades of the two most important official holidays. What was so exceptionally unusual for us, was the fact that while parades all over the world are meant to entertain the public, in the land of the Soviets the marchers are the people and the parade is aimed at a limited number of onlookers, members of the Party and government elite. The parading public greet and honor the First Secretary of the Party; the Second and Third Secretaries; the top level members of the Central Committee of the Party; the ministers; the top brass of the army; and by special invitation a few other selected dignitaries and foreign official visitors, in the order mentioned.

As in all similar other occasions, when high level members of the Party and government officials have to be in closer contact than usual with the general public, the security measures become extremely tighter. Nobody is allowed to pass the checkpoints to the main square where the parade is to take place except by special permission. Even the areas in the vicinity of the main square are elaborately monitored and cleared of ordinary people. Streets converging on the main square are limited only to participants of the parade, where they have to wait for long boring hours before their turn comes to march towards the main square and pass the podium where the dignitaries stand.

In Moscow the parade takes place on the Red Square and the Party leadership: members of the Politbureau and the top members of the Central Committee and government are placed on the pinnacle of Lenin's Mausoleum, while those lesser in rank assemble around the Mausoleum on tribunes especially erected for the occasion. There is also an especial tribune for the diplomatic

corps and foreign guests. In the provincial capitals the parade takes place on the main square where, as a general rule, stands a monument dedicated to Lenin, with a huge statue of the founder of the Soviet State on top. By strictly observing the forms and rules set, the processions in the provincial capitals become in every aspect an exact duplication in miniature of the Moscow parade.

All around the square and at numerous other points in each of the capitals, loudspeakers are placed to deliver to the public the official speech of the day and the countless slogans which follow, to be interrupted only by the hurrahs and the cheers of the marchers and the counter-clamors from above the tribunes. This exchange of hullabaloo, at instances, reaches an ear-piercing decibel. The unceasing music of "The International", the Communist anthem, the national anthem of the Republics, and an array of patriotic songs, pouring out of the loudspeakers and mingling with the high sounds of the marchers' bands produce an unbearable cacophony for which nobody would dare to complain.

During Stalin's reign the apex and the most frequently repeated slogan was *"Slavu Stalinu"*, glory to Stalin, followed by glory to the Communist Party. After Stalin's death this first slogan was dropped to be replaced by others glorifying the wisdom of the leadership of the day. On the eve of each parade the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party issues a list of slogans, which the local provincial Central Committees use as an exemplar to publish their own. The list appears in the local newspapers. Each organization has to pick the ones most suited to its profile of activities. Accordingly, the kolkhoz and sovkhoz organizations participating in the parade pick from the list slogans lauding the achievements made in the area of agriculture, and praising the communist system which provides, to the peasantry, opportunity to live a "prosperous" life; groups representing different industries choose slogans acclaiming their successes in meeting their assigned plans of production; groups representing the educational and academic front: scientists, writers, artists, educators, etc. extol their exploits and victory in their respective fields, over their bourgeois counterparts representing a decaying culture. Each group carries its own banner, its own signs and emblem with inscriptions of the slogans of the day. Huge portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, followed by smaller ones of the leadership of the day, are a must. During Stalin's reign his portrait was the largest, and the most conspicuous. Today it is conspicuous with its absence.

A couple of days before the parade the Party secretary of each organization calls a meeting to pass his instructions for the procedures to follow, which are boring repetitions iterated each year, and he warns about the consequence of failure to participate and/or befool the orders.

The parade, over the years, have become more and more boring experiences for almost all of the people, even for some of the members of the elite. Yet it still remains in Soviet life routine a coerced duty for every citizen from which an attempt to escape would mean committing an unpatriotic manifestation which would bring about some unpleasant aftertastes, often loaded with consequences of serious personal risks. Ofttimes the prospective participants have to be dragooned by the activists at their houses to take part in the parade. Some of the would-be participants find ways to excuse themselves by proving ill health. To do this a medical voucher is needed, which incidentally can be obtained through the good auspices of a friendly physician, or better yet by the usually accepted pattern of greasing a couple of palms.

The day after the parade the Party secretary of the local organization calls once again for a meeting to assess the results of the performance of his group, usually never satisfied asking for more livliness in the future, often reprimanding those who in his opinion, or the opinion of the secret monitors placed among the group, did not show the required enthusiasm and discipline during their march before the tribunes. I was once subjected to such a severe reprimand for having failed in my, so-called "patriotic" duty. And indeed, during one of these parades, many of the participants from our group having left the procession before reaching the square, I, too, was lured by the idea. I was carrying the banner of our group. Pretending that I had to go to the bathroom, I handed over the banner to a co-participant and wriggled out of the group and went directly back home. The next day I became the main target of the attack, regardless of the fact that I was not the only "defector", but then I was the only repatriate, while all of the other escapees were Party members from the Institute, and as such, much less vulnerable. The reason I had dared to follow their example was that it was already the Khrushchevian era of relative liberalism, and I thought that I would be treated in equal manner as my native colleagues. I was wrong once again.

The processions, which have for background colossal decor and

glitter, are perennial scenarios of showiness and pomposity. They start with the army, and depending upon the international political climate of the day, the parades become a demonstration of their latest weaponry, to manifest their military might to outside observers, and generate feelings of security and pride to their own citizenry. Then follows the colorful march of the gymnast-athletes, thousands upon thousands dressed in shiny outfits with the bright colors of their flags and artificial flowers, executing various figures, exhibiting their prowesses. Then comes the group of pioneers followed by the komsomols, and then throngs of marchers representing groups of different organizations. The objective of the parade is, ostensibly, the demonstration to the suspicious and skeptic elements of the natives, and the gullible ones from the outside world, a cosmetic facade of might, achievement, progress, happiness, hope for a better future; to generate enthusiasm and eagerness, and by the same token stimulate the fading patriotic feelings of its citizens. It is an element in the Soviet propaganda machinery to evince the participation of the masses in the Party's efforts towards the realization of the new social order, which at this point in time is already about seventy years old, which shows all the signs of decrepitude. The parades are at the same time huge camouflages of the failures of the system, and self-deceiving attempts to ignore the discontent of the people. But parades, demonstrations and slogans being coercive manifestations, have become wearying experiences for the discerning few who have ceased to fancy them anymore. There still exist, however, that naive majority. An age-old Russian national characteristic, shoddiness and hopes for a brighter future are not the original creation of the Soviets. The rhetoric had always been how brilliant are the expectations and today, under the communist regime, more than ever they needed to refer to the future, while the worst failures of the immediate present are being excused by the prospect of a visionary tomorrow.

The non-Russian element have, under coercian, been forced to adopt this archaism, which intrinsically is foreign to their national character and tradition. And when each time the inexperienced repatriate dared to express doubts for the promises, and deception for the predicament, the natives to console said: *"verchuh love gleenee"* or *"potom budyet khorosho"*, the first in Armenian, the second in Russian, both meaning "the end will be good". Again an expression of belief in futurity.

With time *"verchuh love gleenee"* or *"potom budyet khorosho"* became rather the cynical reminder of the permanency of the predicament. And in fact, from the first day we stepped on Soviet soil and decades thereafter we constantly, day in and day out, heard this common place without any sign of its materialization. A piece of rhetoric so often used and repeated that, by that very fact, had for many of us lost its sense and conveyed no more meaning, other than the scorn of the government towards its people. Those continuing to use the harangue had lost their credibility. It acquired the opposite meaning to express despair instead of hope, skepticism instead of faith, and at one point sarcasm to palliate our despondency. Today more than ever even traditionally naive Russian people are beginning to become more and more skeptical about the illusive promises never to be materialized.

For the last couple of decades, and more so after Stalin's death, starting in very narrow circles of mutually trusting people, later in circles still wider, even among, since then, the most traditional element of the Russian futuristic visionaries anecdotes were circulated ridiculing the apologists and their rhetorics. The reason perhaps was that in a predicament where everybody feels powerless, discharging anecdotes, for many, became that safety valve which helped prevent a total emotional breakdown. And, because of the fact that there were much more skeptics among the non-Russian elements, the general belief was that the source of these anecdotes originated from the regions where the people by nature are more individualistic. The peoples from the southern territories of the Caucasus for example. With the risk of being accused of clannishness, I, further, have to narrow down from among the Caucasian peoples the Armenians as the most witty, and this characteristic is discerned through the thousand and one jokes attributed to a chimericalquixotic "Radio Erevan". May be that is the reason why most of the anecdotes related through all over the Soviet Union start with the exordium "according to radio Erevan..." to which follows the recitation. Most of them sharp, some of them nasty, these anecdotes invariably express disillusionment and nihilism. The satire is almost always aimed, sometime in a round about manner, at other times more directly, to the failure of the system.

One of the squalid anecdotes much in circulation went as follows: One day the most prominent members of the Politbureau decided to visit Lenin's Mausoleum. The intention was for each member to pick from Lenin's cadaver the part of his body which

he or she needed most, with the hope of acquiring the best qualities and his wisdom to become an ideal communist. Khrushchev picked Lenin's brain to govern the country with more wisdom. Then came Mikoyan's turn, who picked Lenin's heart to become more compassionate. Continuing this procession the rest of the members in turn picked the part of the body they needed most to improve their sapience. When Furtseva's turn came, the only female member in the Polibureau then, she started searching from head to toe that part from Lenin's corpse she, as a woman did not possess. After a long and tedious search, desperate as she was, other members join her in the search. But they could not trace it. They then decided to call Voroshilov for help, who was a contemporary and a close collaborator to Lenin. They ask him about the missing part. "I know he had one, Voroshilov replies, but after the success of the Revolution, elated as he was, he stuck it deep into the 'derriere' of the proletariat". And indeed, the moral of this vulgar anecdote is to show "graphically" that at the game's end it was the working class itself that lost the most from the revolution which was supposed to liberate the proletariat from the abuses, exploitation and bondage of the capitalists.

Skepticism has not become only a mark visible among the non-Party members, the common people so to speak, who have not so much to lose, but also among the people in high positions whose offices could be at stake, and are anxious to protect. One probable reason is perhaps their desire not to appear any more like mindless machines or robots in the eyes of the public, at a time when the political atmosphere was relatively relaxed as a result of the diminution of the Stalinist influence. It also became a psychological urge for them to express their self-esteem, some amount of human dignity. I remember an MGB man one day, in a very narrow circle, expressing his doubts about the system, declaring that: "perfect in principle, but outrageously abominable in practice". This was at the aftermath of Khrushchev's famous secret speech denouncing Stalin. The fellow was the one I knew back in time as a diplomat in the Soviet Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon. Having had the experience of the outside world, he, ostensibly, did not want to appear in my eyes one of those dogmatic imbeciles. And this individual as an officer of the MGB was supposed to be a member of the most indoctrinated organization.

Lenin has a book entitled "One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward". With no reference to its content, which pursues a specific

objective, the title itself is suggestive enough to portray the persisting predicament in the Soviet Union. So far as the conditions of the Soviet people are concerned, the pace of the system has been: "One step forward, two steps backward".

6

RECRUITMENT ATTEMPTS BY THE MGB

One morning in May 1950, I was called at the President's office of the Academy of Sciences. The receptionist rose immediately and introduced me to the President, in spite of the fact that a large crowd of impatients were tarrying in the waiting room before me for the President to receive them. Apparently she had special instruction not to let me wait for my turn. The President all smiles, with extreme politness offered me a seat. After a brief casual conversation, as to how well were we adjusting to our new way of life, he handed me a telegram he had received from the President of the All-Union Academy of Sciences of Moscow. Realizing I was not yet enough familiar with the Russian language, he translated the content. He was being instructed to release me immediately from all my duties and arrange my prompt flight to Moscow. It also stated that at Moscow's airport people would be assigned to meet me. There was no other explanation, and no reason was given as to the purpose and objective of this summons, which gave to the proposed expedition a mysterious character. Was I an undercover, all-important personality, employed temporarily under the guise of an ordinary junior researcher? This could have been anybody's guess. Yet I was more perplexed than they. For at least they could speculate, and each according to the degree of expansiveness of his own imagination. While I, did not know what to think, and still more what to say. Strangely enough, my immediate reaction was not one of fear. The invitation emanated from an academic circle. But then, under the circumstances, this too could have been a perfidious trap. Maybe once in the plane, my destination could be anywhere other than Moscow. But oddly enough I was ecstatic, such doubts or suspicions were the last things to come to my mind. Fortunately so, for otherwise I would have found myself extremely tense throughout my trip, at least until I discovered the objective of the trip.

In those days the most common means of transportation in the Soviet Union was the railway system. Airplanes were seldom used, and particularly so for civilian transportation. They were only used by the Party and government top brass, and only when on special assignment of urgent nature. Otherwise everybody else had to travel by train, and then after passing through a long and tedious

process of securing a ticket. The distance by train from Erevan to Moscow took a good five days and five nights under the best conditions. Later on things improved. Today one can reach that destination even within less than three days. The same distance by plane today takes three hours and a half.

The plane I flew on then, took over eleven hours, with a one stop on midflight at Kharkov, one of the major cities in Ukraine. This was a sixteen passenger post-war *"Illyushin"*, yet not pressurized, and as a result most of the passengers felt uncomfortable and suffered air sickness.

We arrived in Moscow late in the same afternoon. In spite of the instruction there was nobody to meet me at the airport. My first time in the All-Union capital of that huge conglomerate of disparate nations and races, and with my lack of fluency of the Russian language, as yet partially ignorant of the mores and habits of the people of this big metropolis, total strangers to me, I had more than one reason to be confused and feel aggravated for their failure to meet me at the airport, as promised. But then, collecting myself, I tried to curb my confusion. After some concerted efforts I managed with my little knowledge of the language to find a willing driver, who, for a price, agreed to drive me to an address I had the prudence to jot down in my little notebook.

In those days regular taxi service was a rarity even in the metropolis, while in the provincial capitals it was non-existent. So, as a general rule, for people arriving at an airport or railroad station there was always a consenting driver employed in an administration, industrial unit, or in any other organization, moonlighting for an additional ruble. The address I had was the boarding house run by the Central Academy of Sciences, destined to provide temporary lodging to the visiting researchers, from the provincial capitals on assignment in Moscow. This was a very useful convenience in housing and lodging starved Moscow. Yet despite the official *"kommendirovka"* (assignment voucher) in my possession, the receptionist of the lodging house to my great dismay and astonishment arrogantly refused to give me a room. This was the second disconcerting experience of my first visit to Moscow after the one at the airport.

The reason for her refusal, as I later gathered, was the poor impression I had left upon that unusually chubby middle aged blonde, who apparently, could not figure out how on earth a so-called intellectual from the Academy of Sciences would be ignor-

ant of the Russian language. She might have thought that the assignment voucher in my possession was either fraudulantly acquired or a forged one. She was more perplexed by my attire, in style and quality so different from the rest of the lodgers. Yet due to her ignorance of the existence of an outside world, with the narrowmindedness of a never questioning fanatic disciplinarian so common in Soviet society, she was incapable and unwilling to cope with an out-of-the-ordinary situation and, therefore, categorically refused to serve a person who couldn't speak Russian properly. Possibly deep in her mind she had even the conviction that by discarding me she was doing the right thing as a good citizen. It was also likely that she was expecting to have her palm greased, as is often the case in similar situations, and in her eyes such a well groomed person could very well afford. I was not aware, because I had been told, as part of the usual prostration and genuflection for everything Russian, that in Moscow people were more honest, they could never be bribed. Which was and is a pure nonsense. Had I known from the start what indeed could have saved me from that awkward situation, I must admit, I could have satisfied the plump "lady". For such was, and still is the rule of the game, kickback is the best incentive which even the so-called most disciplinarian would lend himself or herself to the lure, even though in the process the laws would be broken.

Frustrated and tired, sitting on top of my trunk, and waiting in one corner of the lounge with the constant fear of being thrown out, still hoping in these series of adversities one good thing might happen, not daring to stretch my wearied body on the sofa to avoid the risk of being reprimanded, all of a sudden I, obliquely, heard a name sounding Armenian. With some hesitation I approached the fellow and briefly narrated my story in our own language. He was a young researcher from our Academy, whom I did not know because he was from another department in a separate building. Apparently he took pity on me, for he spared no effort to remedy the situation. Fluent in Russian, as all the intellectuals are, impressive in his manners, persuasive in his locution, yet he, too, expanded considerable effort to convince the receptionist that I was not a fraud. She was totally ignorant of the fact that down south in one of the provincial corners of the Soviet Union a new phenomenon was taking place. This time, instead of people wishing to depart from the country of the Soviets, there were thousands upon thousands of gullible people craving to immigrate

from all over the world to Soviet Armenia, and that within this group of credulous people, despite their ignorance of the Russian language, were none the less, educated intellectuals, a few of them in the employ of the Academy of Sciences. This elucidation and in addition to that a hard handshake with a full palm, finally convinced her that there was nothing wrong in providing me a bed in a dormitory where there were already eleven other lodgers besides me. Never did she agree to give me a private room.

The young man who was of such help was lodging in the same room. Continuing our conversation, he asked me whether he could offer me a glass of tea. Russians drink tea in glasses rather than in cups. The month of May is still very cold in Moscow, and I certainly needed a hot drink to warm up my shivering bones. Without hesitation I accepted the young man's gracious offer. He then handed me a piece of candy to hold under my tongue and a glass of hot water. Noticing my astonishment he said: "what can I do, I have no color." "Color" meaning tea.

In those days tea, as many other products, was scarce. With a lot of imagination the Soviet people had forced themselves to see things the way the authorities wanted them seeing, and in this particular instance had become "color blind". The Russian language has a special term meaning hot water: they call it *"kipitok"*. Apparently a substantial segment of the population even in prerevolutionary Russia could not afford to drink tea. Instead they were drinking plain hot water. Coffee? Many of them never had tasted a drop. They even didn't know what it looked like.

From the time of my arrival at Moscow's airport till the time I settled in my room: the ordeal of finding a taxi, later my efforts to convince the reluctant desk clerk in the boarding house to provide me a place to sleep, took a good six hours. It was already midnight. In a room of twelve lodgers, the regulation was that after midnight all lights had to be turned off. I was preparing to go to bed, when the clerk came running up the stairs, panting and puffing, trying hard to explain that I should dress and wait downstairs in the lounge, for she had received a call I was to be transferred to a first class hotel where reservations had already been made for me. Her attitude had completely changed. Now she addressed me with deference.

From the bewildered look of my new friend I felt that some suspicion had started brooding in his mind. He, who a short while ago was convinced that he was assisting a helpless repatriate, to find

out that the same fellow, meaning me, had reservation in the best hotel in town, and that people were coming to pick him -- it was indeed a situation which would perplex anybody. I could not blame him, since the first explanation I had given about my visit to Moscow did not justify this new turn. I, myself, could not make out anymore than he. I felt extremely embarrassed over a situation which was not of my creation. On later occasions when we met each other on the streets of Erevan, or in the halls of the Main Building of the Academy of Sciences, he politely avoided me, and I also often avoided people I suspected, without even being completely certain if at all they deserved my suspicion.

Hardly half an hour had passed, two people were waiting in the lounge to pick me up. I immediately recognized one of them, Rubin A. He was once the consul general of the USSR in Beirut, whom I knew from the days the repatriation was being organized. The second person was his chauffeur. He had, at his disposal a chauffeur driven limousine, a sign of his high position in the Soviet establishment. At that very moment I started to put some of the pieces together in my mind, and came to realize that although the cable had been signed by the President of the All-Union Academy of Sciences, the origin of the summons was actually from some other source.

Before even I had a chance to ask Rubin A. the reason why there was nobody to meet me at the airport, he immediately apologized explaining that they had the wrong information about the time of arrival of the plane. Every kind of transportation, in those days, was in a state of complete disorder. Even today, the situation is not much better. Arrivals and departures, whether by plane, train or bus, are so very often not in accord with timetables.

The hotel Moskva, where the reservation had been made for me, was in those days the largest and the most modern in town, catering mostly to foreign visitors of distinction and also the elite of the Soviet citizenry. My living quarters consisted of a bedroom, private bathroom, and a large area where one could entertain visitors. This was not only by Soviet, but also by Western standards high class. This luxury, instead of pleasing me, provoked thoughts of suspicion and insecurity. The immediate question which popped into my mind was: what on earth would I be able to offer them in return for such special treatment and cajolry?

So far as I remember, this "expedition" in Moscow lasted two weeks. On a couple of occasions I asked Rubin A. the real motive

behind the invitation, and each time I got an evasive answer. I decided to ask no more and await patiently the outcome of this situation. In the meantime, instead of taking advantage of the conveniences provided, the lingering uncertainties became all the more mortifying. Instinctively I became more cautious in everything I did, in every move I made. Even when I was left alone in my hotel room or strolling in the streets, I felt that I was being constantly watched and followed. I deliberately avoided contacting foreign visitors staying in the hotel, even with those who were from socialist countries. In the streets I never directed my steps towards the American Embassy which was then a few blocks away from the hotel.

The following day after my arrival, Rubin A. came to visit me in the hotel in company of another man, a Moscovite Armenian. He introduced me as his assistant. Officially they both were in the employ of the Foreign Office. Incidentally, the Foreign Office, in the Soviet governmental structure, is closely tied to the Ministry of Security, usually known by its acronym MGB, what at this side of the "Curtain" is known as the KGB. The general consesus is that each and all members of the Foreign Office are in one way or another conjointly high ranking officers in the MGB organization. I did not know their rank at the MGB, neither did I know in what capacity Rubin A. and his companion were acting in their relations with me, whether as members of the Foreign Office, or officers from the organization.

During the whole period of my stay, almost every other day I had the "pleasure" of their company. I have to admit that I was treated royally, an ironic analogy in a Soviet situation. Best seats in the theatres, the concert halls, and the main sport events. Most of the time accompanied, however, in a couple of instances I was left alone to attend these social events by myself. I remember once attending a concert by myself and during the intermission I came across a young man whom I thought I had met before. I then recalled that he was the young man whom, a few years ago, during a reception party at the Soviet Embassy in Beirut, was introduced as a student on an academic furlough studying the mores and traditions of the different peoples of the Middle East. With some hesitation, I tried to approach him. But as soon as I noticed he was avoiding me, I turned away. His impassive look was a sign that he was trying to confuse me, and lead me to believe that I was confounding him with someone else. Being a physionomist by instinct,

I had no doubt that he was the man to whom I was introduced in the past. If this was arranged to have someone who knew me watch my steps, it was indeed a clumsy initiative on their part. As later experience thought me, it is often the case that the MGB operatives either underrate the intelligence and perceptive capability of their prospective victims, or else they considerably overrate them by devoting too much attention and importance to simple, innocent people, or events of no special significance.

This incident too, did not unravel the motive behind this whole scenario: the reason for the trip, the grounds for being watched and followed. It added, I should say, more confusion to an already perplexing situation. In this jungle of uncertainties I pictured myself as a prey hiding behind the bushes of prudence, and trying hard not to fall under the claws of the preditors, while my hosts, in their role of preditors had surrounded me, watching and waiting for the propitious moment to assault.

During our conversations, despite their efforts to appear casual, they had hard time concealing the nature of their questions. Yet, I feigned not to be aware of what they were up to. One of the questions deviously asked a number of times, was the degree of my proficiency in the Arabic language. Could I possibly pose as an Arab? This and some other questions of the same nature gradually shed light on their objective. They presumed that born in Egypt, and having lived most of my life in Arab countries, I would be very fluent in Arabic. But to their great disappointment my knowledge of Arabic was not scholastically speaking to a degree to be taken for an Arab. And indeed, a couple of days before I was told that I could go back to Erevan, Rubin A. invited me to a restaurant, and while we were having our drinks he hinted the real motive for their invitation. It was only during this last conversation that I finally was informed of their true intention, which was to train me as an agent to operate in the higher circles of the Middle Eastern countries. But by then they had realized that my lack of high proficiency in Arabic was a major handicap. My lack of fluency in the language saved me from the worst.

Secrecy being the rule, Rubin A.'s final instruction to me was to tell everyone back home that the reason for my trip had been to meet with researchers of the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies to discuss an eventual collaboration for the training of researchers in the field of Middle Eastern Affairs. That was what I said who ever questioned me. Whether they believed this or not, it is hard to tell.

I was coerced to lie. One more lie in the never ending web of lies which run under and through the whole foundation of the Soviet socio-political system, upon which is erected the structure of a morality distinctively Sovietic. Lies, lavishly administered with almost no respite by the authorities, from their highest to the lowest levels. Lies, which the ordinary citizenry is forced to comply with and utter its acceptance as unquestionable truth. Lies, which the common person is, in his turn, compelled to have recourse to, out of necessity, better yet out of urgency, very often so gurdgeingly, in order to survive. Lies, which systematically imposed, in the long run, are bound to become a deeprooted behavioral pattern. Such being the rationale, and to add a morsel of realism to our scenario, on the eve of my departure for Erevan, they took me for a tour: first, to the Institute of Oriental Studies, occupying the building of the former Center of Armenian Studies of prerevolutionary Russia, which was sponsored by the Armenian community of Moscow. The street where this building stands, for this same reason it still is called *"Armyanskaya Ulitza"* (Armenian Street). Then a visit to the presidential quarters of the Academy of Sciences. These too, a complex of buildings reflecting the splendor of the Russian past, and situated in an area of the city still considered the most "epicurian" of the Soviet capital. The idea was to give me evidence so that when I had to describe my trip, my narration would look real, persuasive and unimpeachable.

The president of the Academy of Sciences with whom I was scheduled to meet was absent from his office. Perhaps even purposely. He must have been repulsed by the idea of participating in a scheme in which he had no direct interest. Consequently, this could have been an easy way to avoid meeting me, by either pretending a last minute indisposition, or having an important call he could not refuse. The fact remains that he was absent from his office, and they did not bother to tell me the reason why.

This unsuccessful expedition, however, did not deter my "sponsors" from continuing their determined course of action, even though their initial scheme had been a failure. All the same, their professionalism (as trained liers and inveterate obstinates) dictated that they continue the path originally set forth, to keep the appearance of the big lie as realistic as possible. Who knows? Perhaps they had other plans for me, more in line with my potentials. This was, apparently the reason they didn't want to put an end to

our relations, and tried to leave an open door.

Even though the president of the Academy was absent from the premises, they still took me for that tour, introducing me to some of the subordinates of the president and the members of the staff. The amicable and neighborly reception I was given by all the people I met made me surmise that they were aware who my "sponsors" were, what their position was in the intricate scale of Soviet hierarchy, and in what specific role they were acting in that particular instance.

Speaking of the increased Soviet interest in the Middle East, and to better comprehend the complexity, better yet the ambiguity of their policies, one has to note that from the very early days of the regime a certain dualism permeated almost every aspect of life in Soviet society -- the dichotomy of their ideals and the exigencies of pragmatic realism. Their policy with respect to the Middle East was no exception. On the one hand encouraging the national-revolutionary movement outside their boundaries, while at the same time fearing that the example itself, by igniting national feelings among the minorities of Russia, would lead to the dismemberment of the country into a number of independent states.

After my Moscow visit, the indications seemed to suggest that they had given up their initial objective for training me as an agent for their overseas subversive activities in the Middle East. For a short while there was a lull. I was left alone and I felt pleasantly relieved. But it did not take long for me to discover that this was not a renunciation of their determination to use me in one way or another in their abject schemes. At that point, presumably, their expectations were twofold: on the one hand, it was quite apparent that their objective was to use me as an effective subject for their propaganda for Diasporan consumption, by radio and favorable letters; while on the other hand, what they ordinarily expect from almost everybody, to act as an informer, to spy on fellow repatriates.

To counter their unceasing pressure was becoming increasingly difficult. The few tactics I could possibly use without hurting my conscience and bewildered soul, without harming other people, while at the same time showing a more or less convincing appearance of submission were the same I had used till then. And, by that time I had become more determined and acquired more experience to cope with the quandaries. I continued to use still more expertly the subterfuge of pretense and restraint.

The successive operatives assigned to monitor and instruct me up till then had been relatively speaking pliable. During the course of our periodical meetings they never had reached the point of making outright threats. In that respect, perhaps I was luckier than some of the other repatriates subjected to the same fate. This fact could possibly be attributed to my initial prestige surging out of my past performance helping the repatriation, and perhaps also to the fear of alienating Pakrat B., my brother-in-law, a prominent personality in Beirut, who they believed still cared about our well being. Perhaps even due to my unbending character, strangely enough, spawning some sort of a respect. But then the last operative, a certain colonel Petrossian, was more determined to obtain tangible results. This meant: if you don't have a story, better fabricate one. In other words they would agree for a slanderous report. Maybe he was instructed by his superiors to be more resolute than his predecessors. They had waited too long a time to get me into their morbid game. They were out of patience. It could have been his own initiative, to show results where others could not.

Tangible results were what I was determined from the very start not to supply. Therefore, as a witty countermeasure, I began to narrow still further my already restricted circle of relations. By so doing I had two main purposes in mind: First, to protect myself by choosing a small number of friends on whom I could rely, hoping they would not report an occasional slip of tongue on my part, or fabricate a slander to satisfy their operative. My second objective was to put a break upon myself, having fewer people to associate with, by the same token, I would be reducing the number of persons I may be assigned to report on.

Earlier in time, when my Diasporan influence was still fresh in their minds, all they were asking was to write back to my kin and friends overseas impressive letters describing our new way of life in rosy terms, praising the system, and underscoring the many opportunities granted from the very first days we stepped on Soviet soil. Banking on the hope that my words would be more influenctial in counteracting the impression created by the innumerable codified unfavorable letters inundating the Diaspora. These letters in major part were expressing in devious terms the discontent and frustrations of the repatriates. The enormous, sophisticated apparatus of the censorship was incapable coping with this new unpredictable situation. Deciphering the improvised codification of the letters and tracking down the authors, became a weari-

some task. Even though extemporaneous these were written with extreme heed, were samples of creative wit. Strangely enough these letters written by the newcomers to their relatives and friends back overseas were too much of a challenge to the experienced MGB operatives. They became an unexpected source of frustration and resentment by confounding the experts in the intelligence profession in their own turf.

As, in the early stages their attitude was more heedful with me, I, wittingly, took advantage of their self-possession and feigned to have interpreted it to be just that -- a mere suggestion which I could safely ignore without any unpleasant consequence. That was actually what I did. With the exception of one letter the first year of our arrival, which I wanted to write it anyway to my parents, to warn them by way of improvised ciphers the true predicament. The letter was all praise, but then a cautious warning between the lines. Apparently unsuccessful in conveying my warnings to my parents, my letter did not convince them enough to discourage from their initial plan to follow my example to repatriate.

In spite of that self-imposed inhibition of correspondence, I, on the other hand, was very cautious to keep on the impression of being in constant correspondence with my brother-in-law, Pakrat B. Especially so after the 1949 events, when the risk of deportations had increased. He was a very influential personality in Lebanon. Not only in the Armenian community but also in high placed Lebanese circles. They needed him as a go-between puppet to play their own political game. Apparently he never failed them. Under the circumstances, I was particularly careful not to let them know that I had severed my relations with the man. So, everytime they asked me news of my brother-in-law I pretended that I was in constant contact with him. A sly ruse, a security measure, to keep the MGB operatives on guard that there still existed an important person overseas who would be extremely unhappy and angered if and when something unpleasant happened to us endangering our well being and safety. I don't know for sure whether they bought my subterfuge. Whether they checked the veracity of my stories. The fact remains, however, I saw no signs of doubts by them. This white lie, and their good relations with my brother-in-law saved our lives at more than one instance. Had Pakrat B. known about our stratagem, I can't tell for sure if he would have unveiled our lie. I cannot blame the man with an hypothetical question.

Having a share in the family business, we, periodically, received

parcels of clothings and other items for personal use, the surplus we sold in the black market to supplement my meager salary. Meager as compared to Free World standards. This also became the best indication in the MGB operatives eyes that our relations with Pakrat B. were not severed.

In another attempt to involve me in their propaganda schemes, they invited me to deliver comments of lauds on radio for overseas Diasporan consumption. They even proposed that I recite prepared texts to spare me from the burden of writing them. But it was obvious that their concern was more for a slip of a tongue, or an undetectable cipher I might weave in. Even though, as an additional precaution, such recitations were never live, but always pre-recorded, checked, censored, and only then after the approval of a special committee, it was permitted to be aired, yet they always prefered to be on the safe side. Once again I did not go along with the proposition. I justified my evasion by being too busy with the construction of our house. They were as much, perhaps even more, aroused to see the completion of our house, ostensibly to use the event for propaganda as an achievement by a repatriate. Once again at the early stages my maneuvres were successful. I was surprised to see myself that sagacious, perhaps even shrewd.

The first couple of months after my return from Moscow, I commanded the "respect", better yet the fear of my colleagues. My explanations of the trip were not convincing for people who had lived for so many years in a reticent-nebulous society. Some of the more activists, for a short while at least, treated me as their equal. They didn't look at me anymore as an ordinary vulnerable newcomer. From their frequent allusions I gathered that they were surmising that I would be called back again to Moscow for a specific assignment. As time passed by with no more insinuating incidents to relate with my Moscow trip, the short-lived "prestige" and "respect" faded down. Gradually I became the same old vulnerable newcomer. One who, perhaps at best, would be entrusted with petty assignments, the nature of which not hard to guess.

Speaking of "petty assignments", let me recall and relate a few, the ones still quite vivid in my mind. It all started with a counter-visit of my Moscow "friend", Rubin A. to Erevan. Unremitting in his determination to use me for their abject schemes, in whatever capacity, he pretended to be returning my visit, and checking at the same time how well was I adjusted to my new environment.

This became an opportunity for him to introduce me to a young MGB operative, who supposedly was to help me if and when I might have a problem. But as the course of our relations came to prove, this young man, whose first name is all I can remember, Martin, was expecting to crop more from me in terms of information, than helping me. Information of inculpatory nature about people I associated with, both professionally and socially. Our frequent meetings usually took place at nights. During the summer in public parks, during the winter indoors, one of their many hide outs, but never the same place twice. Occasionally in our home. In order not to divulge the nature of our meetings to my wife, I was instructed to tell her that he was a colleague from the Academy working with me on an assigned project. Of course, I never kept secrets from my wife. She knew what was going on, but pretended ignorance. And, in that instance it was my wife and I, who were duping the professional. Each and every one of us repatriates, in our own ways, were gradually learning the art of make-believe. He was an operative of medicore capabilities. I, without much experience and with absolutely no training in the "art" often outwitted him. After a short period he was replaced by another, ostensibly because of lack of results. Worth recalling was that in our house whenever I offered him a drink or a snack he invariably refused. My guess was, suspicious by training and nature, these operatives are always afraid of foul play. Suspecting perhaps that some kind of a substance might be mixed in their drink to harm them, or for whatever ill-thoughts their pathological mind might imagine.

These pressures lasted for quite a number of years, so did the meetings, for a certain while at regular intervals, but then more spaced, every so often with a different MGB operative. The one unsuccessful was subsequently replaced by another, ostensibly a more experienced, or more determined one. Brooding on the hope that the substitute would prove to be more capable or luckier in his endeavor to crop information. Then, as time passed by, they apparently became convinced that nothing would be derived by this method, they changed their tactics and tried to engage me on specific assignments. By doing so their contention was presumably that they would corner me by narrowing down my means of escape.

At different intervals I had been called upon to perform a definite assignment, to report upon a designated person. Or again to get in

touch with some of the tourists and find out their contacts with the locals, be they repatriates or natives. I, persistently, avoided fulfilling their instructions. The list of these assignments is too long to insert in a single volume, but I would like to narrate a few, picked at random.

One of the specific assignments I was called upon to perform was to watch closely the activities of the Diasporan delegates who had come to participate in the election of a new Catholicos, the head of the Armenian Church. The reigning Catholicos of the See of Echmiadzin had been Cherekjian who had died few years earlier. To inform the reader of the historical background, it would be pertinent to state briefly that Echmiadzin, once the royal city of Vagharshapat, from the very first years that Christianity had been officially adopted by the State, became the residence of the Supreme Catholicos of all Armenians. Of course during the turbulent history of our nation there had been also other Sees. Even at present there is one other See, the Cilician See, centered in Antelias, Lebanon. Situated about 15 miles west of the capital city of Erevan, Echmiadzin, even today continues to be for the major segment of the Diasporan Armenians the seat of the Supreme Head of their Church. This situation today has created a disunity in our Church.

It is a known fact that Armenia, being one of the republics of the Union of the Soviets, the official ideology is Marxism-Leninism. But this does not preclude the Armenian National Church from being held in high deference, even by the Soviet government authorities. An important factor in this is, according to many, the personality of the present Catholicos Vazken I, and not only for his exceptional ability to win the devotion of the Diasporan Armenians, but also because of his adroitness in securing the indulgence, concession and perhaps also the respect of an atheistic government. The second factor, which actually finds its source from the first, is the fact that the Soviet authorities aware of the existence of large communities of Armenians living overseas, spread all over the world and in particular in large concentrations in some countries where they play quite a substantive role in the local economies, evidently consider the See of the Catholicosate of Echmiadzin a good vehicle for their propaganda by entertaining and perpetuating through this channel the traditional ties with the Armenian Diaspora.

As an example of this interest shown by the propaganda machine of the Central government is the appearance of an article in the

December 1980 issue of Soviet Life Magazine[1], devoted to the sixtieth anniversary of Soviet rule in Armenia, under the title of "In the Heart of the Armenian Church". The author, Alexei Flerowsky, a Russian, indubitably commissioned for the assignment, interviewing the Catholicos Vazken I, writes: "we were told that practically everyone in Erevan attends Sunday services at the Echmiadzin Cathedral". But then to mitigate an uncalled for impression which might raise in the minds of the readers, and in compliance with Party line requisites, he immediately retracts to add that: "...this does not mean that there are that many believers in the city. People come for all sorts of reasons, not the least of which curiosity. They want to see the imposing spectacle of a solemn classical ceremony". With this kind of a demagogical interpretation this author attempts to give the impression to his readers that while on one hand the policy of the authorities towards the Church is one of tolerance and leniency, on the other hand, however, the Soviet citizen is perceptive and introspective enough to look at the Church as only a national tradition, a historical monument. He then adds: "...we went there on an ordinary working day. There was no service being held in the Cathedral, and there were hardly any people in the square in front of it. Inside were only two or three small groups of tourists -- Armenians from both abroad and villages of the republic. For them the visit to Echmiadzin, where the Head of the Armenian Church resides, was a highlight of a trip that was attractive from every viewpoint".

The above quotation is but only one example among many which shows the special importance given by the Central government to the role of the Armenian Church. It might as well be safely assumed that in this particular role and because of that She commands more privileges than the Churches of the other republics of the Soviet Union.

This sort of interest explains why such special importance was given to the election of the Catholicos back in the first half of the 1950's by the Central government in Moscow. The Soviet government's concern was that the delegates with voting power from the Diasporan communities outnumbering the local delegates, would have the leverage to select a candidate not quite acceptable. However, the manipulation was successful, and on that score the Soviet authorities had no reason to be disatisfied. Elected almost unanimously was a clergyman from another communist country, the Archibishop of the Armenian Church from Rumania, the present

Catholicos Vazken I.

As to the problem of how to cope with the vast number of delegates and visitors who had come to participate in the events and celebrations, a wide latitude for action was temporarily granted by the central government in Moscow to the local authorities in Erevan, to act with some independence according to the best of their judgement. Yet as an additional precautionary measure a great number of Russian operatives posing as tourists were flown south to Armenia to monitor and supervise indirectly the actions of the local authorities and see that the "temporary grant of special authority" would not be misinterpreted and misused.

To create the impression of abundance and counteract the overall apprehension of insufficiency and paucity, large quantities and varieties of rationed items were released to fill the stores with produce and other consumer goods hitherto unavailable. A number of programs were set: theatrical presentations, opera, concerts, sport events, etc., to entertain the delegates and visitors, to keep them in groups, busy and under constant watch. By so doing they intended also to restrict the time available for them to contact and relate with the local peoples. Special committees for receptions and guidance were formed, blended with an amalgam of party members, native intellectuals, and thoroughly screened newcomers on whose performance they believed they could rely.

They tried hard to convince me to be involved in one of these committees. One important consideration for them was the fact that among the delegates and official guests from Egypt and Lebanon there were a number of persons I personally knew, who had expressed desire to meet me and see at first hand how was I doing under this new setting. I, at first, agreed because I could not find a good enough excuse to refuse. But then it so happened that my final examinations at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism were coming up. This being a course of ideological significance, interference from whatever source would have given for me weapon to retort. I exploited the predicament with finite agility. I told them I am too busy preparing for my exams. Speaking of Marxism-Leninism Institute, this is the highest center of learning of the ideology and philosophy of communism as set and interpreted by the "scholars" of Marxism according to the policy prescripts of the leader of the day.

These periodical attempts to give me assignments by the MGB organization came to an end, when during one of our nocturnal

meetings I lost my temper, refused outright to collaborate. No more restraint, no more pretense. Petrossian was the name of the last operative who had become so impatient that he started to put on me extreme pressure. He was resolutely the most determined one to grab tangible results.

Even, before this incident had occured, with Stalin's death and overall relaxation, people felt freer to relate and communicate with each other with more candor. They started to converse more effusively with a feeling of freedom, less and less reserved, and they became mutually more accessible and trusting. To appease our inner frustrations accumulated over years of repressions, we assumed time was already propicious enough to cross the "Rubicon" and resume our past free relations with more candor and frequency as we used to before our repatriation in Diaspora. What's more we strived to acquire new friends, even from among the natives. As it has been said with Stalin alive we were fearfully avoiding each other. But then in this new setting, our mutual trust reinstated, our contacts were increasing, we started to visit each other, and even organize parties at some regular intervals. The occasions were not hard to extemporize, every and each one of us had at least a birthday to celebrate. Understandably, during these parties the flow of drinks was abundant. As a consequence the tongues were loosened, every so often beyond the limits of self-restraints. At certain points we felt a special pleasure in competing with each other as to who would be able to tell the most daring anecdote.

Evidently, this new swarming trend had caught the attention of the MGB operatives. It had become a new field of activity for them. Under their new, relatively speaking, restricted status, fearing to lose their former influence, and ostensibly to justify the continuation of their existence, they had initiated a straw-splitting campaign. They had started to gather trivial information to fill the gaps in their fields. Apparently they were imploringly hoping that this was a passing quirk that would fade sooner or later, and that the old order of things would again be re-established. And, that would be the time for them to pass into action at full steam, for which they were loading their archives with a swarm of information full of inflated issues.

Thus, Petrossian was determined to know what, exactly, was the nature of our conversations during those parties. Every so often, he, with his habitual cynicism, tried to suggest that a lot could be

learned from people in a state of inebriation. He even advised moderation in my intake of alcoholic beverages, certainly not out of concern for my health, but rather, as he was insinuating, to be more alert and able to pick the smallest slip of tongue.

Since then, I, invariably, had taken refuge behind the pretext of having been fuddled to the extent that I couldn't remember a thing. But what happened was that, apparently, I was not the only one from within our group in the parties that were pressed upon by the MGB operatives to crop information. During one of our meetings with my counterpart, when I was insistently denying an incident in which I had been part, I was faced with a detailed report which put me in a confusingly akward position. Evidently there was one or more persons in our group who unscrupulously was providing all of the details. A couple of perfidious informers.

What was the nature of the report?

A few of us had bought, what was then called in the Soviet terminology "magnetophone", tape recorders. Revelling in the prevailing atmosphere of relative freedom, during those gatherings at certain instances we transgressed the limits of essential prudence. We taped improvised parodies of political speeches. The kind of speeches we were being pounded with daily through the media of the radio and the press. At that point we had already committed two important offenses, two unpardonable sins. The first offense, of course, was our parties. Private gatherings of over three or four persons were, and still are, looked upon with a lot of suspicion. During our parties we were surpassing that limit by far. On some occasions there were perhaps as many as twenty of us gathered in one place. The second offense, was that we were contemptuous of the system. We were making a mockery of their political preachings. At that point it was obvious in their eyes that we had already trespassed the limits of their patience, the limit of the allowable "freedom".

The night I was called upon and faced with that unexpected confrontation, there was one other operative hanging around Petrossian. I was severely reprimanded by both for my persistent lack of cooperation. At one point they became abusive. I was threatened with a variety of repercussions. They enumerated a list of articles in Soviet penal code under which it would be legally possible for them to prosecute me if they so chose. It was an outright menace. The younger operative went a step further in his efforts of intimidation. He went towards a closet in the room and picked from

his belt hanging over the bar his revolver and began to manipulate, load, unload. At that sight the mounting pressure became so unbearable that, I, all of a sudden, run amuck. I became hysterical, I started to shout at the top of my voice. Turning towards that young man, I said: "a man has one life to live. If and when that life becomes obnoxious, dreary, and therefore meaningless, there is no point living. He becomes so unflinching" I added, pointing my index finger towards his face and deliberately raising my voice further,"...that he would even dare to reject the orders of your damned organization."

Needless to say, they were completely startled. It was so evident from their blushing and stuttering that they never had expected such an outburst from me, especially since up to that point, I had always kept my "sang froid". They were not only confused, they were intimidated. There was a long pause and a moment of total silence. Perhaps it was due to their last minute coolness that the meeting did not end in disaster, a calamity for me. In times earlier, Stalin alive, I would have been arrested on the spot for such a loss of temper. Instead, the moment of the surprise passed, they tried to calm me down, and promised to report my unwillingness to collaborate to their superiors.

This incident took place in a room at the top floor of the Intourist hotel. Apparently in most of the main hotels special quarters are reserved in permanence for the use of this organization for their regular meetings with their respective informers. Meetings in their headquarter are reserved for more serious cases: investigations, interrogations, inquest, or for planning some new despicable schemes when outside informers and collaborators have to participate.

After that incident, I found myself in a state of total numbness. My torpor of the first few days passing away, I, gradually felt relief, but also fear of eventual repercussions. Relief and a sort of self-contentment, for having had the courage to bring an end to our periodic meetings, and with it the pressures of the stern compulsion to improvise each and every time a new excuse for not having been able to provide the information as I had been ordered to do. Fear, as I was almost sure that sometime, somewhere, somehow, they would get even with me, to prove that although the Stalinist era was over, their power to retaliate had not faded, and was still well in place.

It didn't take much time for me to realize and feel the consequences of my daring eruption. The reader should still remember in earlier pages my description of the scenario set up with the intent to discover ideological errors in my book through a deceptive review of my work, which appeared in their most prestigious Party magazine, while denying me the right to refute the criticism. This was an attempt to ruin my career. The above described incident, in chronological order, preceded the assault on my book. It was actually the direct result. It was evident that they were pursuing a twofold objective: First, to throw me out of gear on my way up at the Academy, possibly even suggesting even an eventual demotion from a position I had so painfully arrived at through considerable efforts and against difficult odds. Second, to convey a strong nerve-breaking warning that there would be other such retaliatory measures to follow for my intrepid impulse. And, a couple of years later I could still feel the pang of their retaliation when the obstructions in my struggle to obtain my doctoral degree became hard to overcome. As a matter of record, this was also one of the reasons that played a role in my decision to leave the country when the occasion was presented.

I was terribly vexed also realizing that there were persons from our group betraying our mutual confidence. The suspicion as to who might have been the informer gnawed for quite a while my mind. I passed sleepless nights trying to figure out, to put the pieces together, trying to find an answer to this puzzle. From that date on I started to watch closely the behavior of each and every one in the group. I became still more suspicious whenever I noticed one in our group who would during a casual conversation ask unexpectedly a question unrelated with the subject discussed, or not of immediate concern to him. As a result of my close observations, I, gradually, narrowed down to one on my list of suspects, who showed signs of unwanted curiosity and inquisitiveness. I, also, became aware that a couple of my friends from our group behaved strangely, as if they wanted to say something but were hesitant. After the incident with the MGB operatives I had become more barefaced. I encouraged them to spell out. As I suspected they both revealed that they were under a similar quandary as I were. They couldn't, however, bring an end to it, as I had done. From that point on we agreed to keep each other informed on the course of their subsequent meetings with the operatives. While the person we suspected most, Armenag Z., continued in prying on matters of no concern to him, which led us to

distrust him even more.

Did we have conclusive proof? No, of course not. But then the political climate was such that people suspected each other, especially when one, perhaps unwittingly even, would give reason to distrust. The motive of our suspicion was his inquisitive character, which before our confidence was scorched, we hadn't paid much significance. Whether it was a trait of temperament, or the fulfillment of an assignment, we couldn't with certainty assert. Still we didn't feel that we ought continue to be open and candid with him. We decided to give an end, at least temporarily to our gatherings. It turned to be an unwise step. For he was no dumb. Far from it. He became aware of our change in attitude. He became more inquisitive. This time he had a reason. He wanted to know the cause of our change in demeanor. One night he came to visit us, and under the pressure of his insistence I made the error to tell him the reason of our suspicion. Even though I tried to be as tactful as I could under the circumstances, but the damage was done. He became extremely furious. Of course he denied. At one point he started to cry. To calm him down, I tried hard to explain how under the predicament we were living in, it was a natural reaction for people to suspect the next person when rightly or wrongly some signs are detected. I even exhorted that he in his turn had the right to suspect me, and I would be the last one to blame him for that. Our years long friendship came abruptly to an end. It was indeed a regretful outcome. We became the victims of the prevailing predicament.

Soon after our confrontation, Armenag's son, still in his teens, a high school student, recorded success after success. I have to admit that the young man had some writing skill, but not quite to the degree and level worthy of the rewards bestowed to him, so unproportionate to his "talent", if ever talent he had. Neither was he a "child prodigy". At one point he was even awarded one of the highest prizes, a gold medal, and proclaimed the young writer of the year. His writings were published one after the other within the lapse of a very short period. When we consider that publishing a book is as a general rule a toilsome onerous process, especially when the writer is unknown and an outsider from the tightly closed literary circle, one is prompted to speculate the reasons. His topics, invariably, dealt with the question of exploitation of the children of the poor in the capitalist countries. The same redundantly boring team one reads over and over again, loaded with a

long list of archaic clichés. Coming from a teenager, who, we knew well that at the time of his repatriation with his parents he hadn't yet completed his eight year of age, it became hard for us to imagine as to how he could have been able to remember the conditions of the poor kids abroad, let alone to have had the competence and insight to observe the predicament with such circumspection, enabling him to narrate in such a thought provoking manner. Evidently he had help, and his writings were extensively editorialized. We all surmized that junior's success was part of father's reward for services rendered.

This unprecedented success too came to reinforce our suspicions towards the teenager's father. Armenag Z., a few years after our deplorable "snub", died of cancer. We grieved, as if nothing was changed in our relations, ostensibly our old feelings of friendship overcame our sentiments of scorn. Yet his wife, in her dolor, found time to blame us for having been the cause. She claimed that his vexations had contributed to his early death.

Armenag's son, Berj Z., now in his late forties, apparently continues to rise in position, over the years having acquired the necessary experience to write according to the precepts of their ideology. The last we heard about him was that as a member of a Soviet delegation visiting Canada, a group picture appeared in the press of the day with Berj Z. standing side by side with the Prime Minister of Soviet Armenia. Others in the photograph included the Mayor of Montreal, the Hon. Jean Drapeau, high ranking officials from the Communist Party and government of Soviet Armenia, and officials of the Soviet Exhibition Committee in Canada, and Soviet diplomatic representatives. The Exhibition took place in the summer of 1981.

At the aftermath of the Intourist hotel confrontation, one would have been led to imagine that they would at last give up and set me free from assignments and cease badgering. Believing such a facile conclusion is ignoring the inner realities of the Soviet order, the training and character of the operatives, their stubborness, in short the nature of the whole system. The harassments, which only took other forms, continued with varying frequency, with spasmodic redundancy. A couple of incidents within this new setting, is worthed relating.

My sister, who was then a member in the Opera choir, was pressed to perform the same kind of dismal task, to become an

informer. Needless to say, she refused. Narrating the circumstances would perhaps, be a boring exercise in reiteration. I shall chose, therefore, to skip all the details. Except that, more vulnerable than I, she was fired from her job. She remained unemployed the rest of the time in Soviet Armenia until her expatriation. For a living she gave private lessons in French and served as a nanny to the granddaughter of a prominent painter, Mardiros S., now deceased.

Another vulnerable subject for them was my wife. Evidently their new stratagem for retaliation was to work upon my nerves by attacking what they did consider the weaker links. If my memory doesn't fail me the occasion was the benediction of "Myron"[2], the Holy Crism. It took place in Echmiadzin late 1950's. A great number of delegates and visitors, including a great number of clergymen had come from the Armenian Diaspora. One of the delegates was a priest from Beirut, Lebanon. A family friend who had brought a present from my wife's mother. My wife had called at the hotel to pick the package. On her way back home she was accosted by a young man who kept questioning her about the reason of her visit to the priest. This young man was one of those rank and file operatives roaming around the hotel in search for preys. To avoid being recognized by the passerbys as an operative, he suggested to act as if they were lovers. Unsatisfied with the result of this first encounter, he had fixed an appointment for another meeting. He had menaced reprisals in case my wife would dare tell me about the meeting. She came home frightened, terrified, trembling. In spite of her promise, she told me the whole story. We had decided not to keep any secrets from each other, and this was the kind which should be shared by each members of the family for protection.

We decided that I should be the one to go to the appointment. The meeting place was at the trolley-bus terminal north of the city, near the main gate of a public park. She had described the young man's appearance in detail, and his attire. In those days, like every thing else, there was a shortage of wearing apparel. People wore the same outfit all year round. Therefore, from that angle identifying the fellow was not a problem. When I arrived at the fixed spot, at the fixed hour, the young man was already there waiting. I approached him and stood close observing in a most casual manner. Having scanned thoroughly, I then left him waiting for my wife. I had a deep feeling of contentment, picturing in my mind how this apprentice-operative would go through the excruciation of a wearisome long wait.

In their persistent pursuit for retaliation, fetching grounds to catch me in transgression, ostensibly upon instructions from the MGB organization, the librarian of the "Secret Division" of the Academy of Sciences attempted to lure me into reading prohibited literature. It should be pointed out that all academic institutions: the Academy of Sciences, the Central Library, the universities, the institutions of higher education, the research centres, etc, have their own libraries, and within their own libraries their "Secret Divisions", where under lock and key there is an array of literature prohibited to the general public. This falls under the censorship department, known by its acronym GLAVLIT, which in turn is accountable to the organization. This kind of literature could be used only and almost exclusively by Party members, and only after a srupulous process of screening. If and when official permission is granted, the nature of the literature to be used is perspicaciously specified and limited. There are exceptions though. On some occasions a non-Party member can also use this literature, but then the assignment on which he is working must justify, and the institute or research organization for which he is working has to sign a security release. In such cases the scrutiny and screening process is still more extensive and minute.

I was not, and have never been a member of the Communist Party, neither was I a native reared and educated from my early age with Marxist concepts. However, I was assigned a topic of research politically involving, for the study of which it was imperative to have access to foreign sources. Foreign literature as a rule was subject to censorship, and most of it if not quite all, as classified materials were invariably held in the "Secret Division" of the respective libraries. The topic I was assigned to work on, and the field I was being engaged in as a specialty, was the economy of the Middle Eastern countries, and more specifically their oil resources. The reason I was assigned to this kind of a politically convoluted project, instead of a native Party member with more proficiency and experience in the interpretation of Marxist percepts, was that in those days I was, virtually, the only one in our Institute who was proficient in foreign languages, therefore, the only researcher capable of using foreign literature, sources and data.

The librarian's attempt to entice me into reading prohibited material was a planned trap. They knew that I was an ardent

reader, an inquiring mind. But then I knew all the consequences of such a blunder, and became instantly aware of what they were up to. The years had passed and the experience I had acquired was not in vain. I had learned a lot, I had become perceptive, cautious not to fall into any trap, and this very one in that number. I persistently refused her offer, which if ever I would have been lured in, as per regulation I would have signed on the library's register the title and nature of the literature I had been using. They would have secured substantiating proof of my infringement of the law.

One day while I was working in the library's "Secret Division", I noticed the librarian busily sorting out some books and placing them aside. She, then to give satisfaction to my bewildered inquisitive look, in a very casual manner told me that they were to be burned in the furnace of the building. To sate my curiosity, she added cynically: "we have more than one copy of these books, and our regulation is to destroy extras in order to prevent inadvertantly passing into the hands of 'irresponsible' (?) people". One of the books I noticed was from an Armenian author I, personally, knew from Egypt, Arshag Alboyajian, now deceased. The topic of the book in two volumes was THE ARMENIANS OF CAESERIA. A fascinating study. A very valuable primary source of information for our historians. A politically uninvolved detailed description of the mores and customs of the Armenians living in that region of Turkey. Unerring even by Soviet standards. But then as a general rule the censors are impersonal "robots" using neither mind nor emotion in the performance of their duty. Most of them are a class of illiterate fanatics who owe their positions to their bootlicking servile character. And, they seem to enjoy sadistically burning and destroying books and valuable vestiges of culture at odds with the prevailing percepts. For me, a book lover, it was indeed a heartbreaking sight. Consciously or unconsciously one is led to trace a parallel with the regressive periods in history. Indeed, in many aspects, and at certain instances we felt the twinges of living in an atmosphere reminiscent to the Dark Ages.

1-SOVIET LIFE MAGAZINE, December 1980, published by the Embassy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Printed in USA, under a special agreement of reciprocity with the US Government, for US consumption. The same privilege is granted for the US Embassy in Moscow to publish its own Magazine in Russian, its distribution, however, is obstructed by different means to prevent reaching to the Soviet public.

2-"Myron", the oil extracted from thousands of flowers symbolizing Armenian unity.

7

PERIODICAL IDEOLOGICAL DIATRIBES STALIN'S DEATH: THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH

Barely yet intergrated with the mode of life of the natives' quotidian, we soon became aware that it was a common line of action to, periodically, throw into circulation a new diatribe. At that point in time the one frowned upon was labeled "formalism". At first even the ones from among the repatriates believed to have intellectual perceptibility, grasped neither the meaning nor the intent of the vituperation. But we heard that in the field of music such internationally known figures as the composers Shostakovich and Aram Khachadurian were among those accused of this blunder, also others unknown to us yet not less prominent scientists, artists, painters, sculptors, writers, and intellectuals of different other disciplines. When we learned that all of these one time praised and prized personalities were targeted for reprimand, if not yet demoted, we then came to realize the seriousness of the predicament. I tried hard to understand what "formalism" meant in the Soviet lexicon, but without much success. Nobody was able to explain, or cared to discuss with us, repatriates. Yet one thing was quite perceptible, any person who had a grudge against another could without much effort report to the authorities and have the person punished. The MGB was on a hunting expedition, encouraging any scoundrel to report on the next fellow. In the circles of the intellectuals it sufficed to point out a couple of segments from the works of a prospective victim demonstrating an ideological heresy, to destroy the person. No report was being checked for its veracity. After all, the Kremlin had already assigned plans and set targets and numbers to be met at a fixed date.

Years later I became aware, when people started to talk more freely, that this crisis of "formalism" began with Zhdanov's sweeping purges of the arts. This wave of "purgation" was named "Zhdanovshina". It grew in intensity during the 1947-1948. Some publications ceased to appear. Celebrated writers were proscribed. Distinguished composers were severely reprimanded. Scientists, historians, and scholars of different other pursuits were compelled to confess their "errors", and promise to keep close ties, in the future, with the "masses", which should be the main source of their inspiration. "Masses" in this instance meant Stalin. In fact,

there was a wave of cultural terror which in no time spread all over the country to the remotest provincial regions. For some, self-incrimination, a *"mea-culpa"* in public, became the only way to be spared from the worst. In other words a self-abasement. The intelligentzia, as a result of this, nurtured deep resentment against Zhdanov, even though they knew well that such an extensive purge could not have been initiated without Stalin's approval, if not his initiative.

Both, Aram Khachadurian and Dimitri Shostakovich are dead now. Both, at more than one time in their lives had dominated Soviet music. Each had their times of glory, but also of obscurity, of odium. On the eve of his death, Shostakovich dictated lengthy recollections to a friend, the music critic and journalist, Solomon Volkov. This material was smuggled out and published by Harper and Row under the title "Testimony". It is a poignant description of the predicament of art and artists in the Soviet Union. Actually a Solzhenitzyn's "Gulag" in another version. While one is the incarceration of the body the other is the confinement of the mind.

By his own admission Shostakovich was forced to go along with Party doctrines, hating every minute of it. He was a great talent, and like many other talents in his and many other fields, was pushed back by the system under which he was forced to work. His potentials were much higher than his actual production. Shostakovich confessed that he had lived a nightmare, and at one point was on the brink of exile and physical destruction, as a consequence of Stalin's personal disapproval of what was been labeled "formalism". And the dire fact was that nobody understood the exact meaning, the essence of "formalism", except perhaps, for some minor signs of modernism, or conformity with the West.

From that point on, as he himself conceded, he started to produce Party-line junks. He certainly feared that he was becoming a traitor to his art, but then admitted that he sold out because he enjoyed his perquisits and high connections. In this aspect, he hasn't been the only from the ranks of the intelligentzia, who, to survive, and enjoy a relatively more prosperous life, had to follow this same kind of path. He reasserted himself as full fledged artist for a brief period when he already knew his end was approaching.

In his "Testimony" Shostakovich confesses: "I can't go on describing my unhappy life, and I'm sure that no one can doubt that it was unhappy. There were no particularly happy moments in my life, no great joys. It was grey and dull and it makes me sad to

think about it".

As a music critic in a major review wrote: Shostakovich "... was forced to go along with Party doctrines, hating every minute of it... (he) was a great talent ruined by the system under which he was working". Another critic said: "a little courage might have helped. Shostakovich traveled abroad, to New York in 1949 for example. (Just about a year after the wave of "formalism" had swept out a large number of intellectuals -- H.J.T.). The critic continues: "he could have dumped the commissars and the philistines, lived in New York, say, or Paris. He could have written the large body of first-rate work of which he was capable. Other great artists have sought freedom in exile. Shostakovich's "Testimony", therefore, convicts two defendants, the atrocious Soviet system, of course, but also Shostakovich himself, a traitor to his art".

Although he had not the same guts to confess, Aram Khachadurian's fate was not much different, neither were his feelings, from the ones of his colleague Shostakovich. Yet, to be fair and exonerate to some extent the sins of the peoples in the same predicament as Shostakovich, I shall have to disagree with the last critic for ignoring two important elements. As a general rule a Soviet citizen traveling abroad lives behind a family: spouse, children, parents. They become in a sense hostages. Thus a defector has to chose either to become a traitor to his art, or a betrayor to his family. According to some news Shostakovich's son, a prominent conductor himself, defected to the West. If he succeeded in having his family with him, then he is no traitor, neither to his art nor to his soul.

This analysis applies to the rest of the intelligentzia: scientists, artists, writers, composers, etc., some of whom having grasped the true essence in life have already defected, and are now able to expand their talents. Nuriyev, Barishnikov, and others, are typical examples. They are no more traitors to their arts, but haven't they betrayed their kin?

Hardly a couple of years had passed, the effects of "formalism" still fresh in the minds of many, "cosmopolitanism" became the new "pronouncement" of reprobation. This too was an ill defined heresy, which was difficult even for Marxist scholars to pinpoint the tenor, since "internationalism" is in a sense a positive connotation in the communist lexicon, and hardly differs in quintessence from the term "cosmopolitism". Yet, in the minds of its initiators, it provided the desired flexibility to include all sorts of references from foreign sources which might lead to a positive interpretation of the outside world, compared to Soviet reality. This was the time when the scope of the restrictions was widened not only to limit contacts between the Soviet citizens and foreigners, but also between Soviet citizens, between the ones who had seen the outside world and those who hadn't. In such wise not only the intelligentzia became vulnerable to fall victim to this new wave of "bourgeois-cosmopolitanism" but also a large number of the veterans of World War II. Stalin was particularly worried and concerned that soldiers and/or prisoners of the war who had returned home after having experienced conditions abroad would become a large crowd of skeptics who would eventually relate their true impressions about life in the capitalist world. And, this was the reason why the repatriates, because of their background and experience of the outside world, became automatically targets of suspicion. As a result they became deliberately downtrodden, not only by the authorities, but even the ordinary citizenry who feared closer relation with a newcomer would jeopardize their safety.

While the wave of "cosmopolitanism" was still in full swing, a colleague from the Institute of Economics at the Academy of Sciences, hoping to prove his political alertness and devotion to his Party, in a burst of zeal, denounced me for having made frequent nostalgic allusions of our Diasporan life. He even claimed that at one instance I was trying to expound the ideas of Malthus[1]. I remember that during one of our chitchats I had expressed the opinion that I was in favor of birth control. Evidently he had tried to equate my innocent inference with a social theory which was then despised by the Marxist doctrinarians of the time. This kind of self-assigned righeousness are claimed today by the "Right-to-life" groups in this country. This sort of uncompromising attitude by these groups reminds me the actions of the Soviets at that time. Today, however, the Soviets do allow abortion as a measure for birth control. The years immediately after the war, the Soviet Union had incurred tremendous human loss. Badly in need of man power to reconstruct the devastation, every suggestion, program, regulation tending to interfere with the growth of the population was considered an anti-Soviet expression. In this rare instance the Soviet had good reason for their policy.

The attempt of this "Party-conscience" colleague to implicate me in one error or another did not produce any serious consequence.

The reason, ostensibly, was that he had no enough evidence that I had uttered such an opinion. But then he could have found easily a willing backbiter. Apparently, however, I was not yet a chosen target then. They needed me for future assignments, as later events like my trip to Moscow came to prove. Chronologically the trip came after this incident.

Another wave of terror was the one labeled *"Beran-Batzutiun"* or *"Rotozeyistvo"*, the first in Armenian, the second in Russian. Translated literally it means "open-mouthness". In our everyday vernacular would mean big-mouth. The primary objective of this campaign was to force people to keep their mouths shut. Why? Perhaps to avert gossips and criticisms. The Soviets have an obsession for secrecy, to the point of becoming ridiculous. Even news about ordinary daily events is censored, or information which might reveal aspects of their economic failures. Especially information which might unveil the dimmer features of Soviet socialism, the purges for example. Censored are information that might suggest, even by remote inference that everything is not perfect as claimed to be in this "immaculate" society. Crimes happen even in Soviet society. Life is not void of accidents, sometimes even to catastrophic proportions, earthquakes for example. But all such information are witheld because authorities opine that ordinary people need not know. This policy became still tighter during this tide of *"Beran-Batzutiun"*. A mere slip of tongue, an innocent remark about something considered "secret" became immediately a case for prosecution.

I came out of this last crisis, once again, unharmed. I was out of circulation. The reason was my illness. In the winter of 1952 I had contracted laryngitis which kept me in bed for many weeks. The following winter, 1953, I had a relapse, which this time took a more accute term, coupled with a severe form of bronchitis, with an unremitting high fever. I laid sick in bed the whole winter. Inefficient medication and lack of adequate heat at home, made matters worse. Penicillin was again hard to procure, and the needed quantity was well over ten million units. And, the kind available was not quite effective. I became extremely weak and depressed. Cloistered for months within the four walls of a somber room, I battled with my miserable thoughts, which at certain moments were pounding my mind and soul without reprieve. I was angry with myself for my past stupidities, my mistakes in judgements,

my credulity, my self-delusion. Fortunately I had my wife and my son I felt I owed them protection, to worry above all about their well being. An irreversible act to end my physical and moral pains and miseries, and abandoning them would have meant cowardice from my part. Their presence and the thought of my duties towards them helped me survive. I also owe a great deal to my wife's perseverance in taking care of me, procuring medication and medical care under extremely difficult conditions, and her love.

It was during the winter of 1952-1953 that the crisis of *"Beran-Batzutiun"* had reached to its apogee to threaten not only the intelligentzia but also all levels of the population. There were other crises which came to follow one after the other. Some of them affecting only a certain category of people, mostly the intellectuals. In the fields of arts and literature, in particular, since early 1930's strict control by the Party has been maintained, with a few brief intervals of relative relaxation. Such easing of pressure took place in the aftermath of Stalin's death in 1953-1954, another in 1956-1957 the period of Khrushchev's program of relative liberalization, then a relapse of the controls, and the situation has worsened since the fall of Khrushchev.

Why this retrogression? After so many decades of controls and restrictions on the minds of the people the leadership evidently feared that Khrushchev's experience in relaxation would eventually get out of hand, and the removal of limitations on the written word would ultimately lead the press to disseminate news unpalatable and comments critical of the system.

Stalin alive these periodic pinches were not limited in the fields of art and literature. It included almost all spheres of human intellect. In the field of linguistics for example, the leading figure was Nikolai Yakovlovich Marr, the son of a Scottish father and Georgian mother. By all measures an erudite scientist, but his only weakness was an itching ambition. He was elected member of the Academy of Sciences for his efforts in proving that language is a class phenomenon. This was an assumption which came to deny a common and uniform language for all classes of peoples in a given nation. By implication this meant to express the existence of different and separate languages, one used by the aristocracy, another by the bourgeoisie, still another by the plebeian.

He was determined, hard working and stubborn in his pursuit to prove his views. A substantial part of his voluminous production

dealt with the study of linguistics, despite the fact that by training and education he was a historian. Apparently in his eagerness to please Stalin, it became an obsession for him to prove, in his own wranglesome manner, that language evolved in direct relation with the development of the class struggle. On this baseless premise he built a theory which was found attractive by the Marxist demagogues of his time, who sought in each and every phenomena to see the outgrowth of class struggle. He, evidently, had the ambition of becoming a participant in the building of this new society, wistful to carve a name in the pages of this new history in the making.

He took advantage from the fact that the field of linguistics was wide open and free, since neither Marx nor Engels had given much thought to this particular subject. Nothing was said in their teachings to deny Marr's fantasy. Lenin and Stalin hadn't devoted much time to this question either. Although in a few instances they had discussed the nature of language without, however, any far-reaching conclusion. The only reference made by Stalin during the eralier period of sovietization was in 1930 at the Sixteenth Party Congress when he stated that: "the national languages will flow together into a universal language which of course will be neither Russian nor German, but something altogether new". This prophecy, as many of the other prophecies of the Marxist pundits, did not materialize. We must take exception, of course, to the efforts made towards an overall "russification". But then that wouldn't be the outcome of an evolutionary process as claimed by Stalin. If at all successful this would be a coerced imposition from the part of the dominant nation on the other nations and ethnic groups forming the Soviet Union. History has evinced, however, that the Russian language forcefully imposed will remain still for a long time foreign to large segments of the Soviet people.

After many years of acceptance of Marr's theory, in the summer of 1950, Stalin took the fancy of denying all that had been prescribed since then. Vigorous debates started, first in the press and then in meetings on an academic level, when once distinguished scholars blamed each other, at some points even exchanging unbecoming epithets. Stalin for a short while stayed out of the scene. Then during the months of June and July of the same year five letters one after the other appeared under the signature of Stalin in the "Pravda" discussing the nature of language and the theoretical bases of linguistic doctrines. Overnight the whole structure of

Marr's doctrine crumbled. The Academies of Sciences, the universities, the institutes and all institutions of higher learnings organized discussions.

During these diatribes all members and staff of the Academy of Sciences of Erevan were also invited to participate in the tirades, or at least be physically present at the ongoing meetings where once respected "savants" were pushed down in a game of mutual vilification. Those who had a grudge against one of the victimized could not hide a sense of inner satisfaction, while the rest of us had feelings of pity, even commiseration. Overall the general feeling was one of confusion. Did this become a lesson of humility for those still "shining" as pundit theorists in the other fields of science? Not that I was aware of.

This tide triggered dramatic conflicts in the sphere of natural sciences between adherents for freedom of research and the ideologists, with often no direct training in the particular field, insisting to assess that scientific research should be carried within a set frame regardless of objective realities. The bizarre issue of Lysenko condemning all the science acquired in genetics as bourgeois heritage, is one example of how an illeterate quack was permitted to grab total control of Soviet science of biology and applied agriculture. Lysenko's theory after years of "eclat", was later denounced as having interfered with the normal development of agriculture.

By rejecting the theory of relativity and cybernetics as bourgeois "pseudo-science", Soviet defense and space research programs suffered a great deal at its initial stage. But then in this field, because of the national interest, reason won over the absurdities imposed by the theoreticians of Marxist dogmas. As it appears, in their inner convictions it is doubtful that even the Soviet rulers attach much meaning to the dogmatic formulas. Dogmas which have become more and more uncongruent with the realities of life. Even Soviet humorists have at certain points parodied in the press a prediction of life as it will be tomorrow according to their dogmas. For some the parody became, perhaps unwittingly, a message which turned them skeptical even about the "tomorrow". Yet they continue to insist on their basic "preaching" that in the struggle between the two irreconciable ideologies, between capitalism and socialism, the victory belongs to the latter, according to their theory of historical determinism.

During all these years, in the midst of all these nonsenses, I was the confused spectator. Fortunately, however, I witnessed all this turbulence from a relatively safe distance. I was too new to have had time to involve myself in one or other trend, or become the mouthpiece, or the disciple of any one of the spellbinders, policy makers.

This trend continued with few intervals of relative "calm", while Stalin alive. The case of the "Leningraders" and "Doctors' Plot" are typical examples of Stalin's last days of fury. In spite of its serious repercussions and many purges the "Leningrad Affair" was not publicized, until Khrushchev's Secret Speech to the Twentieth Party Congress. This comes to prove once again how secrecy is such an effective "weapon" in Soviet society, while at the same time suggests how many victims had been sacrificed without the public's awareness.

The paradox in this particular situation was that after the sudden death in 1948 of Andrei Zhdanov, the first secretary of the Party in Leningrad, once considered as the most probable successor of Stalin, a large scale purge had started mainly of those close to Zhdanov himself. Yet Zhdanov was not denounced neither before his death nor after. Decidedly it was an inner Party struggle, the elements of which have not been disclosed in full, nor will they be, at least in the near future.

The "Doctors' Plot" appears to be an outcome of Stalin's pathological imagination, a sudden outburst of unfounded suspicion. As a result the whole body of the Kremlin doctors were arrested on January 1953, on charges of poisoning Andrei Zhdanov, and an eventual attempt to poison Stalin. By all indications this event was a preliminary for a larger scale plan of purges. However that dire scheme did not materialize, Stalin having died the same year in March. The "Doctors' Plot" was at the same time a covert expression of anti-semitism. Stalin had from the very early days such a predilection, which was still more intensified after his rivalry and clashes with Trotzky, who was a Jew. Yet he used the services of many Jews when he felt the need of them. In major part his personal physicians were of Jewish descent.

Serious as they were, these two cases: the banishment of the "Leningraders" and the "Doctors' Plot", did not extend, however to the provincial regions, especially in the Caucasian republics where the number of Jews in high positions is minimal. The news of these chastisements reached us in unconfirmed pieces and did not

affect the normal course of the events in the provincial regions.

The ceaseless poundings of Stalin's cult on the peoples' minds, the continuous assertions of his omnipotence and his so-called infallibility, had left an incredibly curious impact upon the way of the Soviet peoples' thinking to the point that they had lost perspective for the fact that he was mortal. Even for the minority of the non-conformists, the skeptics, who had held the perspective of Stalin's mortality, the event seemed too remote.

The winter of 1952-1953 I was ill at home. Still in bed, not yet quite recovered, the morning of March 4th, 1953, I switched the knob of my radio to listen the local news. It was a few minutes passed ten. I well remember for this is one of those dates one never can forget. The news started with the announcement of Stalin having had stroke. Two days uninterruptedly the doctors' official reports were communicated at short intervals about the course of his illness. For two days without respite people were listening to the news with tense expectations: the gullible majority with genuine grief, the incredulous skeptics with the hope that his death would usher to the beginning of a new era. Perhaps the fear of a disruption of the system was the reason when the news of Stalin's death was announced there was concurrently an appeal by the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers addressed to the Soviet people to redouble their unity, solidarity, fortitude of spirit and above all their vigilance in these days of "sorrow". Strange as it may seem, this atheistic government suggested that the Russian Orthodox Patriarch and the heads of all other religious denominations to hold special memorial religious services for this heathen's "soul".

The events following Stalin's death are known to many. However, none reflects the true picture of the inner involutions. Without being privy to the innermost involutions, it was quite apparent that almost immediately after Stalin's death a mute struggle for power had started, culminating after a little over three months to Beria's demotion and arrest. What was the direct bearing on the common people, the struggle between the top brass? I have to remind the reader that Beria, the head of the "political police", was the co-author with Stalin of the mass purges. To be more veridical, Beria was the demoniacally imaginative executor of Stalin's orders. And, nobody would have doubted that in his struggle for power Beria would have had recourse to the same old methods of destruction

of his rivals, and in the process to extend the purges to include the masses, as Stalin had done in the past, with some success, by converting the people to a cowardly crowd of poltroons. We well knew from past experience that purges on the higher levels were always followed by purges on the lower levels. Having this in mind one can safely infer that in spite of the rivalry existing between all the prospective leaders: Malenkov, Khrushchev, Bulganin, Mikoyan, and still others, Beria's past activities had generated sufficient fear to make them unite against the common threat and neutralize Beria. The arrest of Beria took place in June 1953. The news of his arrest and later of his execution caused general relief.

An overtly expressed relief hitherto unseen, unheard of. Overnight we witnessed a new trend. A tide of anecdotes and jokes went into circulation. The Soviet people up to that point reserved to the degree of dullness, began to show an unsurpassed sense of humor. Even, since then, the most dedicated Party members known for their fidelity and fervor, the most constrained ever expressing their inner feelings, started openly to relate anecdotes, bitter and sweet. At some points they tried to excel one another. One such joke went: "yes indeed, Stalin was our father, for he slept with the mothers of us all."

A short while later, the huge statue of Stalin erected few years earlier and placed on a monumental pedestal on top of a hill in the outskirts of Erevan with his face towards the city and his index finger pointed in the same direction as if to warn the people of his constant watch over them, was pulled down. Needless to say, this was not upon the initiative of the local government of Armenia. The order came from above, from Moscow. Yet a controversy had risen around this order. The Georgian people who, comparatively speaking, had profited the most from Stalin's tenure, showed some resistance to the idea of his demotion, even though this was a post-mortem action on the part of the new government. Stalin was a product of their own land.

In line with these feelings, groups of Georgians had warned the Armenians that they would invade Erevan in force protesting the implementation of such an order. To avoid serious clashes between these two neighboring peoples (who were often at odds with each other, despite the official claim that they were citizens of "fraternal republics") the central government in Moscow took the initiative. One day, after midnight in total secrecy the army, who incidentally,

in the regions of the Caucasus are in major part composed of soldiers of Russian extraction (a central government policy to place in each republic non-native soldiers) surrounded the area, and in the darkness and silence of late night, tied Stalin's statue by the neck with thick cables attached to a battery of tanks, and pulled it down with an enormous crash. The people of the neighborhood must have heard, but at that point they probably had no inkling of what had happened. That night the lights of the whole city of Erevan and surrounding vicinities had gone out. A complete blackout. But since blackouts were frequent occurences, most of the people thought it was the usual electricel failure. According to some rumors, once laid on the ground, the statue was flattened under the crash of the tanks' treads. Then broken into lumps, transported to the city's foundry to be melted into bronze bullions. The statue of the once venerated and feared despot was melted down into oblivion.

The rivalry between the members of his entourage transpired through two distinct manifestations. One while Stalin was alive, the other after his death. While alive sycophants were fighting to grab nothing more than his favors, which were, for that matter, of short duration. When Stalin died the intrinsic nature of the inner struggle changed. It was no more a fight to grab the favors of the "Vozhd" (Leader), but rather one of snatching power, an exclusive total, undivided power, from each others' hands, in conformity with the best Soviet tradition of dictatorship. But out of fear of Beria's power they had united to oust him. After that there was a transitory period at which point they thought of no better way than to compromise and agree on a new form of leadership. A collective leadership with the participation of the most imperious, the most domineering ones from among the associates. A decision was made to form a triumvirate with a division of power between Malenkov, Khrushchev and Bulganin. There was also a change in their former functions. Malenkov, who was holding the secretarship, immediately after Stalin's death relinquished that task to Khrushchev, to hold only the post of premier, while Bulganin became minister of defense. Malenkov, having confidence in his own personal power, intended with this move to soften the power of the secretarship, hence of the Party, while enhancing at the same time the power of the government over the Party apparatus. This was indeed a step forward, if ever had succeeded, towards more democracy. But Soviet rooted tradition of leadership interfered with

this process. Khrushchev as First Secretary of the Party, worked hard to sustain the archaical power of the Party apparatus. He ultimately succeeded ousting Malenkov, and held back the dual positions of secretarship and premiership. He became the new "Vozhd", though not quite as omnipotent nor as harsh as Stalin.

Nobody can guess what would have been the course of history had Malenkov remained in power and succeeded to implement his initial plan of diminishing the power of the Party apparatus at the expense of a more powerful government. He was the precursor of the principle of "peaceful coexistence" before Khrushchev declared the idea his own. Still in power, Malenkov also was the first to suggest measures to give higher priority to the production of consumer goods. He repudiated the "Doctors' Plot" as being slanderous accusations and gave instructions to free the prisoners.

Khrushchev, at this initial stage, as part of his struggle for exclusive leadership, denounced Malenkov and labeled his policy as "revisionism". All of the reforms proposed and measures taken by Malenkov to ameliorate the conditions of the Soviet people, Khrushchev claimed them to be deviations from the original tenets of Marxism. Yet, after grabbing total and exclusive power, he gradually followed Malenkov's steps, and most of whose proposals he claimed to be his own. In a sense a "plagiarism", but if we ignore that attribute, his adoption of this new course was to some extent the beginnings of positive steps. Khrushchev, with his future initiatives, by officially repudiating Stalin's methods, by rehabilitating a large crowd of the victims, by freeing the exileds, by his daring speech against his former boss, when the momentum of the old system was not yet sufficiently faded, he came to the fore with unprecedented courage, and this became unquestionably a step which to a large extent turned the trajectory of history in a new direction. Admittedly not enough, but if the trend had continued this would have been a good beginning.

Having witnessed this transitional period and the first years of Khrushchev's reign it would be hard to deny that some changes have indeed taken place. Changes, one can with some reservations say, have been for the better. After so many years of prostrated quiescence the path towards sanity was still torturous and protracted. In fact, if there was some relaxation, this was rather in the attitude of the new governing body, since overall the laws and the rules remained unchanged. The interpretation of some of the laws was softened, their enforcement was put under a restrained control. When the triumvirate was still in power, each one of its members was trying hard to project a respectful image, as no one's power was yet definitely well established. And the best outcome for the Soviet people at that earlier stage of uncertainties, was the ordinance passed which granted amnesty to the political prisoners and allowed them to come back from exile. We saw most of our friends, victims of the 1949 tragedy, returning home. A few had already perished. This amnesty was one of the happier issues resulting from the changes of the political climate at the aftermath of Stalin's death. Khrushchev in power this trend continued for quite a while.

Lenin, the founder of the Soviet regime, did not live long enough to enable determine the impact of his stewardship. Stalin's long reign of terror, was, no doubt, destiny's curse on the Soviet people. After such a dreadful rule, Khrushchev's advent to power became a mild blessing. He inspired hopes for reforms. And these to some small extent materialized.

1-Thomas Robert Malthus, English clergyman and political economist, known for his theory that the population of the world tends to increase faster than the food supply will warranty its support. Unless birth rate is controlled, poverty and war must serve as a natural restrictive measure.

8

KHRUSHCHEV'S ERA: HOPES FOR REFORMS

After Stalin's death the impact of the change in Party and government leadership on the fate of the Soviet people was palpable, though not sufficiently substantial. It was not an easy matter to change the course of the momentum of the old regime. Even though at some instances timid attempts were made by some, the fact remains, however, that to this date, after three decades from the despot's departure in essence nothing much is changed.

One of the more important measures of "reform" which contributed significantly to the process of general relaxation was the government ordinance to limit the powers of the Ministry of the Interior. This, of course, was primarily intended to secure the safety of the top officials, who during Stalin's era were not exempt from the risk of arbitrary arrests as a consequence of the mere whimsical mood of the "boss", who took particular pleasure in pointing a finger at his prospective victim, as a sign of his order of demotion. But then this was the kind of change from which the general public was also indirectly benefitting.

Since the Revolution and the inception of the Soviet regime, Russia had become more and more a closed society. Stalin alive the multi-faceted barriers between the country and the outside world were continuously reinforced with new partitions still more impermeable each passing year. Visitors from outside world were extremely rare. For the ordinary Soviet citizen to be able to travel overseas, it was an impossible dream. The diplomats representing the Soviet Union abroad were reliable high ranking Party members, who, even so, were tightly screened and had to leave closest relatives as hostages.

During the earlier years foreign visitors were, almost invariably, either communist Party members in their own respective countries, or people known for their sympathies to the Soviet regime. In spite of that, these visitors were not allowed beyond a defined perimeter from the All-Union capital, Moscow, and a few other showcase cities. And the natives were discouraged from having contacts with them. It was much later, and under the new leadership that with some of the overall restrictions being loosened, the peripheries for the foreign visitors extended. To the All-Union capital of Moscow, and the showcase cities of Leningrad and Kiev,

were added new showcase cities of minor importance like Riga, capital of Latvia; Tibilissi, capital of Georgia; Baku, capital of Azerbaijan; Erevan, capital of Armenia, and some other capitals of Central Asian republics. It was then that the number of visitors increased at a regular pace, including people not necessarily in sympathy with the Soviet regime. It was then that the number of visitors from the Armenian Diaspora to Erevan reached unprecedented levels.

Although tourists to Soviet Armenia were and are in major part Armenians from abroad, visiting either relatives or friends, or again just to get acquainted with the country of their forefathers, there are, however, small in number tourists and visitors of other nationalities. The non-Armenian visitors are in most part delegates to scientific conventions, or researchers on furlough under a program of cultural exchange with the Soviet Union. As a matter of record Armenia has two scientific institutions of international repute. One is, the Observatory and Astro-physical Research Center of Byurekan, whose head and founder is academician Victor Hambartzumian. A prominent astrophysicist with many discoveries to his credit, and President of the Academy of Sciences of Erevan. Hambartzumian detains also foreign scientific titles from many international scientific institutions, and is, as such, honorary member in many of them. The other, is the Institute of Physics, who has a Research Center for the studies of "Cosmic Rays" on top of mount Arakadz. This institute is also famous for its achievements in this and other fields. The founders and one time heads of the Institute were the brothers academicians Artemi Alikhanian, residing in Erevan, and Alikhanov, residing in Moscow. They are both deceased. They both commanded international fame in their respective fields of research. These are the main centers of research which attract foreign scientific researchers. There are a few others with lesser international fame.

The post-Stalinist period with a new governmental policy of loosening the restrictions, even though limited, it became significant in as much as it gradually diminished the isolation of the Soviet Union from the rest of the world. In spite of all these changes, never did the ordinary citizen of Armenia, in his wildest imagination ever expected that one day Erevan would entertain as guest of honor a king, and become host of a prime minister.

Indeed, the visits to Erevan of these two prominent personalities in the second half of the 1950's, could have been only attributed to

the overall climate of relaxation. But what was not clear for the citizens of Armenia, why the king of Nepal had chosen to include their country in his itinerary, and not one of the other republics. Was it perhaps for the reason that Armenia's topographical features are in some aspects similar to the ones in Nepal, both being mountainous countries? Was it that he was interested to know how well the Armenians were faring with conditions of their environment? This was of course a mere conjecture. The real reason was perhaps some other consideration from the part of the central government in Moscow.

As to the reason of the visit of the Prime Minister of France, Monsieur Francois Pinaud, the only plausible explanation was that many of the repatriates were Armenians from France, the new generation born in France, but all, former French citizens. This might have been his reason, his interest. The visit of Francois Pinaud to the Soviet Union was initially scheduled as an official one upon the invitation of the Central government in Moscow. According to some rumors the invitation schedule did not include Erevan. This was a last minute decision on the part of the Prime Minister, who again according to rumors, had encountered some resistance from Soviet authorities. As it appeared some intrepid repatriates from France had succeeded to contact French diplomatic representatives and conveyed the dire predicament of their former citizens and expressed desire to return to France. This must have been the impulse.

The visit of the king of Nepal had not aroused any particularly significant reaction. Except for some who hadn't seen a king in their lives, and were curious to know what a royal personage looked like. So, there was only a relatively small gathering of curiosity seekers, mainly from among the natives. But Monsieur Pinaud's visit attracted an unprecedented huge crowd, in major part, of former repatriates from France. The airport was filled with a swarm of demonstrators, with improvised flags of France, and signs in French calling for the intervention of the Prime Minister of France with the Soviet authorities to let them return to France. On some of these signs one could read the incredibly defiant words of *"Sauvez nous"*, save us.

Demonstrations as a general rule, and more specifically the ones in presence of foreign visitors, like the one we witnessed during those few days, had never been seen since the very first days of the establishment of the regime. As a matter of fact they are

prohibited, and the demonstrators, if any, are immediately labeled as anti-government elements, or enemies of the public, subjected to the severest punishment under the laws of the land. During the earlier years of the Revolution there were a few sporadic outbursts which were all suppressed in bloodsheds. The only kind of demonstration permitted is the one fixed and sponsored by the Soviet government itself in front of foreign embassies to express a semblance of discontent by the Soviet people against a given policy of a foreign government, which actually displeases and goes counter Soviet political designs. In spite of all efforts to simulate the spontaneity of these demonstrations they are hardly convincing.

The general surmise was that after the departure of the Prime Minister of France from Erevan the repercussions would become extremely severe. Strange as it may seem, only a small number of the participants were apprehended from among the leaders of the demonstrators, to be questioned. According to the best tradition of France the demonstrators in major part were the women. After a mild reprimand they were most of them later on released. If some of them were later immured, the actions were designedly attributed to motives other than this incident.

How then to explain this unusual forebearance? The general conjecture was, and there were reasons to give credence based on information procured by those who could keep contacts with the French diplomatic personnels, that Monsieur Pinaud at the scene had been extremely moved with emotions. Aware of the possible dire consequences, had taken the unexpected initiative for a foreign statesman, to request the central authorities in Moscow to desist from taking repressive measures against the demonstrators. Evidently, the request of the Prime Minister of France was taken into account, perhaps even to prove a point, that the new course adopted by this post-Stalinist government was one of lenience and forebearance.

Inspired by the fact that there were large numbers of applications pouring on the French Embassy in Moscow from the repatriates from France, to return back home, in all appearance discussions were carried on between the two governments to that effect. Because, not much later, and if my memory doesn't fail me, in the late 1950's, permission were granted at a gradually increasing pace to number of applicants. Yet, these were conceded only after a long, elaborate, tedious process of bureaucratic formalities: postponments, refusals, renewed applications or reinstatement of old

ones, and so on and so forth. All that to obstruct with artificially raised barriers, with the undeniable intention to discourage the applicants. As time passed by, the trend took immense proportions and became so contagious that it seriously worried the local authorities. Not only the number of applicants from France increased, but also the wave spread over to include many of those who had repatriated from the USA and the Middle East. All wishing to return.

Later on, by early 1960's, this trend snowballed, reaching hurtful proportions. At certain periods swarms of repatriates crowded in front of the doors of the visa office in Erevan wishing to lodge applications to leave the country. According to the latest information the situation got out of hand, which moved Moscow to slam the door on Armenians wishing to emigrate. Compared with the initial enthusiasm of the first days of the repatriation, the present trend of expatriation is no less than a historical tragedy. Who is to be blamed? Who is the big culprit? What is the situation at this point in time? These are questions hard to respond. Questions, some of which, I'll attempt to respond in the course of my narration. The phenomenon is, without doubt, immensely regretful. It is a historical backslider. Again who is to be blamed? Perhaps everybody. Perhaps nobody, but the historical fate of the Armenian people, who had to be oppressed either by intruding Turks, or the Soviet regime so alien to the character of the Armenians.

Another positive outcome from the general laxity was that parallel to the increasing influx of foreign tourists, there began a gradual outflow of a restricted number of Soviet tourists, who were being granted permission to travel abroad. Naturally the screening was thorough and tight. The tours were in groups. The groups were accompanied by a group leader, with one assistant or two, who were all predictably officers of the organization in disguise, in civilian clothes. In the screening process it was most evident that after careful scrutiny of all sorts of considerations in the minutest details, permission was granted to persons who had very strong family attachments left behind. Persons who, they were completely convinced would not break those ties for anything in the world. Which actually amounted to a sly version of a hostage situation.

There were no doubts in their minds that I was falling within the frame of the last category. It was no secret for anybody that my ties with my family were extremely strong. They knew that I

was not the type of person who would abandon a wife and a child for even a cherished freedom. But then, inherently by my own status of a repatriate I was failing to satisfy some of the rest of their desiderata. For one thing, I was not a native reared and educated from an early age with their percepts. Neither was I a Party member. Apparently, however, in my favor worked the consideration that being someone who knew the outside world, the confrontation would not be as staggering as for the case of one of their natives who would have to experience the other side of the "curtain" for the first time. The people on top of the organization are not at all a bunch of stolids, neither are they naive. Most of them are no doubt wrong-headed, narrow-minded, obstinates, but definitely not stupid. They very well knew and realized that the risk for a native to defect was no less than a newcomer who had strong attachment left behind.

My first attempt to file an application to travel abroad was made in the summer of 1958. It was for a tour to Hungary. The second attempt was again in a summer. The summer of 1959, this time for a tour to Czekoslovakia. Two communist countries, yet in both cases I was turned down. The justification? I was too late in lodging my application. The tours were booked well in advance of my application. This was of course a pretext to vindicate their refusal. The third time deliberately I filed my application much well in advance, in the winter of 1960. The tour was scheduled for the spring of the same year. By so doing I forestall from the outset any attempt from their part to justify their refusal on the ground that I had been late. And, I succeeded. But it wasn't only for that reason. The fact that the tour, a 23-day-long visit to Red China, Hong Kong and Japan, was too expensive for many to afford, they had but very few applicants. While the condition for allocation for future tours for each Republics, was that if and when unable to procure the fixed number of participants, this will be reduced. The Armenian government did not want that to happen. It was a question of prestige for each Republic to have people go abroad and safely return back.

I had the pecuniary means. I sold a couple of items to finance my trip. I was determined to fight to the end, and dispute all their arguments. I went even a step further. I used some wit. I exhorted the advantages and benefits of the indirect propaganda, my foreign travel will procure for them, when relatives and friends from the Diaspora would hear about it. Apparently they bought my arg-

ment and later made good use of it. Sometime later I became aware that indeed a couple of my friends in the Diaspora had heard about my trip.

In May 1960, for the first time after a "seclusion" of thirteen years, I crossed in an outward direction the ironclad barrier of the Soviet stronghold. But then, the first tier was from one communist "sanctum-sanctorum"[1] to another. From the Soviet cloister to the *"troglodyte"* land of China. *"Troglodyte"*, a term I am deliberately using to emphasize the primitive conditions under which the Chinese population lived during those days. Conditions worse, much worse than we would have imagined. Conditions worse, much worse than ours, which were not thriving. The Soviets, by comparison, were much more "prosperous" in almost all aspects of life, than the Chinese people. At one point it occured to me that if I had to picture in my mind what slavery or serfdom would have looked like in the past, the predicament of the early 1960's in China would have been a vivid example. This was the impression I got from my visit in Red China. I was from the Soviet Union. Not quite economically affluent society. How dreadful would have been the impression of a person visiting China from the Free World?

After so many years, I, naturally, cannot remember all of the details of the trip. But then the general impression, the initial impact of the trip, is still well moored in one corner of my memory. Perhaps because it was my first trip, and the last for that matter, out of the Soviet borders, before our final and permanent departure late 1965. After thirteen years of seclusion, it was my first contact with the outside world. Not so much for Red China, when the change was to see the worst, but rather when after crossing the second communist barrier at the Chinese border to Hong Kong, thence to Japan, the contrast was so much more conspicuously salient. Especially so for the rest of the members in my group who were seeing the Free World for the first time.

In Moscow, on the eve of our departure, we were instructed to gather at a designated spot to form our group and get acquainted with each other. We were also to be briefed about the conditions of the trip, and instructed about the discipline we had to follow and comply with, while on foreign land. It was made plain clear that our adherence to the instructions was imperative, if we didn't wish to be subjected to unpleasant repercussions later on.

The place assigned for our initial meeting was in a large backroom of a hotel. All the members of the group, except one, were

present at the meeting. The absentee was then left behind. Of the fourteen initial travelers, thirteen took the flight the next day at midnight from the Vnukova airport, on a Tupolev-4 jet. Including myself we were three Armenians in the group. One was a young woman, a librarian by profession, and the other a middle aged man, an engineer. The rest in the group were Latvians, Lithuanians, Esthonians, natives from the three Soviet Baltic States. Conspicuously the number of Russians was only two. And of these two only one was the tourist, the other was our group leader, and in that function he was the official in charge of monitoring our comportments, he was the assigned watchdog. In proportion to their number the Russians seem to have less yearning to travel abroad than their counterpart from the rest of the republics. And then the group leader was a Russian Jew. Perhaps also this was the reason why he was fairly fluent in English. In those days the ethnic Russian was very seldom proficient in any other language than his own.

In Red China, we were joined by Russian speaking Chinese guides. In Hong Kong and Japan our guides spoke English. The role of our group leader was also one of an interpreter. Besides him I was the one in our group who could speak English. However, I avoided to take advantage of my knowledge for fear that this could raise suspicion that I might use to slip an indiscretion. Except for a couple of instances when the group leader asked me to assist him, I did use my English, and this under his watchful eyes.

When we stepped on board the Tu-4 plane, most of us for the first time, we were fascinated to observe so much progress, so much modernism, for, up till then, all the planes we used to travel with, were out-of-date. The Tu-4 jets were meant to serve overseas flights, and as such had to compete with the excellence of foreign jets. This must have been the reason for the unusually well groomed personnel we saw, and the exceptionally good service we received on board this plane. Yet, when I first had the opportunity to fly on foreign jets, I realized that even so, the Soviet commercial aircrafts are still far back in efficiency and quality of service from the ones of the capitalist world. As to the military planes, in efficacy and technology in flight and action, this is an area I lack the knowledge to compare.

In this, comparatively speaking, luxurious condition, for us at least, the flight from Moscow to Peking was a pleasant experience.

It was the first time that on board a Soviet plane we had dinner served, and in the morning, breakfast. The stewardesses and flight attendants were unusually neighborly and their uniforms and appearance neater than usual. There were a few foreign passangers on board this flight. Was that the reason? Or, this was rather already a routine order provided on all Tu-4 flights, irrespective of the origin of the passengers.

We flew over the entire Siberian steppes. From West to East. From Europe's last frontier to Asia's last, to almost the shores of the Pacific Ocean. On our way to our first destination, to Peking (Beijing in Chinese), we flew over a number of Siberian cities and in that number over Sverdlovsk, Novosibirsk, etc. We flew over the immense inland lake Baikal, a name so much remembered in Russian folklore. We made three landings: in Omsk, Irkutsk and Vladivostok. We remained in the airports. We were not allowed outside the airports perimeters. This third city, considered also as a military outpost, was the last on Soviet territory. More than the cities, I was curious to see what the Siberian people looked like. It was my first contact with them in their own environment. Some of the native Siberians revealed physical features reminiscent of a Mongolian past. Yet many were those of pure Russian stock. The latters represented a lineage of forbears from past victims of banishments. Some of them from Czarist past, most of the others from more recent crops of Soviet deportees. There were also in this crowd a partially freed category of former convicts, what we might call in our parlance "people on parole". Free, but not yet allowed to go back to their homes of origin. All this assemblage of people, with so many statuses, physical features, in most other aspects looked the same as the rest of us. If we do not take the exception, of course, of their overall external appearance of more rusticity, pauperism and backwardness. Under an overall Soviet lifestyle, between them and the relatively freer ones, the difference is only in degree rather than essence.

After Vladivostok, we continued our flight over Chinese territory. If my memory doesn't fail me it was over Harbin and Mukden in Manchuria, to finally land in Peking's airport. Peking airport impressed us with its unusually light air traffic, for one of that size and importance.

If I remember right, our flight from Moscow to the Chinese capital, took a good twelve hours. Perhaps longer. Our tour in China was scheduled to include, a short stay in Peking, saving

enough time for a longer sojourn on our way back, when a special program was planned for a more elaborate visit with, in store, a number of official receptions to be organized by the city's government and Party authorities. We, therefore, didn't stay long and flew south early the following morning of our arrival. On our way south, we stopped for a day or two in one of the central provincial capitals, the name of which I fail to remember. It must have been one of much historical significance, since the many ancient monuments and archeological sites we visited presented relics from an impressive past of a few millenia old. From that capital city we took a night train to Canton (Guangzhu in Chinese).

There was only one sleeping car attached to the train in destination to Canton. This was reserved almost entirely for our group of thirteen, and a small number of native dignitaries, apparently from the top echelon of government or Party functionaries. There were many compartments left unoccupied. The rest of the commoners were travelling in outmoded decaying and extremely uncomfortable third class passenger cars. The journey took a whole night and a good portion of the next day. All the way through, the commoners were overcrowded in their cars, huddled on narrow hard benches, still a good number had no place to sit. They had to travel overnight standing all along the narrow corridors of the cars. Out of curiosity, and with the intent to compare conditions between our both countries claiming in unison to be building "paradises" for the common people, a couple of us deliberately stayed late during one of the stops, on the platform of the station to catch the last car of the moving train, and sneak into those of the common passengers. The sight reminded me of my first journeys between Batumi and Erevan, and vice versa, when I had to go back to pick my cases for building materials, which had been shipped from Beirut a couple of months after our arrival. The same outrageous conditions, which in the Soviet Union by then had already improved.

Canton or Guangzhu, is the first, perhaps the only Chinese city to have contacts and trade relations with the outside world. By outside world I mean with the capitalist countries. It must have been due to its vicinity to Hong Kong. As a result there were many more visitors from foreign countries during our stay in that city than elsewhere. Visitors to Canton were as a rule recommended to stop by the permanent trade exhibition. This was a complex of vast premises where exposed were the best products of their

industry. Among the many sightseeing attractions foreign tourists were led to visit: the Baylun (White Cloud) Mountain; the Cultural Park of the city; the Seven Star Crags (steep rugged rocks pointed upward); the Star Lake, and the Hsichao Mountain with its beautiful springs and waterfalls.For us citizens of a communist country, of particular importance and interest were considered our visits to sites related with the revolutionary past of the city. Canton is, indeed, rich with memoriabilia of this sort, among which the two most important are: the Memorial Park dedicated to the Martyrs of the Guangzhu uprising, and the Memorial Hall of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen.

As this was the time when the love affair between these two communist countries was still in full swing, during the whole period of our visit in China, as citizens of a "brotherly" country, we enjoyed special attention and treatment. One of their expressions for deference, respect and honor, was that everytime we came back to our hotel from a sightseeing tour, the hotel attendants and the rest of the employees stood in lines parallel to each other through which we had to traverse under an outburst of applause. At first we were confused as to how to respond. Then our group leader instructed us to reciprocate with counter-applauses. To our unaccustomed eyes the scene seemed to be ridiculous. What had we accomplished to deserve each and every time we went back to the hotel such an uproar of applauses? Derision put aside, I have to admit that we were extremely well received and catered, when the conditions of the rest of the people were so deplorable. The hotel accommodations were above reproach, all the comfort and luxuries of pre-communist China. We were provided with the best entertainment, extensive sightseeing, and scenic excursions. The tours were escorted with specially trained bilingual-bicultural guides, courteous, amiable, and most of all forebearing in face of our ignorant questions regarding their culture and mores.

From Canton to the last Chinese border town contiguous to Hong Kong, we traveled in a deluxe saloon car reserved specially for our group. A whole car at our disposal. with comfortable armchairs, tables with beautiful Chinese vases and fresh flowers of the season, fancy tea cups which were intermittently filled, by attendants, with the best blends of Chinese tea. We had a profuse breakfast on board this luxurious car. As to the lunch the cook of the station's restaurant was instructed ahead of time to prepare the best and the most copiuous of his menus. It looked as though, in the last days, before our crossing to the capitalist world, they

deliberately wanted to impress us still more with the kind of VIP treatment they were sure we would not see during our stay on the other side of the frontier.

We were held for some hours in this border town. Presumably the intention was to take us to visit the pride of the region. This was the site of a huge dam in construction. The whole scene impressed us most for the conspicuous absence of modern technology, rather than the immensity of the enterprise. Even for our Soviet eyes so much used to archaism the picture was depressing. The construction of this gigantic dam was carried entirely by a measureless swarm of hand labor with the most primitive tools, reminiscent of the methods used many centuries ago building their famous Great Wall. Watching from a distance it appeared like a large colony of ants in constant move carrying small bits of materials from one place to another. Considering the primeval methods of the construction, the slowness of the pace, and the disturbing events of that regressive period of the cultural revolution which pulled back all progress, it is quite possible that even after so many years this dam is not yet totally completed. I might be wrong. Because it is also true that under extreme pressure, and at the expense of huge human casualties, these regimes often succeed to accomplish enormous feats.

It was early in the afternoon of the same day that we were allowed to cross the demarcation line to a platform on the other side of the border, separating this closed society from an excessively open one. A train was waiting in full steam ready to transport our group and a few other foreign travelers to Hong Kong. All in all just a few steps away from this border line one could not escape noticing a huge difference in the social atmosphere. The British presence was conspicuous, bringing to mind my past days in Egypt. The passenger cars were not the kind of that luxury saloon which we last traveled from Canton to the border town, yet were clean and comfortable. The Hong Kong authorities had no reason to provide us with VIP treatment. For them we were just another group of ordinary tourists.

Kowloon was our point of departure. From there to Hong Kong itself the journey must have taken over an hour, perhaps near two hours. I can't exactly recollect. During its course at each stop the number of passengers increased considerably. As it stopped a number of times to let some passengers off others in, we assumed that this was a commuters' train transporting people from their

place of work to their residences in the suburbs. In major part these passengers were Chinese. Racially of the same stock as the people we met in mainland China. But then in many aspects they seemed to be different. Much different. These, racially the same peoples from the two sides of the border, showed a great number of dissimilarities. For one thing the Chinese in the mainland were skinnier, physically smaller and still more pale than their counterparts on the mainland. In Red China they blatantly appeared to be undernourished. There was a big difference also in their attire. The contrast was so perceptible that one would have wondered for a moment if indeed these were peoples belonging to the same racial stock. This was a manifest example proving how economic and political conditions affect the physique of the people. Women in the mainland, as a general rule, were flat breasted figureless creatures. In their slacks (kind of coarse, ill-fitted jeans), and especially from a certain distance, we had hard time distinguishing a female from a male. One needed very observant eyes, and a top to bottom scrutiny to differentiate the sexes. While at the other side of the border the feminine mold of the Chinese women was so much more in full view that at instances they attracted considerable attention from the men among our group.

We could not see much of the city of Hong Kong as we were in transit on our way to Japan. We were transferred by special bus from the station direct to the airport, where we had to wait for a couple of hours or so before boarding the plane to Tokyo. This was an Air France plane. To our surprise it wasn't a jet aircraft. While waiting and strolling through the large halls of the airport we were amazed to see such a multitude and variety of a crowd, in constant motion. A total contrast to the calm inertia we witnessed in Peking's airport. This was a cosmopolitan population, representing the various shades of oriental types to the fair haired and blue eyed North European stock. We also noticed among this kaleidoscope of people a large segment of racially mixed lineage. Some of the stewardesses seemed to belong to such a mixed parentage. The result was proving to be surprisingly admirable. Some of these girls were the personification of beauty. In their Chinese style attire, silk dresses embracing tightly their slim bodies, with slits from both sides climbing well above their knees to reach as near as their tighs, these stewardesses in their seductive uniforms, like a powerful magnet, captivated the attention of all of our male members of the group. They were indeed refreshingly

sexy to our unaccustomed eyes, and after what we had seen in communist China. My Armenian companion, much more warm-blooded, as most of our people are, than our counterpart northern companions, was more overt in expressing unchecked fascination.

By late evening we boarded the plane to fly to our destination. When we landed in Tokyo airport it was already passed midnight. Even that late at night there was animation in the streets of this big city. In contrast, in Moscow, as a general rule by that time the streets are deserted, the doors of the hotels are closed, and the hosts are instructed to be back before midnight. In China, as much as we would notice, the streets were deserted still much earlier. What struck us most in Tokyo was the excessively polite gestures of the Japanese people constantly bowing. Every time we stepped into the hotel, there were a couple of young men standing near the doors bowing and uttering in Japanese a few words, which we assumed were their way of greeting us welcome. We couldn't decide how to respond. Located in the center of the city in all appearance it was a five-star hotel, the one we stayed in. The luxury and comfort, the cleanliness and neatness, the attentive service we were provided with, bore witness to that. One thing we had never seen, and for that matter, never have I seen since, the toilet seats were being disinfected every single day and sealed with a tape to be torn by the next user. As to the elevator attendants, all girls in their kimonos and extravagant makeup were much like the Geisha girls we later had the opportunity to see in Kyoto. Comparing the two Far Eastern big powers, China and Japan, which in the past had so many things in common, similar culture, art, "hieroglyphic" characters, their physical features, today the contrast becomes so much more conspicuous. So much so that no one member from our group could hide his or her disappointment with what we saw in China, as against our fascination for what we experienced in Japan. And this, in spite of our mental training to curb our inner feelings, and express approbation for everything socialistic in character, and detraction to everything capitalistic in essence. Compared with the rest of the members of the group, I was the least dazzled, for I had outside world experience. Yet, perhaps due to my thirteen years' seclusion behind the Iron Curtain, to some extent, I, too, was enticed and thunderstruck by what I saw. There were so many things changed. The progress made in so many areas during the years of my absence in the countries of the Free World, had thrown me way back.

A more detailed narration of the places we visited and the people we met in Japan would in all probability be not much different, perhaps even not as graphic as the description one can read in a well informed tourist guide book. And, my memory failing I will not have much interesting to add by narrating in the same documentary style what I saw and experienced over two decades ago. But then of some interest would be to the reader to know about our reactions confronting for the first time a world unknown to most of us. The reactions of cloistered people facing for the first time in their lives a world, in so many aspects, so different from theirs. And, the impact this "front-stage" had produced unescapably upon the souls of us all. And this, indeed, is an area which no one guide book would have porpensity to discuss.

Being pounded with propaganda for years uninterrupted, with slogans and rhetorics that life in the world outside the socialist countries is regressive, decadent, decaying, and based on the Marxist theory of "historical determinism", destined to collapse, and then all of a sudden these brainwashed peoples, as most of my companions were, face with the true realities; verities so much different and contrasting all that they, hitherto, had been hearing, naturally such a confrontation was doomed to crush the whole structure of their beliefs. Perhaps, some succeeded to continue to hide their true feelings, but no doubt it awakened them from a long torpor and revived the latent potency of their logic. Certainly for those still possessing a logic.

Aware of that perspective, this was by all appearance, the primary consideration why Stalin was so adamant in keeping the barriers between the two worlds so fast tight, impenetrable, total, and unalterable. But then after World War Two, and the despot's death, so many things began to change. Under the compulsion of such a momentum, one expression of which was the growing role of the Soviet Union in the international arena of world politics, the imposing forces of the events were too much of a challenge to be able to counter and curb. There begun to appear some cracks and fissures in the thick walls of this closed society. This trend acquired more impulse with the advent of the Khrushchevian new policy of relative relaxation, more especially after his famous Secret Speech at the XXth Party Congress denouncing the cult of personality and some of Stalin's ill-practices.

The last couple of days of our sojourn in Japan there was not a scheduled program in our itinerary. We were free to stroll in the

streets of Tokyo as it pleased us, and leisurely browse the windows of the stores. To avoid the appearance of a regimented group marching like a disciplined battalion in the streets of the city under the watchful command of a group-leader, we were split into two separate groups. I was assigned as the interpreter of one of the groups. There was in my group my permanent companion, the Armenian engineer, two Latvians and one Lithuanian. The assumption was that being the only one proficient in English, I was the one in charge. Yet in spite of that, perhaps I should rather say because of that, I was determined to be still more cautious, possibly by habitude, and not to swerve during my contacts with the native Japanese, who may try perchance to push me into embarassing and provocative conversations questioning about our way of life in the Soviet Union. My responses to such questions were invariably evasive, subtle, diplomatic. As later event came to prove my prudence paid off.

A year had hardly passed by, one of our companions from the trip, a Latvian from Riga paid us a visit in Erevan. During a casual conversation I found out that the second Latvian in our last group of which I was supposed to be in charge, was in fact a pure Russian living in Riga. An officer of the MGB, proficient in English, feigning ignoring the language. He was actually assigned to keep watch on the members of the trip, and eventually report anyone who would succumb and jibe towards the blowing wind of temptation. My permanent room mate during the course of our trip, whom at instances I suspected him being assigned to monitor me, tried hard to convince me that he was not that kind of a person. Ostensibly because of my prudent behavior all the way through, back home there were no signs of any damaging report on me either from the Armenian room mate, or the Latvian, who, as it appeared, was the one officiously in charge of that despicable assignment.

This trip had clouded the mind of my Armenian room mate with a swarm of dubious questions. Back in Erevan we met each other again a number of times. He confessed his increasing doubts about a regime in which, as a Party member, he had once so much faith. He had changed his attitude blaming the newcomers, by admitting to understand now why it was so hard for them to adjust to the Soviet way of life. This sort of a reaction from a Party member comes to prove, once again, as how much of a perplexing problem has become for the Soviet authorities this new trend of

increased contacts with the outside world. On the one hand as a surging world power, relations with the outside has become an imperative necessity, on the other hand, however, the unescapable reaction of the Soviet citizen traveling abroad has become an embarrassment, in more than one aspects, and a risk full with the potential of irksome after effects.

Our trip continuing, back through China, we flew from Hong Kong to Canton. This was a brief stay of one night. We continued our way by train to Shanghai, where, because of the bad weather, we were stuck for a few days more than anticipated by our schedule, and our floght to Peking was postponed. Shanghai is one of China's major ports and the most populated city. It is an amazing city of contrasts. Contrasts of high rise buildings and despicable slums. Wide streets and huge capital structures reminiscent of a lively past, yet a splendor vanished by a crowd of people of poor appearance, uniformly dressed with ill-fitted jean-like slacks and blazers of the same coarse material. The streets so conspicuous with their heavy traffic of bycicle riders and outmoded streetcars. Automobiles were a rarity.

During our stay in Shanghai, we visited the Children's Palace, a token monument intended to show the concern of the government towards the new generation. Each important city in China and the rest of the communist world have their own Children's Palaces. These are invariably show places foreign visitors should not miss. We also visited the permanent industrial exhibition of Shanghai. They took us to visit the Swan Lake in the Shanghai West Suburban Park; the Shanghai Museum of Arts and History, where special sections were devoted to their revolutionary history; and then to the Lung Hua Temple district, a monument to their ancient civilization, a marvel not to miss indeed.

Weather improving, we were allowed to fly back to Peking in a small 16 passenger aircraft. An American-made Douglas, a remnant from the 1940's pre-revolutionary Changhaichek arsenal. Added to the lack of comfort of this archaic plane frequent air turbulence was a cause of discomfort by making all of us air sick. Peking or Beijing, capital of the People's Republic of China, is the country's political, economic and cultural center and the focal point of its communications. A city with a long history, Peking is rich in revolutionary traditions. The city contains a wealth of ancient sites and exquisite gardens. Here are located the Palace Museum; Yiheyuan (the Summer Palace); the Great Wall in Badaling (not very distant from the city); the ruins of Beijing Apemen at Zhoukoudian; the Temple of Heaven; the Ming Tombs; the Beihal Park; and their newest source of pride, the huge Square of the Revolution, where literally millions of people can gather. Because of some alterations in our initial schedule due to our delay in Shanghai, we had no time to visit all these sites. And then, they didn't want to discard the originally programmed receptions which had a political overtone, and were meant to stress the brotherly relations between these two major communist states. As I said, it was the period when the love affair between these two countries was still in full bloom. It was only a few months after our return back home that we begun to hear news about the deterioration of relations, but only in tidbits. The discord came to surface after Khrushchev's famous Secret Speech and the admonishment of the cult of personality. But in fact the roots go beyond these ideological differences, and much deeper, surging out of conflicting economic interests and territorial claims and counterclaims.

Back home I was asked to relate my impressions of the trip. Trained as I already was, we came to an agreement with the head of my department that this would take the form of a lecture rather than a question and answer session. And this, for fear that I might face a question too embarrassing to answer. In line with Soviet style standards I was all praise for China. Yet, not being able in the depth of my conscience to pinpoint the good things I, supposedly, had seen in that country, I deliberately stressed the potential perspectives as was officially claimed, and the dedication of the people in building the new order, as the Chinese higher officials had told us to be the case. By so doing I was trying, in my inner conscience to absolve myself for the lies of others which I was forced to convey. While speaking about Japan, I, deliberately, skipped telling the feelings of admiration we have had, and without much conviction, I tried to stress the existing contrasts between rich and poor. As it was that period when the people were feeling relatively free to express their doubts, my words were not taken for granted. Many were those who put me on the spot asking embarrassing question I hardly could lie. Fortunately the director of our Institute came to my rescue by ending the meeting. From the cynical smiles of my colleagues I realized that I had lamentably failed in my role as a liar, in spite of the years of training, and the experience, I thought I had already acquired.

After this trip I had two other occasions to come into contact with outsiders, before our final departure from the country early in October 1965. But then these were contacts within the country. The occasions were the two International Exhibitions: the American, which took place in the late 50's, and the French, which took place in the early 60's. The contacts were not only with foreigners, but also with their cultures, achievements, progress, their industry, their arts, and whatever else one would imagine a large-scale exhibition would convey. In a sense a trip abroad within the perimeter of the site of the exhibition, in the city of Moscow itself. For many, an eye-opener, a denial of the Soviet propaganda about the decadent societies of the capitalist world.

The American exhibition was the first in its kind by scale and substance since the inception of the Soviet regime. It was the expression of a new turn in East and West relations. This was perhaps the reason why the Eisenhower Administration had delegated a top representative, the vice-president, Richard Nixon, for the opening ceremony. Yet, in spite of some signs of amelioration of relations between these two countries, during the opening ceremony there was a bittersweet exchange of speeches between Nikita Khrushchev and Richard Nixon. But these speeches did not lead to the point of closing all doors. Quite the contrary, the charges and the countercharges were delivered with a mild sense of humor, which suggested an overall promising future perspective than a breakdown. Had it not been later on the U-2 incident which drove Khrushchev to cancel Eisenhower's contemplated official visit to the Soviet Union.

The American and the subsequent French Exhibitions were indeed for the visiting Soviet citizens most revealing and thought provoking experiences. The unavoidable consequence was that these Exhibitions provided undeniable evidence prompting skepticism for the thinking Soviets to start questioning the credibility of what had been said since then about the decaying and crumbling world of capitalism. In spite of all the efforts and the obstacles raised to restrict the number of visitors to only a selected category of citizens considered to be more "reliable" and less "impressive", the authorities failed to curb the flow. The process of screening was an extremely difficult one. It was materially impossible to enclose the visitors in a tight mesh under total control. Soviet tourists permitted to travel abroad leave behind members of family as hostages. This provides some amount of safeguard against any

blunder. The fact that the events were taking place in the Soviet capital itself, with the tacit understanding that the doors would be open for everybody was an unprecedented situation for the MGB people to cope with. In such wise the contacts with the realities of the outside world were much broader. The capitalist world was brought right into their own backyard, to the treshold of millions of Soviet citizens. Many were those falling outside the selected category who were not deterred by the obstacles and had improvised means to overcome the restrictions to visit the Exhibitions, both the American and the French.

The French Exhibition took place in the summer of 1962. I'm sure of this, because the interlude coincided with another event that necessitated our presence in Moscow. This Exhibition in scale and import was as thought-provoking and impelling as the American one. In one particular aspect the French Exhibition was more bestiring than its predecessor. The reason was the fact that a good proportion of the repatriates were from France, and were either by birth or by naturalization former French citizens. They knew the language, hence the contact between them and the French visitors were much easier. There was no doubt in the MGB operatives' minds that the French Exhibition would give more opportunity and impetus for these contacts to bourgeon. It should be admitted that in this instance these pathologically suspicious officials for once really did have reason to be worried. As a consequence a special task force was established by the MGB organization to monitor the Armenians, and in particular the Franco-Armenians visiting the Exhibition. They even tried to recruit informers from among the visiting repatriates themselves, in particular the ones fluent in French. In spite of my squabble and wrangle with these brazen individuals and the end of my relations, they tried to involve me once again.

How this came about?

To hold on the chronological order, before going into the description of their attempt to involve me, it would be pertinent to relate about our reason for being in Moscow just about the same time the French Exhibition was in full swing.

It was in early spring of the same year that most unexpectedly we received a cablegram from Beirut announcing a visit by my mother-in-law. It was indeed unexpected because fifteen long years had elapsed since the date of our separation and no one from the

family had ever indicated desire to visit us. And my wife was the only daughter..., the only sister of two brothers... Our son had been born in Armenia. It seemed they didn't care enough to see the new addition to the family. They had plenty opportunity. They had ample means. Permissions for visits by relatives were long before that time granted. Other repatriates were luckier and blessed with visits by their kin and friends, if for nothing else it provided moral and material support.

The mother had brought with her trunks full of clothings and other items we could use or sell in the blackmarket as an additional assistance to our meager income. She had also 200 pieces of gold coins. Half of the coins were confiscated by the customs authorities. The rest she succeeded to smuggle in. We suspected that the customs authorities were tipped off. She was more thoroughly searched than the rest of the tourists. She must have had innocently mentioned about her possessions to the accompanying passengers. In the group there was a young man, a member of the Communist Party of Lebanon. These Party idiosyncratics consider it their duty to report on others. And, strangely as it seems, they feel having performed their duty. Even though it was no secret that there was, and still is, a flourishing black market for foreign currencies and many of the MGB men are partners in the game. When caught, however, the laws against these kind of operations are very strict and rigorous. In those days they were lenient towards the tourists. They only confiscated the money. Later even the foreign visitors were subject to punishment. As for the natives, the punishment is imprisonment, in some cases life imprisonment and exile. When the operations are carried by an organized ring the penalty is death. However, the lure of big profits is such that in spite of all these dangers this kind of operations continue to flourish. Adventurous characters ready to take any kind of risks exist even in the Soviet Union. These people often secure the participation and involvement of the officials assigned to control the smugglers and speculators. In this area too, like in other areas of illegal operations, there exist a "Mafia" type situation, where the links go upward, far beyond the "on-the-streets" operators.

As a general rule tourists traveling the Soviet Union are warned in advance about the restrictions. The majority of them, aware of the consequences, are very careful to transgress the regulations. But there are some, mostly from Lebanon and Syria, Armenians by extraction, having acquired the mercantilistic characteristics of

the peoples where they live, who never take the warnings seriously. They keep on smuggling foreign currencies and gold, or fancy items much in demand in the larger cities of the Soviet Union.

My mother-in-law stayed with us a little over three months. During her stay our house attracted a swarm of visitors. Mostly repatriates from Lebanon who came to ask news about their parents and relatives left behind. Some of them expressed reproaches for letting her daughter and son-in-law repatriate after Pakrat B., her son, had visited Soviet Armenia and had become fully aware of the dire predicament. The gist of the reproof was that having allowed her only daughter repatriate, it set a striking example for others to follow. At times these outpours of reproaches became very embarrassing, not only for her, but also for us since we were the hosts.

When the time arrived for her departure, we accompanied her to Moscow. As the mother of a notorious personality in the Lebanese—Armenian community, and as a gesture of respect towards Pakrat B., the former consul general of the Soviet Union in Lebanon, Rubin A., invited her to a dinner party. We accompanied her. Present were also Zaven Ch. and his wife. At that time he was the head of the Bureau representing the Armenian SSR in Moscow. In the second half of the 1940's Zaven Ch. was also one of the delegates assigned to organize the repatriation of Armenians from Syria and Lebanon. The high level urbanity and affability shown to the mother was a blatant indication that Pakrat B. was still considered a very useful "factotum" in their political aims towards Lebanon.

The dinner went on according to Soviet traditions, with toasts after toasts. Toasts to the health of the day's leaders. Toasts to the health of those present and absent. Toasts to the friendship of all common peoples of the world. Toasts to the health of the progressive peoples overseas. And a special toast to the health of Pakrat B., a very good friend of the Soviets, and a model Armenian patriot. Incidentally Pakrat B. was one of those patriots who expressed deep love for the country of his forefathers, but only from a safe and comfortable distance. All these commendations were certainly of a nature to please my mother-in-law. We, on the other hand, had to feign our approbation and "pleasure" for all the lauds poured upon Pakrat B., despite of the fact that we despised the fellow for having misled us and caused so much harm.

The next day my mother-in-law flew back to Lebanon. Rubin A.

who accompanied us to the airport, lost no time to take advantage of our presence by making one more attempt to involve me in an assignment. A Machiavellian feline, he offered us hardly obtainable free passes for the Exhibition, allowing us to visit as many time as we wished. The knavery behind this generosity was his covert objective to use me helping him track down the Armenians visiting the Exhibition, and more particularly the Franco-Armenians. He was expecting from me to provide a list of names. We visited the Exhibition, enjoying every minute of it, but we handed no list of names. To avoid his wrath we advanced the date of our departure for Erevan without informing him, and left the fellow with his furies.

This was the last incident in which they tried to involve me to any assignment. But then the piques and annoyances, which had started from the day of my outright refusal to cooperate, further intensified, bringing me to the brink of a nervous breakdown. I suffered periods of moral and psychological depressions, that at times were almost impossible to bear. All these lead us to our decision to expatriate.

1-"Sanctum-sanctorum", a sacred or private place. Often used humorously.

2-KHRUSHCHEV REMEMBERS, Little, Brown & Company, Boston & Toronto. Page 458.

9

EXPATRIATION

If I have to be blamed for my love of freedom, no one who lives in freedom has the right to hold that against me, and the one who can bear serfdom does not deserve freedom, anyway.

Many, many years had passed with almost constant pressures and frustrations, and an occasional passing current of optimism emerging out of each change in the hierarchy. A demotion or promotion of a member of the governing body raised hopes for ameliorations. With Stalin still at the helm, obviously nothing good could materialize, and if there were moments of anticipations, these were simply exercises in self-deception.

However, the major event finally happened. The despot departed from the scene. We all surmised that whoever succeeded him could never be a tyrant of the same calibre. And that was true. At least to some extent. But then the momentum of all those years of oppressive rule, the established pattern of an undivided authority, were so deeply rooted in the tradition of running the government, that even though there were signs of willingness for moderation, the ongoing "habit" of one-man-rule interfered intrusively with the realization of such expectations. Nevertheless some changes of historical significance did occur.

These were the years when for the first time in the history of the Soviet Union people were permitted to leave the country permanently. Of course, permission was granted to a specific category of the Soviet citizenry. In the case of Armenia, these were the former repatriates. All the same, it was an unanticipated event and nobody could have even dreamt for such a contingency to happen while Stalin alive. The daring initiative belongs to the former repatriates from France. The reader must remember my description of the unprecedented demonstrations organized by the repatriates from France on the occasion of the French Prime Minister's, Francois Pinaud's, visit to Erevan. The demonstrators were demanding the intervention of the French Minister in asking the Central Government in Moscow permission for the return of the former French citizens of Armenian descent. As related earlier, after a while permission was granted. At first on a very restricted scale, later at a much larger measure and more frequent pace, for

the former French citizens to return to France.

This was a catching event. Before long repatriates from other countries also attempted to file application to return to the countries they came from. Some back to America, others to the Middle East. At one time this outward movement reached alarming proportion. The last few years some of the old restrictions have been reinstated to curb this trend. As it is known the emigration of Soviet Jews also had reached an unprecedented scale. Despite of the fact that they are natives of the land, for many generations having been born there, the desire to leave the country is steadily spreading. With all the difficulties raised by the authorities, the fact that many succeeded to emigrate, this was a change in Soviet policy undeniably of major significance.

Strange as it may seem, our decision to return to the Free World came at a time when we were already, comparatively speaking, doing somewhat better, and signs for improvement of conditions seemed to appear in the horizon. At the Academy by then, I had, relatively speaking, reached to a satisfactorily high position. I had acquired the necessary Soviet life experience that enabled me to meet most of our earthly needs.

We had our own house, a very comfortable one, with conveniences unique by Soviet standards. Indeed, in the second part of the 1950's I had renovated to provide the comfort we initially hoped to have. I had sold the second floor to the president of a kolkhoz from Voskevaz, a small town not far from Erevan. I spent all the money from the sale on the renovation of our quarters. The house rebuilt, whose location was originally considered to be in the outskirts of the city, with the expansion of the capital and constructions of government buildings in the vicinity, such as: the Central Committee's headquarters; the Supreme Soviet, the residence of the President of the Armenian SSR; and the headquarters of the Academy of Sciences, the area became one of the most "classy". Compared with American standards, this was a house which would have easily equated wiyh one in the suburbs of Long Island. Perhaps valued, at present scale of prices three to four hundred thousand dollars.

We even had our own car. The most popular one, a Volga. I had six weeks paid vacation each year. We spent the last years almost every summer in one of the resorts on the shore of the Black Sea. Every other year in the winter, spring or fall, I had the opportunity to go to Moscow on assignment, all expenses paid by the Academy.

Every so often my wife and my son accompanied me on my visits to the All-Union capital and do some shopping.

As to our food supplies, we had already established contacts with a couple of grocery store managers, who provided us with butter, cheese, sugar, and whatever else was in short supply. Granted we paid a premium price, but we didn't have to stand on lines for hours, and the convenience was well worthed. A truck driver on service on the Sevan to Erevan route supplied us with fish from Lake Sevan, the famous and delicious trout "Ishkhan" (Prince fish). We had a retired butcher who would purchase lambs from Kurdish shepherds, who provided us meat.

In the academic field I had made considerable headway and my professionalism and my expertise in the area of my specialization were already well recognized. I had completed my doctoral thesis, but it was still in the hands of the editor, who, however, in league with a couple of my rivals from the Institute, employed delaying tactics to discourage my efforts for an early realization of my goal. To obtain my doctoral degree. This and some other minor irritations the likes of which I had overcome in the past with relative ease compared with the more trying ones, drove my patience to the breaking point. Finally under the weight of just a trifle, I made the drastic decision. One that changed our future irrevocably and raised the possibility of dangerous consequences. The decision was to apply for an exit visa to leave the country permanently.

The catching example of the former repatriates from France, expatriating prodded many of us to take the same drastic action, to file application to leave the country. As if the time had come to take revenge for all the aggravations we had been subjected to. As if we wanted to convey to the natives, against whom we had grudges that if you do not like us we do not like you either. If you do not want us, we might as well leave the country and go away. One more painful gash in the pages of our history so full of tragedies. One more sad result for being unable to come to terms with fellow Armenians. The antipathy traditionally existing between the Eastern and Western Armenians played also a role. Who was to be blamed? Perhaps all of us. Perhaps nobody but the unhappy circumstances. Most of all a political regime so alien to our character. Perhaps the oppressive atmosphere which rendered every body extremely selfish. Could we hope that this is only a passing lurch of which our nation has experienced so many during the treacherous course of history?

Once we had decided to leave the country permanently we had to overcome a good number of serious obstacles. Among them, the most interferring were the facts that: One, in the Diaspora I was known as a fervent supporter of the repatriation, and had been from the inception of the movement one of the organizers, and member of the Repatriation Committee in Lebanon and Syria. Two, as a senior researcher from the Academy of Sciences, I was considered being a member of the local intelligentzia. On both counts my permanent departure from the country would have equated, in the eyes of the authorities, to a defection. A very damaging image. An adverse publicity in the Armenian Diaspora. As a logical consequence of these, our chance for an exit approval was very slim. And, when we did take the decision to expatriate we were well aware of the contretemps we had to encounter, the obstructions we had to overcome. We were also cognizant of the risks of repercussions involved should our applications be refused. Repercussions which would inevitably fall under one of the penal codes of a "political" blunder. But as it has been said, the example of the former repatriates from France had such an epidemic effect, and we had become so much enticed by the idea, that we either unwittingly ignored the risks involved, or, we benumbed, and lost awareness of the potential dangers, and the enormous obstacles we had to surmount.

Today at hindsight, unruffled, I feel more apt to reason and assess the degree of danger we, mindlessly, placed ourselves in. An irrational stupid adventure, which could only have resulted in misfortune. It is true we came out of it without incurring major harm, either moral or physical, yet our initiative was indubitably an unwise step to have undertaken. Even the final success, and as a result, the benefits acquired were not reasons enough to have justified the defiant boldness of our action.

Since we were convinced that an outright application for a permanent departure would be from the very outset refused, we planned a subterfuge which actually was as injudicious as our original decision to expatriate.

First of all, and perhaps this was the only wise step in this entire undertaking, we decided to include our son in our plan, and secure his consent, to avoid future regrets and possible odium from his part in case of a failure. He was then fourteen. A teenager, though, mature enough to understand the enormous risks involved. The potential of losing the modest comfort we had gradually acquired over the years, which if not yet an apex, under Soviet scale, none the less, good enough to cause envy to many. He went along with the idea with no reservations whatever. Apparently we had him brainwashed enough about the better life in the Free World. In fact so much so that all propaganda attempts, at school or pioneer jamborees to inculcate hatred toward the outside world had not been effective in his way of thinking.

Our original strategy was not to rush. To be cool and act by stealth and in stages. The first step was to make a survey of the terrain. A sort of "reconnaissance" to find out the kind of concurrence and complicity we possibly could rely on, both from inside and outside. The most logical first step, we thought, was for my wife to pay a visit to her parents in Beirut, Lebanon. We assumed an exit visa for a visit would be easier to obtain. Even so, we were not sure how much cooperation we would secure from her brothers. There were pecuniary interests involved. For, with our return, they would be compelled to requite her share in the family business. So, we had our doubts about their reaction to our project, let alone about the prospect of securing their collaboration. However, we had no other choice but to take the chance anyway.

The exit visa, which we had to secure on our own, it looked as though, the Soviet authorities had less confidence in my wife's intentions than my own. The reader will remember my narration of my trip to China and Japan. It ended without any incident that would have generated suspicion. The people who had granted me permission for that voyage were entirely satisfied of the result. My comportment both during the trip and after my return describing my impressions about the capitalist world, Japan, was irreproachable. With my wife, however, as the daughter of a wealthy family, they were much concerned. They feared that after so many years of deprivations the lure of an easier, prosperous, luxurious life would tempt her to defect. This, I found out while chatting with a functionary from the visa office over a couple of drinks, who under the influence of the spirit had inadvertently confessed their view. The excuse used for the refusal to grant a visa, was that not long ago my wife's mother had visited us in Erevan. There was no convincing reason for a countervisit so soon after.

In this instance their fear of defection was not an unfounded one. This was part of our stratagem. Our intention was, under the pretext of her mother ailing, my wife, her only daughter, had to stay with her, as her filial duty required, and take care of her.

Under the circumstance she had to ask the Soviet authorities permission for her son and husband to join her in Beirut. Of this scheme, of course the authorities were not aware. But there is always a pathological suspicion. Which is not always entirely groundless. They know well that the lure of the Free World is real, and defections are not rare occurences.

From the very first days all efforts, even to lodge an application for an exit visa to visit her parents was consistently refused. This was a warning that even if they would accept the application, it would never be processed, let alone approved. Much before our attempts to place the application we had requested from my wife's brothers an affidavit of invitation duly signed and notarized, and the signatures and the authenticity of the document verified and ratified by the Soviet Embassy in Beirut. This was a pre-requisite, and the affidavit had to be attached to the application of the exit visa. However, my wife's brothers turned deaf ears to our repeated requests. It became obvious from their inaction that they must have suspected some sort of a scheme from our part, which might disturb their life's routine. Evidently their suspicion might have spawned from the fact that during their mother's visit in Erevan we had asked her to tell her sons to liquidate my wife's share in the family business and deposit the proceeds in her name in a Swiss bank. Even though this request was much before our decision to leave the country permanently, and without being ever sure that such a dream might materialize, still it was something we had not ceased to fantacize from the first day we had stepped on Soviet soil. Both of our requests, the affidavit of invitation and the transfer of funds, were ignored by my wife's brothers.

While this process was still going on, namely, our efforts to overcome the hurdles from inside as much as from outside, we unexpectedly received a cable from a remote relative, my father's cousin from the States. Remote, because our contacts had been sporadic. The telegram stated that he and his wife were to visit Erevan, and had the tremendous desire to meet us. The last time we had seen each other was during his visit to Egypt. I was a teenager of 14 then, he, apparently a mature man around 35. He stayed with us in Heliopolis, a suburb of Cairo, for a couple of months. Since then 36 years had passed. I was already a middle aged man of 50, he was over 70, although very reluctant to admit. In between these two contacts, our relations with each other consisted of infrequent exchange of letters. Ordinary correspondence,

so common between people who had nothing much to convey, yet unwilling to severe relations. In spite of that, when on the eve of our repatriation I had informed him of my intentions, he immediately wrote me urging to desist from my project. Not enticed by the same enthusiasm, he was able to see matters more objectively, and the dire consequences which might follow. It goes without saying that I ignored his warnings, as I had done with the rest of the admonishments.

Manoug Ex. was his name. Now deceased. Well to do. By profession and training an architect, he had amassed his fortune from his real estate business. My mother had died the same year in May. Our family ties had been reduced. Except for my sister and her daughter we had nobody else closely related to us. We confided our plans to him, and discussed how he could be of any use to us.

The year was 1963. The month was September, the best season of the year. Fall is the time when everything is relatively speaking abundant. The kolkhoz markets are full of vegetables and fruits. So fresh and so tasty. The land and the sun of Armenia contribute in large measure. The weather is at its best. Nature, even though preparing for a long hibernation, was making one last effort to impress with its beauty. The falling leaves covered the ground with a multicolor carpet, dominated by a bright orange, the traditional Armenian color. Under the conditions, as a general rule those tourists visiting during fall, leave the country better impressed than those sojourning at any other season of the year. Thus Manoug had every reason to be well impressed. But he was no dupe. He could see also the shortcomings. The way of life so different from that of the USA. And, he had the benefit of our comments to be able to understand the real predicament that was masked by that one season of abundance.

A jovial person by character, his visit brought in our mournful souls some consolation for the pain we still were feeling due to my mother's death few months earlier. He raised hopes with his promise to stop by Beirut on his way back to USA, and urge Pakrat B. to send us without further delay the affidavit of invitation we repeatedly had requested. After another delay of six to seven months, we finally received the document. The affidavit arrived on May 5th, 1964. Strangely enough it coincided with my wife's birthday. This coincidence we considered a good omen, and one of her best birthday presents.

Before we received the document, we had another visitor. This time from Lebanon. A young teacher from an Armenian school in Beirut. It was October of the same year. As we hadn't received any news from Manoug about his efforts to convince my brother-in-law to send the affidavit, we grew impatient. Suspecting that the document would never arrive, we decided to address a letter to the President of Lebanon, who was then Mr. Fouad Chehab, to intervene in our favor, based on the fact that my wife was born in Lebanon. Our friend promised to smuggle it out, and see that it reaches its destination. In our eagerness we neglected to consider that such an attempt if caught, besides being extremely dangerous, coming from the President of a small country would certainly be ignored by the Soviets. Neither did it occur to us that the Lebanese President would also ignore our petition. The letter which was written in French, dated October 10, 1963. It was left unanswered.

Securing the affidavit for visitation from my wife's parents in Beirut, was not the only hurdle to overcome. We had to obtain an exit visa from the Soviet authorities, which was not a lesser problem. We were being refused. We had moments of despair. But then by an unexpected switch of fate, I found out that Ardavazt Y., the editor of my book, with whom I became close friend, had been appointed by the government member of the steering committee overseeing the activities of the administration of the visa office. The visa administration, known by its acronym "OVIR", was at that time, as a result of many complaints, under investigation for alleged improprieties: corruption and bribery. Ardavazt, as a member of that committee had his saying. Not much longer after his intervention the Soviet exit visa was granted.

At that very moment I felt that I had committed the vilest act of my life. He was not privy of our ulterior plans, for my wife to defect. I was deceiving him. I, a friend, in whom he had so much trust. Even though he is dead now, whenever I recall how I betrayed his confidence, my feelings of shame and embarrassment resurge mordantly enough to gnaw my heart. But at that point, in that disdainful act I saw the only way out, the only subterfuge to secure the success of our plan. The only path to gain our freedom. When later he became aware of my wife's attempt of defection, even then he didn't show any rancor for our deceitful action. He was an understanding man. He never knew, however, that I was part of the game.

Securing the affidavit for visitation, and then the Soviet exit visa were not enough. There was still another hurdle to overcome, to obtain an entry visa for Lebanon. We cabled to my wife's brothers requesting their intervention to speed up the process. They had high placed connections in the Lebanese government. Our cables were left unanswered. However, the procedure took its normal course, and the entry visa was received with considerable delays, a few months later.

The exact date I cannot recall, but it must have been sometime in July 1964, that we flew, my wife, my son and I, to Moscow. All flights to overseas, those days, had to start from the Soviet capital. My wife had to fly by Air France to Paris in transit first, thence to Beirut. That was the only available route. Before her flight we stayed a couple of days in Moscow with friends. Moscovite Armenians, who although the husband in government high position and Party member, over the years we had established close relations with them. After Stalin's death, when mutual suspicions had decreased, we became still closer. They were one of the few, from among the natives, we could feel comfortable with them. In fact, we became so close that the day we had to leave the country permanently, they did not hesitate neither feared to assist us when we had difficulty to secure plane tickets.

Before my wife's departure we had devised a limited set of secret codes, and shaped up the course of our future correspondence. A limited number only, because she had to memorize the whole list. Nothing could be written down in advance, for fear that if discovered by the customs examiners all our plans would be ruined. In the Soviet Union not only the incoming travelers are passed through a thorough examination, but also the outgoing travelers. Our plan was therefore to write down in a small note book once the plane was up in the air, before she forgot them.

Our hostess, Tamara A., accompanied us to the airport. My wife was carrying most of her jewelry. Since our hidden plan was for her to defect, we preferred to have part of her valuables out of the country. The customs officer objected to the jewelry, and handed back to me. We were lucky they weren't confiscated. Tamara, a much obliging lady, told us in Armenian not to worry. And, while my wife was passing through a gate we still had access, Tamara approached the attendant there, and discretely passed into her hand a bill of twenty-five rubles with that small package of jewelry

pretending it was a small souvenir she had forgotten to give to my wife. Thanks to the bribe the maneuver worked. Twenty-five rubles for a functionary whose monthly salary is not more than 150 to 200 rubles, is a lot of money. Enough to buy a couple of consciences.

It is now necessary to break the narrative of this event to explain the reason why we were so anxious to have at least some of my wife's jewelry out of the country.

We knew for sure that when the day would come for us to leave the country in permanence, we wouldn't be allowed to take our valuables; the proceed of our sale of the house; our furnitures or our car, let alone the few hundred gold coins which, as described earlier, we had succeeded in smuggling into the country. Later on, a few months before the date of our final departure, when we saw signs of probable success, we took the risk smuggling the rest of our valuables out of the country, and some money with visitors we could trust, as well as with expatriating friends from France.

The former repatriates from France were an exception to this rule. They were able to transfer their rubles on a par with the French francs up to a prescribed limit. Even after so many years, I am not at liberty to disclose the exact nature of this arrangement. If for no other reason but because it is not still quite clear to me whether the Soviet authorities were privy to this unofficial, perhaps rather, this illegal transaction or not. The fact remains, however, that they did not interfere, for at least a considerable length of time. In a society so closely watched, so tightly controlled and sanctioned, yet for some reason or other, the authorities were turning their faces the other side. This was Khrushchev's era of relative relaxation. Thus the "expatriates" who were enjoying this privilege, and did not have an amount reaching the prescribed limit, agreed for a nominal fee to help some of the rest of the prospective expatriates who did not have the same authorization. The transaction was based on mutual confidence, just on a verbal promise. For understandable reasons no written document was exchanged. Some were later disappointed and cheated, while others were more fortunate. We were lucky, neither the tourists to whom we had entrusted some of our valuables, nor our expatriating friends from France to whom we had trusted some money, did betray us. They proved to be much more honorable than my wife's brothers to whom we had entrusted our share in the family business on the eve of our repatriation.

Despite of the opportunities we had, evidently, could not transfer the equivalent value in cash of all our possessions, neither would that had been a wise step from our part. For one thing, in the predicament we were in, this was a blind bargain. We could not, till the very last minute, be sure whether we would be permitted or not to leave the country. An eleventh hour snag was in the realm of possibility. And had we have been prevented from departing we would have found ourselves in complete destitution, hardly able to make a fresh start. Therefore, we had no choice but to transfer in advance only a smaller proportion of our assets. As for the rest? Part of it we had entrusted to my sister and a couple of friends we could trust. We were hoping that in the future we could find the means to have them transferred out of the country. The remainder of our possessions which we weren't able to liquidate, we dispensed among friends and neighbors who happened to be around at that particular moment. We had repatriated with sixty bulky cases (thirty cases of personal effects, and thirty cases of building materials for the house we were contemplating to build). We had no regrets, however, over our losses. We felt the loss of so many material possessions was a fair trade off for something more valuable, the liberty of our bodies and souls. This was one of the many other prices we were willing to pay for our freedom.

After this brief break which was necessary to explain our reasons to smuggle my wife's jewelry out of the country, we can go back to the narration of the events subsequent to her departure. Events which were to occur parallel to ours at home, and one thousand miles or so southwestward, in Beirut, Lebanon. Where my wife had to carry out the rest of our plan on her own, perhaps even with her brothers' oppositions.

The same evening of her departure, my son and I left by the night train to Leningrad. With an opulent wealth of historical monuments, formerly St. Petersburg (a despised appelation by the chauvinistic element of Russians who preferred to call it Petrograd), was once the capital of a rising Russian empire. We had, so many times in the past, planned to visit Leningrad, but for one reason or another this never materialized. This time, however, we had the occasion, and didn't want to leave the country permanently before having seen this famous city, which had always been the pride of the Russian people. Besides, we had a friend who had

urged us to drop by. He had a *"dacha"* (summer house) in the outskirt of Leningrad. This friend was Vahram Papasian, now deceased, a renowned Soviet-Armenian Shakesperean actor. His reputation was Union wide. His fame had reached the country where the genius of the English literature was born. He had an invitation from the Shakesperean Association of England, for an anniversary celebration. The Soviet authorities had refused an exit visa. He didn't hide his frustration from me. He had served most of his acting life in the Soviet theater. "This", he once confessed to me, "is the kind of appreciation I get at the eleventh hour of my life". He had played his roles both in Armenian and Russian. At certain rare occasions, when in the audience were present French or Italian visitors, he played his role in these languages. In his early seventies, in semi-retirement, he used to pass part of the year, mainly in spring and summer, in his *"dacha"*. He often said to me: "the trees die standing, I hope to die acting".

He was not a native of Eastern Armenia. Born in Constantinople (present Istanbul), his original vernacular was Western Armenian. He enjoyed conversing with us in this dialect, which was also ours. While still overseas, before World War One and the years immediately after, he toured all over the world wherever there was an Armenian community. During one of his visits to Russia he married a Russian girl and settled permanently in the Soviet Union. There was a sustainable reason for that. The Armenian Diaspora was not able to support financially viable theatrical companies, and any other artistic endeavor. For a while his headquarters were in Erevan and Tibilisi. Later, when he had gained fame in a wider audience, all over the Soviet Union, he toured as far as the furthest corners of Siberia. Over the years he had acquired enough fluency to play in front of the Russian audiences in their own language. However, during the earlier part of his career, when he was not yet fluent in the Russian language, he played his roles in Armenian in front of the Russian audiences, while the rest of the cast in Russian. Despite of that impedement, which would have been a serious handicap for any other actor, his performance was so powerfully impressive that he reached and seized the hearts of enthusiastic audiences.

His successes had not brought him any closer to the Soviet regime. For one thing he never became member of the Party. Every so often he very discretely criticized the system, and related in his own humorous style incidents he had experienced. He

related in the minutest details how he narrowly escaped from becoming another innocent victim of the Stalinist purges of the thirties. Despite of his vulnerability: his social origin, a non-native of bourgeois background, in addition to that a member of the "intelligentzia", a social caste, which was then targeted, he came out of the crisis with no major physical or emotional injury. What was his stratagem? As he confessed to me, he had become farsighted enough to disappear from the scene as soon as he felt the "storm" coming. He went on tours to the furthest reaches of Siberia, and stayed there for quite a long while until the heat had simmered down. His rationalization was: "were I to become victim of Stalin's madness, where would they send me? If not in front a firing squad, then to the furthest corner of Siberia. So, I went with my own volition, as a free citizen instead of a deportee. This was my palladium, my safeguard. It wouldn't have been possible for these monsters to deport me further than where I went".

This was a typically "Papasian pragmatism", for he was indeed a practical man, despite his talent as an artist, despite the general surmise that artistic talent and pragmatism are mutually dispeling characteristics. Ostensibly many of the survivors of these purges who belonged to a targeted caste had been improvising their own safeguards. Apparently successful, for they had survived. Perhaps many of them who survived they had denounced their colleagues to gain their own amnesty, their own pardon, their own freedom at the price of the misfortune of their one-time friends. I had even been told that some of the prominent artists, writers, painters, etc., I happened to know, had acquired their exoneration at the price of the blight of their victims. There were others like Papasian whose innocent improvisation worked to their benefit. Such was the name of the game. I don't think it was easy even for the traitors who had betrayed the confidence of their close friends. Indeed, the most difficult thing in life is to teach oneself to be able to survive a predicament one despises and hates.

Despite of the fact that Papasian remained faithful to his Armenian heritage: traditions, culture, language, style, taste, and all of his national values, his Russian wife's influence under an environment where the forces of russification were compelling, his only daughter was raised as a Russian. And indeed, who ever would have the temerity to sail in that immense ocean of the Russian reality would unavoidably run the risk to be swallowed by its huge billows.

During the second World War he was caught in the blockade of Leningrad. He, so often related the horrors of the war. His wife was hit by shrapnel during one of the bombings and died. She was buried in the garden of their *"dacha"*. There was no way to take her body for burial in a regular cemetery, in a war torn Leningrad. There was starvation and the cat and dog populations were reduced to the minima. People ate rats. There were instances of cannibalism. Jovial by nature as he was, he narrated all this with some amount of humor. But at instances I noticed tears in his eyes. As soon as the blockade was broken through, he managed to go down south to Erevan. From that time on he made it a point to reestablish his headquarters of activities in Armenia. He passed the major part of the year in his ancestral country.

We became friends in his later years. The first time we met each other was at a summer resort on the shores of the Black Sea, Sukhumi. From that point on we kept in touch with each other with regular frequency till the very last day of our departure. He died after a couple of years. We heard about his death accidentally. It was a grievous news. We enjoyed each other's company despite of being a generation apart. For so many years people had avoided each other out of fear of slander and accusation. After Stalin's death and Khrushchev's advent, we took advantage of that short period of relaxation to visit each other with no much apprehension even though the momentum of the old order was still there to some extent, and continues to remain today.

His tremendous sense of humor is reflected also in his writings. For he was not only an accomplished actor, but also a talented writer. Not very prolific, he left behind but a few works. Yet, these were all literary pieces of high calibre. His originality lies in the fact that while he wrote in Eastern Armenian, his verbiage was profusely Western Armenian, which has a richer and purer vocabulary. His description of even the most banal event, was so interesting to read. His major work is his memoirs with the title of "HEDATARTZ HAYATSK" (At Hindsight), in three volumes. Whoever ventures to read cannot put the book down before he reaches the end. It relates his life story, his adventures, for he had many. Written in a style full of wit, humor and imagination, and so much colorfully so that even his exaggerations and pufferies do not diminish the value of the work. He took advantage of his popularity, as a notorious actor and his advanced age to deviate from the conventional rules of Marxist literature thus avoiding the risk of his

work becoming the usual platitude. He established with his works a sort of precedence, yet some of the timid attempts to imitate his unmuzzled style remain to this date fainthearted, spiritless. Hopefully not so far in the future our dormant talents will come to the fore to duplicate his example and produce new masterpieces of which the Armenian genius is capable.

His other work is a small book. In it he gives the vivid portraitures of some of the giants of Western Armenian theater and literature in such a telling style, as only a Papasian could do. They were his sources of inspiration. They were people he had worked with, during his early years on the stage, still in Constantinople and other Diasporan centers. People whose work he read with admiration, and was stimulated by their talents. All of them had fallen victim of the Armenian holocaust, the first genocide of modern times. Viciously perpetrated by the Turks in their determined effort to wipe out a whole nation, while the so-called civilized Western nations watched the whole process of this annihilation with wicked indifference. With some of the other leaders of the Armenian community, these victims were the *"creme de la creme"* of the Western Armenian intelligentzia. They were the first to go. To this first contingent of victims to Turkish terror, followed the deportations and massacres of a million-and-a-half innocent Armenians: children, elderly, pregnant women. Immolated on a vast unquenchable altar. They died as their persecutors demanded more and more sacrifices because the Armenians were stubbornly clingging to their Christian faith, while the victorious Christian West gave promises and hopes of help never to fulfill. They betrayed. In that sense they are as sinful as the perpetrators themselves.

Having been a contemporary to these giants, he considered having a moral duty to live to posterity his reflections by narrating some of the events he witnessed depicting their courage and dedication to the cause of the nation. As he expressly underscores in his introduction, he chose the title for this book: "SERDISS BARDKEH". Literally translated it means "My Heart's Debt". But it would better express the true spirit of these three words by translating it as: "An acquital of a moral obligation coming from the depths of my heart". I treasure these two books, not only because the author was my friend, or for its literary value, but also because of their inspirational boost. They put down the cornerstone for a literary genre which I hope will eventually be seen as an example to be

followed.

In my turn, having been a contemporary and a participant to that unprecedented event of the repatriation, I consider it my obligation to leave to posterity my own introspections about the phenomenon by narrating my side of the story. For this is a period in our contemporary history which for understandable reasons historians from Soviet Armenia would not feel free to write with the required objectivity. While the ones who have left the country, either out of unfaded ill feelings, or out of a false national pride, would not want to get involved. Yet, doing the remembering while the main issues haven't still been dissipated in clouds over time, is a task not to be postponed any longer. So that the next generation who would tune late will have at its disposal materials to ponder upon. Mine is based upon the premises that: *whether we like it or not this is the only territory at this point in time we can consider to be our own. Also on the fact that no experience is ever a complete failure. It can at best be served as an example not to repeat the same mistakes. Since nobody can deny that errors have not been committed.* And to recruit a wider audience of readers, and by this I mean non-Armenian readers as well, my emphasis is laid upon the system and its reflections upon the lives of all peoples in the Soviet Union, including the Armenians. It, actually, goes deeper than a mere narration. It teaches a lesson to be learned. By telling the truth, as I see it, takes courage and will undoubtedly bring the wrath of some groups. I will certainly be called an apostate to my nation, which I am not, and resent the implication.

This is how Papasian's two books, with their inspiring titles and contents, served as invitations for me to follow his example, in my own way and for my own objective. In both our cases these were personal experiences. In both our cases the source of our initiatives was our sense of obligation to discharge our emotions from the depths of our hearts. There ends the similarity of our purposes. We were from different generations, the periods were different, the events different. His style is artistic, mine is different. He was an artist, I was a researcher. My theme, my subject of discussion too were different from his. His, is commendable. Because it is the lamentation of undisputable events. Mine relates deceptions, frustrations, we, never, wished to see. Mine is controversial, because it criticizes a stanchion we all wanted to lean upon.

Our two-week stay in Leningrad flew by too quickly, as always is the case for any other pleasant "passe temps". At nights, back from

our sightseeing trips, we gathered at the Papasian's to chat. He, always, was the one who commanded the attention of his visitors. When he talked, everyone listened. Abundantly resourceful, he had a consummate series of stories to narrate, in a typically Papasian style with so much wit, so much humor, even though at instances extravagant and overly ornate.

Back in Erevan, we submerged once again into our same daily routine. After uneventful summer months, my son returned to school, and I, to the Academy. In spite of the old chore, however, the absence of my wife from home had left a discernible vacuum to disturb the regular order of things. It was our first long separation since our marriage of twenty years or so, of a very harmonious life together. I had to devote more time to my son than I used to. My duties as a parent had doubled. And since my wife's trip was part of a covert scheme with hazardous potentials and unknown outcome, everytime the prospect of a possible failure came back into our minds, the peril that this temporary separation could become permanent, my son and I were tormented. And despite my efforts not to show my worries, apparently I was not always successful.

I once collapsed in tears, when it became known to the authorities that my wife was not to return, and when Ardavazt Y. had rushed to our home to find out what was the matter. She was not to come back, and it was part of our overall scheme. I knew it since I was one of the initiators. Yet confronting my friend Ardavazt, I do not know exactly why, I, all of a sudden, floundered. Why? it was the second stage in our plan for which I had been impatiently waiting. Why then did I break down? Why? Perhaps because that was the very moment when I realized more than ever, the extent of the risk we had taken, and visualized more realistically the kind of repercussions were in store for us in case of failure. All my thoughts focused on this point. I might also, have had reached that degree of stress where my nerves could not sustain any more. Then, the notion that I had deceived my good friend Ardavazt, was gnawing at my conscience. It was therefore a combination of all these factors which had taken me to the brink of prostration.

A positive outcome of this outburst, however, was the fact it persuaded the authorities that my affliction was genuine, and dissipated all doubt in their minds that this could have been a con-

creted scheme. My impeccable demeanor during my trip to Japan in 1960, served me well. They were all aware that I had the opportunity to defect, had I wished to, considering the ease with which I could communicate, fluent in English and French. In this particular case my record was clear.

After so many years I can't remember the exact set of codes we had established for use in the course of our correspondence with each other. The fact remains, however, that we were fairly successful in communicating and imparting our thoughts and messages to each other, with no particular muddle. One thing I can still remember though, and that was the agreement to use a sign to indicate either the veracity, or the humbug of the contents in our respective letters. This sign was a comma. A comma after the conversational salutation of: "My dear wife", or conversely: "My dear husband", the comma(,). The comma (,) was the sign to disbelief. Without a comma it meant that the content of the letter was what we actually to convey. The subterfuge worked splendidly for some time, until one day I fell into our trap. I shall come back to relate the details of that particular incident, sometime later.

Two months after her departure, my wife's Soviet permit expired. Soviet citizens traveling abroad are not permitted to stay more than a fixed period of time. In exceptional cases they have the option to apply for an extension. But very often they are refused. Transgression of this regulation is a misdemeanor punishable by law. My wife had the option to obtain an extension. Because: First, her brother Pakrat B. had considerable influence in local government circles, and the high level personnel of the Soviet Embassy. They, apparently, assumed she wouldn't have dared if she didn't have the backing of her brother. They did not wish antagonizing Pakrat B. Second, the Soviet counsular authorities in Beirut, realizing her determination indubitable, preferred to grant an extension to mollify her. Hoping that with time they might be able to persuade her to desist from her initial decision. But determined as she was, and to avoid any last minute capitulation, she chose not to apply for an extension. She deliberately put herself in a spot, intentionally violating the law, so her status became that of a defector.

Refusing to return, she at the same time informed the Soviet Embassy the reason for her decision. Her mother, old and ailing,

needed special care, which my wife as her only daughter, could provide more assidiously than the rest. The mother needed the kind of spirited support that only her daughter would procure. She at the same time filed a request, for us to be permitted to join her. Continuing this process, she sent telegrams after telegrams-reiterating her request to the addresses of Gromyko, then the Soviet foreign minister, and to Zarobian, then the first secretary of the communist Party of Armenia. Left unanswered, she repeatedly iterated her demarches.

It goes without saying that from that date on the pressure on me was augmenting considerably. I was, repeatedly called to the headquarters of the MGB, almost at regular intervals. The general surmise is that whoever enters that building can never be sure that he will come out again as a free citizen. It is often referred to as the "house of doom". I must admit that each and every time I was called to the headquarters, my heart was filled with fear. I always tried to keep my composure.

The first couple of times they were very polite and neighborly. They asked me to call her back home. Which of course, I was already doing. They knew it, but suggested to be more insisting. These were at first only suggestions. As time passed, these became menaces. Once they even alluded that they could eventually force her to return. I don't know whether they meant that at last resort they may even kidnap her or not. But they were not that stupid. Since such an action would have created a scandal in the Armenian community of Lebanon. Even so, they bluntly told me that "the Soviets have long arms which could reach to whatever point they chose to". I promised to be more firm, more bidding in my letters. The tone of my letters became increasingly profuse with admonitions, remonstrances, and at certain points when the pressures on me were too forceful, my epithets became even abusive. I blamed my wife for her disloyalty toward her family, treachery towards her country. I knew she would understand that I was under much weight. But then that little comma was there to remind her that I was still withstanding and not yet despondent.

All letters to overseas destinations are passed through the usual censorship. In this case, it goes without saying that the scrutiny was much more thorough. On that score I had no fear. Wasn't I complying with their orders? More than that, my letters were the best evidence of my position disapproving my wife's action. Who, even from among the most "Reynard" of the MGB operatives,

After this trip I had two other occasions to come into contact with outsiders, before our final departure from the country early in October 1965. But then these were contacts within the country. The occasions were the two International Exhibitions: the American, which took place in the late 50's, and the French, which took place in the early 60's. The contacts were not only with foreigners, but also with their cultures, achievements, progress, their industry, their arts, and whatever else one would imagine a large-scale exhibition would convey. In a sense a trip abroad within the perimeter of the site of the exhibition, in the city of Moscow itself. For many, an eye-opener, a denial of the Soviet propaganda about the decadent societies of the capitalist world.

The American exhibition was the first in its kind by scale and substance since the inception of the Soviet regime. It was the expression of a new turn in East and West relations. This was perhaps the reason why the Eisenhower Administration had delegated a top representative, the vice-president, Richard Nixon, for the opening ceremony. Yet, in spite of some signs of amelioration of relations between these two countries, during the opening ceremony there was a bittersweet exchange of speeches between Nikita Khrushchev and Richard Nixon. But these speeches did not lead to the point of closing all doors. Quite the contrary, the charges and the countercharges were delivered with a mild sense of humor, which suggested an overall promising future perspective than a breakdown. Had it not been later on the U-2 incident which drove Khrushchev to cancel Eisenhower's contemplated official visit to the Soviet Union.

The American and the subsequent French Exhibitions were indeed for the visiting Soviet citizens most revealing and thought provoking experiences. The unavoidable consequence was that these Exhibitions provided undeniable evidence prompting skepticism for the thinking Soviets to start questioning the credibility of what had been said since then about the decaying and crumbling world of capitalism. In spite of all the efforts and the obstacles raised to restrict the number of visitors to only a selected category of citizens considered to be more "reliable" and less "impressive", the authorities failed to curb the flow. The process of screening was an extremely difficult one. It was materially impossible to enclose the visitors in a tight mesh under total control. Soviet tourists permitted to travel abroad leave behind members of family as hostages. This provides some amount of safeguard against any

needed special care, which my wife as her only daughter, could provide more assidiously than the rest. The mother needed the kind of spirited support that only her daughter would procure. She at the same time filed a request, for us to be permitted to join her. Continuing this process, she sent telegrams after telegrams-reiterating her request to the addresses of Gromyko, then the Soviet foreign minister, and to Zarobian, then the first secretary of the communist Party of Armenia. Left unanswered, she repeatedly iterated her demarches.

It goes without saying that from that date on the pressure on me was augmenting considerably. I was, repeatedly called to the headquarters of the MGB, almost at regular intervals. The general surmise is that whoever enters that building can never be sure that he will come out again as a free citizen. It is often referred to as the "house of doom". I must admit that each and every time I was called to the headquarters, my heart was filled with fear. I always tried to keep my composure.

The first couple of times they were very polite and neighborly. They asked me to call her back home. Which of course, I was already doing. They knew it, but suggested to be more insisting. These were at first only suggestions. As time passed, these became menaces. Once they even alluded that they could eventually force her to return. I don't know whether they meant that at last resort they may even kidnap her or not. But they were not that stupid. Since such an action would have created a scandal in the Armenian community of Lebanon. Even so, they bluntly told me that "the Soviets have long arms which could reach to whatever point they chose to". I promised to be more firm, more bidding in my letters. The tone of my letters became increasingly profuse with admonitions, remonstrances, and at certain points when the pressures on me were too forceful, my epithets became even abusive. I blamed my wife for her disloyalty toward her family, treachery towards her country. I knew she would understand that I was under much weight. But then that little comma was there to remind her that I was still withstanding and not yet despondent.

All letters to overseas destinations are passed through the usual censorship. In this case, it goes without saying that the scrutiny was much more thorough. On that score I had no fear. Wasn't I complying with their orders? More than that, my letters were the best evidence of my position disapproving my wife's action. Who, even from among the most "Reynard" of the MGB operatives,

would have imagined that a modest, innocent little comma would trick them?

At one point the Soviet consular authorities in Beirut had threatened her that she wouldn't ever be able to see us any more. We would indefinitely be held hostage. At other instances they promised her that they would intervene in favor of our permanent departure if she would agree to return and file for exit visas through the regular channels. An attempt to entice her in their trap. She knew well the value of Soviet promises. In the meantime the pressures continued. Both on her, and on us. Yet she did not yield. Neither did she recede in her determination to see us out of the country. Hoping that, if we would have the Lebanese entry visas the Soviet authorities might relinquish, with no help from her brothers, she toiled hard and obtained them. And, when we received her telegram announcing that our visas were already waiting for us at the Embassy of Lebanon in Moscow, it raised a glimmer of hope. But this again was a self-delusion, underating the degree of stubborness of the Soviet authorities.

Aware of that, it actually exasperated the authorities even more. A couple of days after we received that telegram, I was called back again to the MGB headquarters. This time the summons was official. I was being escorted by an officer of the organization. In contrast to the usual routine of one person questioning me, I was faced to a group of officers. From their more austere comportment, I realized that this time they meant business. This was a commission formed for the specific purpose to prod me. They were threatening, menacing, abusive, and vociferously so. This time the object of their menace was our son. He was born in Soviet Armenia, considered a native of the land. They could legally separate us if we continued to insist on our departure. They well knew how vulnerable we would become. They ordered me to send a telegram asking my wife for her immediate return. Coincidentally there was a Soviet ship in anchor in the port of Beirut. They told me she could board that ship at once.

In spite of all the threats, I refused to send her a telegram. Was it that I still hoped that we would succeed in our scheme, or perhaps again it was an irrational, stolid pique on my part? There are moments in life that one loses the perspective of objective realities. I was confused and fearful, yet umindfully stubborn in my position. At least, I had the sense enough to tell them the reason of my refusal. "If she has chosen...", I said, "... to stay with her mother

in preference to her son and husband, then let it be so. I don't need a wife who would elect to live with her mother over her family." I left the premise wretched and miserable. Out in the street, on my way home, in my confusion I began doubting whether our persistence worthed the risk? I, increasingly, became fearful. For, according to the rumors the new order of puinishment for the wrongdoer was to slur him or her with accusations of mental derangement, lunacy, and instead of imprisonment or deportation, to incarcerate in a mental asylum. This became a prospect as horrifying as outright exile, perhaps even more, for they were taking control of your brain.

Evidently the pressure on my wife had also become intolerable. Not much long after my encounter with the MGB group of operatives, I received a telegram announcing her return home. Confused as I was, instead of feeling happy, I lashed into fury. My mind was still working stubbornly toward that one direction. " I had resisted to so many blights", I said to myself, "all of a sudden to see our whole scheme in ruin?" It became too hard to abdicate.

At that point I was faced with two, equally hard to decide, alternatives. I either had to pick up the telephone, call overseas and improvise at the spur of the moment a surreptitiously ciphered conversation to tell her my disapproval, with the almost certain risk that in case of our scheme's failure, we would become permanently separated. Or else, let her return and face the dire consequences of her attempt to "defect". To see her exiled. For a wrongdoing I was as culpable as she. Perhaps even more as the head of the family. A dilemma so hard to solve. In both of these instances the end result would have been a separation.

Enticed by the succeses of some of the returning repatriates to France, their birthplace, when we initially planned our scheme, our anticipation was great. It never occured to us that our situation, along with my status as a researcher at the Academy, were obstacles hard to overcome. These were causes to interfere with the materialization of our dream-like project, with the prospect of an outcome deceptive, dangerous, perhaps even fatal. Our many years of Soviet experience should have taught us that it was not wise to challenge the force of evil. But, ostensibly, in our fantasy we, at that point, had missed the meaning of that lesson.

Heedlessly I picked up the telephone and asked the overseas operator to put me through to Beirut. After a short while the call was through but due to weather conditions there was a bad con-

nection and before I had the chance to convey my thoughts the call was interrupted. Perhaps it was the grace of destiny. For, in the meantime, before the second call went through, I came back to my senses, and realized how much chance I was taking. I tried to cancel the call. I knew beforehand that we would be bugged. But the pleas of the operator to get the connection back, increased my suspicion, and the determination not to fall into their trap. I picked up the phone and carried a normal conversation without attempting to convey my disapproval to my wife for her action, as I initially planned to do. Even though this would have been furtive signals, hardly detectable by anyone other than us, but I did not want taking the risk.

She came back home. It was November 13, 1964. One of those dates in life one never can forget. I flew to Moscow to meet her at the airport. I wanted to protect her as much as I could, from any possible hastle from the authorities. We stayed a couple of days in Moscow at our Moscovite friends' house. Months of worry and pressure had taken their toll. I lost weight to an unbelievable degree. Emaciated, this was something I could not hide. But no one asked me the reason. Apparently they had their own suspicions. On our flight back to Erevan, in the plane we were very careful not to talk openly. Terse and casual, every so often we talked in French with each other. We suspected being followed, watched, listened. It might have been our state of mind, an obsession. But our Soviet life experience prompted us to be wary.

Back in Erevan, we had two issues to face, two new predicaments to cope with. First, of course, to see that my wife wouldn't fall prey to their vindictiveness. Second, to review and seek a new strategy for the pursuit of our aim. For our determination had not faded. The first issue was unexpectedly easy to overcome. In spite of our fears to be otherwise. They were insisting on confronting her alone. I persistently refused to agree. My contention was that she had made amends by returning. There was no need to drag on an issue so painful for me. I had suffered more than I deserved. I alone would bring her back to her senses. On the other hand, I argued, wouldn't her brothers be extremely upset to hear their sister disciplined? They still respected the opinion of her brothers. They still were not aware of our strained relations with them.

The second issue, as I have said was to contrive a new strategy. To cast a set of new tactics, to adopt a totally new line of action,

which would be conducted through the official channels and, not to transgress the laws of the land. As a pre-condition for her return, my wife had the *"presence d'esprit"* to obtain a promise from the high officials of the Soviet Embassy in Beirut to have them intervene with the authorities concerned in Moscow, to grant, to our entire family, permission to leave the country in permanence. It is true that Soviet promises did not, and do never amount to anything one can safely rely upon, that was something we very well realized. But at least we had at hand an element to lean upon, a promise, to carry our argumentations, a basis to shape out our new course of action.

To begin with, we needed a "period of grace". To cool down the heated atmosphere and the tempers from both sides. This took a couple of months. However, impatient as we were, in the meantime we lost no time to discretely ponder on new plans. Our first step was to re-file our applications, this time for the three of us, to leave the country in permanence. We needed separate affidavits of invitation for each one of us, duly signed and notarized. The notary signature and the authenticity of the documents to be ratified by the Soviet Embassy in Beirut. A procedure required, for our applications to be accepted by the authorities in Erevan. The same tedious and time consuming process all over again. The same malevolent resistence from the part of my wife's brothers. To our reiterated requests they always had a new false pretext. A new lame excuse. A new pious fraud. A new cock-and-bull story. The last one was that the affidavits were ready, but ratification were being refused by the Soviet Embassy. The result, a painful stalemate for us. We couldn't procure the outside help we so much needed. We had to look elsewhere for support.

Eventually we found one. From that point on the course of our struggle took a new shape. We found our support from within the organization. This came to prove once again that there were and are in the midst of their so-called most trustworthy elements, covert renegades, recanters who would be willing to give a hand. Of course it goes without saying, in the existing predicament, these sorts of help are procured for a consideration. The fellow who helped us is now deceased. No harm can reach him. Still, let me give him the fictitious name of Shura.

The chauffeurs in the Soviet Union are in a category by themselves. Each and every Soviet official in a high position, be they:

ministers, top Party officials, directors of institutions, heads of offices, factory managers, presidents of kolkhozes or sovkhozes, etc have their own chauffeur driven limousine at their disposal. Besides serving their bosses, these chauffeurs act as a front for their masters' "off track" dealings. They are, so to speak, the brokers in the widespread business of influence peddling, the hucksters of the trade of granting favors and services. Whenever one needs a favor from a high official the way to secure it, is to approach his chauffeur. And, to get in touch with a particular chauffeur, one often has to find another chauffeur who can be trusted as a contact, and the palms to be greased double, triple, quadruple. In this function the chauffeurs have in a sense virtually formed their unofficial "guild". They know each other. To some extent they trusted each other.

Wretched as I was, despite my hatred for such dealings, I, so very often, was coerced to bend under the weight of urgent needs. Therefore, out of necessity, I had included in the tier of my friends a couple of chauffeurs. One of them was a repatriate like ourselves, therefore I felt more secure dealing with him. He had succeeded establish contacts with some of the most sought for, and highly priced confreres. Hovhanness B. was his name. This was a person I could rely upon. I confided our plan to leave the country. He took upon himself the task to find the link, to put us in contact with an official reliable enough not to betray us, and capable enough to help us in our quest for exit visas.

A couple of weeks had hardly passed when Hovhanness dropped by our house to announce that he had found the link. He was a minister's chauffeur. He had connections with one of the officials from the Foreign Office. The Visa Office, commonly known by its acronym "OVIR", is supposed to be the organization delivering the exit visas. But actually the final decision comes from above. All exit visas have to be approved by the MGB, before they are passed through the Foreign Office, of which "OVIR" is a division. This being so, under the system of Soviet security, all employees of "OVIR" and the Foreign Office are under the jurisdiction of the MGB. So much so that the ones on top, as in the case of all members of the Soviet diplomatic missions abroad, are also officers of the MGB. If not quite officially, definitely so officiously. Indications are that foreign correspondents of the TASS news agency, are also connected with the MGB organization, in one capacity or another. Every so often spying is one of their functions.

The first meeting was arranged in our home under the pretext of a dinner party in honor of Hovhanness's birthday. He would in his turn invite some of his friends. His friends being the go-betweens, and the person from the Foreign Office, who, as I mentioned his name was Shura. Shura, as a top employee of the Foreign Office, implicitly therefore, as an officer of the MGB, was the last man to be trusted. Yet, by all logic, who else would have access to the top levels of the organization, and power and guts to manipulate a contrivance? I had no other choice. Either I had to confide our plan to an insider who had the capability to help us, and run the risk of a possible betrayal, or else linger on hoping for a miracle to happen. A miracle that would enable us secure exit visas through the regular channels.

Hard to believe, yet it is a fact that not all MGB operatives were and are monsters with human faces. There were quite a few who had retained some human feelings, and as it came out Shura was one of them. But when I first disclosed our plan, I wasn't yet completely sure of his feelings. These became clearer as our relations proceeded. And, as time went on, I liked the man. Apparently the feelings were mutual. For he, in turn, was taking some risks in this whole process of helping us.

The dinner party went on in a very festive mood. Shura, from the start showed a cheerful spirit. He liked to drink. So did the rest in the party. When after a while everybody's tongue loosened, they all in turn stepped into the forbidden area of anecdotes. They tried to outdo each other. Even though Khrushchev had been forced to step down, his successor, Brezhnev had not yet time enough to seal the mouths tight. At one point Shura a little off balance stood up to propose a toast to freedom. Under the relatively relaxed atmosphere of Khrushchev's era, many were those who believed that freedom is around the corner. After Brezhnev's advent, later events must have disappointed them all. Shura went on to state that during work hours he was a communist, but after that he turned a Dashnak. By that he meant us to imply that he was as anti-establishment, as anti-Soviet as the rest of us, in spite of his position in the government and the Party. To remind the reader, Dashnak is the Party ousted from Soviet Armenia after the Soviets came to power. It represents in the Diaspora the only well organized opposition to the present regime.

During this first encounter, still not knowing well enough the man, such an outburst from Shura, instead of inspiring confidence, for a moment it still raised more doubts. I suspected that his indiscretion might well have been a test. A ruse so often used by MGB operatives to trap prospective victims. So we let him do all the talking. We just remained aloof. Listened to his jokes, while feigning not able to grasp their spirit and tenor. Neither did we exclude the likelyhood that it was the effect of the alcohol. In a state of inebriation people often tell the truth.

At one point he asked me to show the way to the bathroom. Once in there he pulled me in and shut the door. In a selfcontained manner, he told me he wasn't drunk. He was sincere and all that he said were the expressions of his true feelings. Obviously he didn't fear from us, and assured us not to fear him. He told that I could talk with him freely, openly, with no reticence whatsoever. Whenever one finds himself in an entangled situation, as an Armenian popular expression says: "I had both feet in one shoe". I was in a very awkward situation. I had to take the decision of my life, right on the spot, in the toilet, with no time enough to think.

Our toilet was the spot where the blind, inexorable decision was made. No time to scrutinize the pros and cons of this new variant of the venture we were contemplating to enter in. At that very point I had to disclose our plan and request his help, while running the probable risk of a betrayal. Or else, forget the whole project and just wait hoping a miracle to happen. My worst fear was that, if our plan backfired, my wife and my son would suffer for a blunder which as head of the family, I myself was the chief architect. As the senior member of the family I had the responsibility of their well being and safety. I had to be on the defensive and not put their fate in jeopardy. Was the risk worthed? Was I being a protective husband and father? For a short second my mind flooded with uncertain thoughts. In the lapse of a minute I had to make up my mind. Desperate people should not be faulted for clutching at straws. I decided to confide him our plan. He had inspired my confidence. I trusted him with our lives. Later events came to prove that I was not wrong in taking that decision.

As closer we got, over time, he later confessed me that in spite of being a member of the communist Party and a former operative from the MGB, deep in his heart he despised the regime, and admired the outside world for what it represents. "When I was young", he told me, "I was brainwashed, like most of us were.

Later, during the war, and on frequent diplomatic missions, I saw the capitalist world as it truly is". In spite of the fact that all efforts by the organization are directed towards molding its operatives into a seasoned set of stereotypes, and unmindful bunch of human robots devoid of feelings and logic, it doesn't always succeed. There always are a few exceptions who do not conform entirely and act according to a set program. They are human beings after all. A wide variety of characters. The Armenians and other non-Russians who by nature are more individualistic, seem to have been harder to be patterned as easily. The Russians, on the other hand are a cast of a more maniable substance.

It was indeed the "Big Adventure". However, this was real life. For all its "cloak and dagger elements", it never transpired to a plot of a James Bondian type, or of a chimerical fantasy. Yet it was imbued with the potential of becoming an excitingly dangerous experience. In large measure depending, of course, on the degree of precariousness of the circumstances which had to follow. It was an adventure which required from us all, an abundance of courage. Dexterity, to have been able to initiate it. Prudence, not to have invoked unnecessary risks. Also forsight, skill, perspicacity, to have been able to increase the chances for its success. Still above all, an enormous amount of luck, which seems to play the decisive role in the kind of hectic predicament we were placing ourselves in. At hindsight and in the last analysis, it seems to me that illfated as I, ordinarily was, this time pure luck played the major role.

Pure luck indeed. But we shouldn't underestimate our respective performances in this game. Shura was trained by virtue of his profession to have the required attributes: prudence, skill, perspicacity, etc. I did not have that kind of a schooling. Still, because of the years of my Soviet life experience, if not yet by virtue of my sagacity, the necessity of self-preservation, if not for my wittiness, I had acquired some of those adjunct qualities enabling me to cope with one quandary after another. Modesty aside, I might even add that at instances I surpassed the professionals on their own turf. How did I outdo them? The explanation is that, these operatives a class by themselves, a bunch of cronies within their closed circle, spoiled insolents, often overestimated their intelligence and skill, while they underestimated the resourcefulness of their opponents in the game. This is how these experts in the profession so often bungled in their work.

I had frequent meetings with Shura. At the beginning, to estab-

lish a stratagem. Lines of action for each of us. Subsequent ones were to review our strategies, to improvise new tactics as the new developments required. Whenever we met in our house, we had a full table of delicacies and the best vintage of wine we could afford, we could procure in a scarce market. My wife never spared her efforts to excel in her culinary art, to coddle our guest. Our conviviality impressed Shura so much to express embarrassment for not being able to reciprocate in the same manner. He wasn't one of those insatiable operatives.

As time passed by, and my wife's brothers still seemed reluctant to send the affidavits of invitation required to lodge our applications for Soviet exit visas, Shura became as impatient and restless as we. He decided to step in. Despite of our initial deal that it was for us to procure these documents. My wife's brothers' pretext for the delays was the alleged refusal of the Soviet Embassy in Beirut to approve the affidavits. Coincidentally we found out that Shura had a friend in the Embassy, in Beirut. Stepping in, he sent a diplomatic message to his former colleague, asking urgently the approval of the affidavits. Within the MGB system, even between close colleagues often secrets are kept from each other. Shura took advantage of this fact, and in his message gave the impression that the order was coming from a higher authority for a specific reason he could not disclose. Ostensibly, the former colleague, bought the subterfuge without questioning. Not much later, we received the affidavits, and immediately lodged our applications. From that point on, Shura played the leading role, I became the supporting actor. The whole process took, however, a good portion of the rest of the year, until we were granted the Soviet exit visas.

Once the Soviet visas in our hand, we hoped that we had overcome the main hurdle. In spite of the liberal policy of the Lebanese government, our entry visas were delayed. In our haste, we had made the mistake to ask once again my wife's brothers' help. We were dead wrong. Instead of intervening in our favor, they evidently had interferred. As if this was not enough, we noticed signs of reluctance from the Soviet side. I can't tell for sure if this was the result of the Soviet authorities becoming aware of our feud with my wife's brothers, or else a routine vacillation. They started to make threatening calls, send menacing letters, and other sorts of Chekist style intimidations. Ostensibly to impart fear and discourage our departure. I was called to meet some of their operatives. Each time they fixed a date and a meeting place, each time I

ignored to call. They started to threaten alluding that an accident might happen to one member of our family. Knowing well what the organization is capable of, we could not easily ignore the menaces. However, each time we took the risk of standing firm in our position.

At that stage turning back in our decision would have been as dangerous a proposition as continuing the pursuit of our initial objective. By abandoning our plan and staying back, we would have been at their mercy anyway. At that late stage, we could not meet Shura as often as we wished to, and ask advice. Lest, we would have raised the suspicions of those operatives who were not in this game. A couple of the menacing letters were unmistakably obvious where they came from. As often is the case they underestimated the intelligence of their prospective preys. First, they mailed a letter addressed to our son a teenager of fifteen. Allegedly from a girl friend, claiming to be his lover, asking a date. He had girl friends. Not the type of girl the style of the letter had been suggesting her to be. Naturally he ignored the *"rendez-vous"*. A second letter followed from the same alleged girl friend. The letter was full of unflattering epithets. An attempt to stir our son's ego. He was accused of being just a kid who did not know the facts of life. She called for another date. He ignored once again. Knowing well what these people are capable to, it came to our minds that this might as well be an attempt to kidnap our son.

After a while we received a third letter, this time addressed to me. A menacing letter from a supposedly fellow repatriate. He was accusing me as the cause of his misfortune, claiming that I had set the example for him to repatriate. Strange piece of logic. Instead of blaming those who preached but did not repatriate, I, who fell in the same abyss, had become the target of his frustrations. In his letter he was menacing that his relatives in Beirut had been instructed to kill me as soon as I step on Lebanese soil. In this whole scenario the obvious mistake was the fact that the letters in both instances were signed Sarkissian, and the handwriting the same. Evidently the assignment for harassing us had been handed over to a rookie operative. Inexperienced and unimaginative, he had signed the letters with the same name, first impersonating a girl friend to our son, then impersonating a menacing repatriate full of hatred.

As the pressure increased with almost no respite, we became still more determined. We had, however, a moment of hesitation.

And, at that particular instance, it wasn't out of fear of their threats. Our old flame of patriotism was not completely smothered. We were leaving the country with no inimical feelings toward the country, the people, the Armenian spirit. Our main hostility was against its regime, imposed by an alien power.

Now, what was the exact reason for our last-minute hesitation?

During our entire eighteen years in the Soviet Union, we witnessed but a few major events which briefly raised some hopes for better days to come. I have to admit some changes did occur for the better, but not quite to the degree and scope of our expectations. These were: Stalin's death, a major corporal and spiritual deliverance. Khrushchev's secret speech in the XXth Party Congress the night of June 4th, 1956, when he denounced Stalin's policies, the "odium theologicum" of his theories and methods of government. The uprising of the people in Hungary against the Soviets in late summer of the same year. An event which had it been successful the face of world politics would have changed. The spontaneous demonstration of the repatriates from France on the occasion of the French Prime Minister, Francois Pinaud's visit to Erevan. An unprecedented event in the annals of Soviet history. And, last but not least, almost on the eve of our departure, the solemn commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Martyrs' Day in April 24, 1965, with the official participation of the government. An unprecedented mass rally of peaceful demonstrators was formed. Gigantic in scale. Over half a million pair of feet, silently walked through the main streets of the capital city, with no major incidents, with a scrupulously conscientious crowd of responsible marchers, all and each participant determined not to give a reluctant authority from the Kremlin reason to interfere. It was a demonstration at the same time of how the Armenian people deep in their hearts keep the flame of patriotism aglow. It was also a demonstration of how the Armenian people can unify for a supremely important cause. It was a demonstration that the Armenian people can never forget, and still more, can never forgive the genocide. It was a demonstration that the Armenian people is determined to survive. And at last it was a demonstration that the Armenian people when united can move the mountains. The mountains of all hurdles.

In the Armenian Diaspora Martyrs' Day was commemorated every year on April 24th, with masses in the churches, with meetings in every city and locality where an Armenian community existed. In Soviet Armenia, Stalin alive, for political considerations and in deference to the susceptibility of the Turkish government, the commemoration of Martyrs' Day was not permitted. It was only during the early part of the Khrushchevian era of relative relaxation that people began to feel free to remember and mourn their deads and talk about the Turkish massacres. In 1965, Khrushchev even already demoted, still had left behind, for a short while at least, some sort of a relaxed atmosphere. And, the Diasporan determination to commemorate the 50th anniversary more solemnly than in the past years, became the source of pressure on the Soviet government. The men in the Kremlin were forced to give in. To save face under the weight of the growing influence of the Armenians living abroad. It would have looked an anathema to see that the 50th anniversary of the genocide which was to be commemorated solemnly in the Diaspora, and with the participation of representatives of local governments, when this would have been censured and forbidden in Soviet Armenia. The very land of the Armenian people. This would have underscored once again, and still more blatantly the hold the Central Authorities in Moscow have over the rest of the puppet governments which form the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics. The kind of hold which would force the people to beg permission to mourn its Martyrs. Apparently this time the determination of the Armenian people abroad, all over the world, to commemorate this solemn event ceremoniously, more than in the past, was enough an influence to override Soviet consideration of Turkish susceptibility.

The Armenians of the Diaspora are not yet quite aware that they represent today an accountable force which the Soviet propaganda machine abroad would wish to win over, capitalizing on the fact that the present decimated territory of Armenia forms part of the Soviet Union, and "DEAR" to the Armenians all over the world. The Armenian Diaspora has a trump card in hand. Used systematically and insistently it might become instrumental for our success in our efforts to claim our national rights. For understandable reason the Armenians inside the Soviet Union are not free to lodge such claims. To start with, we can claim from the Soviet government the integration of the region of Karabagh, where over 80% of the population is Armenian. A disputed territory promised to the Armenians after World War One, but through the manipulations of the big powers, passed to Azerbaijan's provisional control. This

provisional arrangement seems to have become permanent. Every time an Armenian from within the Soviet Union dares to remind the authorities of this promise, he or she is reprimanded at best, subjected to repercussions at worst. Nakhichevan is another region under dispute. There are some others, all within the Soviet territory. It is, therefore, the task of the Armenians living in the Diaspora, who are free of political pressures, to claim the reintegration of our legitimate territories within the Soviet Union first. Later the struggle will continue to reinstate the borders to the pre-World One status.

This commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Martyrs Day unprecedented as it was, also became an unprecedented demonstration of courage by half a million Armenians claiming our lost territories. The marchers were carrying large signs demanding the return to the pre-World War One boundaries of Eastern Armenia. It is unfortunate, however, that after that one event the higher authorities at the Kremlin have succeeded to smother this outburst of a reviving patriotism.

The scene was extremely moving. The general enthusiasm was enticing, contagious. For the first time an official permission for mass demonstration had been granted. The unrealizable was being realized. This prompted many to hope that past injustices will be remedied. The spectacle was too inspiring for us not to be impressed. It was at that point, that for a flash moment, we felt some hesitation about leaving the country.

We had repatriated with great hopes and enthusiasms. We, instead faced with situations we never anticipated. A big DECEPTION. The result of a widespread self-centered egotism. Lies, corruption, and a long list of wickedness. Even though these are the characteristics of human nature, vested within each and every human society, but in our dream-like fantasy, we had hoped that people in Armenia would not possess. In such wise we lived cloistered in our shells hateful decades of disillusionment. In despair, we decided to leave the country whenever this became possible. And, all of a sudden on the eve of our departure from almost nowhere we witnessed a totally new aspect, hitherto a hidden one, in the character of the people we had learned to despise. These demonstrations revealed that these people maintained also in the depths of their hearts, if not all, at least some of the best positive feelings a human being can possess.

We hesitated for a while. But then we came back to our senses.

After we had crossed so many barriers, and overcame so many hurdles, a return to our status quo ante, would have been one of the other big mistake of our lives. What was happening was a wobble of history we could not safely rely upon. And indeed, nothing much hope inspiring events have happened since then.

After this brief interim of hesitations and second thoughts back to our project, we continued pounding my wife's brothers with our telegrams asking for their intervention with the Lebanese authorities to speed the grant of entry visas. Each time there was a new explanation for the delay. Hardly convincing. It was during those exchanges of requests and lame excuses, that all of a sudden out of the blue we were informed by OVIR, the Soviet visa office, that our entry visas had been received from the Lebanese Embassy in Moscow. Pleasantly astonished as we were, we wondered why my wife's brothers had not informed us sending the entry visas? Later, when I paid a visit to the Lebanese Embassy in Moscow to thank the ambassador, then it became clear to me how these visas were obtained. I shall come back to that later.

Within the short lapse of a week or so we had to dispose that part of our belongings which would have been too cumbersome to take with us. We had to be ready to fly to Moscow, thence out of the country before the expiration of our visas. In Moscow, for those leaving permanently the country, it was extremely hard if not impossible to secure rooms in a hotel. We were already *"persona non grata"*, recreant slackers. So we had taken the precaution of having a recommendation from someone who knew a lady in Moscow who would be willing to let us rent a room in her tiny apartment. For fear of causing harm, we preferred not to stay with our Moscovite friends, as we used to in the past.

We flew from Erevan to Moscow on September 28, 1965. In Moscow, the room we rented was in the center of the city. It didn't mean, however, that the conveniences were perfect. Far from that. It wasn't even an apartment in the proper sense of the word. It was an extemporization. A remnant of a provisional arrangement from the early days of the regime, when there was a rush to the capital from the provinces, and housing conditions were much worse than they are today. It, obviously, had been a temporary allotment which became a permanent situation as conditions did not improve. The tenants were mostly heirs of the original residents. This was a quasi-apartment with two contiguous rooms,

nine flights up, behind the backstage of a theater. To enter the room we had rented, we had to pass through our landlady's room. As stated earlier, privacy is a word with no equivalent in the Russian language. Neither are they too particular about it. This so-called apartment lacked even the usual conveniences. The toilet and sink were located on the corridors, somewhere in the stairway, for the common use of all tenants. No kitchen. Cooking was done in the rooms, which served at the same time as bedrooms, living room, family room, etc.

My sister had accompanied us to Moscow to bid us farewell. We were four of us packed in that tiny room with only two beds. My son and I slept on the floor. We were hoping that our stay in Moscow would be of very short duration. We were so anxious to have this episode in our lives over. It turned out to be a wishful thinking. The Soviets never give up so easily. New complications, new problems. It became impossible to buy tickets on the "Aeroflot" flying direct to Damascus, Syria, the nearest and quickest route to our destination. They asked hard cash in American dollars for the fare. It was another trap, since trading in foreign currency is strictly forbidden by law, and subject to severe punishment. We were stuck against an almost impregnable wall. It was at that point, debilated as we were, that we, reluctantly, asked our Moscovite friends for help. To that point we had tried not to involve them. For their own safety, to spare them from future eventual repercussions. They did not hesitate to, once again, come to our aid. Even though influential in administrative and Party circles, they too had hard time, brawling and wrangling before they could secure an alternative measure to leave the country. We bought tickets on an "Aeroflot" flight to Paris. It was only under this condition they would accept rubles for payment of the fares. At that eleventh hour, what was that they were aiming at? Was it a last-minute Machiavellian attempt to disrupt our departure? Hard to guess how the minds of the MGB operatives work. They should have known, however, once we had reached that stage of our plan, it would have been impossible to back down. It might also have been a routine obstruction in the best, or better yet, in the worst tradition of Soviet bureaucracy. We had no French visas. They must have known that. We had told them during our altercations. Was it that they were fiendfully enjoying in their hideous imagination the prospect for us having problem with the French authorities? We accepted the proposition without further thoughts. Inasmuch as this would have permitted us to leave the country, we were determined to face the new problems as they were presented, one at a time. Fluent in French, we were confident we would be able to present our case persuasively. We were hoping that the French authorities would be less rigid and more understanding. We were not all that wrong.

On the eve of our departure, as mentioned earlier, I paid a visit to the Lebanese Embassy in Moscow to thank them for their gracious permission to admit us to their country. Chatting unofficially with the Embassy secretary, a very affable young man from Beirut, I found out that the Lebanese entry visas were in fact the ones originally sent by my wife when she was still in Beirut struggling for our extrication. These visas had been waiting at the Embassy for us to claim. In other words, these visas were not sent by my wife's brothers. But having no knowledge of this coincidence we had presumed that they were. Since the expiration date for these visas was fast approaching, this became one more reason to cut short our squabble with the airline officers. The readers might remember that these visas sent by my wife were for my son and myself. I asked the secretary, what about my wife? His response was that being by birth a Lebanese she didn't need a visa. We, thus, became aware that in accordance to Lebanese law one might possess dual citizenship. Had we known that during our struggles, our approach would have been different.

As soon as we became aware of this new situation, we decided not to send the telegram we had initially contemplated, to announce to my wife's folks the date of our arrival. Lest they would have interfered once more. We, instead, cabled our friends in Paris to meet us at Orly airport, and help us out of a situation promising to be tangly.

We boarded the plane on October 6, 1965. After a three or four hour flight we landed at Orly airport the same day, early in the afternoon. At the checkpoint, noticing that we had no entry visas, the French passport officer examining our documents, without listening to our full explanation, asked us to step aside and wait until the rest of the passengers were processed. Ostensibly he had to refer our case to his superiors, which was out of the ordinary. What he said was: *"mais mèssieurs et dame, vous êtes un cas spécial"*. While waiting for the final "verdict" all the passengers were processed and passed through the gate throwing glances at us. Some looked with contempts, evidently in their minds we must

have been wrongdoers caught red handed in the middle of a transgression. Others looked at us with commiseration, perhaps thinking we were stateless people looking for a haven. It goes without saying that in that situation we felt extremely embarrassed, blushing like small children waiting to be reprimanded. And what was our malefaction? If indeed there was one, it was our craving to gain freedom at any cost. But then, we couldn't have blamed those passengers disdainfully staring at us who didn't know the true reason of our being separated from the rest.

Freed from his duties, the passport officer came back to us repeating the same reflection word for word: *"mais mèssieurs et dame, vous êtes un cas spécial"*. Soviet passports and no entry visas for France? A situation this officer seemed to be experiencing for the first time. The feeling of being undesirable is one I would not wish any one of my readers to experience. This time the officer was ready to listen to us. And when he found out the reason why we were so fluent in French, and about our countries of birth, he was convinced that we were not lying. That we were indeed in transit for Beirut.

The trouble was that we did not have sufficient foreign currency to buy tickets for Beirut and justify for sure our contention. We had cabled our Parisian friends to meet us at the airport. They were late. When to our great relief, they appeared behind the gate waving us welcome, I could not retain myself shouting "we have no transit visas, neither money to buy our way to Lebanon. The French authorities won't let us stay in transit in Paris for a couple of days". Our Parisian friends, as the reader will remember from an earlier part of our narration, were the ones with whom we had arranged to transfer out money. After a short wait, which appeared to be an interminable time, the tickets were purchased and presented to the officer. Convinced of our intention, without further reference to his superiors, the officer granted us the transit visas, wishing good luck. We left the airport and drove with our friends directly to the center of the city. Paris, *"le capital de la lumière et du plaisir"*. Our first abode in the Free World.

We spent in the French capital two memorable days. The first two days in freedom after eighteen years of seclusion. Now that we had money, we indulged ourselves with the luxury of a comfortable hotel with private bath, in the center of the city. The two days we spent with our friends, visiting within that short lapse of time as many sites as we could, we enjoyed every minute of them. It

seemed to us that we were floating on the air of an unreal dream world. Still, at certain moments we had hard time believing that we were indeed out of the Soviet Union. At the sight of a policeman or a uniformed government official we felt uncomfortable. We still carried our old apprehension that these were the agents of oppression. Those feelings persisted to remain for quite a while. Even in Lebanon, thence in the USA, where we found our last abode and established permanent residence. This was the time that we realized we needed a period of readjustment, after eighteen years of Soviet life, in spite of the fact that originally we were from the Free World.

We flew to Beirut the night of October 8, 1965. We cabled the time of our arrival to my wife's brothers at the very last minute out of fear that if allowed enough time they might find a way to disrupt our plans. I have to admit that this might have been rather a pathological fear. But we had many reasons to feel that way. It was midnight when we landed at Beirut airport. They were there to meet us. The two brothers with their wives, and the two cousins with their husbands. The reception was cold. We didn't show warm feelings either.

It was still summer in Lebanon. They were still staying up in the mountain resorts. They drove us there. The mother was fast asleep. She woke up, and in a very casual manner bade us welcome. Alienated as we felt we were, and when they took us to an hotel, finally alone, our son turned towards us and expressed his utter disillusion. It penetrated like a spear into our hearts. We feared that this odium would last, and perhaps for ever, to include in the vial of his hatred his mother and father, my wife and I. We were fortunate. In a relatively short span of time his wounds were healed. He adapted to the new environment much sooner than we did. He is now a successful engineer, and as adjusted as can be.

10

BACK TO THE FREE WORLD

The period of our readaptation was a long and painful process. Harder than we expected. Things had changed since the day we had left Lebanon eighteen years earlier. People had changed. In the interim, some of our friends had died. Others had moved out of Lebanon. The rest, greater in number, had climbed the ladder of success and there was a noticeable change in their lifestyle, psychology, and overall attitude. Apparently, during our absence they had enjoyed a period of unprecedented prosperity. Their affluence had rendered them more materialistic. At gatherings the main subject of conversation was about their prowesses in the stock, commodity or the gold market. About their dexterous dealings in real estate. The one-time middle class had become wealthy, leaving room for the more modest in means, in their turn to climb in status and become the well-to-do. We were genuinely pleased to see such prosperity around us, in a community which not long ago people were struggling for a decent livelyhood. What was distasteful, however, was the selfstyled snobbery and arrogance hardly befitting with their recent past. In certain instances their comportment would only be described as grotesque. The insolent demeanor of these *"nouveaux riches"*. For someone who knew their modest origin, was unbearably ridiculous.

At one time "dear" friends of ours who had become very rich were no longer friends. Reestablishing friendship would have meant violating the barriers of the newly established class etiquette. They, very, openly and boldly cut out all hopes that, one day, we might dare contemplating such a "favor" from them. There were others who hadn't climbed the ladder that high. to some extent they were willing to associate with us, but then to have opportunity to boast. And once we got their message they unresiliently kept their distances.

One such random example was, my one-time tailor, Hrach S. During our absence he had been quite a success. He had a store of his own, in one of the best areas in the center of the city, with a high class clientele. I was happy to see him so successful and prosperous. Eighteen years earlier, before I had left Beirut, our association was more than a customer-tailor relationship. He was nice and congenial, I liked the fellow, and had always considered

him a friend, I treated him that way. When we returned the situation had changed. In his eyes I was a poor refugee. He was a well settled merchant-tailor who didn't need my business any more. I could not afford his services. He did not hide his feelings anymore, and looked down at me with disdain. Vexing as it was I tried to ignore his new posture. Apparently inherently mean, the man had, in the past, suffered from an inferiority complex. This was his chance to get even with me. And for what? I had never given him occasion to nurture such begrudging feelings. And never had it occured to me that I was superior because of my material affluence or my educational background. Yet he didn't miss the opportunity to get at me and made me feel that the situation was now reversed. I was the poor, the unsettled, the stateless with an unpredictable future. Whereas, he was the well settled with a future predictable and well defined. Was he? I wonder what and how is he doing in the chaos that now grips Lebanon? And this I say neither with malice, nor with rancor. Just to emphasize that life is full of surprises. This one example typified the psychology of the day, of our one-time friends and acquaintances. What my wife and I had hoped to find was understanding and compassion. Nothing more. Our strong sense of self respect and dignity would never have permitted to ask for material help, even though at some points we were in need of that.

These were our friends. What about our enemies? With that kind of friends it didn't make much difference. Friends and enemies acted in most the same manner. What about our relatives? Still not much difference. From the first day we stepped on Lebanese soil, the reception was cool. The reason? In all certainty because we asked back our share in the family business, which we had left in care of the eldest brother, Pakrat B., with power of attorney.

Knowing well the tight security and censorship of the Soviets, evidently, speculating on the probability that it would have been almost impossible for us to have smuggled out the documents proving our rights of share in the business, the whole family in league including the mother, denied our claims, on the grounds that on the eve of our departure to Soviet Armenia we had already liquidated our stocks entirely. And indeed such a maneuvre had taken place by my wife's brothers, without my knowledge. But when, I, accidentally discovered the ruse, the transaction was officially voided and replaced with a new set of documents reinstating

our rights. The ruse was discovered when, unsatiated as they were, having mounted a fictitious sale transferring my wife's share in their names, they then asked me to agree for a similar transaction. Evidently they had saved these invalidated documents expecting that if in the future the authentic documents could not be produced, then the invalidated would become valid to repudiate our rights. But it so happened that we had been successful in smuggling the documents out. Even so, they had too many connections in the corrupted judicial system of Lebanon. We were no match for them.

From that point on, there was a series of unsavory quarrels. As a result, we became more and more isolated, not only from our relatives, but also the few remaining friends who had for a while "favored" us with their company. They, obviously, preferred to take sides with the more powerful in the ongoing hostilities. In last resort, in total despair, reluctantly we hired a lawyer to defend our rights. In the best or the worst tradition of the Lebanese judicial system our lawyer was bribed. We left Beirut hopeless and bitter, with our dispute unsettled.

While in Beirut, powerless and destitute, we had to live sixteen stressful months with our limited means. The day after our arrival we had succeeded in securing a meager advance on our share in the business. It was a good omen. For otherwise we might have starved, since all my efforts to find a job were unsuccessful. My status as a stateless refugee was largely responsible for that. And my brothers-in-laws had made sure that nobody from their entourage would hire me. Who were the only chance I could get a job. The animosities had reached to such despicable proportions.

Years later, trying to forget the past, living a modest life in the USA, working for a living, both my wife and I, helping our son get a good education, when we had lost all hopes, and after a long silence, we, unexpectedly, received a letter from the eldest brother, Pakrat B. In this letter he was expressing an unaltered tenderly brotherly love. He wanted to settle the dispute and "magnanimously" asked us to tender our price for the sale of our share in his favor. Our share? A share he had constantly denied us to have? Despondent as we were, fearing that if we were to ask our full share we might blow the deal, the three of us conferring still under the influence of our past failures, decided on an amount equal to one-third of our rightful share. Two weeks had hardly gone by when Pakrat B. transferred the money, but not before we

had signed an all comprehensive document waiving all further rights. The speed with which he agreed to our proposal was the best evidence that we had asked much less than our share. For quite some time we could not find a convincing explanation for that sudden change of heart. Putting the pieces together, we gradually surmised that there must have been some sort of a conflict of interest between the two brothers, and with this transaction the eldest brother was securing a majority share in the business.

There were other groups of people who played their own game in aggravating our frustrations furthermore. These people accused us of treachery for having left Soviet Armenia. They were the pseudo-patriots who clamorously announced their deep love for the country of their forefathers, but only from a safe distance. There were also others, the Dashnaks, for example. Blaming and assailing us for their own motives. I might well be a fake, actually a Soviet spy. A passionate outburst of a belated revenge for my past role in the repatriation movement.

For some a traitor to Soviet Armenia. For others a spy in the payroll of the Soviets. And, a lengthy series of other ambivalent accusations running amok in the wild imaginations of people of opposite political affiliations. Charges and imputations contrasting each others. The whole irony in this and some other situations was the fact that when I first stepped on Soviet soil I was suspected of being an American spy because of my educational background, as a graduate from the American University of Beirut.

The period of readaptation was indeed painful. In some ways as tormenting as our first experience stepping on Soviet soil. All our hopes were being shattered one after the other. The same degree of disappointment. Disheartened, disgusted, we had the same kind of second thoughts. Had we made the right decision, in this instance, to expatriate? We felt more and more convinced that: *"le jeu ne vallait pas la chandelle",* the game was not worth the candle.

During the worst years in Soviet Armenia, even at my lowest ebb, it never occured to me so impellingly that suicide would be the easiest way out. With some abashment I have to confess that in Beirut this thought flashed at one point through my mind. But then the prospect of living my wife and my son unprotected at the mercy of a voracious entourage deterred me from such a foolish action. In the ensuing lines I shall come back to narrate the circumstances which led me to such despair.

After a couple of weeks from the date of our arrival in Beirut, realizing that we were not welcomed, and would hardly be able to depend on my wife's folks to help us establish permanent residence in that city, we decided to file an application to immigrate to America. As refugees from the Soviet Union, this option was open for us. There were many refugees: Armenians, Jews, and other ethnic minorities from East European communist countries, who had either legally or by way of defection, found temporary asylum in Lebanon. They were in course of being processed for their final anchor in USA.

The sponsor of this project was "The World Council of Churches", a Division of Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service. Their head office was in Geneva, Switzerland. Their Beirut office on rue Badaro. This organization had a special division to service the Armenian refugees, commonly called ANCHA, the acronym of "American National Committee to Aid Homeless Armenians". Its head office in San Francisco, California, the president, then, was the late George Mardikian. A wealthy American of Armenian descent, a restaurateur by profession (a former cook), and one-time caterer to the US Army. A *"nouveau riche"* who fancied the idea of being called the Armenian prince by a toady entourage. He was also a leading personage from the Dashnak Party.

The procedure for an application began with an interview by a person I sensed was not a member of the Organization of the World Council of Churches, but rather a political officer from the US government. After a thorough examination he asked me to sign a paper. It was a waiver denouncing all ties with the Soviet Union, and renouncing my Soviet citizenship, my wife's and my son's included. I signed without a second's hesitation. Au contraire, I felt relieved, assuming that the process had started, and evidently there were no hindrances to keep us from immigrating to America. But then the pursuant steps did not proceed with the kind of smoothness we had expected. ANCHA showed all the signs of a bureaucratic apparatus. Most of the functionaries local people, with their uncooperative arrogance reminded me of the Soviet bureaucrats. Besides, there were rumors that some of them were receiving kickbacks.

While this process was to all appearance in full progress, a couple of months had hardly passed, when a derogatory article appeared about me in the *"Hayreniki Tzain"* (The Voice of the Homeland), the official organ of the Committee for Relations with

the Armenians of the Diaspora, published in Erevan. The author was the Soviet-Armenian poetess and writer Sylvia Gabudikian. It was immediately reprinted in the local and other Diasporan papers with an array of commentaries, each according its author's bias and political affiliation. Some echoing Gabudikian's style of backbitings, were blaming me for having left the country. Others trying to be more imaginary, were pouring at me a series of disparaging epithets. These were in major part the papers of the parties leaning towards the left. Yet, with the same amount of bitterness I was vilified by the press of the Ramkavars, the Armenian Liberal Democratic Party. Despite its appelation this is the Party and mouthpiece of the Armenian Bourgeoisie in the Diaspora. As a pique to their rival Party Dashnak, they side with Soviet Armenia.

There were others who sided with me, or rather for me. During the whole period of these outrageous charges and countercharges, I remained deliberately silent. For one thing, I still had relatives back in Erevan whom I did not want to cause harm by responding to the assaults, which would have meant scolding Soviet Armenia. For another thing, I have to admit I was fearing repercussions from the left. The Soviets have long arms, and in addition they have surrogates who act upon their command. The reader must remember the threatening letters we received the last days in Erevan. As a matter of fact one such attempt was made. It was unsuccessful. One day while still in Beirut, stepping out from the main post office, a car, out of the blue, rushed at me. I, instinctively, jumped back on the side walk. In the car I noticed M., one time the secretary, now a leading member of the communist Party in Lebanon. Later I have learned from people expatriating after us, that news had reached in Erevan that I was killed. A couple of days after that incident I received a telegram from my sister in Erevan asking about our health. There were no other attempts that I am aware of.

Understandably, it was the press of the Dashnaks who took position against my abusers. There was no doubt in my mind that such a posture was not out of sympathy for me, neither out of compassion for my fate, since I was the last person to melt their hearts. My past activities during the repatriation movement had aroused their anger. They had a grudge against me, which according to some signs after two decades or so had not yet smothered. It was therefore out of pique to rival Parties and the pro-Soviets

that the polemic had been activated.

The press of the Ramkavars dedicated a number of long articles in an effort to debase my action and me. An article from Baykar (Struggle) appeared in reprint in the Zartonk daily (Renaissance). Both official organs of the Ramkavar Party. The first based in Boston, the second in Beirut. The article with the unusual title of *"Hayrenapakh"* (see issue of 3-30-66) is a word which does not exist in the Armenian dictionaries. It is a creation of the author's imagination. The writer of this editorial, Andranik Andressian, an American-Armenian, in his anger had invented the word. In his unbridled fury to denote my new status scornfully. This is in fact a combination of two words: "homeland" and "runaway". I was being labeled as a "runaway from the homeland". A homeland he himself never tried to make his own.

The leftist press in competition with the rest in their efforts to debase me, excelled in vulgarity more than the others. I became the topic of discussion of the day. It was the kind of spotlight I would never have wished to be in. I, deliberately, remained silent to avoid being pushed into painful wrangles. Neither was I too happy to see Armenia being looked at askance. I did not want to add to the controversy by becoming part of the ongoing wanton polemic. I wasn't content at all that an old dream of eighteen years ago had so tragically ended. Yet, at certain gatherings when I was put on the spot, pushed and pulled by some of the pseudo-patriots, who during the early days of the movement refused to repatriate, I could not restrain my anger. I proposed them to go and settle in Armenia., now that conditions have ameliorated to some extent, and fill the gap I had left open with my departure. Invariably they responded: either they would one day go. And that day never came. Or, under the opulence and the lifestyle they have been living, for them it was too soon to go. Hearing these nonsenses I could not retain my wrath and told them" "you sons of bitches, since you are not willing to sacrifice your comfort, why on earth you've the guts to coerce others to do so? The last eighteen years I paid my dues for being born Armenian, now is your turn".

During those squabbles, some who had visited Soviet Armenia as tourists for a couple of weeks or so, were still more challenging. They had come back from their trips with the illusive conviction that they were the experts. These egocentric pundits, these self-styled authorities on Armenian affairs were the same whom if one would have asked about their future plans, they would be stammering and unable to give a honest answer.

The general consensus of the few still remaining friendly with us was that after so many assaults from the Soviet Armenian press, and by projection, the echo of the Diasporan leftists, the approval for our applications for USA entry visas was already secured. *"Persona non grata"* for the Soviets would logically be *"Persona grata"* for the U.S. government. To our great disappointment and dismay the end result was the opposite. The entry visas were refused. In the Free World, our deception was all the more painful. A refusal with no explanation. A refusal as we later found out based on slanderous information.

When the mailman delivered the envelope from the United States Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, before even opening it, we were so sure that this was the notice of the approval. But then when we read the last paragraph of this notice: "After careful consideration of your case, it has been determined that parole will *not* be authorized". We became speechless, numbed. It was hard for us to understand the reason for this refusal. The wordings in the notice said: "...after careful consideration...", how careful was their consideration? It came from a Division of the Department of Justice. How much justice was being served? A decision based on slander.

As soon as I recovered from my initial shock, I renewed my efforts with the same determination, perhaps even more, to find a solution and secure a safe anchor for our erratic life, somehow, somewhere. But with this and other subsequent refusals, the vast spaces of the Free World were becoming narrower each passing day.

It was upon the suggestion of a cousin who had relocated a decade or so ago from Egypt to Australia, that I filed applications to immigrate to the land of his adoption. The refusal was swift and fast. Canada was the last option left for us to lodge applications. The considerable delay by the Canadian authorities in responding to our request, and a false information, made us to believe that another refusal was forthcoming.

This whole process, refusals, one after the other, brought us to the brink of total despair. It was the point at which there remained no place else to go. Our temporary visas for Lebanon were fast nearing expiration. Visas which had already been renewed a number of times, and the Lebanese authorities were reluctant to issue further renewals. Returning to the Soviet Union was an option, it

would even have served to their propaganda. Yet, it was full of predictable dangers. It was at that very point, in my total despair, that I thought about the unthinkable. My sight turned towards the sea. The beautiful blue Mediterranean sea. My steps took me toward the shore. I looked to the billows. My eyes penetrated deep, deep, into the bowels of the sea. Was this the only destination left? For a flash I thought this to be the best solution of the imbroglio I was sinking each day further in; and find peace. I can't find power enough in my pen to describe how deep was my pain, my despair, my anger. Of this tragedy. For it was a tragedy. Later on when I recovered my composure, and began to think clearly, I put the pieces together and was able to pinpoint the source of these refusals.

In my earlier pages I had described how amidst the general enthusiasm only the Dashnak Party came against the repatriation. The Party leaders had their own reasons for that. One reason was that with the establishment of the Soviet regime and the one-Party system, the communist Party, the Dashnaks were ousted from Armenia. These animosities were dating back to the 1920's. The other reason was the fear that if the repatriation was successful and grew gradually in scale the Diasporan communities will disintegrate, leaving no stanchion for the Party leaders to lean upon. The Diasporan Parties would lose their very *"raison d'etre"*. A dreadful prospect indeed, particularly for those leaders who had made the Party their profession and the source of their livelihood. So they came out against the repatriation and fought with all their energy, and by all means available to make it fail. All those who were for the repatriation, by that virtue, became their enemies. I had become their enemy for my part in the Repatriation Committee the first day of its formation. I was included in their "black list". Apparently they had saved that "black list". Evidently they hadn't forgiven me for my past activities. My file pulled out from their archives, the time had come for them to retaliate against me.

There was no secret for many that the Dashnaks, as the best organized anti-Soviet Party in the Armenian Diaspora, had ties with the American authorities, the CIA. All information needed by the latter about the background of a particular Armenian in the Diaspora had been funneled through the Dashnaks. It was therefore a propitious opportunity for them to get even with me for my past actions. And the best evidence for the existence of such ties was the fact that, much before we received notice of refusal for

U.S. visas, I was put in contact, through a Dashnak leader, with an American official who had flawn from Vienna, Austria, specifically to meet me. He introduced himself as an official from "Radio Free Europe". From the interview it was hard for me to tell whether indeed he was a correspondent from "Radio Free Europe", or an agent from the immigration office. What most gnawed my mind was the question why on earth would they take the trouble and incur the expense to send, all the way from Europe, a special envoy to interview a person like me? Unless of course they had a motive, which never became quite clear to me.

Another indication that I had been slandered and reported to the U.S. authorities as a suspect, was a letter received from Mr. George Mardikian, the head of the ANCHA by a mutual friend Vahram D., who upon my request had tried to intervene in my favor. In his letter, Mardikian was explaining the reason for their suspicions, as follows: "...it is hard for me (for George Mardikian) to understand that someone (meaning me) who continued to stay there for eighteen years and lived under the best conditions, would ever wish to leave the country...". First of all, of course, have I had the opportunity sooner, I would have done so. Under Stalin's regime this was an impossible dream. Second, what were the "best conditions": the material deprivations? The moral sufferings? Constant fear of being exiled? How on earth one can say, sitting at safe distance, that these were best of conditions? Wasn't this millionaire, perhaps unwittingly giving too much credit to the Soviet system?

I, persistently, continued my fight, this time in the Free World, against new odds surging from nowhere each passing day. Fighting with the only weapon I possessed. Writing letters, to wherever I could reach. To wherever I could find support. To my father's cousin, Manoug Ex., an Armenian-American of some standing, requesting his moral support and intervention with the American authorities to review my request. To Vahram D., an Armenian-American friend requesting his recommendation and advocacy in my favor with the Dashnak leaders he had some connections. I, also, kept a regular correspondence with the person who had interviewed me. The Radio Free Europe correspondent. Apparently he was well convinced that I wasn't the kind of person to be suspected. For he, constantly, encouraged me to continue my demarches.

Having found out the nature of some of the slanderous accusations, after a few sleepless nights of head breaking cerebrations, the morning of October 10th, 1966, I sat down to write a long let-

ter explaining my own version to Mr. Edgar C. Niebuhr, the officer in charge of the United States Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, at the American Embassy in Athens, Greece, which was the center where the decisions were made, or such decisions transmitted.

Hardly a month had passed from the date of my petition, actually on November 7, 1966, when I was advised by the office of the World Council of Churches, Service to Refugees that: "Mr. Niebuhr of INS Athens informs us that your case has been re-opened for further investigation. We shall let you know in due course of the outcome of INS investigation". Then on the very next day a formal advice dated November 8, 1966, was received, reading: "Please call at this office for interview at your earliest convenience". Which meant in other words that our applications had been reinstated, and acceptance was under consideration.

Brooding over these events it became apparent to me that there were some similarities of action between the Soviet Security system and the American counterpart. For otherwise how would I have to explain the fact that on a mere slanderous tip, the U.S. authorities without further investigation or giving me a chance to repudiate those outrageous allegations, had denied us entry to the U.S.A. We were used to this sort of arbitrary condemnation from the Soviets, but a similar mode of action from the American authorities was the last thing we were expecting. That was the reason the shock was all the more devastating.

In all fairness, however, after the effects of that initial shock had simmered down and I had recovered my equanimity, our applications reinstated, and entry permits granted, I came to reason, and said to myself: while under the Soviet system of policing the people, once someone is stigmatized and labeled a suspect, never do they rehabilitate, even though they might become aware that the accusation was a pure slander. The American counterpart, however, as it has been proven in my case, were ready to listen, when I was persistent enough to pound on them with my letters. Here lies that very difference, which extenuated in my eyes the wrong they had committed, and the harm they had caused. And, this is not a difference one should ignore. Yet, it must be admitted, today perhaps more than ever, in a world so competitive, when the stakes are so onerous and the means of destruction so irrefutably horrifying, that the only way to survive, and as much as the American democratic system would allow, is to use the same methods and

means as the Soviets do. The presumption being that countermeasures are safeguards, perhaps even deterrents. In this instance I became the victim of a policy tenet used by both sides, in the international game of politics. A nuissance, immoral, but then, can politics be less than vicious? This was indeed one of the most frustrating experience of our early years back in the Free World.

Even though parole was authorised and admission granted for residence in the U.S.A., I sensed that the suspicions were not completely dissipated. I took this new situation lightheartedly, for I had nothing to fear. I can't tell for sure if our phone was bugged. But I felt that I was being watched. People around me were asking irrelevant questions. It might have been also the surfacing of my old mistrust. However, when the day arrived to obtain our certificate of permanent residency, the "green cards", the interview was rather of an interrogatory nature, and it took much longer than the ones my wife and my son had. Five years later when it was time to apply for U.S. citizenship, approbation of my application was delayed by another six months or so, even though citizenship had been granted to my wife and my son. Ostensibly we could not see much logic in such a postponment, in such a segragation in time between these "bifurcated" confirmations. What would have happened, if by a repetition of the old error, they would have denied me, alone, U.S. citizenship? Would they have separated me from my family by way of extradiction from the country?

Perhaps it was due to the fact that in our dreams and fantasies about the Free World in general and U.S.A. in particular we had set our expectations too high. Portrayed as a paradise on earth. Apparently we had forgotten many of the disconcerting aspects as we knew them before our repatriation. The unauspicious life in the Soviet Union for so many years had prompted us to recall our past in the Diaspora under a brighter light. We remembered only the better aspects of life. In actual fact, however, the capitalist world too leaves much to be desired. It, too, has many disparaging facets.

Having tasted life under communism as practiced by the Soviets, we decided to return back to the capitalist world, where nothing much is perfect, but it is where we preferred to live the rest of our lives.