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The Foreign Communist Experience in Stalin's USSR: A Course in Disillusionment

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**The Foreign Communist Experience in Stalin's USSR:
A Course in Disillusionment**

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After the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, Communist parties formed in numerous countries, particularly those west of Russia. Lenin formed the Communist International (Comintern) in 1919 to promote revolution around the world. The effects of the First World War and later of the worldwide depression drove people in many nations to Socialism and Communism. Isaiah Berlin explains that these ideologies attracted membership because of their claims to a scientific understanding of human history and to provide a way to end suffering over time. Both systems offered the positive view that everyone could contribute to building a peaceful future without suffering (Riasanovsky).

The Comintern's relationship with foreign Communist parties led to the propagation of the Marxism-Leninism form of Communism. Lenin believed in the necessity of a vanguard party of individuals, who were conscious of the class struggle that Marx and Engels theorized. This group of revolutionaries would lead the working class to rise up against bourgeoisie exploitation. Lenin emphasized the need for military discipline and a chain of command in order for revolution to succeed. After this method led to victory in Russia for the Bolsheviks it gained legitimacy as a viable path to social transformation. The militarist dictatorship of the proletariat produced the conditions that allowed Stalin to assume total control of the Soviet Union and

initiate terror campaigns. Unlike many other Bolshevik leaders, Stalin had never lived abroad and frequently held suspicions about those who had. Subsequently, those foreign Communists whom idealistic propaganda drew to the Workers' Fatherland faced a deep shock upon arrival in Stalin's USSR. The Soviet Union under Stalin reflected a system of terror instead of optimism, and distrust of foreigners instead of brotherhood. These foreign Communists struggled to reconcile the harsh Soviet reality with their expectations, with the result that most of them abandoned Communism in utter disillusionment (Riasanovsky).

This paper will portray two cases of a foreign Communist's transformation into an ex-Communist after life and imprisonment under Stalin. The first part of this paper will depict the journey of Valentin Gonzalez (aka El Campesino), a Spanish revolutionary, as represented in his memoir, *El Campesino: Life and Death in the USSR*. The second part of this paper will relate the experiences of Thomas Sgovio, an Italian-American, as represented in *Dear America! Why I Turned Against Communism*. One should note that the authors have used pseudonyms for many of the persons characterized in their memoirs or have simply forgotten the full names of those mentioned. The reader also should not forget that personal narratives inevitably consist of some bias and distortion.

PART ONE

The Experience of El Campesino

Valentin Gonzalez (aka El Campesino) was born in Malcocinado, Extremadura, Spain in 1904. Extremadura is an autonomous community extending along the western border with Portugal to southern Spain. El Campesino describes his native region as a backwards place of harsh land that breeds harsh, stubborn men. The author proclaims that most Spaniards are opposed to authority and in favor of violent action, just like his anarchist father, Antonio

Gonzalez. The author's father, along with the common peasants and workers of Extremadura, resisted the civil guards of the Spanish monarchy in the fight for freedom--anarchic freedom. Antonio Gonzalez worked the mines of Peñarroya, where his son took part in a strike at the age of fifteen. The civil guards arrested Valentin for his involvement and nicknamed him El Campesino. The junior Gonzalez prided himself over this accomplishment and preferred to be addressed by this title ever since.

At the age of sixteen, the author committed his first terrorist attack, inspired by his father and the terrorist, El Degollado (the Cutthroat). The coal miners of Peñarroya went on strike again and this time the junior Gonzalez hungered to make a significant contribution to the conflict. The young teenager, with the help of another terrorist, El Virulento, exploded a dynamite bomb under a civil guard shack, killing four men. A manhunt ensued and the two teenagers hid themselves in the hills of neighboring El Hoyo. During their seven month withdrawal, the young men rarely descended into town for supplies. However on one of these trips to Peñarroya, the civil guards spotted and arrested them. The two terrorists suffered brutal tortures in three different nearby prisons until the death of El Virulento. The defense lawyers who undertook the case blamed the bombing on the deceased boy in order to exonerate El Campesino. Many peasants, prideful of the successful attack on the guards, had brought food to the fugitives in their hideaway and in prison. The support of the people and his contact with other anarchists in the prison of Fuente Obejuna bolstered El Campesino in his resolve to fight oppression, even by violent means. Upon release the junior Gonzalez led a gang of gunmen to fight the monarchy in any way they could.

In the 1920's the indigenous population of Morocco rose against the Spanish protectorate. In order to suppress the uprising, the monarchy created the Spanish Foreign Legion. El

Campesino was drafted to fight in this army, for the monarchy that he detested. The author recalls deserting service twice, but the army police recaptured him both times. While in Morocco, El Campesino led a group that broke into the food stores and destroyed all the supplies to protest inadequate food distribution. The military officials arrested those involved, and El Campesino faced six years in military prison. Fortunately, a Communist named Joseito took an interest in Gonzalez's case and helped secure his release. Joseito handed El Campesino Communist literature to read and soon convinced the anarchist to join the Communist cause. Joseito emphasized that the Communist Party needed well-disciplined men who would obey orders without question; the individualistic Gonzalez accepted these terms. The young soldier began an anti-militarist paper called "Bandera Roja" (Red Flag), under Joseito's instructions. No matter the cause, El Campesino always strove to be actively involved and make a difference. The soldier decided to deliver ammunition and weapons to two Moors so they could fight the Spanish invasion of their land. However, the military learned of his secret dealings, and El Campesino had to flee prosecution. The soldier ventured into Moor territory, where the locals accepted him because of his assistance, and where he hid until the end of the conflict.

With the conclusion of the war, Spain declared amnesty for wartime offenders and allowed them to return to the peninsula, but El Campesino still needed a clean record in order to avoid harassment. Gonzalez bought the service record of an outstanding soldier, who desperately needed money to feed his family. The now ex-soldier returned to Madrid in 1929 and joined the Spanish Communist Party. El Campesino worked as a road contractor and donated most of his earnings to the party. The author defines this time as the start of his full-time career in Communism.

The Spanish Civil War

In 1931, public dissatisfaction with the military dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera since 1923 led to the formation of the Second Spanish Republic. On July 18, 1936, the nationalist military forces mutinied against the Republican government and the Spanish Civil War began. War propaganda from both sides soon turned the war into a battle between the “Reds” and the fascists. El Campesino proved his commitment to the Communist cause with his enlistment with the Republican militias. The military caste, led by Francisco Franco, immediately received aid from fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, whereas the pro-government forces received belated support from the Soviets. El Campesino fought well and quickly rose in rank to Captain and then Major, his name becoming legendary in Spain. The author mentions that the Soviets “were determined to profit by the distinction [he] had won,” using his namesake to rally the peasants behind the Communist cause (Gonzalez 15). Gonzalez even states that the Soviets executed those who did not conform to Communism and then attributed the crimes to his name, in order to inspire fear. At the time, El Campesino did not protest the false credit because the fearsome reputation did not bother him. In retrospect, the author wishes to separate his own terrible acts from those of the Soviets, because he never murdered any one simply for political disagreements, as the Soviets did. For example, the pro-Soviet Spanish command ordered El Campesino to arrest the Colonel of the National Palace Assault Guards for mutiny plots. El Campesino followed orders and handed the Colonel over to the Soviet-led command. The author later realized that the assault guards had not planned any mutiny, but that the Colonel had only refused to become an instrument for Communist use.

In hindsight, El Campesino notes the behavior of the Soviets in the Spanish Civil War reflected their first priority: the Fatherland. The Spanish commander refers to the Soviets in

Spain as true Stalinists for their disregard of Spanish interests in favor of Soviet ones. Lister and Modesto, Moscow-trained men, held high command posts on the Republican side and directed campaigns. El Campesino led the 5th regiment and won several battles, but the Soviets attributed the successes to Lister and Modesto, because of their pro-Soviet orientation. On the other hand, failures were blamed on El Campesino, who made his pro-Spain attitude clear. The Soviets used such tactics to propagate the image of a Soviet-led, Communist victory. With this purpose in mind, the Soviet commanders planned the loss of Teruel, an Aragonese town. At the time, El Campesino did not fully grasp the Soviet plan to forfeit the city and only later discovered the betrayal.

The pro-Franco forces seized Teruel early in the war, but the Republicans regained the town by the end of 1937 under General Sarabia and on the orders of Indalecio Prieto. The author explains that the Soviets disliked their limited control over these two Spaniards, who were not concerned with Soviet interests. Moreover, Prieto was a Socialist, not a Communist, leader. The Soviets did not want a Socialist to win support from the Spanish people, and so they set the plan to discredit Prieto. The Russian Generals Gregorovich and Barthe gave orders to remove General Sarabia from his command post in Teruel and replace him with Modesto. Then, orders came to strip the Anarcho-Syndicalist front defense of its heavy artillery. El Campesino questioned General Gregorovich about these decisions, but the Russian answered, “We’ve got to...show people the Communists are the only ones who can hold Teruel.” (Gonzalez 26). The General also reminded El Campesino about the Party's need for disciplined members who do not question orders. The soldier acquiesced, only believing that the Soviets planned to endanger, not lose, Teruel.

The Soviets also planned to create a martyr for the cause through El Campesino. Due to his frequent questioning of orders and his inability to place Soviet interests ahead of Spanish ones, the Soviets arranged for El Campesino to die fighting for Teruel. In this way, the Socialist Prieto could be blamed for not only the loss of Teruel, but of beloved revolutionary as well. The commanders Lister and Modesto held their forces away from Teruel and stopped the efforts of Captain Valdepeñas to rescue El Campesino. The militarist forces charged Teruel in the beginning of 1938. El Campesino fought valiantly with his men, but the battle could not be won with such hindrances. Just two months later Franco's men won Teruel and El Campesino narrowly escaped death. The Spanish leader fled to southern Spain aware of the betrayal by the Moscow-led commanders.

El Campesino and a few of his men reached the southern coast and sailed across the Mediterranean Sea to French Oran. Despite the forfeit of Teruel by the Soviet command in Spain, El Campesino remained a Communist and brushed the incident aside as a strategic miscalculation. The Spaniard met with French Communists in Oran, who escorted him to Marseilles and then to Paris. The Politburo in Paris warmly welcomed the Spanish refugees and offered them passage to Leningrad (St. Petersburg) on a Soviet ship. Before departure, the French Communists handed the Spaniards questionnaires to fill in with specific details and personal histories. El Campesino refused to answer the questions, stating that the Soviets already knew his details. The refugees boarded the ship and began the voyage to the USSR in May of 1939.

During the journey El Campesino talked with the Soviet journalist, Ilya Ehrenburg, and began to learn about how Communism works under Stalin. The journalist advised the Spaniard to remember that all communists are subordinate to the Fatherland and its head, Comrade Stalin.

Should El Campesino follow Stalin's orders and maintain discipline, he would surely become the leader of Spanish emigrants in the Soviet Union. The Spaniard answered defensively that his devotion would always lie with Spain and that he planned to return home to organize guerrillas to defeat Franco. Ehrenburg warned El Campesino to check his outspoken nature lest he find trouble for himself in his new home. The journalist also prepared El Campesino for the fact that conditions in the Soviet Union were not as perfect as the propaganda proclaimed. The Spaniard grew fearful of what he might discover in the USSR, but he could not turn back. The commander questioned some of the other passengers about life in the Fatherland, but those who had already been to the country refused to answer and appeared depressed. The passengers traveling to the USSR for the first time were the only ones who appeared happy and carefree. El Campesino met a German who had already been in the country and told him about the great terror that gripped the Fatherland since 1936. The German also warned El Campesino that his lack of restraint would cause him grief, but the Spaniard replied that he needed to find out the truth. And soon enough, El Campesino would know the truth.

Arrival in the Soviet Union

When the Soviet ship arrived in Krondstadt, a town just west of Leningrad, the NKVD rudely greeted the refugees with a thorough search of their belongings and seizure of printed materials and photographs. The author notes that his fellow Spaniards appeared shocked at such treatment for famous war revolutionaries. El Campesino comments on the general mood, "I think we all began to feel that nothing belonged to us anymore, that we did not even belong to ourselves anymore." (Gonzalez 44). However, upon arrival in Leningrad, the mood lightened after a warm reception with an array of foods, wines, and vodka. The banquet celebrated the efforts of the Spanish revolutionaries, and the Soviets reassured the men that they would be

placed at suitable posts in future Communist battles. El Campesino felt a happy sense of camaraderie and even praised Stalin and the Soviet Union. The author spoke at the reception about his dedication to return home to free Spaniards from Franco's oppression and to revolutionize the country.

But army Colonel Popov tainted the relaxed atmosphere with his request that El Campesino divulge information about the character of his fellows and any remarks they may have made about the Moscow show trials. The information, supposedly, was necessary to know which post would suit them best. The Spanish commander refused to provide detailed answers to these questions. The author now believes that Colonel Popov wished to check the soldiers' questionnaire answers against their commander's responses. The Colonel escorted the Spaniards to the Leningrad train station, where they would depart for Moscow. On the way, El Campesino observed firsthand the squalor of living conditions for the workers juxtaposed to large, modern factories. Colonel Popov studied El Campesino's reaction to the disparity and reassured the Spaniard that it was a temporary effect of the state's transition to the Communist ideal. The Colonel stated that the USSR needed factories above all else at the moment. At the train station, El Campesino noted the filthy people who packed the station, and whom the NKVD guards roughly shoved aside so the Spanish revolutionaries could pass through the area. Once on the train, the author comments on the division of goods based on rank and importance and the control of movement by the NKVD. The Spaniard defines his first Soviet train experience as the moment of realization that he and his fellows were "caught in the iron discipline of the Russian Communists" (Gonzalez 47).

Upon arrival in Moscow, El Campesino noticed numerous posters of his image; the Soviets celebrated the Spaniard as a great Communist hero despite losing the civil war.

Nevertheless, even a hero could not freely tour the city; always four NKVD guards accompanied him with an itinerary of places to visit. The Soviets placed the Spanish soldiers in the luxurious Hotel Monino; yet again El Campesino noted that rank and importance determined the quality of goods distributed to the refugees. Beautiful women staffed the Hotel and waited on the men in order to spy on their activities and record their complaints for the police. El Campesino's German friend from the ship made sure to inform him to restrain criticisms while in the presence of maids. After two months in Hotel Monino, El Campesino's friend disappeared. The Spaniard asked about his German friend but received no explanations as to his whereabouts. El Campesino never heard from his friend again.

Problems for El Campesino

Amidst this ominous background, El Campesino began classes at the Frunze Academy to be trained as a Red Army general, but as others warned him, his impetuous personality caused him problems. At the end of the first week at the academy, orders came to change the Spaniard's name to Komisaró Piotr Antonovich. All the foreign students and professors at the college experienced the Russification of their identities. Apparently, no one could know that foreigners attended or taught at the academy. El Campesino refused the new name and requested permission to leave and organize guerrillas against Franco in Spain. The Spanish Committee of the USSR denied his request and kept his new name in force. El Campesino also criticized the fact that ordinary citizens struggled with poverty while the military students received exorbitant wages and excellent housing. The Spaniard continued to disregard warnings to quell his outspokenness. The mood of the academy reflected the restriction on speech; El Campesino noted that students viewed each other suspiciously and talked little. Everyone feared denunciation for criticism or for failing to report another student's anti-Soviet remarks. The

author points out that the class struggle existed among the students, despite Soviet propaganda that class antagonisms no longer existed. The students of military leaders and important officials looked down on the few students with proletariat backgrounds. One such affected student related stories to El Campesino about the denunciations that sooner or later caused the disappearance of lower class students. During the Spaniard's year and a half at the school, all four proletariat students did in fact disappear without a trace. El Campesino resented his presence among the privileged military caste so much like the one he had always detested in Spain.

The Spanish commander's academic experiences negatively affected his Communist beliefs. An individualist at heart, El Campesino struggled to meet Soviet standards of political conformity. The academy required students to pass political exams that tested their adherence to the party line. The author notes that the Soviets preferred a blind Communist supporter with weak skills over a man of excellent skills but questionable loyalty. Failure of the political exams caused serious repercussions, as El Campesino soon realized; he replied to political questions with his honest answers instead of the Party-favored ones. An investigation opened against the Spaniard after his statement that the best army in the world was that of the Germans, not the Soviets. El Campesino refused to change his opinion, and the affair resulted in his expulsion from the Academy in 1941. The Spanish Committee labeled El Campesino a Trotskyite—a menacing reference to a disgraced Party leader.

El Campesino's fame, which drew support from the Spanish refugees, protected him from arrest. The Spanish committee assigned El Campesino to work on the Moscow Underground (Metro) in order to redeem his status with the Communist Party. The author feels that he was given the hardest and most dangerous tasks in hopes that he would accidentally die, saving the Party from the repercussions of executing a Communist hero. El Campesino's faith in Stalinist

Communism started to break; during the Second World War it would completely dissolve. The German invasion of WWII reached Moscow, and chaos ensued because Stalin had ordered his citizens to destroy the wealth of the city rather than hand it over to the Germans. El Campesino evacuated the city and boarded a train that he refers to as the “crazy train.” The passengers of this train stopped at stations to raid towns for food supplies. Ordinary citizens assaulted those who belonged to the NKVD ranks or the privileged class. The author describes the scenes he witnessed as complete anarchic. Eventually his “crazy train” arrived in Tashkent of the Uzbek SSR. The NKVD found the Spaniard there and notified him of his forced residence in the nearby city of Kokand. El Campesino beheld dreadful sights of death and poverty during his two year stay in Central Asia. Crime afflicted the region because numerous criminals (deserters, embezzlers, and bandits) fled to the less controlled Central Asian republics during the war. El Campesino joined the ranks of the bandits in order to survive and became known simply as The Spaniard. Gangs of orphaned or homeless children wandered the land, looting and stealing to survive. The fact that the NKVD arrested a few Spanish orphans from such gangs for being suspected Falangists astonished El Campesino. Such occurrences in the Fatherland boggled his mind.

Despite everything he witnessed in the Soviet Union, El Campesino remained tied to his Communist beliefs and attempted to understand Stalin's regime. The author describes feeling torn between his desire to escape the country and his urge to learn more about the awful place.

El Campesino succinctly explains why he clung to Communism even after his experiences:

It is difficult to break away from a faith into which one has sunk one's whole life, for which one has sacrificed everything and everybody, for which one has even committed crimes, believing them to be necessary for the future of mankind. I thought it would be

possible to form genuine Communist Parties outside Stalinist Communism, or even against it. Nearly everybody who has broken away from Stalinism has passed through such a stage of illusion. (Gonzalez 93)

During his illusory phase, El Campesino traveled from Kokand around the Soviet Union, despite his travel restrictions, so that he could learn about the regime. After a few vain attempts, the trips turned into a study of how to escape the USSR. The Spaniard observed the border between the Turkmen SSR and Persia (Iran). El Campesino noted train schedules and NKVD patrol routes for future reference.

Escape into Persia

The commander's first efforts to leave the country began in 1943 when he returned to Moscow on illegal papers in order to enlist in one of the East European armies under formation at the time. During the journey, the police halted the Spaniard three times but he either bribed them or revealed his namesake and civil war pictures to impress the guards, who then allowed his passage. El Campesino resumed to his work at the Moscow Underground, which continued after the Soviets regained control of the city. The terror and control in Moscow had greatly increased since El Campesino had evacuated two years before. After a month the NKVD checked his papers and arrested him for illegal presence in Moscow. The police took El Campesino towards Kazakhstan for deportation, but the Spaniard escaped and tried to enlist with the Polish army. After he failed to enlist, the commander wrote to Stalin asking for formal criminal charges or permission to fight for Communism abroad. As a result of the letter, an investigation opened against El Campesino, to discern his level of political conformity. Like the investigation during his years at the academy, the Spaniard failed to restrain his true opinions.

Just before the Spanish committee would take over the case, El Campesino fled town, since his enemies in the committee would have convicted him.

The commander solicited the help of two young Spanish pilots for his plan to escape the country by crossing the border into Persia. Thanks to El Campesino's careful study of the border region and his demand for strict discipline, two of the three men avoided detection by the NKVD and crossed into Persia in 1944. The third man, hungry and exhausted, had stopped in a town for provisions and was captured by the NKVD. The author recalls how he felt as he stepped out of the Soviet Union:

How can I describe what I felt when I stood on Persian soil and looked across that strip of plowed land to the country I thought I had left forever? For a moment I was filled with exultation. Then the joy was gone, blotted out the sorrow and bitterness of shattered hopes. The country I had left behind was the same in which I had once believed. I had thought it to be the home of human freedom; now I saw it as freedom's grave. (Gonzalez 121)

As the excerpt suggests, El Campesino's freedom did not last. The effects of living under strict Soviet control and propaganda proved to be the commander's downfall. Despite disillusionment with Communism, El Campesino had difficulty changing his Stalinist mindset. Upon entering Tehran, the sight of a bazaar full of goods and people moving around freely stunned the Spaniard. No police officer stopped anyone to check their documents and question them about their business. The author describes how the lack of regulations and control felt like anarchy to him. El Campesino still wished to fight in the cause of Communism, so he attempted to enlist with the Polish army after he discovered recruiters in the area. However, the Poles took him and his partner, Lorente, as spies and handed them over to the British Mission. The British kept the

two Spaniards as prisoners, but gave them proper food and clothing and offered to send them to England. At this point, El Campesino's Stalinist thinking decided his course. The commander refused the offer because he believed the “Imperialists” could not be trusted. Instead, the two men decided to escape British captivity in January of 1945. The commander made a second mistake as he and Lorente trekked towards the Persian Gulf. The two men lost their way about eighty miles outside of Tehran and stopped at a mill to ask for help. The friendly Armenian there assisted the Spaniards, who in return fixed his stuttering mill engine. The men stayed with the miller for several days and then prepared to resume traveling. The Armenian offered to pay the Spaniards for repairing his mill and asked them to wait in the house while he went to withdraw money in Tehran. El Campesino grew suspicious, but allowed Lorente to convince him to wait for the Armenian to return. When the Armenian came back, an NKVD squad surrounded the house and arrested the fugitives. After the Second World War, the Soviets still maintained influence in Persia and freely arrested their fugitives far beyond the border regions.

Imprisonment

The NKVD sent El Campesino to the Lubyanka prison in Moscow by the start of March 1945. The police interrogated the Spaniard for eight months but never once addressed his banditry in Kokand. Instead the interrogators questioned him about his non-existent relationship with the British and US “imperialists.” El Campesino refused to sign any confession and as a result, he only received a three year sentence of hard labor in Vorkuta—much less than the standard ten years. The author describes his wait to be shipped to Siberia as a time spent waiting for the “slave traders” to come collect their goods. Once he arrived in Vorkuta, El Campesino modified his behavior and strove to be a submissive Stakhanovite. The Spaniard led a coal mining gang and there witnessed firsthand the Soviets' disregard for the lives of prisoners. The

camp administration did not allow the miners to waste time implementing basic safety measures, such as shoring the mining shafts, when the time could be spent hewing coal. El Campesino once asked if they intended to collect bodies with the coal and received the answer, “We want coal. The Soviet Union needs coal. At any price.” Soon enough the lack of safety practices produced a gas explosion that injured the Spaniard. The camp commander offered El Campesino a “soft” job as a Stakhanovite propagandist, traveling from camp to camp and encouraging prisoners to work diligently like himself. The former Communist accepted the position in order to facilitate a second escape attempt. By then, El Campesino no longer held any traces of Stalinist thinking. The camp system allowed prisoners to share their experiences and information easily with each other, and through this network the Spaniard came to know all he had ever wanted to know about Stalin's regime.

The Final Escape into Persia

El Campesino used his position as a propagandist to make connections and obtain travel papers. In June of 1947, he made the journey south towards the Persian border in order to follow his former escape route. Unfortunately, some two hundred miles from the border, the NKVD captured the Spaniard. The police returned him to the prison system, but this time El Campesino labored in the Central Asian republics. El Campesino had again refused to sign a confession of espionage for the US and Great Britain. The police handed him a two-year sentence, with the possibility of an additional sentence if the orders came from Moscow. During this imprisonment, El Campesino's strength waned and he crept towards death until a chief medical officer offered him the least desirable camp job, burying the dead. The author recalls accepting the dreary job for the better food rations, which would help him survive to tell the world about his experiences. The former commander soon regained his strength and worked as a Stakhanovite once more, this

time earning a seven-month reduction in his sentence. Then the news came of orders from Moscow that El Campesino would serve a ten-year sentence in Siberia upon completion of his current sentence. The Spanish prisoner again plotted a way to escape.

Fortunately, the location in the Ashkhabad camp provided a real opportunity to escape the Soviet Union. In December of 1949 a violent earthquake devastated the city and destroyed the camp records building, along with all of the employees. El Campesino survived the earthquake and the ensuing massacre of survivors by the camp guards. The Spaniard informed the camp officials of his release date and they verified his reduced sentence with the local police. No one knew of his additional tenner, and El Campesino was discharged from prison on December 29th, 1949. The ex-prisoner received orders to reside in Leninabad of the Tajik SSR, but instead traveled with another ex-prisoner, Kurgan Amedo, along his previous escape route. The men took extreme caution to avoid the NKVD and their dogs, whom the author describes as, “both more savage than the bears and wolves of the mountains.” (Gonzalez 217). Near the Persian border, the NKVD overseeing a valley detected the fugitives and opened fire. The bullets struck Kurgan Amedo, who died, but the Spaniard managed to slip away unharmed. El Campesino crossed into Persia two days later, where thanks to postwar changes in the world, the Soviets had lost the power to make arrests on Persian territory. The ex-Communist made his way to France and began to write his memoir, finally able to write the truth about the Soviet Union.

PART TWO

The Experience of Thomas Sgovio

Thomas Sgovio's father, Giuseppe (Joseph) came to settle in Buffalo, New York from Italy with his wife Anina. The Sgovios had three children: Angela, Thomas, and Grace. Thomas Sgovio was born in the year 1916, and a year or two later his father became a socialist

revolutionary. The Italian family ceased attending church and Giuseppe involved himself in advancing socialism. The author comments on the nature of his father's new belief system:

How great is the power of words and ideology over humans! The idealists gathered to discuss political and social problems, visioning the not too distant future when Socialism would triumph throughout the world. There were arguments between the Socialists, who aspired to obtain power through the ballot, and the anarchists, advocates of violence and world revolution. The debates were friendly and ended in good humor—during those days they were idealists devoted to humanity, as yet not subjugated to the supreme authority of the leadership of their parties. (Sgovio 62)

Sgovio's father joined the American Communist Party (CPUSA) when it formed in 1919 and spent his evenings organizing activities and demonstrations with other CPUSA members. Members of the CPUSA often stopped by the Sgovios' for coffee and to discuss how to advance the Socialist cause. Thomas Sgovio grew up in this atmosphere, listening to conversations about the coming revolution and the injustices of capitalism. In 1927, around the age of eleven, Sgovio joined the Young Pioneers of America (YPA), a version of the CPUSA for those less than sixteen years old. The boy participated in demonstrations and shouted slogans he had absorbed from his father and other CPUSA members. Sgovio also helped create signs for the protestors and immediately fell in love with painting. This artistic inclination would come to play an important role in the course of his life.

By the age of fourteen, the police had already arrested Sgovio twice for his participation in demonstrations, which often grew disruptive or violent. Even as CPUSA members yelled about capitalist injustices and threw objects at the police, Sgovio recalls that officers tried their best to not harm the children while they subdued the demonstrators. Due to his arrests, the Youth

Communist League (YCL) accepted Thomas into the organization at the age of fourteen instead of the standard age of sixteen. The YCL indoctrinated Sgovio to stay loyal to the Party and keep Communism his number one priority in life. In the year 1931 the police arrested Giuseppe for disrupting a town meeting that would decide the vote for an ordinance, which would prohibit meetings of groups that advocated violence against the government or that disturbed the peace. Sgovio's father was sentenced to one year in prison for his role in the fracas and then to deportation as an undesirable alien. The ACLU and International Labor Defense (ILD) managed to change Giuseppe's deportation sentence from a return to fascist Italy to a "voluntary departure to the Soviet Union" (Sgovio 82). In 1935, the rest of the Sgovio family joined their father in the USSR, except the oldest daughter Angela, who stayed in the US with her husband.

The First Doubts

Sgovio began to carry hesitations about the Communist Party and its policies after reaching his preteen years. Shortly before the Stock Market Crash in 1929, the CPUSA broke into factions. The Sgovio family sided with the William Z. Foster faction, which desired to follow the Stalinist direction for Communism. Ben Gitlow and Jay Lovestone, however, refused to follow Stalin's Party directives; both were expelled from the CPUSA after Foster won the party leadership. Thomas Sgovio describes his confused reaction to the division in the CPUSA, "Deep in the depths of my immature brain, a little voice asked: 'How come these great men, who only yesterday were our leaders, have now turned into our traitors?'" (Sgovio 68). That little voice only grew in strength as Sgovio passed into adolescence. Around the age of sixteen, Sgovio witnessed the Morehouse Trial of three Englishmen, conducted by a district committee of the CPUSA. The committee accused the Morehouse couple and George Barron of being white chauvinists, apparently with the sole proof that all three originated from imperialistic England,

the oppressor of colonial peoples. The CPUSA argued that of course the three Englishmen took pride of their nation and its history and would behave accordingly. Therefore they must be expelled from the party. Giuseppe often had Barron over for coffee and the two had maintained a close friendship, so Sgovio recalls his shock that Barron was a white chauvinist. However, the young Communist anticipated his involvement in the trial, because he trusted that the party had arrested Barron on legitimate evidence of wrongdoing.

The district committee proclaimed that the Morehouse Trial would be held publicly so that everyone could see the truth about the traitors and participate in their expulsion. However, Sgovio quickly learned that the committee planned to stack the trial proceedings with members who believed in the guilt of the defendants, in order to keep those who supported their innocence from being selected as judge, jury, prosecutor, etc. The move to fix the outcome of the trial and the complete lack of evidence proving guilt troubled Sgovio. The teenager spoke up at the meeting, assuring everyone that he believed in the party's finding of guilt, but called for a fair trial. Sgovio asked the other members to not follow the model of the capitalist courts, which the CPUSA always accused of framing Communists. Silence met Sgovio's speech until the District Organizer of the YCL, Red Stevens, denied that the party was framing anyone. Stevens justified the expulsions as a step towards the emancipation of the proletariat. The District Organizer contrasted the party's actions to those of the capitalists, which were not justified because the capitalists strove to increase their exploitation of the people. Sgovio remained quiet after that meeting and refused to participate in the expulsion hearings. The author comments that he lacked support from his father, who was still in prison at the time and only reiterated that the party was always right.

After the Morehouse Trial, Sgovio lessened his involvement in the YCL. When the time came to depart for the Soviet Union, Sgovio applied for a transfer of his YCL membership to the Soviet version, the Komsomol. Another District Organizer, Comrade West, denied Sgovio's request based on his behavior during the Morehouse Trial and his reduced YCL activity afterward. West also commented that Sgovio had avoided expulsion due to his behavior only because of his father's position within the CPUSA. Sgovio completely resented this refusal, but blamed West for the denial and not the party. However, the young Sgovio did not realize that the expression of personal feelings and thoughts, such as before the trial, could never be accepted within the Party. Comrade West also proclaimed that a true Communist must hate capitalists and Trotskyites, and that he could kill his own brother for being a Trotskyite. Sgovio wondered if he could ever be a true Communist, because nothing would ever drive him to murder one of his sisters. In hindsight, the author cheers at never having joined the ranks of the Komsomol. Several times during his imprisonment, Sgovio watched guards, who wore Komsomol badges, shoot inmates in the back. The author believes that as a member of the youth organization, he would never had escaped the USSR.

The First Warning Signs

Shortly before his departure for the Soviet Union in 1935, one of Sgovio's art teachers, Miss Cornell, warned him to not travel with his family to the Workers' Fatherland. Miss Cornell had traveled to the USSR on a tourist visa and knew the grim reality ahead of her student. Sgovio could have remained behind with his eldest sister and her husband, but instead he laughed at Miss Cornell's advice. Despite the Morehouse Trial and the Komsomol transfer denial, Sgovio looked forward to seeing the Workers' Paradise. Moreover, on the day of departure, the family listened to a news report that Fred Beal, a prominent Communist leader,

had just arrived home from the USSR. Fred Beal had received the death penalty for his involvement in a textile factory strike, where a bomb blast had killed several people, including police officers. Despite the death sentence, Fred Beal had returned to the US to speak of his disillusionment with the Soviet Union and to warn everyone of the reality of life in the USSR. The author remarks that, "It now [seems] symbolic, that on the eve of my departure to Russia, an ex-communist returned to tell the truth." (Sgovio 89). The teenager, however, chose to believe like the other US communists that the capitalists had bought out Fred Beal to make him dissuade Americans from advancing the Communist mission. Instead, Thomas Sgovio thought of his father's excited letters praising the Soviet Union and that he would return to the US with a college education, something most of his peers could not expect to obtain.

The First Years in USSR

Thomas Sgovio arrived in Leningrad in 1935 with his mother and younger sister, Grace. The Senior Sgovio met his family at the seaport with hugs and tears and then escorted them to the MOPR (International Red Aid) headquarters. After filling out numerous forms, the family retired to the House of Political Emigrants until the following morning. The entire family except Thomas left the next day on a train to Moscow; only three tickets had been available on the overcrowded train. Sgovio stayed in Leningrad with a tour guide for a few days. The young man, who used to read about the city, found himself disappointed with what he saw. The people on the streets wore plain clothes of the same dark, muted colors and appeared entirely apathetic. The tour guide brought Sgovio to a beer parlor for refreshment and exposed the young adult to a room full of poorly dressed drunks. Sgovio remembered the communist leaders in America who claimed that drunkenness no longer plagued the Workers' Paradise.

When Sgovio arrived in Moscow, he faced the same scenes as in Leningrad. People on the street dressed in the same plain clothing, but now he also saw beggars, some with children. The tour guides told Sgovio and the other political emigrants to recognize that the people, bad as it may seem now, were even worse off under the Tsar, and that conditions would improve in the coming years. Meanwhile, the political emigrants received proper food, clothing, and housing that far surpassed what non-emigrants received. For example, the emigrants had access to as much tea as they wanted, but the general population could only afford to drink hot water with a sugar cube. Even among the emigrant families, the quality of goods received varied according to rank and importance. The Sgovio family held a lower ranking within the group of Italian emigrants. Apparently in exchange for better provisions, the political emigrants were escorted to various Moscow schools and workers' clubs in order to testify against the terrible conditions in capitalistic countries and to promote the Soviet way of life. Sgovio frequently made such speeches during his youth in the US to enthusiastic audiences, but in the Soviet Union these speeches seemed to resonate with few of the attendees.

In addition to the reality of this gloomy, muted Soviet lifestyle, the Sgovio family learned of another shocking behavior. When Thomas arrived in Moscow, Grace quickly explained that their father had openly admitted to living with a Polish Bolshevik named Franka Taube. Giuseppe justified the affair by citing the idea of free love under Communism. Anina, who had never fully adopted Communist beliefs, struggled to cope with this concept. The family unity fractured, but held together. The author notes that he heard many stories similar to that of his family and postulates two reasons for the extensiveness of free love in the Soviet Union. Sgovio believes that the state desired to counterbalance its reliance on foreign specialists by using sex to break up their families and tempt them to renounce their native citizenship in favor of a Soviet

one. The shortages of food and general goods may be another reason for the easy offering of intimacy, the author comments, because foreigners had access to special stores with better-quality goods denied to the rest of the population.

The year 1936 marked a change for the citizens of the USSR. A Stalinist constitution came into effect, making the CPSU the only legal political organization. This legal affirmation of power seemed to give Stalin the green light to purge the Party of disloyal and treacherous elements (Riasanovsky 499). The Moscow Show Trials commenced the same year, where previously loyal Party members confessed to conspiracy plots against the government. The NKVD arrested those accused of involvement in the conspiracy and probed for further plots against the regime. The increase of arrests did not bother the Sgovio family at first, not even when the NKVD arrested two close friends of Giuseppe. The author remarks that the family trusted that the NKVD arrested people only with just cause. Sgovio continued his free-lance work as a commercial artist and his involvement in various social activities with other young foreigners. In fact, Sgovio recalls that he and his friends had a splendid time in the year 1936, unaware of the fates about to befall them all. Stalin also passed along a new slogan to the general population, "Life has become better, life has become more joyous" (Riasanovsky 498). The slogan seemed to perfectly describe the good times Sgovio and his comrades found that year.

In 1936 Sgovio did glimpse a scene of the harsher side of Soviet life, thanks to his Ukrainian friend, Eugene Skalaban. The Ukrainian brought Sgovio to a real workers' district on the pretext of meeting his girlfriend. The tour guides for the political emigrants never took their wards to visit such districts, so as to hide the reality of the workers' living conditions. Skalaban took his friend to a cafeteria in one of these districts; beggars stood around tables waiting for others to finish eating and then attacking the leftovers. The author remembers that not a single

person in the room wore shoes, but instead wore burlap fastened to their feet with twine. Sgovio recalls the words of his tour guide that such beggars came from the old bourgeoisie, the class of exploiters, and that one should not pity their fate. However, the Italian-American could not perceive any trace of nobility among the simple beggars before him. The scene disturbed Sgovio, who could not finish eating, but he did not hasten to confront this serious fault of the state. The author notes that, "Like all the other chinks I had seen in the Soviet armor, I pushed it back into the dark recesses of my mind" (Sgovio 118). Instead, Sgovio eagerly anticipated his family's move to a hotel near Red Square, wondering if he would see Stalin there.

The Great Purge

The happiness of 1936 contrasted sharply with the changes of 1937. Arrests by the NKVD heightened; people disappeared over night and many kept a packed suitcase ready by the door just in case. The police targeted foreigners and anyone who had lived abroad at any time. The Foreign-Workers' Club, in which Sgovio socialized with other young emigrants, disbanded after the arrests of a few members. The MOPR informed the Sgovio family that their hotel residence would be transformed into an NKVD living quarters and they needed to find a new place to live. The family was unable to find a residence for all four members, so they each separated, searching for a place to stay. Giuseppe left crowded Moscow to live in Cheboksary with MOPR assistance, while his wife struggled in the city to find living space and retain her hard-to-come-by residence permit. Grace's boyfriend proposed to her immediately after the news that she had no place to live; she accepted the offer and moved in with him. Thomas Sgovio moved in with his girlfriend's family, whom he calls the C. Family. Despite the arrests, the suspicion of foreigners, and the deification of Stalin, Sgovio remembers maintaining a positive

view of the Soviet Union; all the hardships would pass and a radiant future would come for the people. However, the growing concerns did push Sgovio to decide to leave the USSR.

One night in 1938, a knock came on the door, and the police arrested the father of the C. Family in front of Sgovio. After this incident, the young man quickened his efforts to leave the country; he decided to enlist in the section of the International Red Aid to fight in the Spanish Civil War. The General Secretary, Elena Stasova, denied his request, so Sgovio set out to renounce his citizenship and regain that of the US in order try enlistment again. The Italian-American's determination to leave the USSR brought him to the US embassy in Moscow; the NKVD stopped Sgovio after he exited the embassy and arrested him.

The police pushed Sgovio into a van marked with the Russian word for “bread.” Sgovio remembers his mental awakening at the intentional deception by the Soviets and questioned, “If what they were doing was right, why all the secrecy?” (Sgovio 15). In the US, the police arrested political protestors in public, and during his own arrests the young Communists had laughed and joked, knowing he would be freed soon. Yet the Communists would protest and decry the unjust arrests by the capitalists! In denial that the Soviets intentionally detained innocent citizens, Sgovio waited to be questioned and clear up the whole “mistake.” During his wait for interrogation, Sgovio heard screams from upstairs and another waiting detainee explained that the police were beating a man in the interrogation room. Sgovio could not believe that the Soviets would ever physically harm prisoners. Soon the young man would find out otherwise, and the illusion would finally break.

Imprisonment

The police did not correct their “mistake.” Instead, they locked Sgovio in the ominous Lubyanka prison of Moscow while they reviewed his case. For months the young Communist

lived in a cell designed for thirty men but holding over one hundred. Sheet metal covered the windows so no prisoner could see the sky, and no outsider could see the prisoner. Sgovio recalls an International Red Aid poster depicting a man in capitalist prison, with his arm reaching between the window bars and holding a red handkerchief. The poster meant to call Communists and workers alike to protest against the injustices of capitalism. Now Sgovio found himself in a Communist prison, where he could not reach out the window and call for his supporters. In the cell, Sgovio also noticed another false claim of the Communists: that all nationalities lived united in the Fatherland. Sgovio listened to men insult each other based on nationality and thought, “here are people, born and raised in Russia, and still unaffected by the twenty year rule of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat...what next?” (Sgovio 50). The other prisoners shared their stories and many believed that everything was a mistake. Prisoners tended to believe one of two explanations: first that the NKVD needed to arrest everyone and then sort out the innocent men because of the high number of enemies living among the people, or second, that the enemies had infiltrated the NKVD in order to arrest the best Communists and Party officials. Those who accepted the latter version held out hope that Stalin would realize that the NKVD had been compromised and would cleanse the police force. Sgovio summarizes their predicament as that of “lambs being led to slaughter, waiting for Stalin to free us.” (Sgovio 132). Sgovio struggled to accept either justification and maintained a positive, although severely weakened, view of the Socialist state.

After his interrogations ended, with Sgovio refusing to sign a confession to a crime, the NKVD sent Sgovio to serve a five year sentence of hard labor in Kolyma. Apparently by mishap, Sgovio and a few other prisoners were not informed of their specific sentence until after arrival in the camps. The NKVD branded Sgovio as a “socially dangerous element,” an SOE (for the

Russian words). The prisoners had time to discuss their sentences with each other while the rest waited to hear their charges. Sgovio expressed particular shock over the persons convicted for “suspicion of espionage” (PSH). The PSH label could be applied to every foreigner and any Soviet citizen with foreign contact: relatives, friends, or former residence abroad. Considering the Communists' desire for a world revolution, many people in the Soviet Union qualified for arrest under PSH. Such an ambiguous charge may have served the purpose of facilitating the police, who received quotas to arrest a certain percentage of the population. One may assume that this percentage equaled the state's estimation of the number of “enemies of the people” living among the population. The need to meet quotas meant that anyone could be arrested for just about anything construed as anti-Soviet. Sgovio points out that the Criminal Code was never publicized, and that few outside of the prisons knew that one could be arrested for simple anti-Soviet jokes or complaints. Instead of a system of crime prevention through public awareness, the Soviet system of the 1930's attempted to use a lack of awareness to catch “enemies”, who felt safe expressing their anti-Soviet feelings. The arbitrariness of arrest by the Soviet police combined with the terrible conditions of prison life, forced Sgovio to reject Communism completely and to accept the existence of God. Belief in a higher power enabled the ex-Communist to cope with the devastating circumstances in which he lived. Sgovio's full transformation took until the end of the first winter in Kolyma.

The journey to the far, northern region of Siberia took the prisoners through the Sea of Japan and the Sea of Okhotsk. The crowded and sickening ship conditions reminded Sgovio of his elementary school study of the African slave trade. When the Italian-American voiced his opinion that the African slaves probably experienced better voyages than the Soviet prisoners, another English-speaker agreed, saying that buyers offered good money for slaves, whereas the

Soviet Union considered prisoners almost entirely worthless. Sgovio and the others would soon learn that the state did view them as disposable. The prison experience during WWII highlighted this fact. When the Sea of Japan became unnavigable, Moscow sent the camp administration a notice to not expect fresh shipments of prisoners. After this directive the guards and officials allowed rest days, increased food rations, and allowed dying prisoners to recuperate for ten days before continuing work. Whenever new prisoners were available, the camp administration did not concern itself with the well-being or lives of its wards and simply focused on meeting and over-fulfilling production goals. In fact, Sgovio noted that the animals received better treatment than the prisoners and among the humans, the criminals earned more privileges than the political offenders. The camp officials did not force the horses to work more than eight hours a day, while the humans worked twelve to fourteen hours a day, even when sick and dying. Sgovio also learned from other prisoners that the rape of a woman warranted a ten year sentence, but intimacy with an animal merited death.

The lack of concern for the prisoners' lives allowed the camp administration to push them to work under horrendous conditions in order to meet production goals. Officially, prisoners would not work when the temperature reached negative seventy degrees Fahrenheit, but the author does not recall a single instance when work halted because of freezing temperatures. The camp administration also did not observe the rule of three rest days a month, rarely allotting even one a month and even then the prisoners still had tasks to complete. On top of everything else, the administration tried to motivate the prisoners to work hard by assigning food rations based on individual productivity. The reduction in rations for small outputs weakened the worker further and started a vicious downward cycle ending only in death (Hosking 468).

Before the end of his first year in prison, Sgovio still struggled to understand his experiences in relation to Communism. The author recalls asking a former Soviet prosecutor why prisoners were sent to work in Kolyma. The prosecutor, named Sergei Ivanovitch, answered, “It [has] to be done to get workers in such places like Kolyma. Can you conceive of anything other than prison labor working here?” (Sgovio 155). The reply astonished Sgovio, but opened his mind to new possibilities of understanding. After that conversation, the Italian-American lost most of his illusions about the Soviet Union. The disillusionment quickly turned into hatred.

Sgovio features a particular incident as the start of his aversion to the Communists. Before the author's arrival, a man named Berzin oversaw the camp administration. Berzin implemented a reward system, where prisoners could earn reductions in their sentences through hard work. By the time Sgovio arrived to the camps, Stalin had ordered the execution of Berzin and another man, Garanin, had taken command. Several prisoners with reduced sentences had worked fastidiously during what they believed to be their last months in prison. However, the administration soon informed these inmates that a special NKVD tribunal had sentenced them to additional ten year sentences. The evident despair on the faces of these prisoners and the complete injustice fueled Sgovio's hatred for the camp officials and guards.

Sgovio once held a “soft” job indoors and overheard conversations of the camp guards, who all had to be Komsomol members. Sgovio learned that guards had to attend Komsomol meetings and absorb the Party doctrine. The meetings portrayed the political prisoners as evil saboteurs, who could be shot for standing in the way of the Communist goals of the Soviet Union. The training of the guards in this manner contributed to the brutality that Sgovio witnessed in prison. Guards often shot any prisoner too weak to keep up during the march to and from the work area. Anyone who stepped out of line, intentionally or due to weakness, was also

shot on the spot. On other occasions, Sgovio witnessed guards commanding prisoners to walk in another direction and then shooting them in the back. The guards also opened fire on any prisoner caught wandering into the taiga to eat from the plentiful berry fields or from the streams bursting with fish. These incidents made Sgovio thank God that he had never entered the ranks of the Komsomol.

Thomas Sgovio believes he survived eight years in Kolyma for two reasons: his artistic ability and his nationality. Interestingly enough, Sgovio's Italian ethnicity marked him for execution three times during the Second World War, but each time an official that favored Sgovio protected him from collection for the extermination camp, *Sepertinka*. During the early years of his imprisonment, Sgovio's youth in the US allowed him to win the favor of the *blatniye*, the regular criminals of the camp. The Italian-American narrated stories of Al Capone and other famous US criminals and drew pictures (sometimes of nude women) for the *blatniye*, who offered him food and cigarettes in return. The association with the *blatniye* also protected Sgovio from violent attacks that the common criminals occasionally made on the political prisoners. Artistic talents helped Sgovio secure “soft” jobs, which provided opportunities for increased food and rest and shelter from hard work in the cold. Sgovio painted Communist slogans and, in secrecy, he created images of nude women for various prisoners and free workers. The fact that Sgovio only had five years to serve, also enabled Sgovio to maintain hope that he would soon realize his dream of telling the Communists in America the truth about the USSR.

A Protracted Release

Unfortunately, Sgovio's sentence concluded in 1943 while the Second World War raged on, and the camp administration informed him that his release could not be granted until after the war finished. In June of 1945, the administration permitted Sgovio's release from prison, but

fixed his residence to the Dalstroi area. Sgovio stayed as a free worker, mostly tutoring English and hoped that his or his family's petitions for permission to leave the area would succeed. One day, an order to allow Sgovio's travel to Western Russia arrived and the ex-prisoner attempted to leave. However, an official stopped Sgovio and other political prisoners in Magadan and refused their travel. The Sgovio family wrote more petitions and secured a second order of release in December 1947. This time around the official granted the final authority to leave Dalstroi. However, while Sgovio waited to leave, the last available outbound ship retired until the next summer season. An expensive flight remained the only way out of Dalstroi, but usually the rich camp officials that hoarded money bought up all of the tickets. Fortunately for Sgovio, the money reform of 1947, which required everyone with funds kept outside of banks to exchange old money for the new version at a rate of ten to one, devastated the secret hoards built up by camp elites. Thanks to the loss of wealth, seats on the airplane remained unsold until the announcement that that last ship would not sail as planned. The airplane workers also aimed to regain their losses by selling the last twenty five seats on the plane to more than twenty five people. Sgovio used money his family transferred to him by wire to buy a shared ticket and escape Dalstroi forever.

Sgovio received a “wolf’s” passport, prohibiting him from living in major cities such as Moscow, where his mother and sister Grace still lived. The author learned that his father, whom he saw last in January of 1937, had died a few months earlier after serving a ten year sentence himself. The Italian-American lived in Alexandrov until a renewed campaign to purge the Soviet Union of enemies led to Sgovio's second arrest and imprisonment. However, instead of corrective labor in Siberia, the NKVD sentenced Sgovio to exile in the Boguchansky District. Sgovio remained a forced settler of mid-eastern Siberia until the state granted him amnesty in

1954, one year after Stalin's death. Sgovio then moved to Moscow to live with his mother and sister and worked as a commercial artist. The family strove to obtain exoneration affidavits for Thomas and Giuseppe. The state denied the petitions twice, claiming that the NKVD justly convicted the two men, but on the third attempt in 1956 the state granted the exoneration, citing the lack of evidence proving any crime or wrong-doing. The author notes that only after eighteen years had passed did the Soviets admit his innocence and that of his father. Sgovio and his mother applied for exit visas, which they could not obtain until 1960, to travel to Italy—not the US because of the Cold War with the USSR. After his youngest sister managed to secure her own exit visa three years later, the family moved from Italy back to the US, where Sgovio could finally realize his dream of warning Americans about the reality of Communism under Comrade Stalin.

Conclusion

El Campesino entered the Soviet Union in 1939, one year after the height of the Great Purge. The Spaniard did not escape the country until after his release during the last week of 1949. Thomas Sgovio reached the USSR in 1935, two years prior to the Great Purge. The Italian-American could not free himself from the Soviet Union until 1960. Status as a foreigner affected both men in similar ways. El Campesino and Sgovio enjoyed the privileges offered to foreigner Communists and also suffered the ills of foreign status. The authors' nationalities afforded them a unique experience in the Soviet Union, from high to low and in between. Both of the ex-Communists had wanted to discover the facts about life in the USSR in order to relay their knowledge to the Communists back home. Imprisonment inevitably delivered the final facts about the Soviet regime, as no prisoner needed to fear speaking the truth. The vast separation between the propagandist view of the Fatherland and the reality of the conditions there ensured

that El Campesino and Sgovio would experience a deep disillusionment. The very ideals that once attracted the men to Communism under the great Comrade Stalin could not be found anywhere in Stalin's USSR.

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