

Lazar Sherishevskiy With Camp Orchestra



This is our camp orchestra on a tour in November 1944. I the 1st on the left in the upper row.

In Moscow I was taken to a building in Prechistenka Street. This was the headquarters of Moscow military Corps. I was taken to a weird cell. There were cement floors, cement walls and no window. I didn't distinguish between day and night. Twice a day they put a bowl of some cereal and it was impossible to know between breakfast and dinner. Nobody disturbed me.

One day the door opened and I was taken up the stairs. I decided they were going to execute me. I came outside. There was a blue bus waiting at the entrance. The bus arrived at the Butyrskaya prison. I filled up some papers and was taken to an investigation cell 95 of the Butyrskaya prison. There were 25 prisoners in it. I was taken to interrogations where they asked me about this poem about Stalin. What I found out was that in 1944, when investigation officers realized that I might protest against this poem. What they wrote was sufficient to take me to a tribunal that sentenced me to 5 years in a camp and 3 years of limitation of my rights. I was convicted for anti-Soviet talks. The sentence started as follows: 'Feeling anger to the Soviet power for his father's arrest Sherishevskiy had wrong and critical thoughts, did not trust authorities, condemned their actions and had anti-Soviet discussions and is sentenced thereof'. Then it continued: 'For anti-Soviet propaganda expressed in anti-Soviet discussions with the military and decadent poems qualified under Article 58 Item 10 part 2, he is sentenced to 5 years in a camp and 3 years of limitation of his electoral rights with no confiscation of property due to having no property'. I was put in prison on 22 March, and on 12 May I was exiled. I was sent to a camp near Moscow. I received a camp robe. There was a plant there. The plant manufactured electric engines, electric winding for camp power plants, vehicle spare parts, cable hoists for mines, plastic plates and mugs for camp ware. I got very weak in prison. I was pale, weak and had scurvy sores. I starved in the camp. I worked at the construction design office and then went to work at the chief mechanic department.

I took part in amateur concerts writing reprises and songs. There was a cultural education unit in the camp. There were professional musicians there. They toured to camps in Moscow region giving concerts. I was invited to the ensemble to be in charge of the literature unit. In spring 1947 I was assigned to this ensemble. We rehearsed during the day and went on concerts in the evening. In 1948 Beriya issued an order to relocate all camps in Moscow region and the central part of Russia to Siberia and Kazakhstan. Our ensemble of about 30 of us - actors, musicians and artists - boarded trucks that took us to a railway station where we filled a cattle transportation train that moved to the north, to the construction of railroad from Salekhard [about 2000 km northeast of Moscow] to Kolyma. [About 7000 km northeast of Moscow] - the 2nd Transsiberian railroad behind the polar circle.

We arrived there on 18 March 1948. There were severe frosts. There was a prison theater on tour there at the time, when we came. We reached an agreement with them, and they helped us to join them. We went to Abez' town [About 1700 km northeast of Moscow], where the construction headquarters and the theater office were located. I worked in this theater and didn't have to go to work. This saved my life. We toured the camps. We traveled by train and trucks, where the railroad ended. We also performed for civilians and this was all Soviet propaganda that we showed. We were to raise the moral spirit of prisoners and ensure their moral and political health. We lived in barracks. There were hordes of mosquitoes and insects in summer. By 1948 my 5 year sentence expired, but I was still restricted in my rights, and I stayed to work in the ensemble as a civilian. I didn't have a passport, but a paper stating that it had been issued under Articles 38 and 39 for passport provision. It didn't give me the right to live in Moscow, Kiev, Leningrad, Riga, in any decent town.