



Chapter Fourteen

Vladimir Moroz

Stalin's Orphans

Background

Vladimir Moroz was born in 1922, the son of a mid-level party official in Moscow. Vladimir had an older and a younger brother. On November 2, 1937, his father was arrested and executed for anti-Soviet activity. His mother was sentenced to five years in the Gulag as a traitor to the fatherland. His older brother was sentenced to five years for belonging to an anti-Soviet youth organization. Vladimir, then fifteen, and his nine-year-old brother were sent to separate NKVD orphanages. Vladimir, although he was less than sixteen at the time, was sentenced to prison for anti-Soviet statements made in the orphanage and in letters, and, according to registration statistics, died at the age of seventeen in Prison No. 1 in the city of Kuznetsk on April 28, 1939. Vladimir and his family were posthumously rehabilitated in 1956 as a result of petitions by his older brother, who survived the Great Terror.

This is the story of Vladimir Moroz as told largely by his case file from the archives of the NKVD.¹

The Case Against Vladimir Moroz

According to NKVD records, Vladimir was not an ideal student in his NKVD orphanage in Annenkovo: “He expressed dissatisfaction with

the arrests of his family by the NKVD in conversations and letters.” Excerpts from his interrogation by an NKVD sergeant on April 24, 1938, reveal his “confession”:

NKVD: Our investigation shows that during your stay in the Annenkovo orphanage you conducted counter-revolutionary activity. Tell us about the details.

MOROZ: I did not conduct any counter-revolutionary activity.

NKVD: You are lying. The investigation requires a complete confession.

MOROZ: I repeat that I did not conduct counter-revolutionary activity.

NKVD: We found your letter of counter-revolutionary content. What do you have to say about this?

[At this point in the interrogation, Moroz’s tone changes to one of submission. We would guess that he was tortured at this point. His confession then uses standard NKVD language, which is underlined in the text. These parts of the confession may have been drafted by the interrogator for his signature.]

MOROZ: Yes, these letters have counter-revolutionary content and I am the author. In these letters I expressed evident hostility to Soviet construction, praising Trotsky-Bukharin bandits while sympathizing with the condemned and executed enemies of the people, and I compromised the leaders of the party and Soviet state and personally Stalin.

The NKVD’s conclusion of June 14, 1938: The fifteen-year-old Moroz had violated Article 58 of the Russian criminal codex (counter-revolution) by “defaming the leaders of the party and Soviet state and personally Stalin.” Vladimir was sentenced by a special NKVD tribunal to three years in a corrective-labor camp on October 25, 1938. He survived there less than half a year.

Moroz’s Letter to Stalin

On November 18, 1938, Vladimir wrote a letter to Stalin asking his assistance. The letter was apparently still written from the orphanage.

He had not yet been transferred to the prison, and he probably did not know of his sentence to the Gulag because he complains largely about conditions in the school:

Respected Comrade Stalin!

I am obliged to turn to you for assistance. It is necessary because of my unbearable situation. I read in the paper about your answer to Comrade Ivanov and I hoped that you would answer me as well. What is unbearable about my current situation? My Father, G. S. Moroz, was arrested by the NKVD after which followed the arrest of my Mother for unknown reasons. I endured blow after blow, misfortune after misfortune. They sent me to the village of Annenkovo. You can imagine my situation in the orphanage. I have dark thoughts; I have become a misanthrope: I have isolated myself from others, in every face I see a hidden enemy, I have lost faith in people.

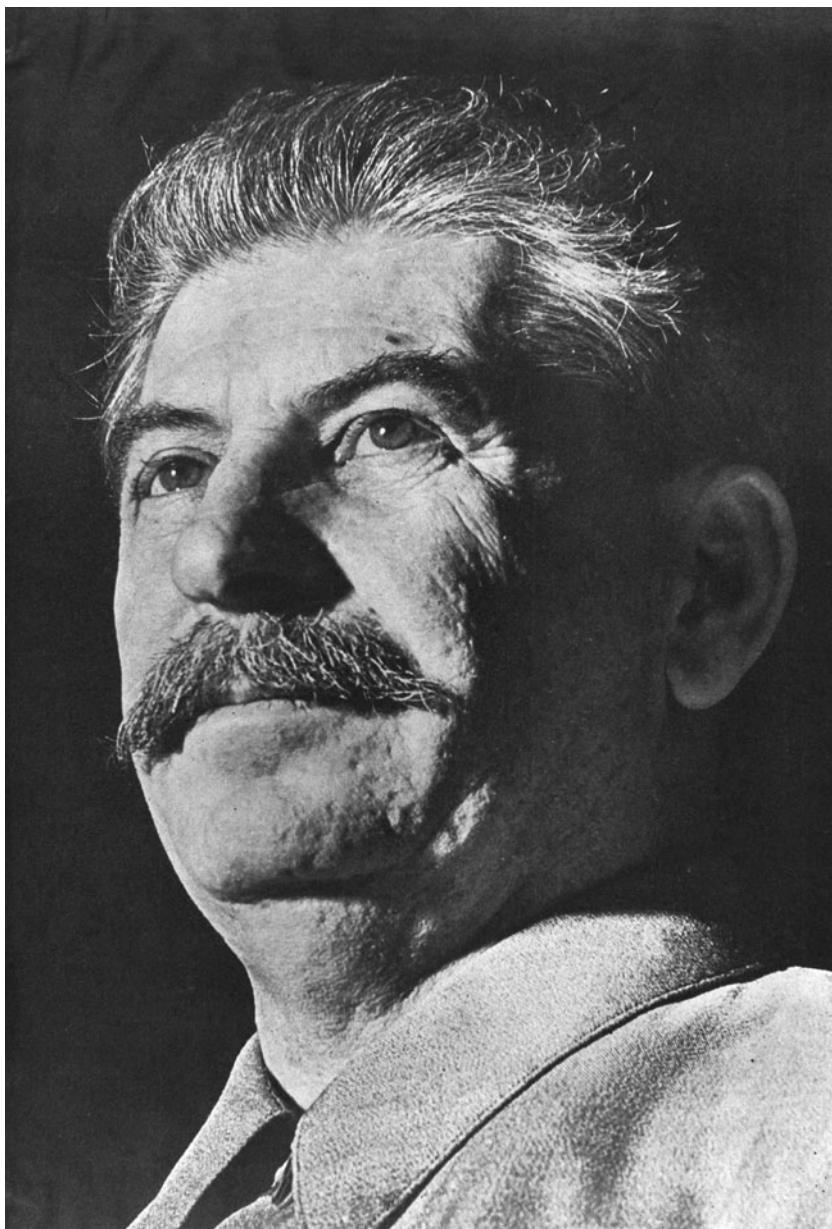
The letter then reveals why Vladimir was singled out for punishment: As an intelligent and privileged son of a party official, he writes that his school is wretched and that he knows more than his teachers. With such an attitude, his NKVD handlers in the orphanage would have singled him out:

Why am I alone? Only because the general intellectual level of the teachers is lower than my own. This is not self praise. The school is so wretched, the teachers so mediocre, that there is no wish to attend classes. I want to receive the maximum knowledge but here you receive less than the minimum. How can one be satisfied with that? You may think that I am too coddled, sentimental. No, this is not the case. I only demand happiness, current happiness, happiness that is enduring.

Vladimir's letter ends:

Comrade Stalin: I am sinking faster and faster into some kind of bottomless pit, from which there is no escape. Save me. Help me. Don't let me perish! This is all I have to say. I hope that you will answer me soon and help me. I am awaiting with impatience your reply.

Of course, there was no response from Stalin.



Photographic portrait of the “Great and Generous Leader,” Joseph Stalin.

A Mother's Plea for an Already-Dead Son

Vladimir died in prison on April 28, 1939. His mother, serving her Gulag sentence, was unaware of the fate of her husband (already executed) and three sons (the eldest in prison, the two younger at least initially in NKVD orphanages). She wrote to NKVD head Lavrenty Beria on September 9, 1939, half a year after Vladimir's death, the following plea:

In the camp, I asked about the fate of my sons and it was communicated to me in March of 1938 that two sons, the fifteen-year-old Vladimir and the nine-year-old Aleksandr, are in the orphanage in Annenkovo in the Kuznetsk region. They did not tell me anything about my eldest son, Samuil. I turned many times to the Moscow NKVD with requests to tell me about my eldest son. Finally, at the end of May 1939, the Moscow NKVD told me that both Samuil and Vladimir had been arrested. They did not say when and for what reason. It is also unclear why a youth, who is held in Kuibyshev province in an orphanage, has been arrested by the NKVD of Moscow.

My eldest son finished the tenth grade.

My second son, Vladimir, a student of the eighth grade, received the highest marks and was a young pioneer, with exemplary behavior.

All this information speaks to the fact that they could not have committed crimes independently that would have been subject to arrest by the NKVD. I presume that my sons, like me, were subject to repression as members of the family. But taking into consideration the directives of the party and of Stalin personally—children in no circumstances should answer for the sins of the father—this directive of the Leader, pronounced on several occasions, gives me the right of a mother to direct to you, Citizen Commissar, a petition—to demand an examination by the Moscow NKVD into the charges against my sons.

Rehabilitation

Vladimir Moroz's posthumous rehabilitation was petitioned by his older brother Samuil, who survived Stalin's Great Terror. There is no record in the file of the fates of his mother and younger brother.

On February 8, 1957, the Deputy USSR Prosecutor filed a protest

with the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court “About the case of V.G. Moroz.” The protest lays out the facts of the execution of Vladimir’s father and the arrests of other family members. The protest concedes that Vladimir Moroz indeed made anti-Soviet statements, such as those covered in Article 58, but they were prompted by the “unjustified” persecution of his family members. Moreover, he had not reached the obligatory age of sixteen at the time of sentencing. For these reasons, the prosecutor requested “the decree of the Special Assembly of the NKVD of October 28, 1938, relating to Vladimir Moroz be rescinded and the case be closed because of the absence of a committed crime.”

The rehabilitation did not raise Vladimir Moroz from the grave, but it must have given some minor satisfaction to his brother and other survivors to have the charge “enemy of the Soviet people” removed from his brother’s name.

Whom Did Stalin Destroy?

The Moroz family was headed by a dedicated communist, a high-ranking party official of the trade ministry. His family enjoyed privileges, living in the regime city of Moscow, probably receiving the famed “Kremlin ration” of food and other goods. Their middle son of fifteen, Vladimir, was a talented student, receiving the highest marks, a young pioneer, and a dedicated communist. It was young people like Vladimir Moroz who carried the promise of Soviet communism.

Vladimir’s confiscated diary, written from a bleak NKVD orphanage in the Russian provinces, shows the devastating effect of the Great Terror on him and others like him. He wrote the following words, never realizing that they would show up in print seventy-five years later:

A person awaking from a lethargic twelve-year dream would be simply stunned by the changes that have taken place. He would not find the old leadership. He would see in the leadership clean-shaven ignoramuses, doing nothing for the victory of the revolution, or elderly do-nothings selling their comrades for their personal gain. He would not see the “former” legendary leaders of the Red Army. He would not see the builders and organizers of the revolution. He would not see talented writers, journal-

ists, engineers, artists, directors, diplomats, and political figures. . . . It is staggering. A clique of gorged, fat people brashly rule and ninety percent of the people are unhappy. . . . Under the pretense of progress, morality is collapsing.

Vladimir was a representative victim of Stalin's purge of the party. Stalin believed that if he was dissatisfied with the current elite, he could destroy it and put a new and improved elite in its place. What happened in fact was that the new elite was made up of the compromisers, do-nothings, lackeys, and non-independent thinkers, who were to lead the Soviet Union and its empire after Stalin's death.

Lost forever were the Vladimir Morozes—the bright, outspoken true believers, under whose guidance the Soviet Union may have taken a quite different path.