

letter to Stalin explaining that the allegations against him were fabricated. How naïve but significant. Significant because Abel was one of the aforementioned prisoners who believed that Stalin was unaware of the cruelties and abuse on the part of the camp administrators. Otherwise, he believed, Stalin would not have allowed those things to happen. And besides, he reasoned, when you cut a forest, wood shavings fly. What he meant was that Stalin's project was the eradication of anti-revolutionaries who hindered the progress of communism in the Soviet Union and the world at large, and during the implementation of that huge project, the victimization of some unimportant albeit innocent people was unavoidable. But when asked who the wood shavings were, you or Aksel Bakunts, Abel would nervously cut the conversation short. He and his like believed in the good intentions of the regime and the need to purge the socialist society of harmful and undesirable elements. This is psychologically explicable. It happens in societies ruled by a mastermind tyrant like Stalin or Hitler.

Many who served time under the Stalinist persecutions did so without any clear understanding of the allegations against them. Even when some of them returned home after Stalin's death, they still had no clear idea of what they had been accused of or who had informed on them. Sometimes all they had in hand was a permit to go home, not a statement of sentence completed or a certificate of discharge. Their persecution remained an incomprehensible enigma. Many families remained in the dark about the reasons for their kin's