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# Post-Soviet States: People, Power, and Assets
# Oral History Archive

Interviewee: Tito Pontecorvo
Interviewer: Rebecca Adeline Johnston
Date: February 10, 2022
Location: Seguin, TX


## Abstract

Tito Pontecorvo is internationally renowned for his more than thirty-year career breeding Akhal-Teke horses in Russia and the United States. Having bred approximately nine hundred pureblood Akhal-Tekes in total, he is chiefly responsible for the development of the population of these horses that live in the United States today. In 1997, facing growing threats to his family's safety, he fled Russia and evacuated seventy-five of these horses to a ranch in Texas. Prior to his career breeding horses, he worked for thirteen years as a professional oceanographer. He holds a PhD in oceanography from Moscow State University.


This transcript is lightly edited for clarity. Unedited remarks are available in the embedded audio recording and can be located with the aid of timestamps bracketed in the transcript text. Interviewer questions and remarks are presented in bold.

## Interview Transcript

**Why don't we start by having you introduce yourself. You've had a very eventful life, and although our focus in this project is on the 1990s, why don't we start a bit about your background and early life. Where you were born; where you grew up; a bit about your family, which was in the midst of a particularly busy time during your early childhood. Whatever you'd like to say.**

I was born in 1944 in Canada, in Montreal. My father was a very famous nuclear scientist. Maybe you've heard about neutrinos. Neutrinos were his discovery in physics. He was Italian; he was born in Italy. My mother was Swedish, born in Stockholm. I was born in Canada, Montreal, then we lived in England, in France, and many other countries. After all that, Bruno Pontecorvo, my father, moved with us, his family, to the Soviet Union. But [I'll talk about] the reasons after a little bit—my opinion on what his reasons were for moving to the Soviet Union.[1]

**How did your parents explain to you when you were six that you were suddenly living in Russia?**

I was small, I was six or seven years old. That's why I don't remember a lot. I don't remember what I was asking, because for a baby of six or seven years old that was born in Canada, what does the Soviet Union mean? It doesn't mean anything. I didn't know at that time what communist, capitalist, and all that stuff meant. That's why probably we weren't asking where we were moving or to what country, about Russia, because we didn't know what Russia was. We didn't know anything at that age. That's why probably we were asking, and probably the answers were as silly as the questions.

**How was it adjusting to having classmates who spoke Russian and having to navigate life as a child when you don't speak the native language? Was it an international school where it was in English [such as the Anglo-American School of Moscow], or was everybody speaking Russian?**

No, no. Russian, yes.

**Was there an adjustment period where you had to learn Russian really quickly, to get used to that?**

What I remember is—and I can explain why it worked like this—at the time, the Soviet Union was a closed country. All the people that lived inside the Soviet Union, we called them Russian. But it's not true, because it was a very international country, with *kazakhy*, *uzbeky* [Kazakhs, Uzebeks], and so on. But in Russia, we said that all of us were Russians. Well, we were not Russian. And at that time, in Russian schools, because of this capitalism-communism fighting, of course everyone that came from other countries to the Soviet Union were not friends; they were "capitalistic." Because we were from capitalist countries. That's why in the beginning, **[0:05:00]** in the school, the Russian children were against us, and we had fights. Not serious fights—about being capitalist or communist, and so on.

I have two brothers. We were all together. I was seven and my oldest brother was twelve. And when we were together, the oldest twelve, and six and seven, we were a group; we were a small army. That's why they couldn't do lots of things, the children, of that age, with us. And because there were three of us, we were quite strong. Very soon "they are from a capitalist country" went away. Very soon we started to be just children, and very soon we got lots of friends and so on. Just a small time in the beginning was a bit shaky. But not very seriously.

**When did you gain awareness of the international controversy around your father's defection? At what point in your life growing up?**

For me, it was probably around twelve years old. Because in the beginning, I was a member of the Pioneers, with the red tie. My oldest brother went into the Komsomol—you know what that is, the Komsomol. I already at that time said no. I didn't join the Komsomol. And my younger brother didn't join, either. You see, we were unlucky; there was a big tragedy in our family. My mother got sick and she was ill for ten years. We were growing up without a mother. And that's why—I'm speaking about me, myself—that's why very soon I was in a quite criminal group of children and parents. That's the time when I started to understand communism, capitalism, and

so on. Of course, because of the group that I was in, I was against communism. That I didn't join the Komsomol, it was not just like that. It was already my principle.

**At age twelve?**

Yes.

**Could you talk a little more about how you came to that understanding about which side of this divide that you wanted to be on?**

I don't have a lot of things to say, because I don't remember the details about the Komsomol. I didn't join the Komsomol because I didn't like them. It was not an idea or a principle. It was my reaction to what I could see around. All this bullshit, all this lying about capitalism. I already could understand when they were lying. Because all this, you know, marching, all this was bullshit. It was lying. It was a game. And not a beautiful game—an ugly game. And that's why I started to be more and more aggressive against the rules in the Soviet Union. At that time, in the Soviet Union, there were Soviet rules. And Soviet rules were created by the Russian—no, by Soviet communists. **[0:10:00]** Because that is a special smell of communism. It's not like the idealistic Italian communism at that time. It was Soviet communism.

**Is there maybe a specific example of something that you saw people in the Komsomol do that made you think there was this different, ugly side to Soviet communism compared to Italian communism?**

My father was a communist, but he was an idealist. Typical idealist Italian communist. "Ah, communism!" All the stuff that was written in the schoolbooks for Soviets. Everybody will be free, everybody will be happy, everybody will be—blah, blah. But, excuse me, I was put in a group of people that were not rich, that were—not *bandity* [bandits]—I was in the—criminal, close to criminal. Not real criminals. And see, in that group, in Russia, the children were not Pioneers, they were not Komsomols, and they had their own way of looking at the situation. Mostly, those people were not rich. They didn't have a very happy life.

On one hand, I was the son of a famous [scientist]; of course he had money. But on the other hand, my mother was in the hospital and my father was working. I saw him very rarely. And I was in that group. First of all, I saw what I saw there. And all of them didn't like communism. They said that all this is lying, and so on. And I got that. I just saw it with my own eyes. That this is a game, nothing more.

**The "criminal" group that you were with, they showed you that communism in the Soviet Union did not work for everybody?**

At that time, we didn't think about politics. That's why at that time I didn't think—communism, capitalist—no. I saw that here. [What I saw was that] it doesn't work like *they* are saying. Not "rich" or "not rich." And the ones who were saying this were the people in command, the communists; Soviet communists.

**When you say that they were criminals, do you mean like they had to steal to eat?**

If you can change this word criminal to something else—we need to do that.

**In Russian, what would it be?**

In Russian? *Oni byli prosto ne ochen' bogatye. Oni ne byli kriminaly. No roditeli, konechno, byli nemnozhko kriminalnye, mozhet byt'*. [They just didn't have a lot of money. They weren't criminals. But their parents, of course, were maybe a little bit criminal.] Criminal is not the right word. But they were not Komsomols, Pioneers, or communists, one hundred percent.[2]

**They were not [Communist] Party members.**

No. First of all, since they were in a bit of an "other" group of people, the officials in the schools didn't even invite their children to become communists. Because they knew that they'd probably say no. In the Soviet Union, believe me, there was quite a big percentage of people who were in that group. That's why when they say that in the Soviet Union everybody was communist and so on, all this is bullshit. It's not true.

**In that context, you said that that's when you [0:15:00] gained this awareness about the controversy over your father. Did you ever talk to him about that, or was he open with you?**

Yes. But already when I was older, after university. Because before that, I was a child, and no child is interested in idiotic politics. They have more interesting things—how to understand what it is to live, and everything. Politics already comes when you're older, after you're twenty years old. Well, after I was twenty years old, and even later, when Bruno was living with us—he was already sick, but he was okay, he was more or less okay—and we talked a lot. I was already a real anti-communist at that time. Because everything in the Soviet Union that was close to communism was bullshit, and quite aggressive bullshit. I mean, aggressive towards the members of the Soviet Union. I hated them. I knew that they were all liars, that this was all a game. For the most part I'm not talking about everybody, I'm talking about the members of the Communist Party that were doing the communist type of work. You understand what I mean.

**Bureaucratic work.**

Bureaucratic work. Or diplomatic work, helping the bureaucrats. Or real idiotic idealists. But any idealist, when he believes in some ideas, in two or three years, he wakes up and says, "No; I was an idealist." Well, except Bruno. But Bruno, you see, he was not an idealist, but he really thought that human beings, with their bright brains, really are able to create a society that would be close to communism. Where everybody more or less is happy.

And when we were fighting, I was explaining to him—"Listen. You forgot one thing. That human beings are very smart animals, but we are animals." And before our brains is the fact that you are an animal. And that the animal, this type of animal, will be alive, will be able to live, and has some rules that come much earlier than communism. [Based on the fact] that human beings

that have been allowed, have been able to create their society and be *cheloveki-liudi*, be *liudi* [individuals and people, be people]. You understand what I mean? Bruno, he of course was realistic, too. But he didn't want to agree with me, because if he agreed, it would mean that human beings would never be able to create this idealistic, unworkable idea, as if this would work. And he didn't want to believe that.

**Would that mean also that he made a mistake in moving to the Soviet Union?**

That of course helped to make this. Of course, yes. Because **[0:20:00]** the Soviet Union was a closed country. "Oh, they're building communism! Oh!" All this bullshit. Of course, he didn't know anything about what a realistic life was like in the Soviet Union. He found that out only after he lived several years in the Soviet Union.

**You've talked elsewhere about your career in oceanography, so we don't have to go through all that. There was that recent interview you did.[3]**

Yes. Well, [there's] only one thing that I [wanted to say]. It was always my dream to work on and study the ocean. For me, the ocean was the most beautiful thing that you could find. When I just see the waves and hear them, that already made me happy, always. That's why, of course, I graduated from the *kafedra okeanologii* [university department of oceanography], and started to work. I worked thirteen years, studying the movements of water near underwater mountains near the Hawaiian archipelago. That's where I was studying and working for thirteen years.

But you see, in Soviet times, you were not allowed to be any type of a boss, of a *rukovoditel'* [manager], if you were not a member of the Communist Party. But I was not a member of the Communist Party. And the communist bosses in my organization in Vladivostok would catch me and say, "Tito, you need to be a member. You can't be a boss." "Yeah, yeah, yeah," I always lied to them, "I'm dreaming of becoming a communist," and I'd run away. But it was not easy to catch me, because I was in the ocean for nine months [of each year]. And for months, I had my pockets full of money—for nine months, all the money collects. And they'd kick me out and I'd just go enjoy myself. It was not easy to catch me.

After thirteen years of all this, they caught me [and presented me] with the papers where they said, "Tito, you said you would love to be a member of the Communist Party. Here are the papers, you need to sign them." Well, [my] lying was finished, and I said everything that I thought about them. And the next day, I find out that I was kicked out of my work. That's why I finished my work with oceanography. It was a tragedy for me. But after two, three weeks of crying and thinking about sad things, I asked myself—"Tito, wake up. Stop it. What do you like?" I always loved horses. Even the smell of horses. And I started to work with horses.[4]

**What made you interested in Akhal-Teke horses in particular?[5]**

In Soviet times, a Soviet citizen was not allowed to own—*imet', vladet'* [to have, to own], own a truck. He was allowed only to have a light car. What was the communists' reason for this? A truck makes you, as a human being, stronger. You can put lots of stuff in the truck and take it to one place from the other place. That was not allowed. Only the government was able to own a

truck. And at that time, because it was still Soviet society, there was a lot of work that was done **[0:25:00]** with working horses. Like in 1950, more than fifty percent of the work was done with horses. That's why in Soviet times you were not allowed, as a private person, to own a truck or a horse. Horses also made you stronger, and it was not allowed.

But I wanted horses. That's why I started to think and speak with people [about how to get some]. I bought my first horses from gypsies.[6] Because gypsies were the only race of people that were allowed to own horses for themselves.[7] Because of the tradition that [historically], Russian gypsies worked with horses and lived with horses. I always had lots of gypsy friends because of their horses. And I bought my first horses from them. They sold me their horses, no problem. They had a very strange way of selling horses. Because officially, you were not allowed to keep a horse. But there were lots of idiotic ways that worked for how to cheat the government. The documents listed the name—not the breed [of the horse]—[and said that it] weighs five hundred kilos. All the documents were made like that. That I'm not buying a horse—I'm buying five hundred kilos of horse meat that is still alive.

**"Living meat."**

"Living meat," [laughs] yes. Well, that was the first horse that I was able to buy. But I wanted better and better horses. And officially, in Soviet times, if you did not officially work, you would go to jail. Or you would go to *prinuditel'naia rabota* [forced labor], for months. What do you call this? Go to work for the government for free.

**Forced labor.**

Slavery, yes. Slavery. Well, of course, I didn't want to be a slave. Even the idea just made me immediately mad. Never. That's why I always needed to think about how to find a way to cheat and show them that I [had an official job]. Well, there were lots of very silly ways. I forget now all the ways. [laughs]

**You started a club, technically, right?**

Yes. Well, when I started to get horses, lots of children immediately came around me. I taught them [about horses]. And at that time, it was probably the only international organization in the Soviet Union. Dubna is an international atomic center with mostly Soviet people and people from socialist countries.[8] But there were also [some] from capitalist countries. And immediately an international club [spontaneously came to be], where all these children from different countries were all together. And in order to make it more official-looking, I created a club. And in that club was a *sovet kluba* [club council]. And it was international. I needed to create this for myself, because I was always scared that [in the end] I would finish in jail. Because I hated them and they knew that. **[0:30:00]** Because I'd always open my mouth and say what I think.

That's why I needed to create some type of organization where I would be the boss. [laughs] It was the group of people in charge of what had already become a huge horse club, where I was the boss. There were more than two hundred children from different nations. And they knew, the communists knew, that if I call—and most of the parents of these children were scientists, very

bright and smart people, and international, from different countries—and they knew that if I opened my mouth and called them, this board of directors, and said, "Listen, they're [interfering with] me, these people," [laughs] they would find a way to make [the communists] shut up, or try to scare them.

**The parents were part of this organization, officially.**

Of course.

**Once you put the club together, you built the stables, right?**

Yes. Well, the first stable, I built myself. It was ugly-looking, somewhere I have a photo. Just from wood, pieces of wood, and so on. But then we built a serious building from bricks. How was I able to build it? Because, again, a private person was not able to own a big barn, for example, for fifty horses, and places to live for workers who work in this barn. But here it was a most tricky situation. On one hand, I already had in the first barn more than fifty extra-class horses. A barn that officially belonged to JINR, the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research.

But a lot of money for how I was building this stable came from my pocket. Officially, it didn't belong to me. On the other hand, I spent lots of my money, because I couldn't invite official workers to work for me, because I was private. That's why I paid real money from hand to pocket, from my pocket, for official workers that worked after [their official jobs]. Plus, all the children and many of the parents were working, too, after work.

That's why the first building—I showed you the photo—was built in, I don't know, [only] several months. Because there was a crowd of children [who helped]. After a week of working, they were laying the bricks themselves, they didn't need the workers. The workers were all just—I was paying them, and they were [conducting]—"do that, do that, do that," so that they wouldn't make any mistakes. And we built it immediately. And officially it belonged to JINR, but a lot of money was spent by me, myself. Plus, there was the committee of this huge horse club. Two hundred children and each had two parents. That means [six] hundred **[0:35:00]** people that will fight for their children to be happy. That's why I was able to survive. [laughs]

**Was it at the beginning that you had mostly Akhal-Tekes or did it become later that—**

No, that came later. Yes, about Akhal-Tekes. Well, the first horses were the ones from the gypsies. No [specific] breed, nothing; just horses. The [most important thing to me] was that they smelled like horses; always, I loved the smell of horses. But after I started, I wanted to get better horses, and I started to buy horses—first as "horse meat," the documents were made up like "horse meat" and so on. But after, it was more legalized. And very soon I already had very good-quality horses. But those were horses of traditional breeds that were bred for sport. They were Hanovers, and Trakehners, and I had Thoroughbreds, English racing horses. Then I had Arabs.

For all that mixture, I still didn't have a breeding idea. The beginning of my breeding idea was to make better-looking horses and horses that had better movement. That's why I started to breed gypsy mares that didn't have any breed with Hanover and Trakehner, pure-blood breed

Trakehners, making them better and better. Later, I started to breed pure-blood horses of these breeds. Or half-bloods, but breed them only with Thoroughbreds. That meant Anglo-Trakehners, Anglo-Hanovers. And making them better. Then I bought several stallions, real pure-blood Trakehners, pure-blood Hanover, and so on, and Thoroughbreds of course, I had Thoroughbreds. Just pure-bloods. But I still didn't have a real idea about breeding.

But then, I saw my first Akhal-Teke in my life. And when I saw that horse, I was amazed. How different. [laughs] I was amazed at how strange and different it was. Everything is different, how strange they are. All these [amateurs who say they love] Akhal-Tekes, they don't even know that they're different. They don't see anything. No eyes, no brains, no professional anything. Only bullshit, nothing more. I'm proud that I have the best Akhal-Tekes.

I saw my first Akhal-Teke, and I bought him. He was castrated; a gelding. But when I had that horse, I already knew that I would not sleep normally if I did not start to breed—*breed*—Akhal-Tekes. I wasn't thinking anymore about mixtures, no. You can like them or not like them, but the Turkmens had their own view of the ideal horse. And they made it. And you can hate them or not hate them, but it's something really original that is different than in other horses.

I started very slowly. Before, the idea when I was breeding was to make horses better. To make the horses better, you need to have a good stallion. I had them, of different breeds. But the idea was to make better horses. Here, it was a different idea—to breed Akhal-Teke horses **[0:40:00]** and make the best of the best—in my opinion, to my eye—the best of the best Akhal-Tekes; more pure-blood Akhal-Tekes. At that time, I was starting to think about only pure-blood breeding, not crossing with other breeds.

I had lots of friends in Turkmenistan and I started to go to Turkmenistan. I started to see all the good-quality Akhal-Teke horses that there already were in Russia at that time. I was not in a hurry, because I already had an idea, and I was not in a hurry. First of all, I understood that I needed to study and get all the information that I could—first of all from Turkmens, and of course from the best breeders of Akhal-Tekes in Russia. All of the Russian and Soviet Akhal-Teke breeding was created by Vladimir Petrovich Shamborant. Shamborant was a generous breeder, an extremely bright person, and, by the way, of course, not a member of the Communist Party. In Soviet times, he was a professional breeder and he worked for the government at the Tersk Stud farm. The Tersk Stud farm was the farm that created the best Arab horses in the world that were born in the Soviet Union, Russian Arabs. All of the organization and breeding ideas there were Shamborant's. And plus, he was already breeding Akhal-Tekes.

At that time, everybody around the world in horse breeding was talking about purebred Arabs. That's why Russians were talking about them, too. But Shamborant had the best Akhal-Teke horses. Why the best? First of all, he worked as a main breeder for a long time in Turkmenistan. That's why. It's not that he was learning *from* Turkmens, he lived there and was commanding breeding at that time. That's why, at that time, the person who knew a thousand times more than the whole crowd of people who were talking about these horses was Shamborant.

He was extremely smart, shy, and he was an outstanding person. I was just lucky that I met him and that we were friends. When he saw my first Akhal-Teke, he said, "Tito, you need to start."

And I said, “Yes, of course, I’m ready.” But before I started to spend money, like I told you, I studied. I started going to Turkmenistan many times, to all the barns, including, of course, first of all, Shamborant’s, talking with him and drinking vodka for hours and hours. And he taught me so much that nobody else could teach me.

And I started to buy Akhal-Tekes. What was the idea? Not to breed pure-blood Akhal-Tekes, but to understand small, different details in each line. A line is a **[0:45:00]** group within a breed that is related to one of the old, very famous stallions. And the idea was, first of all, to start to learn everything about Akhal-Tekes, about the small details. And to create extra-class, quality horses. Second, to start to experiment with crosses with different lines within breeds. To make not only the best horses, but to catch the right combinations that will give you not only the best-looking horses, but horses that will have certain bright, small details that only certain lines have. Or a new combination of lines, which was even more interesting to me.

**When I was here last time, you talked about this conflict that the town was split. That there were the people who were for the horses and the people who were against the horses. And [Andrei] Sakharov came and said, “You have to be for the horses.” What was that whole conflict?**

Well, it was the Soviet Union. And I owned horses. In the Soviet Union, it was not allowed to own horses. That was the beginning of the conflict. Because—“Look at that one! I can’t have a horse, and this one [can]. And he’s not a member of the Communist Party, either. Look at that pig.” That was the beginning of the conflict. That’s the reason why I made the club. Because I had four hundred parents and two hundred children that were on my side. Mostly, the parents were bright people; scientific. I mean, not idiots. And on the other side—a crowd. “I’m not allowed to have even one horse, and this pig has—” That was the beginning. Very easy and simple.

**When you talked about how the town was split, was it split because there were people who didn’t want there to be a horse club?**

The beginning of the conflict was that it was not allowed by our rules in the Soviet Union to own a horse. It’s not allowed. Practically, you can go to jail. “And look at this one.” That’s how the crowd, the main crowd, not the scientific people, but the crowd, how they were thinking. It was jealousy, nothing more. “And look at this, he has these type of horses. He has many horses.” That was the beginning. On one side, four hundred parents, and their friends, and they’re smart. And on the other side, the other crowd. Among half of them, along with them, are communists that are thinking the same like that one. “They love him, not me.” That’s why it was smart and bright people, scientifics, and—the crowd.

**That’s why you built this club structure, to make those people, if not happy, then to be able to—**

For the beginning, it just happened—like that. Horses are something that are in the brains of people, and especially children. I love horses, and they kick me out from my work, like in the ocean, and I start to think, “What do I like?” I like horses. And I started to breed horses. And

immediately, just like, a crowd of children came to me. And when the children came, I needed somehow to organize it. Well, first it was organized very simply. But then I made it more complicated. And it started to be a way for them to save the club, and me who created the club.

**One thing that doesn't completely make sense to me is that if you have this official club, and you are the boss of the club, essentially, that didn't count as a job?**

You had a job by Soviet Union rules if you officially were working in a government organization that paid you a salary.

**Okay. You had no salary.**

No. Because it was all mine. [laughs] But nobody knew that. The crowd didn't know that nobody paid me a salary.

**The "crowd" was okay with having this club, but then there were people in power who could have threatened you with the fact that you didn't have an official job.**

Yes. But when I created this club, and all of the organization, it was not so easy to punish me.

**Right. So, you never had a salary, up until the time that you left Russia.**

Yes. The last time I got a salary was when they chased me from the government organization as the boss of the oceanographic expedition.

**When you were selling horses, when it was Soviet times, did you have to do that completely on the black market, under the table, or was there an official way for you to have that income?**

In Soviet times, the black market always was there. Sometimes he just gives you the money and takes the horse, if he's a very rich and strong person—*vysokostoiashchii kommunist* [high-ranking communist]. If he's in the middle, sometimes maybe they will ask him for official papers. In that case, if they asked me, I'd give them a document [saying I was selling them] horse meat.

**You only sold to people within the Soviet Union, or did you also sell to foreigners?**

Of course.

**How did they pay you? And were they able to take the horses out of the country?**

In the Soviet Union? The ones that lived in the Soviet Union, they didn't need to take the horse [out]. For the ones that went to foreign countries, then we needed to create some type of documents. And sometimes—well, there were lots of, many, many, the same like with this horse meat, many silly, ugly-looking ways of how to cheat. Because the Soviet Union was some type

of slavery country. And in any slavery country, the slaves find a way—I don't know—that will work for how to cheat their bosses.

**You mentioned last time that one of those ways, at the very beginning, was that your "gypsy" friends made you documents to say that you were a "gypsy." Did I remember that correctly?**

Yes.

**How did that work?**

I don't remember. [laughs]

**But you had a document saying, "I, Tito Pontecorvo, am Roma?"**

I'm a gypsy. I'm a gypsy. Of course I had it. [laughs]

**Do you still have it?**

No.

**That's too bad.**

Of course I had it. And there were many of these types of documents. With a seal.

**Yes, it was official.**

Well, first of all, gypsies know how to make seals of any type. [laughs] I had lots of friends, and when I asked them to make a seal on a document that I'm gypsy, they'd say—"Oh, Tito, for you, anything!" [laughs]

**How did you afford all of these horses? Because you ended up with more than two hundred at the height of it, right?**

When I started to buy horses, I still had money. Because when I was working as a chief on oceanographic expeditions, they didn't pay me for nine months and then they gave me lots of money, and I had lots of money. In the beginning, I was just drinking vodka and spending it with ladies and so on. In the last year that I was working on these expeditions, I saved some money. And that was enough to start at the beginning.

Later in the Soviet Union, during perestroika, they started to allow people to buy and sell horses. And many people started to be interested in horses. Plus, people in other countries were interested in Akhal-Tekes. And at that time, I already had extra-class Akhal-Teke horses. And I had a big barn with a big hotel and every month lots of foreigners came and I showed them the horses. Many of them started to go, "Oh, I want a horse like that." The prices were good; I was

selling for good prices. And that was enough to create a big farm. All together, the biggest group I had at that time was two hundred and fifty horses.

**You talked about how having this club structure with the parents of all these international children helped give you some protection from the authorities.**

Well, you see, the fact is that they didn't [have to actively] protect me, because it was organized in such a way, and it was such a big club, that [the authorities] didn't even start. But we knew, and I knew, that if they started to touch me, they would maybe be very sad that they started.

**So you had basically no interference?**

Small details. Sometimes the communists said, "Tito, do you know that you are not allowed to own a horse?" "Yes," I said, "yes, I do. But you see, all these children, all these two hundred children, and all their parents, they're so happy that I have horses." [laughs] All this playing games. **[0:50:00]**

**How sustainable did you think that that setup was? Or did you feel like at some point—you talked in the past about how the KGB became increasingly frustrated with you.**

Well, you see—what happened later. After perestroika, most of the bosses were still communists. Or people that were [former] communists.

**You mean after the collapse of the Soviet Union?**

Yes, after perestroika. When perestroika started.

**Oh, so still during Soviet times.**

During, and when it was finished. You see, during Soviet times, the communists were stealing. But it was more or less legalized stealing. In the Soviet Union, if somebody was *really* stealing, openly, he would go to jail. But after perestroika, everything changed. First of all, most of the bosses were communists. Communists know how to steal very well. Because they had been taught by the *sovetskii stroi* [Soviet system] how to steal without going to jail. And that's why they already had a criminal way of thinking.

But [after the collapse of the Soviet Union] there was no communist *stroi* [system] to command [them]. And [that system] had been very tough on real, clear-cut criminals. It collapsed. And that's why the criminal way of thinking was there, but there was no Soviet *stroi*, no Soviet government that could stop you. That's why many of these communists are real criminals.

But who were these real criminals? They worked in a very simple way. After perestroika, they came to me, and they hated me, because I was free. And after perestroika, they started to hate me even more. Because in Soviet times, they were still my bosses, and they could push me into doing dances and playing games with them that they wanted. One of the elements of that dance

was having them to our place to drink vodka and talk, and so on. That was how I paid for my freedom. If there was no more Soviet Union, I would never again sit at one table with those pigs.

Now everything had changed. They couldn't command me anymore, and that's the reason why they hated me even more than before, you see? How it worked was that they would come to me if they needed money—because I owned more than two hundred horses, so they knew that I had money. And I didn't [get it by stealing], I didn't do anything illegal, it was in my bank documents, everything was open. Yes, I had money. They would come to me, talk with me, I'd show them the horses, and so on. And they'd start to say, "Well, you know, Tito—everything can change, you know? **[0:55:00]** Be careful." That was the beginning. The next meeting—"Oh, what a beautiful wife you have. Be careful. Something will happen to her." And after that they'd come and say, "Okay, well, I will help you—for five thousand. Five thousand dollars."

When it started, I understood that my life in Russia was finished. *Finita*. They will just finish me off. Because I would not live under their rules, the rules of criminals. That's when I started to think seriously, in detail, about how to go and move to another country, and to take—I didn't completely believe that I would be able to do this—my seventy-five best horses along with me.

**When I was here last time, you talked about how you had this conflict—I think this was during the early '90s. We watched a video, and there was a conflict between you and the government that the government owed you money but was not agreeing to pay for the feed for horses. You were asking for a very small amount of money compared to what they owed you.**

Yes. After perestroika, the beginning—and I was happy—the beginning was good. My official status in the Soviet Union and Russia was that I was a farmer. And when perestroika started, they started with very smart, good ideas. They started [issuing] loans that would help farmers. One of the loans was for if a farmer builds a building for animals—like me, I'm building a horse barn—then the government would pay a lot of money, something like sixty or seventy percent, I don't remember the number, of the cost of how much I paid. Well, I paid for the big barn, I don't know, five hundred million, maybe?

**Rubles, right?**

Maybe fifty million dollars. Maybe, I don't know. Or twenty million. Well, it was extremely expensive. And there was a law, it was written and everything, and so on. I was waiting for that money. I really needed it, because I needed to feed my horses. That would give me money to feed the horses. And for me, it would be some protection, because I would get a lot of money. They cheated me. And that interview was on *"V mire zhivotnykh*" ["In the World of Animals"], "Animal World," Russian official [media]. And he did this interview, where I'm saying—and he, by the way, is a very nice person, we're friends—he and I, we were thinking that this official government "Animal World" would help, and [the government] would give me the money. [laughs] Nothing. Not a penny.[9]

**Did they just ignore you or did they officially decline to pay this money?**

I didn't hear anything.

**Nothing, you didn't hear anything.**

Nothing, just ignored. You know why? Because the Soviet Union started **[1:00:00]** and then the communist criminals came. They are the bosses now.

**So, do you think that somebody else got this money, that it was stolen from you? Or do you think that the law just never really worked.**

I know that around me, of course, there was lots of stealing, using me, through the government. Lots of stealing, of course.

**Do you know who?**

I know who. I even have some documents that show how they did it. But for this type of people that have money now, they are strong enough and have plenty of money and everything that you can buy, that one hundred percent I will lose. That's why it's better not to start. For what? To make myself nervous? Better just to forget about the pigs and just enjoy life. [laughs]

**Did you see at the time the stealing as just a tradeoff for continuing to be able to work with horses and to run the club?**

I never agreed with that. Never agreed. I was still working and I never agreed with these things. In my mind, and practically. Any time somebody asks me, or if I see what is going on, I will open my mouth and say what I think about it.

**Right. So, when you did that, there was just no helping it, though, right? There was no practical way for you to stop this stealing.**

To stop them stealing from me? How?

**That's my question. You saw no way to stop it. [pause] Yes.**

But they knew that. And that's why they didn't even try to get me involved with them. They found a way—"Let him work, everybody is crazy, he works like a pig. Well, that's his business. We'll do our stuff without him." When you need to feed two hundred horses that eat like horses, and believe me they eat a lot, you don't really have a lot of time to think about politics. You need to work. And find a way for it to work so that you will be able to feed these horses. That's why.

**When I was here last time, you talked a little bit about the different kinds of surveillance that you and Natasha [Pontecorvo] were under. That there were some police who installed some cameras in your house.**

Natasha knows better than me. If you want, after we can call her. Because like I'm telling you—I needed to feed and work.

**You were too busy.**

I worked every minute. I didn't have time. And that's why if there were problems, then I needed to find a way to cheat these problems. And I was able to do it. To cheat, but not making your own hands dirty.

**Before you left, you mentioned—and this was still during Soviet times—that you had a car accident. Could you talk about what led up to that, and then your theory as to why that happened?**

There was a car accident on the border of the Soviet Union and Romania. **[1:05:00]** Many people, including Natasha, thought that that was organized. I didn't believe that. Maybe yes, maybe no. If you don't have the facts, then it's better not to say anything about it.

**Okay. The one thing I wanted to ask about is that your father wrote a letter to Yuri Andropov about this, right?**

Yes.

**Do you know if he ever got a response?**

I don't know, and I was very mad when he did that. I didn't agree with him. Natasha was happy that he wrote it. Well, first of all, I didn't read this letter. Second, I was mad that he wrote it, because you need to have facts. But, I'll explain why he wrote it—my view on why he wrote it. Eventually, his idealism went away and he understood that the Soviet Union was far and away not what he was looking for. And many things made Bruno very mad. But he already was in that jail, and sometimes he had to keep himself shut up.[10]

But when something happened to me, he got extremely scared and mad. And my idea about what he wrote [in the letter] was—"I didn't come here with my family just so that my children or son would end up like this." But this is just an idea. But I eventually understood that Bruno had helped me. Because it might have been more difficult in some ways for me to leave. I've shown you the real picture of how everything worked. After perestroika started, it could be that it would have been much harder for me [without Bruno's influence].

**Going back to when you're starting to make these plans to leave, you said that you didn't really think that you'd go through with it. What did your initial plan look like, that you started out with?**

First of all, when it started, when they started coming [to ask me for] money and talking and scaring me and preparing me, I understood that my life in Russia was finished. And I started to think about what to do and what I would do in another country. I started thinking that, first of all, I had already learned how to make extra-class horses. At that time, more than half of the international champions were mine, my horses. And that made many people—that made me happy, but it made many people extremely aggressive against me. [laughs] I understood that if I

went to another country, nobody would need me. Nobody would help me. I needed to come with a plan to start working immediately, and to be something, and not be—I don't know what. Nobody needs me. They've already lived without me, and they were living [now], and they would [go on living without me].

But I had already at that point learned how to make extra-class horses, the best Akhal-Tekes in the world. And that's why I started to prepare **[1:10:00]** a group, to continue the work that I still hadn't finished. I told you that I was experimenting with crossing lines. It's very hard to do it. You start to work, but—you breed the mare, and then for nine months—it means a year goes away. That is one of the reasons that I had been buying more and more horses. First of all, quality horses, but second, for me, and it was very serious, horses from different lines. That I would be free to experiment, see? Well, I went on experimenting. And second, I started to choose, carefully, without any hurry, thinking about how I would be able to work. Because I had already counted that I would need seventy-five horses. If I had less, it would mean that I would come with fewer lines and it would mean that I would lose lots of time. And probably, because they are pregnant for a year, I would not be able to, while I was still alive, get explanations to some of these questions.

That's the reason why I chose seventy-five. Of the nineteen lines that this breed has, I chose ten of them. Why ten of them? First of all, I chose the ones that I liked, that was just my taste. But second, and no less seriously, lines that produced results through different combinations. Not just good Akhal-Tekes, but—"Oh! Here is the type of ear, the type of eye." And lots of [different] movements and so on. That's the reason why I chose seventy-five, from ten different lines.

**That was your plan for which horses to bring. How did you start to plan the logistics of getting these horses out of Russia?**

Well, first of all, of course, planes. But [if they were] planes that would go directly from [Russia], I was thinking then, they would put me in jail not on the border with Poland and Russia [sic], but directly in Russia. [laughs] I needed to go far away from Moscow, which meant going to Poland on trucks, then to Holland, and from Holland onto airplanes to America. But when all the horses went through the border of Poland, I was scared to death. I was wet. I was scared, you know? But when we went and said goodbye to the border of Russia and Poland, then it was not work, it was just enjoying the life.

**But to plan an operation like this requires a lot of time, I imagine, and people who are helping you, right?**

Ah, of course. This is when the politicians began to help me very seriously. **[1:15:00]** In Soviet times, we'd have special days when maybe ten or fifteen ambassadors of different countries would come to our place. There were special days for the communists, when all the communists would drink with the ambassadors. And then there were special days for my friends. But this was part of the work. I needed to work with them. And I needed to invite them, spend money with them, play games with them. They were not my friends. At least, most of the ambassadors were not my friends. But I started to invite them each week and we started to work. The American ambassador, the Italians, Holland, and many others.

**They would come and meet with you—first you just knew them casually, but then it became this planning for this project.**

Then it became this planning, yes. I told them, I didn't make any noise when these criminals started to scare me. But I told this information to the ambassadors. They knew that I was not lying and that's why that was a signal that I needed help. And they started to help very seriously.

**This was in 1996-1997, around then?**

Yes.

**And I guess it was good cover, since they were already coming to your place, and you met with them already a lot. It would not have stuck out.**

Yes, it was.

**What changed, if anything, about the structure of your club when the Soviet Union fell. Or actually, even before that, during perestroika, and then when the Soviet Union fell. Did anything have to change with how it was set up logistically, or management? No?**

No. It was organized and it worked without any changes after. The main change was that I built the second big barn and I moved the main horses to the other barn. That was how I finished with Dubna. I always knew that I never wanted to live in Dubna. On one hand, I had friends there, and I liked Dubna, and so on. On the other hand, I hated it, because that's where I had so much contact with all of these communists, *sovetskii stroi* [the Soviet system], and so on. After that, I just took the horses to Tverskaya oblast on the other side of the Volga. I took these two hundred horses. I didn't have enough trucks, you see, and that's why I just chased them. I took my twenty-five riders and two hundred horses and we moved them twenty kilometers, just on the roads. [laughs] I asked my friend from the police, they went in front of us, stopping all the cars. And I never looked back to Dubna.

**The horses that you didn't take to the United States, you moved them to this other farm? Or did you sell them, or transfer them?**

Well, lots of horses I sold, and that helped me with money. **[1:20:00]** But at that time, I felt so—*nezashchishchennyi* [unprotected].

**Unprotected.**

Unprotected. I was very nervous and I was in a hurry. That was a time when I tried to do everything quickly. In Dubna, they felt very irritated. Because on one hand, it was their barn. On the other hand, it was my own money that I spent to build this barn.

**You mean at the institute?**

In Dubna, yes. And that's why they always felt not very—because they knew that at any time, I could open my mouth, and four hundred parents would be on my side. And that's why they were always thinking how to make it illegal. Well, the best would be to shoot me. Or to steal the barns from me, and that's how they were really thinking. But they couldn't do that. And that's why they, in the end, made official documents where they showed that I was spending money, and that they had given me back around a million dollars for what I was doing.

**They made documents to make it look like that?**

I had money. They gave me money.

**Oh, they did give it back.**

Yes. That was very complicated.

**Just so I understand. This is part of how to sell, to get rid of the horses that you're not bringing, right?**

No, no. That's another thing.

**Or this is them trying to steal everything from you.**

That was Dubna. With Dubna it was finished. But after I already moved to the other barn, they made a document where they legalized the money that I had given them for building the barn, and they paid [me back].

**So that they have ownership of the barn.**

Yes.

**Okay, I see. But you didn't want them to do this. Or you did?**

You know, I didn't want anything. Natasha was pushing me, "take the money." [laughs]

**This was basically their way of stealing this barn from you?**

Well, you see, if they didn't [do this], they, knowing me, and knowing that I hate them—you see, it was their way of thinking. It was the only way that they could feel like I would never do anything bad to them.

**So, you continued the club at the other stable, at the new stable.**

Not really. In Dubna, it was a children's club for Dubna and towns close to Dubna, and many children from Moscow. That meant that the parents of these children were themselves scientists. Not only from Dubna, but from Moscow. Yes, mostly scientists. When I moved to the other side **[1:25:00]** of the Volga and built this huge thing, there were only small villages there. There were

very few children. But at that time, as I told you, I started to invite ambassadors every week. And on the other side, it was another type of club. It was Russian, of course, also, but mostly a foreigners club, for foreigners. There were people from all over the world that would come from Moscow. Not only ambassadors, but scientists and other people and so on that were from all over the world.

Why did I change the idea? First of all, there were not enough children. And second, I needed to make my organization international. Because that was the game. I was thinking, and I think I was right, that if it was not seriously international, they would try to punish me. If it was seriously international, they would think, "Let this fuck Tito go away, just so we don't have to see him anymore." [laughs] [As for the farm] in Dubna—I left a girl or two at the farm and I taught them everything that I knew. At least, I thought I did. Very soon there was no club, it collapsed. And now there is nothing. It's not enough only to know lots of things; you need to know how to work.

Now, in the big barn [in Tverskaya oblast]. I started to work with—what was his name—Natasha will know. Well, a communist. The communists already knew how it was going to end, that I would escape. And suddenly a person appeared in front of me, a communist. Eye glasses, blonde. Never speaking. Not any noise. But always listening. [laughs] KGB. I knew what he was. When we were drinking, I said, "you dirty KGB." But even when I said bad things about him and so on, he didn't speak. He listened to everything, the good and the bad. [laughs]

But the main thing that I wanted was for them to allow me to leave the country with my horses. And I started to prepare everything. I worked with him openly, saying all my ideas, on one hand, and explaining to him that if they don't do what I want, they would be sad that they were born. Everything was very open. [laughs] And the most dirty things I could think of, I was [laughs]—you know. And he was telling the KGB everything that I said. I think that the work with this—ah, Igor Gerasimov. I was working with Igor Gerasimov. That was very helpful.

**You don't remember his *otchestvo* [patronymic], do you?**

Igor Viacheslavovich, I think, Viacheslavovich. And he **[1:30:00]** worked with me and helped me in a practical way. He was a smart person. Between us, there were no games. We were not friends, but we trusted each other. I explained to Igor that I had built not only the stables, but there was also a huge, very big apartment where I lived, and a big hotel where I invited all these ambassadors. And I explained to him, "When I go away, everything will be yours." And he—"Oh!" He was happy to get that. That's why everything was open.

Of course, I didn't make money on any of these big barns or anything. Because as I told you, I was scared. It was quite a dangerous situation. That's why he knew that it would go to him. Of course I taught him lots of things, and I taught him because I left many horses at his place, at what was already his barn, and I needed lots of money for transporting seventy-five horses. I got money from him as payment. It would have been better to make [a profit], but I was so scared that I didn't think about money at that point. And that's why he got everything for an extremely low price.

**He got control of the big barn.**

Not control, it's his.

**Yes, ownership. Ownership of the big barn. Not the original barn that belonged to the institute, right?**

No, that's on the other side. Dubna is finished.

**Yes, that's totally different. We're done with that. And then he also got the rest of the horses.**

Yes.

**That's a hundred and fifty horses, probably, right? Or, it's a lot.**

I don't know, maybe less. Because I sold a lot. Yes. But, I taught him how to work and so on. Some girls work at his place, and I know everything that goes on. Of course, everything went down.

**So, there's the money from him, and you have this help from the ambassadors.**

The money from him was going towards airplanes and everything.

**That went towards the airplanes, yes. How did you choose where you wanted to go?**

Well, I also have a Canadian passport. At first, we were going to go to Canada. And then somebody, I forget who, invited us there. We went there, it was winter, and it was extremely cold. I immediately thought—from Moscow, I could never. And that's the reason why it was Texas.

**So, you had a trip to Canada that was for planning, right? And then did you come to visit Texas before settling on it?**

Yes, I had friends here. And they called and they said, "You need to come here." The Askins.

**You flew the horses to Wisconsin, correct?**

Yes. And then on trucks south to Texas.

**Was there a logistical reason for that? You weren't thinking about staying in Wisconsin at any point?**

I don't know why I went to Wisconsin. I don't remember why. There was not a serious reason, but maybe it was serious for me at that time. Because I didn't know where I was going. I knew only that Texas is warm. [laughs]

**What was it like being on this plane with your horses?**

The only hard and **[1:35:00]** very scary thing for me was when I was on the trucks leaving Russia. After that, everything was so easy, so not nervous, so not scary. Everybody says, you know, these ladies that don't understand anything—"Oh! Taking horses on airplanes, it's so dangerous, they're scared, poor animals." Everything is bullshit, they're not scared. Horses are very conservative animals. If a person that they trust—you, for example; they trust me—says, "It's okay, it's okay," they immediately become quiet. They trust you, and they'll be like sheep, quiet. It's no problem. And all this—"Oh, taking stallions together is dangerous!" We never castrated horses in the Soviet Union or in Russia. Or previously, anywhere in the world. And now in America—"Oh, stallions, they're dangerous!" They castrate everything that moves.

My work with training horses started in the Soviet Union. I had extra-class trainers, professional trainers. And my horses were winning many competitions on a very high level. When I came to America, my view of training was that breeding and training always needed to be done together. Breeding is not something where you can do one thing and not do the other thing. You'll breed beautiful horses that won't be able to move, jump, or do anything. Then what? It's an animal, a working animal, a horse. By the way, this is the way that Americans look at it—they close them in somewhere, feed them, and then show the horse in an ugly stable and a bad place for horses to live. They need movement. They need *prostranstvo, chtoby dvigat'sia* [space to move around in]. "Look at this beautiful horse," and so on and so on. What is beautiful? Poor animal, nothing more.

I came to America with extra-class trainers, Pavel Sergeev, for example. Now he's the main trainer of the Russian Olympic team. I have lots of photos of him, jumping on my horses and so on. Only with professional trainers. After two years of working here in America, I suddenly understood that this is not the place that I needed to go. Far and away not the place. That's why I lost, of course. But, well. *Chto podelaesh'* [what can you do]? [laughs]

**Was it only after you moved to America that you began to be invited to international competitions?**

No. My horses were invited from the Soviet Union, they were [competing] internationally. I showed lots of my horses to European countries. They were mostly winning breeding competitions, but some of them were in international sport.

**Did you see your work on the international level as having any kind of opportunity or use in cultural diplomacy? Sort of in the same way that people characterize the Olympic games as useful for bridging cultural barriers that politics doesn't allow.**

Between us? Nothing. Nothing. Sadly, nothing. And you know why? Because I'm talking about horse sport. There's no sport. There's only speaking, and no professional work. When there's no professional work, **[1:40:00]** there will be no serious results, in anything. In politics, in anything.

**There was a news clip that I found, it was an American news clip from the nineties. It said that you were planning to bring thirty Akhal-Tekes to Wisconsin to sell, because the**

**market in Russia had fallen apart, because of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and people weren't buying Akhal-Tekes anymore. Does that sound accurate, or did they get that wrong?**

These American interviews, after that, I started to be very careful with Americans. After the journalists come, you can read things that you didn't ever say. And they put these ideas because *they* think like that. At first, I was mad when I understood that. After, I was sad. Like I told you, I stopped contacting people. I'm not interested in contacting these types of people, for whom to lie and to steal an idea and tell it like it's yours—in America, maybe half of the people can do that. Well, that's why I stopped contacting them. I don't like this way of thinking.

**So it sounds like you were able to continue selling Akhal-Tekes up until you decided to leave Russia altogether, right? And then you had to quickly leave.**

Selling anything is hard work.

**Oh, no, but not any more than before. That had not changed.**

No, no.

**Okay, that's what I mean. You mentioned last time that the bureaucrats who had been threatening you were probably glad to be rid of you. Why do you say that?**

Well, I know how they hated me. And I know how I hated them. And I knew how to make them *crazy* mad. To open my mouth in front of the people and say exactly who this person is in reality. [laughs]

**Did you ever get any sense after you left that there were any hard feelings among those bureaucrats that you were able to take all of these horses successfully to the United States?**

Of course. Many of them hated that that happened. I'll tell you, they hated me. They would love to kill me.

**Did you hear anything about consequences that they faced for letting this happen?**

No. I came with horses and I was working and I left Russia and Dubna and I didn't look back. I didn't care. I was not interested in what they were thinking, what happened to them. I know what happened with the barn that I gave to Igor Gerasimov. I was teaching him and so on. Everything went in a very bad way, and everything is bad there.

**What happened? What did he try to do and then what ended up happening?**

You remember, I'm already used to that. I would teach people, and after that, nothing happened. It means that I know how to work better than them. I was not lucky to give these horses to them. Well, the same with Igor. But he got everything. The super barn, super horses. Everything is

prepared, everything is organized. Where to get oats. Even the people I left with him. Even with all this. [It was] not serious, [difficult] work. Nothing.

**Did he sell most of the horses? When I looked, [1:45:00] it looked like there were not really many left.[11]**

Yes. He sold them. I don't know why, I don't know what he was doing. I know that he still doesn't know anything about the pedigrees. He doesn't understand anything in the lines. And so on. *On tipichnyi kommunisticheskii funktsioner. Bol'she nichego.* [He's a typical communist functionary. Nothing more.]

**I think that that is coming to the end of the questions that I had. You should feel free to say anything that you want to talk about.**

Here's what I wanted to say. My father Bruno was an extremely bright and smart person. Well, it happened that he moved to the Soviet Union. Well, on one hand, he was a communist. On the other hand, he was a very open person. And maybe at that time, when especially in America they were very aggressive against communists, maybe on one hand he believed in the ideal of communism. On the other hand, I think maybe he was scared for us. That's the reason why he moved.

But he taught me, first of all, to be yourself. That's the main thing. You don't need to be somebody in the crowd. You are you. Maybe you're a pig. Well, okay, what can you do? [laughs] You're a pig. Maybe you are not. But there were main criteria of his. Most of all, *ne byt' truslivym* [don't be a coward]. Don't be scared to say what you really think, on any level. Always say what you think. And that is one of the criteria that he taught me and I always do that. [laughs]

**I think that that's a very good note to end on. Thank you so much for the opportunity.**

You're very welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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[1] Bruno Pontecorvo's defection to the Soviet Union in 1950, particularly his reason for doing so, remains a subject of great controversy to this day. For two examples of scholarship that take different stances on this subject, see: Simone Turchetti, *The Pontecorvo Affair: A Cold War Defection and Nuclear Physics* (2012) and Frank E. Close, *Half-Life: The Divided Life of Bruno Pontecorvo, Physicist or Spy* (2015).

[2] Throughout this interview, Pontecorvo commonly, but not exclusively, uses the word "communist" as shorthand for official, card-carrying members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, as opposed to individuals who simply ascribe to communism as a belief system.

[3] See the interview here: https://physicstoday.scitation.org/do/10.1063/PT.6.4.20211115a/full

[4] As a timeline for the story that follows: Pontecorvo began purchasing horses in the Soviet Union in 1979. The first iteration of his club began that same year. He, together with members of the club, built his original wooden stable in 1980. In 1981, he established his club in an official capacity as the *Klub liubitelei verkhovnoi ezdy* [Club for Equestrian Hobbyists] under the auspices of the House of Scientists at the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research in

Dubna. His first large, permanent stable was built in Dubna in 1986. His second permanent stable, in Tverskaya oblast, was built in 1993. He evacuated his horses from Russia and relocated to Texas in 1997.

[5] Akhal-Teke horses are a rare and highly prized breed both in their country of origin, Turkmenistan, and internationally. Though commonly recognized by their metallic coats, not all Akhal-Tekes sport this characteristic. Historically, they are notable for their intelligence, endurance, and adaptability to harsh conditions, and thus their utility in military campaigns.

[6] In 1925, the Soviet government officially categorized Romani people living in the Soviet Union as a national minority, using the Russian word for gypsy, *tsygane*. References to "gypsies" throughout the interview refer to Soviet Roma.

[7] Soviet laws regarding the rights of private citizens to own horses were complex, regionally specific, and changed often throughout the 1980s. At the beginning of Pontecorvo's career working with horses in 1979, one of the prevailing relevant laws was the 1969 statute on collective farms: http://pravo.levonevsky.org/baza/soviet/sssr5092.htm According to the statute, governments in the Soviet republics could make exceptions to the general rules limiting personal ownership of farm animals depending on "*natsional'nykh osobennostei i mestnykh uslovii*" [national characteristics and local conditions].

[8] Dubna is a town approximately 75 miles outside Moscow that was home to the Soviet Union's primary international nuclear research facility, the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, where Pontecorvo's father Bruno was a prominent researcher.

[9] See the episode of this show here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hk36WFzKl-Q

[10] Pontecorvo uses "jail" here in a metaphorical sense, that his father was in a country where safety concerns made it difficult to always speak freely.

[11] A Russian news segment from September 2020 on the current state of the stables under Gerasimov's management can be viewed here: https://mir24.tv/news/16426454/ahaltekinskii-skakun-poroda-osobogo-naznacheniya