

Alexander Vologodsky

Imagine Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin, Father of Peoples, Tsar of
thirteen time zones from Berlin to Kamchatka,
Saying in 1947 to his ministers: let a railway be built between the
Yenisey and the Ob;
Let these two Siberian rivers, eight hundred miles apart, both
flowing—in summer at least—into the Arctic,

Be joined by a railway; let a hundred thousand prisoners work
in the snows and the bogs and the permafrost;
Let a railway be built for the sake of a railway, for the beauty and
grandeur of an unbending railway
For which there is no economic, and no—no in the least bit real-
istic—strategic requirement, a railway from nowhere to
nowhere;

Then think of a physicist, Alexander Vologodsky, happening
across a railway terminus in an Arctic swamp
During a vacation job in the sixties, and finding he couldn't for-
get this railway, and returning year after year,
Photographing overturned trains, sleeperless rails slung across
swamps, slogans in long-empty barracks:

RAILWAY WORKERS! KEEP THE RAIL BED IN GOOD CON-
DITION, DO NOT ALLOW TRAINS TO DERAIL.