THE GULAG MICROCOSM: LIFE AND DEATH AT THE WHITE-SEA BALTIC COMBINE OF THE NKVD, 1933-1941

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Abstract

The current work is devoted to the complex study of the Soviet forced labour camps, later referred to as "the GULAG." In opposition to the traditional interpretation of the view of labour camps as purely an instrument of exploitation and political repression (a sort of death or extermination camps) it adopts an approach, which, relying upon the concepts of "modernization" and "colonization," looks upon the GULAG as a colonizing institution. In doing this, it shows that apart from the tasks of the confinement of the criminals and their exploitation, the GULAG enterprises were burdened with the tasks of the social and cultural colonization of the regions where they were located. Under the slogans of the Soviet propaganda they introduced secular culture, education, and modern medicine to previously backward regions and transformed backward villages in the borderland regions of Russia into densely populated towns and settlements.

The dissertation presents a case study of the "GULAG colonization" through the forced labour institution on an example of the White-Sea Combine of the NKVD. It demonstrates how the through the use of the labour of its convicts BBK introduced medical facilities and educational institutions as well as dramatic and musical culture in Karelia.

Shifting from the general approach to the regional case-study, the work studies the introduction of the health care in the GULAG, medical and sanitary service in the camps and its efficiency in the 1930s. It explores the infamous "Great Terror" of 1937 in relation to the system of the forced labour in general and as a case study of an individual enterprise in particular. It shows the mechanisms of the repressive operations within the forced labour institution, its victims, and the consequences.

Finally, it devotes specific attention to the cultural life in the GULAG, focusing on propaganda, musical and theatrical life there and shows resilience of the dissident educated cultural elite of the Soviet Union against the ideological pressure of the Soviet regime even in the forced labour camps.

The current project reveals the existence of multiple perspectives on the Soviet labour camps on the part of its staff, special settlers, and the prisoners and to reconsider the concept of the labour camp and shows that it even administratively it was a much broader and socially more complicated unit. By taking as a unit of analysis not only the camp itself, but the Combine as a Soviet economic, social and cultural microcosm, which included camp zones, forced settlers villages and hired staff settlements, the most prominent being Medvezhegorsk (the centre of the BBK), the work aims to open a new perspective on a Soviet society at that time and to contribute to the task of obtaining a deeper understanding of the political, social and cultural aspects of the Soviet modernization process.

Discussing multiple problems and deficiencies of the system in the central management and in the region of Karelia, the work uses the above mentioned approach to explain for them. It shows how the GULAG labour, mortal for many of its prisoners was used for peaceful industrial, economic, and social colonization of the region, the ways the goals of the system exceeded the capacity of the leadership and its cadres to carry them out effectively, and the consequences of this situation.

Introduction

The chief aspiration of every historian of a tragic epoch is to demonstrate a decapitated head representing for him an object of exceptional sympathy.

—Paul Valery, *Collected works.*

The public discourse on the GULAG in Russia as well as abroad has largely been influenced by current political agenda. The notion of the "GULAG" itself, surrounded by the political and social myths balancing on the border between historical writing, fiction, and propaganda has become one of the most odious ideological products of the XX century.

Originally the concept "GULAG" was used to designate the system of the management of the places of confinement. The Chief Administration of Labour Camps of the Soviet Interior ministry, the NKVD, later the MVD was created in 1930 as a penitentiary system, entrusted with the task of the fulfillment of the economic plans of the Soviet state. It functioned until the early 1950s, housing penal labourers, who were engaged in forestry, mining, and construction. As such, it included separate departments, responsible for the management of the different branches of the network of the camps.

For a long time, however, the ex-prisoners' memoirs remained the only source of the information about the forced labour camps in the Soviet Union. Due to this fact the term 'GULAG' has acquired eschatological meaning. It meant the reservoir of the slave

labour (*zapovednik rabskogo truda*).[1] As such it was frequently associated with the famous 'archipelago' image, elaborated by Alexander Solzhenitsyn. As will be demonstrated later, this emotional image, the heritage of the Cold War and of the late Soviet period still to a certain extent dominates the GULAG studies.

The system of the places of confinement designated as "the GULAG" included, at different times, corrective labour camps, labour colonies, prisons, various kinds of special settlements (exile), [2] PWO camps, filtration camps, scientific bureaus.

The GULAG was always in a condition of flux, and mobility, reflecting the changes in the country and adjusting to the interests of the Soviet leadership. Thus, it is quite difficult to divide its history into clearly defined segments or determine definite causal factors for certain changes inside the system.

In opposition to the traditional interpretation of the view of labour camps as purely an instrument of exploitation and political repression (a sort of death or extermination camps) it adopts an approach, which, relying upon the concepts of "modernization" and "colonization," looks upon the GULAG as a colonizing institution. In doing this, it shows that apart from the tasks of the confinement of the criminals and their exploitation, the GULAG enterprises were burdened with the tasks

[1] L. Trus, "GULAG kak Zerkalo Realnogo Sozialisma ili Vvedenie v ekonomiku i soziologiy prinuditelnogo truda," *Vozvraschenie Pamyati,* vol. 2. (Novosibirsk: Sibirsky Khronograf, 1994), p. 1.
[2] Management of the special settlements was entrusted to one of the GULAG subsections. The term "spetsposelentsy" (special settlers) applied to relocated to the new territories peoples existed from the summer of 1930 till April of 1933, when after the reform of the system they came to be known as "*trudposelentsy*" (labor settlers) and special settlements as "*trudposeleniia*" ("special labor settlements). In 1944 the NKVD decree renamed the Department of Labor and Special Settlements of the GULAG (Otdel trudovykh i special'nykh poselenii GULAG into Department of Special Settlements of the NKVD, Otdel spetsposelenii OSP NKVD. From this time until the liquidation of the system the term "*spetspereselentsy*" (special settlers) came into use. *Istoriia Stalinskogo GULAGa*, vol. 5, 754. During the 1930s -1950s, this status extended upon hundreds of thousands of families. Usually areas of resettlement were located in northern and eastern regions of the USSR. The largest regions of exile were Kazakhstan, Western Siberia, Urals, European North, and Middle Asia. The first basic areas of resettlement were the North (Severnyi Krai), Urals, Western Siberia, but soon, the resettlement's scope extended to Kazakhstan and Middle Asia. This form of forced labor often involved colonial interests of the state including the colonization of sparsely populated regions of the country and those where access was difficult.

of the social and cultural colonization of the regions where they were located. The dissertation presents a case study of the "GULAG colonization" through the forced labour institution on an example of the White-Sea Combine of the NKVD. It demonstrates how the through the use of the labour of its convicts BBK introduced medical facilities and educational institutions as well as dramatic and musical culture in Karelia.

Current project aims to fit into the contemporary historiography of the GULAG which needs a deeper comparative perspective, a broader analytical vision of the phenomenon as an integral part of the 'Soviet civilization.'

The dissertation encompasses rather broad period of the 1930s. The GULAG was founded in 1931, when a number of large scale economic enterprises based on forced labour were established. The year 1941 marked yet another important benchmark. With the beginning of the Great Patriotic War institutional, social and economic changes in the GULAG completely alterered its outlook. The processes that took place there in the 1940s, however interesting, can not be encompassed in the framework of the current project. Finally, the White Sea Combine and the Camp NKVD, an important camp complex which is taken as a case study in the current project was dismantled in 1941.

The reason of still rather large time-scope of the dissertation lies in the fact that it is important not only to trace the genesis and development of the system itself, but also to encompass the most interesting phenomena connected with it. In particular, the dissertation focuses on the camp medicine, social, and cultural life and its influence on the region.

These phenomena are not only extremely interesting in themselves, but, considered in the framework of a modernizing and colonizing appproach, they disrupt

old cliches, such as one of " extermination camps" (*istrebitelno-trudovie lagerya,*) and open a new vista on the GULAG, on the Soviet society in the 1930s, and on the adaptability, resistance, and creativeness of human nature in general.

The experience of being a prisoner there can be called an extreme one, on the other hand it was organized according to the norms and rules prevalent in the society at large. Only these norms and rules had undergone a very meticulous regimentation by its creators and coordinators (the NKVD authorities) – obviously with the aim of providing strict control and maximized exploitation of the prisoners' labour in the camps.

However, due to many subjective and objective factors, and no doubt, as a result of an instinctive resistance of human nature to being subdued to the stiff, strictly regimented, saturated with ideological cliches automaton prototype of a "proper conduct," these norms and rules were perverted. Thus, an ineradicable contradiction between the authorities' intentions and the actual reality was created.

Some historians note that the social aspects of the period under consideration are not so much interesting than those from the later, "Babylonian" period, starting from 1946. Supposedly the GULAG of the 1930s housed a grey mass of "Ivanov Denisovichei," criminals, and peasants.[3]

The current project aims to demonstrate that the social history of this period is no less important. For in a way it prepared the basis for "cloacae" of later times. According to Aristotle, "to understand the phenomenon one needs to explore its origins." From this point of view the GULAG of the 1930s offers the key to understand the culture of

[3] Interview with Arseny Borisovich Roginsky , the chief of the "Memorial" Society. Moscow, July, 2005.

resistance of the GULAG in the second half of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s.

The period of the 1930s has its own specifics in the history of the GULAG when compared to the later period. During "the heyday of Stalinism," camp social life was was influenced by intense surveillance by Soviet Secret State Police (the NKVD) and periodic repressive measures. This makes the task of revealing the multiplicity of historical processes and voices behind the NKVD surveillance, terror, and the Soviet propaganda more important.

Additionally, since documentary collections of the materials on the GULAG management have been published extensively as well as the monographs based on such collections, thus creating a coherent and comprehensive picture of the GULAG institution in general, [4] the approach towards the GULAG history through a case-study of a particular labour camp seems to be one of the most productive ones. Recent works, following this approach, have focused on the economic functioning as well as social life in particular camps or camp complexes.[5] Following these examples, the dissertation undertakes a case-study of a regional forced-labour camp complex, the White-Sea Combine and the Camp NKVD (*Belomoro-Baltiiskii kombinat I lager NKVD*), later referred to as the BBK when the Combine is meant and the BBLag when the camp as a place of confinement and a residence of the prisoners is meant) during the 1930s.[6] Particular emphasis is placed on its social and cultural history.

[4] *GULAG: Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei, 1918-1960. Sbornik dokumentov.* A. I. Kokurin, N. V. Petrov editors in chief (Moscow, 2002); *Istoriia Stalinskogo GULAGa. Konets 1920-kh – pervaia polovina 1950-x godov: Sobranie Dokumentov v 7 tomakh.* A. B. Bezborodov and V. M. Khrustalev editors in chief (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004).
[5] N.A. Morozov, *Osobie lagerya MVD v Komi ASSR, 1948-1954* (Siktivkar, 1998); A. Shirokov, *Dalstroy: predistoria i pervoe desyatiletie* (Magadan, 2000); *GULAG v Komi krae, 1929-1956* (Ekaterinburg, 2000); V.A. Berdinskikh, *Istoria odnogo lagerya: Vytlag* (Moscow, 2001), etc.
[6] BBLag, entrusted with the task of constructing of the White-Sea Canal, and forestry works in the nearby areas, was created on 16 November 1931 on the basis of the Solovetsky ITL OGPU and closed on 18 September 1941. *Spravochnik po GULAGu,* pp. 7-8.

The history of the BBK NKVD can be conceptualized as an experiment to use the forced labour institution for colonization, industrialization and "socialist construction," including political, ideological and cultural undertakings. These undertakings are the main subject of the dissertation. In words of an editor of the collection of the memoirs composed by the camp actors,

No matter how paradoxically it may sound, it is an aesthetic element that is lacking in the works of historians and memoirists who have focused their attention on the political and social aspects of the GULAG. This mighty institution possessed not only its economy and peculiarities of daily life (*bit)* but also worked out its culture and philosophy.[7]

By the means of combining a general approach towards the GULAG and a specific one through a case-study of a forced labour camp, the dissertation aims to expose the picture of the camps' system as the contradiction of its bureaucratic concept. It aims to reveal the gap between the concept of the GULAG as seen from the center, an extension of the reconstruction of social reality, and utopia that lay at the heart of Stalinism and informed the thinking behind the Five Year Plans, and the actual reality influenced by the resources, cadres and response of the people and resources involved on the local level. It also aims to disclose and analyze the factors that shaped 'the GULAG society.' Finally, the dissertation explores how the changes in the perceptions of the authorities and their politics (from the *perekovka* policy to the fulfillment of the economic plans by any means) shaped the GULAG society and vice versa: how responses on the local level influenced the policy of the central apparatus.

[7] M. Korallov, introduction, *Teatr GULAGa: Vospominania, Ocherki* (Moscow: Memorial, 1995), p. 3.

The understanding of the GULAG society and culture, largely remaining a domain of popular literature, is still in a large part formed on the basis of myths about it as developed in the memoirs, mainly by the 'prominent' political prisoners.[8]

While the main focus of attention is devoted to the social and cultural dimensions of the system, and life in the camps, still, a brief review is provided on the history of the GULAG institution, which shows how the system was generated and how it operated. The first part of the dissertation discusses the principles of the GULAG management on the levels of central and local administration, and the actual implementation of ambitious economic, social, and cultural plans of the BBK NKVD. The second part of the dissertation is devoted to different social aspects of the camps, such as medical service in the camps, cultural, and artistic life. Finally, the study attempts to reconstruct some dimensions of the spiritual life of the GULAG inhabitants and the way they retained their "humanity" in conditions of ruthless exploitation in the camps.

The first chapter, "The History of the GULAG : From Myth-Making Towards Analysis and Back" is devoted to the historiographical review of existing literature and the sources on the subject. In particular, it discusses current trends in the study of the GULAG on examples of recent works, approaches, existing conceptual frameworks, problems of study, and the sources. On an example of the existing sources on the White-Sea Baltic Combine and the Camp NKVD it offers a review of various possible approaches towards the GULAG, including social history, oral history, and cultural studies.

[8] Alexander Solzhenytsin, Evgenia Ginzburg, Varlam Shalamov and others.

The second chapter, called "The GULAG Institution and Its Inhabitants" attempts to grasp the development of the network of the camps in the course of time from 1933 to 1941 as a penitentiary and an industrial complex. The major source base for this chapter consists of the materials from GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation). The NKVD orders starting from the 1933 till 1937, and the instructions and the protocols from different departments of the GULAG are especially valuable. The chapter touches upon such issues as the initial goals of the GULAG coordinators (the NKVD chiefs), how their priorities changed and the ways they adapted their policy to the reality of the camps. The chapter also comments upon on the most important benchmarks of the system's history. The chapter also analyzes the mechanisms of the GULAG economy on the central and local levels. It shows, that the economic side of the system was represented by the condition of chronic deficit and unrealizable economic plans. In planning and organization of administrative and human resources the principle of the economic expediency came into conflict with the political considerations, and this contradiction became more poignant with the worsening of political climate, resulting in repressions and exterminations of the "enemies of the people."

The second part of the chapter is more specific. It is devoted to the White-Sea Combine and the camp NKVD. This section pays attention to the camp apparatus, its management, and provides a social study of its personnel. After a part devoted to the history of the BBK NKVD and the circumstances that lay behind it and influenced the development of the enterprise and its role in the region, it focuses on the ways of recruitment and social profiles of the BBK personnel, in particular, the camp guards and the mid-rank administrative staff and patterns of building the career within the GULAG providing the perspective of the GULAG as an arena for a career take-off. As

major sources for this kind of research the application files for the job of a camp guard, the autobiographies of the applicants, and the materials on the members of the electoral commissions for the elections to the Supreme Soviets are used. The chapter explores how in the course of the 1930s the social composition of the BBLag prisoners gradually changed, reflecting broader patterns in the punitive system in general and provides glimpses into the social and cultural life at the Combine.

The third chapter, "Stalinist Terror in the Soviet GULAG : The Case of the White-Sea Combine and the Camp NKVD" focuses on the NKVD policy in the camp system. It elaborates upon the informers network and its activity in the camps, institutional history of the Third Departments (or "Operative-Chekist" Departments) and the training of the NKVD officers for work in the camps. It traces how what was happening in the country in general influenced the changes that occurred in the camp system during the 1930s. This part of the dissertation analyzes criminal cases of the 'counter-revolutionary' and 'anti-Soviet' organizations, espionage, and sabotage, instigated in the GULAG at the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s. Finally, it provides an example of the mechanism and patterns of implementation of the so-called 'Great Terror' within the camp system on the example of the BBK NKVD and underrtakes a social study of the victims and the executors of the Terror in this particular camp.

The fourth chapter, "Introduction of Health Care and Medical Service in the GULAG" introduces a brief history of the organization of medical service in the camps. It provides an analysis of the data on prisoners' diseases and mortality rates, focuses on major 'camp diseases,' epidemics, the ways of their treatment, and prophylactics, and development of medical research network within the GULAG. It comments upon the ways of recruitment, living and working conditions of the camp medical staff.

The aim of the chapter is to reveal the patterns of development of the health care system in the camps in the 1930s, and its implementation in the Karelian GULAG. The primary material for this kind of research basically consists of the orders of the NKVD and the materials of the GULAG Sanitary Section. Memoirs of the camp medical staff (hired and the prisoner one), and accounts of their imprisoned patients contain primarily anecdotal evidence and can not serve as a basis of empirical research. Thus, they are used as a complementary material for the chapter.

The last chapter, "Painting the Dogs into the Racoons: Soviet Culture in the GULAG," starts with exploration of the cultural-educative service within the GULAG. It focuses on the implementation of propaganda and the cultural-educative policy in the labour camps, means of its implementation, changes in its focus through time.The second part of the chapter is devoted to the cultural life within the GULAG. It touches such questions as camp censorship, the persecutions inside the artistic milieu of the GULAG in 1937, the phenomenon of art patronage and the kinds of art performed in the camps. Finally, the chapter focuses on the cultural life within the BBK NKVD. The chapter explores continuities between the earlier camp cultural life in the area in the 1920s and the one of 1930s. It attempts to reconstruct the pastime of the prisoners and the hired staff of the camp and to demonstrate how within the framework of the forced labour institution a network of cultural and educative activities was created that conformed to professional standards. From this chapter it is clear that this network was based on the intellectual resources of the camp prisoners.

The chapter will provide some insights into the functioning of the major cultural institution of the BBK (The Central Theatre of the BBK NKVD). On the basis of the archival documents pertaining to the functioning of the theatre (the orders and the

correspondence), and the reviews of theatrical productions in the local newspaper this section of the dissertation provides a view "from within" on the camp theatrical life.

On the basis of the archival materials, the chapter will also attempt to reconstruct certain dimensions of the social life of the prisoners, and the representatives of the hired staff of the camp complex: their pastime, interrelationships, aspirations, morale, hopes, and attempts to come to grips with the reality of the Soviet forced labour camp. The chapter traces how the implementation and reinforcement of the official Soviet culture and propaganda in the region was accompanied by physical repression of ideological opponents within the framework of the BBK.

Finally, it is necessary to mention major problems encountered in the project.

The first problem, that is also the major problem of social history as an analytical approach towards historical studies of the Soviet regime in Russia, is one of narrow and insufficient source base. Because the existing archival materials are so scanty, the anecdotal nature of most of the existing evidence is also a problem in some cases. It is very difficult or impossible to actually reveal some broader patterns or make conclusions.

The next problem, that is the direct outcome of the first one, is the problem of balancing the general material on the system as a whole and the local material. It is especially evident in the chapter on the health care within the GULAG. For the reason that the material on the medical service inside the White-Sea Baltic Combine itself is scarce, it has to rely on the orders and statistical materials of the GULAG Sanitary Department. Nevertheless, it attempts to explore patterns of implementation of medical service in the BBK on a broader background of materials on other camps. Even the existing source base is rather narrow. It is represented by the orders and instructions

from the center (the GULAG apparatus in Moscow). Unfortunately, the reports and any materials from the camps themselves (which were regularly sent to the GULAG administrative centre in Moscow) are absent from the archives.

The same can be said about the third chapter. Its first part is based on the general material on the GULAG, collected from the State Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow, while the second part focuses on the local camp in Karelia.

In the chapter on cultural history, because of absence of the actual orders of the Cultural-Educative Department of the camp, one of the major sources is the press. The problem is to what extent the information provided in the camp press (as in any other Soviet newspaper) can be taken for granted? The author of the current work assumed that one can trust the factual information contained in the reports on the cultural activities as well as the theatrical reviews.

Any camp included not just the prisoners and administration, but it also involved special settlers, contracted workers. Due to the fact that the 'proper' regime was not kept, the isolation was partial or non existent, and all inhabitants of the camp engaged in daily contact with each other.

Chapter I The History of the GULAG: From Myth-Making Towards Analysis and Back

Literature and the Sources

The first descriptions of the GULAG appeared in the Soviet press at the beginning of the 1930s. These articles were part of the propaganda campaign to praise the industrial success of the Soviet state, collective labour as a process, through which the USSR modernized itself, and to demonstrate the success of *perekovka,* ("reforging"), a program of creating a new, "Soviet" man through forced labour and ideological conditioning .[9]

The first significant work on the camps in the USSR, devoted to the construction of the White-Sea Baltic Canal*,* was written at the beginning of the thirties in fulfillment of an order by the OGPU (the Soviet Secret State Police) and the Communist party. [10]

The authors of this collective work represented the literary elite of the Soviet Union at that time and included such famous Soviet writers as Maxim Gorky, Mikhail Zoschenko, and Viktor Shklovskii. Instead of life inside the forced labour camps they were shown "Potemkin's villages," for the OGPU controlled not only the project, but also the information about it. The work, composed by a literary *kolkhoz,* had its various parts compiled with the help of the modernist literary technique of montage. This work, focused on the labour camp in Karelia, portrayed imprisonment as human, redemptive, and curative.The GULAG stories, presented there*,* were organized around the motif of positive change over time. Their characteristic feature was Manichaean plot, where "struggle between forces of good and evil" was taking place with an optimistic end,

[9] S. Firin, "Moskva-Volga," *Bolshevik,* Issue 20, Part 1 (March 1935): 39-52. Budapest, Open Society Archives. ; —. "Moskva-Volga," Issue 21, Part 2 (April 1935): 38-72. Budapest, Open Society Archives.
[10] M.Gorky, L. Averbach, ed., *Belomorsko-Baltiiskii Kanal imeni Stalina: Istoria stroitelstva 1931-1934* [Stalin's Baltic Canal: the history of the construction, 1931-1934] (Moscow: OGIZ, 1998).

(as in all other Socialist Realist texts), informed by the idea of "reforging," implying qualitative change of man into productive and worthy member of a society, taken from Marx's political philosophy. These GULAG accounts legitimized the rapidity of industrialization, and the use of forced labour.

From the end of the 1930s any references to the GULAG in the public sphere disappeared. This silence was broken in the 1950s, when due to the circulation of the secretly typed texts, banned in the Soviet Union (*Samizdat*) the memoirs of the ex-prisoners of the GULAG were introduced to the Soviet public.

Especially popular became the works by Alexander Solzhenitsyn.[11] *The GULAG Archipelago*, along with other published well-known literary memoirs by 'prominent' political prisoners, such as Evgenia Ginzburg,[12] Varlam Shalamov,[13] can be designated as the literary canon of writing on the GULAG, providing a 'standard' vision and understanding of the phenomenon of the Soviet forced labor camps. Many later memoirists stated their belonging to the tradition, started by Solzhenitsyn. Often, even when the later accounts did not share his view of the camps, they started a retrospective dialog with this author.

Initially historians of the GULAG in Russia conceived of it as an inherent part of the history of the atrocities committed by the Soviet regime. So the first academic works on the GULAG at the beginning of the 1990s studied it within the concext of the NKVD repressive operations, targeted at definite groups of the 'enemies of the people.'

[11] A. Solzhenitsyn, *Archipelag GULAG, 1918-1956: Opyt khudozestvennogo issledovania* [The GULAG Archipelago: An attempt at literary investigation] (Moscow: Novyi mir, 1990) ;—. *Odin den Ivana Denisovicha* [One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich] (Moscow: Russkii put, 1997).
[12] E. Ginzburg, *Krutoy Marshrut* [The steep route] (New York: Possev- USA, 1985).
[13] V. Shalamov, *Kolymskie rasskazii*[Kolyma Tales] (Paris: YMCA Press, 1985).

These operations included the 'dekulakization' campaign of the beginning of the 1930s, the complex repressions of the years 1937-1938 ('The Great Terror'), and 'national operations' of the deportations of entire peoples in order to eliminate the danger from the potential 'fifth column' in the borderland regions of the USSR. [14]

Soon the first publications appeared on the basis of the archival material on the number of the GULAG inmates in different periods which generated lively discussions.[15]

Further studies have explored the connection between the escalation in political repressions and persecutions that took place in the Soviet Union in 1937-1939, changes in the situation inside the camp system, and the number of the persecuted inmates of the GULAG.[16]

Recently scholarly attention has been directed towards publications of the documentary collections related to the activity of the central GULAG and the NKVD apparatuses[17] and the complex study of the regional camps.[18]

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[14] V. Yakovlev, Yu. Burzev, *Konzentrazionnie lagerya v SSSR* (Munich, 1955); M. Smirnov, S. Sigachev, "Sistema mest zaklychenia v SSSR. 1929-1960," in *Sistema ispravitelno-trudovih lagerei v SSSR, 1923-1960,* ed. M. Smirnov (Moscow: Zvenja, 1998); *GULAG : Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei, 1918-1960*, ed. A.I. Kokurin, N.V. Petrov (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia", 2000) ; N. Petrov, *Istoria Imperii GULAG.* Available at: http:// www.pseudology.org/GULAG/GULAG.htm, Internet; P. Solomon, *Soviet Criminal Justice under Stalin* (Cambridge, 1996); R. Conquest, *The Great Terror* (London, 1968), J. A. Getty, O. Naumov, *The Road to Terror* (New Haven, 1999); . O. Khlevniyk, *The History of the GULAG: From Collectivization to the Great Terror,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); P. M. Polian, *Ne po svoei vole… Istoriia i geografia prinuditel'nykh migratsii v SSSR* (Moscow: OGI Memorial, 2001).

[15] S. Kuzmin, "Lagerniki" in *Molodaia Gvardia,* no. 3,4,5, 1993; V. Zemskov, "GULAG: istoriko-sotsiologicheskii aspekt," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania,* 1991, no. 6, pp. 10-27, no. 7, pp. 3-16. Available at http://www.hrono.ru/statii/2001/zesmkov.htm, Internet; accessed on 7.02.2003; "Zaklychennie v 1930-e godi: sotsialno-demographicheskie problemi" in *Otechestvennaia Istoria,* 1997, no. 4;

[16] A. Getty, G. Rittersporn, "Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-War Years, " in *American Historical Review,* October 1993; O. Khlevniyk, *The History of the GULAG: From Collectivization to the Great Terror,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

[17] *Istoriia Stalinskogo GULAGa, Konets 1920-kh – pervaia polovina 1950-x godov: Sobranie Dokumentov v 7 tomakh*. A. B. Bezborodov and V. M. Khrustalev editors in chief (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004); vol. 4 *Chislennost I usloviia soderzania.*

[18] V. G. Makurov, ed., *GULAG v Karelii: sbornik dokumentov I materialov 1930-1941.* (Petrozavodsk, 1992; N. Morozov, *GULAG v Komi Krae 1929-1956* (Siktivkar: Siktivkarskii Universitet, 1997); A.

Upon the opening of the archives in the first half of the 1990s, new archival documents became available on the special settlements of the GULAG.[19] Despite their diversity, these works can be divided into two principal groups on the basis of the thematic and chronological principles of their research methods. The system of the special settlements of the 1930s is often studied in the interrelation with the history of the Russian peasantry, especially with the collectivization campaign, subsequent 'dekulakization' campaign and the re-settlement of the "kulaks." In a veiled form, the historiography of the "kulak exile" started from the 1960s[20], whereas the end of the 1980s and the 1990s witnessed an influx of historical studies on this topic.[21]

The system of the special settlements of the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1950s has traditionally been viewed within the context of the "ethno-political deportations."[22] Recent changes in the political climate in Russia resulted in the

Shirokov, *Dalstroy: predistoriia I pervoe desyatiletie* (Magadan, 2000); V. Berdinskikh, *Istoriia odnogo lageria (Viatlag)* (Moscow: Izd-vo "Agraf", 2001).

[19] In October, 1940 the GULAG system of special settlements consisted of 1645 settlements and was controlled by 160 regional and 741 district administrations. Settlements housed 258448 families (the general figure for all special settlers accounts for 959472 persons). By 1 January 1953 the number of the special settlers amounted to 2753356. Zemskov, *Spetspereselentsy*, 205.

[20] V. A. Sidorov, "Meropriiatiia po trydovomy perevospitaniiu byvshikh kulakov," *Voprosy Istorii* 11 (1964); N. A. Ivnitskii, Klassovaia bor'ba v derevne i likvidatsiia kulachestva kak klassa, 1929-1932 (Moscow: Nauka, 1972).

[21] N. A. Ivnitskii, *Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie: nachalo 30-kh gg*. (Moscow: Magist, 1997); T. I. Slavko, *Kulatskaia ssylka na Urale, 1930-1936* (Moscow: Rosgorarkhiv, 1995); V. Ia. Shashkov, *Raskulachivanie v SSSR i sud'by spetspereselentsev,* 1930-1954 (Murmansk: Murmanskii pedagogicheskii institut, 1992); idem, *Repressii v SSSR protiv krest'ian i sud'by spetspereselentsev Karelo-Murmanskogo kraia* (Murmansk: IPP "Sever," 2000); S. A. Krasil'nikov, *Serp i molokh. Krest'ianskaia ssylka v Zapadnoi Sibiri v 1930-e gg.* (Moscow: ROSPEN, 2003). For reviews of publications on this topic, see Krasil'nikov, *Serp*; O. A. Nikitina, *Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie v Karelii* (Petrozavodsk: Karel'skii Nauchnyi tsentr RAN, 1997) and *Istoriia Stalinskogo GULAGa*, vol. 5, 26-27; V. Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy v SSSR, 1930-1960.* (Moscow: Nauka, 2003);

[22] A. Nekrich, *Nakazannye Narody* (New York: Khronika, 1978); N. F. Bugai, *Iocif Stalin – Lavrentiiu Beriia: "Ikh nado deportirovat'…," Dokumenty, Fakty, Kommentarii* (Moscow: Druzhba Narodov, YEAR); idem*, L. Beriia – I. Stalinu: "Soglasno Vashemy ukazaniiu…"* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 1995); N. F. Bugai, A. M. Gonov, *Kavkaz: Narody v eshelonakh, 20 – 60-e* gody (Moscow: Insan, 1998); N. F. Bugai, A. N. Kotsonis, "*Obiazat' NKVD SSSR . . . byselit' grekov*" (Moscow: Insan, 1999); V. I. Passat, *Trudovye traditsii istorii Moldovy: 1940-1950* (Moscow: Terra, 1994); A. A. German, Istoriia Respubliki nemtsev Povolzh'ia v sobytiiakh, faktakh, dokumentakh (Moscow: Gorika, 1996); D. V. Shabaev, Pravda o vyselenii balkartsev (Nal'chik: El'brus, 1994); V. Ubushaev, *Kalmyki: Vyselenie i vozvrashchenie* (Elista: Sanan, 1991); P. M. Polian, *Ne po svoei vole… Istoriia i geografia prinuditel'nykh migratsii v SSSR* (Moscow: OGI Memorial, 2001); V. Berdinskikh, *Spetsposelentsy: Politicheskaia ssylka narodov Rossii* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2005).

publication of works that tend to justify the existence of the GULAG, and depict it as an ordinary and even necessary state institution.[23]

Similarly to Russian academic studies, Western literature on the camps has also evolved from emphasizing purely repressive function of the GULAG towards the exploration of its economic and social aspects.[24]

In the light of newly published sources many of the recent studies of the Soviet Union are directed towards stressing factor of spontaneity in functioning of the state apparatus, on the contradictions and frictions between the central and regional authorities, and among the local party officials, Soviet repressive apparatus and the common people. Nowhere else did these contradictions manifested themselves so poignantly as in the GULAG system, and nowhere else did they influenced to such an extent human destinies. A number of scholars have already produced nuanced insights into the development and operations of specific camps, into the impact of individual and general factors, and into center-periphery dynamics of the GULAG.[25]

[23]Bratyschenko, Y. Angarsk kak ditya lagernoi zoni. [Angarsk as a Child of the Camp Zone.) Angrask, 2005.

[24] S. Swianiewicz, *Forced Labour and Economic Development: An Inquiry into the Experience of Soviet Industrialization* (Westport, 1985); E. Bacon, *the GULAG at War: Stalin's Forced Labour System in the Light of the Archives* (New York: New York University Press, 1994). R. Stettner, *Archipel GULAG: Stalins Zwangslager: Terrorinstrument und Wirtschatfsgigant: Entstehung, Organization und Function des Sowjetischen Lagersystems, 1928-1956* (Paderborn, 1996); *The Economics of Forced Labor: The Soviet GULAG,* P. Gregory and V. Lazarev editors in chief (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2003). A. Applebaum, *GULAG: a History* (New York : Doubleday, 2003). It is highly debatable whether this book can be included into a group of academic studies, for it presents a slightly revised version of Solzhenytsyn's *The GULAG Archipelago*. S. Kuzmin, "Lagerniki" in *Molodaia Gvardia,* no. 3,4,5, 1993; D. Dallin, Nicholaevsky, *Forced Labour in Soviet Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947); R. Conquest, *Kolyma: The Arctic Death Camps* (New York, 1978). For an analytical review of recent Western literature on the GULAG see S. Ertz, *Tracking Down the "Real" GULAG: Explorations into the Administration of the Stalinist Forced Labour Camp System*, PERSA Working paper No. 33.

[25] David J. Nordlander, "Origins of a GULAG Capital: Magadan and Stalinist Control in the Early 1930," in: Slavic Review, vol. 57, no. 4 (1998), 791-812; Golfo Alexopoulos, "Amnesty 1945: The Revolving Door of Stalin's Gulag," *Slavic Review,* vol. 64, no. 2 (Summer 2005), 274-306; Christopher Joyce, "The Soviet Penal Ssytem and the Great Terror," in *Stalin's Terror Revisited,* ed. Melanie Ilic (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 90-115.

The approach of studying the GULAG as a repressive tool of the regime is still the most popular among Russian and Western scholars. On the one hand, it has created a possibility of exploring the connection between the punitive and corrective-labour policies of the Soviet state on the one hand and between the changes in the numbers and social composition of the GULAG prisoners and the repressive operations of the Soviet state on the other hand. Thus, one can trace the ways the NKVD repressive operations influenced the situation within the camps and find explanations of the processes going on there through the prism of the decision making process in the Soviet ruling circles.

This approach still generates a biased vision of the subject. Many aspects of the GULAG system can not be understood or explained exclusively in the context of the repressive policy. Some historians fail to make a distinction between the concept of "the GULAG" as a penitentiary institution and as a political phenomenon, an embodiment of the repressive essence of the regime (an understanding resulting from ex-prisoners' memoirs). More often those historians who study the repressive policy in the USSR fall prey to this mistake. They endow the term "GULAG" with a broadly descriptive and collective meaning.[26] This fallacy frequently leads to false conclusions. For example, it blurs the fact that the GULAG was not a direct mechanism of political repression, but one of the structural subsections of the NKVD, while the planning and implementation of the repressive operations (arrests, deportations and persecutions) were carried out by other departments of the NKVD.

Among recent studies of the 'Great Terror' as such in Soviet Union there are three positions that need correction. First of all, according to the conventional view, recently

[26] G. Ivanova, *GULAG v systeme totalitarnogo gosudarstva* (Moscow, 1997); A. Applebaum, *GULAG: a History* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

expressed by Oleg Khlevniyk, the state terror as a method of resolving the problems specific to certain periods, during the years 1937 and 1938 was used to replace the old political elite with a new generation of Stalinist careerists and also to purge the country of a potential fifth column in case of war. In other words it aimed at the elimination of those suspected of disloyalty and treason.[27] Many regional books of memory, however, that have been published in the recent years, confirm Alexander Solzhenitsyn's argument that the majority of the victims of the Great Terror were ordinary people accused of political crimes. In Karelia the share of the people of Finnish origins was remarkably high.

Secondly, a popular issue of the interconnection between political repressions in the country at the end of the 1930s and the course of the increase of its economic plans has generated certain stereotypes. Some historians of the GULAG, such as Edvard Bacon, claimed that a constant need for workers became especially acute in the second half of the thirties and this factor was one of the main motives behind the purges of the "Great Terror." The necessity to fill the camps with the labour force in order to fulfill the NKVD output production plans encouraged local NKVD offices to determine the number of the people to be arrested, executed and sent to the labour camps.[28]

Indeed, there was a certain interconnection between the positive results of camp labour and the repressive state policy. The "achievements" of the camp construction in the eyes of the government removed the limitations on the overall number of convicts in the country that functioned in the 1920s. This led to the indirect strengthening of repression. The expansion of the camp system in 1933-1934 was connected with the

[27] O. Khlevniyk, *The History of the GULAG,* p. 330.
[28] E. Bacon, *The Gulag at War: Stalin's Forced Labour System in the Light of the Archives,* (New York, 1994), p. 35.

notorious "seven grains order" dated August 7, 1932, that preconceived a confinement in the camps for the "theft of the state property." But it does not mean that had it not been for the camps system, certain economic projects either would not have been carried out or would have required the hiring of workers.

There were more than one million forced settlers at the NKVD disposal. Their participation in the camps' activities was outlined in basic regulations on organization of the camps' economic activity in the first half of the 1930s. That their role in the production process happened to be on a small scale was most probably caused by more or less sufficient numbers of prisoners in the camps. If the latter were insufficient, there was no reason that would hinder the development of centralized economic structures based on the forced settlers' labour analogous to the camp ones. Thus, it is reasonable to speak about the presence of a complex set of interdependent circumstances that influenced the decisions of the authorities. The most recent studies of the GULAG admitted that it is not possible to trace a direct connection between the political terror (from the point of view of the numbers and professional qualifications of those arrested and sent to the camps) and the economic demands of the system.[29]

Finally, in some of these studies investigation of the real logic of the development of the GULAG economy and its connections with the repressive policy of the Stalinist regime gave rise to other mythologies, such as the explanation of the high number of executions during the "Great Terror" of 1937 and 1938 through "the Gulag's inability to accommodate the enormous influx of new inmates."[30] Indeed, the massive influx of convicts into the Gulag camps during "the Great Purges" was not a desirable outcome,

[29] Bezborodov, A., Khrustalev, V., ed. (2004), The History of the Stalin's GULAG. The End of the 1920-s–the beginning of the 1950-s: The Collection of the Documents, Moscow. Vol. 3, The GULAG Economy, p. 47.
[30] Gregory, P., and Lazarev, V. *The Economics of Forced Labour: The Soviet GULAG,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 192.

but caused a crisis in the system which was unprepared to host such a large number of prisoners.

However, as the haphazard attempts of the NKVD to organize new forestry complex camps with the lack of elementary conditions of survival demonstrate, this argument in itself cannot constitute sufficient grounds for claiming it as the main reason for the persecutions. First of all, because the number of those persecuted in 1937-1939 was insignificant in comparison with the overall GULAG population. During the years 1937-1938 2.5 million people were arrested (2.5% of the population). Of these, political cases accounted for 1,344,923 arrests, and 581,692, or 50.7% of the arrested were sentenced to capital punishment.[31] By January 1, 1937 the overall number of prisoners in the GULAG amounted to 1,196,369 people. Secondly, the motives for these persecutions were purely political.

Even in the cases where Stalin by un coup de plume decided the fate of one or another NKVD official, he was deeply influenced by his closest circle, first of all by being dependent on the information he was provided with by his associates. He never went to the remote camp complexes, never checked upon their work or witnessed economic and social processes taking place there.

The GULAG economy or, as it is often called, "slave labour" economy has also become a popular subject in the US. Recent studies tend to focus on the origins of the GULAG as a state economic agency, its functioning, the efficacy of the forced labour, and the question of the interconnection between political repressions and the intensification of the five-year economic plans in the Soviet Union. The GULAG is

[31] Zemskov, V. (1997), "Zaklychennie v 1930-e godi: sotsialno-demographicheskie problemi," *Otechestvennaia istoria,* no. 4, p. 60.

often conceived of in terms of a "reservation of slave labour," and as such is often juxtaposed to "normal" economic development of the Western European states.[32]

A number of recent academic studies of the GULAG heavily rely on the official sources, (data, decrees, reports, memoranda), in other words, the materials, representing the perspective of the GULAG officials. As a result, the vision of the complexity of the system, and the link between its social and economic aspects as well as its temporal dynamics is sometimes blurred.

For example, it is a well-known fact, that by the beginning of the 1950s the GULAG became a cumbersome, expendable, and economically unprofitable mechanism. The last years of the GULAG existence are regarded as a declaration of the economic bankruptcy of the Soviet state.[33] This statement, however, frequently results in simplifications such as viewing the "coerced labour economy" as an expendable, doomed and ineffective mechanism as opposed to the 'market economy.' As a result, the important questions such as "why the system's economy functioned in the 1930s, and witnessed a slow collapse from the second half of the 1940s?" remain unanswered.

The institutional history of the GULAG enables one to explore the history of the camps' system in its dynamics through concentrating on the definite functions of the GULAG and contributes towards the evaluation of its role in the history of the country and its industrial development. In such studies the GULAG is sometimes linked with

[32] Gregory, *Economics of Forced Labor*.
[33] Gregory, *Economics of Forced Labor,* p. 196.

the broader history of the Soviet punitive system, its genesis, political and ideological origins and also its structural and administrative aspects.[34]

Recently in response to the enormous broadening of the source base, Western scholars have made attempts to develop and establish new methodological and conceptual approaches to the subject. Steven Barnes and later Kate Brown have called for the need to scrutinize complex social and cultural practices inside the camps and to relate them to characteristics and dynamics of the Soviet system at large.[35]

Apart from the newly declassified archival sources, the study of the GULAG can rely now on the abundance of memoirs describing the human camp destinies in all their diversity and incredibility, opening a perspective towards life experience of diverse social and national groups with their subculture, art, and philosophy.

Pursued along these lines, and adopting the approach of Soviet modernization and colonization, the current project aims to juxtapose complex and diversified interpretations to the schematic and moralistic approaches to the GULAG that have dominated the literature for decades and to contribute into the current debate in the Western academia on the essence of the Soviet regime, or as it is sometimes called after an American historian, "Soviet" or "Stalinist" "civilization,"[36] and on the interpretations of the further course of the Soviet and later Russian history.

A regional camp study will be applied in the current work as a productive approach. It demands proper balance between the general and the particular.

[34] I. Dobrovolsky, ed., *GULAG: Ego stroiteli, obiteteli i geroi* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1998); G. Ivanova, *GULAG v systeme totalitarnogo gosudarstva* (Moscow, 1997); M. Jakobson*, Origins of the GULAG : the Soviet prison camp system, 1917-1934* (Kentucky:University Press of Kentucky, 1993);
[35] Steven A. Barnes, "Researching Daily Life in the Gulag," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History,* vol. 1, no. 2 (2000), 377-90; Kate Brown, "Out of Solitary Confinement: The History of the Gulag," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History,* vol. 8, no. 1 (2007), 67-103.
[36]S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1995).

Unfortunately, this approach becomes problematic with time due to the process of closing down an access to the documental collections in many regional archives.

There is a significant asymmetry between available sources and secondary literature on the GULAG's social dimensions, the latter being very scarce (basically consisting of several books) and also between the two parts of sources themselves: the memoirs and the documents. Due to the fact that the topic still constitutes "state secrets" the latter are still very limited and one-sided. This incompleteness, created by the lack of the official sources, is to be compensated with the information from the published and unpublished memoirs of former prisoners.

GARF,[37] the Memorial Society Archive, the TsODM[38] and the Soviet Communist Party Archives at Hoover Institution on Revolution, War and Peace[39] constitute the major part of the source base on the GULAG institution. The peculiarity of the materials in GARF is that in their major part they consist of the orders and instructions from the center (the GULAG apparatus in Moscow). Unfortunately, the reports and materials from the camps (which were regularly sent to Moscow) are very limited.

Materials of the GULAG Sanitary Department, covering the years 1933-1945, include the correspondence between the central GULAG apparatus and the regional camps concerning the diseases and mortality rates in the camps. This correspondence was carried out with the use of the digital code for diseases and mortality indicators.

[37] Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (The State Archive of the Russian Federation). The central GULAG archive is contained in the fond 9414.
[38] Tsentralnyi Arkhiv Obschestvennykh dvizenii Moskvi (Central Archive of Social Movements in Moscow).
[39] According to the agreement between the State Archival Service of Russia (Rosarkhiv) and the Hoover Institution along with other documentary collections the GULAG files from the GARF were transferred to the Hoover. The materials on the camps system are stored in the following archival collections of the Hoover institution: fond R-9414 (The Main Administration of the Places of Confinement of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs, 1930-1960), fond 8131 (Public Prosecutor's Office), and fond R-4042 (The Main Administration of the Places of Confinement of the Peoples Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the RSFSR (NKVD RSFSR,) 1922-1930.

Additionally, the correspondence includes the orders concerning the sanitary and medical conditions within the forced labour camps, as well as the instructions how to counteract medical problems in the camps. They shed light on the relations between the Sanitary Departments of the camps and regional medical establishments, rules and regulations of medical service.

Materials of the Cultural Educative Section (*Kulturno-vospitatelnii otdel*) of the GULAG include instructions concerning the educative and cultural activities in the camps among the guards, the staff, and the prisoners. Regional reports disclose patterns of recruitment and training of the camp educators.

Reports from the Political Section of the GULAG ranging from 1938 to 1944 shed light on recruitment, training, and daily life of the camp guards.

The information on the camp guards is also available in the materials from the Department of the Security and the Regime. They contain the information about political propaganda among the guards, and their relationship with the prisoners. Materials of the *Sekretariat* section of the GULAG disclose how the system of the camps was created and managed on a daily basis.

Among other issues, the materials of the Department of the Surveillance of the Places of Confinement of the Office of the Public Prosecutor of the USSR[40] contain reports of the chief of the Third Departments of the camps on issues related to state secutirty, correspondence of the NKVD officials concerning the number of political arrests and trials of members of the camp administration at the end of 1930s as well as the reports of the regional public prosecutors on accidents in the camps and colonies in corresponding provinces.

[40] GARF, f. 8131.

The materials of the NKVD, stored in GARF, also contain the orders of the subsequent NKVD chiefs (Henrich Yagoda, Nikolai Ezhov, Lavrentii Beria) or their assistants on management of the camps. In particular, they contain the information on the recruitment and training of the GULAG officials, their salaries, courses of qualification improvement, including the programs, curriculum, financing, and the teaching staff, on the investigation of 'political' and daily crimes in the camps and on the management of the infromers' network.

Finally, such archives as TsAODM (The Central Archive of the Social Movements of Moscow**)** and RGASPI (Russian State Archive of the Social and Political History) contain sources on the GULAG. The former incorporates the protocols of the party meetings of the central GULAG apparatus covering the years 1937-1939, the latter offers few camp memoirs of the political prisoners, including prominent party members, supporters of Leo Trotsky and Nikolai Bukharin.

The comprehensive history of the GULAG, the one that aims to answer the most crucial questions related to the system, is inseparable from and can not be written without studying its social history. In this respect the memoirs of people who had some relation to the GULAG are especially valuable.

Whereas some aspects of the GULAG history are well documented, other problems are known to historians only through a few literary publicatons. For example, daily life of the camp guards has been described by few prisoners, and in relation to their own life. Official notes on their behaviour are scanty, superficial, and written in a bureaucratic language. The memoirs of the camp guards are almost totally absent. Very little is known about their daily life, hopes and aspirations, and the aattitude towards the institution they worked in. The same is true about the camp administrators. The perspective of the camps as seen by the common criminals is thoroughly concealed

from a contemporary reader. Being a popular subject of the camp memoirs, they themselves left no written evidence of their camp life. The same is true about the prominent NKVD officials in charge of the GULAG. The data on these people, contained in the Federal Security Bureau (FSB) archives, is not available to researchers.

The majority of the memoirs stored in the Memorial Society Archive in Moscow were written by the ex-prisoners sentenced on the basis of the article 58 of the Soviet penal code.[41] Their similar perception and depiction of the GULAG often manifested itself through their frequent adoption of Solzhenitsyn's metaphoric language.

In their majority the authors of these memoirs came from the ranks of the educated Russians and Russian Jews, who prior to the arrest belonged to the intelligentsia.[42] Their memoirs provide the main source of the information about the social and cultural life in the camps. As a rule, at the time of their staying in the camps, these prisoners were not occupied with the jobs demanding hard physical labour. Rather, they held positions in the camp medical establishments, technical bureaus or camp entertainment networks, and had more advantageous living conditions that let them survive the camps.

The memoirs of the prominent communist leaders, who had occupied positions of responsibility in politics and economy, are especially valuable, since the majority of those sentenced to imprisonement did not survive the camps.

[41] I. Bazanov, *Vospominanie deda Ivana: 17 let v Archipelage.* Moscow, 1974. Memorial Society Archive, f. 2, op. 1, d. 7; G. Chemakin, *Pervaya pravdivaia biografia.* Moscow: 1998. Ibid., f. 2, op. 1, d. 126.

[42] For example, a lot of the memoirs were written by the *CHSIR* ("the Member of the Family of the Traitor of the Motherland"), the wives of the highly-placed state officials, charged with the treason.

A large number of the memoirs of the prisoners with peasant and working class background are available in the Memorial Society Archive. Their camp experience looked similar and consisted of the monotonous circles of the hard physical work and staying in the camp hospital. The difference between the memoirs of the well-educated and poorly educated people is significant. The latter tend to be more descriptive and devote a lot of space to the petty details of daily life. As a rule, their camp life consisted of work and satisfaction of the most vital needs. Their sociability was limited by the immediate neighbours in the barrack or at the working place. Their memoirs rarely contained any reflections on the camp experience.

In the memoirs of the intelligentsia much space is devoted to the reflections on their emotional state and the influence the camp exerted on it.

The end of the 1930s witnessed mass incarceration in camps of Poles (many of them were liberated in 1941 in the course of so called 'Pilsudski' amnesty) and citizens of Baltic countries. Their recollections constitute an important layer of the GULAG memoirs and open a vista on the camps through the eyes of the foreigners.

Memoirs of imprisoned and hired technical staff, who were employed at the industrial enterprises near the camps reveal another side of the camps' reality, with better living and working conditions, and with a richer social and intellectual life.

Letters of the prisoners to their relatives can hardly be listed as a valuable source on life inside the camps. They rarely mention the details of the camp life. As a rule, occasional references to their camp life had practical nature: remarks on the weather, descriptions of the job, state of health, and requests to send either clothes or food.Apart from the restrictions of the camp censorship, the prisoners, while writing letters, attempted to distance themselves from the camp reality at least for a short period of

time and to concentrate on the things emotionally connecting them with the addressee (as a rule, a family member or a close relative): common reminiscences, hopes and plans for the future.

Many of those who went to work in the camps on a contract basis were either attracted there in hopes of earning extra money, or else they had their relatives arrested and tried to escape their own imminent arrest. Some of the representatives of the hired staff– especially medical personnel- were recruited into the GULAG immediately after their graduation from the university through the system of compulsory appointments or volunteered to work there out of the romantic motivations after mass propaganda campaigns.

There are significantly fewer memoirs pertaining to the camps of 1930s than to the camps of later period, especially the one starting from the middle of the 1940s. Literature written on the camps of later periods is quite prolific. It is connected with the fact, that very few of those detained in the camps of the late 1930s, survived till the time it was safe to write and publish camp memoirs.

From General to Particular: The History of the Karelian GULAG

An overview of the literature and the sources on the White-Sea Baltic Combine and the Camp NKVD shows that in a large part the history of this enterprise has been obscured from public view and is known to historians only through a few official publications.

After the propaganda campaign around the construction of the White-Sea Baltic Canal of the 1930s subsided, the first publicly available information about the GULAG

in Karelia appeared only in 1992 in the regional press. These articles were based on the archival material as well as on the oral testimonies of the local inhabitants.[43]

Although the major part of existing literature on Karelian GULAG is devoted to the construction of the White-Sea-Baltic Canal,[44] a significant number of works has been published on the structure, management, economic activity, and social composition of the camp as well as the number of inmates and hired personnel involved in its sphere in different periods.[45] Special settlements on the territory of Karelia have gained lesser attention in the scholarly literature.[46] Additionally, several important works addressed the NKVD repressive operations within the BBK.[47] Along with documents on the central GULAG apparatus several documentary collections have

[43] Transcript of the radio broadcast of an interview of N. M. Ermolovich, correspondent of the republican newspaper *Kurjer Karelii,* 1997, p. 1.

[44] Since the amount of literature on the canal construction is immense, I will just mention few works. I. Chukhin, *Kanaloarmeitsi: Istoria stroitelstva Belomorkanala v dokumentah, zifrah, faktah, fotografiah, svidetelstvah uchastnikov.* (Petrozavodsk, 1990); K. V. Gnetnev, *Kanal. Belomoro-Baltiiski kanal. 1933-2003* (Petrozavodsk: PetroPress, 2003). It is interesting that the evaluation of the economic role of the enterprise depends on the attitude of the author towards the Communist regime. While in the 1990s the major part of the authors insisted on its economic unprofitability and an accompanying waste of human and natural resources, recent local works, although admitting the brutality of the forced labour system and the human losses during the construction, tend to stress the canal's crucial significance in the economic development of the region and its defense function against the foreign aggressors. K. V. Gnetnev, *Kanal. Belomoro-Baltiiski kanal. 1933-2003* (Petrozavodsk: PetroPress, 2003).

[45] V. G. Makurov, "Belomoro-Baltiiski kombinat v Karelii. 1933-1941," *Novoe v Izuchenii Karelii*; K. Gnetnev, *Kanal*; C. Joyce, "The GULAG in Karelia: 1929 to 1941," in *The Economics of Forced Labor: The Soviet GULAG,* P. Gregory and V. Lazarev editors in chief (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2003).

[46]These places of exile (often called s*petsposelki*) in their appearance usually did not differ from rural settlements, although their inhabitants were limited in civil rights. For example, they were subjected to severe restrictions on freedom of movement and constant control of the NKVD. This control was laid upon the settlement administration (*spetskomendatura*) O. A. Nikitina, "Spetsposelenia v Karelii (1931-1932)," in *Novoe v izuchenii Karelii* (Petrozavodsk: Karel'skii Nauchnyi tsentr RAN, 1994); O. A. Nikitina, *Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie v Karelii* (Petrozavodsk: Karel'skii Nauchnyi tsentr RAN, 1997); V. Ia. Shashkov, *Repressii v SSSR protiv krest'ian i sud'by spetspereselentsev Karelo-Murmanskogo kraia* (Murmansk: IPP "Sever," 2000).

[47] I.I. Chukhin, *Karelia—37: ideologiya I praktika terrora* (Petrozavodsk : State University, 1999), I. I. Chukhin, Yu. A. Dmirtiev, *Pominalnie spiski Karelii*, 1937-1938 (Petrozavodsk, 2002); *Memorialnoe kladbische Sandarmokh. 1937: 27 oktyabrya–4 noyabra.* (St–Petersburg: Memorial, 1997). Literature that deals with the repressions in the republic of Karelia in general is much more abundant. To mention just a few works: A. Tsigankov, *Ikh nazivali KR: Repressii v Karelii 20-kh-30-kh godov* (Petrozavodsk: Karelia, 1992), *One United Family: the Nationalities Policy of CPSU from the 1920's to the 1950's and Its Implementation in North-Western Russia* (Petrozavodsk, 1998); *Osobie papki: rassekrechennie dokumenti partiinikh organov Karelii 1930-1956* (Petrozavodsk, 2001).

been published on the Karelian GULAG.[48] A wide range of official documents referring to diverse problems of the enterprise, presented in them, endow this source with especial value.

The cultural history approach towards the GULAG has been applied in few works, as a rule, in the framework of descriptive institutional history of the camps' theatrical institutions.[49] The biographical approach is actively used in ongoing local projects, such as one undertaken by Konstantin Gnetnev, who, after publishing a volume on the construction of the White-Sea Baltic Canal,[50] is writing a book devoted to well-known prisoners and their life and work in the BBK.[51] A former Memorial Society member and an editor of the Book of Memory Yurii Dmitriev is engaged in a work devoted to the life of one of the actresses of the Central Theatre of the White-Sea Baltic Combine.

One of the most important sources for this kind of research is represented by the memoir literature. The memoirs, however, excessively abundant in relation to the history of the Solovetsky islands (the so-called *Solovki*)[52] are extremely scarce in relation to the history of the Combine itself.[53] Thus a paradoxical situation exists, when

[48] V. G. Makurov, ed., *GULAG v Karelii: sbornik dokumentov I materialov 1930-1941.* (Petrozavodsk, 1992); *Istoriia Stalinskogo GULAGa, Konets 1920-kh – pervaia polovina 1950-x godov: Sobranie Dokumentov v 7 tomakh*. A. B. Bezborodov and V. M. Khrustalev editors in chief (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004); vol. 4 *Chislennost I usloviia soderzania.*

[49] N. Kuziakina, *Theatre in the Solovki Prison Camp* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic publishers, 1995); N. Kuzyakina, "Za Solovetskim Predelom," *Teatralnaia Zhizn* 1993, no. 10. A. Kozlov, *Ogni lagernoi rampi: iz istorii lagernogo teatra 1930-kh-1950-kh godov* (Moscow, 1991); A. Kozlov, *Teatr na Severnoi Zemle* (Magadan, 1992); A. Kaneva, *GULAGovskyi teatr Ukhti* (Siktivkar, 2001).

[50] K. Gnetnev, *Kanal.*

[51] Interview with K. V. Gnetnev, Petrozavodsk, May 2006.

[52] D. S. Likhachev, *Kniga Bespokoistv,* (Moscow, 1991); M. Z. Nikonov-Smorodin, *Krasnaia katorga* (Sofia,1938); M. Rozanov, *Solovetsky konzlager v monastire.1922-1939. Fakti- Domisli – "Parashi." Obzor vospominanii solovchan solovchanami* (USA: izd-vo avtora, 1979); B. Shiryaev, *Neugasimaia lampada* (Moscow, 1991); A. Solzhenytsin, *The GULAG Archipelago* (1989), vol. 2; "Lagernie muzi," *Ikh nazivali KR,* pp. 96-126; Yu. A. Brodsky, *Solovki: dvadzat let Osobogo Naznachenia* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2002). Web-site http://www.solovki.ru.

[53] Y. Margolin, *Puteshestvie v Stranu Z/K.* (Tel-Aviv, 2000).

a historian has more sources at his/her disposal in relation to the history of the 1920s than one of the 1930s.

The published newspaper interviews with the ex-prisoners, taken at the beginning of the 1990s, represent one of the few sources from the prisoners' perspective. The problem with this kind of sources is that in the best case they refer to the well known singers, dancers, and art directors.

Few of the BBK personnel (if any) left memoirs. However, a few letters of the armed guards to the camp administration and the NKVD chief Lavrentii Beria are available that shed light on their daily life, and their attempts to come to the grips with the outward reality, to integrate into the Soviet society, and to explain the gap between the Soviet propaganda and the outward reality.[54] Complemented by the official reports on their misdeeds and administrative sanctions, this source can contribute to the productive research on the armed guards.

Appraisals of the guards, composed by their platoon commanders, provide an information on the party membership, social standing, state of health, education, participation in the public life, "features of personality," and relations with other guards and the commanders. However, the descriptions, especially the part called 'personal features' are formal. They fall into three distinctive types, and cover more than fifty individuals.[55] The descriptions of the discipline abuses and the sanctions that followed them provide yet another glimpse on the camp guards life as well the characteristics of the guards wishing to leave the service or being fired as unreliable.[56]

[54] Karelskyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii (KGANI), f. 214, op. 1, d.45, p. 40; d. 75, pp. 39-52; *GULAG v Karelii,* p. 173.
[55] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 10/49.
[56] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/8, p. 54.

Overall, the materials in the local archives, abundant enough to reconstruct the location, institutional development and economic activity of the White-Sea Baltic Combine, in relation to its social and cultural history are rather meager. The major part of the BBK archive is absent. In autumn 1941 Finnish troops seized a large share of the BBK archive. First the documents were located in Petrozavodsk, but at the beginning of the year 1943 they were transferred to Finland, the Military Archive. In accordance with the article 14 of the peace treaty, signed in autumn 1944, the Commander in Chief ordered the archives transferred to the USSR. The trophy archive, amounting to eighteen train carriages, passed under the jurisdiction of the Military Command of Eastern Karelia, which on November 20, 1944 passed them to the USSR representatives. [57] What happened to it afterwards, is unknown. A small part of the BBK documents is still available. Primarily these are the materials that the military command of the Eastern Karelia considered to be useful for itself. So they remained in Petrozavodsk in 1943 and passed to the Soviet troops when they occupied the city at the end of June 1944.

The archival holdings of the National Archive of Karelian Republic contain a thin folder with material on the Central Theatre BBK NKVD for the years 1935 - 1938, as well as the scanty materials on the social and cultural life in the region, mainly in the form of the issues of the BBK newspaper *Stalinskaya Trassa.* Cultural life in the BBK is also reflected in the private collections of writers, actors, and stage directors who had worked at the BBK.[58]

[57] A copy of the memo of the director of the Military Archive V. M. Syrje to Magister P. Kauppala, dated March 20, 1991.
[58]The fond of a poet and a KVCH official Sergey Yakovlevich Alymov (stored in GARF) contains his diary, notes on the history of the White-Sea Canal, letters of prisoners and the camp newspaper "Perekovka."

The national archive of Karelian Republic contains few private collections, such as ones of Leopold Yakovlevich Teplitsky (1890-1965),[59] and of the chief of the 8th camp subdivision Solomon Moiseev.[60]

An exhibition devoted to the White-Sea Baltic Combine and the Camp NKVD in the Medvezhegorsk regional museum sheds light on the imprisoned artistic elite in the BBK. Its large part consists of the donations of the family archives to the museum by the local residents.[61]

These family archives contain photographs, unpublished memoirs and diaries, the criminal cases and camp files of the prisoners. Alexei Mikhailovich Grigorovich has collected an archive of the family history that includes criminal cases and camp notes.[62]

His father Mikhail Mikhailovich Grigorovich was an imprisoned engineer employed at the BBK. He was son-in- law of Sergey Konstantinovich Shvarsalon, an editor –in-chief of the BBK newspaper "Perekovka" (and the son of a famous Russian poet Vyacheslav Ivanov).

Two other kinds of documentary collections are of especial interest for an historian of the GULAG: the criminal cases of the repressed and the camp files of the

[59] A prominent Soviet musician who was the first to introduce jazz into the concert halls of the Soviet Union. He was employed as a concertmaster on the Second Congress of *Komintern* in the Theatre of Opera and Ballet. Arrested in 1930 on the premise of the article 58-6 (espionage), he was imprisoned in the BBLag for three years. He worked as a conductor and the pianist of the Central Theatre, where he created both the symphonic and band orchestras, and participated in the organization of the jazz band.
[60] A former prisoner of the BBLag. After his release he was restored in the party and promoted within the GULAG system.
[61] An interview with the director of Medvezhegorsk regional museum S. I. Koltyrin. Medvezhegorsk, July 14, 2006.
[62] Shvarsalon, an editor of the International section of the journal "Smena" in Leningrad, was arrested in 1932 for publication of the article devoted to the "aggressive expansion plans of Germany" at times when the Germany was treated as an ally. Given ten years of imprisonment and transferred to the BBK, he was appointed there as an editor of "Perekovka." In 1938 he was released and exiled in Kaluga, where he worked as a history and foreign languages teacher in the local school. In 1941 he was re-arrested and sentenced for the capital punishment for "espionage" for Germany and Japan. Interview with A.M. Grigorovich. Petrozavodsk, June 26, 2006.

inmates, stored in the archival storages of the FSB (Federal Security Bureau) and MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs) archives accordingly. The criminal cases contain the investigation materials, extracts from the protocols of the juridical bodies that had passed the sentence and documents related to the rehabilitation. The camp files encompass various documents, connected with the stay of the repressed individual in the GULAG system.[63]

Special settlers' personal files, stored in the MVD archive, include registration materials with biographies and protocols of witnesses' testimonies (as a rule, poor peasants from the same village.) The files also contain detailed descriptions of 'kulaks' households, before and after the revolution, and excerpts from the protocols of the local office of the Executive Committee about their eviction. The materials related to the life in the special settlements contain references about stay in the hospital, documents about death of children and relatives, and petitions asking to provide medical care, pensions for disability, and work release. Additionally, special settlers' files contain memoranda, letters from special settlers to their relatives and friends, autobiographies, references from employers, reports on criminal activities (speculation, escapes, and so on), correspondence between special settlers or members of their families with MVD officials concerning their rehabilitation.[64]

Materials on cultural and educational policies in the special settlements in Karelia and development of the system of primary and secondary education there are located in documentary collections the White-Sea Canal and the Camp of the NKVD, as well as in the archival storages of the archival holdings of local Council of Peoples'

[63] The MVD Archive of the Republic of Karelia contains around several thousands of the dossiers of the prisoners who had died in the camp.
[64] Arkhiv MVD KASSR (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Karelia), fond 69, op. 1. This archive contains several thousands of files on labour settlers.

Commissars and the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment in the Karelian republic.[65]

Materials regarding school functioning in the special settlements of the White-Sea Canal and the camp NKVD [66] disclose linguistic tensions in schools, reflect the penetration and influences of various languages and dialects and the spread of slang among children. The peculiarities of such schools resulted, first of all, from the ethnic diversity of the pupils. Outside the classroom, each child communicated in his/her native language. The most common was Ukrainian. Some of its words even penetrated the vocabularies of non-Ukrainian children. In addition, the documents reveal the specifics of gender-age composition in these schools.[67]

Finally, a collection of the photographic bureau of the Cultural Educative Section of the White-Sea Canal administration, related to life and work during the construction of the canal reflects the process of the construction in its lively dynamics. This was part of an ambitious project of writing a book devoted to a history of the canal construction, undertaken under the aegis of the KVCh. Albeit in the veiled or distorted form, it discloses history of life, work, and culture on the canal.

A few words might be said about the current state of public memory in relation to the repressive operations in the camp and the republic in general. At the beginning of the 1990s significant public attention was devoted to the identification of the remnants of the BBLag prisoners, executed during the years 1937-1938, in the course

[65] NARK, fond 630, 690.
[66] NARK, fond 630, op. 1.
[67] The records reveal that special settlements contained significant numbers of over-aged juveniles. Their number would probably be even greater if school authorities knew their real ages when they admitted children. In the conditions of the absence of birth certificates, they recorded the age of the children on the basis of the family dossiers. "For certain reasons, when they were questioned, parents often decreased children's real ages." *GULAG v Karelii: Sbornik dokumentov i materialov, 1930-1941* (Petrozavodsk: Karel'skii Nauchnyi tsentr RAN, 1992), 126.

of the so-called 'Great Terror' and dislocation of major execution sites. According to the testimony of a local journalist, the first remains of the victims were found in the 1950s near Medvezhegorsk, but this fact was supressed and the remains were quietly disposed of to avoid provoking public interest.[68] After the appearance of the first publications in the 1990s, their authors started receiving calls from the local residents, who informed them on the possible dislocation of mass execution sites on the basis of the alleged confessions of the former executioners. Among them was *Sandarmokh,* a remote forested area twelve kilometers east of Medvezhegorsk (location of the headquarters of the BBK and BBLag). The first excavations there were conducted with the assistance of the FSB in 1991 on the basis of witnesses' accounts. In June 1996 the joint project, carried out by the members of the Karelian branch of the Scholarly and Information Centre Memorial,[69] representatives of the St-Petersburg Memorial Society (interested in the fate of the *Solovki etap*[70]) and the supporting group from the Medvezhegorsk administration and the journalists, was successfully completed. In June 1996 the Sandarmokh mass graves were uncovered.[71] Soon the publications were released by St-Petersburg Memorial society and the local activists devoted to the execution of *Solovki* etap.[72] This version lacks reliable evidence, for it has been

[68] Interview with N. M. Ermolovich, May 2006.
[69] It is interesting, that the majority of enthusiasts who stood at the origins of the Karelian Memorial were either descendants of the so-called "Red Finns," Bolshevik activists of Finnish origins who arrived in the USSR in the 1930s and were subsequently repressed and exterminated (Victor Paaso, Irina Takala, Perrti Vuori) or of the finns, mobilized to the labour army and exiled to Karelia according to Stalin's order from 1942. "Vesti Karelskogo 'Memoriala,' *Edinenie,* November 2, 1990, no. 44, p. 3.
[70] By the *Solvestky etap* the group of the BBLag prisoners is understood, including prominent political, national and religious leaders (Russian scholar and philosopher Pavel A. Florensky, the famous Ukrainian stage director Alexei Kurbas, an orchestra conductor from the *Kazan* Opera Theatre, and later the chief conductor of the Central Theatre of the BBK NKVD Pavel Grindberg; religious leaders, such as Orthodox bishop Aleksii Voronezksy, Damian Kurskii, Nikolai Tamborsky, Petr Samarskii, the chief of the Baptist church of the USSR V. Kolesnikov and a range of the Catholic priests, including P. Veigel, that had been sent by the Vatican with the official mission to investigate the facts of the persecution of believers in the USSR) ; For more complete information see *Memorialnoe kladbische Sandarmokh. 1937: 27 oktyabrya–4 noyabra.* p. 1; I.I. Chukhin, *Karelia—37: ideologiya I praktika terrora* (Petrozavodsk : State University, 1999), pp. 124-125.
[71] Transcript of the radio broadcast of an interview of N. M. Ermolovich, (1997) p. 3.
[72] Yu. Dmitriev, *Mesto rasstrela Sandarmokh; Memorialnoe Kladbische Sandarmokh.*

impossible to identify who was executed on this site. It is highly probable that the real execution site was situated on the dead–end siding of the eleventh track section of the local railway line, where the prisoners were transported from the *Solovetsky prison*.[73] The executions that took place on *Sandarmokh* might well have been conducted by the Finnish troops that had occupied the territory of the republic in autumn 1941.

Later on more eyewitnesses appeared that tended to point at another place of execution of the *Solovki* etap. However, the appeals of few enthusiasts to resume search campaigns did not find support. Currently there are no more direct eyewitnesses of the executions in the region any more, and the information is of second hand and already folklore nature.

The discrepancy between the significance of the *Sandarmokh* as a site of memory and mourning, and availability of actual evidence to support the theory is staggering. On the site itself very little information about the actual evidence on repressive operations and their victims is displayed. The memorial ceremony, that takes place there every August has undergone a transformation from the act of mourning and commemoration to political battles between the parties "Yabloko" and "United Russia." The memory about the repressive acts of the Soviet regime serves as an argument for an anti-state and anti-Putin protest, thus depriving the ceremony of its original meaning for the participants.[74] Several other executions sites remain unknown or completely forgotten.

[73] Interviews with the local journalists and researchers N. M. Ermolovich, A. M. Grigorovich, K. V. Gnetnev. Petrozavodsk, May 2006.

[74] Interview with A. M. Grigorovich. Petrozavodsk, May 2006. Currently in many regions the commemoration days have turned into a protest against "conscious implementation of the policy of reanimation of the Soviet repressive regime." "Den' Pamyati i Borbi," in *30 Oktyabra*, no. 48, (November 2004), p. 4. This fact serves as a vivid manifestation of manipulation of collective memory in post-Soviet Russia, and provides an interesting perspective of comparing the celebrations of the commemoration days in Moscow and on the periphery.

The relations between the local branch of the Memorial Society, the chief driving force in making the GULAG history public and the state authorities have been no less problematic. The Memorial Centre in Karelia was created as a result of activity of several activists. Officially registered in 1988, it found its new members through appeals in the newspaper articles.[75] An access to the FSB archives was granted to the individuals, either previously employed in the FSB-MVD system or those having personal connections there or enjoying a deputy status. [76] The MVD , in cases of disclosure of the remnants of the persecuted in the course of the construction projects, preferred to silently transfer them and bury in remoter places.[77] Memorial organization itself was torn by internal conflicts.[78]

The most significant step of collaboration between the state and the Memorial was the work on the "Book of Memory," which, however, had a complicated and troubled history. The lists of the repressed, granted by the FSB of the Karelian Republic, were compiled by the members of the Memorial, and verified by the staff of the Public Prosecutor's Office.

In 1998 the regional authorities donated a grant for publishing the "Book of Memory." However, due to internal conflicts inside the Memorial, this grant went to one faction of the Memorial society, while the majority distanced themselves from the project. In June 1998 the current Memorial chief Victor Paaso sent a petition to the head of the local government on behalf of the entire Memorial organization, insisting that

[75] V. Paaso, "Obschestvo 'Memorial' v Karelii," *Komsomolets,* no. 146, December 9, 1989; the material "Memorial nuzen vsem," from March, 4th, 1990, was published in all newspapers of all regions of the KASSR and multi-tirazkakh of Petrozazvodsk; " 'Memorial: bol' u vsekh odna," *Leninskaia pravda,* July 9, 1991, no. 135, p. 4.

[76] The person who was responsible for the verification and compilation of the lists prior to their publication (also a chief of the Memorial society from 1992-1997) was a son of an NKVD official involved in the implementation of repressions.

[77]As it happened in the course of the territorial expansion in the city of Medvezhegorsk. Interview with N. M. Ermolovich, Petrozavodsk, May 2006.

[78] Interview with V. T. Paaso, Petrozavodsk, June 28, 2006.

Launched in 1989 by a number of the Memorial activists, the work on the 'Book of Memory'can not be carried out by a single individual. The newly created so-called "editorial board" for publication of the "Book of Memory of the Victims of the Political Repressions on the Territory of the Karelian Republic" (hastily created in December 1997 according to the order of the former head of the Karelian government V. Stepanov) has not met for already a year. Additionally, the editorial board includes individuals, who are in fact not involved in the editorial work.[79]

Finally, Paaso noted, that the entire work on the preparation of the 'Book of Memory' as well as financing of the publication should have been conducted by the Republican Committee on Restoration of the Civil Rights of the Rehabilitated Victims of the Stalinist Repressions, created by the order of the head of the Karelian government from March 6, 1995. He called for complete replacement of the editorial board within the framework of this institution, staffing it with scientists and professional historians, instead of the 'amateur writers with excessive ambitions' who had nothing to do either with the current Committee or the Memorial Society."[80]

Nevertheless, the Book of Memory was published in its initial version. The fact that in its final stages the work on the regional Book of Memory was conducted not by professional historians but by amateur activists, resulted in a poor quality of editing, as in cases of incorrect spelling of Finnish names.[81]

Apart from the publication of the local martyrology, the most significant contribution of the Memorial society to the institualization of the memory of the repressions was its practical work on the identification of the common graves of the

[79] A note of the Memorial chief V. T. Paaso to the head of the Karelian government S. Katanandov from June 24, 1998.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Interview with the chief of the Karelian 'Memorial' V. T. Paaso, Petrozavodsk. June 28, 2006.

victims of the punitive operations of the 1930s, arrangements of re-burials and opening the sites of mourning there. At the beginning of the 1990s the members of the Memorial Society uncovered a number of mass graves on the territory near Petrozavodsk.[82] The information about the location of the execution sites and mass graves is second hand and already belongs to the local folklore.

The members of the Memorial themselves admitted, that "having no documentary evidence our major source base consists of oral testimony of the witnesses or their descendants."[83]

After the period of its intense activity at the beginning of the 1992, the 'Memorial' witnessed its slow decline at the end of the decade. Primarily it was caused by absence of adequate leadership, underfinancing, and internal conflicts. Soon the Karelian branch of the Memorial joined the St-Petersburg Memorial society and ceased to exist as an independent unit.

The most peculiar characteristic feature of the local memory of the state terror and its victims is the fact that it is not institutionalized and has never been. That is why all measures, undertaken by the Memorial and the activists to uncover the crimes and preserve the memory of them have had a sporadic, irregular character.

At the beginning of the 1990s attempts were undertaken to find out the information on the local NKVD staff that had carried out the repressive operations of the 1930s. As a rule, requests and letters to the local Ministry of Internal Affairs with

[82] "Po-chelovecheski," *Nabat Severo-Zapada,* March 6, 1992, no. 19 (107), p. 3.
[83] According to the testimony of the KGB KASSR there are no archival sources on this subject left. "Uvekovechit pamyat zertv Terrora, obraschenie karelskogo obschestva Memorial k zitelyam Petrozavodska," *Leninskaia Pravda,* no. 288, December 16, 1990.

inquiries about the past of the individuals, who according to the witnesses' testimonies, had served in the NKVD, remained unsuccessful.[84]

How to Write Social History of the GULAG?

The current study opens up a new perspective on the forced labour camp as a place of acclimatization and social adaptation which are yet to be explored. A number of factors have influenced the course of these processes which should be taken into the consideration in the future studies.

Daily life (*bytovaia*), moral, psychological and cultural adaptation of the exiles and camp inmates and their regional assimilation acquired various forms depending on their ethnic and social background. This issue is broad and varies greatly in the camps and special settlements. In the forced labor camps of the GULAG, members of OUN (*banderovtsy*) were usually quick to organize themselves into compact groups, took over the key positions in camp administration, and turned into an influential force which in certain cases did not yield to criminal clans.[85] Other groups, such as the Uzbeks and the Chinese, after they found themselves in an unfamiliar environment, frequently perished.[86]

Adaptation and behavioral specifics in special settlements depended on the combination of many factors. Climate was an important one. Deported to Siberia, southern ethnic groups had very little chances to survive. The infamous Nazinsk tragedy, which involved the mass deaths of special settlers in the Alexander-Vakhovsk special settlement administration of *Siblag* in 1933, demonstrates the importance of this

[84] Letter of N. M. Ermolovich to the Retirement Office of the MVD KASSR, March 14, 1995; a note from V. I. Sidorov, Minister of Internal Affairs of the KASSR to N. M. Ermolovich, April 12, 1995.
[85] Interview with Arseny Roginskii, Moscow, June 22, 2005.
[86] Personal files of prisoners from Dagestan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan of the White-Sea Baltic Camp of the NKVD display similar picture of life of this category of prisoners: after a short period (from 6 month to 1.5 year) with a positive camp characteristic, death in medical facilities, from exhaustion, diseases and accidents. Arkhiv MVD Respubliki Kareliia, fond 72, sv. 4.

social factor.[87] The representatives of the criminal world, however, occupied the major portion of these deportees. This tragedy should be interpreted not as a part of "genocide policy" but as a failure of state policies to combine the efficient use of the labor of the special settlers with providing them with the means for survival. The people were thrown out from the train carriages into the wilderness. Using meager resources they had to construct shelter for themselves and obtain provisions. But at the same time they had to fulfill 'the state tasks.' Frequently it happened, for example, that they could build their houses only after the working day.

The protocols of the investigation reveal that the settlers were placed in conditions that differed little from those of previously deported peasants groups. But from the moment of their arrival peasants began to settle themselves and organize albeit wretched households, following the simple rule: "labor saved, labor helped survive." Meanwhile, the criminals committed banditry, robbery and despoliation of poor households, which in conditions of stern climate, scarce resources, and the complete isolation of the settlement produced dramatic results.

To analyze the behavioral specifics of different contingents of the special settlers, the national factor is no less significant. In 1933 the state tried to create gipsy settlements, relocating there gypsies who roamed from place to place across Moscow province. This idea collapsed from the onset. After the gypsies arrived at the places of exile, they "did not want to settle and stubbornly escaped in mass with the first opportunity."[88] In the fall of 1933, this contingent of the special settlers actually ceased to exist since almost all the gypsies had escaped.[89]

[87] Krasil'nikov, *Serp i Molokh*, pp. 104-107.
[88] Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy,* p. 46.
[89] Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy,* p. 46.

The chronology of exile also has a tremendous significance. The 1930s and the beginning of 1940s became lethal for many GULAG inmates. By the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, the conditions in the camps and settlements became much milder. Uzbek, Kazakh, and Turkmen settlers who worked in the Krasnoiarsk mines displayed "positive attitudes." This was due to better living conditions in places of their exile than at home.[90]

An exploration of the conditions of the camp inmates and special settlers should not be conducted separately from the economic conditions in the region and in the country as a whole. On the one hand, published documents reveal that living conditions and food supply in the settlements were no better than in labor camps. The data on mortality rates, the descriptions of emaciation are similar to the data on mortality in the camps and the descriptions of the labor camp "goners" ("*dokhodiagi*").[91] On the other hand, the reports from the settlements, particularly from the first half of the 1930s, suggest better economic conditions of special settlers than of the local population. For example, in some regions provision supply was better in special settlements than in free (*kadrovye*) workers' settlements since special settlers were under especial care of the GPU. Due to the regular fulfillment by the responsible organizations of orders from the authorities regarding provisions for special settlers they received 100 percent of their ration whereas free workers only 30 percent. [92]

The documents of Volume 5 of *Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga* display ethnic and behavioral diversity. They reveal how different ethnic groups, deported and confined in the GULAG settlements, such as Armenians, Turks, and Kurds settled down and how

[90] *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga,* vol. 5 , p. 631.
[91] The illness and mortality rates in the special settlements and the camps can be compared on the basis of the data contained in the GULAG reports. *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga,* vol. 5, pp. 194-196, 202-203, 307–310, 734.
[92] *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga,* vol. 5, pp. 171.

they established relations with the local population.[93] In 1940 a group of Jewish refugees from Poland established commercial ties with the local population and hired the locals as wage laborers.[94] They created a commonwealth, which restored religious practices and exerted cultural influence on the local population.[95]

The documentation of the OGPU-NKVD contains cases when the NKVD personnel instructed Uzbeks how to live in Ukrainian houses (*khata*).[96] At this point, the documents that reflect special settlers' views on the problem of adaptation to new conditions are a valuable source.[97]

This theme of adaptation and cultural assimilation of national diasporas within the GULAG can contribute to a deeper understanding of factors that had influenced the effectiveness of Bolshevik nationality policies. In the special settlements of the Caucasian nationalities, the contradictions between the norms imposed by the Soviet government, such as statements about the emancipation of women and her traditional role (as defined by the Islamic Law) frequently led to conflicts and tragedies.[98]

The arrival of the Chechen and Ingush deportees, in certain cases, deepened their opposition to Soviet anti-religious policies. This spurred and in many ways reinforced the influence of Islamic beliefs as preserver of centuries- old traditions and forms of protest against the Soviet government.[99] In this context, the authorities' policy of

[93] *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga,* vol. 5, pp. 269, 281-285.
[94] In contrast to the "kulaks" exiled at the beginning of the 1930s, whose property was entirely confiscated, the Polish "*osadniki*" were allowed to carry valuables and unlimited amount of money to their new places of residence. *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga,* vol. 5, pp. 304-305. See also Berdinskikh, *Spetsposelentsy*, 442.
[95] *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga,* vol. 5, pp. 306, 317.
[96] *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga,* vol. 5, pp. 172-174.
[97] For example, a letter from the representatives of the special settlers of Korean origins to the chairman of the Soviet of Peoples Deputies Molotov about the conditions in the special settlement in Western Kazakhstan (1938) explains the causes of the problems of their adaptation in the area. It points the differences in culture, climate, and economic specificities. *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga,* vol. 5, 239-240.
[98] *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga,* vol. 5, 187-192.
[99] A report devoted to the special settlers residing in Kazakhstan from 1950 stated "the most embittered part of re-settlers are those deported from Northern Caucasus, and in particular, Chechens

suppressing this historically anti-Russian and anti-Soviet protest is interesting. The published documents reveal that during the 1940s the NKVD officials attempted to use the influence of kindred Islamic authorities on their communities (usually from Caucasus, Zakavkaz'e, and Crimea) for propaganda, agitation, and criminal investigation.[100]

Manifestations of relations among the ethnic groups, recorded in documents and monographs, are so diverse as to resist any attempt to produce a typology or trace similarities within the context of a general approach. Studying them within the context of specific circumstances would be the only way to explain the tensions and mutual influence.

Poles, Latvians, and Estonians usually viewed the local population as uneducated and uncultured and avoided contact with them. Victor Berdinskikh illustrates that extreme cultural isolation of these peoples was characteristic for rural areas in Siberia and the Russian North. In these areas, "the very conditions of life preserved ethnic disconnectedness, stimulated nostalgic feelings, and feelings of cultural deprivation." In the Ural, in industrial areas, and in the GULAG camps national differences were quicker to disappear and inter-ethnic relations were tighter.[101] It is interesting to note the manifestations of the longstanding problem in relations between Poles and Ukrainians in the special settlements.[102]

and Ingushs. The internal kin connections and influence of religious and kin leaders are particularly strong. The '*adat'* still represents the foundation of everyday life for the youth and even for the Communists. Chechen-Ingush intelligentsia, former party and Soviet activists, mainly members of the party, not only ignore those tendencies but themselves follow religious and feudal traditions." *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga,* vol. 5, pp. 654-655.

[100] *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga,* vol. 5, pp. 452, 547

[101] Berdinskikh, *Spetsposelentsy*, p. 75.

[102] Berdinskikh, *Spetsposelentsy*, chapter 5.

The assimilation of groups, which for one or another reason were subjected to strong political pressure leading to the exclusion of native language and the gradual oblivion of ethnic traditions and customs, took specific forms in the exile.

The Russian Germans represent the most revealing example. From the beginning of the war and during the following years, they could use their language only at home. Most people viewed German as the "language of fascists."[103] During the 1960s, German surnames were changed to Russian ones on a mass scale.

The GULAG settlements, thus, were a sort of "purgatory" of developing socialism. Scholars have already done a considerable research on the mechanisms of its functioning and on the analysis of the data related to various groups of exiles. Nevertheless, deeper exploration of their individual lives and writing collective biographies within the framework of analytical approach to the study of the processes that took place in the heart of the resettlement system and their influence on the changes of policies of the Soviet state still has to be conducted.

Chapter II The GULAG Institution and Its Inhabitants

In order to provide a comprehensive picture of the GULAG institution as a special administrative and industrial complex in the 1930s the chapter adopts two levels of analysis. It starts with a broader approach of looking into the institutional history of the

[103] The documents on the school education display the introduction of extensive training in the Russian language for children of the special settlers of this category.

GULAG insitution as such, and then looks at a particular forced labour camp: the White Sea Combine and the Camp of the NKVD.

In words of one of its bosses, the GULAG of the NKVD was "organized by the Soviet State as a centralized penitentiary for socially dangerous criminals and counter-revolutionary elements."[104] Its primary function consisted in 'the protection of the socialist society and industry.' Since the GULAG was an industrial branch of the NKVD, (*Glavk*) it was responsible for the fulfillment of the economic tasks of the Soviet state through the "utilization of the labour of those who are isolated in the camps and colonies on the basis of the yearly industrial plans, stated by the Soviet government."[105]

A term "camp" usually was used to designate a conglomerate of separate smaller camp subdivisions, (*lagpunkti*). In their part they were divided into smaller units, *laguchastki* or *komandirovki.* As a rule, administration of a camp (or a group of camps located in the same area) consisted of a number of sections, (departments) subordinated to the respective departments of the GULAG.

The history of the GULAG is the history of Soviet colonization. It started in 1929-1930, and witnessed a mass campaign by the OGPU to establish camps on unexplored territories near the economic enterprises under construction. The process continued until the very end of the GULAG system. As usual, setting up a new camp took place after a preliminary expedition, by sea or over land, the goal of which was to explore the territory and survey its resources. After that, the expedition was often renamed "a camp." For example, *Ukhtinskaia*[106] expedition, which was launched in 1929, resulted

[104] *GULAG, 1918-1960,* p. 297.
[105] *GULAG, 1918-1960,* p. 297.
[106] An expedition organized to explore the natural resources of the Ukhta region in North-Western part of Russia.

in the establishment of "*Ukhtinsko-Pechorckii* camp, or *Ukhtpechlag* in 1931. In the same year, an expedition was launched to explore the coal basin nearby, resulting in the establishment of *Vorkutlag.* [107]

During the relative stabilization of the situation in the country and of the number of prisoners (which declined from 1935 till 1937), the NKVD (and, consequently, the GULAG) witnessed a number of structural changes, which had a huge influence on the final shape of the camp structure of the Stalin's period. In May 1935 the camps that were engaged in the fulfillment of the NKVD's most important state economic tasks (such as *BBK, Dmitrovsky, Amurksii, Ukhtinsko-Pecherskii* camps) were directly subordinated to the GULAG. The economic management of all other camps was supposed to be conducted by the local NKVD offices (UNKVD). However, they remained subordinated to the GULAG in questions of surveillance, regimentation of the economic activity, regime, supply of the camps with the labour force, food and clothes. This reorganization had a two-fold aim: to let the central GULAG apparatus focus on the objects of primary economic significance and to engage in it all local NKVD apparatuses. At the same time, this reorganization was supposed to result in the enforcement of the role of the central GULAG apparatus in coordinating the technologic and managerial aspects of the NKVD economic activity. From now on instead of one industrial section the GULAG contained eight sectors specializing in different branches of industry.

From the middle of 1937 the camp system underwent another important change. The drastic influx of prisoners as a result of the repressive operations of the "Great

[107]For more detailed account of the organization and development of the GULAG as an industrial and economic mechanism under the aegis of the NKVD and of its structural changes from the end of the 1920s till the end of 1940s see M. Smirnov, S. Sigachev "Sistema mest zaklychenia v SSSR. 1929-1960," in *Spravochnik: Sistema ispravitelno-trudovikh lagerei v SSSR,* (Moscow: Zvenja, 1998), pp. 25-62.

Terror" coincided with the intensification of industrialization and an expansion of the economic plans.

These events contributed to the process of restructuring of the old camps. The previous type of organization of forced labour in camps, intended for complex industrial exploitation of new territories (according to the decree of 1929) After the mass influx of the prisoners into the camps proved to be inefficient. The huge camps became difficult to coordinate. Therefore, the BBK along with other large industrial complexes (such as BAM, *Uchtpechlag, Siblag, Sevvostlag*) were divided into a multiplicity of smaller, highly specialized camps.[108] In the face of the necessity of creating management capable of coordinating this multiplicity of the forced-labour complexes scattered over the entire territory of the Soviet Union, the system of management of the camps was changed, and new sections were created. These changes, however, resulted in an uncontrolled expansion in the central GULAG apparatus, and complications of its structure, processes of planning and financing.

In order to accomodated the new inmates, already in August 1937 hasty creation of seven new camps with a specialization in forestry and a subsequent reorganization of the Forest Industry sector of the GULAG into a separate department. By January 1, 1938 these camps contained more than 80.000 prisoners. At the beginning of the year 1938, six new labour camps were created.[109]

The decision to organize labour camps in the forest industry was largely motivated by considerations of economic expediency. The forest industry, at least at its initial stage, does not demand significant capital investments and elaborate project planning. In fact, it was possible to establish a camp using local resources. Additionally,

[108] M. Smirnov, "Sistema mest zaklychenia v SSSR," p. 42.
[109] M. Smirnov, "Sistema mest zaklychenia v SSSR," p. 41.

the existence of vast forest areas surrounding the camps served as a security measure against the z/k escapes. Finally, almost all these camps were established near transportation routes. Labour camps in the forest industry, despite their spontaneous growth, were viable. The majority of the forest industry camps, created in 1937-1938, were still functional in 1960.[110] Apart from the labour camps specialized in forestry, nine other camps were established. Three camps had an industrial profile, entrusted with the tasks of the construction of a military-marine base, an airport, and a hydro-electric power station. Two camps provided labourforce for the construction of a railway, and one camp was established for the construction of a motorway. Half of these camps later closed, probably for the reason that large-scale industrial projects required good planning and significant investments.

The increase in the number of the new camps and the growth of the existing ones, diversification of their economic specialization (especially where the construction of the technically sophisticated industrial projects took place) necessitated structural changes aimed at division of the gourps of the camps according to their economic profile. This newly created sophisticated system of management of the GULAG presupposed improvement in the expertise of its technical, financial, and managerial personnel. With the complication of the structure of the central GULAG apparatus the number of its personnel also grew. Already in summer 1939 it included forty two subdivisions –departments, sections, and managerial units (*upravlenia*); by January 1, 1940 the number of the GULAG staff in Moscow consisted of 2040 employees. Bureaucracy and confusion, which soon became rampant, reflected obvious difficulties in managing such a cumbersome structure. In these circumstances the NKVD introduced certain reorganizations. In order to relieve the central GULAG apparatus

[110] M. Smirnov, "Sistema mest zaklychenia v SSSR," p. 41.

from the responsibility of remote camp structures, such as those located at the Far East it created relatively autonomous systems of camps' management in the regions (*Dalstroi, UZHDS*[111]).

However, these reorganizations contradicted the general trend in the country's economy which tended towards centralization in all spheres. In the conditions of the poorly developed transportation and communication systems, the GULAG authorities suffered from the loss of control over the newly created industrial centres. Additionally, in their vast majority the camps with the similar economic specialization were not clustered in one area. All the experimental reorganizations of 1938-1940 testify to certain crisis of in both the camp system and the NKVD administration.

The crisis was also reflected in increased disease and mortality rates of the z/k. After the period of relative improvement in the regime, living and working conditions for the prisoners, and a number of amnesty campaigns initiated by Nikolai Yezhov, starting from 1938 the regime in the camps and economic conditions of the prisoners significantly worsened. Dramatic expansion in the number of prisoners in 1937-1938, a major outcome of the renewed struggle against 'the enemies of the people' inside and outside the camps coincided with increase of the economic pressure on the GULAG in the form of expanding economic plans and with cuts in state subsidies. Primarily it was caused by the escalation and complication of the industrialization processes in the context of the growing militarization of the country's economy.

The next important structural reform within the GULAG took place in 1940 in the form of the reorganization of the GULAG sector of the NKVD. The majority of the industrial sections (*glavki)* were separated from it together with the corresponding

[111] 'Dalstroy' is an acronym for the management of the camps in Kolyma region; UZHDS meas 'The Management of the Railway Construction of the Far North.'

camps. They became attached to the economic enterprises under the aegis of the NKVD. In 1941 the NKVD itself was divided into two sections named "People's Commissariat, " namely the NKVD as such and the NKGB (People's Commissariat of the State Security). The former, besides the GULAG, contained nine sections specialized in industry and managerial structures which were also responsible for the economic management of corresponding camps.

This innovation was the last one in the evolution of the places of confinement in the Soviet State. Subsequently, only minor changes took place, such as those in the number and specialization of the industrial units and the division of functions between the GULAG and these offices. From time to time some of the GULAG functions were delegated to the local administrative bodies. But the most important organizational principle– the fusion of management of the industrial enterprises and camp complexes into unified hierarchical structure remained the same until 1953.

The GULAG retained responsibility over the camps, specialized in the agriculture, fishing industry, and those producing products of mass consumption (*shirpotreb*), as well as over all the colonies. Besides, the GULAG retained responsibility over the regime inside the camps, elaboration and control over the implementation of security orders, centralized registration and allocation of the prisoners, and general control over the places of confinement, including sanitary conditions and cultural-educative work.

The changes that took place in the system of confinement during the war, are very well described in existing works on the GULAG.[112] The war was a true trial to the expanding branches of the GULAG and its economy. The mobilization of all the

[112] S. Kuzmin, *Lagerniki,* M. Smirnov, S. Sigachev, 1998.

resources for the military needs meant closing down almost all construction projects, especially the long-term ones, where, as a part of an old tradition, the majority of the prisoners were engaged. The structure of the camps' management was simplified. On July 20, 1941 the NKVD and the NKGB again became one institution. New projects were launched only if they were considered important for the state security. The remaining enterprises changed their specialization and adjusted production to the war necessities. Their economic plans expanded. The decline in the workforce (a significant part of it left for the frontline) was to be compensated with a much longer duration of the working hours and higher production targets.

To summarize, the history of the GULAG the period of 1930s was characterized by a constant search by the NKVD for the most suitable forms of the interaction between the camps and industrial sectors. This phenomenon was reflected in periodic structural reforms of the GULAG and the NKVD. The crucial factors that influenced the evolution of the system of confinement were the formation of the centralized planned economy, an intensified struggle for power in the state insitutions, and periodical repressive campaigns such as collectivization, the 'Great Terror' of 1937-1938, the deportations in newly acquired territories: Baltic countries, Eastern provinces of Poland and so on.

In 1938, the GULAG production totaled 1.5 billion rubles; in 1939 it reached 2.5 billion. In 1940 it already amounted to 3.7 billion, and the plan for 1941 totaled 4.7 billion rubles.[113] By 1940, the camp economy included twenty branches of the national economy, the most important being nonferrous metallurgy, amounting to 32.1 % of the overall production of the GULAG and forestry, which made 16.3% of the GULAG production. Besides, by 1940 the GULAG was one of the primary forest suppliers of

[113] G. Ivanova, *Labour Camp Socalism,* p. 82.

the Soviet Union. The total output of forestry production of the GULAG was 40% of the total production of the People's Commissariat of Forestry (*Narkomles*) of the USSR which amounted to 13% of the total production of the Soviet Union and the one of fuel industry equaled to 4.5%. On the eve of the Second World War camp enterprises produced from one- third to one- half of the Soviet tin, nickel, gold, and timber, and accounted for 11.0% of all capital investments.[114]

The qualitative evaluation of the role of the GULAG in the economy of the country in the 1930s is reflected in section three of the report of the assistant of the GULAG chief composed for the NKVD boss in March 1940.[115] It argues that the GULAG was a chief producer in many branches of Soviet economy and in many regions of the country a primary actor in the Soviet industrialization. The GULAG coordinated the most important enterprises in mining and metallurgic industry, such as copper-nickel industrial complex of Norilsk, which was the primary industrial center of the Polar zones of the USSR. Even if the total output in certain branches was not very big, (such as one in fuel industry, amounting to 3, 7% of the total output in the Soviet Union), it nevertheless was of primary significance. Fuel industry, for example, was organized by the NKVD in those regions of the USSR, where the extracted fuel was the only available or the primary source of energy and the raw material for metallurgy. An example of it is the production in the *Ukhtizemlag*, which was established with the aim of creating the oil base for the USSR on the Far North. Additionally, the enterprises run by this camp developed the practice of radium extraction. It was the only enterprise of this kind not only in the Soviet Union but also in the world, for it functioned not on the

[114] G. Ivanova, *Labour Camp Socalism* p. 84.
[115] *GULAG, 1918-1960,* pp. 725-780.

basis of the using uranium ore (as in all other parts of the world), but on basis of the radioactive waters, unprecedented in the world practice at that time.[116]

In the 1940s the situation inside the GULAG changed, starting with the social composition of its camps. The wide influx of the civilians, sentenced for "political" crimes into the GULAG stopped. On the contrary, it witnessed the arrival of new categories of the prisoners: POWs, "Vlasovites,"[117] members of the OUN.[118] These groups of prisoners, resolutely hostile to the Soviet power, possessed a rich mobilization and warfare experience. Often upon their arrival they launched a warfare against the power of the informal organizations of the criminals within the camps or instigated anti-state revolts or attempts at the armed escape. From the second half of the 1940s, when the power of the criminal organizations within the camps increased, the GULAG became a reservation of the anti–state destructive tendencies. It was shaken by the revolts and the criminals' internal wars, the most notorious of which were the so-called Bitch wars.[119]

One of the important tenets of the criminal organization in the camps, inherited from the Tsarist prisons, was that members would not serve or collaborate Soviet government. As World War II progressed, I. Stalin made an offer to many prisoners such that in exchange for their service within the Soviet military they would be granted a pardon at the end of the war. At the end of World War II, Stalin reneged on his promise and promptly sent those prisoners who had served in the military back to prison. The

[116] *GULAG,* p. 755.
[117] The term "Vlasovites" designated the members of the anti-Soviet military groups of the "Russian Liberation Army," headed by the general A. Vlasov during the Second World War.
[118]OUN was the military organization fighting for Ukraine' independence during the Second World War.
[119] The Bitch Wars occurred within the Soviet prison system between 1945 and around the death of I. Stalin in 1953. The Russian word *suka* (literally, "bitchc") has a general negative connotation, somewhat different from the meaning in the English language. In Russian criminal argot, it specifically refers to a person from the criminal world who has cooperated with the government or "went bitch."

veterans who returned to prison were declared *sukas* and placed on the bottom of the prisoner hierarchy. As a result they sought to survive through collaboration with prison officials, and in return got some of the better jobs within the prison. This, along with the sukas involvement in the Soviet military, started an internal prison war between the military veterans and the leaders of the Russian criminal underground, or "Thieves in Law." Many prisoners were killed in the Bitch Wars. Prison authorities turned a blind eye, since prisoner deaths would serve to reduce the overall prison population. These wars are said to have transformed the old criminal organizations. As the wars ended the old criminal ethic of non-collaboration with government officials is said to have ended.

In a large part the wars were provoked by the MVD authorities, who, out of fear of a complete loss of the control over the camps, started to support criminal groups in a hope of their mutual extermination, destroying the camps' infrastructure. An alliance between criminal and administrative elements, that always was present in the camps, increased its influence. In these conditions the continuation of the productive process was impossible, and all the efforts of the MVD were redirected from the fulfillment of the economic tasks to keeping the system from falling apart in revolts, internal wars, and rebellions. The influence of the changes in the social fabric of the camps on the production process was reflected in the official reports of regional camp managers as well as the memoirs. Another factor that contributed to the decay of the GULAG was the fact of discrediting of the Soviet values and propaganda in the society within and outside of the system.

One of the manifestations of the slow but irrevocable decline in the GULAG as an economic agency was its corruption. In the 1940s the system of capital punishment for the "state crimes" such as embezzlements and the failures to fulfill the plans that existed in the 1930s and contributed to the economic effectiveness no longer

functioned. There were no factors that could restrain or limit the horrific practices or mass scale embezzlements and swindle, previously used to conceal the economic losses within the system. Already in 1943 the camps served as a ground for activity of powerful illegal networks participants in which committed embezzlements on the vast scale. The NKVD reports disclose the scale and the mechanisms of the so-called "predators' organizations," that comprised the hired employees of different sections of the camp economy, administrators as well as the prisoners, which were non-existent in the 1930s. Such reports also include the classification of embezzlements and the hidden strings of the criminal network.[120]

In all times, the economic activity of any particular camp was influenced by the unreal economic plan and the lack of all necessary prerequisites for its successful implementation.

Deficit weighed on the GULAG's activity with immense pressure, worsening over time. The correspondence between the NKVD officials with the SNK (Council of the People's Commissars) and the TsK VKPb (Central Committee of the Communist party) dated 1938 (the year of the drastic increase of prisoners in the camps) contains repetitive pleas of Nikolai Yezhov to Vyacheslav Molotov, an SNK chief, to provide the GULAG prisoners with extra food and clothes for the newly arrived prisoners. The funds the GULAG had at its disposal were insufficient even for a previous number of prisoners. In the words of its managers,

Desperate lack of material funds, contrary to our needs, deprives us of the possibility to satisfy the most basic needs of the prisoners for food and clothes for winter 1938-1939. As a result, to a large extent the workforce will remain unused.[121]

[120] GARF, f. 9401, op. 1a, d. 143, pp. 139-143.
[121] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 19, p. 202.

Similar pleas to the Economic Council of the SNK were issued by the GULAG chiefs in 1941-1942. In 1941 the current GULAG chief V. V. Chernyshov repeatedly contacted Anastas Mikoyan[122] on the question of the conflicts between the GULAG officials and the staff of other People's Commissariats. The People's Commissariat of the Trade (*Narkomtorg* USSR) frequently refused to supply the GULAG prisoners with adequate food resources. (The Section of the Vitamins Production Industry) *SOYZVITAMINPROM* of the People's Commissariat of the Food Industry repetitively stopped the vitamins supply to the camps in the Northern regions. In his report the GULAG chief stated that "a large part of the food and clothes supply proposed for year 1941 is lacking, and another part has been refused." In 1942 the situation with supply was worse. "As a result of the insufficient food supply in the first quarter of the current year, and unsatisfactory provisions in the fourth quarter of the last year the camps experience a desperate lack of funds. The number of non-working z/k is staggering, as is the increase in deceases and mortality rates."[123] While the pressure weighing on the shoulders of the GULAG managers and vits inmates steadily growing, from the point of view of allocation of the investments in the Soviet economy it remained the most unprivileged agency.

Lavrentii Beria's letter to Molotov from April 17, 1939 stated that

daily ration for the GULAG prisoner is calculated according to the task of subsistence of a non-working man. In practice even this norm is provided for by the supply organizations only for 65-70%. As a result, the most part of labour force contained in the camps is absolutely useless for fulfillment of the economic tasks of the

[122] People's Commissar of Supplies, 1930-1934, and People's Commissar of Food Industry, 1934-1938.
[123] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 34, p. 142.

camps. Overall, the camp labour force is used for no more than 60-65% of its full potential."[124]

At the same time, the economic plans had to be fulfilled. The fulfillment of the plan was equal to a military command. In case of failure, no objective circumstances were ever taken into consideration.[125] As one of the ex-inmates noted,

"The plan was an unlimited sovereign and despot. It weighed over everyone, from a dying goner to the well-fed piggy looking foreman. Everyone was bowing to it and trembling at the thought of it: the camp administrators wearing the NKVD regalia as well as newly liberated z/k who have just migrated to another side of the zone." [126]

The White-Sea Baltic Combine and the Camp NKVD : An Insight into the History of the GULAG Institution.

Without any doubt the construction of the White-Sea Canal in 1931-1934 can be called the most important experiment in the history of the system of forced labour in the Soviet Union. It was the principal factor that shaped the process of the gradual centralization of its management, a direct reflection of the centralizing tendency in the country's economy.[127] It was a test case for the GULAG. Because of the objective conditions of this construction– the fixed time limits and impossibility of hiring workers (absence of elementary living conditions) it became a task well suited to the

[124] V. Zemskov, "Zaklychennie v 1930-e gody: sotsialno-demograficheskie problemy, 1945-1957," in *Otechestvennaya Istoriya,* no. 4, July/ August 1997, p. 61.
[125] G. Zzenov, *Prozitoe,* p. 115.
[126] Memorial, f. 2, op. 2, d. 22.
[127] At the beginning of 1930s rapid extension of the sphere of directive planning and corresponding forms of material supply of the production process acquired a primary significance in the country's economy . The industrial projects and enterprises coming changed their economic priorities: their crucial task became not the attainment of profitability (in the case of the places of confinement it was self-sustainment,) but the fulfillment of the fixed economic tasks with fixed material supply funds. M. Smirnov, "Sistema mest zaklychenia v SSSR," p. 30.

organizational structure of the GULAG with its centralized, hierarchical apparatus. This project triggered the transformation of the OGPU (which supervised the GULAG at that time) from the mere supplier of the cheap work force into a manager of the production processes, fully responsible for the fulfillment of the state's economic tasks. By the 1935 the NKVD gained control over all the places of confinement and important industrial enterprises in the USSR, thus becoming a mighty economic agent.

After the completion of the White-Sea Canal in 1933, the BBLag (White-Sea Baltic camp) was assigned to the created at that time White-Sea Baltic Combine (BBK), which was endowed with the task of the exploitation of the canal and the natural resources surrounding it with the use of forced labour. During the years of its existence (1934-1941) it focused on the industrial production and construction, having constructed many important industrial enterprises of the region. Judging by the number of employed workers, productive output and the scale of industrial activity BBK was a true colonizer of the region. For example, in the industrial sector of the Karelian economy in 1925-1926 5000 workers were employed. In 1932 this number reached 23000. On the combine the number of workers varied from 50000 and more. At that time the combine had an authority over 14 subdivisions, two smaller sections, (*lagpunkty*) a labour colony for juvenile delinquents, and the White-Sea Baltic Canal. Besides, it possessed its own train, aircraft, and its own permanent court, called "Permanent Session of the Supreme Court of the Karelo-Finnish SSR at the White-Sea Baltic Combine."[128]

The BBLag reports show, that during the 1930-s the number of prisoners amounted to approximately 75-85000.[129] That was still less than during the canal

[128] *GULAG v Karelii,* p. 104.
[129] V. G. Makurov, "Belomoro-Baltiiskii Kombinat v Karelii. 1933-1941,"*Novoe v izuchenii Karelii* (Petrozavodsk: RAN, 1994), pp. 139-140.

construction: in summer 1932 the BBLag housed 126000 prisoners. On January 1, 1939, the BBLag contained 86567 prisoners, from them sentenced for "counter-revolutionary" crimes amounted to 29706 (35%). From this number 10017 prisoners were sentenced for 'espionage,'1855 for the 'terror,' 440 for 'wrecking,' 26 for 'the treason of the Motherland.'

Constant fluctuations in the number of the prisoners were connected with the arrival and departure of the z/k transfers from one camp to another (*etapi)* as well as internal transfers. On a daily basis prisoners arrived sentenced according to diverse articles of the penal code, of different nationality, origin, social status, age, and education.

By July 8, 1938 the BBK had accepted and hosted in the 21 special settlements(built by the deportees themselves) 28083 special settlers. The national composition of the settlers was marked by diversity, but Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Chuvash, Polish and Mordvines and Germans predominated.[130]

Special settlements received increased attention in the plans of the state authorities. According to the decision of the Commission of the Party Control, (KPK) that arrived from Moscow to Medvezhegorsk (administrative center of the BBK) in 1935 for the inspection of the BBK and elaboration of the future plans for its development, in the course of the upcoming changes in the strategy of the allocation of the human resources, special settlers were supposed to become a chief agent in the further industrial colonization of the region in the course of years 1938-1947. According to the elaborated plan of the future development of the enterprise, published in the newspaper "Red Karelia" (*Krasnaya Karelia,*) the leadership of the BBK

[130] V. Makurov, "Belomoro-Baltiiskii Kombinat v Karelii," p. 146.

attempted to increase the number of the colonists to 30715 in 1947. Together with the existing residents it would make more than 60000 settlers. For their accommodation 75 new workers' settlements were supposed to be constructed in addition to the existing 20 settlements.[131]

Apart from the prisoners and the special settlers, 4-5000 hired workers were employed in the BBLag, and the armed guards divisions (VOKHR) that according to the existing instruction had to be calculated at no less than 5 % of the camp population. Finally, in the 1930s every winter around 50000 seasonal workers came yearly to the BBK for forestry labour, attracted by higher payments. For example, already in the winter forestry season 1929-1930 50.767 recruited workers toiled in Karelia, in their majority peasants from the central regions of the country.[132]

An insight into the functioning of the BBK, as well as other any particular labour camp shows plenty of chaos, confusion and disorder. The GULAG administrators had problems with controlling the camps from the very beginning. In many respects they lost control over the situation in different, especially remote, corners of the GULAG empire. The orders on the work of the GULAG in its different spheres disclose an apocalyptic picture. Bureaucratic disorder and confusion, flood of paper work, chaos, perversion of the orders and failure to meet with the requirements, presenting of faked results characterized the whole period of the GULAG history and NKVD's desperate and persistent fight with it.[133]

In the BBK bureaucratic disorder reigned in almost all its sections. The absence of control over what was going on in the armed guard detachments was already clear

[131] K. Gnetnev, *Kanal,* p. 58.
[132] K. Gnetnev, *Kanal,* p. 58.
[133] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 4, p. 86; op.1, d. 7, p. 112, d. 32, p. 41, d. 32, p. 48.

on the level of platoon –battalion,[134] and was very well reflected in the guards' characteristics and reports of the officers.

A report of the Karelian prosecutor on the work of *Oneglag* (a former BBK subdivision) during 1939-1940 explains the systematic yearly failure of the camp to fulfill the forestry production plans(the last fulfillment being 63%) due to the absence of the control by the NKVD chief and the camp administration resulting in a laissez-faire (*samotek*) attitude as the main feature of the camp sections. As the head of the camp commented on the fulfillment of his orders "they don't sabotage them but at the same time don't carry them out."[135]

Publically disclosed administrative abuses were punished severely. Often the culprits received death sentences, as it happened in *Belbaltlag* in 1932.[136] But the measures of disciplinary punishment were arbitrary, sporadic and with articulated didactic aims. "Sporadic, isolated measures in the 'fight with embezzlement' were hardly effective in the conditions of terrifying poverty, hopeless mass destitution, and total chronic deficit in everything connected with the elementary needs of human existence. "[137]

Frequently embezzlement was accomplished under the guise of all necessary attributes of Soviet propaganda. Press campaigns, brochures, praising fictitious "shock-workers" and presenting forged production results, thunderous rhetoric during the peak

[134] The reports on the state of affairs in the armed guards platoons in the BBK from April 11, 1934 show that the most part of reporting procedures was treated superficially. Gratitude expressed for the "sleeping while on guard" was not just an occasional occurrence, but a common phenomenon in the 1st , 2nd , 3rd , 4th , 5th , 7th , 9th armed guard sections and separate Solovestky and Murmansk platoons. Fake reports, containing incorrect data, written in illiterate and obscure language, where all the guards in the platoon could be registered as absent " on vacation," were a widespread phenomenon. NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 11/25, pp. 247, 305. It is interesting however that normal pretext for epxressing the "gratitude" to the guards in the "journal of disciplinary sanctions and encouragements" was "leaving the bed tidy." NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 9/48, p. 76.
[135] Garf, f. 8131, op. 37, d. 363, p. 6.
[136] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 3, p. 24.
[137] V. Berdinskikh, *Vyatlag,* p. 278.

of Stakhanovites (*Stakhanovite sleti)* created an atmosphere of "unnecessary fuss and perilous self-glorification."[138]

BBK-BBLag enterprise of the NKVD can not be conceptualized as just a "camp." According to the administrative structure of the combine, special settlements, along with camp zones, were integral parts of BBK subdivisions or 'separate camp subsections' (*OLP*), managed by their administration.[139] Its inhabitants, located right next to the zones, and often separated from it by just a feeble fence, could easily observe "the life and work of Stalin's slaves" and engage in daily contacts with them. [140]

In many areas the restrictions, associated with the notion "labour camp" were absent. Its *camp* part was an integral part of the world adjacent to it. The orders on the BBK from 1937, devoted to the strengthening of the regime and to discipline, commented on the " wandering of the large groups of prisoners in private apartments, clubs, and restaurants of Medvezhegorsk and adjacent areas either without a permit, or with illegally obtained permits. [141]

From spring 1937 police raids started to take place in Medvezhegorsk and its localities. They aimed at seizing the prisoners, who illegally remained outside of the camp zones. During some of these raids up to 100 prisoners were caught daily without permits in all possible places: in markets, railway stations, shops, theatre, restaurants, bathing houses. Out of 83 z/k caught in the course of a police raid that lasted from April 21 to April 24, 1937 around 50% of the detained prisoners were caught in private apartments after the midnight. Another 50% of the z/k were detained during working hours. Some of these prisoners had been sentenced according to the article 58 of the

[138] Garf, 9414, op 1, d. 8, p. 95; op. 4, d. 3, p. 5.
[139] *GULAG v Karelii,* p. 104; V. Makurov, "Belomoro-Baltiiski kombinat v Karelii. 1933-1941," p. 147.
[140] Moskva, 10 (1990), 162-166.
[141] *GULAG v Karelii,* p. 140.

Soviet penal code, some of them had significant sums of money on them. Among these prisoners there was a significant number of those employed in the administration of the camp subsections, financial and medical establishments or enterprises, such as typography. The majority of these prisoners were living outside of the zones with the informal agreement of the camp administrators. [142] Many prisoners indulged in 'debauchery and heavy drinking.' [143]

Even in 1939, after the measures to strengthen the regime had been implemented, a large number of the camp subsections had no zones. The prisoners, for the most part, were left unguarded, and freely communicated with the local population, engaging in trade, illegal correspondence and meetings with their relatives. Even in the camp sections where the zones were present, they were accessible to outsiders, and a large part of the prisoners lived outside.[144]

On May 26, 1937 an inspector entered the camp of the 3rd section of the Medveghegorsk separate subsection(KOLP) through the camp gates unnoticed by anyone. Having spent several hours walking around the territory of the camp zone, he failed to attract any attention. When he was leaving neither the guard nor the watchman asked for his ID.[145]

On June 8, 1939 an order was issued that significantly limited the independence and mobility of the prisoners, who worked in the BBK managerial departments.[146] The same happened in relation to the hired staff. According to the decree of the TsK and SNK from December 28, 1938, in the course of January and March 1939 alone 166

[142] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/8, p. 76.
[143] An order from April 24, 1937. *GULAG v Karelii*, p. 140.
[144] *GULAG v Karelii,* p.168-169; NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/8, p. 31.
[145] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/8, p. 31.
[146] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 3/15, p. 175.

hired employees of the BBK administration were fired on the pretext of "violations of labour discipline and truancy."[147]

In the late 1930s the BBK underwent structural changes, reflecting the broader trends in the GULAG instituion. It lost its authority over some of its enterprises. In 1937 *Severonikel* Combine, engaged in the construction of the nickel plant, became an independent unit. In 1938 the same happened to *Segezlag,* which was engaged in the construction of paper combine. On March 23, 1939 the authority of the canal and the nearby territories was transferred to the People's Commissariat of Water Transport. In 1940 the Combine lost authority over *Keksgolmlag,* which was engaged in the reconstruction of the cellulose enterprises taken from Finland), *Kandalakshlag* (construction of a railroad), *Pudozlag* (construction of the metallurgic combine), and *Matkozlag* (construction of Soroksky port). [148] Despite it's ambitious economic and industrial plans that stretched far into the 1940s, (up to 1947),[149] the Combine was dismantled in 1941. Although the primary reason was the war between the USSR and Finland, that broke out in 1939 and took place at the borders of the BBK, economic problems had plagued it long before that. In the face of increasing productive output plans, and a cut in the investments in the BBK starting from 1935, that had "undermined the colonization process of the nearby regions,"[150] the combine had to provide for the support of the people who worked for it without external assistance. According to the state plan on agricultural development, by the end of the first decade of its existence in 1943 BBK had to provide for 275000 people. This number was composed from 100000

[147] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 3/15, p. 19.
[148] "Dodnes Tyagoteet," *Ikh nazivali KR. Repressii v Karelii 20-kh-30-kh godov* (Petrozavodsk, 1992), p. 16.
[149] K. Gnetnev, *Kanal,* p. 53.
[150] *GULAG v Karelii,* p. 108.

workers and 175000 members of their families whom the authorities planned to attract into the BBK system by the beginning of the 1940s. [151]

For comparison, the entire population of Karelia at the beginning of 1933 amounted to 372000 people. The 'human' factor surfaced more poignantly in the course of the growth of the enterprise in the 1930s. The system of the forced labour without material incentives put a premium on coercion and appeal to sheer enthusiasm, which however successful in the task of digging a canal in a short time span, failed to efficiently carry out the task of gradual economic colonization of the region, the exploitation of industrial enterprises, and the establishment of the towns and the settlements. For those tasks a different attitude and mentality on the part of people involved would be necessary.

The inherent inadequacy of the camp complex to manage the special settlements is reflected in many camp chief's orders, that reproached the BBK management for treating the special settlers exclusively as a sort of prisoners, a mobile labour force, and ignoring the social side of the problem, not caring for a "special approach toward the settler and his family." As the order from December 1935 noted,

A number of leading BBK officials, including the chiefs of the subdivisions and their assistants, think the colonization issue is not their business. Consequently, they pay attention only to the camp's affairs and are not interested in the life in the special settlements. This attitude results in the disruption of the work of the schools, and delays in the food supply… Looking upon a settler as a mobile labour force leads to frequent transfer of the head of the family and the breadwinner far away from the settlements.

[151] K. Gnetnev, *Kanal*, p. 54.

Such transfers aggravate the material condition of his family. Sometimes the parents are separated from their children, who are left on their own.[152]

The most poignant 'GULAG contradiction,'a contradiction between the political and economic tasks of the camps, vividly manifested itself at the BBK. The enterprise was tormented by the necessity to fulfill the productive plans with extremely limited financial resources. At the same time, it was supposed to provide adequate regime and isolation for its prisoners, and take care of the population in the special settlements, develop and maintain a social infrastructure with "a complex of appropriate cultural and daily life conditions." In other words, it was supposed to prepare the settlements for "their transfer in a few years to the Soviet government."[153] This means that the Combine was burdened not only with ambitious economic plans, but also with social and cultural tasks that were impossible to complete in the light of existing financial, administrative, and human resources. For example, the dubious nature of this enterprise is revealed in the decision of the bureau of local Communist party committee (*raikom*) from August 1, 1937 to prescribe total liquidation of illiteracy in the BBK labour settlements in half a year.[154] Quite predictably, this project failed.

In his report to the assistant to the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs from February 26, 1939 Mikhail Timofeev, the chief of both the BBK and the BBLag, stressed urgent necessity to transfer the labour settlers from the territory of the Karelian republic to the inland regions of the country. The proximity to the Finnish border, presence of the 'counter-revolutionary Fascist and nationalist' organizations within the settlements, defense works of the BBLag and a large number of the 'counter-

[152] *GULAG v Karelii,* p. 115.
[153] *GULAG v Karelii,* p. 115.
[154] *GULAG v Karelii,* p. 142.

revolutionary' prisoners were indicated as chief reasons. Further on, he went on insisting on the necessity to abandon the economic activity of the camp:

"the camp should concentrate on providing the state secutiry as its primary task, and limit itself to prisoners' maintenance, taking them out to work and control the quality of their labor. Management of the industrial enterprises is the task of the corresponding People's Commissariats."[155]

With the beginning of the war on the basis of the BBK NKVD the Board of the Karelian-Finnish Defense Construction was created and the majority of the prisoners were evacuated to other camps of Archangelsk region, Komi ASSR, Ural and Siberia.

The Soviet Society in the Forced Labour Camp: Myths and Reality.

Many representatives of the country's elite and intelligentsia: engineers, scientists, professors, literary figures, and musicians were incarcerated in the BBLag. Among the most prominent prisoners of this camp one can mention philosophers Alexey Fyodorovich Losev (1893-1988), scholar and philosopher Pavel A. Florensky, (1882-1937), artistic figures such as a famous Ukrainian stage director Alexei Kurbas, an orchestra conductor from the *Kazan* Opera Theatre, and later the chief conductor of the Central Theatre of the BBK NKVD A. Grindberg; religious leaders, such as Orthodox bishop Aleksii Voronezksy, Damian Kurskii, Nikolai Tamborsky, Petr Samarskii, the chief of the Baptist church of the USSR V. Kolesnikov and a range of the Catholic priests, including Pyotr Veigel, who had been sent by Vatikan with the official mission to investigate the facts of the persecution of believers in the USSR) This gave ground for a scientist N. P. Antsiferov, an ex-prisoner of the BBLag to call Medvezhegorsk "a capital of the Russian intelligentsia." Many of these prisoners were

[155] *GULAG v Karelii,* p. 164.

later included into the notorious *Solovki etap,* confined in the *Solovki* prison and executed in autumn 1937.[156]

In the light of absence of reliable statistical data, the problem with defining the proportions of the prisoners of certain categories is aggravated by the fact that ordinary criminals were frequently sentenced on the basis of the article 58. Additionally, the distinction between the "political" and "criminal" categories of the prisoners itself is very problematic. The NKVD authorities rarely resorted to the term "criminal" ("*ugolovnii*") as opposite to "political." To describe the ordinary criminality the terms "declassed element," abbreviations *SOE* (socially dangerous element) and *SVE* (socially harmful element) were used.[157] The term "political" ("*politicheskii*") itself is a later invention by the prisoners, and was never used by the NKVD officials in the 1930s.

It is also highly problematic to determine the exact proportion of prisoners of one or another nationality at a certain period of time. The inclusive statistical materials are absent. However, the prisoners' dossiers, stored in the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Karelian Republic sheld light on the national composition of the BBK prisoners and disprove common stereotypes.

The share of peasants from Asia was high in the BBLag. Some Uzbeks, Tatars, Bashkirs, Turkmen, imprisoned in the BBK were charged with the "counter-revolutionary" crimes and 'resistance to collectivization,' but others were sentenced for

[156] The '*Solvestky etap'* means the group of the BBLag prisoners who were executed during the Terror; For more complete information see *Memorialnoe kladbische Sandarmokh. 1937: 27 oktyabrya–4 noyabra.* p. 1; I.I. Chukhin, *Karelia—37: ideologiya I praktika terrora* (Petrozavodsk : State University, 1999), pp. 124-125.

[157] Additionally, the officials of the Third Department of the BBK NKVD used such designations as a "bandit element," or "exercizing criminal authority in daily life," *"v bitu pahanstvuyschii element."* Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 294, p. 6.

minor offences.[158] It has been frequently claimed that at the beginning of 1930s, from the onset of the Canal construction, the majority of the BBLag prisoners consisted of the "innocent people, sentenced for participation in counter-revolutionary organizations and dekulakized peasants."[159] The presence of multiple cases of the prisoners sentenced for banditry and hooliganism shows that the proportion of ordinary criminals was high in the BBLag as in every other camp. Besides, even the legal acts, that were supposedly targeted at the "innocent people," such as law of 1932 'on the protection of state property,' and some other acts of the Soviet legislature at the beginning of the 1930s brought to the camps not only individuals of peasant background, sentenced for minor economic offences, but also swept up a number of real swindlers and thieves. although indeed of peasant background.[160]

The social composition of the camp changed significantly in the late 1930s, when in the course of the "Great Terror" the camp "intelligentsia" was destroyed.

Making a Career in the GULAG Archipelago: The BBK personnel.

In the first half of the 1930s the camp industrial enterprises, managerial camp apparatuses, offices, workshops, and factories were staffed primarily with the prisoners, including those sentenced for 'counter revolutionary' crimes.[161] Following the traditions of the White-Sea Canal Construction, prisoners were employed in all the administrative sections, technical bureaus, as engineers, statisticians, accountants and armed guards.[162] Many of the industrial enterprises of the GULAG at that time, including the White-Sea canal, de facto run by the imprisoned specialists, officially

[158] Arkhiv MVD, f. 72, op. 01, d. 124, p. 1.
[159] V.G. Makurov, "Uzniki GULAGa v Karelii," p. 46; I.I. Chukhin, *Kanaloarmeitsi,* p. 193; *Ikh nazivali KR,* p. 13.
[160] It is interesting that the files of the BBK prisoners show that part of the peasants, not engaged in the criminal lifestyle prior to their arrest, smoothly integrated into the community of the criminals in the camp.Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 306, 310.
[161] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 3, p. 71; d. 12, p. 39.
[162]. KGANI, f. 214, op. 1, d. 27, p. 73.

"chief engineers," de jure were headed by the hired party members. After the end of the canal construction a significant share of administrators, engineers and qualified technical specialists were transferred either to the central GULAG apparatus in Moscow or to the Moscow-Volga canal construction.[163]

In the first half of 1930s the staff of the Department of the Registration and the Allocation of the Prisoners (URO) of the BBK consisted of 420 employees. The majority of them were prisoners, formerly prominent economists, statisticians and the engineers.[164]

From the very beginning of the White-Sea Canal construction (*Belomorstroy)* the imprisoned specialists were provided with better living conditions and higher salaries than those of the ordinary z/k. Their average monthly salaries in the BBK were one hundred rubles, while the z/k's engaged in hard manual labour ranged from seven to ten rubles.[165] Thus a special caste was created, with higher living standards and its own social life. The regime for them was very mild, especially during the beginning of the 1930s until the year 1937. Some of them, while on business trips to Moscow and Leningrad, were unguarded and lived at home.[166]

As a result, during the 1930s only major posts in the camp administration were occupied by the trained Checkists or hired staff, wihle the z/k were employed on all levels of camp administration: as the heads of the camp subdivisions, monitors, foremen, and inspectors(*naryadchiki*).

From the year 1937, the start of the "Great Terror," the repetitive orders were sent to the camps with demands to remove "political" prisoners from their positions and

[163] TSAODM, f. 3352, op. 3, d.3, p. 3.
[164] Gnetnev, *Kanal,* p. 33.
[165] S. Kuzmin, "Lagerniki"// *Molodaia Gvardia*, 1993, no. 3, p. 161.
[166] GARF, f. 9414, op.1, d. 7, p. 15.

to prevent "anti-Soviet" elements from holding positions of responsibility in the camp administration, technical and industrial apparatuses. But the "counterrevolutionairies" were usually the best qualified prisoners to hold such posts and carry out important economic tasks. Thus, during the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, the use of these prisoners in the administration and managerial apparatuses of the camp was tacitly accepted and encouraged. [167]

Even in February 1939, after the 'Great Terror' out of 5395 employees of the BBLag 1893 were ex-prisoners. From this number 424 employees had been sentenced for 'counter-revolutionary' crimes. In the administration of the camp from 557 hired employees 259 were ex-prisoners. From this number 126 were registered as "counter-revolutionaries." In the Section of Finances and Planning, in the Central Accounting Department the leading administrative staff (the chiefs of the departments) had previously been accused for 'counter-revolutionary' crimes.[168]

At the beginning of the 1930s the difference between the hired staff and the certain categories of the prisoners (in particular, the engineers and the technical staff) was thoroughly concealed from everybody. It was expressed neither in clothes nor in lifestyle, so that even important camp officials did not know who among the ranks of the chiefs of the construction, managers, engineers, armed guards was a prisoner and who was not.

If the jobs demanding professional skills in the Combine were often occupied by the (ex-) prisoners, among whom there were many so-called "*bivshikh,*" specialists with higher education and diverse social background,[169] administrative positions, starting

[167] TsGARK, f. 865, op. 35, d. 1, p. 120.
[168] *GULAG v Karelii,* p. *163.*
[169] The only source that presents the information on the social background of the Combine management, is *Pominalnie spiski Karelii.*

from the armed guards and ending with the chiefs of the camp were frequently filled by the hired individuals of modest social background.

The number of the hired guards and the prisoners in the platoons of the armed guards varied, although it is possible to argue that the proportion of prisoners was very high. For example, in May 1931 the fourth platoon of the second marksmen's unit of the second detachment included 2 commanders, 19 hired guards, and 57 prisoner guards, altogether amounting to 81 members.

The application files of the BBLag prisoners for the job of a camp guard, or for the position of an officer in the ISCH (Information-Investigatory Department, later the Third Department) dated the first half of 1930s reveal that all these prisoners were sentenced for duty or domestic crimes. Many of those prisoners, from the poorest peasant or working class background, prior to their arrest were registered as members of the VKPb or VLKSM. In several dozen cases the majority of applicants had served in the army. As a rule, those applying for a job in the ISCH had had a working experience in the CHeKa, in the court, in the OGPU, or in the Investigatory Department (*Ugolovnii Rozisk*).[170] Some of them had long sentences and were sentenced for murder,[171] or for the abuse of power during the collectivization."[172]

The prisoners were recruited only after the Chekist-Operative Section, (the ISCH) had checked their files for "compromising materials." From the list of 50 prisoner applicants dated 1932, (47 accepted, 3 rejected) all of them had been sentenced

[170] NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 9/47, pp. 1-430.; In the questionnaires of the former Cheka-ISCH employees the graph "work experience" was left blank, despite the fact that the "main profession" was indicated as a working specialty. They obviously did not work a day on their main profession. NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 9/47, p. 257.

[171] One such a prisoner, sentenced for murdering his wife, was working as a KVCh instructor at a time of his application for a guard position. NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 9/47, p. 27. In general among KVCh chief instructors and instructors in this camp murderers were not infrequent. NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 11/53, p.409-410; NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 9/47, p. 260.

[172] As a rule these individuals had worked in the lowest and middle ranks of the Soviet state security organs, the CHK-OGPU-NKVD. NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 9/47, p. 54-57; p. 254.

by the People's Court according to the articles of the Soviet penal code dealing with general crime, the most frequent being 136, 164, 169 ('v'), and 142. Most of the applicants indicated their "social standing" as either "peasant," or "worker." Almost all of them were Russians, few Ukrainians, one Buryat, one Tatar. The most frequently mentioned 'professions prior to arrest' included 'grain grower,' ("khleborob,") "worker," "loader," peasant," "cooper," "shoemaker," "seller," "brigadier," "militiaman." All of them had served in the army.

This group of the prisoners constituted the major source of the camp guards.[173] This job gave ordinary prisoners a chance to escape the deadly common routine. As a memo from April 7, 1934 testifies, there was an increasingly severe shortage of the z/k guards in all the armed guards detachments of the BBK.[174] From the application letters it is obvious that ths job was a popular one and was sought by a great share of the prisoners. It was more popular than the post of the KVCh instructor and even than some administrative positions.[175] Having a positive record of work in the camp administration, the prisoner had better chances to get a similar job after being transferred to another camp.[176]

Many of the released prisoners who had previously worked as camp guards, wished to stay in the camp on a contract basis. Many of the application letters of the liberated prisoners for camp guards positions were written by the z/k guards prior to their liberation to secure a position in advance.[177] An application letter of a prisoner z/k

[173] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 9/47, p. 57-61.
[174] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 12/57, p. 267.
[175] Prisoners who occupied these posts wished to leave them for the one of the camp guard. NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 11/53, pp. 217-218, 259.
[176] NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 9/47, p. 292.
[177] NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 9/47, pp. 170-183.

guard Semen Nikitovich Goncharov, addressed to the chief of the VOKHR BBK, dated August 1,.1932 stated:

Having served as a camp guard for almost two years, I became deeply attached to my job and think it would be useful for me to raise my poor literacy through self-training. I also hope to be of use for the VOKHR and promise to serve as well as I did being a prisoner.[178]

Further evidence shows, that not only those employed in the administrative apparatus, but also some of the 'ordinary ' released prisoners were not willing or prepared to leave the camp immediately. [179] Sometimes relatives at liberty wrote to the prisoners asking if it was possible to accommodate them there as well.[180]

The autobiographies, attached to the prisoners' application files, display similar life stories that started with extremely harsh material conditions in childhood: large families, death of one or both parents and siblings, hunger, work experience from the age of 10-12, or leaving primary or secondary school. [181] It is interesting that some of the applicants (as well as the hired guards themselves) had a number of mental disorders, the most widespread being neurasthenia and schizophrenia.[182]

The post of a camp guard or an ISCH officer frequently was occupied by promoted workers, "vidvizhentsev" who had committed a duty crime. Some of them prior to their arrest had occupied responsible positions.[183] These files disclose the

[178] NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 9/47, p. 430.
[179] As an ex-prisoner wrote in her memoirs, "in the camp we had a daily ration, a shelter, and connections that guaranteed our survival. V. Nikitina, *Dom oknami na zakat,*
[180] At the beginning of 1930s the mother of an actor, performing in the *Belomorkanal* troupe (vaudevilles composed and staged by professional actors) of peasant "dekulakized" background sent him a letter, asking if it was possible to arrange to sent to the camp his younger brother. M. Terentjeva, "Moi otez Igor Terentjev," in *Teatr GULAGa,* p. 56. This vision was shared mainly by people of lower social standing, peasants and workers.
[181] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 9/47, pp. 231, 260, etc.
[182] NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 9/47, p. 43; d. 9/45, p. 46.
[183] NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 11/53, p. 259. NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 9/47, p. 244.

patterns of the social mobility within the Soviet society, and display the route from the employment office to a responsible position in Moscow, Leningrad or in the provinces. The majority of those who had served in the ChK-OGPU-NKVD had been recruited there in the middle or at the end of 1920s, after having worked in a factory, or on a construction site.

On May 25, 1935 a bureau was organized with branches in all the sections of the camp "on the employment and assistance of the ex-prisoners." It was supposed to arrange the employment for liberated prisoners, prepare work contracts for them and provide them with financial support.[184] Additionally, from 1932 the Central College was functioning under the aegis of the Cultural Educative Section of the BBK which prepared skilled workers of many qualifications. In the course of 1934 and the first half of 1935 alone 7500 specialists of different technical qualifications were prepared there, the majority of them coming from the ranks of the prisoners.[185]

To enroll in the courses at the Central College which ranged from forestry to medicine and cultural service, the prisoners had to conform to certain requirements. Apart from a "non-political" crime, they had to have completed 7 grades of school education. However, ordinary delinquents were not always eager to study there. Some of the prisoners escaped after arrival, while others were disqualified as "illiterate."

The policy of relying upon 'socially close elements' was not very efficient in the conditions of the forced labour camps. Recruitment of the professional criminals for the guards positions often resulted in a failure. Even after the recruitment, many of them were reluctant to abandon their criminal lifestyle after the appointment, they engaged

[184] NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 1/2, p. 12.
[185] *GULAG v Karelii,* p. 108.

in drunkenness and speculation, and provoked the authorities in order to be released from their posts.[186]

In 1935 in all camp subsections commissions were created for selection of the prospective candidates.[187] At the same time a system of professional education for the juvenile prisoners was established by the camp administrators, although it proved to be dysfunctional.[188]

A number of applications shows that the post of a guard was also desired by the demobilized army soldiers, OGPU soldiers, primarily of peasant background. [189]

This is especially interesting in the light of the fact that living and working conditions of the guards were truly pathetic. However, the interests of these people were also very limited. The report on the inspection of one of the BBK armed guard platoons contains the description of the discussion between an inspector and the armed guards. It discloses that the guards suffered from extreme poverty and deprivation, but were not discontented. The questions posed by the guards to the inspector were devoted to the petty complaints of daily life, such as how to compensate for a stolen pillow case, how to get new clothes, how to get better kitchen facilities ; other complaints ranged from delayed salary to poor meals.[190]

Denunciations among the guards were not infrequent. These were sent to the regimen commander. The subjects ranged from exposing damaging details of a colleague's biography, such as his being a priest in the past, [191] or an accusation of "speculation," which was rampant among the guards and ranged from selling a piece

[186] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 12/57, p. 281.
[187] NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 1/2, p. 101.
[188] NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 1/2, p. 164.
[189] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 9/48, p.122.
[190] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 12/57, pp. 475- 477.
[191] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 12/57, p. 148.

of clothing to prisoners to having a lively trade with them.[192] Other denunciations disclosed "mixing" with the z/k women.[193]

Data on 78 hired members of the first platoon of the first VOKHR detachment from April 1933 reveals that their place of residence prior to the arrival to the BBLag was either the village or (just several cases) a small provincial town. In this report under "social standing" there were three choices: "a peasant-kolkhoznik," "an individual peasant"(in the minority), or "a worker." Five indicated themselves as "farm laborers" ("batraki,") other five as "state employees." The rotation was so high that only few guards overstayed their initial contract term. The same was the case in other platoons.[194] Only five guards arrived in the BBLag in 1931, while the rest started their term in 1932 or in 1933.

Research into the social background of the middle and higher rank hired BBK staff reveals similar patterns. The chiefs of the managerial sections and departments, Third Department officers, commandants of the special labour settlements, political instructors, chiefs of the camp guards subdivisions, chiefs of the BBK subsections, KVCh chiefs employed on the contract basis for the most part were promoted workers of the poorest peasant/working class background.[195]

The majority of the 31 candidates for positions of the chiefs of the election commissions from the Medvezhegorsk district had started their career within the BBK system.[196] Many of them arrived in the GULAG as guards through recruitment. During their term they were promoted first to the post of a commander of the armed guard

[192] NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 11/53, p. 204.
[193] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 10/50.
[194] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 11/53, pp. 471, 472.
[195] The files of the candidates for the secretaries of the election committees for the elections to the Supreme Soviet, 1937. Not a single person was from "state employees" family.
[196] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 67.

platoon or a political instructor. Later they were promoted to the position of a chief of a camp subsection or a commandant of a labour settlement.[197]

Promotion from the post of an armed guard was not the only way of making a career inside the GULAG system. Some of the guards got transferred to the OGPU-NKVD schools after a corresponding petition, saying they would like to "enhance their political and military skills in the 'normal' OGPU-NKVD school."[198]

The educational level of mid-rank Combine administrative staff was rather poor. The majority of the commandants of the special settlements, applying to the positions of the chiefs of the electory commissions indicated their educational level as "the lowest."[199] Their handwritten application letters and autobiographies, as well as these of the prisoners, display a huge variety of orthographic and stylistic mistakes. This was true also of those individuals, whose former job consisted of working with documents. [200]

The typical life story of many of these people included getting into the camp system through recruitment as a guard (or, in the case of the NKVD officers through the OGPU-NKVD organs). Not a single individual descended from the family of the state employees (sluzashchie). Similar to the cases of the camp guards, the majority described harsh material conditions in their childhood. The only exception was the case of a BBK employee who went to work there following a recruited spouse.[201] A former Ukrainian peasant even described in detail the cattle owned by his family.[202]

[197]The only exception was the case when a person went to work for the BBK following a recruited spouse. NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 67, p. 36.
NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 67, pp. 5, 29, 30, 39.
[198] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 11/53, p. 487.
[199] Some of the autobiographies actively use Bolshevik rhetoric, some of them present a unique mixture of old Slavonic words, Russian language, Bolshevik rhetoric and Ukrainian.
[200] NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 9/47, p. 322.
[201] NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 67, p. 36.
[202] NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 67, p. 67.

The same can be said about the secretaries of the election committees.[203] Out of 30 applicants not a single one had higher education, and only few had completed the secondary school. As a rule, these were school instructors from the special settlements.

Promoted workers, (*vidvizhentsi*) made up an important source also for the highest BBK administrative staff. The chief of the BBK from 1937 to 1941 Mikhail Timofeev, a protégée of Nikolai Ezhov, who propagated and actively supported the policy of the purges, [204] was of urban working class background. He passed a typical route from the errand boy in the Fershtadt store in Peterburg to the member of the CheKa. During the revolution of 1917 and the Civil War he served in the various kinds of extraordinary commissions: *chrezvichaikakh,* and *troikah.* Later, during 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s he worked "in the most crucial areas of the Chekist work in the Special Departments in the Ukraine, disclosing and fighting the enemy groups" and got an award for his "ruthless fight with the enemies of the people." He left his post of a BBK chief in 1941 for the position of the chief of the GULLP.[205] He survived the purges and retired in 1956 from this post, with a wide range of state awards and medals.[206]

The life and career of a former Solovki inmate Naftalii Frenkel has become a subject of interest for many scholars. Many of them used the references of other prisoners and anecdotal evidence as a source.[207] His personal case, stored in the MVD archive (rather scanty, for all the protocols of interrogation are stored in Moscow Presidential Archive) clarifies the details of his arrest and life in the camp. It shows that

[203] NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 13/68.
[204] As the BBK press commented, "from the first days of his work in the BBK eradicated and crushed the enemy groups, that had been hiding in the BBK apparatuses *Stalinskaia trassa,* no. 57, June 17, 1938, p. 2.
[205] The Administration of the Forestry camps of the NKVD (later the MVD) of the USSR.
[206]N. V. Petrov, K. V. Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD 1934-1941,* spravochnik (Moscow: Memorial, 1999). Internet,http://www.memo.ru/history/nkvd/kto/biogr/index.htm, accessed on August 27, 2006.
[207] K. Gnetnev, *Kanal,* p. 22, A. Applebaum, *The GULAG: A History.*

after his service as a secret agent of the OGPU, in 1924 he was sentenced for the ten year camp imprisonment by the Collegium of the OGPU on the basis of the articles 57, 98 and 188 of the Soviet penal code (illegal crossing of the Soviet border, contrabanda and fraud).[208] Service as an OGPU agent partly explains the circumstances of his early release (in 1927) and a successful career within the GULAG system (after completion of the canal construction he was appointed as the Chief of the BAM (Baikal- Amur Route) administration of the GULAG OGPU. On October 29 he was granted a rank of the General-Lieutenant of the Engineering-Technical Service, and on April 28, 1947 he proceeded to an honorary retirement, accompanied by numerous state awards.[209] He died at the age of 77 in 1960.

Z. A. Almazov-Almazyan (Almazov) who occupied the post of the BBLag chief from October 7, 1936 to June 13, 1937 (combining it with the posts of the chief of the BBK and an assistant to the chief of the GULAG),[210] also was of modest social background. Later he was promoted within the GULAG. Contrary to the earlier examples, his career ended in his arrest and execution in 1937.

Social Life in the Camp:Glimpses Beyond the Barbed Wire

Labour camp context endowed social life in the region with peculiar features. A frightening shift of culture, back to the Middle Ages, even to slavery coincided with a vigorous spurt ahead, self-development and adaptation of old forms to the habits and concepts of the 20th century.

By the end of the 1930s the use of the labour settlers as housemaids in the households of the BBK administrative staff had become an integral part of life, and the

[208] Arkhiv MVD, f. 72, op. 01, d. 3107, p. 5. The case also sheds light on his education: instead of the degrees in economics and law he supposedly held, it indicates professional training of "an agronomist." Ibid.
[209] O. Khlevniyk, *The History of the GULAG: From Collectivization to the Great Terror,* p. 348.
[210] Spravochnik po GULAGu, p. 9.

only concern the management expressed in relation to this matter was the concern over able-bodied settlers. Orders were issued demanding their replacement with the settlers with a poorer state of health so that to prevent "the distraction of labour force from fulfillment of the state tasks."[211] In some of the BBK subsections the VOKHR guards and firemen, although still formally employed, had given up their duties and made their living as the shoemakers, artisans, and cooks.[212]

The *blat* system with its hidden networks of commodities (*raspredi)* and the special reservation system, as in any other USSR enterprises,[213] was flourishing in the second half of 1930s in sections and regional subdivisions of the BBK.[214] It also was functioning in most of camp subsections. For example, in May 1938 a letter to the editorial office of *Stalinskaia Trassa* complained

All sought-after products, such as butter, pork, salted fish have suddenly disappeared from the stores of *Segezstroy.* It turned out that the employees of the Department of the Supply have organized a genuine hidden distribution network. The the store number one contained a list of the "privileged" camp officials, who enjoyed a home delivery of a wide variety products of high quality."[215]

The same situation existed in other BBK subdivisions, and small camp subsections, where the goods were sold "under the shelves," according to the lists composed by the chief of the subdivision.[216] This was not only the case with the main stores but also with petty trade units, dolly shops in the remotest and smallest

[211] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 3/15, p. 181.
[212] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 16, February 2, 36, p. 3.
[213] S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 258.
[214] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 13, January 26, 1936, p. 4.
[215] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 32, May 5, 1938, p. 4.
[216] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 64, July 4, 1938, p. 4; issue 9, January 18, 1939, p. 3.

settlements.[217] Sometimes *blat* took unexpected forms due to the motley social composition of BBK staff. In the theatre club of *Tuloma*, for example, at the beginning of 1936, the hired staff had difficulties obtaining the tickets for the productions, for the theatre administration reserved tickets primarily for the prisoners.[218] The pioneer camps in the region were also managed by the GULAG. Their organization and management was provided by the "morally stable" "z/k labourforce" with few hired workers.[219]

The BBLag set out a model of the camp for years to come. A great share of the prison camp folklore, that later permeated the entire camp system and the country at large was born during *Belomorstroy.* The same refers to the practices and patterns of life and work such as the 'storm work,' (*shturmovschina*)*,* widespread in the camps. It meant urgent mobilization of all resources available for completion of one part of work at the expense of the others under the imminent threat of collapse of the plan.[220] This practice, usually resulting in arhythmic, uneven character of economic activity, is one of the most obvious legacies of the construction of the White-Sea Baltic Combine (*Belomorstroy.)*

The same can be said of the practice of *tufta.* The term, a derivative from official abbreviation TFT, meaning "Heavy Manual Labour," dates back to the process of construction of the White-See Canal, when it was first used in the camp slang. Very quickly the word "tufta" became an integral part not only of the camp folklore, but also of the vocabulary of official documents. Already in 1933 the NKVD authorities called for 'the decisive fight with the regular use of the criminal jargon in the economic reports

[217] In the *Sennuha* camp subsection of the 9th BBK subdivision, for example, the seller in lavka (the state-owned shop) turned it into a private dolly shop, selling the goods on the basis of the family ties. (po semeinomu) NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 30, February 28, 1939, p.3.
[218] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 19, February 9, 1936, p. 4.
[219] NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 1/2 p. 2-3.
[220] TsAODM, f.3352, op.3, d.248, p.., *Berdinskikh,* p. 132.

of the camp apparatuses.'[221] This term with the slightly changed meaning, "a lie," "nonsense," "poorly done work" is included in the dictionaries of contemporary Russian slang.

In words of a BBLag ex-prisoner *"*if the prescriptions, coming from above, would have been understood literally, all would have perished from hunger.[222]" The word *blat* (being not only the main principle of social relations in the camps, especially in the sphere of administrative appointments, but also the main principle of social relations in contemporary Russia), of Jewish origins, from Biblical "b'laat" meaning "*v tishine, potihonku,"* also achieved popularity during the canal construction.

Conclusion

The history of the GULAG as well as any of its enterprise, consisted of frequent reorganizations, restlessness, search for right administrative solutions to the poignant economic, political, and social problems that had been created in the course of the implementation of the utopian ideological project. The pursuit of clearly defined aims for the camps' system coincided with uncertainty as how precisely they should be achieved. This problem found its manifestation in multiple reorganizations in the GULAG system that took place in the course of the 1930s. In a large part this reorganization was motivated by the search for an important administrative problem : the most suitable form of interaction between the camps and industrial development.

The general logic of these reorganizations was directed towards shifting from relatively automonous large-scale enterprises, which incorporated camps and industrial sections (or dismantling them, as was the case with the BBK NKVD) towards

[221] P. Gregory, *The Economics of Forced Labor,* p. 420.
[222] Y. Margolin, *Puteshestvie v stranu z/k,* p. 43.

separatation of the camps from economic agencies and their full subordination to the central GULAG apparatus. Economic tasks, previously entrusted to the camp administrations, were transferred to the correponding branches of the economic *glavki.* These reorganizations were caused by the difficulties of the camp administrations in controlling immense human and technical resources and managing large-scale projects. At the same time, these changes were directed towards liquidation of any possibility of dissent among powerful camp elite, which had become too independent.

Still, as the history of the GULAG of the 1940s and 1950s demonstrates, the major problems, caused by the nature of the forced labour, were not solved. Apart from the cumbersome bureaucratic apparatus, underfinancing, poor transportation, coercive nature of the entire enterprise, conflicts between industrial enterprises and the camps, embezzlement and corruption were the major plagues of the GULAG which undermined it and largely contributed to its liquidation.

The question of the profitability of the GULAG labour is also important. One way to calculate the profits brought by the forced labour insitution would be to contrast its production figures from various years and relate them to expenditures on overall costs, including labour, feeding, guards, and so on. However, the production figures presented by the GULAG and by its particular camps are problematic. It is difficult to say whether and to what extent they reflected the reality. Still, the problem is to be explored. What is clear is that almost every camp and every settlement, including the BBK, was supposed to finance its labour force and infrastructure with little external help. The enterprises, plants, and canals, thus, were built at a high human cost. Mortality in the BBLag was at its highest in 1933, the year when White-Sea Baltic Canal was built. But the number of the prisoners sent to build it was also immense. The GULAG labour could achieve results only in the extreme situations at the price of lives of its prisoners.

But it was absolutely inadequate for peaceful industrial, economic, and social colonization of the region, as the history of the BBK amply demonstrates.

The BBK was supposed to become a sample of the Soviet economic, social and cultural colonization of a backward region. However, it was precisely its forced labour element, the 'camp' nature of the Combine that hindered successful implementation of these ambitious plans.

Under the aegis of this camp, endowed with the task of the exploitation of the canal and colonization of the region, several important enterpises were constructed. Later, as well as the canal, they were separated from the Combine, which turned out inadequate for their proper maintenance and exploitation. Initial plans of its leadership, targeted at the colonization of the region with the help of the prisoners and the special settlers, were never fulfilled.

The 'human' factor surfaced more poignantly in the course of the growth of the enterprise in the 1930s. The system of the forced labour without material incentives put a premium on coercion and appeal to sheer enthusiasm, which however successful in the task of digging a canal in a short time span, failed to efficiently carry out the task of gradual economic colonization of the region, the exploitation of industrial enterprises, and the establishment of the towns and the settlements. For those tasks a different attitude and mentality on the part of people involved would be necessary.

BBK-BBLag enterprise of the NKVD can not be conceptualized as just a "camp." According to the administrative structure of the combine, special settlements, along with camp zones, were integral parts of BBK subdivisions or 'separate camp subsections' (*OLP*), managed by their administration. Its inhabitants, located right next to the zones, and often separated from it by just a feeble fence, could easily

communicate with the prisoners, as well as the hired staff. In many areas the restrictions, associated with the notion "labour camp" were absent. Its *camp* part was an integral part of the world adjacent to it.

Thus, the border between imprisonment and freedom, between 'the camp' and 'the mainland,' between being a camp prisoner and a camp employee was more blurred and elusive than it seemed to be. The practices of the prisoners employed as the camp guards, as technical specialists indistinguishable from other administrative personnel, and ex prisoners remaining to serve the camp challenge much received wisdom about the camps.

The archival documents demonstrate, that many of the released prisoners who had previously worked as camp guards, wished to stay in the camp on a contract basis. Many of the prisoners sent their petitions prior to their liberation to secure a position in advance. Not only those employed in the administrative apparatus, but also some of the 'ordinary ' released prisoners were not willing or prepared to leave the camp. For these people, coming, as it is obvious from their application files, from the lower strata,(in their majority peasants and workers) life at liberty was hardly easier than their existence in the camp. People, who had lived through two revolutions and the world war, lost their families and worked from their childhood, did not consider their camp term as the worst evil. Moreover, they found life there convenient and secure. They could not only make a career as a guard or an inspector there, but also learn a profession through enrollment in the camp educational programs.

The post of a guard in the BBLag was also desired by the demobilized army soldiers, OGPU soldiers, primarily of peasant background. Despite the fact that living and working conditions of the guards were truly pathetic, the needs of these people were also very limited.

Research into the social background of the middle and higher rank hired BBK staff reveals similar patterns. The chiefs of the managerial sections and departments, Third Department officers, commandants of the special labour settlements, political instructors, chiefs of the camp guards subdivisions, chiefs of the BBK subsections, KVCh chiefs employed on the contract basis for the most part were promoted workers of the poorest peasant/working class background.

Many of them arrived in the GULAG as guards through recruitment. During their term they were promoted first to the post of a commander of the armed guard platoon or a political instructor. Later they were promoted to the position of a chief of a camp subsection or a commandant of a labour settlement.

Promotion from the post of an armed guard was not the only way of making a career inside the GULAG system. Some of the guards got transferred to the OGPU-NKVD schools. Promoted workers, (*vidvizenzi*) made up an important source also for the highest BBK administrative staff. All these facts provide an alternative to the commonly accepted vision of the camps, provided by the ex-prisoners, coming from the educated and well-off families, for whom the camp experience was a degradation from their relatively high social and economic status prior to imprisonement.

Chapter III Stalinist Terror in the Soviet GULAG: The Case of the White-Sea Combine and the Camp NKVD

Circuit quarens quem devoret

Preparing 'The Terror' in the GULAG: Trends and Policies

The "Great Terror" as such is commonly known as a range of repressive operations targeting certain social groups in the Soviet Union in years 1937-1938, also referred to as "Ezhovschina" or "Stalinskie Repressii." ("Stalin's purges.") The years 1937-1939 are quite justifiably considered to constitute one of the most macabre pages of the Soviet history. The NKVD organs launched a "class struggle" in the form of a competition in disclosing hidden enemies. Moreover, lagging behind in this competition might have had the most deplorable consequences for executioners, because they themselves could fall into this category. According to the notion of the laws of the class struggle which were formed in the 1920s and the 1930s in the USSR, morality was equated with the fastest liquidation of the class enemy.

The origins of radical repressive measures to suppress political opponents and those dissatisfied with the regime, accompanied by intense propaganda campaigns fostering *total* mobilization in the struggle against the external and internal enemies can be traced to the period of genesis of the Soviet state. The creation of the VCHK as a direct antecedent of the OGPU-NKVD and its policy during the civil war influenced future development of the organs of the state security. The *troiki* of 1937 might be seen as a direct continuation of the Revolutionary Tribunals of 1918. Both kinds of institutions functioned according to Lenin's principle "revolutions can not be accomplished by wearing gloves," meaning that for the higher ends any means will do.

Although the repressive operations targeted at the GULAG inmates and its hired staff took place during the years 1937 and 1938, (and the executions of the camp NKVD personnel continued well into the 1939), within the camps they had been prepared long before that.

On April 26, 1935 following the assasination of Sergey Kirov, and the political campaign in the course of which the NKVD was accused in 'delaying the extermination of the enemy,' Henrich Jagoda issued an order to the officials of the Third Departments of the camps. Entitled 'On the condition of the secret informers network in the ITL NKVD'[223] it identified the camps as 'the place where the most dangerous spies, terrorists, and other anti-party elements, the most malicious enemies of the Soviet state were concentrated, who have nothing to lose and are always ready for active counterrevolutionary struggle.' It also stated that the camps are used as a base from which to instigate a counter-revolutionary revolt in the USSR.' Further on, the order called for the urgent re-organization of the agent- informers network and the intensification of the activity of the Third Departments. [224] Finally, it insisted on a closer collaboration between Third Departments of the Gulag and the regional offices of the State Security (GUGB) in the struggle against ' counter-revolutionary elements.' [225]

The conditions for employment in the Third Departments of the GULAG and the principles of promotion in the NKVD in general were gradually changing in the course

[223] The informers' network consisted of the informers/ the agents (the words "agent" and "informer" have the same meaning, in the official documents they are used interchangeably) and the residents. A commissioned NKVD officer (*Operupolnomochennii*) coordinated the activity of the informers, gathered the information, launched the criminal cases and was responsible for their investigation. Being subordinated directly to the officer, the residents, that had gathered the information from the agents, were supposed to be recruited exclusively from the ranks of the hired staff.

[224] GARF, f.9414, op.1a, p. 25, no. 00159.
[225] GARF, f.9414, op. 1a, no. 00159, p. 25.

of the 1930s. In all times, the main prerequisite was a "a spotless working or peasant class background." For the NKVD career "proletarian" origins were of a higher value than "peasant" ones, and among the latter the preference was granted to those from the poorest families.

However, if one looks at the actual social background of the middle and highest Gulag staff (all of them wore NKVD regalia) until the end of the 1930s, many of them come from the pre-revolutionary petty bourgeoisie and lower town dwellers strata: peddlers, bakers, petty sellers, gymnasium teachers, etc. Normally their basic education did not for the most part deviate from the following scheme: parish school and army experience was followed by various courses in the OGPU-NKVD. Their personal data forms usually included a designation 'a worker' acquired in a remote youth and happily forgotten, but later proudly stated as "the main profession."[226] Those with higher (and often unfinished education), constituted a smaller part of the camps NKVD apparatus and belonged to the first generation of the Gulag Chekists. Many of them were repressed during the 1930s.[227]

During the years 1929-1931 there was a discernible tendency to fill the vacancies of the camp officers and camp chiefs with the disgraced NKVD officials, not those necessarily sentenced to imprisonment, but who no longer enjoyed "political trust."[228] This category became the main source of the cadres supply for the GULAG in the 1930s

[226] V. Berdinskikh, *Vyatlag,* p. 319.
[227] Lubianka : VChK-OGPU-NKVD-NKGB-MGB-MVD-KGB : 1917-1960, ed. R.G. Pikhoia (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia", 1997). Also contains exhaustive national educational, national and statistical data on the NKVD officers, tracing the dynamics in the cadres cleansing and rotation procedures at the end of the 1930s in the Gulag and the NKVD. For the biographical data on the leading Gulag staff at the centre and on the periphery see *The Gulag,* pp. 798-857, for the list of the Gulag chiefs in the chronological order, their years in service see p. 797.
[228] In many cases, the distrust was not legally stated. Often the disclosure of the alien social origins, of suspicious circumstances of the residence abroad (mainly refers to the former intelligence officers, such as S. Firin), relations with the relatives residing outside of the USSR resulted in the transfer to the camps system. *Istoria Stalinskogo GULAGa*, vol. 2, p. 44.

and the Chekists, sentenced not for political crimes, but for power abuse (in other words, excess of zeal in exterminating 'the enemies of the people'), or corruption (*bitovoe razlozenie*).[229] The administration frequently staffed the VOKHR Department[230] and the Operative Department of the camps with the prisoners, sentenced for duty crimes.

In 1935 courses were introduced for training the operative staff for the camp Third (Operative) Departments at the headquarters of the NKVD of the Leningrad region. The five-months training was targeted at fifty Communists with a party record of no less than two years, recommended by their party organizations ; also at demobilized senior and junior commanders of the NKVD troops, from twenty three to thirty two years old with completed secondary school. The GULAG financed the courses and supplied the teaching materials.[231]

After the repressive operations among the NKVD staff in the course of the 'Great Terror,' the newly recruited cadres indeed were of pure proletarian origins, and Russian nationality became the norm.[232] As for the lowest NKVD staff of the Third Departments, these were usually composed of people of "proper" origins. The basic source for recruitment were the leading officials of the NKVD troops, but often in the conditions of desperate lack of cadres, the Third Departments were urged to recruit the investigators directly from the guards with a semblance of professional training.

[229] V. Yakovlev, Y. Burzev, *Konzentrazionnie lagerya v SSSR.* (Munich, 1955).
[230] Department of the Security and the Regime (VOKHR means "Militarized Guard at Places of Confinement.")
[231] GARF, f. 9401, op. 1a, d.9, p. 132.
[232] For statistical data see A.I. Kokurin, N.V. Petrov, *Lubianka : VChK-OGPU-NKVD-NKGB-MGB-MVD-KGB : 1917-1960*. Among these newly recruited individuals, that were supposed to replace Ezhov's employees, many were quite young people, that Beria had ordered through the Central Commitee to investigate manifold forged group cases. Memorial, f. 2 b, op. 1b, d. 77, p. 36.

In 1938 in response to the severe shortage of the camp security officers the NKVD launched a program of intensified training at the Kharkov School. The training lasted for six months. The recruitment took place twice a year primarily among the members of demobilized junior commanders of the Red Army and the NKVD troops.

Apart from the general curriculum, consisting of Russian language (ninety hours), history of the USSR (ninety hours), history of the VCHK-OGPU in connection with the fight with the enemies of the people (twenty hours), and Soviet constitution (thirty hours), the six-month training provided an intense training in managing the informers network as a part of the so called "special curriculum." Overall this cluster of subjects accounted for seventy academic hours. A second subject was called "fight with the foreign services and their Trotskyite-Bukharinite agents." It included sub disciplines such as the "Struggle with the German foreign service" (thirty hours), with the Polish one (thirty hours), the Japanese (thirty hours), and with "others." (thirty hours.) In addition there was a disciplinary subdivision called "the peculiarities of the agent-operative tactics among the Trotskyite-Bukharinite agents of the foreign services (forty hours)." Special subjects instructed how to counteract the Menshevik agents, Socialist-Revolutionary ones, and Anarchists (fourteen hours), foreign White émigré organizations (ten hours), "Nationalist Counterrevolution" (sixteen hours), and "the remnants of the liquidated classes" (kulaks, White officers, foreign sects, and the believers (sixteen hours). Overall this disciplinary subsection amounted to two hundred twenty hours. The remaining subjects included "targets and principles of work of the GUGB (The Main Administration of the State Security) organs, objectives and procedures of their work with transport, and in the camps."

In the majority of such programs the "special Chekist" part of the curriculum amounted to around four hundred hours. Two hundred hours were devoted for

operative practice in the camps. General disciplines accounted for ninety hours, social sciences and the subjects related to economy for one hundred forty hours.[233] What is striking about this program is not an increased attention to the struggle with external enemies, but the absence of the adequate training in investigating and preventing ordinary crimes.

Starting from the year 1937, those sentenced for Trotskyite-Bukharinite activities, treason, espionage, or terrorism were usually sent to the special camps with an intensified regime such as Northern- Eastern camp (Kolyma region), Norillag and Uchtinsko-Pecherskii camp (Vorkuta region). However, in accordance with Yagoda's previous order #009 from January 1936, such camps of an enforced regime were intended primarily to host the worst of criminals such as recidivists, and bandits.[234] This partly explains why these labour camps were often denounced as the most pernicious by political prisoners sent to them (for example, by Varlam Shalamov). The 'politicals' were terrorized by already existing criminal networks.[235] The mortality rate at the end of the 1930s was the highest in these camps.[236]

On November 26, 1936 Nikolai Ezhov was appointed as an NKVD chief. Soon he transferred the Third Departments[237] from the jurisdiction of the camps'

[233] Garf, f.9401, op. 1a, d.20, p.253.
[234] N. Petrov. *Istoria imperii Gulag* [The History of the GULAG Empire] Available at: http://www.pseudology.org/GULAG/Gulag.htm, Internet; accessed on 11.12.2002.
[235] V. Shalamov, *Kolymskie rasskazi.*(Paris: YMCA-Press, 1985.)
[236] V. Zemskov, "Zaklychennie v 1930-e godi: sotsialno-demographicheskie problemi" in *Otechestvennaia istoria,* 1997, no. 4, p. 64.
[237] The Third or, the so-called 'Operative-Chekist' Departments, subordinated to the Third Department of the GULAG NKVD, (previously the Information and Investigation Sections of the camps) primarily dealt with the prevention and investigation of the so–called 'counter-revolutionary' crimes among the prisoners and the camp hired staff. They consisted of four sections. The 'Counter-Revolutionary' Section was responsible for managing the informers' network among the z/k guilty of espionage, treason, active counter-revolutionary organizations, and hired staff suspected of such crimes. The Secret-Political Section was responsible for the agents working among those sentenced for the "Counter-revolutionary Trotskyite-Zinovievite and Rightist organizations, both Fascist and Nationalist ones." The Special Section was responsible for the surveillance of the armed guards, and the Statistical Department for the "registration of counter-revolutionary elements and agent networks in the camps." Ordinary criminality was supposed to be handled by the special sections: one "For the Fight with Escapes" and another one

administration and subordinated them directly to the Third Department of the Gulag. Their policy, thenceforth concealed from the camp authorities, could be monitored by the regional NKVD offices and the regional offices of the public prosecutors.

From the second half of 1930s political and ideological aspects of training of the newly enrolled NKVD personnel became 'a necessary precondition of creating an appropriate regime of confinement for counter-revolutionary elements in the camps.' In November 1937 a Section of Political Training was created within the 10th Department of the GUGB.[238] It was endowed with the task of organizing intense training of the selected NKVD personnel in politics and ideology.[239] These "politically trained" NKVD officials were sent to the camps to organize intensive training of the camp administration and the guards.

Some historians agree in fixing the commencement of the policy of the'Great Terror' in the USSR at the end of the summer or the beginning of the autumn of 1936, when the show trials of Trotskyists and Zinovievites were staged, and Nikolai Ezhov was appointed the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs (NKVD SSSR) replacing Henrich Yagoda.[240]

Soon Yagoda was accused of "creating the privileged conditions and regime for the counter-revolutionaries, and corruption of vigilance" in the GULAG. In fact, displacement of Yagoda and his execution enabled the GULAG administration to identify a major culprit of the system's failures. At the meeting of the NKVD and the GULAG officials in April 1937 current chief of the GULAG Isaak Pliner blamed

on "Criminal Investigation." Additionally, these sections were supposed to handle agents' activity on escapes, camp banditry, murder, theft, and so on. *The Gulag,* p.454.
[238] The Main Administration of the State Security, *Glavnoe Upravlenie Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnoti*.
[239] S. Kuzmin, *Lagerniki*.
[240] O. Khlevniyk, "The Objectives of the Great Terror. 1937-1938," in *Soviet History 1917-1953: Essays in Honour of R.W. Davies,* J. Cooper, ed. (New York: St' Martin's Press, 1995), p. 158.

Yagoda for usurping power and encouraging *blat* within the NKVD. He went on to summarize: "Everything that has happened in our People's Commissariat is the result of Yagoda's counterrevolutionary crimes." [241]

The ideological justification of the repressive course on the 1937 February-March plenum of the Central Committee of VKP(b) was followed by several major orders unleashing the Terror. The most notorious one, an operative order № 00447 of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs "On the operation to repress former kulaks, criminals and other anti-Soviet elements" initiated mass repressions of "anti-Soviet elements" in years 1937-1938 starting in August, 5 -15 (depending on the region) and concluding in four months. It named the "elements to be repressed," which included all those who in some form or other opposed the Soviet regime or had been a victim of state terror: the kulaks who had completed their terms of exile or who had escaped; former members of non-Bolshevik parties (Socialist Revolutionaries, Georgian Mensheviks, Mussavatists, etc); former White Guardsmen; surviving tsarist officials, "terrorists" and "spies" from previous years; political prisoners in the camps, hardened criminals and recidivists. In total, the order authorized the arrest of 268, 950 people, of whom 72, 950 (including 10000 camp prisoners) were to be shot.[242] These operations, which made up what later would be called the Great Terror, were conducted with varying intensity until November 1938. Complementing them, the regular activities of the Soviet punitive organs became more active in this period.

[241] TsAODM, f. 3352, op. 3, d. 3, p. 27.

[242] A. Getty, O. Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 473-80. Two other important orders, signed by N. Ezhov, from 14th of September and 9th of October 1937, simplified the procedure of reviewing criminal cases on "counter-revolutionary" crimes and extended the term of the imprisonment for the crimes of espionage, terror, treason and sabotage from ten to twenty five years.

On September 14, 1937 Ezhov issued an order that fueled the repressive operations. It simplifed the procedure of conducting criminal cases on counter-revolutionary crime. Soon other measures established and extended the prerogatives of the special extra-judicial institutions *troiki*[243] as well as ones of OSO (Extraordinary Committee, *Osoboe soveschanie*), increasing the length of the sentence from ten years of imprisonment to twenty five years for the crimes of espionage, terror, treason, and sabotage. At the same time, the oppositionist Bolshevik leaders were prepared for show trials. The old elite was repressed and new political course was set for the government.

In 1937 all regions (*regions*), *kraia,* and republics were assigned quotas (*limiti*) for those to be persecuted on the basis of the information on the number of "anti-Soviet elements" which local NKVD officials had sent to Moscow. The GULAG also received the quotas of the "enemies" to be repressed. After the NKVD officers of the GULAG camps received the order, they were responsible for its due implementation. However, the unified pattern of repressive operations for all the camps did not exist. In some camps the selection of the prisoners for troika's court was conducted by the commision from the Third Department of the GULAG. It visisted the camps at the end of summer 1937 (after the end of the criminal process involving the Red Army commanders, such as Mikhail Tukhachevsky). Together with with the local camp commision, they reviewed the criminal cases of the 'political' prisoners and sorted them into the three groups on the basis of the reports composed by the officers of the Third department. In other camps the repressive operations were carried out by the local NKVD officers.

[243] Extra-juridical commissions, *Spezialnie sudebnie kollegii.* In August 1937, by a telegram to local NKVD branches signed by Stalin, they were granted the right to decide cases of category 1, that is, those subject to the death penalty and category 2, warranting ten-year prison or camp sentence. See G. Ivanova, *Labour Camp Socialism: The Gulag in the Soviet Totalitarian System*, p. 27.

The prisoners ascribed to the first category were executed. Those belonging to the second were exilec with hard labour in remote areas. The prisoneres of the last category were assigned to common (*obschie*) tasks near industrial centres. As a rule, the "political" prisoners, sentenced according to the article 58 of the Soviet penal code, were the chief target of the repressive operations. In the camps where the concentration of such prisoners was high, (such as Ukhtpechlag and Vorkutlag) initially only the prisoners in categories targeted by the mass operations reviewed. Later, if the numbers of the executed "enemies" were lower than those prescribed in the quotas, (as it will be demonstrated later on an example of the BBK NKVD) the NKVD staff resorted to reviewing the dossiers of non-political prisoners.

In cases of "political" prisoners, as a rule, the gravity of the crimes determined according to the paragraphs of the article 58 of the Soviet penal code and a note on the behaviour in the camp composed by the camp administration became the major factors in determining the fate of a prisoner.

The length of the sentence did not always play a crucial role. At the beginning of the 1930s those guilty of 'counter-revolutionary' crimes received rather mild sentences, as a rule, five years of the camps. In the course of the 1930s several amendments to the Soviet penal code were made that increased the sentence for these crimes. Thus, the prisoners sentenced for the same crime could have sentences ranging from five to twenty five years of imprisonment. Sometimes among the prisoners sentenced in the course of the same political process those with shorter sentences were executed for 'conducting anti-Soviet activity in the camp.' But as a rule, among 'political' prisoners shooting or exile to remote subdivisions of the Northern camps was the sentence for participation in armed revolt, espionage, terrorizm and sabotage, according to the

paragraphs two, six, eigth and nine of the article 58 of the Soviet penal code or those having the label of *KRTD*[244] in their criminal case.

Some officials from the Third Department that participated in these inspections acquired notoriety. One such example is *Garaninschina,* a persecution of the prisoners in *Sevlag*(Kolyma) bearing the name of its executor, the colonel S. N. Garanin.[245] Similarly notorious are the executions headed by under Lieuteunant E. Kashketin(Skomorovsky) *Kashketinskie rasstreli* of 1938 initiated by the special NKVD comission from Moscow.[246]

Less known is the case of Ukchto-Pechorskii camp, headed by Ia. M. Moroz. In this camp, the number of people shot was 2,755. A similarly notorious place was the coal mine in the Vorkuta region where, according to some historians, 3,000 "Trotskyites" were executed.[247] During the executions the old hostility between the "politicals" and "criminals" was frequently used to kill the prisoners of one category with the direct assistance of the other. Upon receival of the quotas for repressions, camp officials were obliged to present a report on the number and the cases of those persecuted. Officials of the operative apparatus of Uchtpechlag, having failed to find the twenty z/k escapees (while the time for the fulfillment of the order was limited to twenty four hours), sent the cases on the randomly selected hired employees to the

[244] In the Soviet penal system the abbreviations *KRTD, KRD, SO,* etc. are equivalent to the various crimes prescribed by the 58 article of the Penal Code. The basic difference is that while the sentences listed in the article 58 were indicted by the "*troika"* tribunal, the sentences for the crimes indicated by such abbreviations were the result of the *OSO* court. It is probable, the *OSO* court was directed toward more privileged or the "elite" strata of population, while *"troiki"* sentenced ordinary citizens. Finally, the highest instance of the court during the Great Terror was the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court, *Voennaia Kollegia Verkhovnogo Suda* headed by V. Ulrikh. This judicial body and its local variants-military tribunals were dealing with the crimes of treason, terrorism, sabotage, espionage. All other counterrevolutionary crimes were to be considered by "troiki."

[245]It consisted in the wholesale arrest and persecution in the camp, the typical charge being the systematic underfulfillment of quotas R. Conquest, *Kolyma: The Arctic Death Camps*, p. 51.

[246] The head of the Third Section of the Gulag Third Department, arrested in December 1939, in March 1940 he was sentenced to death.

[247] D. Dallin. *Forced labor in Soviet Russia,* p. 260.

troika session. Later it was found out that instead of a prisoner a member of the hired staff had been executed. His accusation in "sympathizing to the imprisoned Trotskyites, and appointing them to the administrative positions" was used as a ground for his execution. Six victims were shot by mistake under the other surnames, including one member of the hired staff.[248]

The accusation in the "counter-revolutionary propaganda," although a very widespread ground for the execution of the prisoners, was not the only one. Other reasons for the prisoners' executions included accusations of instigation of hunger strikes, refusal to work (individual and collective ones), and attempts to escape.

Apart from the random executions of the prisoners, conducted in the course of the specially planned campaigns (and frequently coordinated from the centre through the NKVD commissions), from spring 1937 the Third Departments of the camps launched a number of the criminal cases involving the imprisoned and the hired staff of the administrative units of the corresponding camps.

The NKVD gathered information on the hired staff of the camps not only through secret agent networks, but also through the Political Department. This section of the central Gulag apparatus was created in the spring of 1938. During the summer the local sections of Political Management were established in the camps. Formally they were endowed with the tasks of transmitting "policy of the party," coordinating the activity of all the camp sections,[249] and "improving the political spirit of the populace and situation in the camps through creating new party cells and consolidating already existing ones."

[248] S. Kuzmin, *Lagerniki*, p. 196.
[249]

The Political Sections were supposed to implement the principles of mutual responsibility (*krugovaia poruka,*) in the camps administrative apparatuses.[250] The officials of the sections collected political dossiers on the highest camp staff, the heads of the camps and of the industrial departments. An important function of the Political Section was to gain control over the political thinking of the camp staff through a wide practice of officials reporting on each other.[251] The repressions among the Gulag staff, which took place during the years 1938-1939 in a large degree had been prepared by the Political Departments in the camps.

The employees of the camps who had previously been sentenced for "counter-revolutionary" crimes, or exile for political grounds, were the chief target. A large number of criminal cases was started on the pretext of a disclosure of a 'counter-revlutionary organization' within the camp apparatus. For example, in the course of a criminal process on the 'Espionage organization among of the Trotskyites among the imprisoned and hired staff on BAM[252]' that lasted from June 1937 to August 1938 several dozens of the employees of the Sanitary and Cultural Departments of Bamlag were arrested and five of them were executed. As in many other enterprises of the Soviet Union, evidence for the existence of the 'Anti-Soviet Trotskyite- espionage centre' was based on the confessions of the accused.

Allegedly, this powerful organization had as its main goal the overthrow of the Soviet power and restoration of the capitalism in the Soviet Union. Their participants were planning to engage in sabotage, espionage, and wrecking. The organization was supposedly headed by the chief of the construction Naftaly Frenkel and his assistants.

[250] Garf, f. 9414, op.3a,. d.1, p. 40.
[251] Garf, f. 9414, op. 3a, d.1, p. 67.
[252] Construction of the Baikal-Amur railway line. It was carried out by the prisoners of Bamlag, one of the most chaotic and lethal camps in the Far East.

It included the former head of the Third Department of the camp Sh.[253] (who by that time had been promoted to the post of a head of the security office of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs in Moscow), the heads of all the camp departments and their immediate assistants, administrators and the engineering and technical staff employed at the construction.[254]

In June 1938 the case was transferred to Moscow for further investigation. According to the report of the prosecutor of the Bamlag Dimakov to Andrey Vyshinsky, by August 11, 1938 forty eight people had been arrested. Some of the accused had spent more than a year under the arrest by that time. In August the same year three camp investigators returned without any further instructions, bringing back all the paperwork and the accused with them. For a while they waited for the return of the head of the Third Department T. from Moscow. Soon afterwards the case was suspended and cancelled.

What is unusual in the Bamlag process and opens up new perspective on the 'Terror' is the role played by the camp prosecutor in the repressive operations. The question related to those actually coordinating and exercising decision-making during the repressions is very interesting. In other camps the chief of the Third Department and his assistants were the initiators of cases involving the rest of the operative staff, who, either voluntarily fearful of falling under suspicion for the "leniency towards the enemies," obeyed their orders.

In the Bamlag the camp prosecutor was an important driving force in the repressive operations. Already in August 1938, as soon as the case was suspended, he

[253] If the full names of the officials are not provided, this means according to the archivists' requests these names are still not to be disclosed to the wider public.
[254] GARF, f. 8131, op. 37, d. 99, p. 19.

started to send letters to Moscow expressing his dissatisfaction with the state of affairs. Addressing USSR Prosecutor Vyshinsky, he wrote:

What's the matter? We need to arrest another forty enemies, but the process has been suspended 'until special instructions' while Japan is continuing its provocations at the border. The leaders of the organization remain at large. If we don't arrest and put on trial Trotskyite spies and saboteurs immediately, then what is the use of our work? I beg you to explain me why the bosses of the Third Department of the Gulag have ordered us to wait until further instructions and what they are going to do.[255]

With a similar note on August 19, 1938 he addressed the head of Department of the Surveillance of the Places of Confinement:

I have got no feedback from you for the reports I have sent. I haven't received any orders, or notes on the measures undertaken through the comrade Ezhov. Why do not the members of the Third Department of the Gulag or the People's Commissar's assistant Zhukovsky give sanctions to arrest the leaders of the gang? Why don't they realize that unarrested spies are being recruiting assistants? This strange and uncertain situation makes us, the staff of the Office of the Public Prosecutor, so nervous that we can't sleep any more. We easily execute petty swindlers, but the spies who have already confessed their crimes, remain unpunished. One example is the 17th camp division, where the head of the Industrial-Technical department S. had received a sentence according to the paragraphs two and seven of the article 58 of the penal code. He has harmed us a lot. All his assistants are already arrested, but the NKVD does not give sanction of his displacement and incarceration in SHIZO. I can not do it myself, for he is a technical specialist *and* according to the NKVD instruction such employees can be displaced only upon a prior sanction from Moscow. What a nonsense! A wrecker, a spy, sentenced for counter-revolutionary activities can not be fired and put on his proper place either by me or by the Third Department of Bamlag! I demand the cancellation of the ban on the arrests of the imprisoned spies and wreckers without a prior sanction of the NKVD. Please take into consideration the fact that it takes not hours but months to get a sanction from Moscow, and we let spies and bandits harm us in such a crucial moment when the Japanese are poking their piglet mug into our Soviet Union.[256]

Soon all the NKVD officials who had organized and managed the case were displaced and arrested and a new team was formed for the further investigation of the disclosed administrative abuses and violations of the "Soviet legality" during the process. The victims who still were alive by that time were released and rehabilitated.

In the course of subsequent inspection of the investigation activity of the Third Department of the Management of the Railway Construction of the Gulag on the Far

[255] GARF, f. 8131, op. 37, d. 99, p. 11.
[256] GARF, f. 8131, op. 37, d. 99, p. 12.

East a number of its former employees were put on trial. It was found out that in the criminal process perverse methods of interrogation were used in combination with forging of fictitious documents. The majority of the criminal cases on thirty two unjustly accused members of the hired staff were started upon the order of the Bamlag prosecutor Dimakov.

Two other regional prosecutors who were supposed to control the process, were accused of the 'criminal negligence.' As was stated in the report of the inspection, during the interrogations they had asked the accused two or three questions to confirm the charges. Over the course of the next ten or fifteen days, however, they signed extensive protocols of the interrogations that had been forged by the officers from the Third Department. In May 1939 the newly appointed camp prosecutor V. disclosed the fact of existence of multiple repetitive complaints on the part of the victims to each of the prosecutors concerning illegal methods of interrogations, beatings, and torture. [257] In most of the individual criminal cases the victims were kept unerr arrest without any legal ground for more than a year.[258]

The report on the Bamlag case made by the assistant to the NKVD chief V. N. Merkulov states:

> despite the grandeur of the criminal process, splendor of the accusations, verboseness and gravity of the testimonies of the accused, despite the immense work conducted by the "technical commission" (the materials of this revision, complied in nine huge volumes, were included into the case), the evidence and factual information was worthless.

[257] The contents of the petitions composed by the arrested did not differ from each other. Most of them, as B., the former head of the Transport Department of Bamlag, in his letter dated October 8, 1940 and addressed to Iosif Stalin and Lavrenty Beria, stressed their working class background and untainted reputation, pleaded for the acceleration and completion of their criminal case and for the consequent the rehabilitation. GARF, f. 8131, op. 37, d. 99, p. 51.
[258] GARF, f. 8131, op.37, d. 99, p.38.

According to this official, the eloquent resolution on the case, composed on March 6, 1939 was based on the unproved facts and barefaced lies.

The 'sabotage' on BAM was demonstrated only by several train accidents, that had occurred there during the past five or six years. The connection between the accidents, the scope of the crashes, and the involvement of the accused was never investigated. For example, a defective train carriage was provided for Lazar Kaganovich during his visit to BAM in 1936. This rumour, insignificant in itself, never supported by any factual evidence, was used as a ground for an accusation based on the confession of the tortured arrestees. Merkulov ended his report with the following words:

The question arises if this process is not an attempt of the enemies from the Third Department of the Railway Construction of the Gulag to deprive the Bamlag construction of its personnel, to destroy the apparatus of the construction and to ruin the enterprise.[259]

It is interesting that despite the deaths of nearly all of his former colleagues, Naftaly Frenkel, by 1937 the head of Bamlag, was not among the arrested 'Trotskyites,' on BAM, although camp newspaper attacked him, openly accusing him of sabotage. His case was mysteriously held up in Moscow. The shooting lists of the NKVD personnel were prepared and confirmed by the committee consisting of Ezhov and Vyshinsky and signed by Stalin himself. Applebaum states, that Stalin decided on Frenkel's case.[260]

The NKVD materials contain the examples of the similar cases disclosed in the course of the inspections of the commissions from the Third Department of the GULAG

[259] GARF, f. 8131, op. 37, d. 99, p. 59.
[260] A. Applebaum, *The GULAG,* p. 98.

in various camps in 1938-1939. Most of these inspections took place in autumn 1938. In most of the camps where the grandiose criminal processes had been organized "the facts of the criminal perversion of the revolutionary legality of the investigation procedures were disclosed."[261]

A counter-revolutionary organization was disclosed by the Third Department of Amurlag (a sub-division of BAM). Overall there were more than one hundred people involved, who, in the course of the repeated interrogations, had disclosed a terrifying picture of humiliation, torture, and beatings committed by the members of the Third Department under the guidance of its chief. The cases of deaths through beatings, suicides and attempts at suicides of the suspects were registered.[262]

The idea of the 'counter-revolutionary' plot in the Bamlag process as well as in other cases of such kind were based on Nikolai Ezhov's report "On the conspiracy in the NKVD" which he delivered during the June 1937 plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. It stated, that according to the coup d'etat prepared by Henrich Yagoda, a significant role in the revolt was ascribed to the prisoners of the camps located near Moscow such as Dmitlag. The camp chief Semyon Firin and the Head of the Third Department Sergey Puzitsky planned to 'organize mobile groups of terrorists in the NKVD camps.' Supposedly, they had recruited 'the most dangerous bandits and the leaders of the criminal bands from Dmitlag into their 'counter-revolutionary organization.' In the crucial moment these bandits would organize armed groups from the members of their working brigades. The leaders had to recruit as many as possible

[261] GARF, f. 9401, op. 1a, d. 79, p. 166.
[262] GARF, f. 8131, op. 37, d. 99, p. 58. Also see analogous materials on Dallag. GARF, f. 8131, op. 37, d. 99, p. 59.

camp recidivists. After the turnover these 'dangerous elements' themselves were supposed to be exterminated.[263]

The initial plan of the conspirators included the murder of the members of the Soviet government upon their visits to the Moscow-Volga canal, and then the seizure of the most important government structures and the enterprises. [264]

The idea of a counter-revolutionary plot became a motto of major repressive operations within the GULAG until autumn 1938. On August 14, 1938 the GULAG chief Isaak Pliner delivered a report "On the Fight with the Consequences of Wrecking." The resolution which was worked out later during this joint meeting of the Gulag and the NKVD staff stated:

> …Not a single unit of our system remained untouched by the spies' and saboteurs' activity. According to the information provided by the Third Departments of the camps, the enemies arranged the work in such a way that the most important economic tasks were insufficiently supplied with a labour force. Unnecessary transfers of the prisoners resulted in the shortage of technical specialists, who were engaged in unskilled labour. The vast number of the prisoners were deliberately infected with contagious diseases. In the financial sphere the enemies seized the material resources and sold them to various private and state organizations. As a result, tens of millions of rubles were lost. In the sphere of planning, wreckage in many camps took the form of reducing the plan targets. Another method of the enemy is *ochkovtiratelstvo* in fulfillment of the plans. The low level of discipline in the Gulag apparatus and in the camps is also the result of the enemies' activity. To get an answer from the camp administration to just one question it is sometimes necessary to send them five telegrams in a row and only the sixth one will be answered, and usually not with what is needed.[265]

In the course of the "Great Terror"numerous NKVD officials employed in the Gulag were accused of "wrecking," "the sabotage of the plans" and in the Trotskyite conspiracies. These charges exactly replicate the charges in industry as a whole.In

[263] N. Petrov, *Istoria imperii Gulag* .
[264] N. Petrov, *Istoria imperii Gulag* .
[265] TsAODM, f. 3352, op. 3, d. 176, p. 17.

spring and summer 1938, the heads of eight camps were among those arrested and persecuted on this pretext.[266]

The speeches and comments at the joint meeting of the party organization of the Gulag, that took place on August 13, 1938, explained away not only the major problems and failures of the camps system, but also poor work of the central Gulag apparatus in Moscow. The failures of its Cultural Educative section, for example, were attributed to the counter-revolutionary activity of its chief : "because K., the son of a priest (*sin popa*) was sitting there." At the same time, when the recently appointed head of the KVCH Department was asked "what have you done to liquidate the consequences of the wrecking?" he responded:

Well, we don't have the KVCH chiefs in the camps any more, who would not have been exposed as an enemy of the people. I think we have done a lot, but I personally could have done more if my assistant explained to me why certain KVCH officials had been arrested. Maybe we can guess, but at least the NKVD should inform us what the wrecking consisted of.[267]

Sometimes the "witchhunt" in the camps departments and managerial structures was fueled by financial interests. A man with a politicially unreliable past became an easy target for those dissatisfied with his material conditions such as an apartment he lived in or a position he occupied. During a party conference of Volgostroy construction at the end of May 1937 (soon after the February-March plenum of the VKP (b)), several complaints of this kind were issued, that resulted in the investigation. For example, one of the officials complained that at the 10th camp division "the head of the Financial

[266] Applebaum, p. 98.
[267] TsAODM, f. 3352, op. 3, d. 176, p. 45.

Section, a member of the Communist party, gets a salary of 355 rubles, while one of the officials, a former counter-revolutionary, receives 700 rubles a month.[268]

In many camps repressions of the hired staff were preceded by the camp inspection. Since the majority of the camps chiefs became reckless opportunists, who, according to the principle of "apres nous, le deluge" were set on obtaining percentages of productive output from the "human material" by any means, forging the reports, these inspections prepared the ground for their future arrest.

In July 1937 an inspection was sent to the Ukhtpechlag, and the report revealed 'the hopeless decay of the camp,' terrorism of the criminals, corruptness and drunkenness of the hired staff. The executed z/k hardly fulfilled twenty percent from the original economic plan. Upon receiving the news about the arrival of yet another, a higher commission, the chief of the camp, Yakov (Iosema) Moroz adopted the policy of a preventive strike. He composed a report to the current Gulag chief, Matvey Berman, where all camp problems were explained away as a result of "corrupting influence of those sentenced for counter-revolutionary activity, espionage, terror and wrecking." The terrorist group supposedly comprised half of the prisoners contained in the camp, of whom at least 25 % were the members of the former 'Trotskite-Zinovievite gang.'[269] This act was a result of an apparently precise calculation: the NKVD was already preparing repressive operations. Soon the order was issued to the heads of the places of confinement "to shoot those z/k who had been engaged in an anti-Soviet activity." In August 1938 Moroz was removed from his post and executed.

As a result of the Terror, power networks of local camp elites were exterminated and replaced by others. For example, almost the entire Dalstroy elite, a powerful

[268] Garf, f.9414, op. 4, d. 2, p. 57.
[269] S. Kuzmin, *Lagerniki,* p. 198.

network, starting with its chief Eduard Berzin and the majority of his subordinates and heads of Kolyma camps, was exterminated in 1938.[270]

In some cases the leading staff of the Third Departments acted independently from the regional NKVD officials and the public prosecutor. Sometimes, as it happened in Bamlag, the latter got fully involved in the repressive operations. The new officials that were appointed instead of arrested, found themselves in a dubious position. One of the newly appointed assistants to the Bamlag Third Department preferred to leave the things to themselves, only to be accused together with the most active executioners and tried by the Revolutionary Tribunal for "concealing the crimes instead of reviewing the investigation materials and exposing the crimes." [271]

Social Study of the Great Terror in the Karelian GULAG: The BBK NKVD

One of the most important questions related to the Terror is one of defining the numbers and reconstructing the social profiles of the victims sentenced by extra–juridical *troiki* in years 1937–1938. Before studying these issues from the example of the BBK NKVD, it is necessary to reconstruct the general course of repressive operations in this camp.

On August 5, 1937 Nicolai Ezhov signed an operative order № 00409 (a supplement to the 00447 order) addressed to the Karelian NKVD chief Karl Tennison, the current BBK chief and the staff of the Third (Operative) Department of the BBK NKVD. The Karelian NKVD was assigned a quota of 3700 individuals to be repressed, 2800 of them to be shot, 900 to be confined in the camps. (The real numbers were significantly higher: 7221 were shot and 1207 confined in the camps). The initial

[270] For the lists of the chief Gulag staff arrested during the spring-summer 1938 (and some of them persecuted) see work by N. Petrov *Istoriia imperii GULAG.*
[271] GARF, f. 9401, op.1a, d.40, p. 79.

number of prisoners to be repressed within the BBLag amounted to 800 people.[272] The first meeting of *troika* NKVD KASSR[273] that examined the cases of the BBLag prisoners took place on August 17, 1937. The chief of the Third Department BBK NKVD Pavel Dolinksy reported on 110 convicts. All of them were sentenced by *troika* to be executed. The *troika* protocols issued on the basis of the materials supplied by the Third Department of the BBK NKVD contained significantly more death sentences than those based on the information from other sections of the Karelian NKVD, such as regional Investigation Department (*Ugolovnii Rozisk*).

The wave of repressive operations in the country subsided in the autumn 1938. The joint *Sovnarkom*-Party Central Committee resolution dated November 17, 1938 forbade "mass operations of arrest and exile." On November 24, N. Ezhov was released from the post of the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs; he was soon to be shot.

Overall during the years 1937-1938 12453 individuals were shot on the territory of the republic of Karelia. Here too as in many other regions of the USSR, the deadline of the operations there was extended. While the official end of the *troikas'* functions was scheduled on April 15, 1938, four additional *troika* meetings took place to review the cases of the BBLag prisoners. At the last (46th) meeting of *troika* in Karelia on November 10, the chief of the first section of the Third Department of *Soroklag* (a subsection of the BBK) and the chief of the fifth section of the Third Department BBK NKVD presented a report on 456 convicts.[274] The data about the size and composition

[272] I.I. Chukhin, *Karelia—37: ideologiya I praktika terrora* (Petrozavodsk : State University, 1999), p. 123.
[273] As a rule, *troika* consisted of the people's commissar of the NKVD administration, the secretary of the local party organization, and the procurator of the republic, province, or territory. *Troikas* enjoyed the extraordinary right to pass verdicts unilaterally and carry them out, including death sentences.
[274] I.I. Chukhin, *Karelia-37,* p. 124.

of the camp population is much more reliable than the number of those repressed within the camp system.

Within the BBK NKVD, in the year 1937 several administrative sections were proclaimed " nests of the enemies," their staff arrested and persecuted, following the earlier removal and repression of the management of the White-Sea Canal.[275] Starting from January 1937 *Stalinskaia Trassa* (the official newspaper of the BBK) was flooded with articles exposing "enemies of the people" in the Medical, Cultural-Educative and other sections of the BBLag, in the White–Sea Canal management, in the special settlers' cooperative associations (artels), in the Tourists' corner of Medvezhegorsk hotel, on the local construction sites, in the department stores. The term "enemy of the people" was used in the press and in public to describe non-political offences.[276].

An analysis of the social profiles of the repressed members of the staff is complicated by the fact that the information provided on them in the regional Book of Memory is incomplete and selective. During the Terror among approximately seventy seven repressed employees of the BBK NKVD representatives of technical intelligentsia were abundantly represented. Only one individual was a Communist party member. At least several members of the staff were of noble origin. The majority (seventy one individual) were charged with the "counter-revolutionary" offences, the rest were persecuted "according to the order 00447."[277] Sixty-eight employees were shot, the rest received ten-year imprisonment in the camps. At least sixteen employees had held important administrative positions in the BBK. Special settlers[278] constituted

[275]NARK, f. 865, op. 36, d. 2/14, p. 4.
[276] *Stalinskaia trassa,* № 90, 1.08.1937, p. 2.
[277] *Pominalnie spiki,* pp. 844-849.
[278] Inhabitants of the "special settlements" that had been deported from the original place of residence to the areas of resettlement in northern and eastern regions of the USSR, including Karelia as "unreliable" elements.

another target group. More than seven hundred were arrested and repressed, the majority being sentenced for "counter-revolutionary activity [279]

The personal information on those executed en masse in the course of the repressive operations inside the BBK NKVD, as well as in the republic of Karelia in general, contained in the regional Book of Memory[280] provides a sufficient ground for a statistical analysis of the various groups of prisoners that fell prey to the Terror. Overall, around 2-4 % of the BBLag prisoners were persecuted in the course of the Terror.[281]

The exact number of the BBLag prisoners, subjected to the repression, amounts to 2588, of whom 2580 were shot.[282] A statistical breakdown of the bases for persecution reveals the following pattern: 851 prisoners or about 32 % were sentenced under article 58[h] of the Soviet penal code for "political" or "counter-revolutionary crimes"; 1352 or 52 % under article 82 on attempted escape, 365 or 14 % under the operative order 00447. The remaining 2 % under the articles 59-3,[283] 54-5[284] and 67.

[279] *Pominalnie spiski* mentiones seven hundred fourteen names of the victims from the ranks of the special settlers.

[280] I. I. Chukhin, Yu. A. Dmirtiev, *Pominalnie spiski Karelii*, 1937-1938 (Petrozavodsk, 2002); *Memorialnoe kladbische Sandarmokh. 1937: 27 oktyabrya–4 noyabra.* (St–Petersburg: Memorial, 1997). Literature that deals with the repressions in the republic of Karelia in general is much more abundant. To mention just a few works: A. Tsigankov, *Ikh nazivali KR: Repressii v Karelii 20-kh-30-kh godov* (Petrozavodsk: Karelia, 1992), *One United Family: the Nationalities Policy of CPSU from the 1920's to the 1950's and Its Implementation in North-Western Russia* (Petrozavodsk, 1998); *Osobie papki: rassekrechennie dokumenti partiinikh organov Karelii 1930-1956* (Petrozavodsk, 2001).

[281] During the second half of the 1930-s the population of the BBLag amounted to 75-85000 prisoners. Constant fluctuations in the number of the prisoners were connected with the arrival and departure of *etapi,* internal and external transfers of the workforce. On the first of July 1938 the number of prisoners amounted to 77278. V. G. Makurov, "Belomoro-Baltiiskii Kombinat v Karelii. 1933-1941,"*Novoe v izuchenii Karelii* (Petrozavodsk: RAN, 1994), pp. 139-140.

[282] *Pominalnie spiski Karelii,* pp. 904-1075. The data provided in this work is based on the *troika* protocols dated 1937-1938.

[283] "Acts of banditry, organization of the armed gangs and participation in them; organizing of the attacks on the Soviet institutions of citizens, destruction of the railway lines or other means of transport and communication." D. Karnitsky, G. Roginzky, *Ugolovnii kodeks RSFSR. Posobie dlya slushatelei pravovikh VUZov, shkol I yuridichesikh kursov* (Moscow: OGIZ, 1935).

[284] This article referred to the cases of the repetitive crimes committed by the individuals while already on probationary period. D. Karnitsky, B. Roginzksy, *Ugolovnii kodeks RSFSR.*

The reasons for persecutions of remaining 5 prisoners are not mentioned.[285] The data about those physically exterminated during the Terror need to be updated and verified. Besides those officially executed, others died under torture or from extremely harsh conditions. Some of those deaths were backdated as executions, but many might have been registered as caused by illnesses.

Nevertheless, it is still possible to draw conclusions from this data. *Troikas'* protocols dated 1937-1939, included a vast number of individuals, sentenced to death for other than "counter-revolutionary" crimes. So far, only prominent prisoners of the *Solovetsky etap,* sentenced on the basis of the article 58, have become a subject of public and scholarly attention. The basic questions for the social historians to answer are: who were the rest of the victims, how they were selected and what was the basis for their sentences. The criminal cases of the prisoners referred to the *troika* court can provide an answer to this question.

The charge of counter-revolutionary crimes, based on the article 58 of the Soviet penal code, served as a pretext for more than 30% of all the executions of the prisoners. In the BBLag as in other forced labour camps,[286] where such cases were started, [287] they were often based on the confessions extracted under torture of participation in a large "counter-revolutionary" organization. The transcripts consisted of confessions of espionage, membership in underground organizations, denunciations of other prisoners, etc. For example, in the third camp subsection of the Onega section of the BBK an

[285] *Pominalnie spiski Karelii,* pp. 904-1075.
[286] GARF, f. 8131, op. 37, d. 99.
[287]However, sometimes during the Terror the procedure of compiling lists of the repressed prisoners was simplified to an extent that all legal procedures of investigation were abandoned. According to the rules of the "simplified procedure" the prisoners, charged with "counter–revolutionary" crimes, were often dragged to the execution site from the barracks after the chief of the Third Department composed a memo on every victim that included personal data, criminal record, and the "criminal activity" of a prisoner inside the camp. I.I. Chukhin, *Karelia-37,* p. 123. The same refers to the prisoners of the *Solovetsky etap.* These prisoners' sentences were based on the data from the memo composed by the chief of the *Solovki* prison and his assistant.

alleged "counter-revolutionary Fascist organization" was exposed involving sixteen prisoners. A nobleman, the famous drama artist Nikita Appolonsky was persecuted as its leader. All his camp acquaintances, among whom were the Count S. Medem, the Count N. Lipke, a general's son, A. Bers, a renowned Russian chemist and professor of the Leningrad Institute of Technology, Leonid Fokin were shot as his accomplices.[288]

The executions under the article on attempted escapes totaled more than 50% of all executions of the BBLag prisoners. Although the regular penalty for the crimes of attempted escapes and camp banditry, was detention in the ZHIZO (Camp punishment cell),[289] capital punishment for these crimes was imposed selectively prior to the year 1937. The sentences, passed by the Special Board of the Leningrad region functioning at the BBK NKVD, were usually announced in all camp subdivisions.[290] According to order № 00409, issued by N. Ezhov, attempted escapes were subject to criminal investigation and then transferred to the *troika* court. In January 1938 more than 211 BBLag prisoners were executed for attempted escapes.[291]

As with cases on "counter-revolutionary" crimes, the BBK Chekists resorted to forging the accusatory materials. On December 24 and 25, 1937 a raid was undertaken in the course of which about one hundred prisoners returning from work were arrested and, in accordance with the orders from the chief of the 5th Section of the BBK Third Department I. Bondarenko, charged with attempted escape. On the basis of this incident twenty five criminal cases were sent to the *troika* and fifteen prisoners were shot.[292] In their desire to fulfill or overfulfill the quotas of the criminal cases supplied

[288] I. I. Chukhin, *Karelia-37,* pp. 125-126.
[289] According to the Soviet penal code, the regular punishment for the attempted escape from the place of confinement consisted in the deprivation of freedom up to three years. D. Karnitsky, G. Roginzky, *Ugolovnii kodeks RSFSR*, p. 129.
[290] NARK, f. 865, op. 2 d. 1/3, p. 14, f. 865, op. 2, d. 1/2, p. 11; f. 865, op. 2 d. 1/2, p. 64, 116, 182.
[291] NARK, f. 865, op.2, d. 7/33, pp. 4-122.
[292] I. Chukhin, *Karelia-37,* p. 127.

to the *troika'* s court, the NKVD officials resorted not only to forging the 'counter-revolutionary' cases, but to the cases on any offences suitable for the court.

The majority of the executed BBLAg escapees had been detained in the camp for common criminal offences. They belonged to a group designated as *SVE* ("Socially harmful element") or *SOE* (socially dangerous element).[293] This category included a broad range of hardened criminals as well as "declassed" peasants. In other circumstances these prisoners were not likely to become the victims of the 'Terror.' However, in the extraordinary circumstances of 1937, when all the 'counter-revolutionairies' in the camp had already been executed, the supposed 'loyalty' to the Soviet state and the gravity of the sentence could not save the unlucky ones.

In several dozen cases under review, that eventuated in the death sentence issued by *troika,* the victims possessed a spotless proletarian or peasant pedigree.[294] The majority of them were illiterate or barely literate. Some of the convicts were also Red Army veterans or had participated in the guerilla war against the White Bands.[295]

In the interrogation protocols dated summer–autumn 1937 some prisoners, hoping for a mild punishment, either insisted that they had not entertained any plan to escape, or else they pleaded extenuating circumstances: such as needing to assist sick or disabled family members at liberty, or having been tortured in the camp, etc., and promised to compensate for their error through "honest labour for the benefit of the Soviet motherland."[296] Others, obviously suspecting that the punishment might be

[293] The escapees that had been confined in the camp on the basis of the 58th article, during the terror were usually accused of the "counter-revolutionary crimes."
[294] A significant number of former peasants reveal a process of the pauperization and criminalization of the peasant Russia under the Communist regime. Among them younger age groups were abundantly represented, born in 1918–1921.
[295] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 290, 297.
[296] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 293, 303, 304, 305, 901.

severe, denied that they had attempted to escape or pretended to be ignorant of the internal camp rules.[297]

During the Terror some escapes by prisoners did not result in the instigation of the criminal cases. Instead they were sentenced to six months of penal labour. The same pertains to other crimes.[298] This is probably explained by the fact that the number of the cases assigned to the *troika's* court was influenced by the pressure of fulfilling the quotas. After the quota was met, the rest of the transgressors were punished in a usual way.

Prior to the Terror, the criminal cases instigated in the BBK on the pretext of the violation of the law from August 7, 1932 "on the protection of the state property" or the articles 116, 110, or 169, [299] after their investigation by the Third Department,[300] were submitted to the BBK prosecutor for further transfer to the BBK court, Special Collegium of the Supreme Court of the KASSR or a military tribunal.[301] During the Terror, along with camp banditry, discipline abuses, such as refusal to work, the cases of embezzlements, investigated by the BBK Third Department, could be transferred to the *troika*'s[302] court session on the premise of operative order № 00447.

[297] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 301, 307, 309.
[298] NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 7/33, p. 20.
[299] Archiv MVD RK, (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Karelia), f. 73, op. 01, d. 1029. Although in the Soviet penal code 'economic crimes' frequently passed under the 'political' article (58-7 'wrecking'), (58-8 act of terrorism), portrayed as a part of the counter-revolutionary plot, 'embezzlement of the public property' as such was outlined in the following legal norms: the law from August 7th, 1932, article 162 of the penal code (theft), article 116 (embezzlement), speculation (article 107), fraud (169) and bribery (articles 117, 118, 119). Hoover Institution on War, Peace and Revolution, Soviet Communist Party Archives. GARF, f. 8131, op. 13, d.28, p. 15.
[300] Third Departments or, the so-called 'Operative-Chekist' Departments of the camps, subordinated to the Third Department of the GULAG NKVD, evolved from the Information and Investigation Sections of the camps. These administrative bodies performed function of the State Security organs in the respective camps.
[301] GARF, f. 8131, op. 13, d. 34, p. 94. This depended upon a number of factors: first of all, whether the accusants were hired employees or prisoners, and secondly, on the nature of the charges.
[302] As a rule, *troika* consisted of the people's commissar of the NKVD administration, the secretary of the local party organization, and the procurator of the republic, province, or territory. *Troikas* enjoyed the extraordinary right to pass verdicts unilaterally and carry them out, including death sentences.

It is difficult to calculate the exact number of executions in 1937-1938 in the BBK on the grounds of the economic crimes. What is certain is that in comparison with the executions on other grounds this number was insignificant in itself. In the *troika's* verdicts such executions of the prisoners as well as hired staff passed under operative order № 00447 (14% of all prisoners' executions).[303] However, it can not be taken for granted that all these executions occurred on the basis of the economic crimes: other categories of bases for execution could pass under this formulation (such as vagrancy and discipline abuses.) As for the hired staff, the share of executions on the grounds of embezzlements and office crimes is even smaller.[304]

The total financial losses, indicated in the criminal cases under analysis, varied from 30000 to 100000 rubles.[305] The number of those involved in a particular criminal case varied from one dozen to several dozens individuals. Sometimes the case was started with investigation of the crimes of several individuals, but in the course of further investigation more officials got arrested.

As a rule, the criminal network, revealed in the course of the investigation, was headed by an official on the responsible position within the camp subsection: the chief of the camp section with his close associates, or managerial staff of the economic unit, such as agricultural association (*neustavnaia artel*.)[306] These were hired employees of the Combine. The rest of the participants were either camp prisoners or special settlers, occupying positions in the financial or administrative apparatuses: chief accountants,

[303] I. I. Chukhin, Yu. A. Dmirtiev, *Pominalnie spiski Karelii*, 1937-1938 (Petrozavodsk, 2002); *Memorialnoe kladbische Sandarmokh. 1937: 27 oktyabrya–4 noyabra.* (St–Petersburg: Memorial, 1997).

[304] According to the available data, during the Terror among approximately seventy seven repressed employees of the BBK NKVD the majority (seventy one individual) were charged with the "counter-revolutionary" offences, the rest were persecuted "according to the order 00447, including those accused of either embezzlements or 'office crimes.' (*bitoviie prestuplenia*)." *Pominalnie spiki,* pp. 844-849. Sixty eight employees were shot, the rest received ten-year imprisonment in the camps.

[305] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 902, p. 290; d. 934, vol. 1, p. 3; d. 1029.

[306] Archiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 902, vol. 1.

managers, superintendents, agronomists, stock keepers, the staff responsible for food supply, etc. Later on the prisoners occupying the lowest positions were involved and found guilty of petty theft: warders, cooks, milkmaids, forwarding agents, storekeepers.[307]

Contrary to the so called "counter-revolutionary' cases where as a rule all the accused were executed, in the cases under review some of the accused later were exempt from the charges and released. This frequently happened with the prisoners from the ranks of the lowest camp administration, guilty of petty theft and embezzlements, who were either released on the basis of the 'insignificance of the offence'[308] or received a one year sentnece of the penal regime.[309]

In the course of the investigation, the economic crimes of a number of arrestees were often aggravated by other offences, ranging from accusations in 'anti-Semitism' to 'corruption of juveniles.'[310]

The social background of the majority of the accused was modest. All of them were registered either as "state employees" (*sluzashchie)* prior to their arrest and detention or employment in the camp, peasants (sometimes designated as 'kulak'), or workers.[311] Their nationality was mainly Russian, with a few Ukrainians and Jews.[312] Prisoners had been frequently sentenced for office crimes, (such as the article 109, embezzlement).[313] But whatever article of the penal code mentioned, these were the so-called 'ordinary' versus 'counter-revolutionary' or 'political' crimes. The hired staff

[307] Archiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 934.
[308] Archiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 902, vol. 1.
[309] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 934, vol. 3, p. 196.
[310] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 934, pp. 12, 24.
[311] Archiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 934, vol. 1, pp. 1-16; d. 1029; d. 902; the same was true of the analogous cases that had been started prior to the Terror: GARF, f. 8131, op. 13, d. 34, p. 74-93.
[312] Ibid.
[313] Archiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 934, vol. 1, p. 1-11.

involved in these cases, also came from the lowest social stratum and previously had been sentenced to the camp imprisonment either for petty crimes, or office crimes.[314]

The cases were based on the reports composed by the inspectors' commissions of the BBK administrative apparatuses and economic enterprises. The verification committee of one or another economic unit of the Combine or a particular camp subsection relied on denunciations either in the form of a note either to the Third Department, [315] or to the BBK newspaper publishing house. [316]

The protocols of interrogation reveal, that involvement in criminal networks were different. Some of the accused ones sought to earn extra money; others had been subjected to blackmail by their superiors and were forced to participate or cover up their fraud.[317]

The gravity of the sentence varied accordingly. Prior to 1937 in the BBK as well as in any other Soviet enterprise the economic (as well as other 'office crimes') were punished through dismissal of the guilty from their positions, reprimands, and (if they were prisoners) loss of extra work days counted towards the release (*zacheti*), and additional term of imprisonment that varied from three to five years.[318] During the Terror the investigation procedures were accelerated and capital punishment was not infrequent. A case containing several volumes of biographic data, interrogation protocols, documents and notes, could be completed in one and a half months. Then it

[314] Archiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 934, vol. 1, p. 3.
[315] Archiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 934, vol. 1, p. 3.
[316] After the BBK management issued the orders ascribing significant role in directing and controlling the cleansing operations to the press, the official newspaper of the BBK, *Stalinskaia Trassa* played an important role in fueling the frenzy of revealing "enemies" and crimes inside the BBK administrative apparatuses.*Stalinskaia trassa,* № 93, 22.08.1937, p. 1; № 109, 12.10.1937, p. 4.
[317] Archiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 934, vol. 1, pp. 36-46; 131-133.
[318] GARF, f. 8131, op. 13, d. 34.
pp. 101-102.

was transferred to the troika's court, which sometimes sentenced bunches of more than 400 prisoners at one time. [319]

Study of cases of embezzlement, as other common criminal offences, reveals no evidence of violence or torture to extract confession which normally did not provide the main burden of guilt. [320] Alternatively, the accused could have denied involvement in the criminal activities until the moment of execution.[321] This fact constitutes a significant contrast with the so-called 'counter-revolutionary' cases of the same period, which, following the chief USSR prosecutor Andrey Vishinsky's principle that confession of the accused was the most reliable basis for the indictment (hence frequent application of torture and beatings in the 'political' processes). In the 'general crime' cases during the Terror formal procedures of investigation were preserved: interrogations of the witnesses, confrontations, official documentation, while personal confession was relegated to a mere supplementary status. When the accused denied all the charges, the accusation was based on the results of the revision by the commission and witnesses' testimonies. The investigation, conducted with an 'accusatory bias,' ignored the pleas of innocence by the accused.[322]

The role of informers is especially interesting in these cases. One of the participants in a case concerning an embezzlement network within the agricultural cooperative association, an agronomist, was released soon after it had begun despite the fact that all the accused denounced him as the responsible official. The investigators stubbornly ignored these testimonies. The agronomist, with the 'kulak' social

[319] I.I. Chukhin, *Karelia-37,* p. 124.
[320] Although confession revealing other participants of the criminal network was welcomed; as in the 'political cases,' in the criminal cases the authors of these confessions expressed pleas for forgiveness, stated the intentions to work honestly "for the benefit of the Motherland" and tended to transfer the responsibility for the crimes to the representatives to their bosses. At the end, the authors of such confessions were also shot.
[321] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 902, vol. 1.
[322] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 902, vol. 2.

background, a state official by occupation and a former Communist party member, had an eleven years record in the 'organs of inquiry' (*organi doznania),* in other words, the GPU (later OGPU).[323] Although the details of his involvement and release are not clear, it is certain that his service as a secret agent influenced the outcome.

Despite the fact that such cases were non-political, political rhetoric was frequently employed. In the accusatory fabula of the troika's court, a suspicious social background became grounds for a major crime. A previous record in the White Guard, a 'kulak' past evoked an image of 'an enemy of the people' and justified execution for a minor offence.

Despite the fact that the "shadow" economy was thriving in the camp subsections, reports, that constituted the basis of the accusation fabula, in a large part were based on assumptions, guess–work, forged evidence and denunciations. For example, financial losses could be attributed to "uncollected profits," that had allegedly occurred as a result of failure to fulfill the economic plan, or to an "inappropriate use of cattle." [324]

Often the conclusions of the inspection reports were based on documents, the authenticity of which was highly problematic. Normally, records of the accounts department, or qualified expertise were not admitted as evidence. The job obligations of the accused were not mentioned. The total financial loss as well as embezzlements, committed by each of the accused were determined arbitrarily.[325]

[323] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 902, vol. 1, p. 34.
[324] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 902, vol. 1, p. 247
[325] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 902, vol. 1, p. 234; 290.

If the investigators were more diligent, the charges might be supported with evidence in the form of financial documentation (such as forged pay-rolls and other documents,) and detailed accounts of the witnesses.[326]

However, the distinction remained unclear between the real embezzlement and falsifications of the production figures. The economic plans and tasks were frequently based upon unreal expectations, so falsified results became the prerequisite for survival for many camp administrators. The investigators themselves confessed that sometimes it was impossible to adequately document the financial losses that had occurred as a result of embezzlement.[327]

The interrogations protocols of the criminal cases show that autonomy of the provincial bosses which became one of the pretexts for repressive operations of the 1937-1938, and elimination of which was an important step in the consolidation of the Stalin's dictatorial power. This autonomy manifested itself even on the level of the chiefs of the smallest forced labour camp subsections who felt confident and secure in appropriating the economic resources to their own ends, and creating their own 'mini-empires.'[328]

In the case of the so-called 'political' crimes the principle of selection of the victims was more or less clear: almost everyone with improper social origins and unloyalty to the Soviet power, manifested in the past, was exterminated during the Terror. An important question is why during the Terror some crimes connected with

[326] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 934, vol. 4, p. 4. Apart from direct theft and appropriation of the state resources, a common practice was cutting down the salaries of the workers with the help of forged documents and appropriation of money that had remained.? Another widespread practice was including into the lists of the salaried workers fictive names (called by the investigators 'mertvie dushi') and appropriating money received as their salaries.
[327] GARF, f. 8131, op. 13, d. 34, p. 73.
[328] The chief of the second BBLag subdivision had confessed to his accountant(a prisoners), when the latter asked him to stop singing suspicious songs in his house and reproached for arrogant behaviour: "I am the master here. I am not afraid of anyone." Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 934, vol. 1, p. 40.

embezzlement and failure to fulfill the economic plan were turned into 'counter-revolutionary cases,' why were the individuals accused labeled 'enemies of the people' and sentenced according to article 58 of the Soviet penal code,[329] while other cases were considered non-political ? It seems the primary criterion was the importance of the economic enterprise for the state. Mass scale construction and industrial projects represented the higher level of risk for their management. Secondly, the previous records of the individuals played a role. Not a single individual among those executed in the BBK in the course of the Great Terror on the grounds of embezzlement came from the ranks of the so-called *bivshikh*. None of them had a higher education or was sentenced on the basis of the 'political' article.

Evidence of some rationality raises the question of the degree of arbitrariness versus rationality in the selection of the victims and their sentences. Apart from the given example of determining where a case was 'political' or 'non-political' no other evidence of rational decisions of the executors is available. The selectiveness and arbitrary nature of repressive measures in the cases of the non-political crimes manifested itself more poignantly. The executions on the basis of non-political crimes were motivated exclusively by the desire to fulfill the quotas of the 'enemies,' allocated from the centre. At the level of the troika court a great number of non-political cases were usually supplied when the number of the executions of 'political' enemies was lacking. After the quota set by the central NKVD apparatus was met, the rest of the transgressors were punished in a usual way.

Thus, despite the fact that in every administrative unit of the Combine (as well as any other Soviet enterprise based on forced labour) corruption was rampant, only small

[329] *Stalinskaia trassa,* № 85, 27.07.1937, p. 1.

proportion of the personnel was tried at the troika's court. Those who were caught were victims of denunciations that arrived at the right time to the right place.

As a result, corruption and swindling, as well as the criminality, continued to flourish in the BBK-BBLag, sometimes in the outrageous forms; the participants remained unpunished and frequently were promoted or transferred to the capital.[330] Similar situation was observed in other camps. In *Krasnoyarskii* labour camp, as the results of the NKVD inspection revealed, in 1939 the sum of financial losses, as a result of falsifications and embezzlements of the camp administration, amounted to seven million rubles.[331] Even in the central Gulag apparatus, however strictly controlled by the NKVD, financial machinations and embezzlement were rampant.[332]

Later on the NKVD attempted to find new methods to counteract the corruption. In 1944 a decree was issued that prohibited appointing to financial positions individuals sentenced for financial crimes.[333]

By the second half of 1940s corruption within the GULAG reached previously unheard of dimensions. In many camps all the levels of the economic management were enmeshed in an elaborate, well structured network.[334] The NKVD even provided a classification of different kinds of camp embezzlement and began to recruit informer networks in the fight with embezzlement within the camps. This network later became a separate unit of the NKVD apparatus.[335]

In order to make the investigation of the embezzlement of the Soviet property more effective a recruitment of a special agent-informers network called 'On the fight

[330] *Stalinskaia trassa,* issue 6, 12.01. 1939, p. 3.
[331] Garf, f. 9401, op.1a, d. 56, p. 209.
[332] Garf, f. 9401, op.1a, d. 60, p. 105. Data for 1940.
[333] Garf, f. 9401, op.1a, d. 56, p. 209.
[334] Garf, f. 9401, op.1a, d.143, p. 139; d. 164, p. 163.
[335] GARF, f. 9401, op.1a, d.143, p. 69.

with embezzlement and theft' was launched at the end of the 1930s.[336] If in 1940 there were ten informers for each thousand prisoners, in 1947 this indicator ranged around eighty.

During the Terror prisoners who had recently been released from the camp also became targets of repressive operations. If they failed to obtain their passports and find a job after having spent several days at liberty, they could be rearrested for minor offences or a "parasitic lifestyle."[337] Occasionally, the prisoner was arrested on the day following his release from the camp, and within five days after the investigation was finished, sentenced to capital punishment by a *troika* court for "leading a parasite lifestyle of a declasse element ."[338]

The verdicts issued by *troikas* on these cases reveal the basis for interpreting the notion of social "deviancy." The typical verdict of *troika* meetings in autumn 1937, referring to a recently released prisoner, was formulated in the following way: "to be shot as a declasse element with the parasite lifestyle, regularly committing the acts of drunkenness, theft, swindle, and hooliganism." [339] Or, alternatively, the sentence provided a more specific justification for execution, such as "maintaining personal connections with the declasse element, he is guilty of robbing a worker from Onega plant in September. To be shot." [340]

The protocols of the interrogations in the cases of the criminal offences, composed by he interrogators, were certainly adapted to produce a desirable

[336]GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 68, p. 32.
[337] The local RO (*Ugrozisk)* Criminal Investigation Departments of the regional NKVD branches while investigating such cases and supplying the materials for *troika,* worked in close cooperation with the BBK operative sections. In the local book of memory these people are registered as *BOZ* ("individuals without a definite occupation") and *BOMZ* ("individuals without permanent place of residence.") *Pominalnie spiski Karelii,* pp. 824-843.
[338] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 916, p. 11.
[339] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 191, p. 28, d. 910.
[340] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 907, p. 30.

impression. However, they aimed not at presenting the evidence of the existence of the "anti-state" intentions or actions of those interrogated, or the gravity of the charges, but at demonstrating the transgressor's "immunity to re-education." For example, the protocols of interrogation might state that an ex-prisoner confessed "would not work, but would go on stealing, for theft is also a form of labour that he performs.'"[341] The interrogation protocol of a prisoner charged with theft stated "I can not refrain from stealing due to instincts that I have cultivated, and that make me steal again and again."[342]

Such "predilections" were also reflected in the prisoners' 'kharacteristika' issued by the camp administration and the interrogation protocols of the witnesses, who, often "playing the game" of an interrogator, consciously contributed to the creation of an image of a "deviant element.[343]

There was an abundance of political rhetoric in cases of criminal offences. If there had been a fight in the workers' settlement, one participant being a Stakhanovite, and another one an ex–prisoner, the course of the investigation was predetermined. The roles of the victim and attacker were ideologically predictable, resulting in the charges of " being embittered by a failure to organize a workers' strike and motivated by class struggle attacked and injured a Stakhanovite F."[344]

In the course of the rehabilitation process of the 1990–s political rhetoric acquires another dimension. If a victim had been repressed on the basis of a "non-political" crime, rehabilitation was normally denied. However, if a political charge (as a rule,

[341] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 1035, p. 18; d. 917, p. 1.
[342] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 916, p. 8.
[343]Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 902, p. 24.
[344] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 1150, p. 1.

formulated according to article 58) accompanied the main one, then the individual was often rehabilitated on political grounds, even if he had been a hardened criminal. [345]

As far as the NKVD staff is concerned, only basic biographical data on the leading officials, including members of the *troika* of the Karelian NKVD has been published.[346] As is indicated in their personal files, the majority of the employees of the Third Department of the BBK NKVD, who participated in implementing order № 00447 in the BBK came from the poorest peasant or working class background. They were recruited into the GULAG system after serving in the Red Army. Some of them were promoted by the local party organization.[347] Almost all of them had only primary education or none at all. An exception was an assistant to the chief of the Third Department BBK NKVD, Alexander Shondysh, who in 1927 graduated from the Herzen Pedagogical University in St-Petersburg.

As it has already been demonstrated, the climax of the repressive operation was followed by a wholesale purge within the NKVD apparatus that reached its peak at the end of the year 1938 and the beginning of 1939.[348]

A number of the employees of the Third Department of the BBK NKVD, who played the major role in implementing the Terror, were arrested in March–August 1938. The investigation case № 11602, (non- political and not subject to rehabilitation), apart from the BBK NKVD officials, included the NKVD officers from the Leningrad region, sent to the BBK to staff the operative team for execution of the sentences. The majority of the defendants were accused of "abuse of power, falsification of criminal

[345] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 912.
[346] *Pominalnie spiski,* pp. 19-26.
[347] A note from the TsA FSB RF (Central Archive of the FSB of the Republic of Karelia), (*Informatsionnaia spravka po sledstvennim delam*), issued on December 21, .2005.
[348] N. Petrov, V. Kokurin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD 1934-1941. Spravochnik* (Moscow: Memorial, 1999), p. 499.

cases, torture of the prisoners and appropriation of the arrestees' private possessions."[349]

According to a note from the FSB archive that contains data on ten officials of the Third Department of the BBK NKVD, who had taken an active part in the repressive operations, only two of them were sentenced to death. [350]

Pavel Dolinsky, the chief of the Third Section of the Third BBK Department from the first of December 1938 until April 16, 1939 and the one who reported on the prisoners' cases during the *troika's* meetings, was arrested on April 13, 1939. Following the trial that lasted from May 24 to May 30 the same year the Military Tribunal sentenced him to a year of imprisonment reduced subsequently to "corrective labour" for the same period of time with the 10% loss in the salary.[351] An officer from the fifth section of the BBK Third Department, - Fyodor Volkov, arrested on July 21, 1938, was sentenced by the Military Tribunal in January 1939 to six years of imprisonment in a camp without loss of civil rights. On September 23, 1939, according to the decision of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR, the length of his sentence was reduced to one year of corrective labour. After the sentence was reviewed he was released immediately on the basis of having already served time. from May 30, 1939."[352] An assistant to the chief of the first section of the Third Department Michail Pletz, who in the course of the executions had issued " criminal orders on torture and beatings of the convicts," during the process was sentenced to four years of

[349] I. Chukhin, *Karelia-37,* p. 126.
[350] During the process that lasted on May 24-30, 1939 the military tribunal of the NKVD troops of the Leningrad region sentenced the assistant to the chief of the BBK Third Department Alexander Shondysh and the chief of the fifth section of the BBK Third Department Ivan Bondarenko to capital punishment on the basis of article 193-17 "b" of the criminal code. On October 20 the sentence was carried out.
[351] Informatsionnaia spravka.
[352] Ibid.

imprisonment in a camp. Soon thereafter, the Supreme Collegium reduced his sentence to two years."[353]

In some cases the subsequent review of a sentence resulted in its being increased. The commander of the armed guard division of the Third Department Nikolai Mironov, arrested on July 8, 1938, was placed on a probationary period of four years. By the decision of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR, issued on September 23, 1939, the sentence of the Military Tribunal was reversed as "inadequately mild." On December 25, 1939 he was sentenced again, this time to a sentence of two years and six months in prison, without the loss of electoral rights.[354]

Formal punishment in the form of salary deductions was applied to executioners of the lowest ranks.[355] Apart from the welfare privileges (pensions and numerous benefits), the NKVD (later MVD) provided them with the confidentiality, anonymity and security. Their involvement in the repressive operations was denied and their real place of service was concealed, often replaced by another occupation altogether such as a contract worker in forestry. In the course of the regional party committee meetings starting from January 1939, officials who had taken an active part in the implementation of the Terror were promoted in the NKVD hierarchy. Thus, it is possible to argue that the purges of the NKVD, based on investigations of "deviations" during the Terror, such as committing brutal murders and forging accusatory materials, on the level of the provincial NKVD offices were implemented under strict central control and taken simply in order to guarantee the success of the new political line, without undermining the punitive system as a whole.

[353] Ibid.
[354] Ibid.
[355] Ibid.

A lot of "white spots" remain in the repressive operations. The data on the victims and the repressive mechanism needs further work and verification. Besides, the Terror exerted significant influence not only on the functioning of the White-Sea Baltic Combine and the Camp NKVD, but also on social life of the prisoners and the hired staff. This influence also remains to be investigated. However, despite the stricter regulations of the camp regime that were implemented in 1937, the total separation of the camp prisoners from the BBK settlements was never achieved. The close ties as well as hidden routes and patterns of coexistence between these groups pervaded even those macabre years. Despite the wave of arrests and depositions, frequent announcements of "unmasking" "enemies" and "wreckers," the centre of the BBK, located in the city of Medvezhegorsk, enjoyed rich social and cultural life. In spite of the crisis in the Central Theatre of the BBK NKVD, related to the simultaneous dismissal of all its z/k members of the artistic troupe, the regular theatrical and operatic productions of high quality and cultural diversity took place, not to mention Estrada concerts, concerts of the amateur circles, parades and masquerades. In the first half of 1937 the population of Medvezhegorsk participated in a variety of social and cultural events, including Alexander Pushkin days in Karelia, (*Pushkinskie dni)*, that included concerts and literary evenings, the social events devoted to mourning of Sergey Kirov, then, finally, the election campaign, that was supposed to engage the population for almost half a year. How the Terror was perceived by the local population and the prisoners themselves is a serious challenge for future studies.

After the 'Great Terror' : The NKVD Policy in the Camps, the End of the 1930s – the Beginning of the 1940s.

There is a prevalent tendency to suppose that compared to Ezhov's atrocities Beria's policy was rather mild and tolerant. To some extent this might be true. Still, the division of the camps' history by the names of the NKVD chiefs and their policy is not accurate. Ezhov reacted and adjusted his policy to pressures 'from above,' namely the demands of the government, and 'from below', the reports and the situation in the camps. That is why before the start of the 'Terror' policy the camp prisoners enjoyed a period of relative relaxation of the regime, betterment in nutrition and several amnesties.

In November 1938, when Lavrenty Beria was appointed as a People's Commissar of Internal Affairs, he summarized in a short memo the results of the work of the labour camps: "For a number of years the Gulag was in the hands of the enemies."[356] The wave of repression within the NKVD apparatus reached its peak at the end of 1938 and the beginning of 1939.[357] In spring 1939 the heads of almost all major Gulag departments were charged with the participation in the "Right-Trotskyite terrorist conspiracy."

As happened during other political processes in the country at that time, during the trial, the accused NKVD officers denied their own confessions.[358] The typical crimes of the camp administrators consisted of "wrecking" and "ruining the economy of the camp." Some of them were charged with "drunkenness," "debauchery," and "liaisons with the enemies of the people."[359] In the course of the repressive operations, during the years 1938 and 1939 thirty high ranked officials from the NKVD camps and prisons were executed.[360]

[356] N. Petrov, *Istoria imperii Gulag.*
[357] N. Petrov, V. Kokurin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD 1934-1941,* p. 499.
[358] D. Yurasov, "Reabilitazionnoe opredelenie," in *Zvenja: Palachi I zertvi,* p. 389-399.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Exact data on the repression in the NKVD for those years has been recently published, as well as the biographical data on the leading NKVD personnel in general, that enables to draw some observations. N. Petrov, V. Kokurin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD 1934-1941.*

In November 1939 an anti-Soviet conspiracy was disclosed in the BBK. Eleven contracted officials were arrested, and a prisoner who was employed as a camp guard. Allegedly the group was headed by a follower of Petliura and a Menshevik. The conspirators, actively engaged in anti-Soviet propaganda among the prisoners. They planned to disarm the guards, flee to Finland and establish the connections with the foreign Anti-Soviet organizations and to organize a military operation against the Soviet Union. Special settlers from the nearby settlements were also supposed to be involved. Anti-Soviet leaflets and an Anti-Soviet slogan, confiscated during the arrest, were used as evidence.[361] The insistence of the NKVD bosses on blaming the political enemies for the failures of the Gulag economic tasks continued late into the 1940s.[362]

The disruption of the criminal investigation processes and collapse of the informer networks in the camps was one of the most obvious and predictable consequences of the Terror which the newly appointed investigators had to face in 1939.

Apart from the executions of the prisoners who in many camps had constitutede the core of the informers' network and the NKVD officials who managed it a number of other factors aggravated the situation.

When *troiki* had finished their work, in many camps the flood of unfinished criminal cases generated a lot of confusion. For example, in *Bamlag* more than six hundred criminal cases were stacked up in the camp court, and the investigators were helpless for they had to finish the investigation on the crimes which allegedly had happened somewhere on a line that was seven thousand kilometers long.[363]

[361] Garf, f. 9401, op. 1a, d. 41, p. 86.
[362] GARF, f. 9401, op. 1a, d. 127, p. 7.
[363] GARF, f.8131, op.37, d.99, p.12.

The NKVD order dated August 22, 1939 and addressed to the camp NKVD sections states that the obsession of the NKVD staff with big counter-revolutionary cases resulted in the collapse of the informers' work in the apparatuses of the NKVD enterprises in the Far East. Poor work of the Third Departments contributed to the collapse of the economic plans.[364]

The 'Terror' undermined the traditional methods of the NKVD service in the camps as the order of the Third department of the GULAG dated December 25, 1939 demonstrates:

At the construction site no. 203 for example, contrary to the NKVD order dated June 27, 1939 which banned the use of the prisoners as residents, the Third Department has entrusted the supervision over its agents to twenty two z/k residents and provided them with the complete information on the agents. Some of these prisoners appeared to be more vigilant than the operative staff, and repored that the work of the network was close to collapse. The regular inspections in the barracks endangered the lives of the residents of the Third Departments through disclosure. Operative staff of the Third departments visited the agents at their working places, and publicly arranged appointments with them. Some of the tally clerks attempted to obtain the sympathy of the agents after they had identified them as such. Sometimes the z/k were attached to residents as agents-informers while in reality they had never been actually recruited into the network. These fake informers were registered under the nicknames that were their actual surnames. While reporting about the state of affairs, the assistant of the head of the Third Department got lost in the materials he had brought for the report, and displayed outrageous ignorance. But the most outrageous disgrace is the fact that until January 1939 the positions of the investigators of the Third Department were occupied

[364] GARF, f.9401, op.1a, d.40, p. 79.

by seven prisoners. They were responsible for investigating the criminal cases started not only on the camp z/k, but also on the hired staff..[365]

Frequently criminal cases were forged out of thin air just to avoid reprimands. Numerous cases of corruption[366] of the staff of the apparatuses of the Operative Departments, and their integration into the criminal power camp structures (as shown in the first chapter) were registered in the camps.

The principles of the NKVD work in the camps did not change much from the times of the "Terror." Starting from the second half of 1941 a significant increase in the number of counter-revolutionary criminal cases in the camps took place in comparison with the pre-war period. During the war any suspicious utterance could result in a death sentence according to the tenth paragraph of article 58 of the Soviet penal code, "counter-revolutionary propaganda." It is interesting that the prosecutors' reports from the camps from that time almost never mention the cases of banditry and ordinary criminality.

Juridical expertise in such cases did not change much from the end of the 1930s. An ex-prisoner tried in the subdivision of the Bezimanlag in 1942 for "Anti-Soviet propaganda" (whose death sentence was later committed to ten years of the confinement in the camps), described the procedure in the camp court :

> Among the four witnesses who appeared on the courtroom, I knew only one. It was a medical assistant M., whom I saw twice. Such 'witnesses ,' recruited among the barrack watchers, sanitars, and medical assistants are easily bribed by the NKVD. Exhausted by hard work and hunger they are ready to say what they are told by their superiors just to get a better position.[367]

[365] Garf, f.9401, op.1a, d.41, p. 840.
[366] By the way, the term 'corruption,' *razlozhenie* , so often used by the central NKVD authorities to describe the state of affairs on the localities, is inherited from the Pre-Soviet past. It was used by the officers of the Russian Tsarist army to describe the essence and the effects of the Bolsheviks anti-military and anti-monarchical propaganda in the army regiments during the First World War.
[367] Memorial, f.2, op.1, d.94, p.71.

According to reports of the local camp prosecutors "On the fight with the counter-revolutionary crimes among the z/k and members of the staff" starting with the year 1941 the imprisoned citizens of the newly annexed territories of Baltic countries displayed significant level of resistance. Some of them planned escapes and revolts in order to flee and join the Germans.[368] The resistance of these prisoners increased in 1942, in the camps Karlag and Sevdvinlag which were very close to the frontline.

To what extent such cases were real or based on the forged evidence, is unknown. However, the information they contained, contrary to the criminal cases of the end of the 930s, can not be dismissed as utterly false. For example, an NKVD order from August 20, 1942 states, that the collapse of the agents' operative work of the Third department of Vorkutlag resulted in the fact that the preparation of the prisoners for an armed revolt passed unnoticed. As a result, forty members of the NKVD staff were killed.[369] The primary reason for the unqualified work of the Third Departments in the camps was seen by the NKVD bosses in the deficiencies of the management of the informers network and the lack of the qualified agents. While the network represented only 3% of the total number of the prisoners, the number of the qualified agents was insufficient and their turnover increadibly high, sometimes reaching 100%.[370]

Still, due to the efforts of the NKVD in the course of the 1940s a significant increase in the informer network in the GULAG took place. From July 1, 1941 to July 1, 1944 the agents-informers network in the camps and colonies had increased to 63.646 members (which amounted to 186% of the initial number) and embraced 97.780

[368] Garf, f.8131, op.37, d.1253, p.161, d.2036, p.68, etc.
[369] Garf, f.9401, op.1a, d.114.
[370] The most adequate translation of the term offered by J. Rossi in *The Gulag handbook*, "non political prisoners," still fails to grasp the essence of the term. For it does not differentiate between *bitoviks* as such (mainly state officials, sentenced for robbery, swindling, and embezzlements) and the criminals, or *urki*, who also fall under the category of non-political prisoners. This distinction is explicitly or implicitly underlined in many Gulag memoirs.

residents, agents, and informers. Of this number 72.455 members were listed as prisoners. Additionally, it included 19.085 hired officials, and 6240 Germans mobilized for the labour army. As a result, the saturation of the camp population with informers had increased from 1, 7% in 1941 to 8% in 1944. With the general growth of the entire network in 186% the number of agents increased in 302%, and the number of the residents (whose role in camp conditions was considered especially important) increased in 225%.

Conclusion

The Great Terror of 1937-1938 in the GULAG was a culmination of the processes which started with the assassination of Sergey Kirov in 1934. Strengthening discipline, worsening of the camp regime for the "political" prisoners, and the practice of sending them to the deadly Northern camps coincided with the introduction of yet more intensive drill of the camp guards and the NKVD officers. In the GULAG apparatus and its camps the Terror as such consisted of several waves of repressions, targeting different groups of the camp inhabitants and administrative staff. In the course of the repressive operations which started in August 1937 after the order 00447 of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs different groups of prisoners fell the victims to the Terror.

As a rule, "political" prisoners, sentenced according to the article 58 of the Soviet penal code (many of them being the representatives of intelligentsia and nobility, the so-called *bivshie*), were the chief target of the repressive operations. In the camps where the concentration of such prisoners was high, (such as Ukhtpechlag and Vorkutlag) only the prisoners in categories targeted by the mass operations were reviewed. In cases of the camps where the numbers of the executed "enemies" were lower than those

prescribed in the quotas, (as it will be demonstrated later on an example of the BBK NKVD) did the NKVD staff resort to reviewing the dossiers of non-political prisoners.

These were convicts who are difficult to classify: the kulaks who had escaped from exile, those convicted under the August 7, 1932 law on the theft of public property and so on. A large proportion of the victims consisted of ordinary and hardened criminals. This meant that the policy of benevolence towards and reliance on the "socially close" categories of the camp population were abandoned. Additionally, a rather broad group designated as *SVE* ("socially harmful element") or *SOE* ("socially dangerous element,") including hardened criminals as well as "declassed" peasants were executed. In other circumstances these prisoners were not likely to become the victims of the 'Terror.' Many of the victims possessed a spotless proletarian or peasant pedigree including Red Army veterans.

In the case of the so-called 'political' crimes the principle of selection of the victims was more or less clear: almost everyone with suspect social origins and unloyalty to the Soviet power, manifested in the past, was exterminated during the Terror. The repressive operations, targeted at non-political criminals, motivated by the desire to fulfill the quotas for troika meetings, were absolutely indiscriminate. The definition of the 'enemy'became inclusive as never before. It extended to the criminal gangs that had been "terrorizing" the camp population, informal administrative networks of the "shadow economy," and 'single internal regime violators': the prisoners who for some reasons violated the internal camp rules.

In the BBLag the executions on 'political' grounds provided an initial quota for overall number of executions (which, as it was already mentioned, amounted to 800 individuals). However, in the course of the subsequent raising of the quota campaigns (a process which took place in all the regional NKVD sections) the number of the

executed prisoners exceeded the initial limit more than threefold. As a result, ordinary delinquents were executed en masse. Previously the crimes, widespread in the camps, such as banditry or embezzlement, had been rarely punished by a death sentence. Initially, according to the order № 00447, the crimes of banditry and various discipline abuses fell under the category of the criminal cases which had to be shifted to the *troika's* court. Theoretically the repressive operations targeted informal groups of criminals who exercised power in the camp subsections and terrorized the rest of the prisoners. In reality, the selection of victims was random and independent of the behaviour of the prisoner in the camp and his role in the camp hierarchy.

As a result, the charge of counter-revolutionary crimes, based on the article 58 of the Soviet penal code, served as a pretext for slightly more than 30% of all the executions while the executions for attempted escape totaled more than 50% of all executions of the BBLag prisoners. Although the regular penalty for the crimes of attempted escape and camp banditry, was detention in the ZHIZO (Camp punishment cell), capital punishment for these crimes was imposed selectively prior to the year 1937. The large proportion of the alleged escapees among the executed in comparison with the number of repressed recidivists remains a puzzling fact. Probably the BBK chekists used this category as the easiest way to fulfill the quotas. Those accused of embezzlement and corruption constituted a very small part of the overall executions.

From the point of view of improving the problem with criminality within the camp the 'Terror' was absolutely ineffective. Despite the fact that a number of executed prisoners and the staff were repressed for corruption and fraud these crimes were not eradicated. Banditry also flourished in the camps, for the chiefs of the criminal clans were not among the executed prisoners.

On the one hand the criminal procedures adopted during the "Terror" within the GULAG were similar to the repressive operations in the rest of the country. On the other hand, they were different from it.

The main peculiarity of the 'Great Terror' in the Stalinist Russia consisted in an unimaginable gap between the inquisitorial mechanisms and macabre charges on the one side and the factual evidence of the crimes on the other side. As Evgenia Ginzburg, a GULAG survivor noted, "in everything that was happening in the country at that time we are confronted with the monstrous violation of the logic and total absence of the common sense, which remains to be puzzling."[371] The Gulag was yet another arena for arbitrary play of the mantality of executioners, and a mirror image of the Soviet state and society at large.

The procedures that preceeded the executions varied in various camps. Sometimes during the Terror compiling lists of repressed prisoners was simplified to the extent that all legal procedures of investigation were ignored. According to the rules of the "simplified procedure" the prisoners, charged with "counter–revolutionary" crimes, were often dragged to the execution site from the barracks after the chief of the Third Department composed a memo on every victim that included personal data, criminal record, and the "criminal activity" of a prisoner inside the camp. This was the case with the prisoners of the *Solovetsky etap:* their death sentences were based on the data from the memo composed by the chief of the *Solovki* prison and his assistant. Sometimes real criminal cases were undertaken. In the BBLag as in other forced labour camps, they were often based on confessions, extracted under torture, of participation in a large "counter-revolutionary" organization. The transcripts included confessions of espionage, membership in underground organizations, and denunciations of other

[371] E. Ginzburg, *Krutoi Marshrut.*

prisoners. As with cases on “counter-revolutionary” crimes, so with cases of common crimes subjected to the troika’s court the BBK Chekists resorted to forging the accusatory materials. In the latter, however, the confessions of the accused were not considered as sufficient proof of the crime.

Apart from the executions of the prisoners, conducted in the course of the specially planned campaigns (and frequently coordinated from the centre through the NKVD commissions), from spring 1937 the Third Departments of the camps launched a number of the criminal cases involving the imprisoned and the hired staff of the administrative units of the corresponding camps.

The main reason for the rotation and persecution of a large part of the Gulag personnel in 1937 was purely political. Its aim was to remove Henrich Yagoda's people from the camps and the Gulag apparatus. In the repressive operations targeted at the hired staff similar patterns are observable as in the case with the prisoners. Where the number of the executed “politicals” did not suffice, the investigators reverted to the criminal cases on embezzlement and administrative abuses.

A number of the NKVD officials, especially those employed in administrative posts in remote camps, were swept by a wave of terror after the numerous cases of their abuses were disclosed. The gravity of the situation in the camps fueled the repressions. The underfulfillment of the economic plans frequently became a primary cause for persecutions apart from affiliation with a disgraced People’s Commissar.

The charges of “wrecking,” “the sabotage of the plans” and Trotskyite conspiracies which frequently resounded in the GULAG in the course of the “Great Terror” exactly replicate the charges in industry as a whole.

Thus, the "Terror" can be interpreted as yet another attempt to find an administrative solution to much larger, often unsolvable material problems, such as embezzlement, corruption, distortion of figures and general administrative malfeasance. Instead of looking into the causes of the inefficiency of the system of the forced labour itself, the authorities attempted to find scapegoats among the prisoners, camp administrators, and the NKVD officers.[372]

Still, the distinction between the real embezzlement and falsifications of the production figures is not always clear. The economic plans and tasks were frequently based upon unreal expectations, so falsified results became the prerequisite for survival for many camp administrators. The investigators themselves confessed that sometimes it was impossible to adequately document the financial losses that had occurred as a result of embezzlement.

At the same time, autonomy of the provincial bosses also became one of the pretexts for repressive operations of the 1937-1938. Eliminating it was an important step in the consolidation of the Stalin's dictatorial power. This autonomy manifested itself even on the level of the chiefs of the smallest forced labour camp subsections who felt confident and secure in appropriating the economic resources to their own ends, and creating their own 'mini-empires.'

An important question is why during the Terror some crimes connected with embezzlement and failure to fulfill the economic plan were turned into 'counter-revolutionary cases;' why were the individuals accused labeled 'enemies of the people' and sentenced according to article 58 of the Soviet penal code,[373] while other cases were considered non-political ? It seems the primary criterion was the importance of the

[372] Kuzmin, *Lagerniki..*
[373] *Stalinskaia trassa,* № 85, 27.07.1937, p. 1.

economic enterprise for the state. Mass scale construction and industrial projects represented the higher level of risk for their management. Secondly, the previous records of individuals played a role. Not a single individual among those executed in the BBK in the course of the Great Terror on the grounds of embezzlement came from the ranks of the so-called *bivshikh*. None of them had a higher education or was sentenced on the basis of a 'political' article.

Evidence of some rationality raises the question of the degree of arbitrariness versus rationality in the selection of the victims and their sentences. Apart from the given example of determining where a case was 'political' or 'non-political' no other evidence of rational decisions of the executors is available. The selectiveness and arbitrary nature of repressive measures in the cases of the non-political crimes manifested itself more poignantly. The executions on the basis of non-political crimes were motivated exclusively by the desire to fulfill the quotas of the 'enemies,' allocated from the centre. At the level of the troika court a great number of non-political cases were usually supplied when the number of the executions of 'political' enemies was lacking. After the quota set by the central NKVD apparatus was met, the rest of the transgressors were punished in a usual way.

Thus, despite the fact that in every administrative unit of the Combine (as well as any other Soviet enterprise based on forced labour) corruption was rampant, only small proportion of the personnel was tried at the troika's court. Those who were caught were victims of denunciations that arrived at the right time and the right place.

As in the rest of the USSR, after Ezhov's removal and execution, soon the executioners themselves became the victims. The wave of the Terror that swept the executioners themselves started from November 1938 and reached its peak in spring 1939. The process by which those who were initially responsible for certain arrests were

themselves later arrested, and their victims, in turn, exonerated, is a complex process that occurred within the party and other institutions as well.

Materials on the repressions among the staff of the Third Department of the BBK NKVD, who had taken an active part in the repressive operations, demonstrate that only few of them were sentenced to death. Formal punishment in the form of salary deductions was applied to executioners of the lowest ranks. Later, apart from the welfare privileges (pensions and numerous benefits), the NKVD (later MVD) provided them with the confidentiality, anonymity and security. Their involvement in the repressive operations was denied and their real place of service was concealed, often replaced by another occupation altogether such as a contract worker in forestry. In the course of the regional party committee meetings starting from January 1939, officials who had taken an active part in the implementation of the Terror were promoted in the NKVD hierarchy. Thus, it is possible to argue that the purges of the NKVD, based on investigations of "deviations" during the Terror, such as committing brutal murders and forging accusatory materials, on the level of the provincial NKVD offices were implemented under strict central control and taken simply in order to guarantee the success of the new political line, without undermining the punitive system as a whole. Yet this very complicated process certainly affected the culture and practice of the punitive organs. Primarily this manifested itself in the disorder rampant in the NKVD apparatuses, caused by the influx of low-qualified individuals into the profession and stricter selection of the personnel on the basis of their social origins.

Chapter IV Medical Service and Introduction of Health Care in the GULAG in the 1930s

Sources and Questions

A health care system for the GULAG prisoners was born in the unique conditions of confinement, exploitation, and colonization undertaken by the GULAG. Its development acquired peculiar forms in the course of intensification of the Soviet industrialization.

After providing and analyzing the data on diseases and mortality rates, the current chapter focuses upon the major diseases prevalent in the camps, their treatment, prophylactics, and development of medical research network in the GULAG. It

analyzes recruitment, living and working conditions of the camp medical staff as well as upon the policy of the GULAG administrators in their attempts to solve major sanitary and medical problems within the camps.

Here again the problem of sources has to be confronted. Memoirs of the camp medical staff (hired and the prisoner one) as well as accounts of their prisoner patients mostly contain anecdotal evidence and can not serve as a basis for empirical research. The reliability of the statistical data presented in the reports from the camps addressed to the Sanitary Department of the GULAG is also debatable. Due to the chaos and disorder inside the administrative apparatuses of the camps not all prisoners' deaths were accurately registered. In some camps the monthly difference in registered death cases provided by the Sanitary Department and the Registration Department ranged from several to thirty.[374]

The comparison of the data on mortality and diseases rates among different camps is complicated by the fact that the number of the camps and the number of the prisoners constantly changed. Their structure and administrative subordination also underwent modifications. Certain camps or camp subsections were closed down; new ones were organized. Finally, the high turnover of prisoners in the same camp makes any calculation very approximate.[375]

[374] Hoover Institution of War, Revolution and Peace. Microfilms of the Soviet Communist Party Archives. GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 5. In the future only the original location of the document in GARF will be indicated.

[375] In the BBLag even the camp bosses did not know exactly how many prisoners toiled on the canal. The prisoners arrived daily in great numbes and were dispersed over vast construction area with elaborate network of settlements and zones which often were not supplied even with radiostations. Poor transportation and poor road conditions aggravated the situation. The policy of the administrators was to supply as many prisoners as it was needed to finish the construction of the White-Sea Baltic canal on time. The population of some of the camp subdivisions, such as the settlement of Nadvoizi, reached the size of a town of 20000 inhabitants. The existence of multiple camp subdivisions made the job of counting the number of prisoners even more difficult. K. Gnetnev, *Kanal,* p. 36.

Falsification of medical reports was a rather common phenomenon in the periphery of the camps. Frequently the staff of the Sanitary Department of the camp was not informed about epidemics which erupted in the camp's subsections.[376]Many prisoners died outside of the hospitals under circumstances that were concealed. Consequently, their records were lost or falsified, especially when the deaths occurred as a result of harsh treatment, beatings, or negligence by the medical staff. Finally, the information, provided by the Sanitary sections of the camps to the GULAG was carelessly reported and important data was frequently omitted. All these factors make the analysis and comprehensive evaluation of certain aspects of medical service and medical conditions in the camps impossible.

The problem of terminology further complicates an analysis of the sources. Due to the secrecy of the data statistical reports include equivocal, formalistic and imprecise terminology ;[377] for example, in the statistical reports on medical networks, mortality, and diseases rate in the "corrective labour camps" (ITL). The abbreviation 'the BBLag,' used instead of the BBK referring to "the White-Sea Baltic Combine" as a whole such and not just the camp, distorted the results.[378] In reality the Combine incorporated not only the prisoners, but also special settlers and the hired staff. As long as the data refers to the mortality and disease rates, it is clear that it mainly relates to the prisoners. As for the data on the network of the medical institutions and the medical staff, it is unclear whether it related just to the prisoners, or covered other groups of the Combine

[376] See the review of the statistical camps' medical reports by the GULAG Sanitary Department dated 1936. As a rule, falsification of the data took place in order to diminish or to conceal the spread of the disease and to diminish the rates of the prisoners' visits to the hospitals. Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2747, p. 5.

[377] Such as "departed" (ubilo). Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, pp. 55-56. Literally translated as "gone "this term was used to designate the number of the deceased prisoners in the camps' monthly medical reports to the centre. Probably the origins of this interpretation are related to the direct translation of the Latin "exitus" which means "the deceased. " Garf, f.9414, op.1, d.2741, p. 39.

[378] Gard, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, 2741, etc.

population.[379] To solve this problem it is necessary to find the orders explaining the terms or provide the context of their usage. Otherwise one can only guess at the possible meaning.

Birth of the GULAG Medicine : Plans, Regulations, and Reality.

Although sanitary sections existed in the camps of the 1920s, the organizational development of the centralized medical network took place at the beginning of the 1930s, after the creation of the Chief Directorate of the Forced Labour Camps in 1930. The Sanitary Department of the Chief Directorate of the Camps was responsible for administering the medical treatment of the prisoners and their 'labour usefulness' (*trudispolzovanie*) based on the state of their health.[380]

Its another function consisted in organizing sanitary propaganda (*Sanprosvetrabota*) together with the Cultural-Educative section. Later, at the end of the thirties, this function fell into disuse and was later abandoned.

Propaganda campaign of hygiene and sanitation included lectures on sanitary and medical issues, discussions, amateur activity circles, theatrical plays, leaflets, posters, wall-papers, and organization of courses to improve the qualifications of the low and mid-level medical personnel.[381] In order to correct ignorance of hygiene practices the newspapers featured "examples from the daily life demonstrating the experience of the best subsections and criticizing negligence."[382]

[379] For example, the data on the working hours spent on 'serving' the patients, or the number of visits paid to the medical staff. Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, dd. 2750-2759.
[380] *The GULAG,* p. 302.
[381] Garf, f. 9414, op.1, d. 2736, p. 2.
[382] Garf, f. 9414, op.1, d.2739, p. 10.

Usually the content of such newspapers varied from slogans appealing for hygiene and propagating local methods of curing camp diseases to preventive drawings identifying poisonous plants, mushrooms, and berries.

The staff of the Sanitary Department of the GULAG composed a program of the sanitary propaganda for the camp guards which consisted of lectures combining elementary medical knowledge and Soviet propaganda.[383] The Sanitary sections were financed through the general camp budget; the medical services of the hired staff and the special settlers was financed through social security.[384]

The personnel of the Sanitary Departments of the camps had to participate in multiple 'Socialist competitions' arranged among the camps. For example, in June 1938, prizes were awarded for reducing the number of debilitated prisoners who could not work through "exercising proper control over the organization of the labour force and effective restorative health measures," adequate provision for first aid, prevention measures for the winter season, and timely implementation of prophylactic measures.[385]

Officials of the Sanitary Departments were obliged to send monthly reports with data on the prisoners' visits to the hospitals, their mortality and diseases rates, the number of the hospitalized prisoners and the types of diagnoses. Additionally, quarterly statistical reports on the network of medical institutions and personnel, on the presence of a debilitated labour force and on its "utilization" had to be provided. Broader reports on the medical service were drawn up once a year.[386]

However, as a result of the bureaucratic confusion, poor transportation and control, and typical Russian devil-may -care attitude, the GULAG administrators did

[383] Garf, f.9414, op.1, d.2756, p. 498.
[384] NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 5/20, p. 39.
[385] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2753, p. 264.
[386] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 6, p. 29.

not get reports from the camps regularly. The orders of the Sanitary Department chief Isaak Ginzburg to the camps already in1933 reveal a state of helplessness and an information vacuum.[387]

The preparedness of the camps for the winter (warming the dwellings, and preparation of the winter clothes for the prisoners was am especially painful question for the officials of the Sanitary Section of the GULAG. Typically the inspection characterized the preparation of the majority of the camps for winter as "abominable." But this state of affairs did not change with time for no financial means were allocated for this purpose. The multiple orders prescribed "renovation of the entire housing, sewing clothes through the utilization of the local resources" which was not possible in the conditions of the camps. [388]

Many orders set limits on their implementation. For example, the instruction on the "measures against frostbites" contained a phrase "conforming to the interests of production."

Naturally, much of the correspondence on medical issues was concealed from the public. According to the GULAG instruction from 1935, the Sanitary service of the camps was totally isolated from the local medical establishments. The few legal contacts with the regional medical institutions were limited to providing information on the spread of the epidemic diseases in the region. However, the GULAG Sanitary Sections were supposed to inform the local medical institutions on the epidemics inside the camps if the situation in the camps threatened to spread the epidemic in the region. Only then could the staff of the Third Departments contact local medical establishments without, however, revealing any quantitative data on the epidemic. The medical staff

[387] Garf, f .9414, op. 1, d. 2741, p. 7.
[388] Garf, f. 9414, op .1, d. 2756, p. 410.

of the camps were allowed to consulr with the local medical establishments on the specifics of the communicable diseases in the region. They could also contact local establishments in order to supply medical personnel for the GULAG. Finally, in the emergency cases when the adequate medical assistance could not be provided for in the camp medical instituion, sick prisoners could be accomodated in the local hospitals but only if such a transfer did not pose a danger for state security.[389]

Not a single case of such a transfer was ever registered in the GULAG reports or mentioned in the ex-prisoners' memoirs. Most of the camp administrators looked upon the prisoners as asbtract labour force and were unwilling to take the trouble and responsibility to arrange such transfers. At the end of the 1930s, when the achievement of higher production targets became the chief concern of the camp authorities, concern over emergency cases evaporated.

The state of the prisoners' health, and consequently their ability to work was determined by the commissions consisting of the camp medical staff (*komissovki*.) At the end of the 1930s the inspections by these commissions, conducted quarterly, frequently placed invalids and the disabled into a category of the convalescents, while those who had been placed in this category for two weeks were designated as ready for "heavy physical labour." As a rule, the results of the medical inspection were not made known to the prisoner.[390]

If a prisoner died from emaciation or malnutrition, the true cause was concealed by a substitute diagnosis such as "acute heart attack." Outside of the camps, and, accordingly, in the GULAG as well, the actual cause of the

[389] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2744, pp. 11, 28.
[390] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2753, p. 122.

death, nutritional dropsy, was first stated in the official records only after the blockade of Leningrad, when such a diagnosis became widespread among the civil population.

Minor surgery was practiced in many camp centres which had the basic facilities. Major surgery was practiced mainly in large hospitals, where adequately equipped surgical sections existed, as in *Ukhtpechlag*, and the BBK hospital in Medvezhegorsk.

From the very beginning of the establishment of the forced labour camps, the poor state of the medical service there, high diseases and mortality rates of the prisoners were explained away by the central administration as a result of the local problems. A rapid growth of the number of debilitated and sick prisoners in the camps in 1933, as well as the sharp increase in their mortality rates were explained as an outcome of "intolerable attitude of the administrators of the camps towards the problem of the proper arrangement of the labour force and the organization of the system of the differentiated food rations." To improve the state of affairs, the GULAG officials ordered an increase in surveillance over the barracks where debilitated and sick prisoners resided, with periodic reports on the state of health of every prisoner.[391] At the beginning of the 1930s the GULAG bosses argued the situation with the medical service in the camps and the state of health of the prisoners could be easily improved.[392]

The implementation of modern prophylactic and curative methods in the camps, undertaken by the GULAG Sanitary Department, encountered many problems. Already in 1934 the GULAG chief Matvey Berman complained of the obscurantism (*mrakobesie*) of the medical personnel of the majority of the camps who were disinclined to adopt rather simple measures for the disinfection of the prisoners' living

[391] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2741, p. 46.
[392] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2, p. 77.

quarters and clothes. He commented that the corruption of the personnel caused "distortions" in the work of the medical sections. These included administrative abuses *(sluzebnie zloupotreblenia*), faked certificates of illness release from work, infiltration of adventurers into the medical sections of the camps. To improve the state of affairs a revision was launched to improve professional qualifications and the "social-political" outlook of the medical staff in the camps by the Heads of the Sanitary Sections.[393]

Multiple GULAG orders and instructions related to implementation of 'proper' health care in the camps[394] remained on paper, never put into practice. For example, an order in 1935 instruced the Heads of the Sanitary sections in the camps to conduct regular inspections of the prisoners on the working sites checking the state of their health and verifying the different categories of suitability for labour, by submitting regular reports to the head of the camp and the head of the Sanitary Department of the camp. Additionally, the order required regular inspections and reports to the camp administration on the preparation, preservation, and the quality of the prisoners' food.[395]

Surveillance and regimentation were conceived as the primary measures to solve medical and sanitary problems in the camps.

The orders from 1933 repetitively called for intervention of the agent-informers network in the system of nutrition in order to improve the condition of the medical

[393] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 7, p. 49.
[394]Not only a decree existed that prescribed "release on the premise of disability", (later the practice of early release of invalids and incurably sick prisoners was cancelled since every part of the GULAG system was supposed to bring utility, to be restored during the Second World War, under the article 458 of the Penal Code) but the z/k previously fulfilling no less than 100% of the norm with mutilations were supposed to receive under certain conditions (mutilations acquired as a result of work injuries, frostbites on the way to work,), inability allowances: the first group 50 rubles a month, two next ones forty and thirty rubles, for half a year after the release day. The applications were reviewed by permanent GULAG commission. Garf, f.9414, op.1, d.2741, p. 61.
[395] Garf, f.9414, op. 1, d. 2744, pp. 23- 26.

service and increase the control over food preparation.[396]The tendency to rely on surveillance and violence strengthened when the initial plans failed to organize adequate medical network and maintain proper sanitary and medical conditions in the camps.

Special commissions were organized in the camps for regular scrutinizing of all camp storages, kitchens and canteens. In the cases of disclosure of the "criminal attitude" towards the storage of food resources the OGPU board intervened.[397] In practice, the central administration did not possess adequate means at its disposal to implement these principles in all the GULAG camps.

The camp administrators were forced to look for local solutions to the medical and sanitary problems. While the physical health of the prisoners worsened, the production output dropped. The failure to fulfill the plan was charged with severe punishment. For example, in the BBlag, after the failure to motivate the prisoners for increasing the production output through establishing "Honorary Book of the Camp Labour" and granting them with the certificates and various privileges, in February 1934 a "Statute on the weakened labour force" was issued that established barracks with the semi-hospital regime and increased rations.[398]

An order from May 29, 1933 starts from the premise that an increase in group "B" of the prisoners (those to be shortly released from work) resulted in the "presence of a great number of idly wandering elements on the camp territory" which demoralized the rest of the prisoners and made the surveillance of the prisoners problematic. To prevent "aimless loitering on the camp territory" the medical assistants had to sort the

[396] Garf, f.9414, op. 1, d. 4, p. 42.
[397] Garf, f.9414, op. 1, d. 2741, p. 46.
[398] S. Kuzmin, *Lagerniki,* p. 172.

prisoners and arrange various kinds of daily regime for them. According to this measure, the majority of the prisoners were not allowed to leave the barracks. Secondly, camp administration had to establish a timetable and space for exercise for convalescent prisoners. Medical staff together with the instructors of the KVCH were supposed to organize an intensive cultural-educative work with the non-working prisoners.[399] It is not surprising given conditions in the camps were completely ignored.

The spread of the cases of self-mutilation of the prisoners[400] in 1933 was connected with the rapid increase in their numbers and their exploitation as a result of precise and unattainable production targets for the camps as the GULAG underwent a transformation from a purely penitentiary to an economic institution. However, the GULAG authorities preferred to explain the multiple problems with the medical service in a different way:

> Rapid increase of the number of the prisoners exerted a negative influence on the quality and the scope of the general cultural-educative and sanitary service in the camps. Additionally, it facilitated counter-revolutionary propaganda and the spread of the false rumours among the prisoners. The influx of vast number of the debilitated inmates from the prisons eliminated an individual approach towards the prisoners on the part of the medical staff and imposed certain stereotypes in diagnostics. The errors can not be justified by the overwork of the medical personnel. Finally, the practice of early releases on the premise of the illnesses and disabilities also contributed to the corruption of the medical service in the camps. We are afraid that the lethal cases of the prisoners' poisoning with the wild plants in Dmitlag were caused not only by the desire to enjoy delicacies and to complement the ration, but also to anticipate a chance to claim being sick. The same refers to the cases of prisoners' eating the garbage from the dumps.[401]

[399] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2741, p. 22.
[400] As a rule, this practice was popular among the low-rank camp criminals. Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 41, p. 98.
[401] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2741, p. 21.

At the end of the 1930s the punishment for simulation or exaggeration of a disease in order to escape work (the so-called *aggravanti*)[402]and self-mutilation became more severe. The culprits were tried at the camp court, charged according to the article 58-14 "sabotage" and received ten years of additional imprisonment. During the 'Great Terror' the capital punishment for such a crime was a regular occurrence. In certain cases the medical staff was also put on trial as an accomplice.[403] From 1937 in some camps commissions consisting of the members of the Sanitary and Third Departments conducted regular inspections of all the sick prisoners on the use of simulants.[404]

The memoirs of ex-prisoners disclose the principles of work of medical inspections of the end of the 1930s. An excerpt devoted to the occasion at a camp subsection in the Kolyma region that took place in November 1939 states:

> All the prisoners were mortally afraid of being sent to the gold mines. Again the medical commission arrived to take one hundred prisoners suitable for hard physical labour in the mines. But just a month ago they already took everyone who at least by his physical appearance could be mistaken for a person suitable for the brand 'heavy physical labour.' All the prisoners who had this stamp in their personal dossiers were viewed as suitable. The possessors of this ominous brand were already taken without any inspection. Now, to create at least a semblance of justice, the camp administrators called for a new commission and subjected to the inspection all the prisoners. There was nothing left for the inspectors to do but to paint the dogs into racoons. The Hypocrite's oath was completely forgotten. As a result of yet another inspection the number of dying prisoners significantly fell. Many of them were transferred into the category of "recovering prisoners," while those who had belonged to this category in their turn 'recovered' in the most miraculous way…and the expected one hundred prisoners with the brand "TFT" were ready to depart for the golden mines.[405]

[402] N. Glazov, *Koshmar parallelnogo mira,* p. 84.
[403] Memorial, f. 2, op. 2, d. 91, p. 124.
[404] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2741, p. 21.
[405] G. Zzenov, *Prozitoe,* (Moscow : Propaganda, 2002), p. 105.

According to the regulations, at least one member in the medical commission had to be a contracted employee. Usually this was a chief of the Sanitary section. In most cases the actual decision making in these commissions was left to him for the rest of the members were imprisoned doctors. The accuracy of his decisions was almost never checked. In 1938 the division of the z/k into three categories of labour suitability was cancelled. The head of the camp became fully responsible now for placement of the prisoners at work. The state of health of the z/k was determined by the medical commission, its results were secret and never announced to the prisoners.[406]

Development of the Network of Medical Institutions

In 1940 the network of the medical institutions within the GULAG contained 35000 hospital places. 519 of existing medical ambulatory clinics were staffed with doctors, and 4166 with the medical assistants. Overall the personnel treating z/k amounted to 2222 doctors, 4166 medical assistants, 2640 medical nurses, 334 dentists. If one compares this data with the actual number of the z/k imprisoned in the camps at that time and their state of health one understands the extent of inadequate medical service. There was a separate medical network for the camp hired staff and the members of their families.[407]

By the second half of 1930s the BBK as any other Soviet enterprise based on forced labour had also developed an extensive network of medical institutions. On October 1, 1939 it contained 23 hospitals not counting psychiatric hospitals and abortion quarters. As in any other camp enterprise, its medical institutions were divided into those "managed by the high-rank medical personnel" (*vrachebnoe obsluzivanie*)

[406] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2753, p. 122.
[407] *The GULAG,* p. 730.

and "managed by mid-level medical personnel" (*feldsherskoe obsluzivanie*). Concerning the first category, the BBK contained an infirmary (*lazaret*) (an establishment where the number of beds ranged from 6 to 20), 22 hospitals where the number of beds ranged from 100 to 200 and 10 hospitals where the number of beds ranged from 100 to 250. Desperate lack of medical facilities and an increasing number of sick or debilitated prisoners originated the practice of the so-called 'conjoint beds' (*slitnie koiki.*) There were 304 beds in surgery ward, just 17 in gynecology ward. The BBK was provided with 203 disinfection stations; 180 of them were functional, in contrast to other camps where this number was much lower, ranging from 3 to 135. The medical network also included 18 drug stores, 17 non-specialized ambulatory clinics staffed with high rank medical personnel, 144 ambulance clinics run by mid-level medical staff, and 14 dentistry offices.[408]

The dynamics of development of the medical institutions network shows that the overall number of medical institutions in the forestry camps did not increase much by October 1940 (amounting to 295). Most probably it was influenced by the decrease in the number of the camps from 17 in 1939 to 14 with the liquidation of Lokchimlag, Taishetlag and Tamasinlag. The BBK at that time possessed medical network of 63 medical establishments.

The prescribed number of beds there decreased to 2041, reflecting a general decrease in the number of its prisoners from 76. 408 on October 1, 1939, to 52.723 on October 1, 1940.[409] The same happened to the supply of hospital beds, which numbered around 1805.

[408] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 64.
[409] A. N. Kokurin, Yu. N. Morukov, *Stalinskie stroiki GULAGa: 1930-1953* (Moskva : Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokrati´i`a" : Izd-vo Materik, 2005).

Still the medical network did not meet the needs of the patients and the cut in the facilities within the medical establishments was connected not with the actual sanitary situation within the camp and the health of its prisoners but with the necessity to save the meager financial, human, and technical resources the Combine had at its disposal. The Combine could not afford a medical network which would satisfy prisoners' needs, so the decrease in the number of the prisoners was matched by an immediate cut in medical facilities and in the numbers of the personnel.

The number of the infirmaries staffed with mid rank medical personnel decreased to 44. The number of the "general medical establishments" (*lechuchrezdenii*) increased from 81 to 107 (although the number of beds in them decreased to 2224). At the same time, the number of the clinics run by 'doctors' increased from 17 to 34, while the number of the clinics run by mid level medical personnel decreased from 144 to 111. Thus, it is possible to argue about a certain increase in numbers and the qualification of high-qualified medical staff in the medical institutions of the Combine. Additionally, by 1939 the BBK had developed 6 medical laboratories, one sanitary-bacteriological laboratory, 75 disinfection stations, (from them 66 were functional), and 19 sanitation stations (*sanpropusknikov*.) [410]

Despite the rapid establishment and gradual development of the medical institutions network, it never met the needs of those employed in the BBK system. In comparison with other camps the situation with the medical service in the BBK could be characterized as generally favourable and stable. This was also true in relation to the mortality rates of the already hospitalized prisoners which during 1933 in the BBLag, did not exceed 17%. In majority of other camps it exceeded 20%.[411] In 1936 the

[410] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2750, pp. 12-14.
[411] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 7.

hospitalization rates slightly increased in the BBLag. 16, 55% of the prisoners asking for medical help of the first time were hospitalized. The length of the overall prisoners' stay in the hospital per every 100 prisoners increased from 898 days in 1933 to 1016, 87 days in 1936. The general length of the "occupancy of the hospital beds in relation to the number of prisoners" also increased from 2,4 days in 1933 to almost three days (2, 82) in 1936.

Still, even with the significant decrease in the number of the prisoners in the camp after the end of the canal construction, there were insufficient medical facilities for the sick. The development of the medical facilities was very slow. Still, by 1936 the situation was much better than in 1933. The prisoner mortality rates within the hospitals in relation to the number of the hospitalized prisoners fell from 17% in 1933 to just 3, 67% in 1936.[412] Still, in 1936 the average mortality rate in the BBLag, 2, 23% (2, 43% for the GULAG camps in general).

However insignificant in comparison with the analogous data from 1933, this indicator was still much higher than the mortality rates within the NKVD prisons, which in the RSFSR at that time amounted to 1, 53% and in the USSR to just 1, 41% of all the prisoners contained there.[413]

According to the data provided on the work of the BBK clinics and hospitals during the year 1931, *pervichnaia poseshchaemost* (first time visit to the hospital) for one prisoner amounted to approximately 8, 7 (while average rate for all the camps was 8, 9). It meant every prisoner visited medical institution at least 8 times during the year. During the first four months of 1932 it amounted to 2,3 while the yearly quota of the prisoners' asking for a medical help for this year was 6, 5 visits for each prisoner.

[412] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 39.
[413]GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 32.

Hospitalization rates remained low in the course of 1930s. During 1931 out of every 100 z/k who visited the medical establishments 40 were hospitalized. This indicator equalled the general rate for the GULAG camps. During the first four months of 1932 this number fell to 12, 3 hospitalizations for every 100 prisoners. The decline was connected not only with the frantic rates of the canal construction, discrepancy between the rapidly increasing numebr of the prisoners and slow development of the medical network, and the indifference of the camp administration towards human lives, but also with the yearly limit of prisoner hospitalizations set by the GULAG administrators. For 1932 this number was limited to just 35 hospitalized prisoners. Still, the BBLag administration did not fill even this quarter, allowing hundreds of the prisoners to die at the working place and in the overcrowded barracks.

In 1933 only 14,4 % of all z/k that had asked for medical help for first time (*pervichnaia ambulatornaia poseschaemost v techenie goda*)[414] were hospitalized. Still the situation in the BBK was much better than in other camps. In Bamlag this indicator was as low as 9%, in Svirlag it ranged around 8, 5%. According to the official statistics, at this time one place in the BBK hospitals had to be shared by two or three prisoners (the actual indicator was '2, 4 prisoners per each hospital bed.') On the background of broader GULAG statistics it was an average indicator. In some camps the number of prisoners for every hospital place reached 5 or 7.

The data on the percentage of the prisoners who were granted a sick leave to the hospital from the total number of the prisoners in the BBK is also telling. In 1931 it was 2% equaling the average GULAG rate. During the first four months of 1932 this

[414] According to the official statistics, every BBLag prisoner paid 3,8 first time visits to the hospital a year, contrary to the 'overall visits' *obschaia ambulatornaia poseschaemost* which amounted to 24, 4 visits a year.

indicator fell to 1, 2%. Most probably this decrease was connected with the fact that the yearly limit for that year, set by the GULAG Sanitary Department, was 1,3%.

In the course of 1931 3,4 % of all the prisoners contained in the BBLag were granted work release without hospitalization. For the GULAG camps in general the average indicator at that time ranged around 3,5 %. , During the first four months of 1932, however, 2, 4 % of the BBLag prisoners received work releases while the overall limit for that year did not exceed 2, 6% of all the prisoners.[415] In the course of the intensification of the rates of the canal construction the medical staff were unprepared to face an increasing number of the sick and debilitated prisoners : releasing them from work was their immediate reaction even if it contradicted official policy. Later the number of the granted work releases rarely exceeded quotas set by the administration. This is one explanation of high prisoners death rates: due to the strict limits only small number of the sick prisoners could get a work release, not speaking of their hospitalization and adequate medical treatment.

Only a small proportion of the prisoners had access to qualified medical help. In the course of 1938 76781 prisoners' visits were paid to the doctors at the BBK. 14274 of them were registered as the 'first time visits.' From this number only 6020 prisoners were temporarily released from work for overall 26738 days. While the number of prisoners who were treated by the mid level medical staff was 2794348 (311598 first time visits). 272873 of these prisoners were granted work release for overall 933412 days. According to the official data 136 prisoners died outside of the hospital. 12765 prisoners out of 16415 were released from the hospitals served by high ranking medical

[415] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2738, p. 14.

personnel. 2880 prisoner died there. 4872 prisoners out of 6040 were released from the hospitals served by mid ranking medical personnel and 1013 prisoners died there.[416]

"Camp" Diseases: Origins, Scale, and Cure

The frequency of epidemic diseases in the camps resulted from the perilous living and working conditions, and frequent transfers of the prisoners. The most widespread of them were tuberculosis, pellagra, dysentery, acute gastric-intestinal diseases, malaria, typhus, lung inflammation, and scurvy.[417]

High mortality from tuberculosis was influenced by the fact that during the 1930s and 1940s an effective tubercular vaccine did not yet exist.

"Pellagra," a non-infectious disease widespread in Northern Italy, Southern France, Spain, Portugal, Bosnia, Romania, Bessarabia, Greece and Turkey was flourishing in all Soviet forced labour camps. Prisoners engaged in heavy physical labour were the most vulnerable, especially at the end of the winter.

For the first time pellagra was diagnosed in the BBK in 1932 among the newly arrived prisoner. A large share of the sick belonged to national minorities. After the diagnosis was confirmed by the medical consultant commissioned by the GULAG, a discussion on the questions of its causes was initiated. Among other issues the question was debated whether the people of particular nationalities were more susceptible. Soon, the Sanitary sections of the GULAG camps received an instruction which prescribed the most elementary and inexpensive method to counteract the disease: the yeast which "can be prepared on any camp bakery."[418]

[416] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 55.
[417] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d .62, p. 15.
[418] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2741, p. 14.

One of the most pernicious diseases in the camps, which claimed many lives, was acute gastric-intestinal diseases. The most frequent cause for mass epidemics of infectious gastric diseases were poor quality food and anti-sanitary conditions in the camp kitchens and canteens.

The mass spread of dysentery in many camps in the spring 1934 was aggravated by the negligence of the camp administrations in dealing with the threat of epidemics and applying preventative measures.[419] The low level of hospitalization contributed to the spread of the disease. In 1938 in some camps only 4, 7% of the sick prisoners were hospitalized; in others the figures improved from 24% to 45%. Still in other camps, such as *Taishetlag* the medical staff did not hospitalized a single prisoner diagnosed with dysentery.[420]

As a rule, in each case of mass poisoning of the prisoners caused by eating plants or mushrooms in remote territories the samples of these plants were immediately sent to the Moscow Institute of Pharmacology for identification and experimentation for curative measures. The camp administration was responsible for informing the prisoners about the danger with the help of the posters and lectures. Additionally, in such cases an instruction was sent to the camps to increase the surveillance over the prisoners dietary habits.

Malaria was yet another disease widespread in the many camps. In 1934 in six camps located in marshy areas during ten months of epidemics, approximately 141 prisoners per 1000 fell victim to the disease. A decree of the Council of People's Commissars qualified the disease as an especially dangerous one and called the struggle with the epidemics "one of the most important tasks of the Soviet state." On this

[419] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2747, p. 20.
[420] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2753, p. 257.

occasion the meeting of the heads of the Sanitary Sections of the camps was organized in Moscow. The primary concern in the discussion was the "loss of the labour force" and the resulting under fulfillment of the economic plan. [421]

During the years 1933-1934 in the Soviet Union the malaria rates significantly increased. While in 1933 381.2 cases were reported per 1000 population in 1934 this number rose to 562. 5. Similar increase in epidemics took place in the GULAG camps. In 1933 882 cases were registered per 10000 prisoners' population while in 1934 this number was 915.

The spread of the malaria largely depended on the geographical location of the camps, climate, and population density of the region. The camps located in the northern latitudes of the newly explored regions witnessed not only decrease in malaria cases among the prisoners, but also quickly recovered from malaria of newly arrived sick prisoners. For example in the BBK, a drop in malaria rates took place from 147 registered cases in 1933 to 108 cases in 1934. On the contrary, the camps, located in the regions where malaria affected the civil population, displayed even higher disease rates than the local population of surrounding areas. In 1933 in Prorvlag 3855 cases of malaria were registered. In 1934 this number increased to 3034, while the city of Astrakhan (the capital of the region) during the same period witnessed an increase from 508 cases in 1933 to 905 cases in 1934.[422]

In the course of the years 1935-1936 in the Soviet Union rates of malaria epidemics increased significantly. In some areas the disease acquired the dimensions of the social and economic disaster. In some camps malaria rates were much higher than those among the civil population of the region. Despite the fact that the GULAG camps

[421] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 11, p. 7.
[422] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2747, p. 3.

were better supplied with better facilities to treat malaria than the regional hospitals, provided for by the People's Commissariat of Health, the disease was rampant there. The GULAG leadership was prone to attribute the failure to stamp out malaria to the negligence of the camp administrators and their attitude that malaria was an 'inevitable evil.'[423]

While the administration of some camps managed to organize an effective treatment of the sick prisoners as well as to introduce extensive prophylactic measures, (such as Dmitlag), the medical staff in most of the camps affected with malaria turned out to be helpless against the epidemics.

The GULAG bosses blamed the camp authorities for failing to take timely prophylactic measures. The lack of qualified medical personnel, especially specialists not only in the camps subsections, but also in the Sanitary Departments of the central parts of the camps aggravated the situation. Finally, due to the absence of standardized, uniform diagnostics, proper registration of the disease, and the diversity of curative methods the Sanitary Departments were not provided with reliable data on the disease rates from the periphery of the camps.

In 1936 the plan of counteracting the malaria epidemics in the GULAG was elaborated. It proposed land drainage, liquidation of all the transfer camps in the regions attacked by malaria, and organization of centralized record of the prisoners sick with the disease."[424] The transfer of the sick prisoners required the permission of the Sanitary Department of a camp. In 1939, after a brief period of decline in the number of malaria epidemics during the second half of 1930s, the malaria rates again significantly

[423] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2747, p. 2.
[424] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2747, p. 2.

increased in a number of forestry camps, located in Northern areas (Ust-Vimlag, Oneglag, Kuloilag, the BBK).[425]

In the labour camps normal medical procedures to combat epidemics such as quarantine (the isolation of the possible carriers of infection in a certain prescribed order,) and disinfection conforming to medical standards proved impossible due to specific regimes, the failure to quarantine the sick prisoners, and the lack of separate living quarters or small subsections. If only one prisoner out of 300 or 400 residing in the same barracks fell sick with a contagious disease, the rest of the prisoners had to stay in the same compound.[426]

The situation was aggravated by the fact that the sanitary and medical conditions of the majority of the camps were characterized as absolutely "unsatisfactory."[427] Even in 1939, after repressions of the medical staff on the grounds of their failure to implement necessary prophylactic and sanitary measures, sanitary conditions within the BBK compounds remained "outrageous;"[428] the absence of sanitation resulted in the mass spread of scurvy and gastric diseases. A similar situation prevailed in the special settlements of this camp.[429]

One of the deadliest diseases was typhus, the direct consequence of dirty, overcrowded barracks. The transfer camps and prisons were places where epidemics frequently started. The first mass epidemics of typhus in the labour camps erupted in 1929-1930 in *Solovki.* Its primary cause was concentration of vast numbers of newly arrived prisoners in overcrowded barracks.[430] The administration of the Solovetsky

[425] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2756, p. 330.
[426] Ibid., p. 458.
[427] NARK, f. 865, op. 2 d. 5/2, p. 23.
[428] NARK, f. 865, op. 35, d. 1/3; d. 3/14, pp. 8, 11, 13.
[429] NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 1/3, pp. 79, 91.
[430] *Istoriia Stalinskogo GULAGa,* vol. 4, p. 325. Just in winter 1929-1930 354 out of 9000 prisoners or 4% fell prey to the disease. Ibid.

Camps of Special Designation (USLON) reported that the impossibility of organizing proper quarantine and disinfection procedures, the lack of qualified medical staff, and frequent transfers of the prisoners within particular camps had contributed to the spread of the epidemics.[431]

The situation with the typhoid epidemics, as well as many other epidemic diseases worsened from 1931 to 1934. In 1931 in the BBLag only 11 cases of typhus were registered contrary to Sevlag, Vishlag and Sazlag where 76, 104 and 256 registered cases of the disease were registered respectively. In 1932 this number increased to 81 and in 1934 already to 90.[432] As a rule, the epidemics erupted in winter. In 1934 in the BBLag 48 cases of typhus were reported in January and 26 cases in February. Similar dynamics was observed in other camps.[433] In 1935 in majority of the camps the situation was stable with the exception of Bamlag, Dmitlag, Siblag and Karlag, where 45, 66, 140 and 46 cases of the disease were registered respectively.[434]. In the BBK the number of the sick amounted to just 4 prisoners.

According to the data from 16 camps, in 1936 the number of cases of typhus in the camps ranged from 2 to 15. In the BBK 8 cases of typhus were reported during this year. However, the general number of the cases of disease during the year 1936 was 339. This quite a high number was due to the winter epidemics in Karlag, where 257 prisoners fell victim to the disease.[435]

The overall number of prisoners sick with typhus in the NKVD prisons and the colonies in the course of the years 1936 and 1937 amounted to 241 in the RSFSR and

[431] Ibid., p. 455.
[432] *Istoriia Stalinskogo GULAGa,* vol. 4, p. 466.
[433]GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 12.
[434]GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 28.
[435]GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 40.

224 in the USSR.[436] Analogous data from the camps shows that during the same period of time 589 cases of typhus occurred there. The BBK registered 87 cases, 86 of which came on November 1937.[437]

The measures to fight the epidemics within the framework of the demands of the system consisted primarily of attempts to regulate the transfers of the prisoners, making them dependent only with the permission of the staff of the Sanitary sections. In several camps the construction of extra living quarters and disinfection wards (*dezokameri*) was initiated.[438]

At the beginning of the 1930s the special sanitary commissions consisting of three members (*troiki*) were created in the camps for regular inspections of the living quarters. The instruction on the prophylactics of the typhoid epidemics, issued by the GULAG Sanitary Department supplement by intense propaganda on sanitation among the prisoners and the guards, assigned these commissions responsibility for assisting the administration and the Sanitary section of the camps for implementation of the typhoid prophylactic procedures. These extraordinary commissions, as well as those consisting of five members (*pyaterki*) were headed by the chief of the camp subsection. Apart from the medical staff they included the officials from the Department of Supply, an officer of the Third Department and a member of the Cultural-Educative unit. They were responsible for "controlling the private hygiene of the prisoners and the cleanliness of the barracks by organizing Socialist competition among them, initiating shock-work in sanitation and granting monetary bonuses to the best barracks and camp subsections."[439]

[436] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 45.
[437]GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 46.
[438] Ibid., p. 456.
[439] Garf, f. 9414, op.1, d. 2741, p. 1.

Typhoid fever, was a rarer but no less deadly disease. In the year 1936 the BBLag witnessed an epidemic of typhoid fever. 55 prisoners fell ill with the disease, which amounted to almost one third of all prisoners sick with typhoid fever in the GULAG at that time.[440] The negligence and ignorance of the mid-level local medical staff in the remote parts of the camps in no small degree aggravated the situation.

Investigation into the causes of the typhoid epidemics which erupted in 1938 in several camps disclosed crude mistakes in diagnostics, belated and incomplete quarantine, negligence of the medical staff, and their complete inability in determine the sources and the ways of dissemination of infection. In Temlag and the BBK for example the diagnostics of typhus as influenza took place. In Siblag and Ushostroilag attempts were made to conceal the epidemics.[441] The BBK report on the epidemics of typhoid fever in 1938 indicated contamination of the prisoners by the newly arrived z/k and partly by the local population as the major cause of the disease.[442]

The decrees of the Sanitary Department of the GULAG from 1936-1938 demonstrate that for various reasons the personnel of a number of the camps were unable to implement even the simplest measures of disinfection either because of their inertia, obscurantism, or fear of a deduction in the salary or penalty. [443]

Scurvy, a disease caused by avitaminosis, was rampant among the camp prisoners. A medical commission was created at the People's Commissariat of Supply which was responsible for and supply of the camps located in the Far North with the anti-scurvy medicine. The most widespread cure against scurvy, mentioned in so many ex-z/k memoirs, was a fowl-tasting brew made from the pine needles. This curative

[440] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 40.
[441] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2753, p. 305.
[442] NARK, f. 865, op. 36, d. 1/11, p. 27.
[443] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2748, p. 4.

method was a result of the experiments conducted in 1933 in the Moscow Institute of Nutrition on the basis of the reports from the camps (*Dallag, Sevvostlag*), where medical staff on their own initiative had first used this method and found it effective. Later, it was legalized, and the brochures and instructions were sent to the rest of the camps. It is necessary to note that camp memoirs, including those composed by the medical staff recognized the immense significance of pine needles brew in helping to preserve the prisoners' health, to prevent and to cure scurvy. Sanitary sections of some camps strictly demanded regular preparation and consumption of the brew. On occasion a prisoner was allowed to get his daily meal only after taking a dose of the brew. As a result of such prophylactics, the disease rate in a number of the camps dropped significantly and many people's lives were saved.[444]

Notwithstanding the repetitive GULAG decrees starting from 1932 on the preparation and organization of regular mass consumption of the anti-scurvy mixture, the scurvy flourished in the camps throughout the thirties. Despite the attempts of the central administration to seek its causes in the ignorance and the negligence of the local staff, often followed by threats and penalties, the disease was ineradicable because its true cause lay in inadequate nutrition.

Apart from the geographic dislocation of the camp and the climate, the season of the year influenced the spread of certain diseases. For example, in the BBLag the year 1938 started with two cases of typhus epidemics (77 prisoners fell sick), the spring season was marked by 11 cases of typhoid fever, in the summer season, from the second half of June until September acute gastric-intestinal diseases were widespread. 13888 prisoners fell sick or 17, 7% of the overall camp population.[445]

[444] Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 41, p. 25.
[445] NARK, f. 865, op. 36, d. 1/11, p. 27.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that it is difficult to reveal general patterns. The analysis of the statistical data contained in the medical reports from the first quarter of 1939 reveals that even during the winter a number of camps (Siblag, BBK, Kraslag, Amurlag, Bureilag, Sevzerdorlag, Ukhtpechlag, and Dallag) witnessed incredibly high rates of gastric intestinal diseases and an increase in the rates of scurvy and pellagra against a background of irregular hospitalization of the sick prisoners.[446]

Death in the GULAG: Rates and Patterns

Important questions are how many prisoners died yearly in the GULAG camps, what the dynamic of the mortality rates was, and what proportion was caused by a particular disease.

According to the published data on the GULAG prisoners,' the peaks of mortality fell between 1933 and 1938.[447] 1933 was the year when the GULAG experienced mass influx of the prisoners and was turned from a mere penitentiary to the economic agency, while the camps were not preparerd for it. In 1933 one of the deadliest projects was accomplished, the construction of the White-Sea Baltic Canal, that took lives of many camp prisoners. In 1938 the "Great Terror" was at full swing. Again, as it happened in 1933, arrival of prisoners en masse into the camps coincided with the absence of the basic facilities and nutrition. The majority of the newly arrived prisoners were already debilitated from their previous experience in the prisons. The same pattern of the prisoners' death rates could be observed particular camps, including the BBLag NKVD. Despite the fact that many prisoners died in 1933, the BBLag NKVD was not one of the deadliest camps in the GULAG history. On the contrary during the 1930s the BBK was frequently referred to in the GULAG orders as an 'exemplary camp.'[448]

[446] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2756, p. 438.
[447] V. Zemskov, "Zaklychennie v 1930-s gody: sotsialno-demograficheskie problemi," pp. 63-64.
[448] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2747, p. 19.

To be more precise, the mortality rates in the BBLag during the 1930s ranged around 2-3% of the total number of the prisoners. In 1931 1438 prisoners died or 2, 24% of the overall number. In some camps during this year the death rate reached 5% in Sevlag and Ustvimlag and even 10% in Sazlag.[449] In 1932 the number in the BBLag amounted to 2010 or 2, 03%. In 1933 this indicator increased to 8870 or 10, 56% of the total number of the prisoners. In 1933 the deadliest months for the prisoners of the BBLag as well as those from other camps were May, June, July and August.[450] The death rates started to fall from September. In 1934 mortality rate in the BBLag fell to 2, 62%, following the general GULAG pattern (except Svirlag, Sazlag, and Sarlag, where the prisoner mortaity maintained on the level of 8% of the total number of the prisoners).[451]

In 1934 1636 prisoners died in the BBLag (2, 62%). In 1935 the mortality rate fell to 1362. The years 1936 witnessed a decrease in mortality rate to 1298. In 1937 the indicator increased to 2271 or 3, 50% and to 3945 in 1938. It was obviously connected with the worsening of nutrition and material conditions and influx of prisoners during the 'Great Terror.' In 1940 2139 prisoners died. In 1941 this number amounted to 1888. Overall, during the entire period of the camp existence 29819 prisoners died.[452]

The transformation of the GULAG from a penitentiary to an economic agency immediately left its imprint on living and working conditions of the prisoners, and especially on their state of health and mortality. The mortality rates in the camps started

[449] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 1.
[450] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 8.
[451] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 10.
[452] A. N. Kokurin, Yu. N. Morukov, *Stalinskie stroiki GULAGa: 1930-1953* (Moscow : Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokrati´i`a" : Izd-vo Materik, 2005). This information, as the editorsof this volume indicated, is based on the reports from the Sanitary section of the camp. The data contained in other documents is slightly different. For example, the percentage of prisoner deaths in 1933 is indicated as 10%. GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 7.

to grow already in 1932. If one examines the data on mortality rates from the BBLag on a monthly basis, one can observe a steady increase in the mortality rate from 64 deaths in January 1932 to 312 deaths in December of the same year. This data reflects the intensification of the tempe of construction of the canal.[453]

During the final stages of the White-Sea Baltic canal construction in 1933 mortality in the camp reached around 10, 56% of the total number of the prisoners. In addition to the intensification of the work tempos, there was a worsening of living and working conditions and a deterioration of the medical service due to the unpreparedness of the camp to host the large numbers of newly arriving prisoners. The data from other camps shows an analogous increase in death rates. In some camps in 1933 they reached 17, 2% (Dmitlag), 18, 1% (Slag), and 18,7 % (Karlag), and even 34, 6% (Vishlag), thus making the average GULAG indicator 15, 7%.[454]

Later years show a significant decrease of the death rates up to 1937. The average mortality rate within the GULAG camps in 1936 was 2, 43% of the total number of the prisoners (in the BBLag it amounted to 2, 23%) ; and still this was much higher than the rest of the places of confinement in the Soviet Union. During the same period in Russia as such (RSFSR) it amounted to 1, 53% and in the USSR in general this indicator reached just 1, 41% of the total number of the prisoners.[455]

In 1937 2271 prisoners died in the BBLag or 3,50% of the prisoners, the peaks of mortality rate falling on August and December.[456]

The mortality within the camps increased significantly in 1938. The highest rates were registered in the newly organized forestry camps. It was caused by the fact that

[453] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 5.
[454] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 7.
[455]GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 32.
[456]GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 42.

the majority of these camps were hastily established in the course of a few months without proper planning and adequate material resources to accompany increrasing number of the convicts arriving from the overcrowded prisons.

In 15 forestry camps 22910 prisoners died in the course of this year, amounting to 16, 90% of the total number of the prisoners contained in the GULAG at that time. Overall 6, 28% of the prisoners contained in these camps died in the course of one year.[457] The BBLag recorded 3945 prisoner deaths, or 4,84% of all the prisoners contained there.

The data on mortality rates in the corrective labour camps during the years 1932-1938, compared to the average (*srednespisochnii*) number of the prisoners, reveals that the highest death rate was registered in 1933 (15, 2% of the prisoners). This was almost four times the number recorded in other years. Even in 1938 the mortality rate did not exceed 6, 18% of the prisoners.

The comparative data on mortality rates in the BBK in 1938 and 1939 reveals that in the course of 1938 the monthly rates were much the same, ranging around 300-350 prisoner deaths. In 1939, they were steadily falling, from 365 in January 1939 to just 129 in October, with a slight increase to 159 in December 1939 (in comparison to 310 in December 1938).[458] After a crisis of 1937-1938 caused by the influx of prisoners in the course of the repressive operations of the 'Great Terror,'[459] deterioration of material conditions and supply and their ruthless exploitation a relative stabilization of the situation within the camps took place during the later years. Overall the number of registered deaths in the BBK in 1939 was 2462 in contrast to 3945 in 1938.[460] In

[457] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 49.
[458] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 63.
[459] On June 1, 1937, 59.071 prisoners were contained in the camp. On January 1, 1939 this number amounted to 86.567. *Stalinskie stroiki GULAGa,* p. 537.
[460] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 63.

relation to the total number of the prisoners contained in the camp, it amounted to 0, 24% in contrast to 0, 40 in 1938. However, even this indicator was better than the average indicator in forestry camps at that time: 0, 86% in 1938 and 0, 31% in 1939.[461] This situation was characteristic of other camps. In the 17 camps specialized in forestry the overall number of deaths decreased from 27638 in 1938 to 14521 in 1939. The BBLag displayed the highest prisoner mortality rates during this period. In the majority of the camps (except Lokchimlag, Usollag and Ustvimlag) the number of registered deaths in 1939 did not exceed 1000.[462]

In 1938 in the GULAG camps gastric-intestinal diseases claimed 14.775 prisoner lives, which amounted to 20, 3% of all prisoners' deaths. Tuberculosis was responsible for 9288 prisoner deaths, or 12, 8% of all death cases. Pellagra was much less lethal: 6.713 prisoners (or 9, 2%) died from this disease in 1938. Emaciation caused 3.685 deaths (5, 1%) and work injury in the camps caused 552 deaths (or 0, 75 %.) Overall 34991 deaths from the above mentioned causes amounted to 48, 2% of all the prisoner deaths. This indicator amounted to 2,9% of all the prisoners contained in the camps at that time.[463] Unfortunately, the data on mortality rates caused by frostbites and heart failure is not available.

Death caused by circulatory diseases was also high. For example, in the BBLag in October 1940 lethal cases caused by the figure amounted to 46 or 28, 93% of all lethal cases in this camp during this period. This number was much higher than the analogous data from other 11 forestry camps where this indicator ranged from 1 lethal case in Vyatlag to 16 lethal cases in Kraslag. In December of the same year in the BBK the number of these deaths increased to 53, making for 23.35% of all lethal cases. The

[461] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 62.
[462] Ibid.
[463]GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 39.

number of death cases from diseases of the respiratory organs in the GULAG camps also increased from 61 (38, 30%) in October to 71 (31, 41%) in December. While in other forestry camps it was much lower, ranging from 1 lethal case in Vyatlag to 11 lethal cases in Kraslag in October and from 5 lethal cases in Birlag to 46 lethal cases in Oneglag in December of the same year. The number of deaths caused by the diseases of the digestive organs also increased by the end of this year. In October they amounted to 5 (3,14%) and in December to 7 (3,09%). In Oneglag 15 prisoners died in December, accounting for 12% of all prisoner deaths in the camp.[464]

Against the background of the data from other forestry camps the BBLag displayed the highest rate of the circulatory diseases and respiratory diseases, while its share of the lethal cases caused by disorders of the digestive system was relatively insignificant. The primary factor that contributed to this state of affairs, was the cold climate in the region. The analogous patterns were observed in Oneglag, a camp in the adjacent area.

From January to October 1940 1622 prisoner deaths were registered in the BBK. This number was four times higher than the analogous indicator from the rest of the forestry camps, with the exception of Lokchimlag, Sevurallag, Unzlag and Usollag, where 464, 499, 500 and 665 lethal cases were registered respectively. 26% from 1622 lethal cases registered in the BBK were caused by tuberculosis, 6, 1% by pellagra, 4, 9% by the digestive-intestinal diseases, and 1, 7% occured through work accidents. 61, 3% of the lethal cases were registered as 'caused by 'other' diseases.'

[464] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 76.

From the accompanying commentaries, it is clear that a percentage was accounted for by elderly prisoners, prisoners suffering from chronic diseases and the invalids. The same pattern showed up in the BBK and in the majority of the GULAG camps.[465]

The situation changed with the beginning of the Great Patriotic War. The data on the prisoner death rates in the camps for the years 1941-1943 demonstrate that the highest prisoner death rates from tuberculosis, avitaminosis and emaciation in 1943 occured in the group from twenty to forty years of age. They constituted a drastic contrast with the analogous data in relation to other age groups. In January 1942 in Vyatlag the death rates from pellagra, tuberculosis, lung inflammation, avitaminosis, and emaciation in the group of the prisoners from 20 to 40 years of age were from 4 to 27 times higher than the ones observed in other age groups.[466] In other camps similar balance was observed. In Sevurallag during the first quarter of 1942 3562 prisoners died. From this number the age of 1480 prisoners ranged from 20 to 40 years old.[467] This age group was most vulnerable to these diseases due to the fact that responsibility for the production plan targets rested almost exclusively on their shoulders. They were the first to perish. The analogous situation was observed in 1943.[468]

Staffing the GULAG Hospitals : Medical Personnel in the Camps

In the second half of the 1930s the salaries of the high level medical staff of Ukhtpechlag, BBK and Solovki were high, especially in comparison with the employees of the VOKHR and the KVCh Departments of these camps. Still, their monthly income amounted to much less than the one of the engineers and the technical

[465] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 94-95.
[466] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2779, pp. 12-13.
[467] Garf, f. 9414, op .1, d.2779, p. 39.
[468] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2785, p. 67.

staff of the industrial enterprises.[469] The salaries of the mid-level medical personnel were much lower.

In 1935, for example, in Bamlag, Dallag, Siblag, Dmitlag, Karlag, Sazlag, and the BBK were the chiefs of the Sanitary Departments of these camps received a salary of 750 rubles. Their assistants' salary amounted to 700 rubles. Sanitary inspectors and the chiefs of the sections of supply received 650 rubles a month. The chiefs of the Sanitary Sections of the camp subsections with higher education were paid 650 rubles a month, while the chiefs of the Sanitary sections of the camp subsections without higher education received only 450 rubles. Finally, sanitary inspectors of the medical sections received 380 rubles a month.[470]

The medical staff of the remoter camps with harsher climatic conditions, such as Ukhtpechlag, Solovki islands and the island of Vaigach, as well as sub polar regions of the BBK received salaries around 100 rubles higher than the medical staff of the rest of the camps.[471]Besides, a flexible system of various bonuses, subsidies, and compensations existed for service in the remote camps in the climatically problematic areas such as the Far North.

The length of service also mattered a lot. The so called 'medical personnel of the third category,' the employees who had worked more than three years on the periphery of subdivisions of all the camps received higher payments than the medical staff in other camps.[472] For example, in the BBK the medical staff of the first category received a monthly salary of 525 rubles, while those of the third category received 750 rubles.

[469] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2753, p. 6.
[470] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2753, p. 11.
[471] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2753, p. 6.
[472] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2753, p. 4.

The salaries of the medical assistants, 'feldshers' varied from 325 to 425 rubles' and the nurses' salaries ranged from 230 to 275 rubles a month.[473]

The medical staff employed in the central hospitals of the camps were provided with adequate living conditions. In most of the camps, however, living quarters of the medical personnel, located near the remote construction sites, hardly differed from those of the prisoners. [474] Consequently, desperate lack and high rotation rates of qualified medical staff were widespread problems in the camps. Frequently, newly recruited specialists left the GULAG immediately upon their arrival at the working place after finding living conditions unbearable.[475] Cases of the suicide attempts were not infrequent. [476]

Another reason why qualified specialists were reluctant to work in the GULAG camps was that it was a dangerous job. The practice of the camp administrators to allocate daily quotas for work releases for every camp subsection and for every ambulatory clinic meant that few prisoners could get a permission to be relieved of work no matter what their complaint. For the medical staff to increase this quota was fraught with danger; they could be punished by being sent to the 'common works,' while hired doctors could receive a severe reprimand and a cut in salary. Criminal networks of the camps attempted to manipulate this practice in their own interest. Cases of mutilations or murder of the medical staff for a refusal to grant a work release to a criminal were widespread in many camps, including the BBK.[477]

[473] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2753, p. 7.
[474]In 1938 in Temlag hired doctors received the 3rd (intensified) ration for the prisoners. In Ushostroilag several hired members of the medical staff were accommodated in the zone, in the barracks together with the z/k. Endless delays and refusals on the part of the camp administrators to pay the monthly salaries were a widespread phenomenon. Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2753, p. 366.
[475] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d.23, p. 165.
[476] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2756, p. 222.
[477]Y. Verzenskaia, *Vospominania,* p. 62 ; NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 1 /2, p. 182.

Hardly any medical specialist voluntarily entered the GULAG system without a compelling reason. For example, the head of the Sanitary Department of a subsection of Norillag at the beginning of the 1940s, a hired employee, was a wife of a representative of the Moscow medical elite. After her husband's arrest and execution in 1937, she, volunteered to work in the GULAG in order to avoid the fate of a 'wife of an enemy of the people,' left Moscow, and from 1937 on worked on the most forlorn camp sites. She acquired a reputation of a savior of the z/k lives by obtaining extra food resources from the camp administration. At the same time she was saving her own life but at a high risk; if the mortality and disease rates would for some reasons have become too conspicuous, she would have paid a heavy penalty.[478]

Medical personnel in the camps was in short supply and many positions were staffed by the prisoners. For example, in 1933 the BBLag contained 47000 prisoners. The medical staff of the camp included 28 representatives of high level medical staff ('doctors'). 20 of them were the prisoners, and only 8 were contracted workers. Out of 28 medical assistants 25 had been imprisoned, and only 3 were officially hired. Finally, among 90 nurses only 10 were contracted workers. [479]

This state of affairs hardly changed in the course of 1930s. In 1938, for example according to official regulations the medical section of the camp was supposed to be staffed with 93 doctors, 231 medical assistants and 276 nurses. In reality there were only 51 doctors, 24 of them being contracted workers, and 27 prisoners. 42 positions were vacant. Of the 70 employees registered as "the mid-rank medical personnel" 47

[478] Y. Verzenskaia, *Vospominania,* p. 62.
[479] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 4, p. 60.

were contracted workers. 23 positions were filled with the prisoners. The shortfall of staff amounted to 141 positions.[480]

As for the White-Sea Baltic Combine, according to the 'list of the medical personnel' in 1938 its medical establishment was supposed to be staffed with 133 high rank medical specialists but only 77 positions were filled. Of this number instead of 31 only 12 doctors were employed in the ambulatory stations and clinics. The BBK hospitals were staffed with 45 doctors instead of 70, 8 sanitary inspectors instead of 24. However, the number of the doctors, employed 'in the apparatus of the Combine,' numbered 12 although 8 positions were prescribed in the regulations.

The overall number of high-rank medical practitioners was 77, and only 16 of them were women. 7 specialists held part-time jobs. According to their specializations, general practitioners (*terapevti*) numbered 48. The Combine had at its disposal only 10 surgeons, 3 gynecologists, 1 pediatrician, 1 venereologist, 1 ophthalmologist, 1 otolaringologist, 2 'physical culture specialists,' 1 psychiatrist, one bacteriologist, one sanitary doctor, (a specialist in nutrition sanitation), 8 dentists, and 5 'others.' The positions of epidemiologists, tuberculosis specialists, roentgenologists, experts on criminal medicine, and neuropathologists remained vacant. Taking into the consideration the number of the prisoners who actually worked for the Combine and the number of the special settlers it housed, one can imagine the discrepancy between the needs of the people and the availability of the medical service there.Not a single employee of the medical establishments of the Combine was a candidate or a member of the Communist party.

[480] NARK, f. 865, op. 36, d. 1/11, p. 27.

The lack of the qualified medical staff at the BBK remained a serious problem until the end of the enterprise. In 1939 the overall number of the medical personnel at the Combine increased significantly. However, at the level of mid- rank medical personnel this was accomplished by recruiting a large number of unqualified workers into Sanitary sections; meanwhile the number of the qualified mid- level medical specialists was steadily falling.

On October 1, 1939 98 high-ranked medical personnel were employed in the BBK contrary to fill 168 positions, (among them 27 female employees). Of this number only 2 specialists were members of the Communist party. The Combine was provided with 4 gynecologists, 3 pediatricians, 3 dermatologists and venereologists, 1 ophthalmogist, 3 otolaringologists, 2 neuropathologists, 3 roentgenologists, 11 surgeons, 2 sanitary specialists, 1 'expert in criminal medicine,' 16 dentists , and 49 'other specialists.' The Combine did not possess a psychiatrist or a tuberculosis specialist.

At this time there were only 415 representatives of the mid- rank medical personnel to fill 598 positions. 53 of them were listed as 'qualified specialists,' 31 as low- qualified workers' and 331 as 'nurses.' Finally, 24 pharmaceutists and 76 disinfection specialists worked for the Combine.[481] From 1933 the GULAG arranged three-month trips for research and training for the camp doctors for every three years of their service in the camps.[482]

The lack of medical staff in the camps became more serious after the repressive operations of 1937-1939. Isaak Ginzburg, the chief of the GULAG Sanitary Department from 1933 to 1938, was repressed in 1938 with all his associates for

[481] GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2740, p. 67.
[482] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2741, p. 60.

negligence and 'wrecking,' which allegedly caused the high rates of disease and mortality among the prisoners and corruption of the camp regime through patronage of "hostile elements."

The displacement and persecution of the GULAG personnel in 1938 resulted in the almost total replacement of the high rank medical personnel in the camps. In many camps, the head of the Sanitary Section was arrested and repressed together with his medical associates.[483] "Criminal negligence," "wrecking," and "sabotage of medical work" were typical accusations leveled at the arrested members of the medical staff.

Imprisoned medical specialists, confined in the camp for 'counter-revolutionary' crimes[484] were especially vulnerable. Arrests were triggered by epidemics which were usually followed by the inspection of the camp hospitals, ambulatories, kitchens, and canteens; it was no surprise that everywhere they were in appaling condition. [485]

The 'Great Terror' left its imprint on the living conditions of the prisoners. A number of the NKVD orders dated 1937-1938 related to the regime in the Northern camps implied the extermination of the "counter-revolutionary prisoners." For example, an order was issued which prescribed their accomodation in the tents. In the climatic conditions of the regions where the camps like Vorkutlag were located it meant almost certain exposure and death. Perilous living and working conditions, that reigned in such camps in 1937, were later described in the memoirs of the medical personnel and ex-prisoners.[486]

[483] N. Glazov, *Koshmar parallelnogo mira,* p. 95. For the replaced and executed hired and imprisoned medical staff of the BBK see *Pominalnie spiski Karelii*.
[484] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 39, p. 2 ; NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 10/42, p. 9. Many of the accusations of the imprisoned medical staff were meaningless. The chief of the section of the camp hospital doctor K. was sentenced at the end of 1930s for ten years of camps as a "terrorist." During the interrogation he was forced to admit that, being a gynecologist in a small city, he was going to dig a tunnel to the Kremlin, under the Stalin's cabinet to assassinate him. V. Samsonov, p. 171.
[485] Garf, f. 8131, op. 37, d. 1251, p. 2.
[486] N. Glazov, *Koshmar parallelnogo mira,* p. 95 ; V. Samsonov, *Zapiski Lekpoma.*

The assignment (*raspredelenie*) of graduates from Moscow and Leningrad medical institutions was an important source of filling staff positions. The candidates were selected by the commissions consisting of the potential employers and the representatives of the Cadres Department of the GULAG. As a rule, a typical contract lasted for two years. The camps were also supplied with the newly graduated mid-level medical personnel by the appointments of the People's Commissariat of Health.[487]

In 1938 the GULAG appointed about 1500 newly graduated members of high and mid-level medical personnel to work in the camps. Most of them were members of the League of the Communist Youth (VLKSM,) young people of 19-25 years of age without any life experience.

Work in the camp was a shock for many of them. An extract from the memoir of a Head of the Sanitary Department (hired by assignment) in the camp near *Kuibishev* engaged in hydroelectric power unit construction on the Volga river states:

In December 1940 an order of Kruglov [the current NKVD chief] arrived in the camp. It obliged the camp administration to take only those prisoners for work outside who received warm clothes and proper nutrition. On the next day I went to see the prisoners leaving for work. It was still dark, only at the gate the lights were on, swinging on the wind, and watchtowers were visible at the distance. It was frosty. Starting from the gate, deep into the zone territory I could see a gray stirring mass of the prisoners. I loudly announced that those inadequately clothed will not go to work. Then something unforeseen happened. Simultaneously all 7000 prisoners fell down and tore up their camp coats. By eight o'clock the administration of the zone arrived

[487] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2753, p. 254.

and explained to me that I should have coordinated my actions with them. '7000 z/k truant! If this happens again, you'll never pay off the losses.'[488]

At the end of the 1930s, upon their arrival on the working place, especially in the camps of the Far North, the newly recruited staff specialists received the "prophylactic training " in the course of which they were warned against the possible seduction by "the enemies of the people" and taught how to resist. [489] In 1938, after a successful recruitment experiment by newspaper advertising, GULAG offered the administrators of the camps to order daily advertisements in the press along the following lines:

The general practitioners, sanitation workers, malaria specialists, dentists, mid – level medical staff and nurses are needed for the work on the construction and forestry sites in the area beyond the lake Baikal (*Zabaikalje*,) Far-East and Northern regions of the Soviet Union. Salary negotiable.[490]

The BBK, Bamlag, Dallag, Shosdorlag, Norrilag, Ukhtpechlag, and the camps of the Far East were listed as the sites of primary choice for the newly recruited personnel. There, as well as in other rather remote camps, hardship bonuses were provided: double subsidy (*dvoinie podjemnie*) to an area more remote than 1500 kilometers from Moscow by railway; double salary during the first three months of work in a remote area; an extra monthly salary for each year of service there; and a double monthly salary for every three years of service.[491]

The GULAG Sanitary Department regularly distributed medical brochures for the medical staff of the camps devoted to the diagnostics and cure of the diseases prevalent

[488] Memorial, f. 2, op. 2, d. 21, p. 12.
[489] N. Savoeva, *Ia vibrala Kolimy,* p. 12.
[490] Garf, f. 9414, op .1, d. 2753, p. 143.
[491] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2753, p. 143.

in the camps as well as to exposing the symptoms of simulation and self-mutilation of the prisoners in order to escape work. [492]

Due to the lack of the qualified medical staff in the camps the personnel employed there was over-worked. In some camps the norms for the medical service simply exploded; every doctor was assigned to 200 hospitalized patients at a time; the norm was 35 patients. Additionally, he/she had to cope with 50-70 daily visits by prisoners to the hospital.[493] In 1938 a 20% addition to the salary for overwork of the medical staff was introduced. It was argued that since the lack of the medical personnel in the camps sometimes amounted to 50%, and there was no hope of improving the situation, the only option left was to provide supplements to the already existing salaries An analogous measure had already been introduced in compensating the camp guards.

Social background of the camp medical staff was extremely varied. Renowed scientists with the noble origins worked together with the doctors of peasant and working class background. As s rule, hired doctors came from lower social strata. Some of them conceived of themselves as of a camp elite and enjoyed social life at the camp site.[494]

In major penitentiaries of the country, such as infamous *Lubyanka* prison in Moscow during the interrogations doctors usually inspected the tortured convicts to determine how much beatings they were still able to endure. In 1939 many of such doctors were charged with the 'counter-revolutionary' crimes, repressed or sent for work in the camps.[495]

[492] Memorial, f.2, op. 2, d. 21, p. 10.
[493] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2753, p. 145.
[494] Memorial, f. 2, op. 2, d. 21, p. 8.
[495] Memorial, f. 2, op.1, d. 11, p. 48.

At the end of the 1930s, illegal abortion practice, which at that time was punished with 8 years of imprisonment, endowed camp doctors with better economic conditions and useful connections among the camp administration. The lack of the qualified medical personnel in the camps resulted in the fact that the medical establishments were staffed almost exclusively with mid-level medical personnel among whom self-educated adventurists, hardened criminals, morphine and cocaine addicts were not infrequent.[496] As a result of poor medical service at the end of the 1930s, in the hospital of the all- Kolyma camp subsection for the invalids around 90 % of the operated prisoners died from general sepsis after surgery.[497]

The corruption in the administration of the camps was the primary reason for recruitment of unqualified staff. The practice of the camp administrators to rely on the 'socially allied' prisoners ('ordinary' versus 'counter-revolutionary' delinquents of peasant and working class background) while filling the vacant positions aggravated the situation. For a long time such prisoners were recruited for visiting medical courses within the camps.

Research and Academic Life Behind the Barbed Wire

The central medical institutions of the large camp complexes were not only well-equipped and well-staffed medical institutions with surgical, tubercular, and therapeutic sections but also important research centres. Medical research in the GULAG was initiated and carried out by its hired and imprisoned medical personnel. Most of the experimental achievements in the GULAG were not state-sponsored and coordinated projects and were conducted in conditions of lack of financial resources and medical equipment.

[496] V. Lazarev, "1937 god glazami ochevidza," in *Pozivshi v GULAGe.* Ed. A. Solzhenitsyn, (Moscow : Russkii Put, 2001), p. 38.
[497] Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 84, p. 10.

A "Sanitary Town," *Sangorodok,* in Medvezhegorsk, where new branches of medicine, based on the contemporary achievements of the medical research and medical technology were implemented, included the Central hospital and the clinic, built and opened in 1935. The clinic, serving the BBK hired staff and the local population, was equipped with an X-ray quarters and physiotherapeutic section with hydropathical baths.

Starting from the year 1934 conferences took place every May at the Central Hospital and at the clinic of the BBK. Launched upon the initiative of the local medical staff, the conferences informed the medical staff from the Sanitary Section of the BBLag, nurses and obstetricians from remote corners of the BBK about recent discoveries in Soviet medicine.[498] The imprisoned medical staff from other camps frequently participated in these conferences.[499]

Members of medical elite of the country even in the conditions of imprisonment and exile conducted important research work at the BBK. During the years of his work in the medical establishments of the BBK (1933-1939) the surgeoun Pribitkov[500]carried out 2200 various operations excluding brain cancer. Working simultaneously in two hospitals and in the clinic, he carried out around five surgeries a week, not counting the emergency operations. In 1939 he completed his research project related to surgery. Abram Shapiro, a prominent venereologist employed at the BBK hospital in the second half of the 1930s, received his training in Germany. He was the author of twenty five works on venereology

[498] Stalinskaia trassa, May 30, 1940, p.4.
[499] V. Samsonov, p. 149.
[500] Unfortunately I could not obtain the basic information about this person, starting from his first name. The only information available regards to this specialist is contained in the articles in the newspaper *Stalinskaia trassa*.

The BBK was not a unique case. During the Great Patriotic war, in the hospital in the small Belichja settlement of Sevlag, due to the efforts of imprisoned physicians the first in the Kolyma region station of blood transfusion was established along with the clinical laboratory. Analogous laboratory of such kind was established much later in the hospital of Magadan, the capital of the region and of the Dalstroy trust.[501]

The staff of the Belichja hospital regularly received professional literature including the latest issues of thr journals "The Soviet Medicine," "The Clinical Medicine," and "The Surgery."[502] In 1943, following the range of discussions, its staff launched an experimentary transfusion of the ascitic fluid as the cheapest blood surrogate. The method was elaborated in 1934 by S. Meerzon, a member of the Central Clinical Institute of the Blood Transfusion. During the years 1943-1945 more than 500 liters of this substance were transfused with the therapeutic effect.[503]

At the beginning of the 1940s a lively discussion whether human physiology in the 'extreme' conditions of the forced labour camps differed from the one at liberty took place during medical conferences held in the hospital of Vetlosyan, the centre of Ukhtizemlag. [504] These conferences were primarily devoted to sharing experience on the course of the diseases in the camp conditions.

A number of physicians defended their doctoral dissertations while being imprisoned in the camps. Others collected the material there that was used later in their publications. Doctor Rosenbloom,[505] a former assistant from the Military Academy of Medicine, arrested in 1937, during his imprisonment in Norillag defended a doctoral

[501] Created in November 1931 to explore and exploit gold deposits along the Kolyma river.
[502] Till 1940 the Sanitary Department of the GULAG was sending medical periodicals to the camps in centralized order. From 1940 it started to allocate to the camp Sanitary Sections a fixed sum of money for this purpose.?
[503] N. Savoeva, *Ia vibrala Kolimu,* p. 31.
[504] Memorial, f. 2, op. 3, d. 23, p. 131.
[505] Unfortunately the first name of this person is not available.

dissertation on the specifics of the clinical picture of dysentery in the climatic conditions of the territories beyond the Polar Circle (*Zapoljarje.)* Analogous cases happened in other camps.[506]

Conclusion

The current chapter has demonstrated that the prisoner diseases and mortality rates varied in different camps, depending on the camps' profile, climate of the region, the number of inmates there and living conditions. But in all the camps in the course of 1930s steady deterioration of the prisoners' living and working conditions with sharp increases in diseases and mortality rates during the years 1933 and 1938. The first peak occurred when an influx of prisoners into the newly organized camps coincided with the inability of the system to provid e adequate sanitary, living and working conditions for them. The second peak in diseases and mortality rates can be directly linked first of all, to the intensification of the prisoners' exploitation in the camps in the course of the increase in the state economic plans, mass creation of new camps unprepared to host new convicts, and secondly, to the outcome of the Great Terror. Worsening of the living conditions in the camps, strengthening of the regime, increased production plans and cut in investments into the camp enterprises and in food supply for the prisoners aggravated the situation.

According to the data on the diseases and the mortality rates of the prisoners, except for the year 1933, the final year of the White-Sea Baltic Canal construction, when the mortality of the prisoners was the highest in the GULAG, the BBLag was an average camp, where the situation was relatively stable and the prisoner mortality did not exceed the average GULAG indicators.

[506] Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 125, p. 15 ; Memorial, f. 2, op. 1 , d. 118, p. 78.

In the second half of 1930s the tension between the camp administrators and the central GULAG apparatus increased. In 1938 local camp authorities attempted to explain the drastic increase of the category "B" of the prisoners in the camps (sick and disabled inmates) through an influx of a vast number of the sick and debilitated arrestees from the prisons in 1937. On the contrary, the GULAG officials insisted on the appaling living and working conditions in the camps as the main cause of poor health of the prisoners. They referred to the connection between the data on the diseases and mortality rates from the gastric diseases in 1937 and worsening of the sanitary conditions and nutrition in the camps.[507]

Unable to provide adequate living and working conditions under the pressure of increasing production plans, many of the local administrators launched ruthless exploitation of the prisoners. Frequently medical staff became their involuntary accomplices.

The reports of the NKVD officers from the camps show that the state of the prisoners' health and medical service in the camps significantly worsened with the beginning of the war and the sickness and mortality rates raised. They tended to explain it as the result of poor medical service and negligence or, using their jargon, "swinish attitude" of the medical staff towards the prisoners[508] while reports of the camp administrators indicated increasing economic plans as the chief reason for growing number of sick and debilitated prisoners [509]

In order to tackle sanitary and medical problems of the camps soon after its establishment the GULAG initiated medical research which was targeted towards the

[507] Garf, f. 9414, op. 4, d. 11, p. 47.
[508] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 39, p. 93.
[509] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d .1432, p. 28.

investigation of the diseases prevalent in the camps and aimed at developing inexpensive and easily accessible curative and prophylactic methods in the conditions of the preordained lack of financial resources and medicaments. Many instructions and brochures recommended using the "available measures" for cure and prophylactics.[510] At the same time, due to the fact that the staff of large medical centres were well informed of the recent medical achievements, the camp medicine was developing in accordance with the Soviet medicine at large. By conducting research in important areas of human physiology, and solving its particular problems it represented a step forward in modern medicine.

In 1933 in the BBLag an experimentary disinfection of living quarters with liquide chlorine was carried out. It was followed by the further elaboration of the method, changes in the instructions, and its implementation in the rest of the camps.[511] This fact demonstrates once again that it is the experimentary character of the medical service in the Soviet forced labour camps that should be taken into the consideration in the course of its overall evaluation.

Being unable to solve the sanitary and medical problems through civic medical establishments, the administration referred to increasing surveillance, control, and repressions. This tendency was present already from the onset of the camps' system at the beginning of 1930s. The "intensification of the control" was the first measure to fight with the deterioration of the sanitary conditions in the camps, the spread if the gastric-intestinal diseases, problems of the funds supply, and transfers of the large groups of the z/k.[512] As the time passed, the central administration increasingly relied

[510] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2741, p. 43.
[511] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2747, p. 33.
[512] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 2739, p. 10.

on meticulous regimentation and enforcement of surveillance by the Third Departments through the agent-informers network in the hospitals and canteens.

All the problems raised in the current chapter seem immune to "normal " administrative solutions. One example is repression of the medical personnel as a reult of corruption and epidemics. The repressions and punishment of medical personnel hardly had any positive effect on the conditions of the prisoners. On the contrary, executions of qualified medical personnel on "political" grounds resulted in worsening of the medical service and an influx of criminals into the profession. High prisoner diseases and mortality rates, as well as shortcomings and overall inadequacy of medical service in the camps were part of a larger problem of the overexploitation of the prisoners due to need to fill unrealistic plans. This problem is cruicial to understanding why camps were so poorly run and ineffective. It seems as there was no way to raise the medical service in the camps to the level necessary to provide more or less decent health care for the prisoners, so there was no administrative solution to the endemic problems of corruption, embezzlement, negligence, and so on. To conclude, the camp problems were the result of unsolvable, objective conditions.

It seems that the GULAG bosses of the end of the 1930s had a better understanding of the reality of the camps than their predecessors of the beginning of the decade. By that time the prisoners were looked upon by the NKVD officials as true pariahs of the Soviet society. In 1938 a decree was issued that prohibited the z/k burials on the civic cemeteries. According to the order from November 17, 1941 denture prostheses were to be removed by the special commission from the deceased prisoners.

Chapter V Painting the Dogs Into the Racoons: Soviet Culture in the GULAG "Perekovka:" From Propaganda to Entertainment.

If the key to understanding the institutional history of the GULAG rests in broader political and economic context of the Soviet history, to understand its social and cultural aspects one needs to refer to the Soviet cultural and educational policy. From the middle of the 1930s Soviet culture (also frequently referred to as "Stalinist culture") repudiated earlier iconoclasm, avant-garde, replacing it with neo-classicism (reverting to Russian classical heritage) and Socialist Realism. The policy was pursued of creating a cultural order in which the lower classes would receive proper education and share in Russian high culture and create all-union culture that would serve as a unifying force between all Soviet citizens. Appeal to the "masses" to participate in the process of 'cultural construction' coincided with a didactic popularization of Russian and European classics.

In the camps the cultural-educative mission was entrusted to the Cultural-Educative Section of the GULAG (the KVCh). Initially, the KVCh was a subdivision of the Political Section of the Gulag. The chief of the camp KVCh was an assistant to

the chief of the camp, and the latter was also responsible for directing and controlling the camp propaganda.[513]

Cultural mission of the Soviet labour camps, pursued along these lines, coincided with the well-known re-forging, '*perekovka'* theme that resounded during the construction of the White-Sea Baltic Canal. It was accompanied by the propaganda of the Soviet forced labour camps in literary works, newspaper articles and theatrical plays.[514]

Soon a favourable regime towards the ordinary delinquents was created. The thieves and recidivists were treated as 'social allies' and granted multiple privileges. The practice of *zacheti* (providing the prisoners with extra work days counting towards their early release) was arranged in such a way, that for 'especially dangerous' prisoners (namely, those sentenced for 'counterrevolutionary' crimes), it was extremely difficult to get *zachet* for excellent labour. On the contrary, the common criminals easily obtained *zacheti*, frequently through the falsification of the records.

At the beginning of the 1930s the cases of early release were frequently used as instructive examples to raise the labour enthusiasm among the prisoners of the White-Sea Baltic Combine and the Camp NKVD :

> "From time to time Yakov Rappoport [a leading official during the *BBK* construction] issued an order releasing a 'a shock worker of the grand construction' from the ranks of the 'sociallyallied 'prisoners. The Newspapers *Perekovka* and *Zapolyarnaia perekovka* immediately published pictures of the "Stakhanovites" with inscriptions "Motherland Has Forgiven Them" "Let All Follow An Example," or "Labour is a Subject of Honour." The event was reflected in theatrical plays and at the concerts. Additionally, the KVCH instructors arranged a summit at the construction site. A "liberated" delinquent read a speech "I have been a thief all my life. Now due to comrade Stalin and the Soviet Power

[513] *Gulag,* p. 120.
[514] Apart from popular works, such as collective volume on the White-Sea Baltic Canal, *BBK: Istoriia Stroitelstva,* and Nikolai Pogodin's play "Aristokrati," a large number of newspaper articles and several propagandistic documentary films devoted to the forced labour camps were created in the 1930s.

> I have become a useful citizen for my Motherland. I have decided to stay in my brigade for yet another month to demonstrate all the reptiles, the enemies of the people, that their wrecking and sabotage will not prevent the proletariat from completion of our greatest construction of the Communism, our dear White-Sea canal! Comrades, be vigilant and expose wreckers who hide among us in order to ruin our plans. Long live comrade Stalin! Long live Comrade Rappoport!"[515]

At the end of the 1930s this policy was abandoned. The resolution of the Gulag apparatus party meeting from December 1938 states:

> Concerning our approach to recidivists, it seems that the more time one spends in the camps, the more honour he receives, for hardly has he time to get out of the train carriage, B. (a KVCh official) climbes on the tribune and starts to shrill "the party and the government have entrusted you with a glorious task to build a canal/a road/ a plant,"or "you are the heroes of the White-Sea Canal, Moscow-Volga Route, "Second Rout." As a result, a "hero" soon appears in our office in Moscow, at *Kuznezky* 24, [the address of the central Gulag apparatus] saying "I am a hero of two canals and two routes" and demanding privileges and financial support without understanding that he is not a hero but a recidivist. We have to get rid of this practice as soon as possible.[516]

Although officially 're-education of the z/k,' sentenced for 'domestic and duty crimes' was proclaimed as the chief goal of the cultural-educative service in the camps, in reality its most important task was "to assist to the fulfillment of the production plans of the camps."[517] According to the Corrective-Labour Code of the USSR dated August 1, 1933, those imprisoned for political crimes were not primary targets of the cultural-educative policy. However, until the end of the 1930s, apart from the ban to appoint them on "responsible positions" no other limitations on their participation in political and educative activities existed.[518]

According to the initial plan the posts in the Cultural Educative Section were supposed to be staffed only with the non-z/k officials. However, soon due to the lack

[515] Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 96, p.18.
[516] TsAODM, f. 3352, op. 3, d. 176, p. 2.
[517] *Gulag,* p. 118.
[518] *Gulag,* p. 81.

of the hired staff the post of *kultorganizator* –a prisoner assistant to the cultural instructor was established. Any prisoner could obtain this position except for the 'counter-revolutionary' crimes (outlined in the articles 58 and 59 of the Soviet penal code) and some other crimes, such as 'attempt at escape,' 'bribery,' 'gender' crimes, 'robbery,' and 'violation of the camp regime.'The prisoners who had more than one previous conviction, former White Guard members, 'Trotskyites,' 'Zinovievites,' 'Bukharinites,' and other members of the anti-Soviet parties and organizations, former kulaks, believers, and foreigners were also not allowed to apply for this position.[519]

Cultural-educative service in the camps included propaganda related to politics, '*politmassovaia rabota,'* and propaganda related to production themes *'proizvodstvenno-massovaia rabota,'* such as the 'Socialist competition.' Another important aspect of cultural service was nstallation of clubs and libraries in the camps, *'klubnaia and bibliotechnaia rabota.'*

The most popular forms of political propaganda in the camps included political study groups, discussions, public readings of the newspapers and the journals (the so called '*chitki'*) and antireligious propaganda. Visual forms of propaganda included wall-newspapers, posters, slogans, and films.

Political discussions were considered as the most important aspect of cultural service in the camps. A well-developed network of political study groups evolved there in the 1930s. Officially the classes were supposed to be organized at least once a decade. Local party organizations were responsible for appointing the instructors. In reality in many camps most of the instructors were recruited among the prisoners.[520] The z/k, sentenced for 'counter-revolutionary crimes' were also allowed to visit the classes with exception of those sentenced for the 'treason of the Motherland,' 'espionage,'

[519] *Gulag*, p. 120.
[520] TsAODM., f. 3352, op. 3, d. 3, p. 47.

'terrorism,' 'sabotage,' as well as 'Trotskyites,' 'Zinovievites,' 'Bukharinites,' 'participants of the nationalist counter-revolutionary organizations,' and the foreigners.[521] As a result, apart from the ordinary delinquents, only prisoners sentenced for 'counter-revolutionary propaganda and agitation' were allowed to participate in the political study groups.

According to the regulations, daily readings of the newspapers for the prisoners had to take place even in the smallest camp subsections. Antireligious propaganda in the camps was yet another reflection of the economic interests of the state security organs. It was targeted against the believers who stayed away from work during the religious holidays and weekends.

The changes in the forms of propaganda, targeted at the increase of the production output in the course of 1930s were merely formal. It cultivated either Stakhanovite labour or "shock work." In the camps *Stakhanovites* and shock workers enyojed certain privileges such as a "first priority to enter the cantee." Sometimes they were invited to a short jazz performance of the camp artistic troupe. [522]

The "Socialist competition" was supposed to embrace all the z/k by brigades and individually through "labour contracts." As a rule, the surveillance of the contracts took place once a month, or once a week, depending on the circumstances.[523] However the inspections into the course of the Socialist competition frequently revealed upward distortions of the production data (*pripiski*) and the presence of a large numbers of debilitated z/k among the participants. In their zeal to "overfulfill the norms" and to win the 'Socialist competition' the camp administrators frequently sent off to work sick prisoners.

[521] *Gulag,* p. 121.
[522] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1435, p. 9.
[523] *Gulag*, p. 122.

Other measures of fostering 'labour enthusiasm' among the prisoners included lavishness of petty objects coloured red that were supposed to be laden with symbolic meaning: banners, certificates, badges, and so on. Sometimes they were accompanied by certain privileges such as a possibility of a better communication with one's family. For example, on November 29, 1932 a number of prisoners toiling at the White Sea Canal construction together with the badges received the right to unlimited correspondence with their families, meetings with their relatives for a longer duration of time, and a little bit better living conditions.[524]

Every camp subsection (*lagpunkt*) was supposed to have its own wall-newspaper. As a rule, the newspapers were edited by either KVCh chiefs or the heads of the camp subdivision. The editor was obliged to accept the material for the newspaper from all the z/k, notwithstanding their sentence.[525]The contents of the wall-newspapers were limited to the information on the production process. Sometimes they ranged around social themes, castigating those refusing to work, those engaged in selling illegally the prisoners' clothes (*promotchiki*), and prasing the shock workers ("*otlichniki proizvodstva*.") The publication of the articles, headlines, and slogans on important political topics, as well as portraits of the leaders of the party and the Soviet government at the front pages (*peredovizi*), and in the wall newspapers for the z/k was banned. The notes, criticizing the actions of the hired camp staff were also prohibited. Satirical journalssuch as "Crocodile," and "Scorpion" or its wall-newspaper versions were yet another widespread form of the camp print.

An important part of the cultural service in the camps was the organization of the comprehensive schooling for the z/k. Originally it was aimed at complete

[524] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 3, p. 12.
[525] Gulag, p. 124.

liquidation of illiteracy and semi-literacy among the prisoners.[526] The elementary schooling was supposed to embrace all illiterate and hardly literate z/k less than 50 years old. The instructors were frequently recruited among the prisoners with teaching experience, sentenced for domestic crimes. Teaching of certain subjects, such as geography could only be conducted by the hired staff with pedagogical education.[527] Prior to the 'Great Terror,' however, 'political' prisoners were amployed not only in the Gulag comprehensive schooling programs, but also as teachers in the camp and regional primary and secondary schools.[528]

'Club based activity' (*Clubno-massovaia rabota*) was yet another means to motivate the prisoners for labour. Additionally, it was targeted at "the fight with the criminal traditions and habits." Usually the clubs and "cultural corners" in the camps were decorated with the portraits and busts of the Soviet leaders. It is interesting that placement of the portraits and the slogans in the cultural corners located near the barracks and in the barracks themselves was prohibited.[529]

Cultural Educative section was responsible for the organization of the amateur artistic groups (*kruzki*) for the z/k. These included theatre, musical bands, choir, painting and chess classes, and so on. According to the regulations, only the z/k who "properly behaved at the working sites and in daily life" could participate in the amateur artistic groups. 'Counter-revolutionary' prisoners were permitted just to play musical instruments.[530]

[526] *Gulag,* p. 118.
[527] *Gulag*, p. 124.
[528] Memorial, f. 2, op. 3, d. 19, p. 49.
[529] *Gulag*, p. 125.
[530] *Gulag*, p. 125.

Every camp site was supposed to host a library. The prisoners, sentenced for counter-revolutionary crimes, were not permitted to work in the libraries. However, this regulation, as many others of such kind, was rarely followed.

The only acceptable forms of the cultural educative work among the z/k in the camp sections with the penal regime were "propaganda related to production themes," (*proizvodstvenno-massovaia rabota*) through demonstrative agitation (*naglyadnoi agitazii*), and discussions on production themes: Socialist competition, the productive output results, and so on.[531]

Political Sections of the camps were responsible for arrangements of the lectures for the hired staff on the subjects of the party history, basics of Marxism-Leninism and philosophy. In some camps the staff of the regional institutions of higher education were invited as guest lecturers. To visit the lectures, the camp staff had to purchase the tickets.[532]

Starting from 1937, cultural-educative work in the camps witnessed a decline. Its "revival" in 1939 was connected with replacements in the NKVD leadership and changes in camp regime after the displacement of Nikolai Yezhov from the post of the NKVD head. In winter 1939 the NKVD called for the intensification of the KVR. For example, an order from January 14, 1939 states:

For a long time the GULAG apparatus pursued a policy directed against the interests of the state. It was aimed at the liquidation of KVR in the camps. As a result some heads of the camps refused to finance the courses of the KVCh instructors. In many camps the interests of the staff of the KVCh sections were ignored, and their salaries were steadily declining. In the camps the camp administration either dismissed

[531] *Gulag,* p. 127.
[532] Garf, f. 9414, op. 3a, d. 10, p. 56.

them from their jobs for their criticism of the camp management[533] or made them carry out other duties. In the best case they were employed at administrative positions, in the worst case worked as porters and waiters. In 1939, a great number of clubs were closed down in the camps, and the financial resources allocated for the KVR were spent on other purposes.[534]

In 1940 the part of the GULAG budget spent on KVR amounted to six million rubles. In the course of the years 1939-1940 fifty new clubs were opened in the camps. Approximately at the same time professional theatrical establishments were opened in *Ukhtoizemlag, Sevurallag, Ivdellag,* and *Usollag*. By that time the GULAG possessed 205 clubs and 675 'Red corners.' 175 clubs were provided with the libraries containing 1125 books. The number of those participating in the amateur artistic work had witnessed a two-fold increase since 1939, and the number of the visitors in theatrical circles (*dramkruzki*) raised from 890 members January 1, 1939 to 2800 at the end of this year.[535]The Gulag developed a network of Pioneers' camps for the children of the Gulag staff.[536]

Physical culture and sport played an important role in the propaganda in the camps. In August 1939 the VOKHR (Security and the Regime) Section of the Gulag announced the first marksmen's contest among the camp guards.[537] Ski races of the camps' staff took place regularly in the 1930s.[538] The Gulag team participated in the contests among various NKVD departments. The team was composed of the best sportsmen from different camps. [539] Mass-scale contest in track and field athletics and

[533] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 21, p. 24.
[534] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 24, p. 59.
[535] Garf, f. 9414, op.1, d. 40, p.3.
[536] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 24, p. 64.
[537] Garf, f. 9414, op.1, d. 25, p. 54.
[538] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 25, p. 199.
[539] Garf, f. 9414, op.1, d. 31, p. 69.

shooting took place among the GULAG guards in August and September 1941.[540] The activities related to physical culture (a "defense-physical culture work" from spring 1941) included the organization of the groups of the Society for support to Aviation and Chemical Defense (OSOAVIAHIM) for the camp staff, and marksmen's' groups in the camps.

Major construction sites were provided with well-equipped sport utilities: stadiums, football fields, tennis courts, and volleyball grounds. According to the official documents, donations into the sports programs were significant, and the staff of the camps frequently won first prizes in the regions.[541]

The participation of the camps staff in certain activities, such as the Communist Youth Leage cross-country ski-race during the anniversaries of the Red Army, and the Olympiads was obligatory. Implementation of cultural-educative service for the guards was not an easy task. The report delivered during the Gulag party meeting in 1939 stated that in many camps the z/k were provided with better cultural facilities than the guards, who never received any newspapers or journals.[542]

According to the reports of the Political section on the results of the inspection of the camps from the years 1938-1939 no one there studied the Abridged History of the VKP (b) In the best case, the simulation of the classes took place. The content of regularly issued wall-newspapers for the guards was characterized as "leaving much to be desired."[543]

The cultural service on the periphery of the camps was a problem not only in respect to the guards. In the course of the first regional party conference of *Volgostroy* which took place on May 26, 1937, an official from *Uglichskii* camp subsection

[540] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 31, p.156.
[541] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 40, p. 7.
[542] TsAODM, f. 3352, op. 3, d. 3, p. 95.
[543] Garf, f. 9414, op. 4, d. 11, p. 12.

commented on the poor condition of the cultural service for the Communist party members:

In addition to the abominable living conditions, as a rule their salary is much less than the one of the individuals 'with the stained reputation.' There is no library nearby, the books are not available. How do our communists spend their weekends? They get up an hour later than usual and plunge into long hours of boredom and idleness, looking forward to the beginning of the next week. The courses of party studies still remain on paper.[544]

In the conditions of hard and ungratifying service, a network of informers, and obstrusive, tiresome propaganda, the guards endulged in drunkeness. In the remote camp subsections it was the only way to releave the burden of their gloomy existence. The widespread cases of guards' suicides were explained by the administrators as a result of 'poor quality of cultural-educative service among the guards.' The KVCh officials treated their obligations to submit regulat reports to the centre as sheer formality. As a result, in their most part the reports were formal and meaningless.[545] Having reviewed the reports from the camps dated the first half of 1941 the chief of the Political Section of the GULAG noted "the cultural- educative service is avoided and distorted in any possible way." The classes were either not conducted at all, or remained "meaningless and formal."[546]

Apart from the resistance on the part of the camps administrators, especially at the remote camp sites, who were unwilling to finance political and cultural service, its implementation for the prisoners and the camp staff was hindered by a desperate lack

[544] Garf, f. 9414, op. 4, d. 2, p. 22.
[545] Garf, f. 9414, op.1, d. 1432, p. 18. Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1432, p. 18.
[546] Garf, f. 9414, op.1, d. 1432, p. 26.

of staff, high rates of turnover of the personnel and the poor level of political and educational qualifications of the KVCh instructors. An ex-prisoner from the BBK noted in his memoirs:

Every morning the KVCh chief, a dumbhead, who could not put two words together, climbed up the tribune and murmured something on the necessity to raise the pace of the spring sowing. Where do they find these hopelessly ridiculous individuals for work in KVCh? The answer is simple: the smarter ones managed to find better jobs. A job in the camp in general is a lot of a loser, and from all the camp functions the cultural-educative sercive is the worst. In contrast to the jobs at a plant or in the kitchen there are no benefits. In five years I have not met a single educated person among the KVCh staff.[547]

On the periphery of the BBK the situation with the literacy of the instructors was even worse:

On the 15th section (*OLP*) of *Kargopollag* the head of the KVCh was a good-natured, but absolutely ignorant sergeant (*starshina*.) He used to announce a theatrical play in the following way: "Gogol's marriage. By Ostrovsky." He honestly confessed to his prisoner assistant that "he himself is not very good in these affairs …"[548]

Poor salaries in the KVCh resulted in the repetitive attempts on the part of some KVCh inspectors to get a transfer to the Section of the Security and Regime and to obtain the position of an armed guard position. The memoirs dated the end of the 1930s mention educators, recruited from the criminal prisoners.[549] In many camps it was impossible to distinguish the KVCh instructors from the z/k by outward appearance.[550] A report from *Siblag* dated the second half of 1941 presents a vivid picture of the actual implementation of the KVCh tasks:

[547] Y. Margolin, *Puteshestvie v stranu z/k,* p. 242.
[548] V. Frid, "Zenitba Gogolya. Sochinenie Ostrovskogo," in *Teatr Gulaga,* (Moscow: Memorial, 1995) p. 106.
[549] Garf, f. 9414, op.3a, d.3, p. 69.
[550] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1434, p. 35.

The KVCh inspector of the *Novosibirskoe otdelenie* comrade Baranov did not manage to read the newspaper to the prisoners. In the course of the following discussion, being not able to asnswer the question "What does the USA mean?" he replied "this is not our business." The wall-newspaper that he had edited contained so many spelling and grammar mistakes that the z/k asked the head of the camp subsection to take it off and correct the mistakes. Inspector of the KVCh of *Kemerovskoe otdelenie,* asked by the z/k "Why did our Red Army retreat ? " answered "well, first we have to collect the harvest, so the main attention now is paid to the harvest drive. When we are done with the harvest, we'll crush the Fascists. "[551]

In the camp print absurdities coexisted with naievete. As a rule, the wall-newspapers praised the 're-educated' prisoners and castigated violators of the regime. The Gulag order from winter 1942 devoted to the critique of the camp print, notes:

Among other camp news the wall newspaper no. three in *Aktyblag* mentiones that the z/k K. sold camp clothes and for eight days has been hiding from the administrators in the camp zone. What did the author want to say in this note? It seems he wanted to demonstrate to the prisoners that one can escape the work and sell the camp clothers. The editors of other newspapers go to another extreme through publishing threats and swearings. An article in the production bulletin no. three in *Dzezgazgan*an states "the z/k Af., M., G. and K. regularly saboteur the work. The wall newspaper is asking you, are you still going to ignore your job obligations? If so, the Operative-Chekist Section is going to launch a criminal case on.[552]

Swearing, foul language, crude lexical and grammar mistakes penetrated the camp print. [553] The camp administrators were helpless in this respect. Some newspapers lavishly use camp jargon. For example, the newspaper "The Window of the Satire" (*Okno Satiri*) at the fifth camp section of *Vostokurallag* was usually composed in the criminal jargon. The only thing he chief of the KVCh of *Vostokurallag* could do to

[551] Garf, f. 9414, op.1, d. 1436, p. 39.
[552] Garf, f. 9414, op.1, d. 1436, p. 82.
[553] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1436, p. 82.

change the situation was to issue the resolution prescribing "to devote more space to the information on production data."[554]

The Great Patriotic War: Revolution in Minds?

Starting from 1941 antireligios propaganda was replaced with the patriotic one which was considered to be much more powerful and convincing in the conditions of the war. On October 23, 1941 the Cultural-Educative Section was separated from the Political Department and reorganized into an independent unit of the Gulag. From now on it was subordinated directly to the Gulag chief. Analogous reorganizations took place in the camps.[555]

From the second half of 1941, mobilization of the z/k for 'labour upsurge,' and fostering among them 'patriotism and hatred towards fascism' became the chief goals of political propaganda in the camps. [556] The beginning of the war was a crucial factor in the revival of the cultural service in the camps and changes in its contents. The chief of the Gulag Political Section commented upon the poor condition of elementary schooling programs for the prisoners during the first quarter of 1941 due to the absence of available study rooms and frequent transfers of the prisoners. As a result financial resources allocated for this purpose were wasted.[557] After the beginning of the war official instructions and the reports from the camps never mentioned this issue.

With the beginning of the war reading of the newspapers and listening to the radio were banned in the camp zones. The reports dated June 1941 stated that in some camps in the conditions of absence of any political and cultural activities, the KVCh instructors had nothing to do but to preoccupy themselves with spying on the prisoners trying to trace down the illegitimate cases of listening to the radio and composing the

[554] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d.1441, p. 194.
[555] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1432, p. 60.
[556] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1432, p. 65.
[557] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1434, p. 12.

denunciatory reports. Finally, in July 1941 an instruction was issued by the GULAG that permitted these activities.[558] This event marked the beginning of the resurrection of propaganda and cultural life in the camps.

The contents of propaganda as well as the means of its transmission altered significantly with the mass implementation of radiosets and portable motion picture apparatuses in the camps. Not only the guards and the camp staff received the updated information on situation at the frontline but also the prisoners. [559]

According to the GULAG order from 1943 devoted to the "propagandistic and educative influence of the feature films," the movies were supposed to be shown no rarer than twice a month.[560]In comparison with the year 1940, in 1941 study plans for the commanders and the guards underwent an extensive revision. If previously the *Kratkii Kurs,* 'The Abridged History of the Communist Party' consituted the core of the curriculum, from now on the guards studied the history of the USSR from the primordial times, filtered through the prism of patriotic propaganda. Additionally, the curriculum was complemented by the geographically inclusive illumination of current international politics.

During the second half of 1941 65 lectures and reports were delivered in the course of the so called 'literary evenings' in the camps of Irkutsk region. The topics ranged around prominent Russian writers ("Life and Creative Works of Nikolai Gogol") or national heroes ("The Great Russian Commander Suvorov.")[561] The most frequently cited works during these collective readings were "War and Peace" by Leo

[558] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1435, p. 112.
[559] G. Zzenov, *Prozitoe,* p. 134.
[560] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1449, p. 15.
[561] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1437, p. 6.

Tolstoy, "The Mother" by Maxim Gorky, "Borodin Battle" by Mikhail Lermontov, Vladimir Mayakovsky's "Soviet Passport" and Anton Chekhov's stories.[562]

Collective readings of the "letters from the frontline" among the prisoners were considered as a powerful propaganda technique by the GULAG officials. Supposedly these letters were sent by the ex-prisoners fighting against the Germans. They were addressed either to the prisoners' brigade or to the staff of the KVO. Sometimes, however, they referred to all the prisoners in the camp. The most prominent themes in these letters were "the sense of duty," and "atonement for one's guilt through heroic fight with the Fascism."[563] Many of the authors ended with requests to inform them about the state of affairs at the construction site and in the camp. All this, and especially repetitive appeals to work harder to fulfill the norms of production[564] makes one assume that these letters were composed in the camps by the KVCh officials.

In 1946 the Cultural Educative Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs published a brochure called "They were brought up by the Chekists." It contained multiple stories of the z/k feats in the Great Patriotic War. It was targeted particularly at the camp prisoners and contained an inscription "for internal camp use."[565]

The reports from the camps at the beginning of the 1940s contain curious information:

Political and educative work has contributed to the growth of patriotism among the z/k. It found its reflection in the multiple appeals of the prisoners to send them to the frontline, and to donate private valuables to the defense fund."[566] … In comparison

[562] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1. Contrary to the informal collective readings of the excerpts from the classical literature in the barracks, these events were organized by the prisoners with the official agreement of the camp authorities.
[563] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1474.
[564] Garf, f. 9414 op. 1, d. 325, pp. 64-65.
[565] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1474.
[566] Report of the Gulag chief to Lavrenty Beria "On the work of the Gulag during the war years" from 17.08.1944. *Gulag,* p. 282.

with the data from the year 1940 the number of refuters has witnessed a five-time decrease and amounts to just 0, 25% from the general number of healthy prisoners."[567]

In the second quarter of 1941 not only the reports from the camps but also their appraisals by the officials of the central GULAG apparatus acquired optimistic overtones:

> As a result of our timely measures for intensification of propaganda among the prisoners in the form of collective readings of Molotov speech from June 22, 1941, and other activities, the z/khad correctly interpreted recent events. KVO has tens of examples at its disposal, when the entire z/k brigades increased their labour productivity twice or more. Hundreds of the z/k appeals to recruit into the Red Army. We have launched the practice of attachment of the prisoners to their 'own' industrial enterprises. The labour productivity at these enterprises has witnessed an increase of up to 150%. There are tens of brigades and hundreds of prisoners who achieved the productive output of 1.5 to 3 production norms.[568]

Nevertheless, even in the conditions of the wartime mobilization the Soviet authorities were not willing to treat the z/k as legitimate Soviet citizens. The appeals to the z/k patriotism had to be "cautious" and "moderate." For example, in the second half of 1942 the officials of the *Vostokurallag* KVCh received a severe reprimand for displaying the poster which depicted a woman with the child under the slogan «If you value Your Honour and Freedom, Fight for Them through Honest Labour:

> Talks with the z/k on the subjects of honour, freedom, and family are dangerous. It is more appropriate to refer to the production themes in a title or a slogan. In the *Taborinsky* camp subsection the political ignorance of the instructor resulted in a joint meeting of the hired staff and the z/k. A joint resolution was issued in the course of the meeting, which was later cited in an article under the title "The Banner is Our Pride!" Apart from the fact that such a note should not have been published, meetings of the hired staff and the z/k are strictly prohibited.[569]

[567] *Gulag,* p. 282.
[568] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1432, p. 63.
[569] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1441, p. 194.

The reports devoted to the behaviour of the hired staff of the camp apparatuses and the former BBK prisoners at the front," presented by the BBK administrators, confirm the fact of the upsurge of prisoners' patriotism:

In the administrative center (*komendantskii lagpunkt*) of *Soroklag* near *Belomorsk* 600 prisoners were released. Their transportation to the frontline was temporarily delayed due to the absence of the train carriages. Upon the first appeal of the military command they joined the construction of the defense line and, having worked fourteen hours per day, soon completed the task. The group of the *Beltballag* prisoners toiled at the construction of the defensive installations at the Karelian sector of the front twenty four hours a day without breaks under repetitive enemy attacks. Despite the human losses, the prisoners displayed remarkable self-organization. No escape attempts were registered. During the fist days of the war the prisoners from the 9th section of the colony (*UITLK*) of the *Leningrad* region increased the output production to 400%.[570]

Apart from increasing the productive output, the prisoners of this camp eagerly participated in the military actions against the Germans:

A group of 1000 z/k was commissioned for the construction of the strategic transportation route at *Pudoz* (*Pudozstroi*). Even under severe enemy attacks the prisoners did not abandon the construction site. In their turn, headed by the chief of the *colonna* F. the camp hired staff along with the prisoners obtained the rifles and joined the group of the partisans in the adjacent area. While retreating, some of the prisoners' detachments got into the enemy encirclement. They broke through it without external help and within a couple of days appeared in *Petrozavodsk* [Regional centre].[571]

The report from the BBK called "The prisoners' participation in military actions" states that in 1941 the enemy tanks broke through near *Viborg*. A group of the prisoners nearby were engaged in the construction of the defense line. Seeing the enemy approaching, one of the prisoners from *Soroklag* jumped into the car and rushed

[570] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 325, p. 77.
[571] Garf, f. 9414, op.1, d. 325, p. 73.

ahead towards the forefront tank. As a result of the collision, the route was blocked. Thus the z/k saved the entire military detachment from imminent defeat and capture.[572]

During the first days of the war a group of the *Beltballag* z/k successfully fulfilled its tasks at the occupied territory. The prisoners assisted the military units of the Red Army in tracking down German pilots and parachutists, who had descended on our territory.

The group of the prisoners engaged in the works at the construction site number 92 was attacked by the Germans during their evacuation to the *Olonez* region. Part of the z/k flew. Some of them, having taken the rifles of the killed guards and continuing to fight back, retreated. They took a wounded soldier with them, whom they later escorted to the hospital. Having handed the rifles over to the nearest military unit they appeared at the *Obozerskaia* station.[573]

In the *Medvejegorsk* region the commander of the military unit asked for 136 z/k for the construction of the defense line. While working they were attacked by the Germans. Upon appeal of the commander: "Those who love their Motherland, take the arms of the slain soldiers and fight!" the prisoners grabbed the riffles, attacked the Germans and helped to crush the entire enemy detachment. Having captured fifty six Germans they suffered just several casualties. All these prisoners were liberated and joined the Soviet army.[574]

Ex-prisoners' memoirs also contain multiple examples of prisoners' displaying patriotism and readiness for 'shock work.' In doing so, a Communist administrator from the State Bank of USSR, who was arrested in 1937 and sentenced as a 'counter-

[572] Garf, f. 9414, op.1, d.325, p. 57.
[573] Garf, f. 9414, op.1, d.325, p. 57.
[574] Garf, f. 9414, op.1, d.325, p. 57.

revolutionaire' for ten years of camps refers to an accident at the *Kolyma* gold mine in 1941:

> After an accident with the dam, the KVCh chief E. Novikov, also referred to as the Peter the Great (obviously owing this nickname to his outstanding height, and probably to the fact that he, unlike other officials, was tolerant towards the 'political' prisoners) ordered to build a new dam. It was necessary to work in the raging river. He was the first to jump into the river: "At the front the people don't spare their lives, and you are afraid of getting into the cold water! Now! Those who are genuine Soviet people, and not cowards, follow me!" We were cut to the quick by these words. We exchanged glances and understood each other without words. We started to undress quickly. Novikov jumped into the water, and the followed him…. Mishka the Woodpecker realized that his position of a foreman was in danger. If he refused to follow N., he would soon find himself at the 'common works.' When I looked at him, he had already took off his camp robe and with the club hammer in his hand stepped into the water. None of his fellow criminals followed him. When we finally got out from the water we were frozen to death. All "submariners" as we were nicknamed bythe rest of the prisoners, received alchohol. It was obvious however, that the spirits was not the point. Novikov appealed to the "honest Soviet people" not to "the z/k"(many camp officials did not regard us as human beings). And such people turned up, as they turn up everywhere in our country.[575]

At the beginning of the war, certain layer of the prisoners, mainly those charged for 'counter-revolutionary crimes received the possibility to demonstrate their patriotic feelings towards the Soviet country. Even the 'Socialist competition' was treated seriously. Ordinary delinquents with the 'criminal' background almost never joined them. The criminals, though regularly recruited into the Soviet army, attempted to escape from it by any means. The inner drive of the z/k was used by the KVCh officials to demonstrate how successful their cultural and educative policy was.

A Case Study: Cultural Policy at the White-Sea Combine and the Camp NKVD.

From the moment of its creation, the BBK developed far reaching plans of 'cultural colonization.' According to the program of the investments into the BBK, approved in 1934, from the entire volume of the capital investments (54064, 4 thousand rubles), "social and cultural construction" amounted to 2594, 5 rubles. This figure

[575] Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 41, p. 64.

amounted to almost half of the investments into the industrial construction (5721, 5 thousand rubles).[576] By the year 1937, BBK's network of the cultural-educative institutions included Central Theatre of the BBK NKVD, cinematic-photographic section, museum of the BBK, pavilion with the works of the local artists, symphonic and band orchestras, the camp "radio newspaper," newspapers "Re-forging" (*Perekovka*)[577] and "Stalin's Route" (*Stalinskaia Trassa.*)[578] Additionally, it was equipped with 56 camp clubs and 21 club in the special settlements, 142 "red corners" in the camps and 20 in the special settlements, 25 stationary libraries, more than 400 portable libraries, and 21 library in the special settlements. Finally the Combine possessed 49 radio centers with 1540 radio sets in its local branches, 2 radio centers and 12 radio sets in the special settlements; 5 sound portable cinemas and 25 mute ones.[579]

Medvezhegorsk, the capital of the BBK, offered a variety of cultural and intellectual events. From the year 1934 annual conferences of the medical staff at the Central Hospital took place, hosting hired and z/k medical staff. It was primarily targeted at discussion of theoretical and practical questions of medical treatment and prophylactics, and discussions of recent achievements in medicine on the basis of the medical reports and the demonstration of the recovering patients. Overall the Central Hospital hosted 33 conference sessions, during which 46 reports were presented. The

[576] The priorities were given to the development of transport (23, 547, 5 thousands roubles) and resettlement (11,319,4 thousand rubles). NARK, f. 690, op. 6, d. 19, p. 495.
[577] Apart from *Perekovka,* the prisoners were supposed to receive the central newspapers, *Izvestia, Moskovskaia Pravda, Leningradskaia Pravda* through subscription.
[578] The official newspaper, issued every other day by the Political Department of the BBK, was directed to the hired specialists, the BBLag staff, and the local population. But since it was informing not only about the recent events in the country and in the world, but also about camp subsections, daily life of guards, prisoners, and the hired staff, it used such terms as "camp unit" ("*lagkomandirovka*,") "camp subsection" ("*lagpunkt*") and "the prisoner" ("*lagernik*,") often just mentioning prisoners' names without "z/k" or called them "Stakhanovites," "workers." NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issues 15 from January, 31, 1936 and from February 9, 1936.
[579] V. Makurov, *Belomoro-Baltiiskii Kombinat,* p. 155.

most prominent doctors of the BBK (Iosifov, Arbuzov, Pribitkov, Shapiro, Lodinsky)[580] presented the results of their research. Additionally, lectures for a wider audience were held at the Central Clinic.[581]

The Agricultural Department of the BBK hosted symposiums devoted to the agricultural development of the region in Medvezhegorsk. These events, hosted by, were visited by the representatives of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and the Leningrad Scientific Research Institute.[582]

The House of Defense (originally built for the meetings and the entertainment of the guards from the Department of the Security and the Regime of the BBK) regularly staged motley performances that included amateur activity concerts, Russian folk songs, "eccentric music," a troupe of acrobats, and declamation of the verses.[583]

In many ways the contrast between cultural life at the centre and the remote subsections of the BBK can be compared to one between contemporary Moscow or St-Petersburg and the provinces. Apart from *Solovki,* a prominent cultural and intellectual centre until 1937, smaller subsections were plunged into misery and deprivation, vividly reflected both in the administrative orders and ex-prisoners' memoirs.[584]

The lack of the financial resources there, ruthless exploitation of the prisoners and the rule of criminal clans on the camp subsections[585] coincided with the shortage of the personnel, absence of enthusiasm on the part of instructors, partly caused by their low salaries and stubborn resistance on the part of the camp administrators to any

[580] Unfortunately the first names and the initials of these people are not available. The search for the biographical information on them was not successful.
[581] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue June 2, 1940, p. 4.
[582] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 25, February 26, 1936, p. 4.
[583] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 64, June 4,1938, p. 4.
[584] NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 1/2, p. 120; V. R. Nikitina, *Dom Oknami na Zakat,* (Moscow: Interservis, 1996).
[585] In one camp subsection in the course of one and a half months in 1935 six educators were replaced. Its library did not contain any books or newspapers. All the books, sent to this library, were immediately utilized for making the playcards. Only during the first decade of July 152 freshly made card sets were confiscated there.

cultural or educative undertakings. The clubs and the libraries at the remote camp sites, in special settlements, and near the armed guards platoons were short lived.[586] Poorly developed communications and transportation served as perfect excuses for the local KVCh sections in submitting faked and belated reports.[587] In the remote sections of the BBK the phone connection was established only at the end of 1939.[588]

One of the most frequently repeated headlines in *Stalinskaia trassa* at the end of the thirties was "there is no culture in the periphery." The versatile and numerous activities, such as drama circles, embroidery, dance circles, automobile fans circles were not viable due to the absence of the lodgment, instructors, financing and technical supply.[589] A little bit better off were the sport clubs, OSOAVIAHIM and marksmanship circles.[590]

Poverty of 'cultural life' on the periphery was reflected in meaningless contents of wall newspapers of the local camp subdivisions. The press, filled with libels about local officials, soon became an arena for setting the personal scores.[591] Due to vulgar and bureaucratic language, crude lexical and grammar mistakes most of the articles in the newspapers, published by the Combine, were unreadable.[592]

Poor literacy was a major problem not only in the press, but also in the visual propaganda: posters and slogans. In an article published on March 6, 1939, the White-Sea Baltic Canal administrative center, *Povenets,* was called "Nursery of Illiteracy." Among all the recent announcements the most ignorant were those posted by the local club, by the voluntary 'societies' and by the *Komsomol* organization of the canal.[593]

[586] NARK, f, 865, op. 1, d. 11/55, p. 20; d. 2/8, p. 16.
[587] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 11/55, p. 247.
[588] NARK, f. 865, op. 35, d. 2/4, p. 61. Still, even at that time there was no telephone connection in many VOKHR subsections. NARK, f. 865, op. 35, d. 2/4, p. 68.
[589] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 83, June 20, 1937, p. 4.
[590] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 25, February 26, 1936, p. 4.
[591] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 43, May 5, 1938, p. 3.
[592] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 19, February 6, 1939, p. 3.
[593] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 33, June 3, 1939, p. 3.

However, in some areas achievements were significant also on the periphery. For example, the program of elementary schooling was launched and implemented with the beginning of the canal construction under the aegis of the administration of the construction of the White-Sea Baltic Canal. The results of work on the "liquidation of illiteracy" with adult population were quite modest. By the end of 1932 there were 213 schools of 'liquidation of illiteracy' and 128 schools for individuals with poor literacy. Although overall more than ten thousand z/k passed through those schools, and four thousand prisoners passed through technical schools,[594] in relation to the amount of illiterate prisoners this was a not an impressive result. On June 1, 1937, there were 1254 special settlers and 1612 camp prisoners registered as 'illiterate' compared to 941(75%) and 1225 (76%) respectively enrolled in schools. Compared with the actual number of prisoners at this date (59.071)[595] which meant that only 2. 7% of the prisoners were registered as "illiterate," which of course did not reflect a real situation. The training, however, was intense: only during the first five months of 1937 327(26%) settlers and 896 (55.5%) prisoners completed the courses. 'Liquidation of illiteracy' program within the BBLag, itself a problematic task, was complicated by high turnover of the prisoners.

Implementation of an elementary schooling program in the special settlements, that started with the construction of the schools by the 'forced labour' contingents, was much more impressive. By September 21, 1935, in 18 primary and 4 junior high schools 5274 or 87, 2% out of all children in the settlements (6040) visited schools.[596]

In October 1935 the BBK transferred part of its responsibilities in the special settlements (in particular, the "mass Soviet work" among the settlers with restored civil rights (353 individuals) and the hired staff (196 individuals) to the local Soviets and the

[594] I. Chukhin, *Kanaloarmeitsi,* p. 174.
[595] A. N. Kokurin, Yu. N. Morukov, *Stalinskie stroiki GULaga: 1930-1953* (Moskva : Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokrati´i`a" : Izd-vo Materik, 2005).
[596] V. Makurov, *Belomoro-Baltiiskii Kombinat,* p. 155.

People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*). According to the decree of the SNK KASSR from June 4, 1936 all schools in the labour settlements were transferred to the *Narkompros* system. This fact was a clear demonstration of the failure of the BBK to maintain and develop existing educational network.[597]

At the moment of the transfer there was 21 school with 5624 pupils. Of these 4 were junior high schools with 2227 pupils and 64 grades, and 17 primary schools with 3397 pupils and 96 grades.[598] Additionally, a number of various clubs and circles was created. It consisted of 19 drama clubs (including agitbrigades with 217 members,) six physical culture circles with 94 members, 8 circles of the young naturalists with 139 members, 3 literature study groups with 75 members, 1 circle of handiwork with 22 members, 3 political clubs with 39 members, 5 antitheists (bezboznikov) with 49 members, 11 choir circles with 213 members, and 2 circles of rabbit-breeders with 23 members.[599]

The report on the work of the BBK schools for the years 1935-1936 demonstrates that on May 1, 1936 there were 38 instructors with pedagogical education, 33 with secondary education, 18 with the "lowest" education level. Only one instructor was a member of the Communist Party, 14 of them belonged to the Communist Youth (VLKSM); 25 instructors came from the ranks of special settlers and 9 from the ranks of the exiles.[600] According to the information on a school in *Pindushi* settlement, its staff also included a significant number of the camp prisoners.[601] Even the pioneer

[597] *GULAG v Karelii,* p. 116.
[598] NARK, f. 690, op. 6, d. 10/28, p. 333. The social composition of the pupils was diverse. Children of the special settlers, hired employees, contract workers studied together with children of the prisoners. In 1936 the prisoners' children older than 8 years old were supposed to be removed from the camp and sent to orphanages to prevent 'corruption of the children of the hired staff and instilling them with counter-revolutionary moods' in schools. *GULAG v Karelii,* p. 117.
[599] NARK, f. 630, op. 1, d. 87/717, p. 10.
[600] NARK, f. 630, op. 1, d. 87/717, p. 12.
[601] NARK, f. 630, op. 1, d. 87/717, p. 226-227.

camps, run by the BBK, were organized and managed by a "morally stable" "z/k labourforce" along with the hired workers.[602]

The schools experienced material difficulties. The lack of the textbooks was overwhelming. Only two schools in 1935 had electricity. Since kerosene supply was insufficient, in some schools the classes had to be frequently cancelled.[603] Due to the lack of the cadres and intense pressure, the staff was heavily overworked. A typical working week of a principal was 40-48 hours of teaching. School directors were charged with 20-25 hours of teaching a week, and a head teacher had around 38 hours of teaching. As a rule, the rank and file instructors' working day twice exceeded normal working hours.[604] Some schools even worked three sessions a day, the fourth grade pupils finishing their study at 10 p.m.[605] Despite the fact that many of the instructors and school administrators abandoned their duties and endulged in drunkenness, and falsification of the pupils' records,[606] true enthusiasts, fully believing in the cause they were serving were also present.[607]

Apart from schooling, a range of activities for children was developed which allowed regular inspections of their homes, such as regular contests for the "best family," "the cleanest household", and labour contracts between children and their parents, employed in industry.[608] According to the report dated summer 1936, the competition for the "best family" was not successful. Only three schools presented

[602] NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 1/2 p. 2-3.
[603] NARK, f. 630, op. 1, d.87/717, p. 3.
[604] NARK, f. 630, op. 1, d. 87/717, p. 11.
[605] NARK, *Stalinskaia trassa,* issue 13, January 21, 1936.
[606] NARK, f. 630, op. 1, d. 87/717, p. 9.
[607] Among them was the first husband of my grandmother, a very young school teacher in the settlement's school. Despite his fact of having married an exiled child of an "enemy of the people" (her father was shot in 1937, articles 58-10, 11 of the Soviet penal code), his letters from the frontline display a deep belief in "Stalinist values," and deep interest in his job. It was manifested through their discussion of recent textbooks, school literature, and reference to a circle of their friends, also school instructors sharing his values and hopes.
[608] NARK, f. 630, op. 1, d. 87/717, p. 11.

desirable results. The visits of the households by the teachers, although frequent, were not usually productive enough due to the insufficient preparatory work, except from one settlement in *Pindushi*, where 200 children were involved into the schooling that way. The school counsels and Komsomol counsels worked irregularly and never displayed their own initiative. Nevertheless, it was proclaimed that "the ties with the agricultural artels significantly improved."[609]

Under the aegis of the BBK 'mass culture' in the form of cinematic and radio installations was introduced in the region. Cinema played an increasing role in the social and cultural life of the region. Despite the problems with electricity and technical supply, already in 1936 many camp subsections could boast stationary motion-picture installations in the local clubs, designed for serving the camp prisoners, hired staff, local inhabitants, and schoolchildren.[610] In the 1930s watching movies was the favorite pastime of all the BBK inhabitants, and one of the few features of the 'Bolshevik culture,' which, being a very good distraction from the gloomy reality, was welcomed by the populace.

In the first half of the 1930s the radiosets were installed in the prisoners' barracks in the majority of the BBLag *lagpunkts*. The broadcasts included concerts of the Soviet composers, poetry, political lectures, operas transmitted from the Bolshoi Theatre.[611] The lectures of the Institute of the mass extramural training of the party activists at the TsK VKP(b) (mainly devoted to the party and government politics) were transmitted daily in mid 1930s.[612]

[609] NARK, f. 630, op. 1, d. 87/717, p. 14.
[610] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 5/26, p. 1. On the question of the availability of the cinema productions to the prisoners, see the BBLag KVCh reports. For example, the report from the 5th subdivision of the BBK states in March 1940 the camp prisoners (amounting to 4645) watched ten movies, two theatre perrformances and participated in an amateur activity evening. NARK, f. 865, op. 35, d. 3/14, p. 163.
[611] Y. Margolin, *Puteshestvie v stranu Z/K* (Tel-Aviv, 2000), p. 253; NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 4, 9.01.1938, p. 4.
[612] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 27, March 4, 1936, p. 4.

At the end of the 1930s sport games, especially football and volleyball were favorably received by the BBK hired staff and BBLag armed guards.[613] Apart from the motion pictures they remained the only kind of cultural-educative activities regularly organized by the KVCh instructors.[614]

A popular Soviet movement of the female community assistants ("*obschestvennitsi*") was fully developed in the BBK by 1937. The wives of the BBK administrators and the armed guards organized regular 'campaigns' and exhibitions aimed at raising the hygienic standards at the guards' regimens, households, kindergartens, schools, and clubs. [615]

Soviet culture slowly made its way to the outskirts of Medvezhegorsk also in the form of the amateur artistic activity, a multi-cultural and multi-ethnical form of art which offered ample possibilities of self-expression. It is necessary to note though that by the mid-1930s the appeal to the creative energy of the prisoners in the form of literary and other kinds of amateur activity, so powerful at the time of the canal construction,[616] from the mid 1930s was over as well as active participation of ordinary delinquents in camp cultural life.[617]

Nevertheless, amateur artistic activity, an integral part of "tour on culture," was conceived by the local communists as an important means of re-forging the psychology

[613] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 11/53, p. 10-16.
[614] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 92, August 18, 1937, p. 3.
[615] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/8, p. 19.
[616] Regular literary and theatrical contests among the BBK prisoners, organized by the KVO, are especially interesting in this respect. For example, in June 1932 the contest, organized by the *Perekovka* newspaper, included such forms of artistic productions as the best story, the best essay, or a feuilleton and the best repertoire of smaller forms ("life newspaper," sketch, etc.) There were 60 works sent to the commission, consisting of the KVO staff. The majority of the works presented were written in the style of short stories, very much reminding of those collected in the volume *Belomoro-Baltiiskii Kanal*. NARK, f. 167, op.1, d. 10/140, p. 170 ob.
[617] An itinerant brigade of criminal offenders, prostitutes and thieves under Igor Terentjev (a gifted director, active in 'Left' art in Russia, 1892-1937) performed at the end of 1932 or early in 1933 in Povents. It was also known as a "Comrade Firin Propaganda Brigade." (Named after a high-ranking chief of the GULAG, S. G. Firin.) The texts of their limericks were provided by their stage director and by poets from among the convicts; later the brigade was transferred to the Moskva-Volga Canal project.

and the proper, 'class' upbringing of the armed guards and the Soviet populace in general. [618]

The "evenings of the amateur art" regularly took place in the Medvezhegorsk Park of Culture and Recreation. They hosted a variety of bands from the BBK subsections. In summer 1937 the program included performances by the string orchestra of the *Pervomasky* settlement (28 members) which played contemporary music such as "A Song about Stalin and the Civil War," and Isaak Dunayevsky's marches. Russian composers were also popular, epecially Mikhail Glinka's "Kamarinskaia." Amateur performances contained folk dances such as *gopak*, ditties from *Povenetz* and other localities. The troupe of thevMedveghegorsk House of Defense performed Hungarian and Gipsy dances, dances "Metelitsa," and "Bolgaresko" with the accordion accompaniment, tango, foxtrot, songs "Nochenka," "Melnik" (composed by Alexandre Sergeevich Dargomizsky). The event ended with the performances by the local quires from *Povenets* and *Gabselga.*[619]

The contests of amateur performers among the armed were very popular. Usually they took place on occasions of the Soviet holidays, such as the Day of the Red Army and consisted of "minor forms of artistic production": songs, ditties, dances, declamation of the verses, the performances of the guitar, the mandolin, the balalaika and the accordion players.[620] In the first half of 1930s an ambitious cultural-educative program for the BBK and Dmitlag guards was elaborated by the GULAG. It preconceived 100% involvement of guards in the amateur groups (as well as in all other cultural and political undertakings) in just few months.[621] Still, the amateur groups of guards remained a rare phenomenon, especially when in 1940, after the regimentation

[618] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 11/55, p. 98-100. NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 11/55, p. 99.
[619]NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 83, June 20, 1937, p. 4.
[620] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 19, February 9, 1936, p. 4; issue 64, July 4, 1938, p. 4.
[621] NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 7/32, p. 98-100.

of the twelve hours working day for the z/k, the guards' working day increased up to fifteen hours.[622]

The most prominent armed guards artistic troupes were "the orchestra of the VOHKR BBK NKVD" (conductor Ivan Stepanovich Zhedulov) and "the Band of Red Army Song and Dance," (the leader N. A. Eremeev), organized in spring 1938. The first band preferred a classical repertoire. It performed pieces by Wolfgand Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Anton Rubinshtein, Leo Delibes, and Pyotr Chaikovsky together with the compositions of its conductor, Ivan Zhedulov.[623] For example, the concert performed in the Medvezhegorsk Part of Culture and Recreation on June 30, 1937, consisted from three parts. During the first section the band played the overture from "The Barber of Seville" by Jacomo Rossini, mazurka from the ballet "Coppelia" by Leo Delibes, pieces from "The Swan Lake," and entr'acte for the 4th act of "Carmen" by George Bizet. During the second and the third sections lighter musical pieces were performed, starting with "Toreadore and Andaluzka" by Anton Rubinshtein.[624]

The orchestra consisted of 35 musicians. Along with the names of Musorgsky, Beethoven, and Chaikovsky the programs of daily performances always contained obscure name of 'Zhedulov.' The posters read 'Musorgsky, Zhedulov, Beethoven, and others.' According to a note by an art critic, his musical playes were "a motley collection of musical notes from all more or less known musical pieces."[625]

The second musical troupe, "the Band of the Red Army Song and Dance," in about 2-3 weeks after its establishment already included 15 members. As well as "the

[622] KGANI, f. 214, op.1, d. 27, p. 73.
[623] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 84, July 23, 1937, p. 4.
[624] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 76, July 2, 1937, p. 4.
[625] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 84, July 23, .1937, p. 4.

Orchestra of the VOKHR of the BBK" it consisted mainly of the prisoners.[626] It gave lively performances in Medveghegorsk, and was more inclined to folk motives and Soviet music.[627] The concert from April 30, and May 1, 1938, included cento (litmontaz) "The first of May." During the second part of the concert it performed songs "Metelitsa," "Suliko," and the ditties.[628] Despite its successful performances this band was short lived. In 1940, when no financial means were provided for its maintenance, it was dissolved.[629]

Another important aspect of the 'cultural construction' was the development of the library network. Theoretically, until 1937, not only special settlers, but also the prisoners were allowed to use the library collections either through borrowing books or through ordering them if they could not visit the library. Actually, many of them used this possibility, even those employed at the "general works."[630]

The Central Library of the BBK boasted a rich library collection. At the beginning of 1936 the number of volumes amounted to 50000, while the number of readers ranged around 35000. Daily visits, in 1935 ranging from 100 to 200, in 1936 sometimes reached more than 300 (although at the same time the library was not equipped with the reading room). The majority of newly arrived books and exhibitions were related to propaganda. There was a database of works related to the Stakhanovite movement.

[626] NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 7/32, p. 87-89.
[627] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 44, May 9, 1938, p. 4.
[628] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 44, May 9, 1938, p. 4. Among the shortcomings of the performance the reviewer noted the absence of the choreography and poor musical accompaniment. With exception of two pieces, only the accordion and the piano players were available for the performance.
[629] KGANI, f. 214, op. 1, d.27, p. 69.
[630] According to the information provided in an ex-prisoner's memoirs, at the beginning of 1936 *Solovki* library contained more than 1800 individual z/k library records, around 100 records of the inmates of the camp punishment cells, and around 30 collective library records from remoter camp subsections. The number of regular readers ranged around around 200. Yu. I. Chirkov, *A bylo vse tak* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991) pp. 74-87.

According to the information on the analysis of the library cards of the users, published in *Stalinskaia Trassa* in 1936, pre-Soviet and European writers were the most popular ones, especially Victor Hugo, Daniel Defo, Jules Verne, Leon Feihtvanger and Theodore Dreiser. Satire of Evgeny Petrov, Ilja Ilf and Mikhail Zoschenko was also very popular as well as works of Ilja Ehrenburg, Alexey Novikov-Priboy, Vyacheslav Shishkov, Alexey Tolstoy, and Dmitry Mamin-Sibiryak.[631] The Central Library hosted regular exhibitions, the subjects ranging from life and work of famous writers (Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Nekrasov) to the "anti-religious" theme.[632]

The history of the *Solovki* library collection dates back to the 1920s. By 1927 the stocks of the *Solovki* library amounted to more than 30000 volumes. Its major part was brought from the library of the *Butirki* prison. In 1925, upon the petition of the local camp authorities, GPU sent there several confiscated private and commercial book collections. Lazar Kogan, responsible for reviewing the books on the question of censorship, treated his duties superficially, so the camp library handed over the books that had been already banned in the country, such as "Besi" by Fydor Dostoevsky, works of Konstantin Leontjev, "Russia and Europe" by Nikolai Danilevsky, and so on.[633]

The collections of the rest of the local libraries were extremely poor. The readers frequently submitted complaints to the *Stalinskaia Trassa* publishing house on this issue. In 1938 while the Central Library's collection amounted to 321067 items,[634] the total number of books in 21 library in the labour settlements was just 8500. [635] The

[631] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 13, January 26, 1936, p. 4.
[632]NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 4, January 9, 1938, p. 4.
[633] M. Rozanov, *Solovetsky konzlager v monastire. 1922-1939. Fakti-Domisli-"Parashi." Obzor vospominanii solovchan solovchanami.* USA: izd-vo avtora, 1979. Internet, http://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/auth_pages.xtmpl?Key=19622&page=16.
[634] From this number books devoted to politics amounted to 94057 items, belles- lettres collection amounted to 61003 items, the number of the books on technical subjects ranged around 65846, "other" books amounted to 100162. The number of regular users was 17574.
[635] *Gulag v Karelii,* p. 149.

users of some libraries complained they had to keep the same books for more than two years, for the library was always closed.[636] The books distributed by the Central Library to the periphery,[637] were either propagandistic brochures or works written by second and third rate Soviet writers.[638] The same could be said about the clubs of the armed guards platoons. They received exclusively propagandistic literature.[639]

Local party functionaries manipulated the interest of the public to cinema for their own ends by attracting workers into the clubs on the pretext of watching a movie and then turning it into a Communist propaganda seminar. They placed the guards outside of the club so that no one would leave it. Manifestations of discontent or protest on the part of the workers resulted in the accusation in 'counter-revolutionary propaganda' and the instigation of the criminal cases on the article 58. The protocols of the eyewitnesses' accounts in such cases demonstrate that while the workers' attitudes towards the Soviet regime and local communists varied, indifference towards them prevailed. [640]

To fight with the multiple violations of the regime, such as drunkenness, co-habitation with the z/k, low morale, despondent "moods" and frequent suicides of the guards, including the Communists and the *Komsomol* members,[641] the Political Section of the BBK developed a comprehensive program aimed at "civilizing the guards, raising their cultural and educative level." "Lenin's corners," installed in the armed guards'

[636] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* p. 4.
[637] From January to May 1938 it sent to the periphery around 17020 items. *Gulag v Karelii,* p. 149.
[638] From a stock of 18 titles, sent by the Central Library in February, 1936, ten pertained to the Staklhanovite movement. The rest, apart from the works of Pushkin and Dobrolybov, were written by obscure Soviet writers. NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issues 19, and 23, February, 1936, p. 4.
[639] Or books like "Warfare game," (*Voennaia Igra)* by A. Khripin. NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 11/53, pp. 21, 133.
[640] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 1149. At the same time, these cases reveal that pastime, and aspirations of the BBK contract workers and ex-prisoners hardly extended above drinking. It is interesting that these workers, having lived in the same barracks for many years, and addressed each other by nicknames "Vaska", "Kuzka" and during the interrogations could not even remember the surnames of their friends/neighbors or appeared to never know them.
[641] NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 10/51, pp.40-43, 92, etc.

subvidisions were supposed to offer the multiplicity of pastimes: collective readings of the classical literature, playing games, excursions, lectures on multiplicity of subjects starting with politics and ending with geography and botanic. Special emphasis, however, was placed on the 'amateur artistic activity,' *samodeyatelnost* with regular performances (*smotri*) of the amateur artistic circles of the battalions in the 'House of the Defense' in Medvezhegorsk.[642]

"Social work among the masses"in *Kondopozskii* armed guards platoon the was conceived of as a primary measure in 'decisive struggle against the violations of the military and labour discipline in the form of drunken orgies.' Its monthly plan included a lecture called "The History of the Commune in Paris, rehearsals of the plays "Under the Wild Apple Tree", Chekhov's comedies "The Proposal" and "Suspicious Love."[643] Apart from military and political training the programs elaborated in the Political section included groups of track and field athletics, Russian, German, math, algebra, geometry, economics and physical geography study groups, and the marksmen's contests.[644]

Political propaganda plan among the guards of *Letnerechenskii* platoon of the BBK for January 1941 included discussions, lectures devoted to the history of the revolutions in Russia in 1905 and 1917, the Civil War, and the Prague conference accompanied by several theatrical performances. In 1941 the guards of this VOKHR listened to the lectures "The doctrine of the origins of Christmas and its perils," "Military actions between England and Germany," "Creative works of Saltikov-Schedrin." According to the regulations, the cultural service was supposed to fill every

[642] NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 12/58, p. 53.
[643]RGANI, f. 214, op.1, d. 108, p. 74.
[644] The data for 1940. RGANI (State Archive of the Recent History of the Republic of Karelia), f. 214, op.1, d. 27, p. 72.

day, every free minute of the guards' life.[645] Still, the inspection reports from different camp sites stated that in majority of the armed guards subdivisions social and cultural service was absent. [646]

The traditional Soviet holidays, so macabre for the z/k, for the hired staff were supposed to be filled with reports, lectures, discussions, exhibitions in the camp clubs, and in the Red Corners, kindergartens and primary schools.[647] The propagandists were responsible for the ideological indoctrination of the hired staff.

The officials of the Political Section were responsible for controlling the guards' daily life. The "reprimands of the Communists" issued by the BBK Politotdel in 1939-1940 ranged from 'selling the Trotskyite books' to concealment either of 'the Trotskyite biases,' or of 'the social origins;' 'deviation from the class line,' 'drunkenness,' 'debauchery,' and 'low morale' (bytovoe razlozhenie.)[648]

The statistics of the Political Section of the BBK from 1939 shows that among the *BBK* communists very few belonged to the engineering and technical staff, or to the administrative elite of the camp subsections. As a rule, only the employees of the Third Department, political instructors of the guards, the commanders of VOKHR units, and the instructors of the *Politodel* belonged to the Communist party. The medical staff, technical specialists, and workers it seems in their majority they didn't join the party.

As anywhere else in the country, 'cultural construction' was accompanied by the repressions of the "ideological enemies." Apart from the 'counter-revolutionairies,' this definition referred to the community of the believers. Even in the summer 1937 in *Tunguda* special settlement (around 1500 inhabitants) a strong religious community of the Baptists existed. The club was closed, the children were brought up according to

[645] RGANI, f. 214, op. 1, d. 108, p. 14.
[646] RGANI, f. 214, op. 1, d. 108, p. 226.
[647] RGANI, f. 214, op. 1, d. 57, p. 15.
[648] Garf, f. 9414, op. 3a, d. 1, p. 10.

the religious rules. According to the reporter who visited this settlement, the elders used various means to instill and preserve the religious beliefs among the representatives of younger generations: starting from the threats of expulsion from the community to the economic measures, such as deprivation of food for smaller children, who were also prohibited to go to school. The corruption within the economic enterprises of the special settlements, agricultural artels, failures and incompetence of the Soviet authorities were used by the elders as a convincing argument of inadequacy of the Soviet doctrine.[649]

Sometimes religious leaders pretended to submit to the Soviet authorities and taught their religious doctrines under the guise of the Soviet propaganda. As a rule, this happened during the anti-religious celebrations, such as an "anti-Easter day." On the day of a religious holiday of Trinity on June 20, 1937, for example, the communists organized the dances for youth in the club. They waited until the beginning, then locked the doors, so that "the youth, excited after dances," could not leave the club, and started anti-religious propaganda. However, soon it was converted into the preaching due to the intervention of the believers.[650]

Apart from the Baptists, Orthodox bishops enjoyed great popularity in the BBK settlements. However, in the course of the executions of the 'Great Terror' of 1937-1938, together with the prominent Russian religious leaders[651] all the Karelian rural bishops and church officers were exterminated.[652] The same happened to the imprisoned Russian intelligentsia of the *Solovki* prison camp, which by its intense

[649] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 83, June 20, 1937, p. 2.
[650] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 83, June 20, 1937, p. 2.
[651] Such as Orthodox bishop Aleksii Voronezksy, Damian Kurskii, Nikolai Tamborsky, Petr Samarskii, the chief of the Baptist church of the USSR V. Kolesnikov and a range of the Catholic priests. I. Chukhin, *Karelia—37: ideologiya I praktika terrora* (Petrozavodsk : State University, 1999), pp. 124-125.
[652] Interview with N. M. Ermolovich, a correspondent of the republican newspaper *Kurjer Karelii.* Petrozavodsk, May 2006.

cultural and intellectual life in many respects contradicted Soviet officialdom through bringing culture to the public which was banned in the country.[653]

Having exterminated those who by their sole existence provided an alternative to the Soviet 'cultural construction,' the authorities were powerless against the constant dissemination of the camp habits, culture, philosophy and folklore of the criminals, that finally reached its peak of popularity in the country in the 1960s -1970s. In the 1930s, many of Soviet cultural-educative institutions at the outskirts of the BBK, such as the club in *Kyargozero* settlement, instead of serving as citadels of Soviet culture, became the outposts of criminality. The club opened rarely and always around 10-11 p.m. The bandits and the hooligans broke in, 'terrorized the youth, and instigated the fights.'[654] Similar occurrences took place in the clubs in *Shoivani* and *Povenets* in May 1938.[655] The criminal cases, instigated on the incidents that took place during such occasions, (for they frequently ended in violence) shed light on how the communication between the criminal clans and the local inhabitants was established. Instead of Soviet cultural activists, the criminals took the initiative at kolkhoz youth parties, singing *blatnie* songs, organizing dances, and so on. [656]

Still, unlike many other industrial enterprises, based on forced labour, the BBK provided not only its hired staff, but also prisoners and the special settlers with a wide range of cultural activities, many of which it had inherited from rich cultural and intellectual life of the *Solovki* prison camp during the 1920s.[657] Close proximity to

[653] For example, during the concerts Sergey Rakhmaninov was played under the guise of Pyotr Chaikovsky, not speaking of endless private evenings and discussions devoted to rejected by the Soviet culture intellectuals and works of art. Yu. Chirkov, *A bylo vse tak,* p. 133. In 1937, with the extermination of the most part of its intelligentsia *Solovki* ceased to exist as a prominent cultural center and was turned into a special regime prison (STON).
[654] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 92, August 18, 1937, p. 3.
[655]NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 11, February 1, 1938, p. 2; issue 47, May 15, 1938, p. 4.
[656] Arkhiv MVD, f. 73, op. 01.
[657]See prisoners' accounts of their impressions from visiting academic lectures and theatre performances in the 1930s: *GULAG v Karelii,* p. 84; Y. Chirkov, *A bylo vse tak* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991); V. Nikitina, *Dom oknami na zakat.*

Leningrad and Moscow ensured that its 'forced labour contingents' included academics, intellectuals, and artistic troupes which gave professional performances.

3. Artistic Life in the GULAG

In the 1930s the prtisoners' amateur artistic activity (*samodeatelnost)* gave birth to professional theatrical and musical establishments in the camps.

Cultural policy of the Soviet authorities promoted Russian and European literature, drama and music, and set out the project of bringing 'high culture' to the remotest places of the Soviet Union. In the Soviet labour camps theatres, operetta troupes, symphony orchestras, and multiple amateur performing groups were established under the auspices of the KVO.

Amateur theatre and other kinds of amateur artistic activity were popular during the entire Soviet period. Tradition of people's amateur performances dates back to pre-revolutionary times, the end of the nineteenth century. But the term got imbued with new significance in Soviet era. "Self-activity," *samodeyatelnost* was claimed by the Soviet trade union movement as the embodiment of the spirit of autonomous working class and its values.[658]

According to the basic regulations of the prisoners' amateur artistic activity, only the plays approved by the Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs (*Glavlit*) and by the *Glavrepetkom* could be staged in the camps. Additionally, in the camps the major part of the repertoire was supposed to consist of the plays on the 'local economic and daily life material.' According to the official regulation,

Every theatrical production should mobilize the prisoners for labour, and criticize loafers, shirkers, and criminal traditions. The repertoire should be carefully

[658] L. Mally, *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State, 1917-1938* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000) p. 23.

reviewed by the KVO chief, by the representative of the party organization, and by the head of the camp subsection. Any performances of the prisoners outside the camp zone and for the hired staff are banned as well as the participation of the hired staff and their relatives in the prisoners' amateur artistic activity.[659]

While amateur artistic activity (*samodeyatelnost*) was flourishing in the camps from the early 1920s, the first large camp theatres were created in 1933-1934. The establishment of the majority of professional musical and dramatic theatres took place at the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s when the representatives of artistic intelligentsia, as a rule sentenced according to the 58th article of the Soviet Criminal Code (the so-called 'political' crimes) started to arrive in camps in large numbers. In 1937-1938 the repressions within the artistic milieu of the country's best theatrical and musical establishments took place on a mass scale. The staff of an entire artistic institution could be executed or sent to the camp in the course of the NKVD campaign of liquidating the 'anti-Soviet 'counter-revolutionary plot,' or a 'terrorist organization.[660] The majority of camp artistic centres were created as a result of the z/k initiative and financed through the camps' budget.

Prior to establishment of the Theatre of Music and Drama in *Vorkutlag* (*Vorkutinsky Muzdramteatr*) amateur performing groups were periodically created. Its first director, Boris Mordvinov, was a pupil of Konstantin Sergeevich Stanislavsky and

[659] *GULAG, 1918-1960* (Moscow: MFD, 2002) p. 125.
[660] For example, during the rehearsals of "Traviata" in *Maglag* it was found out that the male voices in the quire were lacking, the theatre patron Alexandra Gridasova (the wife of the *Dalstroy* chief consoled the stage director: "Don't worry, we are just expecting an entire Esthonian capella from Tomsk." I. Varpahovskaya, "Iz vospominanii Kolymskoi Traviati," in *Teatr Gulaga,* p. 76. Of course, not always an entire troupe was exterminated, as it happened with the *Rustaveli* theatre in Tbilisi in 1937where all male performers, involved in the investigation, were shot, and only three female members of the troupe were sentenced for the camp imprisonement. T. Tsulukidze, "Kukolnaia Tragikomedia," in *Teatr Gulaga,* p. 34. The same refers to the staff of a Polish jazz band. After the German invasion of Poland they fleed to the Soviet Union with the musical instruments in their arms to be arrested by the Soviet border troops and transferred to the labour camp.

Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko. At the beginning of the war he was arrested and sentenced for the "counter-revolutionary" crime. Prior to his arrest he headed the Department of the Dramatic Art in Moscow conservatory, and from 1936 to 1940 worked as the chief director of the *Bolshoi* theatre.[661] While working on common works, he met many professional actors. He sent a proposal to the camp chief to establish a theatre. This proposal, as many others, coincided with the interests of the administrators, proponents of the Soviet panem et circenses policy in the fulfillment of the economic plans.[662] In *Sevzerdorlag* a chief of the medical personnel in the local clinic, an ardent lover of drama, along with several other enthusiasts got in touch with the KVCh to organize a theatre.[663]

In the theatre of *Uhchtpechlag* (opened in 1936, patronized by the *Ukhtpechlag* chief Iosema Moroz) a symphonic orchestra was organized the same year by an ex-conductor of the *Bolshoi* theatre V. Kaplun-Vladimirskii.[664] To staff the troupe of a newly established theatre camp the administrators looked for musicians, actors, and artists among the prisoners on the periphery of the camp subsections. Among others, they recruited into the camp orchestra Boris Shiffers and Boris Krein, the violinist and the conductor from the *Bolshoi* Theatre, Oleg Rassadin, a pianist from Moscow, and a number of the graduates of Moscow and Berlin conservatories.[665] The singers of the *Mariinsky* Theatre of Opera and Ballet, of the Moscow opera theatre, singers from the central broadcasting were also included into the theatrical troupe. Along with

[661] Markova, *Gulagovskie taini osvoenia severa,*[The Mysteries of the Gulag Expansion on the North] 2001, p. 112.
[662] E. Kotlyar, "Faust" v ITL," in *Teatr Gulaga: Vospominania, ocherki* (Moscow: Memorial, p. 1995), p. 47.
[663] N. Tsulukidze, "Kukolnaia Tragikomedia," in *Teatr GULAGa,* p. 34.
[664] A. Kaneva, *Gulagovskyii teatr Uhti* [The Gulag Theatre of Ukhta] (SIktivkar: Komi kniznoe izdatelstvo, 2001), p. 24
[665] A. Kaneva, p. 26.

professional actors, they staffed the troupe with informers, whom it was impossible to get rid of later.[666]

World-class artists, directors, and dancers were employed in the theatrical institutions of the GULAG. The chief of the main club of the Management of the North-Eastern Camps a nobleman Oleg Dolgorukov was a graduate of the Los-Angeles conservatory.[667] In *Karlag* the great share of the concerts was performed by the representatives of the Italian vocal school, and pianists educated in Paris.[668] In 1943 a private tailor of the Romanian king Mihai worked as the costumes designer for operatic performances in one the camps.

Classical music enjoyed a great popularity in the camps. For example, in 1941 in the repertoire of *Sevurallag* orchestra concert Frederick Chopin, Robert Schumann, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart were played along with the marches of the Soviet composers, and songs from the popular movies.[669] At the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s the programs of the concerts included musical compositions by Claud Debussy, Ference Liszt, Pablo de Sarasate, Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, Antonin Dvorak, Johann Brahms, Fritz Kreisler, Franz Schubert, Hector Berlioz, Edward Grieg and Maurice Ravel. Russian composers, especially Pyotr Chaikovsky, Ilja Glazunov, and Alexandre Borodin were also very popular. [670] Apart from regular productions of theatrical plays, operas, operettas, and symphonic concerts, mixed performances were popular. They combined Soviet and European productions. In their most part the camp concerts were a motley collection of genres, combining classical ballet intermingling with musicals, operettas, opera arias, Gypsy and folk

[666] E. Kotlyar, "Faust v ITL," in *Teatre Gulaga,* p. 47.
[667] A. Kozlov, *Ogni lagernoi rampi* [The Camp Footlights] (Moscow: Raritet, 1991), p. 35.
[668] Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 72, p. 18.
[669] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1436, p. 5.
[670] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1441, p. 22.

dances.[671]The motley composition of the performances resulted from the mixed character of the artistic troupes: musical comedy, drama, and operetta.

Artistic activity in the camps was subjected to the meticulous control of the NKVD. As in any other institution outside of the barbed wire, the selection of the repertoire was carried out by the Artistic Council, which in the camps consisted of eight or ten members. It always included the chief of the Political Department, the editor of the local newspaper and the prisoners of the theatrical troupe."[672] In the Central Theatre of the BBK NKVD not only an official from the Cultural-Educative Department was always present during the rehearsal, but also an NKVD officer from the Third Section.[673] According to the information from the Magadan Theatre, an official approval of the theatrical production had to bear not only the signature of a camp censor, but also the ones of an NKVD officer and a representative of the Political Section of *Dalstroy.* [674] Still, with the exception of the years 1937 and 1939[675] in the remote camps due to the absence of the centralized control, certain independence of the camp bosses and the ignorance of the hired staff, the censorship was less strict than in the central theatres of the country, and more freedom of artistic productions was allowed.

The all-time favorite operetta in the camps was Imre Kalman's "Silva." *"*Countess Maritza," "Die Baiadere" and "The Circus Princess" were also frequently staged, as well as Rudolf Frimls' "Rose-Mary.*"* Early Soviet operettas such as "Wedding in Malinovka" (first staged in 1937), also repeatedly staged in the camps,

[671] Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 72, p. 7.
[672] E. Kotlyar, "Faust in the ITL," p. 48.
[673] V. Dvorzezky, "Puti Bolshih etapov,"[The Grand Routes] in *Teatr GULAGa,* p. 18.
[674] A. Kozlov, *Ogni Lagernoi Rampi,* (Moscow: Raritet, 1991) p. 70.
[675] In 1937, following the turn towards the repressive policy in the country the NKVD surveillance over camp theatres intensified. The Third Departments launched the search for "enemies of the people" within artistic establishments. This campaign resulted in a range of repressive operations. A. Kaneva, *GULAGovskii teatr Ukhti,* (Siktivkar: Komi kniznoe izdatelstvo, 2001) p. 34.

presented Vienna style adapted to the Russian village, *derevenskaia operetta* or "rustic Viennese." In general Soviet operetta as a genre developed in emulation of the European tradition.

The most popular operas in the Northern camps were "Carmen," "Rigoletto," "Traviata," "Othello," and "Tosca." The list of most frequently staged theatrical plays was headed by "The Mistress of the Inn," "The Servant of Two Masters" by Carlo Goldoni, "A Curious Accident," "Le Tartuffe," and "The Imaginary Invalid" by Jean-Batist Molière, "Intrigue and Love" by Friedrich Schiller, William Shakespear's "Twelth Night," Honore Balzac's "Eugenia Grandet," and "Maria Tudor" by Victor Hugo. [676]

During their visits to *Uchtpechlag* high ranked GULAG officials issued daily orders in which they stated which European or Russian plays and musical pieces they wished to include into the concert programs. Thus, in 1937 "Intrigue and Love," "A Curious Accident" and few other plays were repeatedly staged, revealing the preferences of the GULAG bosses. Sometimes the programs included the excerpts from the operas. "The Barber of Seville," "Traviata," "Pique Dame" were especially popular in this respect.[677]

From the end of 1930s the scantiness of the Soviet dramaturgy manifested itself poignantly. A tension arose between the necessity to rely on the "proper" repertoire and the unavoidable dullness that would result from such attempts.[678] As a rule, attempts to rely on the amateur artistic activity inside the camps failed :

The plays for the amateur performing groups, that have been composed by the z/k themselves, can not be staged due to their ideological intemperance. For example,

[676] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1441, 1435, etc.
[677] A. Kaneva, p. 32.
[678] Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1434, p. 136.

the z/k Zuev-Ordynez offered his plays, verses, and ditties. However, they either cultivate romantics of the criminal lifestyle or deal with sexual themes.[679]

A stunning irony of camp artistic life was that jazz, which was banned in the Soviet Union, flourished there. Although in the 1930s jazz was popular in the Soviet Union, periodic anti-jazz campaigns based on labeling it as a "bourgeois decadent music" took place. The first anti-jazz campaign took place in 1928. The next one followed the "Red Jazz age" (1932-1936).

Among the arrestees who performed jazz in the camps world famous performers such as Eddie Rosner were not infrequent. One of the most famous variety (*Estrada*) singer, Vadim Kozin, was arrested in 1943 and spent most of his subsequent life in Magadan. Jazz bands were created in many camps. In 1941 in *Riblag*, for example, a band was organized by an ex-wife of Mihkail Tukhachevsky, Natalia Sats.

It has already been mentioned that from the beginning of the war mass implementation of portable movie theatres was launched in the camps. Along with the Soviet patriotic films Western movies were screened. At the end of the 1930s and at the beginning of the 1940s "The Great Waltz" (1938, Julien Duvivier) and "Charley's Aunt" (1941, Archie Mayo) were screened in the majority of the camps. In *Karlag* the prisoner, inspired by the latter movie, obtained its script and staged the play. [680]

The KVO reports from the camps demonstrate that the repertoire of the theatrical performances in different camps was almost identical. It mirrored what was staged in the country at large, and, in particular, what was staged in the central theatres of the country. As a repertoire of any theatre outside the barbed wire, it combined

[679] Garf, f. 9414, op 1, d. 1434, p. 136.
[680] E. Kuznetsova, *Karlag: Po obe storoni kolychki* [Karlag: On Both Sides of the Barbed Wire] (Surgut: Defis, 2001) p. 179.

Soviet works with Russian and European classics. The balance between them slightly changed over time. With the beginning of the war the share of the Russian classical heritage in the repertoire significantly grew. But the 'Chekist' themes and aesthetics of the revolutionary sacrifice remained its integral part, so the European classics (Carlo Goldoni, Lope de Vega, and William Shakespeare) were staged along with popular Soviet plays such as "Platon Krechet."[681]

One of the most popular Soviet plays staged in the camps during the second half of 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s was Kosntantin Trenev's "Lyubov Yarovaia." First it was performed in Malyi Theatre in 1926. The action of this play takes place during the civil war in the province, and discloses a Manichean world of good and evil. The play was soon taken up by amateurs theatres, although its popularity did not peak before mid 1930s.[682] Another very popular play, also frequently staged in the camps, was "Platon Krechet" composed by the Ukrainian writer Platon Korneichuk. The play is devoted to the life of the Soviet intelligentsia during the 1930s. It propagates collective values and self-sacrifice. Its premiere took place in 1936. "Someone Else's Child" by Vassily Shkvarkin, "At the Headquarters" by Nikolai Gorev, "Fame" by Victor Gusev, and "Kiss-me-quick" by Isaak Levinson were among few Socialist Realist plays which acquired popularity in many camps.

The repertoires of the camp theaters reflect a process of rediscovery of Russian classics in literature that started from the mid 1930s.[683] In many camps the predominant place in the repertoire was occupied by the plays of Alexandre Ostrovsky. For example, in the first quarter of 1941 the repertoires of many camp theatres contained his plays

[681] A. Kozlov, *Teatr na Severnoi zemle* [The Theatre in Northern Land] (Magadan, 1992), pp. 37-41.
[682] L. Mally, p. 97.
[683] From 1936 there was a tremendous popularity of works by L. Tolstoy, A. Ostrovsky, and M. Gorky. D. Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism. Stalinist Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002) p. 221.

"The Forest," "Poverty is No Vice," "Brisk Corner," "The Inspector General," and "Without Dowry" along with Nikolai Gogol's "Inspector General" and "Marriage," Maxim Gorky's "Lower Depths," Anton Chekhov' "The Bear" and Alexandre Griboedov's "Woe from Wit."[684]

The camp left its imprint upon artistic productions. In many camps there was no way of obtaining librettos for staging operas and operettas. Singers and musicians had to restore a clavier and libretto of every opera by memory. For example, during the years 1936-1937 in the newly created *Uchtpechlag* theatre the clavier and librettos for the productions of "Silva," "Roz-Mary," "Mariza," "Bayadera," "Kolombina," "Othello," "Traviata," "Rigoletto," "Carmen," and "Il Pagliacci" were restored by memory.[685] Only in exceptional cases, such as in the case of the production of "Faust" in the theater of *Maglag* the libretto was obtained with the help of the hired staff.[686]

Due to its nature the 'camp' art was an unavoidable mixture of professional performance and amateur activity. Many camp theatres, absorbing professional artists from different corners of the Gulag empire, soon became cultural centres that were no inferior to the best metropolitan theatres. On the other hand, a large share of positions in the camp troupes was occupied by talented, but untrained individuals with a peasant or working class background. These prisoners, sentenced for criminal offences, received their first training in the camps.

It was very difficult to obtain the material for the costumes and the decorations for the performances. Sometimes it was provided for by the camp authorities but often the prisoners sew the costumes from whatever they had at their disposal.

[684] See the reports from Norillag, Kraslag, ITL Solikamstroya, Unzlag, and Usollag dated the first quarter of 1941. Garf, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1441, 1434, pp. 160, 192, d. 1436, pp. 165, 237.
[685] A. Kaneva, p. 26.
[686] E. Kotlyar, p. 47.

Still, even in those conditions there was a space for creative energy of the stage directors and the designers. For example, the costumes for "Traviata" staged in the theatre of *Maglag* were designed in the style taken from the Renouir's portraits and the action was shifted to the second half of the 19th century.[687] In the production of "Othello" in the first half of the 1940s Alexander Pushkin' interpretation of the protagonist's actions predominated. Not the play of passions, but his credulity was seen as the cause of the tragedy.[688]

The majority of the hired chiefs of the KVO, the directors of the camp theatres and the political instructors, who were supposed to provide the theatre with 'ideological and political guidance' were uneducated individuals. In their most part the KVO chiefs were recruited among the former camp guards, the metalworkers, and the typists.[689]

Apart from few exceptions, such as Eduard Berzin, the first deputy head of *Dalstroy,* who graduated from the Berlin Royal artistic school and Lazar Kogan, the chief of the White –Sea Canal construction, the camp chiefs and GULAG bosses who patronized artistic establishment were also not spoiled by an excess of education..[690] The camp elite with pre-revolutionary roots were exterminated in the course of the repressive opetations within the NKVD in the course of 1937-1939. The Gulag bosses of the 1940s had even more modest cultural and educational background.

The most famous aert patrons of this time were Ivan Fyodorovich Nikishov (the chief of the *Dalstroy* trust in the Kolyma region from 1939 to 1948) and his wife Alexandra Gridasova. She organized an amateur artistic group, *kultbrigada* in the camp centre, Magadan, which later, in 1943, was granted a status of a professional theatre. With primary education and the profession of a metalworker, she was recruited into the

[687] I. Varpahovskaia, "Iz vospominanii Kolimskoi Traviati," in *Teatr Gulaga,* p. 77.
[688] A. Kozlov, 1992*,* p. 35.
[689] A. Kaneva, p. 53.
[690] A. Kozlov, 1992, p. 6.

GULAG in the course of the propaganda campaign targeted at the members of the Communist Youth Leage(*Komsomolsky priziv*). Soon she became a powerful GULAG official.

The phenomenon of art patronage in the Gulag can be conceived of as a unique Russian experience. It had deep roots in Russian tradition. The direct link can be drawn from theatrical troupes consisting of serves, created by art-loving ambitious landowners in their estates in the 19th century, to the theatres in the camps And at the construction sites. Their chiefs also competed with each other and liked to show off, as did the patrons of the arts from the Russian merchant class. During their visits to the neighboring camps they took not only their large escort but also their "court" theatre.

The elite of *Vorkutlag, Pechorlag, Intlag,* and *Sevzerdorlag* for example met in the city of *Siktivkar* under the pretext of discussing the results of the socialist competition and exchanging the work experience. Brief formalities were followed by a theatrical performance of "someone's theatre" and informal closed banquets with the actors.[691]

The performances of camp theatrical troupes were shown to highly positioned guests inside the country and abroad. For example, in May 1944 a performance was staged in Magadan for the vice-president of the USA on his visit to *Kolyma*.[692]

Theatrical life in the camps possessed its own 'court' rules and rituals. In some theatrical establishments, performances by the prisoners were not supposed to be followed by applauding. The seats in the theatres were occupied according to the camp hierarchy. The performance was never started if the camp chief had not arrived. If he was not supposed to show up, his seat and the seats reserved for his family members

[691] A. Kaneva, p. 113.
[692] A. Kozlov, 1991, p. 69.

remained vacant.[693] The reviews of successful productions in the local newspapers never mentioned the names of the director and actors/musicians if they were prisoners.[694] In the Central Theatre of the BBK NKVD first two rows were reserved for the hired staff, the rest could be taken by the prisoners.

The camp chiefs never missed the chance to say "my theatre," and "my actors" showing them to the chiefs of lower ranks. Still, Oleg Volkov was right to argue that the camp theatres were not established just to entertain the camp administrators. These theatres were also created as a proof to the progressive nature of the Soviet regime.[695]

Although the local camp masters did enjoy almost unlimited power in the camp, the basic regulations of the camp cultural life originated from the centre. They were informed by the idea of "reforging" of professional criminals (*perekovka*).

Some of the patrons of the camp artistic centres in the 1930s, such as Eduard Berzin and Lazar Kogan, were ardent supporters of this idea. And their generous support of the camp artistic establishments was not just a whim, the desire to obtain a subject of pride at the centres of their camp empires, but also was motivated by certain idealism. Although the z/k artists sometimes were fully dependent on the whims of their "masters," [696] they still were the subjects of the Soviet state. As all other Soviet citizens, they had their own "production output plan." It preconceived to give certain number of performances for the lowest camp staff and the prisoners.

An Insight Into the Mystery of the GULAG Art: The Central Theatre of the BBK NKVD

The Central Theatre of the BBK NKVD in Medvezhegorsk was one of the most cherished cultural institutions in the Karelian GULAG of the 1930s. In Karelian camp

[693] A. Kaneva, *Gulagovsky Teatr Ukhti,* p. 86.
[694] I. Varpahovskaya, p. 78.
[695] O. Volkov, *Pogruzenie vo tjmu,* p. 286.
[696] Memorial, f. 2, op.1, d. 72, p. 19.

system, as in many other camps, the creation of the theater was a spontaneous act, initiated by the "counter-revolutionary" prisoners, who prior to their arrest belonged to the cultural elite of the country. It started with the *Solovki* theatre that was created in spring 1923. [697] Two theatrical troupes of the early *Solovki:* "Trash," established on 28 February, and the theatre of "Our Own" in April 1925 played a popular hit of those years, "At Night Marseilles is All Astir" and borrowed dancing numbers from the repertoire of the "Bat" and the "Crooked Mirror," the best pre-Revolutionary cabarets. Soon they were attacked for the banality of couplets, for low artistic standards and for indulging the tastes of the bourgeois spectator. Partly it happened because the theatres of miniatures of satire and the like, were not amenable to control, even though the texts were checked before performance. It was impossible to predict a compere's responses, the behaviour of the actors and the reaction of the audience: all this aroused suspicion. The main motive of closing down "Our Own" (the theatre of the prison camp folklore, an artistic group of criminals) was that its participants 'kept cultivating their own habits, jargon and ethics,' thereby corrupting the actors and the spectators.

In 1929 the main part of the *Solovetsky* professional troupe was moved to Kem, to become USLON's Central Theatre. The audience also changed, mainly consisting of the clerks and officers of the board's expanding administrative offices and the town's free population. In 1931 it offered a concert performance of Pyotr Chaikovsky's "Eugene Onegin" to the accompaniment of a symphony orchestra under the baron of A. Kenel and the scene between the Pretender and Marina from Pushkin's "Boris Godunov."

It produced satirical plays such as "The Inspector General" by Nikolai Gogol, "The Swindler," "The Swindler" by Vasily Shkvarkin and "Souffle" by Boris

[697] N. B. Kuzyakina, "A bil li 'folklornii' teatr v GULAGe?" Internet: http://www.ruthenia.ru/folktee/CYBERSTOL/GULAG/Kuzyakina.html.

Romashov. Among other things it staged vaudevilles in the style of "The Princess Turandot," as staged at the Vakhtangov Theatre.[698]

With the establishment of the Board for the Construction of the White-Sea Baltic Canal in Medvezhya Gora (an earlier name for Medvezhegorsk) the theatre was moved there. The main part of the *Solovki* troupe moved to Medvezhegorsk from Kem.[699]

In 1934 on the first night of the week the theatre staged a drama, on the second an opera and on the third an operetta. On the fourth night one could watch a ballet, on the fifth the stage was given over to the symphony orchestra and on the sixth to the theatre of miniatures and variety, while on the seventh a new film was shown.[700]

Solovki theatre still existed in the 1930s. Directed by Alexei Kurbas, it staged dramas and operettas, possessed three orchestras, two troupes (dramatic and opera ones), concert brigade, Gypsy band and a propaganda brigade.[701]These transfers and structural changes were accompanied by the evolution of the Karelian GULAG theatre from the "court" theatres of *Solovki* traditions, when the theatre, apart from its other functions, was a satire on camp life and work, to the "state" theatre of Medvezhegorsk.

For example, one of the satirical sketches performed in 1924, was openly directed against the prisoners' exploitation. Its object were the work supervisors, recruited from the prisoners of Georgian origins. "It started with the scenic trick: the actors, disguised as Georgians, waving sticks, rushed on to the stage from the auditorium. They imitated dragging performing actors to the regular work storm ("udarnik"). The trick looked so credible that the public believed it. Some of the petty

[698] N. Kuziakina, *Theatre in the Solovki Prison Camp,* p. 99.
[699] The year 1933 was also an important benchmark in the history of the theatrical life in Daltstroy in Kolyma. It was the time of the creation of the first theatrical troupes and the construction of the theatre. Kozlov, *Ogni lagernoi rampi,* p. 12.
[700] N. Kuziakina, *Theatre in the Solovki Prison Camp,* p. 121.
[701] Y. Brodsky, *Solovki,* p. 454.

criminals rushed to hide, and the camp chief Eikhmanns stood up and shouted indignantly: who permitted *udarnik*? To hell with *rabsila*!" [702]

Additinally, at the beginning of the 1920s the *Solovki* Theatre presented productions which were already banned in the country. For example, operetta "The Secrets of Harlem," repetitively staged at *Solovki* had been banned by the Soviet censors as "obscene farce."[703]Still, during the first years of its existence, even the Central Theatre of the White Sea-Baltic Canal, headed by Dmitry Vladimirovich Uspensky and Yakov Davydovich Rappoport, still largely depended on the tastes of its patrons.[704]

The changes in the repertoire reflected its shift "to the left" as it happened to the repertoires of many theatres in the Soviet Union. In the fifteen years of the existence of theatres of the *Solovki* and the White Sea Baltic Combine, nearly all the forms known to the Russian stage were represented there. More and more place was given to the plays of the Russian and Soviet playwrights (primarily Alexander Afinogenov, Alexander Korneichuk, Vasily Shkavrkin, and Viktor Gusev).

Avant-garde, pre-revolutionary cabarets and café chantant as well as farce and *balagan*, intermingled with the folk art (songs, dances) and the pathos of Soviet *agitka* were abandoned. Despite the fact that by 1937 the theatre still staged dramas, comedies, vaudevilles, and Estrada concerts, it was subjected to intense surveillance on the question of its following "clear political line in serving the Soviet spectator."[705]

[702]V. Dvorzetsky, "Puti Bolshikh etapov," in *Teatr GULAGa,* p. 18.
[703] V. Dvorzetsky, "Puti Bolshikh etapov," in *Teatr GULAGa,* p. 18.
[704] D. V. Uspensky occupied the post of the BBLag chief from July 2, 1933 to July 10, 1936. Y. Rappoport, BBK chief from 1933 to 1935. Supposedly his tastes were formed when he was a student in Derpt (Tartu) University in Estonia, and largely influenced by the Esthonian *Vanemuine* theatre, a typical European urban theatre, producing everything, from psychological drama to operetta, opera, and the concerts. Kuziakina, p. 109.
[705] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 8/43, p. 95-99.

In 1936 the repertoire included the following operas: Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's "The Tsar's Bride," "Carmen," by George Bizet, and "Lantern Wedding" by Jaques Offenbach. It staged "The Inspector General," by Nikolai Gogol, "Brisk Corner" by Alexander Ostrovsky, "Krechinsky's Wedding" by Altxandre Sukhovo-Kobilin, "The Lower Depths" by Maxim Gorky, and Soviet plays such as Aleksandr Korneichuk's "Platon Krechet" (1934), Viktor Gusev's "Glory," and "Comrade's Wife." The troupe performed in the schools of the settlements of Pindushi and Nadvoizi and pioneer camps.[706] Apart from its regular artistic performances, the Central Theatre ran movies three times a day. It offered a variety of Soviet and popular foreign films, such as "Big Waltz,"(1940), "Invisible Man"(1936) "Professor Mamlock"(1938), "City Lights," (1940). Finally, it hosted carnivals, festivals of the kolkhoz youth and masked balls.[707]

The quality of artistic production of the BBK troupe was praised by its visitors, including prominent musicians.[708] The Central Theatre was the first to stage in Karelia in the 1930s such well-known operas, as "The Marriage of Figaro" and "Evgenii Onegin."[709] On March 5, 1936, during the celebration of the one year anniversary of one of the most cherished Central Theatre operatic productions, "Evgenii Onegin" it was proclaimed that more than 6000 spectators had visited this opera.[710] If in 1936 the theatre was visited by 149403 spectators, in 1938 this number increased to 216419.[711]

By the end of 1930s its management started to display a particular interest in young national Soviet playwrights. Following the broader trends in the artistic life in

[706] *GULAG v Karelii,* p. 136; NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 2/10, pp. 22, 27.
[707] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issues 25, February 26, 1936; June 19, 1940, p. 4; October 4, 1940, p. 4; November 30, 1937, p. 4.
[708] Mikhail Gnesin left a note after the concert in the BBK club on July 1, 1939. . Exhibition devoted to the BBK, Medvezhegorsk regional museum.
[709] NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 1/2, p.8.
[710] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 27, March 4, 1936, p. 4.
[711] *Gulag v Karelii,* p. 136; NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 2, January 4, .1939, p. 4.

the country, it staged the plays composed by Jewish, Byelorussian, Ukrainian, and Baltic playwrights. It also propagated the policy of "bringing the author closer to the theatre" which coincided with the call for creation of the theatre's indigenous repertoire. In 1939 it staged the play "At the Outpost" in close collaboration with its author, young Karelian writer Sergey Norin.[712] Despite frequent revisions of the repertoire, there was a number of productions which, being repetitively staged for several years, constituted its keystone. Among these were the plays "The Confrontation" by brothers Leonid and Petr Tur, "Poverty is No Vice," "The Servant of Two Masters," "Simple Girl" by Vasily Shkvarkin, operas "Evgenii Onegin," "Pique Dame," "Tsar's Bride," "Carmen," and "Tosca." The most popular plays were "The Confrontation," performed 30 times, and "Evgenii Onegin," performed 42 times.[713]

Although the primary task of any production as well as actors' play was "to convey to the public the social message, engraved in the work" following the canons of the "Soviet realist" art , [714] "classics" were to remain "classics," and "overplaying," readjusting or changing the script in order to comply with ideological demands of the current day was not welcome.

The review of "Pamela Giraud," (Honore de Balzac), staged in October 1937, states:

> To what extent does the play belong to its author if the text has been rewritten by the stage director? Despite relatively decent first three acts, one hardly can include the name of Balzac (even in the presence of a note 'edited for the stage by Zagorsky') into the program. The stage director made Balzac reason about social inequality and 'unification of the toiling masses' in the language of an outdated wall newspaper or a language of long forgotten '*sinjaja bluza*'(a genre of propagandistic theatrical performances in the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s)...The end of the play, when the protagonist turns out to be a rascal, and the maid and lackey, together with the old

[712] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 2, 4.01.1939, p. 4.
[713] NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 2, 4.01.1939, p. 4.
[714] A review of "Boris Godunov," staged in February 1937, NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 23, February 14, 1937, p. 4; Review on the production of "Dalekoe" by the popular Soviet playwright Afinogenov. NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 25, 26.02, 1936, p. 4.

Giraud couple proclaim the 'solidarity and unity of the working class,' has nothing in common with the Balzac and the original text of the play." [715]

In the 1930s, as in any other GULAG theatre, a large part of artistic troupe (primarily the stage director, the conductor of orchestra, the assistant to the director of the operatic productions, and most of the actors, singers, artists of the ballet, musicians, and painters) consisted of the prisoners.[716]

In contrast to the Central theatres of other GULAG enterprises, which were managed by the individuals without professional training[717] for many years, from 1933 to 1939, nearly as long as the theatre's life, the Central Theatre was managed by the first Russian compere, an experienced stage director of minor forms and author of operetta librettos Alexei Alexeyev (Livshits) (1887-1985). He had an eight-year term to serve under a non-political article. Discarding his lawyer's diploma, he started his career before the revolution in the theatre-cabarets if Odessa, Kiev and St-Petersburg. He appeared in Medvezhegorsk in 1933. The composition of the permanent artistic troupe was quite motley. It included experienced performers from the central theatres of the country.

Among prominent dramatic directors who worked in the Central Theatre in the 1930s were Sergey Taneev (a relative of the well-known composer), Igor Alander, Alexei Larionov, assistant stage director Vladimir Tsekhansky, who had worked with a team of documentary film makers in Moscow and other professionals. Ivan I. Vovk,

[715]NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* issue 109, October 12, 1937, p. 4.
[716] The document called "The record of the utilized z/k labourforce of the BBK Central Theatre" from the March and April 1936 displays that apart from the cleaning staff, 7 orchestra musicians, and 20 actors all others were prisoners including the director of the theatre, 3 concertmasters, 2 stage directors, two assistants to the stage director, 10 orchestra musicians and 30 actors. NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 1/6.
[717] Studies of other camp theatres in the 1930s display a staggering ignorance of their administrators and consequently, high rotation of the personnel. In the theatre of Ukhta during the first five years of the its existence, ten directors were fired for drunkenness, "liaisons with the z/k, and incompetence." Among them were a metalworker, a camp guard, an NKVD sergeant, a typist, a Chekist, and "an adventurer." A. Kaneva, *Gulagovskii Teatr Ukhti,* pp. 52-53.

a talented chief stage designer got a ten year imprisonment in 1929. For several years he worked in Medvezhegorsk, as well as the Leningrad artist and the gifted cartoonist Mikhail M. Molodiashin. The theatre orchestra was maintained at a high level by Boleslav S. Pshibyshevsky (a relative of the Polish writer Stanislaw Przybyszewsky), who before his arrest had worked in the arts sector of the People's Commissariat of Education in Moscow, Raisa Evers, Leonid Teplitsky, and Pavel Grinberg; excellent professional singers were available such as Elly Rosenshtrauch, Sonia Tuchner, Leonid Privalov and others.

The troupe also included amateur and non –professional actors.[718] The majority of professional actors came from Moscow and St-Petersburg and were sentenced according to article 58, starting from "corruption of the army and the fleet (homosexuality) to "involvement in counter-revolutionary organizations."[719]

For a prisoner a position in the Central Theatre was always shaky and insecure. Personal relations mattered a lot. Alexei Kurbas, who staged rather bold productions without any outward negative consequences, [720] was dismissed from the post of the director of the Central Theater because of the personal dislike and rivalry of Alexeev.[721]

At the beginning of the 1930s the barrack for the actors also housed the staff of the "Perekovka" newspaper, including many prominent literary figures, philosophers,

[718] Sergey Vasilyevich Zhbankov and Fyodor Oskarovich Peltzer, permanent members of the troupe, were registered as "state employees" on their camp cards. The first one, a club worker, coordinator from Ukraine, was imprisoned for five years on the basis of article 116. The latter, a German from Moscow, an actor of the amateur drama circle was also sentenced according to the "daily crime" article of the Soviet penal code. After early release on March 13, 1938 he left the BBK for Kazan. Arkhiv MVD KASSR, records of the BBK prisoners.

[719] For a more or less inclusive list of actors constituting the core of the Central Theatre troupe in 1935-1937 see N. Kuziakina, p. 123.

[720] A stage director of the Central Theatre from November 1934 to January 1935, an Ukrainian intellectual of the European type, had studied at Vienna and Lvov Universities. He staged productions in Kiev theatres before he was given a five-year sentence in the camps for participating in an underground nationalist organization according to the article 58 of the Soviet penal code (54 under the Ukrainian Code). The production of Bernard Show's "Devil's Disciple" by Alexei Kurbas in 1936 in the *Solovki* theatre included dialogs which were marked as defiant of the Soviet authorities even by the contemporaries. N. Kuzyakina, "Za Solovetskim Predelom," *Teatralnaia Zizn* 1993, no. 10, p. 30.

[721] N. Kuziakina, p. 126.

and scientists. Later the actors were accommodated in the dormitory. According to the rules of the residence, men and women resided separately, no contacts were allowed. Self-appointed monitors were responsible for the proper regime in the dormitory. [722] According to the rules, the failure to conform to the orders of the monitors resulted in expelling the guilty from the dormitory and sending them to the camp. But even the monitors were frequently accused of the "negligence of the duties."[723] The patterns of reaction on the part of the people varied from different ways of internalization of the ideology (as sometimes Alexeev himself did), to outward resistance and passive withdrawal.[724]

The major plague of the theatre was underfinancing. The tension between the director and the troupe was growing with the cuts in the budget in the second half of 1930s. Attempts at the compromise were followed by threats and punishments in the form of reprimands, loss of work days counted towards an early release, detention in the camp punishment cell and the expulsion to general works. [725] Most of the reprimands and punishments were based on the denunciatory reports of either members of the troupe, or the armed guards.[726]

In his order from May 13, 1937 the current BBK chief characterized the atmosphere within the theatre as "unhealthy." He stated that all the members were engaged in mutual help and responsibility, covering up each others' misdeeds.[727] Many of the hired actors hardly displayed more enthusiasm than the prisoners, [728] which was

[722] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/9, p. 23. At the end of 1937 more actors were transferred to the camp subsection. On December 7, 1937 an order was issued saying "since more time is spent on the way to the working place, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., the rehearsals hours were switched to 12p.m.-17 p.m. NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/9, p. 44.
[723] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/9, p. 4.
[724] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/9, p. 7.
[725]NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/9, pp. 2, 3, 4, 5. 10.
[726] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/9, pp. 3 ob, 51.
[727] NARK, f. 865,op. 1, d. 5/26, p. 34.
[728] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/9, p. 22.

quite understandable: in 1937 monthly salary of a hired actor amounted to just 350-500 rubles.[729] In Alexeev's words,

Despite the fact that during the meetings they proclaim intention to provide all possible financial and moral support to the theatre, in reality they not only fail to do so, but tend to spoil everything, to aggravate any problem, as though they are playing the roles from 'The Lower Depths' in real life.[730]

By the end of the 1930s the higher rates of the personnel turnover due to releases and dismissals of the actors made it difficult to make them stay on a contract basis. Sometimes the inability to compensate for the loss of qualified personnel resulted in the cancellation of operatic productions.[731]The situation was aggravated by the dismissals within the theatre in the course of the 'Great Terror.' Similar to what was going on in the theatrical institutions of other camps,[732] in 1937-1938 at least several prominent artistic figures of the Central Theatre were executed. [733]

During the year 1938, the best operas from the repertoire of the last year such as "Tosca" and "The Tsar's Bride" could not be staged. Instead of 73 actors there were only 33. Withdrawal of the actors, previously engaged in the main roles coincided with the inability to replace them. The major principle of the selection of the repertoire

[729] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/9, pp. 24, 32. Some artists received monthly salary up to 250 rubles, which equaled the salary of a type-writer, a guard, and a cleaner within the GULAG system at that time. NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/9, p. 40. The salary of a concertmaster was 450 rubles; the one of the hired director of the Central Theatre amounted to 797.50 rubles (688.85 rubles with tax deduction). NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 7/39, p. 1. Even these poor salaries were not paid on time. In February 1937 the administrators were struggling to pay the debts in salary for the years 1935. At the same time, under the pressure of the Combine leadership, the campaign was launched to "cut spendings as much as possible." NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 5/26, p. 7.
[730] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 2/9, p. 22.
[731] NARK, f. 865, op.1, d. 5/26, p. 1.
[732] In the theatre of Ukhta (the center of *Ukhtpechlag*) in 1937-1938 during the inspections of the theatre several "counter-revolutionary conspiracies" and multiple regime violations were revealed. A number of artists were shot and more than 60 z/k members of the artistic troupe were sent to the common work or transferred to other camps. A. Kaneva, *Gulagovskii Teatr Ukhti* (Siktivkar: Komi kniznoe izdatelstvo, 2001), pp. 45-46; in Magadan Theatre the search for "enemies of the people" also exerted a significant influence on the theatre's functioning and actors' lives. A. Kozlov, *Ogni Lagernoi Rampi* (Moscow: Raritet, 1992) p. 23.
[733] *Pominalnie spiski Karelii.*

became not 'what should be done,' but 'what can be done.' There were seven first rank actors, five second rank actors, five third rank actors and five fourth rank actors. This meant that only twelve actors were qualified professionals, ten others were amateur beginners, part of them having come from the amateur activity circles. The rest were first time on the stage. Besides, already prepared performances, such as "The Friendship," "Guilty Without Guilt," "Pamela Giraud" and the like had fallen out of the repertoire and there was no chance of staging them because of the absence of the actors for the main roles. The work on the plays "The Year 1918," "Port-Artur," "the Inspector General," "Woe from Wit," and "Quiet Flows the Don" was interrupted. Instead of planned 15 to 18 theatrical productions, only two: "The Servant of Two Masters" and "Poverty is No Vice" were staged. [734] The work was conducted in extremely difficult conditions. Apart from the rehearsals it was necessary to organize training for the actors."[735] "There is not a single pretty girl, not a single good-looking boy who could play contemporary Komsomol members."[736]

To solve this problem, the resolution the BBK chief prescribed to supply the theatre troupe with the z/k actors and to attract the free ones through an increase in their monthly salary."[737]

The final phase of the evolution of the Central Theatre of the BBK NKVD, its transformation into the "ordinary" Soviet theatre took place at the end of the 1930s. In 1939 the reorganization took place according to which the prisoners were to be removed from the drama and opera troupes; all such troupes as well the leading positions in the theatre had to be filled exclusively with the hired staff.[738]

[734] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 8/43, p. 95-99.
[735] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 8/43, p. 95-99.
[736] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 8/43, p. 118.
[737] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 8/43, p. 100.
[738] The prisoners were supposed to be sent by the KVO to the clubs of the local camp subsections. NARK, f. 865, op. 35, d. 2/4, p. 104.

The process of replacing the prisoner actors and musicians with the contracted staff at the end of the 1930s took place in the artistic establishments of other camps. In the camp theatre of Ukhta from the establishment of the theatre in 1934 up to 1939 there were very few hired actors. In 1942 already 30 members of the troupe were employed on a contract basis. Finally, a number of actors stayed at the camp theatres after their release as "attached to the camp" (*prikrelennie*).[739]

In 1940 the drive for economy seemed a plausible pretext and an order was issued which banned the practice of employing free actors in the camp theatre. In an attempt to save the Medvezhegorsk theatre in January 1941 it was handed over to Karelian-Finnish Republic as a Theatre of Musical Comedy.

The much diminished troupe was at Petrozavodsk when in June 1941, war broke out. The actors formed a concert brigade and turned up on Solovki. By then the prisoners had been removed to provide room for a naval cadet school and a naval base being built.[740]

The repertoire of the Republican Theatre of the Musical Comedy did not change: the productions of the musicals, Viennese rustic style operettas and comedy co-existed with operas and dramas.[741] In the pre-war season 1940-1941seven other theatres existed in Karelia, three of which: Republican Theatre of Russian drama, Finnish Dramatic Theatre (these two still exist), and Petrozavodsk puppet theatre were located in Petrozavodsk. Both Sortavala and Vyborg Drama Theatres were opened only in 1940. The last two were Kondopoga (organized in summer 1938) and Segeza portable kolkhoz-sovkhoz theatres. Work of these theatres varied with the quality of

[739] A. Kaneva, *Gulagovsky Teatr Ukhti,* p. 80.
[740] N. Kuziakina, *Theatre in the Solovki Prison Camp,* p. 128.
[741] From January to May 1941 the theatrical troupe performed 89 productions, the most successful being Stotgardt's operettas, "Roz-Mary" by Rudolf Friml, Nikolai Strelnikov's "Kholopka," Boris Alexandrov's "Wedding in Malinovka." In January 1941 the troupe was working at the "Rigoletto" and Trenev' "Lyubov Yarovaia." NARK, *Stalinskaia Trassa,* March 12, 1941, p. 4.

repertoire, lack of professionals, and absence of quarters. In 1941 on the premise of "weak artistic leadership and absence of the actors of the prime and first rates in the troupe" Segeza theatre was incorporated into Kondopoga one.[742]

After the beginning of the Great Patriotic War the theatre was one of two (along with *Kondopozskyi* theatre) which were not evacuated but continued to perform in Karelia.[743]Many of the released artists, conductors, and composers from St-Petersburg and Moscow, either afraid of losing the NKVD protection of for other reasons, remained in the theatre on a contract basis after their release. First of all, this refers to Leonid Teplitsky.[744] Liberated in 1933, he went to Leningrad. Being unable to get a registration there, he returned to Karelia and from June 1 1935 was employed as the chief conductor of Karelian Republican Symphony Orchestra of the House of the National Culture (later Karelian State Philharmonic). He was one of the creators and a chief conductor of a Karelian folk band *Kantele,* of Petrozavodsk music school and taught there from the moment of its creation in 1938 until his death. An entire generation of Karelian composers remember him as their teacher. Finally, he composed a number of productions for symphonic and brass bands on particular Karelian and Finnish themes.

Among the musicians of high professionalism who also stayed in the BBK after their liberation was Raisa Zherebtsova (Evers), a student at Leningrad Conservatory and in camp assistant to the conductor and choir-master, with the term of 3 years, turned up at Medvezhegorsk in 1935. She was sentenced according to the articles 58-10 and 58-11 of the Soviet penal code ("counter-revolutionary propaganda" and "participation

[742] E. Melentjev, "Dalshe bila voina…" in *Karelia,* № 60 (June, 2001); Internet: http://www.gov.karelia.ru/Karelia/760/27.html; accessed on September 16, 2006.
[743] E. Melentjev, "Dalshe bila voina…" in *Karelia,* № 60 (June, 2001); Internet: http://www.gov.karelia.ru/Karelia/760/27.html; accessed on September 16, 2006.
[744] See p. 31.

in the counter-revolutionary organizations.") In the BBK during the years 1936-1938 she staged the operas "Pique Dame," "The Tsar's Bride," "Tosca," "Cavalierra Rusticiana," and "Il Pagliacchi." After her liberation she remained in the BBK Central Theatre under contract as a conductor and stage director.[745] By June 1941, when the NKVD Central Theatre was transferred to Petrozavodsk and renamed the Republican Theatre of Musical Comedy, she had staged operettas "Silva," "Rose-Mary," "A Wedding in Malinovka," and "Kholopka." Soon she was invited to work as a musical director in the Solovki House of the Fleet. She stayed in Solovki until her death in 1977.[746] Similarly, Yakov Khusid after his release did not abandon his post as a chief director of the Central Theatre.[747]

Conclusion

The explorations of the camp art reveal a unique phenomenon when the significant part of cultural life of the country was transferred to the punitive institution and acquired new forms in the conditions of imprisonment. Even in the most macabre parts of the USSR, the Soviet labour camps, there was a cultural life inspired by Russian and European cultural heritage. The study of the White-Sea Baltic Combine and the Camp NKVD demonstrates that the prisoners actively participated in Soviet cultural projects.

The camp theatres and cultural centres were patronized by the regional camp elites and resembled more feudal court places of interest than citadels of the Soviet culture. In words of an ex-prisoner, a renowed actor,

[745] After the end of her prison term she was sentenced for exile in *Kazakhstan.* However, on the day of her departure in 1938, contrary to the NKVD order, she was taken from the railway station to the theatre to direct the performance of the "Pique Dame." G. A. Igumnova, "Lydi Solovkov: portreti I sudbi," in almanac *Solovetskoe more* № 3 (2004). Internet: http://solovki.info/?action=archive&id=237; accessed on September 16, 2006.
[746] G. A. Igumnova, "Lydi Solovkov: portreti I sudbi."
[747] NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 8/43, p. 109.

On can hardly reproach the OGPU and later the NKVD officials for neglect of artistic life. All highly positioned GULAG bosses warmly welcomed the artists. It was their art. But at the same time ours.[748]

The richness of artistic life in the camps demonstrates once again that it is impossible to study and understand the phenomenon of the Gulag without a comparative context.

The BBK made an important contribution to the organization of education in the region. It constructed schools and kindergardens in the special settlements, introduced the policy of universal elementary education. In the course of 1936 alone BBK built six schools in the special settlements. To complete this endeavor camp inmates and labour settlers were transferred from their main jobs. In 1936 these schools were transferred to the People's Commissariat of Education.[749]

Otherwise the schools would not have been built, for the construction could not be accomplished by the administration of the republic or by its People's Commissariat of Education due to the lack of material resources and the labour force.[750] Until March 1936 all the schools were financed through the GULAG. Finally, it introduced mass culture to the ordinary spectator. In the conditions of provincial life political indoctrination was replaced with entertainment.

At the end of the 1930s the Combine leadership asserted that the Central Theatre of the BBK NKVD had managed to "deeply integrate local proletariat into the Soviet cultural life." It was also proclaimed that the best creations of Soviet cinematography were screened simultaneously with the premieres in the capital and the large regional centers.[751]

[748] *Teatr Gulaga,* p. 8.
[749] NARK, f. 690, op. 6, d. 10/28, p. 112.
[750] Ibid.
[751] NARK, f. 865, op. 2, d. 1/2, p. 8.

The current study has demonstrated that cultural life was rich only in the camp administrative centres where the theatres, financed through camps' management, were easily accessible for local population and the tickets were inexpensive.[752]In smaller camp subsections working and living conditions of the prisoners were abominable. Few kilometers away from the administrative centre people struggled to survive physically and mentally. Apart from periodic artistic tours cultural life was absent there.

The reception of the Soviet cultural-educative policy and propaganda in the GULAG, as well as the interrelationship between the Soviet propaganda and the mentality of the people imprisoned and employed in the camps are very important questions which are yet to be explored.

In the 1930s the Soviet propaganda was taken seriously by the majority of the Soviet citizens. Later, in accordance with Honore de Balzac's saying "the power that is mocked at with impunity is close to its doom" the Soviet propaganda became an empty sound and a subject of mockery.

In this respect the experience of the forced labour camps in a way served as a test to the beliefs of the Soviet citizens. While for many prisoners the camps experience resulted in the dissilusionment of their previous values and beliefs, others retained their faith in the camps. From this respect the dialog between the "political" prisoner with his co-workers of a criminal background that took place in one of the Northern camps in the 1930s is informative. The recidivists, eating carrots while unloading the unguarded carriage with the vegetables noted to the "political": " Eat, *fraer,* or you'll kick the bucket ." The latter replied: "It belongs to the state."

The BBK housed people of various social and cultural background. Soviet provincial officials coexisted with professional criminals, peasants, workers, and the

[752] Kaneva, *Gulagovsky Teatr Ukhti,* p. 22.

representatives of intelligentsia. All of them had to face the reality of the forced labour camp. In the course of several generations of people of different cultural background residing together a demolition of traditional cultural norms and values and the creation of the new, Soviet ones took place either under the pressure of the Soviet "tour on culture" or through physical extermination.

During conversations that the author conducted with children of deported and executed individuals or exiled peasants in Karelia (usually these children migrated to industrial centers of the region), only a few of them displayed strong anti-Soviet attitudes regarding the repression or destruction of their parents' lives.[753] Some of them were apolitical whereas others entered the party and actively participated in public life.

The numerous patriarchal Aksenov family, whose head served in the Red Army during the Civil War, were exiled in 1931 and lived in the settlement at the Khibin mine. Representatives of the older generation thoroughly concealed their extremely negative attitude towards Stalin and the Soviet regime. But since the deportees had no information about Soviet leaders, they were guided in their sympathies or antipathies by personal experience. Therefore they treated Sergey Kirov, whose frequent visits to the mine were followed by improvements in food supply with respect. All their lives the representatives of the older generation of Aksenovs retained the tradition of regular celebrations of Easter and other religious holidays. They kept it in secret from the Soviet officials for disclosure of such was usually followed by severe punishment.

Nevertheless, their children, who received their education in a Soviet school built by the special settlers, grew up as staunch atheists. In conversations between mother and daughter (the mother was born in 1922), the mother remembered the long

[753] Interviews with children of former "kulaks" of the first or second category, sentenced to execution, exiled, or who had served their sentence. (With A. A. Minkina, and A. V. Davydova, Petrozavodsk, September 8, 2004, and October 11, 2004 respectively; and with A. V. Ermolaev on January 12, 2005).

trip in commodity railroad trucks (the trip from Siberia to Khibiny took a month), as well as the hunger and stuffy air, as negative moments in her life. As regards her stay in the special settlement, she recalled how pleasant her childhood had been. She spoke about classes at school, and her participation in cultural events, such as dances, amateur theatre performances, visits to the local theatre and to the sport clubs with excitement. One of her brothers from his childhood was an ardent Stalinist. He was killed during the Great Patriotic War. [754]

This interpretation of the experience of the labour settlers corresponds with the stories described in Keith Brown's study. The protagonists, Poles deported from the USSR's borderlands considered their deportation to Kazakhstan to be a honored mission for the goal of colonizing a wild area. They viewed themselves as agents of European progress, or according to Soviet dogma, "builders of a better (*svetloe*) future."[755] In a way even the camp zones were a place which some prisoners were reluctant to leave when the prison term was over and which for some people seemed to be even more attractive than 'the mainland.'[756]

Future study, carried out along these lines, should also be extended upon other categories of population, who resided on the territory of labour camp enterprises. These included local residents, special settlers, contracted workers and their children. One fascinating but completely unexplored topic that might shed light on this probelm is the upbringing of children within the GULAG system. The NKVD summer camps accommodated children of the staff of the labour camps, local residents, and the special

[754] Interview with S. A. Aksenova.
[755] Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 301-303.
[756] V. Nikitina, *Dom oknami na zakat;* At the beginning of 1930s the mother of an actor, performing in the *Belomorkanal* troupe of peasant "dekulakized" background sent him a letter, asking if it was possible to arrange to sent to the camp his younger brother. M. Terentjeva, "Moi otez Igor Terentjev," in *Teatr GULAGa,* p. 56. Finally see applications of the prison guards to the VOKHR section on the question of their employment on a contract basis after the expiration of the prison term. NARK, f. 865, op. 1, d. 9/47, pp. 170-430.

settlers. The children played the games such as "find and catch the enemy."[757] Regular campaigns for the struggle against child homelessness and neglect in resettlements deserve particular attention, as well as school education within the GULAG.

The year 1937 marked an important benchmark in the Soviet policy and the social life at the camp sites. Until 1937 the regime in the camp was rather mild and the prisoners and the special settlers' could preserve their traditions and secretly practice their religion. The *Solovki* prison camp, for example, boasted an intense religious and intellectual life until 1937. The 'Great Terror' marked the end of this relative freedom. All those who for some reasons were conceived as ideological opponents of the Soviet regime were exterminated. The year 1937 marked a brutal end of the "Reforging.' Since then the culture of professional criminals became the most important cultural alternative to the Soviet official culture within the forced labour camps. Later it transformed into the powerful force and invaded the cultural landscape of the country. This phenomenon, as well as the patterns of its reception/rejection of the Soviet 'civilizing' project provide ample perspectives for future explorations.

By the end of the 1930s even criminal culture had fully incorporated Bolshevik rhetoric. It manifested itself in cases of mass disobediences of juvenile delinquents in the camp during 1937-1939 which took place under the slogans of Fascism. These mini revolts combined Bolshevik pathos with the Fascist rhetoric.[758]

The influence of the experience of the Soviet labour camps on the criminal culture was manifold. Camps became a place where criminal clans' traditions were maintained and preserved:

It was known ages and ages ago, that if our corrective-labour camps did fulfill its 're-educative mission,' the result was unexpected. They transformed inexperienced

[757] Interview with Yu. Dmitriev, May 2005.
[758] Arkhiv MVD RK, f. 73, op. 01, d. 1468.

dilettantes into professional recidivists with the "Gulag diplomas" in highly specialized fields. The "friends of the people" made cozy nests in the camps terrorizing the rest of the prisoners and ignoring the orders of the camp administration. [759]

Studies of culture and the mental habits of the criminals are interesting from various perspectives. The criminal culture, shaped by the camps, penetrated the Soviet Union at large in the course of several amnesties in the 1950s.

What is especially interesting, in earlier times it was welcomed by the leaders of the Soviet state. Even in the 1930s, during the concerts in Kremlin the famous Soviet singer Leonid Utesov sang the songs of professional criminals upon Stalin's request. Moreover, some of these songs are very popular among the population in the contemporary Russia.[760] In the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s the ordinary delinquents actively participated in the cultural and musical activities in the camps, as the folklore theatre of "SVOI" of the 1920s in Karelia demonstrates. Such facts enables one to speculate of the ways the elements of mass culture penetrated the criminal world in the Soviet labour camps in the course of the adaptation by this world of alien cultural experience.

The thieves' music and poetry is a very interesting topic. They had their own tradition of amateur artistic activity. The powerful thieves arranged their own "concerts" in the thieves' barracks *(shalmanakh).* Although 'programs' of such performances greatly varied, there almost always was a Gypsy ('*mora,*' obviously form the German "mohr" or a Spanish "moro,") who danced *tsiganochka* dance.[761]

[759] G. Zzenov, *Prozitoe,* p. 134.
[760] "Murka,"a well-known to many contemporary Russians song, is not only frequently played during the evening programs, but sometimes during the weddings instead of Felix Mendelssohn's traditional march. The origins of this product of the criminal romantics can be traced back to Jewish culture of Odessa at the beginning of the 20th century.
[761] V. Frid, "Zenitba Gogolya, proizvedenie Ostrovskogo," in *Teatr Gulaga,* p. 107.

The GULAG criminal culture is still alive in Russia. Currently popular paper back bestsellers, sold in extensive amounts in most bookstores in Petrozavodsk, by their plot and setting easily fit the canons of the genre of the criminal folklore ballads which were widespread in the 1930s. Its origins lay in the intensified communication between the criminal and "political" prisoners. As a result of this communication in the 1930s a genre of an oral tale evolved cultivating the romantics of the criminal lifestyle.[762] The narrators, the 'political' prisoners among whom well-educated people were not infrequent, made their living in the camps through entertaining the "thieves." They successfully combined their knowledge of criminal culture, scenes of the camp life with the stories from belles-lettres. A typical narrative of a story could also include detailed description of nature and scenes from the thieves' daily life.

Such epic stories of a "noble" thief, acting in conformance with the "thieves' code," with its lavish use of criminal jargon occupy an important place in contemporary fiction.[763]The camp art also needs further exploration. Too little material is available to write about the camp art in the language of an art critic, but one can do so in the language of an historian, for the performers and spectators are of no less interest than the stage.

[762] Under the Tsarist regime this communication was almost absent.
[763] A. Sedov, *Znahar.* This multi-voluminous epos is sold in every book store of Petrozavodsk. It conforms to the "standards" of the thieves' tale of the 1930s. Its paperback contains the information on "the feedback from the readers," most of them being prisoners, ex-prisoners, armed guards, or relatives of the prisoners. The action is shifted to the current times.

Conclusion

Current work sought to avoid two conventional approaches. One is making a comeback in Russia, presupposing that the GULAG was something normal and ordinary in the lives of the Soviet people, or else something that has been exaggerated in its importance. But on the other side there is the interpretation that the GULAG was solely a repressive institution, indeed a form of death or extermination camp. Instead, the current study has adopted an approach that stresses 'modernization' and 'colonization' and looks upon the GULAG as a colonizing institution.

The current work has demonstrated that the GULAG was not just a penitentiary with inhuman living and working conditions, where repression and exploitation drove inmates to physical and psychological degradation and death (the term 'the GULAG survivor' is the direct outcome of such vision.[764]

On an example of the BBK-BBLag enterprise of the NKVD the current project revealed the facts that challenge the traditional understanding of the camps. It has shown that a forced labour enterprise can not be thouroughly studied through the prism of a concept of a "camp." According to the administrative structure of the Combine, special settlements, along with camp zones, were integral parts of BBK subdivisions or

[764] A. Applebaum, *GULAG: a History* (New York : Doubleday, 2003.

'separate camp subsections' (*OLP*), managed by their administration. Its inhabitants, located right next to the zones, and often separated from it by just a feeble fence, could easily communicate with the prisoners, as well as the hired staff. In many areas the restrictions, associated with the notion "labour camp" were absent. Its *camp* part was an integral part of the world adjacent to it.

Thus, the border between imprisonment and freedom, between 'the camp' and 'the mainland,' between being a camp prisoner and a camp employee was more blurred and elusive than it seemed to be. Multiple examples, such as the practices of the prisoners employed as the camp guards, as technical specialists indistinguishable from other administrative personnel, and ex prisoners remaining to serve the camp, highlighted in the second chapter, challenge much received wisdom about the camps.

Not only those employed in the administrative apparatus, but also some of the 'ordinary ' released prisoners were not willing or prepared to leave the camp. For these people, coming, as it is obvious from their application files, from the lower strata,(in their majority peasants and workers) life at liberty was hardly easier than their existence in the camp. People, who had lived through two revolutions and the world war, lost their families and worked from their childhood, did not consider their camp term as the worst evil. Moreover, they found life there convenient and secure. They could not only make a career as a guard or an inspector there, but also receive a profession through enrollment in the camp educational programs.

Research into the social background of the middle and higher rank hired BBK proves the validity of this approach. The chiefs of the managerial sections and departments, Third Department officers, commandants of the special labour settlements, political instructors, chiefs of the camp guards subdivisions, chiefs of the

BBK subsections, KVCh chiefs employed on the contract basis for the most part were promoted workers of the poorest peasant/working class background.

Many of them arrived in the GULAG as guards through recruitment. During their term they were promoted first to the post of a commander of the armed guard platoon or a political instructor. Later they were promoted to the position of a chief of a camp subsection or a commandant of a labour settlement.

Promotion from the post of an armed guard was not the only way of making a career inside the GULAG system. Some of the guards got transferred to the OGPU-NKVD schools. Promoted workers, (*vidvizenzi*) made up an important source also for the highest BBK administrative staff. All these facts provide an alternative to the commonly accepted vision of the camps, provided by the ex-prisoners, coming from the educated and well-off families, for whom the camp experience was a degradation from their relatively high social and economic status prior to imprisonement.

The current work has demonstrated that apart from the tasks of the confinement of the criminals and their exploitation, the GULAG enterprises were burdened with the tasks of the social and cultural colonization of the regions where they were located. Under the slogans of the Soviet propaganda they introduced secular culture, education, and the network of modern medical institutions and modern medicine to previously backward regions and transformed backward villages in the borderland regions of Russia into densely populated towns and settlements.

In the 1930s large camps became regional centres of rich cultural life which blossomed under the aegis of the Cultural-Educative Sections due to the efforts of the prisoners. Thus, the overall impact of the cultural and educational activities of the

camps on the cultural development of relatively backward areas should not be underestimated.

The theme of cultural colonization may have been secondary or non-existent in the minds of the camps authorities, but it happened and should not be ignored. Thus the dystopian theme of most studies has to be revised to take into consideration the unintended consequences of the project which, nevertheless, was not entirely divorced from the original if much distorted plans.

The dissertation presented a case study of the "cultural colonization" through the forced labour institution on an example of the White-Sea Combine of the NKVD. It has demonstrated how the BBK introduced dramatic and musical culture to an ordinary spectator in Karelia through establishment and maintenance of several major cultural institutions. Moreover, one of the main theatres of Karelia (the Theatre of Musical Comedy of the Karelian-Finnish Republic) evolved from and continued the tradition of the Central Theatre of the BBK.

Other institutions, such as Karelian Philharmonic and the musical school (both of them are still functioning today) were established and managed due to the efforts of the ex-prisoners who remained to work in the Republic after their prison term had expired.

The BBK also made an important contribution to the organization of education in the region. It constructed schools and kindergardens in the special settlements which otherwise could not have been built, introduced and launched the policy of universal elementary education. Local People's Commissariat of Education did not possess financial and human resources to implement these projects. Only the availability of cheap labour of the prisoners and the special settlers of the BBK made them plausible.

Diversity and high professionalism of performances in the BBK-BBLag NKVD, which in a way was a unique, a "show-case" camp, was hardly representative of the rest of the GULAG empire. Cultural and artistic life in the GULAG was concentrated in few camp centres, and its impact was limited to the nearby areas. Still, it was a unique phenomenon it itself providing a perspective of an alternative to the traditional interpretation of the GULAG system as a history of the regime and its victims.

Vision of the GULAG as a colonizing institution, and as a distorted form of Soviet society, a Utopian vision that turned into a dystopia and received a life of its own provided a perspective for understanding the major problems and deficiencies of the system. The goals of the system, economic production, industrialization and colonization of backward or unexplored regions exceeded the capacity of the leadership and its cadres to carry them out effectively. The work has presented ample proof that the economic and cultural policies required vast resources both material and human in the sense of adequate housing, medical facilities, food, clothing, and a trained body of personnel, well educated and dedicated to their profession. These resources were never provided.

Thus, the exploration of any aspect of the GULAg system reveals terrible shortcomings and the gap between the resources and mental set necessary to implement the specific goals under consideration and the reality. At the same time, the archival sources have demonstrated how certain kinds of innovations, spontaneous, sometimes crude and occasionally effective like some of the medical treatments such as pine needles for scurvy were used in lieu of modern techniques. These all have their parallels in the outer Soviet world.

All peculiarities, atrocities, and distortions of the Gulag system, highlighted in the current work, can be explained as an outcome of the multiplicity of circumstances

connected with the response to specific conditions into which the Soviet government placed the state security apparatus, the NKVD.

The economic and political situation in the country at that time, and what is more important, the geopolitical situation in the world, made the genesis and development of the phenomenon of the Gulag easily explainable. Several important factors, inherited from the Tsarist Russia, influenced the foreign and domestic policy of the Bolsheviks : economic backwardness, porous frontiers, a multinational society, and cultural alienation.[765] Facing these factors, the Bolshevik leaders found themselves in the situation of alienation and animosity of the 'capitalist world.' The growing war scare necessitated to mount a strong defense against external enemies, and provided the regime with a useful justification for the purges inside the country even in the camps. Rapid industrialization with especial emphasis on heavy industry of backward and devastated country resulted in the concentration of economic and human resources on the construction of mass scale industrial and transportation objects.

Appropriation by the state of all production processes (*ogosudarstvlenie*) gave birth to the centralized systems of the allocation of the resources (material funds and well as human labour), industrial planning and the utilization of the products of labour. In the conditions of lack of finances, technical supply, qualified and motivated labourforce, the state leaders reverted to a penitentiary as one of such systems in solving the most serious political, economic, and social problems of the USSR. The GULAG was burdened with the fulfillment of the utopian projects of the Soviet industrialization.

[765] A. J. Rieber, "How Persistent are Persistent Factors," in *Russian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century of and the Shadow of the Past,* ed. R. Legvold (Columbia University Press, 2007) p. 206.

Despite frequent reorganizations of the system in the 1930s, which were targeted towards finding the most suitable forms of interaction between the camps and industrial development, major problems, caused by the nature of the forced labour, were not solved. Apart from the cumbersome bureaucratic apparatus, underfinancing, poor transportation, coercive nature of the entire enterprise, overexploitation and emaciation of the prisoners, conflicts between industrial enterprises and the camps, embezzlement and corruption were the major plagues of the GULAG which undermined it and largely contributed to its liquidation.

The enterprises, plants, and canals, thus, were built at the highest human cost. It is no coincidence that the number of the prisoners as well as their mortality rate in the BBLag was at its highest in 1933, the year when White-Sea Baltic Canal was accomplished. The GULAG labour, mortal for the prisoners, could achieve results only in the "extreme" situations at the highest human cost. But it was absolutely inqadequate for peaceful industrial, economic, and social colonization of the region, as the history of the BBK amply demonstrates.

The BBK was supposed to become a sample of the Soviet economic, social and cultural colonization of a backward region. However, it was precisely its forced labour element, the 'camp' nature of the Combine that hindered successful implementation of these ambitious plans.

Under the aegis of this camp, endowed with the task of the exploitation of the canal and colonization of the region, several important enterpises were constructed. Later, as well as the canal, they were separated from the Combine, which turned out inadequate for their proper maintenance and exploitation. Initial plans of its leadership, targeted at the colonization of the region with the help of the prisoners and the special settlers, were never fulfilled.

The 'human' factor surfaced more poignantly in the course of the growth of the enterprise in the 1930s. The system of the forced labour without material incentives put a premium on coercion and appeal to sheer enthusiasm, which however successful in the task of digging a canal in a short time span, failed to efficiently carry out the task of gradual economic colonization of the region, the exploitation of industrial enterprises, and the establishment of the towns and the settlements. For those tasks a proper financing, technical supply, system of management, and a different attitude and mentality on the part of people involved would be necessary.

The discrepancy between the political and economic tasks aggravated the situation in the GULAG. Political considerations necessitated strict regime of isolation of 'socially dangerous elements.' On the other hand, the principle of economic profitability of the enterprises managed by the GULAG and the necessity to fulfill growing economic plans of the Soviet state preconceived proper planning, rational management and the allocation of the human resources, impossible in the conditions of the penitentiary. An official noted during the party meeting of the staff of the central GULAG apparatus in Moscow: "Staggering from one side to another, we are torn between attempts to solve the economic problems and the political ones."[766]

Facing the problems immune to "normal" administrative solutions due to the absence of necessary financial and human resources, the dictator in possession of the vast bureaucratic apparatus adopted the policy of state violence in the form of the infamous "Great Terror," which was studied in the current project in relation to the system of the forced labour in general and as a case study of an individual enterprise in particular.

[766] TsAODM, Protokoli partsobranii, p. 95.

In the GULAG apparatus and its camps the Terror as such consisted of several waves of repressions, targeting different groups of the camp inhabitants and administrative staff. In the course of the repressive operations which started in August 1937 after the order 00447 of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs different groups of prisoners and the camp staff fell the victims to the Terror.

As a rule, "political" prisoners, sentenced according to the article 58 of the Soviet penal code (many of them being the representatives of intelligentsia and nobility, the so-called *bivshie*), were the chief target of the repressive operations. Initially only the prisoners in categories targeted by the mass operations reviewed. Later, as it happened in the case of the BBK NKVD, if the numbers of the newly executed "enemies" were lower than those prescribed in the increasing quotas, (as it happened in the case of the BBK NKVD) the NKVD staff in the camps resorted to reviewing the dossiers of non-political prisoners and executing them.

These were convicts who are difficult to classify: the kulaks who had escaped from exile, those convicted under the August 7, 1932 law on the theft of public property and so on. A large share of the victims consisted of ordinary and hardened criminals.

In the case of the so-called 'political' crimes the principle of selection of the victims was more or less clear: almost everyone with improper social origins and unloyalty to the Soviet power, manifested in the past, was exterminated during the Terror. The repressive operations, targeted at non-political criminals, motivated by the desire to fulfill the quotas for troika meetings, were absolutely indiscriminate. The definition of the 'enemy'became inclusive as never before. It extended to the criminal gangs that had been "terrorizing" the camp population, informal administrative networks of the "shadow economy," and single internal regime violators: the prisoners who for some reasons violated the internal camp rules.

As a result of raising the quotas for executions for the BBLag, in the end the charge of counter-revolutionary crimes, based on the article 58 of the Soviet penal code, served as a pretext for slightly more than 30% of all the executions of the prisoners while the executions under the article on attempted escapes totaled more than 50% of all executions of the BBLag prisoners. This rather high number can be explained by the fact that the BBK Chekists looked upon these occasions as the easiest way to fulfill the quotas. Those executed on the premise and embezzlement and corruption constituted a very small part of the overall executions.

From the point of view of improving the situation with the criminality within the camp and the enterprise the 'Terror' was absolutely ineffective. Despite the fact that a number of executed prisoners and the staff were repressed for corruption and swindle, it was not eradicated. Banditry also flourished in the camps, for the rulers of the criminal clans were not among the executed prisoners.

Apart from the executions of the prisoners, conducted in the course of the specially planned campaigns (and frequently coordinated from the centre through the NKVD commissions), from spring 1937 the Third Departments of the camps launched a number of the criminal cases involving the imprisoned and the hired staff of the administrative units of the corresponding camps.

The main reason for the rotation and persecution of a large part of the Gulag personnel in 1937 was purely political and had as its aim to remove Henrich Yagoda's people from the camps and the Gulag apparatus. Autonomy of the provincial bosses also became one of the pretexts for repressive operations of the 1937-1938, and elimination of which was an important step in the consolidation of the Stalin's dictatorial power. This autonomy manifested itself even on the level of the chiefs of the

smallest forced labour camp subsections who felt confident and secure in appropriating the economic resources to their own ends, and creating their own 'mini-empires.'

In the repressive operations targeted at the hired staff similar patterns are observable as in the case with the prisoners. Where the number of the executed "politicals" did not suffice, the investigators reverted to the criminal cases started on embezzlement and administrative abuses.

A number of officials, especially those employed in administrative posts in remote camps, were swept by the wave of terror after the numerous cases of their abuses were disclosed. The gravity of the situation in the camps fueled the repressions. The underfulfillment of the economic plans frequently became a primary cause for persecutions apart from affiliation with the disgraced People's Commissar.

The charges of "wrecking," "the sabotage of the plans" and in the Trotskyite conspiracies which frequently resounded in the GULAG in the course of the "Great Terror" exactly replicate the charges in industry as a whole.

Thus, the "Terror" can be interpreted as yet another attempt to find an administrative solution to much larger, often unsolvable material problems, such as embezzlement, corruption, distortion of figures and general administrative malfeasance.

Instead of looking into the causes of the inefficiency of the system of the forced labour itself, the authorities attempted to find scapegoats among the prisoners, camp administrators, and the NKVD officers.[767]

Still, the distinction between the real embezzlement and falsifications of the production figures is not always clear. The economic plans and tasks were frequently

[767] Kuzmin, *Lagerniki..*

based upon unreal expectations, so falsified results became the prerequisite for survival for many camp administrators. The investigators themselves confessed that sometimes it was impossible to adequately document the financial losses that had occurred as a result of embezzlement.

An important question is why during the Terror some crimes connected with embezzlement and failure to fulfill the economic plan were turned into 'counter-revolutionary cases,' why were the individuals accused labeled 'enemies of the people' and sentenced according to article 58 of the Soviet penal code, while other cases were considered non-political ? It seems the primary criterion was the importance of the economic enterprise for the state. Mass scale construction and industrial projects represented the higher level of risk for their management. Secondly, the previous records of the individuals played a role. Not a single individual among those executed in the BBK in the course of the Great Terror on the grounds of embezzlement came from the ranks of the so-called *bivshikh*. None of them had a higher education or was sentenced on the basis of the 'political' article.

Evidence of some rationality raises the question of the degree of arbitrariness versus rationality in the selection of the victims and their sentences. Apart from the given example of determining where a case was 'political' or 'non-political' no other evidence of rational decisions of the executors is available. The selectiveness and arbitrary nature of repressive measures in the cases of the non-political crimes manifested itself more poignantly. The executions on the basis of non-political crimes were motivated exclusively by the desire to fulfill the quotas of the 'enemies,' allocated from the centre. At the level of the troika court a great number of non-political cases were usually supplied when the number of the executions of 'political' enemies was

lacking. After the quota set by the central NKVD apparatus was met, the rest of the transgressors were punished in a usual way.

Thus, despite the fact that in every administrative unit of the Combine (as well as any other Soviet enterprise based on forced labour) corruption was rampant, only small proportion of the personnel was tried at the troika's court. Those who were caught were victims of denunciations that arrived at the right time to the right place.

Apart from being a radical attempt to solve the problems of failure to fulfill the economic plans of the camps, administrative abuse and corruption, the "Terror" in a way was an attempt to solve the problem of deterioration of the prisoners' state of health in the camps, high diseases and mortality rates and the deficiencies of health care there. Having coincided with the second peak in epidemics and mortality rates in the camps, related to the intensification of the prisoners' exploitation in the course of the increase in the state economic plans, and mass creation in summer and autumn 1937 of new camps unprepared to host new convicts, it swept a number of the responsible medical officials in the camps. Previously, being unable to solve sanitary and medical problems through civic medical establishments, the administration referred to increasing surveillance, and control through the informers network.

The repressions and punishment of a large part of qualified medical personnel hardly had any positive effect on the conditions of the prisoners. On the contrary, executions of qualified medical personnel on "political" grounds resulted in worsening of the medical service and an influx of criminals into the profession. High prisoner diseases and mortality rates, as well as shortcomings and overall inadequacy of medical service in the camps were part of a larger problem of the overexploitation of the prisoners due to need to fill unrealistic plans. This problem is cruicial to understanding why camps were so poorly run and ineffective. It seems as

there was no way to raise the medical service in the camps to the level necessary to provide more or less decent health care for the prisoners, so there was no administrative solution to the endemic problems of corruption, embezzlement, negligence, and so on. To conclude, the camp problems were the result of unsolvable, objective conditions.

As in the rest of the USSR, after Ezhov's displacement and execution, soon the executioners themselves became the victims. The wave of the Terror that swept the executioners themselves started from November 1938 and reached its peak in spring 1939. The process by which those who were initially responsible for certain arrests were themselves later arrested, and their victims, in turn, exonerated, is a complex process that occurred within the party and other institutions as well.

Materials on the repressions among the staff of the Third Department of the BBK NKVD, who had taken an active part in the repressive operations, demonstrate that the purges of the NKVD, based on investigations of "deviations" during the Terror, such as committing brutal murders and forging accusatory materials, on the level of the provincial NKVD offices were implemented under strict central control and taken simply in order to guarantee the success of the new political line, without undermining the punitive system as a whole. The purge of the NKVD did not undermine the punitive system as a whole.

Further study of the GULAG institution might contribute to further exploration of the specifics and driving forces of the Soviet modernization project, while study of the "history of the mentality" can shed light on its cultural side. The current project has demonstrated that the GULAG camps and special settlements represented a sort of reservations. In this partially isolated world a process of social and cultural assimilation of elements, which were considered as temporary socially unacceptable, dangerous and deviant, occured.

Labour camp context endowed social life in the region with peculiar features. A frightening shift of culture, back to the Middle Ages, even to slavery coincided with a vigorous spurt ahead, self-development and adaptation of old forms to the habits and concepts of the 20th century. Various forms of dependence and slavery, legalized individual exploitation and the use of the prisoners as the housekeepers, tutors, and housemaids by the hired staff, hidden networks of commodities (raspredi), *blat* and nepotism were yet another manifestation of diversity of forms of life in the forced labour camp, the independence of life in the region from the instructions issued in Moscow and the unavoidable "deviations" from the utopian, ideologically charged project.

All this opens up a perspective for studies of cultural and anthropological cultural assimilation, behavior, and potential for adaptation of various groups in a framework of an approach towards the GULAG as a multisided, controversial and complicated social body. Students of the GULAG settlements called them a "giant ethnical and social experiment."[768] Within the framework of this experiment, social and ethnic groups were forcefully relocated to new territories. They found themselves taken away from the accustomed environment and sent to extremely harsh climatic and social conditions for confinement or exile.

Old ways of life and traditions, which in a peculiar way intertwined with the new ones, bound by the language and traditions of the revolution; peasant values, such as bourgeois interests, patriarchic traditions, and, finally, perceptions of power, land, and freedom, adherence to communal customs dissapeared under the Bolshevik regime. Numerous religious and family traditions interrupted and new models of behavior

[768] *Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga*, vol. 5, 92; L. Viola, "The Aesthetics of Stalinist Planning and the World of Special Villages" Kritika 4(1) (Winter 2003): 101-128.

emerged. However, to study how it all happened, sources of private origin are needed, primarily the witnesses' testimonies. And these are extremely scarce.

Due to the limited scope of the project and a limited source base the current study has provided just selective examples of these phenomena, which are still to be explored in depth. Unfortunately, the possibilities of writing the history of the GULAG settlements as it was conceived by their inhabitants are steadily shrinking. At this point, not the children, but only the grandchildren can testify about experiences in exile and forced labor camps. But even from the third parties, the uniqueness of this experience is unquestionable and the necessity of its deep exploration is the most important task, first of all because of the tremendous influence of the consequences of this phenomenon on the political, economic, and social life of the country.

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