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CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
RELEASE AS SANITIZED  
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CERTAIN QUESTIONS ON SOVIET FORCED LABOR

(OER Project)

17 September 1956

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1. "We have noted that beginning in 1954 there were large-scale returns of common law offenders to camps which had been thereto reserved for political prisoners; Verkhuta, Kizhvir, Potan. Had this phenomenon also taken place in other camps? If so, are there any indications justifying the hypothesis that we are faced here with the discontinuation of the separation of the "political" from the "common-law" which had been observed to begin around 1948?"

No information is available concerning specific instances of the transfer of criminals to camps formerly reserved for political prisoners, other than those noted above. With respect to the separation of the two types of prisoners, however, statements of former camp inmates indicate that a policy of separation was not uniformly enforced. Some camps, for example, individual units in the Kraslag, Tayshant, Verkhuta and Kolyma River camp complexes, remained segregated; 1/ other camps in these complexes and some prisons in other areas housed both types of prisoners throughout the period. 2/

Available evidence suggests, however, that the mixing of criminals and political prisoners may have been speeded up following the 1953 amnesty. Thus, one source reports that 1000 criminals were transferred to political camps at Kizhvir in mid-May 1954. 3/ Another states that in 1954 "special" camps for political prisoners were discontinued and all prisoners were placed in "general" or mixed camps. 4/ Still other sources report that special political prisons were abolished in the Tayshant area in 1954, 5/ and in the Khoril'sk area in 1954. 6/

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2. "Is there information permitting us to determine which categories of prisoners are being kept on the "austerity regime" since, within the camps, there has been set up the "relaxed regime"?"

According to available information only prisoners who have committed "serious" political crimes or who were convicted of "serious" criminal offenses are now subjected to the "austerity" or "strict" regime status. The kind of crimes considered to be "serious" in this respect is not known. Apparently prisoners kept on "strict" regime are housed in separate camps apart from ordinary prisoners, for whom a more lenient regime has been in effect since at least 1953. 7/

3. "We are interested in all information having to do with the arrival of new prisoners in the camps in 1955 and 1956."

No information is available concerning new arrivals in forced labor camps in 1956; with respect to 1955 arrivals, the following specific items have been supplied by ex-prisoners:

(1) In August from 30 to 40 women with sentences ranging from 3-20 years arrived at the Kachary camp in the Jayshant area; in January-February about 18 Korean and Estonian women arrived at Jayshant camp 8021. 8/

(2) During February "groups of juvenile delinquents" arrived at the Kookva prison every day. 9/

(3) In February 1100 prisoners who had been convicted of criminal offenses arrived in Vorkuta. 10/

(4) New prisoners continued to arrive at Inta during 1955. 11/

(5) In the Poles area during 1955 "the influx of new prisoners was uninterrupted". Source mentions a newly arrested Ukrainian student who had been a member of a partisan band. 12/

(6) During March-October in the transit camp at Bazhet "forced laborers from all parts of the USSR were constantly moved in and out". 13/

In some of these instances cited by ex-inmates the newly arrived prisoners may have been transferees from other camps and not persons newly sentenced. No definitive information is available concerning the kinds of persons now being sent to the forced labor camps for the first time, nor the numbers of such persons. It is probable, however, that the number of prisoners released in 1954-55 far exceeded the number of new arrests.

4. "Is it a fact that individuals arrested during and after the manifestations in Kifis in March 1956 were deported to concentration camps?"

ORR has no information on this question.

5. "We are interested in all information having to do with the strikes and other disorders supposed to have occurred in camps in central Siberia in early 1956."

The only information available to ORR on this question is a report from a German newspaper that in early April 56 more than 200 political prisoners were killed by MVD troops in connection with uprisings in 4 camps along the Yenisei River, 1000 km north of Tomsak (Vorezhchayino, Verkhny, Imbratskoye, and Mirnoye). According to this report

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disturbances were touched off by news of the anti-Stalin campaign. 14/

6. "We are interested in all information having to do with disorders in Karaganda in autumn of 1952."

We have no information concerning disorders in Karaganda in the autumn of 1952. One source reports, however, that there were riots there in the spring of 1952, possibly fomented by anti-Soviet Ukrainians. 15/

7. "We are interested in all disorders supposedly occurring in the camps of the northern Urals in 1950."

According to several sources a major uprising took place in July and August 1950 in camps of the 501st Strouka MVD. The revolt, led by former Lt. General Belayev, began in the 64th Column (Kolonna 64), a punishment camp located in the Chilyg area of the northern Urals. This camp housed about 1600 prisoners, both criminal and political. Killing their guards while they were occupied in blasting operations, prisoners on work detachment returned to the camp site for Kolonna 64, overcame the MVD guards there and freed the remaining prisoners. They then marched to Camp #68, where they were joined by 1000 freed prisoners. The prisoners then proceeded to Camp #101, which had been forewarned and where the uprising was finally put down. About 100 of the rioters, along with Belayev, escaped to the Urals, where they held out for about a month, before he was killed along with most of his companions. Altogether several thousand prisoners and more than 500 MVD troops were killed in the uprising. 16/

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8. "We are interested in all information of strikes and riots beginning in 1953 in camps other than Vorkuta, Noril'sk, Kizil'sk, and Zhaporozhsk."

Disorders reportedly occurred during 1953-55 in a number of camps other than those noted above:

(1) In December 1954 a strike took place at Bratskoye Transit Camp #043, because prisoners were not released in accordance with promises made to them. The strike was put down by soldiers and the ringleaders transferred to a punishment camp in the area. 17/

(2) There was a strike of women in Tayshet Camp #09 in July 54 in protest against high norms. The norms were lowered the following month. 18/

(3) In March 55 a 1-day strike took place in a PW camp at Revda in protest against being required to work in extremely cold weather. 19/

(4) Hunger strikes occurred in 3 camps at Marynsk (sometimes called "Marynsk") in 1953. The free population in the area smuggled food to the prisoners, but after 6 days a detachment of troops restored order, shot 200 participants and sent the strikers in small groups to other camps. 20/

(5) 1200 prisoners struck for 4 days in November 54 at Tayshet Camp #13. The leaders were prisoners who had been transferred there following the Noril'sk disorders. 21/

(6) In the summer of 54 there were strikes of political prisoners in Branch Camps 1, 2, and 3 of the Isherbascan Lager. 22/

(7) Protesting against lack of warm clothing, prisoners at Tayshet Camp #13 staged sit-down strikes and work slow-downs in November 54. 23/

(8) During 53-54 small-scale hunger strikes occurred in camps at Inta and Sakhobyevodnaya. 24/

(9) In June 54 prisoners at the Rudnik camp (near Kunguir) staged a 7-day sympathy strike in support of the disorders at Kunguir. 25/

(10) In January 54 a strike occurred at Tyat Camp Ad. #5 (located at Zennaya). A commission from Moscow investigated this strike, in which at least 275 were killed. 26/

(11) In June 54 at Karaganda there was a rebellion which was instigated by about 1000 young Communists who had volunteered for work on the virgin land but who had been interned in the forced labor camp when they complained about working conditions. The rebellion was put down with tanks and troops and about 1000 forced laborers were killed. 27/ Another source reports a rebellion in Karaganda in 1954 which lasted 6 days. 28/ Both sources may be referring to the same disorders or even to the Kunguir disturbances in the spring and summer of 1954.

(12) A strike occurred in the Tishar River Camp in the Northern Urals in July 54. 29/

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1. "We are interested in all information on the purported existence of 'the silent camps' in the Far North, and possibly in the Novaya Zemlya (New Land)."

A number of reports are available concerning the existence of camps which are located in isolated, remote areas and which might be considered to be "silent camps":

(1) A returned German PW reports that he was interned during 1951-52 in a camp called "Blind 5-37" located in the southwestern part of Novaya Zemlya; prisoners, nearly all of whom were Russians, were engaged in iron ore mining. 30/

(2) Several camps for both men and women political and criminal prisoners are located on islands in the Franz Joseph group. Prisoners mined coal, copper and silver. Source was imprisoned in a camp located on Korlyak Island. 31/

(3) Other sources report the existence of camps on Novaya Zemlya located at Zaliv Bogachova and elsewhere. 32/

(4) A wolfram mining camp is reported at Uliskit in the Kolyva-Indigirka region. 33/ Also, uranium mining camps are reported in Varkutya, north of the Kolyva River basin. 34/

(5) One source reports the existence of an isolated camp - called "fairyland" by the prisoners - located at Novy Port; its official designation was Special Camp Point 34 of the 501st Stradka, NVD. The approximately 1500 inmates of this camp received no mail

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for newspapers and had no radio. Discipline in the camp was supposedly the most severe of the whole complex operated by the 501st Straika. 35/

(6) A prison camp is reported to be located in the northern area of the Chukotsk peninsula. 36/ A mining camp #350 reportedly is located in the Bering Straits area. 37/ Returned PW's reported that some of those who were arrested during the June 13 uprising in East Germany were interned in camps near the Bering Straits under conditions of complete isolation. 38/

(7) "Isolation camps" for serious political offenders are reported to exist in the Kalyua River area. 39/

10. "We are interested in all information having to do with new prisons under construction, and on the new conditions of detention in prisons and in "isolators" or solitary."

Most of the testimony of released prisoners indicates that some of the camps and prisons have been closed. Only one source reports the building of a new prison - a disciplinary camp rumored in early 55 to be under construction in the mountain area east of Bratsk. 40/ In an article of 13 September 55 the government newspaper Izvestia alleges that no new prisons are to be constructed. 41/

Available evidence indicates that treatment of prisoners in camps and prisons improved considerably, particularly after 1953. Food and housing conditions became better, and prisoners generally were treated with less harshness. Wages are now paid for fulfillment and overfulfillment of norms. Although a fixed portion is deducted

for upkeep and other purposes, prisoners are permitted to spend or save the remainder as they see fit. In some places the system of sanctity was put into effect; under this arrangement prisoners could get their prison terms reduced by earning "bonus days" for good behavior or for particularly high output. 12/

With specific reference to conditions in "isolators" or solitary confinement, the following miscellaneous reports are available:

(1) It is reported that regulations pertaining to "isolators" were relaxed in the spring of 1954, in camps in the Tayshet areas. Prisoners so confined were allowed to work and were given the same food allowance as regular prisoners; fewer persons were confined in these isolators. 13/

(2) There is reported to be a central isolation camp in Irkutsk. Persons with at least 10 year sentences are sent to camps such as this and are not allowed to communicate with relatives. 14/

(3) Returnees who were in Yerkuta during 1950-55 report that as punishment for infractions of discipline prisoners were sometimes given 2-14 days' solitary confinement in cells with concrete floors and without heat or equipment of any kind. The prisoner so confined forfeited most of his clothes, including shoes, and was fed on bread and water. 15/

(4) In the Tayshet area in the so-called "Lake Camps" for political prisoners there was an "isolator" which was a cellar comprising individual cells and a group cell. Prisoners were not chained. 16/

11. "We are interested in data on the population of 'concentrationary areas' already known, such as numbers or percentages of prisoners, ex-prisoners, inmates, administrative or guard staff, etc."

OHR has not attempted to estimate the populations of areas where forced labor camps are concentrated so as to provide any kind of breakdown between prisoners and free population. A number of ex-inmates of Soviet prison camps have provided various estimates of the characteristics of the population in labor camp regions. For the most part these data relate to the years before 1954 and so will not reflect the substantial decline in the number of forced laborers which is believed to have occurred during the past 2 years. The reports are summarized below:

- (1) Andshinskaya, Dec 51-May 55. Total population more than 20,000, including about 2300 penal laborers. 47/
- (2) Dudinka-Moxil'sk, June 51. Total population 165-215,000, including 65,000 prisoners in 18 camps. 48/ Another source reports 54 population to be about 200,000, including 80,000 prisoners. 49/
- (3) Knyash-Pogost, Sep 52. Total population 20,000, including 15,000 convicts in 6 camps, 1000 former prisoners and free settlers, and 2000 employees of the MVD. 50/
- (4) Bratsk, 49-53. A penal district with more than 35,000 forced laborers; free population comprised of released prisoners or forced settlers and MVD personnel. 51/

(5) Omsk. Oct 53-Nov 54. 800,000 in city and suburbs, including estimated 30,000 forced laborers. 52/ (Official Soviet statistics give 505,000 as population of city of Omsk). 52/

(6) Kolyma River-Magadan Area, end of 52. Population estimated at 1,500,000, including 1,100,000, forced laborers, 200,000 free workers and forced settlers, and 130,000 MVD personnel. 1955 - total population about 1,400,000, including 300,000 forced laborers, 800,000 free workers and forced settlers, and 75,000 MVD personnel. 54/

(7) Inta, Oct 54. About 10,000 political prisoners in 3 camps. 55/ Another source estimates total population in 1953 at 40,000 including convicts. 56/

(8) Vorkuta, Jan 55. About 150,000 prisoners in area. 57/ Another source estimated population (Jan 53-Mar-55) at 200,000, of which 120,000 were forced laborers in 40 camps, 50,000 forced resettlers and released prisoners, and 30,000 MVD personnel. 58/ In a debriefing report stated that the population of Vorkuta was about 700,000 during early 54, including 500,000 forced laborers. 52/

(9) Kraslag area. Source estimated that prior to 1953 amnesty there were 60-80,000 prisoners in Kraslag camps, half of whom were released under the amnesty. Shortly thereafter about 2500 free workers came to the area, about 60 percent of whom were amnestied former inmates of the Kraslag camps. By March 55 only 10 percent of

these free workers, remained, most having left because of intolerable living conditions. 60/

GSR has recently prepared population estimates for the USSR by oblast as of 1955. These estimates are considered preliminary and purport to represent the total population in each oblast, including both free citizens and prisoners. It must be emphasized, however, that the nature of the estimating methods used is such that proper allowance may not have been made with respect to the distribution of forced labor. In the following table these tentative population estimates are shown for those oblasts where forced labor and prisoner-of-war camps are known to have been concentrated in the past.

## Population of Selected Oblasts in the USSR,

1950 and 1955 61

Oblast	Population (in thousands)	
	1950	1955
Murmansk	529	563
Arkangel	1059	1126
Komi ASSR	265	563
Vologda	1588	1689
Kiev	3272	2208
Stalino	2726	3589
Voroshilograd	1637	1932
Kamensk	a/	1126
Armenian SSR	1217	1600
Krybshov	1528	1689
Stalingrad	1588	1107
Tatar ASSR	2618	3097
Azambas	a/	1126
Bryansk	1588	1689
Gorki	3177	2253
Ivanovo	1324	1107
Kirov	2118	2253
Mari ASSR	529	563
Nordvin ASSR	1059	1126
Vladimir	1324	1107
Chelyabinsk	1853	2253
Sverdlovsk	2618	3378
Novosibirsk	1853	1976
Tyumen	794	814
Karaganda	569	1061
Stalinbad	552	599
Chita	1059	1107
Irkutsk	1059	1689
Krasnoyarsk	1853	2252
Yakut ASSR	265	563
Amur	3971	4380
Khabarovsk krai	1324	1107
Magadan	a/	282
Primorski krai	1059	1153
Sakhalin	794	814

a/ Oblast created between 1950 and 1955.

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(Tr. of Brauer Nachrichten, Bremen, Germany, 11 Apr 56. U).

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(tr. of Frankischer Tag, Bamberg, Germany, 9 Aug 55. U).

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B. Yakoblev, Konzentrationslager, Munich, 55, pp. 150-51. U.

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38. (tr. of Telegraf, Berlin, 9 Aug 55. U.)

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41. Washington Post and Times Herald, 14 Sep 56. U. Eval. RR 6.

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