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Most countries have prison systems where those convicted of crime serve out their sentences.

These countries believe that criminals should be punished for their actions by being separated from the society, by being deprived of their freedoms.

However, the Gulag served primarily as a way to gain control over the entire population, rather than punish criminal acts. (Applebaum, 1).

A history of the vast network of labour camps that were once scattered across the length and breadth of the Soviet Union, from the islands of the White Sea to the shores of the Black Sea, from the Arctic Circle to the plains of central Asia, from Murmansk to Vorkuta to Kazakhstan, from central Moscow to the Leningrad suburbs. (Applebaum, 1). From 1929, when the Gulag began its expansion, until 1953, when Stalin died, the best estimates indicate that some eighteen million people passed through this massive system. The killings of millions of innocent people in the Gulag system is seen as one most shocking and vicious episodes of the twentieth century. Gulag is the system of Soviet labour camps from 1920s to mid-1950s housed the political criminals and prisoners in Soviet Union. There were 474 camps on the territory of Soviet Union. The word Gulag is an acronym for Glavnoye Upravleniye Lagerey, or Main Camp Administration.

(Applebaum, 1). Over the time the word not only signified the administration of the labour camps but also the system, the idea of Soviet slave labour itself. Prisoners in camps worked in terrifying conditions without their will. Outdoors and in mines, in arid regions and the Arctic Circle, without adequate clothing, tools, shelter, food, or even clean water. The Gulag had its roots from the

Czarist Russia, in the force-labour brigades that operated in Siberia from the seventeenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. (Applebaum, 1). It then took on its modern and more familiar form almost immediately after the Russian Revolution, becoming an integral part of the Soviet system. Mass terror against opponents was a part of Revolution from the very beginning.

Solzhenitsyn argued, and with real evidence, that Lenin, not Stalin, was responsible for creating the Gulag, and that the first Soviet concentration camps for political prisoners were built in the 1920s, not the 1930s. He also showed that far more people were killed during the era of mass collectivization, and the Gulag population actually reached its zenith a decade later at the end of the 1940s and in the early 1950s. Most importantly, Solzhenitsyn aimed to show that, contrary to what many believed, the Gulag was not an incidental phenomenon, something which the Soviet Union could eventually eliminate or outgrow. Rather, the prison system had been an essential part of the Soviet economic and political system from the very beginning. From 1929, the camps took on a new significance. In that year, Stalin decided to use forced labour both to speed up the Soviet Union's industrialization, and to excavate the natural resources in the Soviet Union's barely habitable far north. In that year, the Soviet secret police also began to take control of the Soviet penal system, slowly wresting all of the country's camps and prisons away from the judicial establishment. Helped along by the mass arrests of 1937 and 1938, the camps entered a period of rapid expansion.

By the end of the 1930s, they could be found in every one of the Soviet Union's twelve time zones. Contrary to popular assumption, the Gulag did not cease growing in the 1930s, but rather continued to expand throughout the Second World War and the 1940s, reaching its apex in the early 1950s. By that time the camps had come to play a central role in the Soviet economy. They produced a third of the country's gold, much of its coal and timber, and a great deal of almost everything else.

The prisoners worked in almost every industry imaginable—logging, mining, construction, factory work, farming, the designing of airplanes and artillery—and lived, in effect, in a country within a country, almost a separate civilization. The Gulag had its own laws, its own customs, its own morality, even its own slang. It spawned its own literature, its own villains, its own heroes, and it left its mark upon all who passed through it, whether as prisoners or guards. The Soviet economic planners actually counted on prison labour as part of the overall economy. Although the primary stated reason for imprisonment was to pay for some alleged crime, the ministers of the NKVD agreed that they should take advantage of the free physical labour to contribute to economy.

The Gulag participated in every sector of Soviet economy. Prisoners produced any type of products such as missiles, car parts, furniture, leather goods, lamps, candles, textiles, locks, buttons, glass cups and even toys. Even the one-third of all the Soviet Union gold, coal and timber were mined by the Gulag's. Even though in some respects, the Gulag's helped boost the financial

status of USSR ; the labour camps did not make a substantial contribution to economy.

The conditions were really terrible for prisoners to effectively work. The prisoners were sick, weak, hungry and unable to work without sufficient food, clothes and supplies. Instead of being a triumph, the camps turned out to be economic failures. But how does this painful journey start for a citizen? Only with four words: " You are under arrest." And you'll find nothing better to respond than: " Me? What for?" That's all. " That's what arrest is: it's a blinding flash and a blow which shifts the present instantly into the past and the impossible into omnipotent actuality." (Solzhenitsyn, 4).

Arrests are classified according to various criteria: nighttime and daytime; at home, at work, during a journey; first-time arrests and repeats; individual and group arrests. Arrests are distinguished by the degree of surprise required, the amount of resistance expected (even though in terms of millions of cases no resistance was expected and in fact there was none). Arrests are also differentiated by the thoroughness of the required search; by instructions either to make out or not to make out an inventory of confiscated property or seal a room or apartment; to arrest the wife after the husband and send the children to an orphanage; or to send the rest of the family into exile, or to send the old folks to a labour camp too. For example, in 1926 Irma Mendel, a Hungarian, obtained through the Comintern to front-row tickets to the Bolshoi Theatre.

Interrogator Klegel was courting her at the time and she invited him to go with her. They sat through the show very affectionately, and when it was over he took her—straight to the Lubyanka. The criminals sentenced to prison camps can be divided into two categories. People who committed crimes such as murder, rape and robbery, acts which could be prosecuted in most countries.

Second one is people who committed “crimes” so minor that they would not be punishable in other countries. These “crimes” included unexcused absence from work, or petty theft. This type of “criminal” made up vast majority of prisoners in the Gulag system, and were punished by sentences of eight-ten years of forced labour. Their trials usually took five minutes, if there was one at all. People who were arrested remained in overcrowded filthy prison cells until they were sentenced by a court or a special committee. Then they would be sent to one of several types of forced labor camps, or sent into exile. There were three types of prison camps: First one was camps with barbed wire and guards in watchtowers. Prisoners were allowed to move within the camp zone but not allowed to leave the zone.

If they were caught beyond, they were shot immediately. Second was stricter camps with bolted windows. It allowed restricted movements for prisoners.

Lastly, there were unguarded camps in remote regions of the USSR. Even though prisoners had complete movement of freedom, labour was controlled. Another type of punishment was internal exile, where the person would be

sent to a remoteregion of USSR and could not leave. Any attempt to leave the region waspunished.

Even though they did not live behind barbed wire, they were forcedlaborers. Nearly six million were sent into exile, deported to the Kazakhdeserts or the Siberian forests. Instead of individual criminals, usuallygroups of people were sentenced to internal exile. Koreans, Chechens andGermans were included in these groups. During the mass exile, thousands ofChechens died. This is one of the reasons that Chechnya wants to gain itsindependence from Russia today. Not onlyprison camps but also type of labour varied on the location of the camp. Generally, camps in Central Asia dependent on agriculture where prisoners grewand picked cotton.

Whereas prisoners in the northern camps did logging. Campsin the Northeast did mining, gold and tin were the products they extracted. The Naziconcentration camps and the Gulag differ in a very important way. Even though morepeople passed through the Gulag, for a much longer period of time, than throughNazi concentration camps; yet, the Gulag is still not nearly as well known. Nazicamps was used to exterminate whole groups of people, Jewish population inEurope. The Gulag was used as a weapon of ongoing political control over onecountry. The Gulag system did not target any specific group of people: in factall ethnic groups nationalities, and religions were imprisoned.

Moreover, therewere no plans for releasing any of the prisoners of Nazi concentration camps. Whereas in the Gulag system if a prisoner managed to

somehow survive his or hersentence, he or she would be released at the end of it. Between 1934 and 1953, for example, between 150, 000 and 500, 000 people were released each year. Someprisoners were even eligible to earn early release, if they worked very hardand exceed their quotas. Some were released because they were let into the RedArmy, or because they were invalids or women with small children, or becausethey had been promoted from captive to guard. As a result, the total number ofprisoners in the camps generally hovered around two million, but the totalnumber of Soviet citizens who had some experience of the camps, as political orcriminal prisoners, was far higher. However, oncereleased, ex-prisoners often faced many difficulties.

Some were sent intoexile, or banned from returning to their homes in the cities. It was very hardto find a work. Family members often had died, or were afraid to be associatedwith a former Gulag inmate. If former prisoners were allowed back to theirhomes, they faced month of difficult travel with little or no money and nomeans of surviving the trip.

Some opted to stay, or were stranded, in the towns close to where they had been imprisoned." For thoseleft behind after the arrest there is the long tail end of a wrecked anddevastated life." (Solzhenitsyn, 5). When married men were sentenced to alabour camp the wives and children they left behind were victimized as well. Friends and neighbors might turn against them, for fear of associating with " wivesof enemies of people." Frequently, women lost their jobs, their apartments, andhad to sell their possessions and live on occasional work or the kindness ofrelatives.

Most women did not know which prison camps their husbands were sent to, and since mail between prisoners and outsiders were strictly limited, communication was nearly impossible. If they knew where their husbands were, some women moved to the town so it was possible to visit. If a prisoner worked hard and earned the privilege of a visit with a wife or mother, he would be watched over by guards. If both parents were sent to the prison camps, children were either adopted by family members and raised in other cities or sent to orphanages for children, where, like the wives of prisoners, they were treated badly by the other children. The teachers were afraid to show them too much affection for fear of having sympathies for "enemies."

" During the Great Terror, in less than one year, 15, 347 children were sent to orphanages when their parents were arrested. Children sometimes went to the prison camp with their parents, where they lived in special barracks for juveniles. Children born in the prison camps stayed with their mothers until the age of two, and then were transferred to orphanages. Perhaps the most important factor in a person's survival in labour camps was where that person worked. This was determined by two factors: what type of sentence the prisoner had been given and by camp administration. Endless variety of jobs were present in labour camps.

Certain jobs would lead to definite death. Outdoor jobs which exposed the prisoners to harsh elements were the hardest ones. Woodcutting or among prisoners referred as " green execution" was the main but the most short lasted outdoor job.

Prisoners would usually die of exhaustion in a short period. Mining and manual construction also usually ended up with death. However, there were ones who were given better jobs and had the power to dominate the others. These individuals were called trusties. Trusties would usually work in the cafeteria, the bathhouse, or the barber shop.

They controlled who got food, who got rest, and who would do the lethal work that meant certain death. They would get their jobs through bribes or other connections with the guards. Norm was the control system of the production at each camp, a quota of work expected from a prisoner each day. Norms were usually set at very high. The amount of food a prisoner received was based on the norms they fulfilled. Food played a critical role on survival of prisoners.

Food was the only thought in prisoners' minds. The drive to get food both controlled the prisoners and encouraged them to work hard. The prisoners were fed with the amount of work they had accomplished. If a prisoner fulfilled over 125% of their quota, they were fed from the third cauldron which consisted of the most ingredients and had the most amount of food. The second cauldron was for those who fulfilled over 100%-125% of their quota. Finally, the third cauldron was for the ones who failed to fulfill their quotas which lacked ingredients and had the less amount of food.

It was nearly impossible to fulfill the quota, let alone over-fulfill it. Many prisoners felt that if a prisoner worked enough for the third cauldron, it was

doomed to death due to exhaustion. Sickness and injuries were common at the labour camps because of the horrible conditions.

Hospitals were the safety place for prisoners to escape from the brutal life in camp. During their stays in hospitals, the prisoners were excused from work however, it was not easy to be admitted to hospitals. Doctors were allowed to admit limited amount of people, even though the actual need was higher. The problem of the system was that criminals would take the limited space in hospitals by bribe and threats. The conditions were so horrible that some prisoners would go to great lengths in order to avoid working.

The prisoners would intentionally hurt themselves. One prisoner recalls a man who, " cut his hand open with an axe in order to get into the hospital to relax for at least a couple of days." They would cut or freeze their extremities, burn their skins with chemicals, drink kerosene or soap to cause stomach ailments and many more horrible actions just to rest for a few days. It is estimated that one out of every six Soviet citizens was persecuted in the Stalin era. Countless more were caught up in the web of fear and suspicion that permeated society at this time.

Despite this fact, or perhaps because of it, Stalin was able to stay in power for over 25 years and died a natural death. His legacy is complex. Today there are still many who feel that the iron hand of the Georgian-born leader was necessary in such a backwards and underdeveloped country. Although the USSR did improve in some areas, it is impossible to ignore the enormous

price paid by the Soviet people who weretreated as if they were an expendable commodity in the name of communism.