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Khrushchev's Gulag: the Soviet Penitentiary System after Stalin's death, 1953-1964[i]

Marc Elie

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"The camps aren't our ideal."

Georgi Malenkov, at the CC Presidium Session of February 8, 1954[ii]

[Introduction]

With the understatement that stands in the epigraph of this article, the head of the Soviet government summed up the universal dissatisfaction of the post-Stalin Party elite with the GULag (Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei, Main Camp Administration). In the post-War years, if the need for profound reforms in the detention system was obvious for most of the higher Party functionaries, they were not able to take any substantial step until Stalin's death. In 1953-1954, the Soviet camp system experienced a major crisis, as it went through an unprecedented series of prisoners' strikes and uprisings. Stalin's heirs were worried about the hideous penitentiary machine and inefficient economic colossus the dictator left to them. Despite their dissatisfaction with the Stalinist model of the camp as giant unit of confinement and production located in a remote place and committed to supplying workforce to great industrial projects, in February 1954 the Soviet leaders could not agree on an "ideal" penal system to replace the old one.

Given the importance of the Gulag in Stalin's government and the menace it represented for the social order after his death, its future was a central issue in his heirs' reform agenda. As with other pending structural reforms of the Thaw though, the reconfiguration of the Gulag was a matter of disagreement and debate among officials of central agencies. Depending on how they envisioned the post-Stalin societal system as a whole, they expressed contradicting views on how the Gulag should be reshaped. Should the detention system remain a lighter version of Stalin's Gulag or should it be based on new organizational and disciplinary principles? Answering this question implied defining the size of the penitentiary network, its place in the economy and state budget, and the role of the reeducation of prisoners in their economic exploitation. Along with discussions of principles, bureaucratic conflicts and personal rivalries among leaders played an important part in the rambling developments of the Gulag reform. Lavrentii Beria, Georgii Malenkov and Nikita Khrushchev successively attempted to implement their projects for reforming the Gulag.

Relatively little attention has been given to the evolution of the Gulag after Stalin's death.[iii] The opinion is widespread that, with the crisis of 1953-54 and the liberation of most of the political prisoners the Gulag was quickly dismantled.[iv] Mitigating this perspective I argue that in the ebb and flow of the Thaw, the penitentiary system appears as transitional and highly versatile, as it evolved from Stalin's camp model into a mechanism of limited political and penal repression. The Gulag, though suppressed as an all-Union agency in 1960, went through constant reorganizations until the mid-1960s and maintained throughout some fundamental organizational features it had had under Stalin.

Saving the Gulag (1953-56)

Immediately after Stalin's death in March 1953, Lavrentii Beria, appointed Minister of a reunited Ministry Internal Affairs (MVD) including the State Security (MGB), launched a broad reform aiming at rationalizing the repressive system around three priorities:[v] dividing up the police, imprisonment and economic functions formerly merged in a single agency, the MVD, among different ministries; cutting most of the MVD construction program; and radically reducing the incarcerated population. It is important to note that this purely organizational reform was not directed against the massive use of forced labor in the Soviet economy.[vi] On the contrary, Beria and his party colleagues saw this reform as necessary for maintaining the camp system. However, the reform deepened the crisis it was deemed to cure, and was therefore partially reversed after Beria's arrest in Summer 1953.

By the end of Stalin's reign, the MVD had grown into one of the biggest economic agencies in the USSR. It supervised sixteen economic Main Directorates (Glavnye upravlenia, GU), some of which covered the economic structures of entire regions (like Eniseistroi in Krasnoiarsk Territory or Dal'stroi in the Northeast), some others encompassed entire industrial sectors (like the Main Directorates for the Mica and Asbestos Industries), others still were created for the sake of a unique grand enterprise (like the construction of the Volga-Baltic Sea canal). Each directorate had its own network of camps extracting forced labor.[vii] In addition to its own economic sites, the GULag as an MVD Main Directorate controlled the regional and republican administrations of the camps and colonies (such as the camp administrations of the Sverdlovsk region, of Byelorussia). Subordinated to one of the directorates, the camp (ispravitel'no-trudovoi lager', ITL) was the key unit of workforce detention and

management. The camp included up to several tens of thousands of inmates and was subdivided into camp sections, officially up to 3000 prisoners each. By Stalin's death the MVD detained 2,624,537 convicts.[viii]

Beria's first steps were to dismantle the economic empire of the Gulag with the goal to "free the MVD from its industrial and economic activities." The MVD was to become a pure police agency without production tasks. A few weeks after the death of his master, Beria obtained an almost 50% reduction of the MVD 105-billion ruble construction program by scrapping the most gigantic and unworkable canal, road and railroad construction projects of the late Stalin era operated by the MVD. The so-called "great construction projects of socialism," such as the Turkmenistan canal and the railroad track Chum – Salekhard – Igarka, had dubious economic prospects and were a waste of human and material resources, Beria argued.[ix] Earlier still, he obtained the transfer of all economic directorates and their subordinate industrial and construction enterprises from the MVD to the corresponding economic ministries.[x] This separation of economic and penal functions had important consequences for the camp administration. Camp commanders lost control over the economic enterprises that had belonged to the MVD. Their competence was now limited to surveilling prisoners and farming them out to construction and production projects, while the economic ministries appointed their own personnel to manage the enterprises they received.

Separating the camp hierarchy and the industrial management was to put an end to the principle of edinonachalie (one-man management). However, some large industrial complexes were ultimately excluded from the reform.[xi] In the logging industry, the reform was carried out with difficulty. The MVD Main Directorate of

Timber Industry Camps (GULLP) with all its branches was transferred to the civilian Ministry of Forest and Paper Industry and renamed Glavspetsles. To get prison laborers, the logging enterprises henceforth had to contract with the regional camp administration. However, MVD camp bosses and the Ministry's high-ranking officials were hard pushed to work with each other. Both parties claimed edinonachalie for themselves. The Minister of Timber and Paper Industry, Georgii Orlov maintained in May 1953 that in the new configuration the camp administration was preoccupied only by the issue of discipline, while the management only cared about plan fulfillment, and each authority ignored the concerns of the other. Meant to rationalize the workforce management, the reform led to a sharp decrease in productivity and failure to fulfill the timber plan in 1953.[xii]

As Beria wanted the MVD to lose not only its economic power but also most of its penal responsibilities, he transferred the GULag from the MVD to the Ministry of Justice.[xiii] Furthermore, several hundred camps formerly administered by the MVD economic directorates were shifted to the GULag. The MVD retained only the most severe camp network of the GULag's detention system, the "special camps" (osobye lageria) and "special prisons," designed to confine 221,435 "especially dangerous" political, war and common criminals in the hardest possible conditions.[xiv] For its part, the Ministry of Justice was in charge of carrying out the sentences of the majority of prisoners. After the redistribution of its economic and penal functions, Beria could now focus the MVD on what he considered its core objective: the protection of state security.[xv]

Since the late 1940s, the MVD had unsuccessfully attempted to cut back on prisoners in order to make the prison system fitter and more efficient.[xvi] On March 27,

1953, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet adopted an amnesty edict, following Beria's recommendations to remove all prisoners serving short sentences (less than five years) and all prisoners condemned for small economic and office crimes.[xvii] The prisoners unfit for labor, who were a financial burden to the camps (too young, too old, pregnant or with young children, disabled, ill), were to recover their freedom, too, except for those condemned for counterrevolutionary and the most dangerous common crimes.[xviii] 1,201,738 prisoners left the camps and colonies under the March amnesty.[xix] In October, there remained 1,055,950 prisoners in the camps and colonies of the Ministry of Justice.[xx] The mass release of prisoners brought about a drastic reduction in the "Gulag Archipelago": 40% of 3274 camp units were closed in 1953, implying an equivalent 40% cutback in GULag personnel.[xxi]

{CHART 1: INMATE POPULATION, USSR, 1940-1970}[xxii]

The massive release had a detrimental effect on the prisoners who were left behind. In the summer of 1953, the situation became incontrollable in the camps where hardened prisoners, dangerous recidivists, and resolute nationalists, among others, were still detained.[xxiii] In some places, the camp bosses, disoriented by the turmoil of changes, had lost the control over the situation. Mass disorders happened in the special camps – in Gorlag in May-July, Noril'sk and Viatlag in July, Rechlag in July-August, and Pechorlag in November 1953. In Steplag in May-June 1954 the prisoners staged a forty-day rebellion, demanding an improvement of living and working conditions as well as a review of their cases. The revolt was quelled in a bloodbath.[xxiv]

The reorganization of the Gulag that Beria sought to implement partly failed. The amnesty did not break the penal machine; on the contrary, the panic created by

mass rumors of crimes committed by the amnestied led the Party leadership to take harsh law-and-order measures in the fall of 1953, increasing the monthly influx of new Gulag convicts.[xxv] Moreover, the unrest in the camps convinced the leaders that the Ministry of Justice was unable to manage the confusion within the GULag.[xxvi] By the beginning of 1954, the directorate was transferred back to the MVD.[xxvii] At the same moment, the MVD lost the secret services, which were now entrusted to a new separate agency, the KGB (Committee for State Security).[xxviii] Thus, the pre-March 1953 organizational scheme of the repressive agencies was reestablished. Sergei Kruglov, who had been in charge of the MVD during the whole postwar period and became its head again after Beria's arrest, applied himself to fulfilling Malenkov's reform endeavor of maintaining the ministry's economic power and ensuring its financial viability. Beria's model of contractual relations between camps and enterprises lost ground: the proportion of prisoners farmed out fell from 67.6 % in October 1953 to 43.3% in July 1954.[xxix] Kruglov consolidated the ministry's economic potential by recreating some economic main directorates and reestablishing there the principle of edinonachalie within them. The timber industry was reintegrated in the MVD with fifteen timber camp directions. At the beginning of 1956, 237,909 convict workers, one third of all inmates, were working for the GULLP.[xxx]

Moreover, the political leadership still entrusted the MVD with the in-house carrying out of strategic economic projects. It transferred back to the MVD two industrial main directorates (glavnye upravleniia, or glavki) from the recently created Ministry of Medium Machine-Building, the Main Directorates for Special Construction (Glavspetsstroi) and for Industrial Construction (Glavpromstroi), fulfilling secret construction assignments for the Soviet nuclear project. These glavki

took control over some 20 camps delivering roughly 126,500 convict laborers. The MVD even succeeded to play a vanguard – if fairly short-lived – role in the newly launched campaign for Virgin Lands' conquest.[xxxi] In July 1954, Kruglov proposed to Khrushchev the idea of developing the farming camp of Karaganda and building ten new grain state farms in the Karaganda region.[xxxii] The CC and the Council of Ministers entrusted the forced-labor system with a still broader program: it was to build 31 grain state farms, 129 grain storage facilities, and a harvester plant in Pavlodar. In March 1955, Kruglov went on a three-week journey to Kazakhstan to supervise the operations.[xxxiii] These construction works employed 17,085 prisoners in the summer of 1955, and Kruglov anticipated providing some 14,000 more.[xxxiv] Moreover, the Party leadership needed specialists to tame the nature in Kazakhstan. In the spring of 1954, Khrushchev ordered Kruglov to free 8,000 convicted agriculture specialists from the camps and colonies. These tractor drivers, repair mechanics, agronomists, and veterinarians were assigned to the Virgin Lands for compulsory work.[xxxv]

As second priority, the political leadership established or reestablished release mechanisms to free prisoners on a regular basis. This was a long-sought progress for Kruglov, who, in an attempt to step up labor productivity, had for years unsuccessfully petitioned Stalin to release detainees incapable of working and to create real incentives for prison labor.[xxxvi] In July 1954, Kruglov obtained the reintroduction of early conditional release for good behavior, suppressed in 1939.[xxxvii] Moreover, the 1954 "Statute of the corrective labor camps and colonies" brought the system of work credits into general use: for one workday, a detainee could get up to a three-day sentence reduction if employed in common works, and up to a two-day

sentence reduction if employed in subsidiary works, depending on his/her performance.[xxxviii] The economic agencies encouraged such measures because they were strongly interested in offering incentives to the prisoners working on their sites.[xxxix] These early release mechanisms hastened mass exits from the camps, as did specific mass amnesties meant to free the Gulag finances of those prisoners who where a "burden." In the summer of 1955, the Gulag detained 122,148 invalids, 16,345 persons aged 60 or more, and 8556 pregnant women or mothers with newborns (16% of all prisoners) whom it couldn't farm out to enterprises and who cost him 650 millions ruble yearly.[xl] An amnesty released 77,333 of them on September 3, 1955.[xli]

From camps to colonies? (1956-60)

By the beginning of 1956 the Gulag had slimmed down to a third of its 1953 level with 781,630 inmates.[xlii] Even though the majority of the unworkable industrial projects had been canceled under Beria, the MVD under Premier Malenkov and Minister Kruglov stabilized as an important economic agency. However, Khrushchev, who was becoming primus inter pares at the CC Presidium, advocated a different reform vision. To him the problem with Stalin's Gulag was mainly not in the ministerial organization or in the technocratic viewpoint on how to raise the profitability of forced labor. The problem was ideological and social. Khrushchev advocated a regionalized system of small penitentiary units (called colonies) oriented toward prisoner reform, with less separation from the familiar environment, with rewarding and skilled work, and regime relaxation as a reward for good behavior. Khrushchev idealized the prison system of the 1920s, what he called "Dzerzhinsky's system" and opposed it to the model of huge camp complexes at the core of the Soviet

penitentiary and economic organization under Beria, and Kruglov. The emphasis on re-education implied the end not only of the MVD own great projects, but of the contract system as well. Under the colony system, the prisoners could no longer be farmed out to enterprises to do the job free workers refused to do – hard physical and unqualified labor in dangerous working conditions on remote industrial sites. The colonies had to create their own production facilities.[xliii] Symbolically enough, the GULag (Main Directorate of the Camps) was renamed Main Directorate of Corrective Labor Colonies (GUITK) at the end of 1956, to signify the end of the camp era.[xliv]

The First Secretary set up a new reform agenda for the MVD, implying the participation of central and regional party organizations. At the end of 1955, Kruglov was dismissed. The party leadership accused him of concealing the real state of affairs in the MVD and managing the Gulag without much party interference. In particular, he was charged with organizing mass amnesties to save on Gulag budget without regard for their social consequences: since 1953 the political elite was concerned with disorders during liberation operations and high recidivism rates among ex-convicts.[xlv] To break with the past Khrushchev appointed his man at the top of the MVD, a devoted party official without Chekist ties – Nikolai Dudorov (1906-1977).[xlvi] Khrushchev expected Dudorov, a specialist in construction known as an effective organizer, to build a new network of penitentiary institutions replacing the camps. The aim was to create a downsized penitential system that would not constantly menace public order with upheavals and massive violence. Dudorov's appointment heralded an intensification of the party's role in the Gulag reform. This change hit Premier Malenkov, who had protected Kruglov and promoted the MVD's role as industrial

operator.[xlvii] Indeed, Dudorov's first step was to remove the production directorates from the MVD's purview.[xlviii]

Two months after his appointment, on April 5, 1956, Dudorov presented the CC with an ambitious reform project for the Gulag to "renew the approach to reeducating prisoners." The minister drew up a disastrous picture of the state of affairs in the places of detention. Revealingly, he named the social organization of professional criminals in the camps – and not economic or managerial issues – as the greatest ill. To him the challenge was to get rid of the unofficial network of power created by the "recidivists and other hardened criminals" who "exert a corrupt influence on" the other prisoners, "commit pillage, murder, and other grave crimes" and "live the life of parasites at the expense of the work of honest prisoners". For Dudorov this category of prisoners represented a real danger to the penal system: criminals grouped in rival gangs and were so well organized that the camp administration had no effective means to fight against them. In his memo, Dudorov said no single word on the "counterrevolutionaries", until then the greatest political and social foe in the camps and elsewhere.[xlix] Most of the politicals had been already liberated by the time Dudorov became minister: only 92,000 of them remained by April 1956, some 10% of the overall prison population (against 460,000 representing 22% of all prisoners at the beginning of 1953).[l] Since 1955 the professional criminals had replaced the politicals as enemy number one for the Gulag bosses in Moscow.[li]

The camp system in Dudorov's presentation was the breeding ground for these perverted social phenomena. Within the system of great camp complexes and the managerial contract model, able-bodied inmates were overwhelmingly employed as "gross workforce" (valovaia rabochaia sila) at hard physical labor in timbering,

mining and construction.[lii] The use of prison labor in the economy was the pride and joy of Kruglov, but it was fairly incompatible with the now proclaimed goal of reeducation.[liii] In giant camps, the physical separation of different categories of prisoners, control of prisoners' activities after work, and organisation of vocational training were next to impossible.

The minister suggested "a revision of the current forms and methods of the corrective labor institutions' activities". Demanding a stricter separation of prisoner categories from each other, he claimed that professional criminals could not be reeducated, because in their "consciousness (soznanie) anti-social views had set up." As their mindsets were deeply affected by "parasite" principles, none of the means usually employed by the camp administration would bring them into line. Dudorov suggested shutting these prisoners away in two special corrective labor prisons beyond the polar circle to resume the construction of the unfinished railroad track Salekhard – Igarka that Beria had cancelled in 1953. This unusual concept of a "corrective labor prison," almost an oxymoron in Soviet penal theory, was meant to combine the hardness and isolation of prison detention with the possibility of employing the prisoners as labor force in the most exhausting outdoor jobs.[liv] Although contradicting the principles of Khrushchev's reeducation policy, the conviction that the professional criminals were "incorrigible" was widespread among the Gulag headship since at least 1954. After the suppression of the special camps in 1954 it was admitted that gang members could not be returned to normal camps and had to be locked up in prison. In the camps, they "could not be reformed" and exerted a corrupting influence on the other inmates. Already by May 1954, 11,560 "incorrigible prisoners" had been transferred to prisons.[lv]

Table // {Chart 2} PROPORTION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE GULAG, 1951-1960[lvi]

To perfect the separation of different categories of prisoners, Dudorov suggested increasing the number of common prisons for severe offenders. The rest of the convicts, sentenced for minor offenses, were to be held in corrective labor colonies. The camps had to be fully liquidated as a detention form, because their gigantism hindered the separation of prisoners and the proper organization of labor. Furthermore, the practice of mass displacing of convicts (massovye etapirovaniia) from one corner of the Soviet Union to another was to cease. In order to make their social reintegration easier, prisoners were to serve their sentences with a minimum of isolation from the rest of society – in the regions where they had been condemned.

In the labor colonies, as the projected new core of the Gulag system, reeducation by labor was to become the main goal of detention. This, in Dudorov's view, implied a change in imperatives: labor would serve the prisoners' reeducation rather than economic priorities. Therefore, hard physical and unqualified labor on construction sites, in mining and logging industries would be banned from the colonies, which instead were to be involved in consumer goods industries and other local industrial and agricultural enterprises. During their detention, prisoners would acquire a useful training to increase their ability to find a job upon release. The Minister laid down a prerequisite for success in this reorientation of priorities: it was feasible only if the USSR budget fully sustained the Gulag.

Dudorov's proposal was the product of a compromise between three tendencies: Khrushchev's ideas of smaller colonies, the Stalinist penitentiary model of extensive industrial development, and criminological ideas among the MVD

leadership. The proposal to see the "Death Road" project resurrected may have come from the nostalgia among Gulag high functionaries for the spectacular construction enterprises of the Stalin era. As for the effort to isolate the gang members from the rest of the prisoners, it was borrowed from new criminological thoughts in the Gulag administration on the existence of dangerous criminal structures in the camps and the inability of the penitentiary system to reeducate gang members.[lvii]

The commission in charge of examining Dudorov's project turned it down. The Chairman of the KGB, Ivan Serov, opposed every single suggestion: the suppression of the camps, the creation of regional colonies, the softening of the regime in the process of reeducation, the turn to vocational training, and the extension of the prison network without forced labor. From his ideological standpoint, he actually supported the traditional Stalinist model of huge camps located in remote regions and employing convicts in low-skilled, hard physical labor.[lviii] But, contrarily to what is generally assumed, Serov's radical criticism was not the strongest argument against the reform project.[lix] The majority of the commission members did not share Serov's viewpoint on the necessity of remote camps and hard labor.

More important was the opinion of the central planning agencies. Gosplan (the USSR Council of Ministers State Committee for Advanced Planning) and Gosekonomkomissiia (the USSR Council of Ministers State Economic Committee for Current Planning) came down against Dudorov's proposal to accomplish the construction of the railroad Salekhard – Igarka. They dismissed the project as unworkable, refusing to give Dudorov the 70 million rubles he needed to build the two special prisons. The most controversial point was the request of the MVD to include the Gulag into the state budget, a measure Gosplan and the Ministry of

Finance insistently opposed.[lx] Since at least 1947, the MVD had unsuccessfully petitioned the party and government to budget the detention system. Although the 1954 Statute of camps and colonies foresaw to include the Gulag in the state budget, the Ministry of Finance had succeeded in canceling this point. At the time Dudorov wrote his memo, the camps and colonies (except for the strong regime sections) were 87% self-financed, the rest of the money coming from budget allocation. For Dudorov the inclusion of the Gulag into the state budget was the key to reorienting the Gulag's attention toward its penal duties. Without complete state funding, the Gulag was urged to finance itself, concentrating its entire activities on fulfilling the economic plans and securing the financial viability of the camps and colonies. That implied utterly exploiting the workforce of the inmates at the detriment of their reeducation.[lxi]

The political leadership returned to the reform of the Gulag in October 1956. In the wake of the 20th Party Congress, the reformist wing in the party led by Khrushchev received support from the regional party leaders, after hundreds of them worked for weeks in the camps as heads of liberation commissions in 1956.[lxii] The decree reforming the MVD, which the CC and the Council of Ministers finally issued on October 25, 1956, was a compromise between the views Dudorov expressed in his memorandum and the needs of the central planning agencies.[lxiii] The decree met Dudorov's demand to reorganize the penal system around colonies, endowed with their own production facilities. There prisoners were to be employed according to their qualification or receive appropriate training. Reeducation was made a priority in the decree, although in general terms only. The decree confined itself to declarative statements that the prisoners sentenced for petty crimes should be separated from the ones sentenced for dangerous crimes and that leaders and active members of criminal

groups should be locked up in prisons or held in strong regime colony subdivisions. More alarmingly still, the decree was passed in a money-saving mode: the political leadership did not allot any funds for reorganizing camps into colonies.

The reorganization of the Gulag into smaller penitentiary units failed for a number of reasons. The main one lay in the correlation between the permanence of the giant camp model and the fluctuation in the numbers of the Gulag population. A simple scheme was at work after Stalin's death: even a short-term increase in the detained population created financial and disciplinary difficulties for the Gulag, as this meant increasing the number of non-working prisoners who had to be maintained. The prisoner surplus motivated the MVD to keep the camp model alive and to postpone the creation of colonies: for the Gulag administrators, camps were a flexible system, able to adapt to greatly varying convict numbers as camp sections could accommodate huge number of prisoners, and prisoner surplus in one camp could always be shifted to another. In the colonies, on the contrary, accommodation regulations were less adjustable: ceilings for prisoner numbers were limited and convicts were to serve their sentences in their home regions. New colonies lacked work assignments: the creation of in-house production facilities in every colony necessitated serious investments. For the Gulag adapting to the jolts of the government criminal policy was problematic.

To understand this mechanism, one has to get accustomed to the idea that, although an abysmal reduction in prisoner figures is the general trend, there were indeed months and years during the Thaw when the Gulag population was increasing: thus, it increased by 10% in 1956 in the wake of a law-and-order campaign against petty criminality, notwithstanding massive release operations and the “Secret

speech".[lxiv] The Gulag retained its "revolving door" that historians of Stalinism have aptly described: vast numbers of prisoners entered the camps, and vast numbers left them every year.[lxv] The fluctuations in the numbers of prisoners exerted a tremendous influence on how reformable the Gulag was. Overpopulation and unemployment meant severe losses for the Gulag economy and danger for the camp discipline. Confronted with such problems, the Gulag leadership petitioned the political authorities to enact mass amnesties and to offer "work fronts" by transferring labor-intensive enterprises (such as construction and timbering) into the Gulag or by widening the contract system. The economic need to obtain "work fronts" in mass hard labor contradicted the proclaimed refocusing on re-education, hampering the transformation of the penitentiary system.

The MVD was caught in an overpopulation crisis beginning in the spring of 1957, when Dudorov claimed that 70,000 prisoners were unemployed. He proposed to the party and the government to create "a set of colonies on great construction sites in remote regions of the country," which actually amounted to creating new camps. The transfer back to the MVD of a greater GULLP, of Glavspetsstroi, Dalstroj and the enterprises of the Vorkuta region was equally recommended to put prisoners to work, a year only after the same Dudorov had managed to "free" the MVD of its economic directorates.[lxvi] By the summer, the government had enacted some of his proposals. In blatant contradiction with the Decree of October 25, 1956, the MVD obtained the right to open new camps for construction and timbering in November 1958, which would house 60,000 to 70,000 prisoners for up to five years. The MVD took over three large construction projects to be linked to these new camps (a mineral processing plant, Plant 530 and a cellulose plant). The old economic directorates were

not recreated to supervise the camps and the enterprises. Instead, the MVD had to work together with the newly established Soviets of the National Economy (sovnarkhozy) in the regions where the industrial sites were situated – Sverdlovsk oblast and the autonomous republic of Buriat-Mongolia. Remarkably, the system of forced labor inherited from the Stalin years was made compatible with Khrushchev's reorganization of the command economy on a regional basis.[lxvii]

Table // {Chart 3} LIBERATION FROM DETENTION AND CONVICTION TO DEPRIVATION OF FREEDOM, USSR, 1950-1966[lxviii]

The second reason for the reform failure lay, paradoxically, in the efforts of industrial managers to limit the use of forced labor in economic sectors and regions traditionally relying on convict workforce. Whenever they could, industry managers and party bosses were moving to free labor since 1955, accentuating the unemployment crisis in the Gulag.[lxix] Furthermore, managers still employing prisoners refused those convicted for serious crimes. "The Forest, Coal and Non-Ferrous Metal Ministries refuse categorically to employ in their enterprises criminals and bandits among the prisoners," claimed Dudorov at the end of 1956.[lxx] Indeed, the Vorkutugol' industrial complex asked in April 1956 to transfer from Vorkutlag all hardened criminals to other camps.[lxxi] In August, the Inta Region and Intaugol' mine complex asked the MVD to send the workforce they keenly needed to fulfill the plan requirements, but insisted on obtaining only light or regular regime prisoners.[lxxii] To Dudorov, this query was impossible to meet, because the majority of convict newcomers had to be detained on strong regime. The relative weight of prisoners condemned for serious offenses rose continuously from 1956, representing a fifth of all detainees in 1958 and a third in 1960.[lxxiii] The reduction in the demand for forced

labor and the ever-higher requirements of the managers, far from encouraging the change of paradigm Khrushchev imposed in 1956, put a considerable financial burden on the MVD, and motivated it to open new camps and new large-scale projects.[lxxiv]

The third reason why the colony project did not succeed was that, in traditionally non-camp regions, republican and regional leaders deliberately impeded the process of colony founding. While the old system allowed them to relegate local convicts to camps in remote regions, the colony system implied that the delinquents serve their sentence in the region where they lived prior to conviction.[lxxv] To avoid keeping their criminals at home, regional leaders built only 43 out of the 276 colonies they were obliged to build in 1957.[lxxvi] In traditional penitentiary regions, like Perm, Irkutsk and Kemerovo, obkom secretaries refused to receive the new prisoners influx from the republics and regions that had not built enough colonies to accommodate their own convicts.[lxxvii] The MVD was thus put in a strained situation as it was ever more difficult to house new prisoners. To release the financial burden of unemployment and overpopulation, the ministry had to resort regularly to mass amnesties, in November 1957 (196,713 liberations) and 1959-60 (471,858 liberations).[lxxviii]

Fourthly, the government insufficiently subsidized enough the reorganization of the camp archipelago into a network of colonies. At the beginning of 1957, the MVD was denied the necessary financial resources to acquire buildings and facilities for the colonies.[lxxix] From the end of 1957, a rule authorized the MVD to finance the renovation of old and the creation of new colonies by appropriating 60% of income from the prisoners' work until 1960.[lxxx] This rule, though insufficient to cope with the colony construction program, encouraged the contracting out of prisoners,

contradicting the spirit of the 1956 reform. In 1959, 28 huge camps were still in place, detaining 45% of all inmates.[lxxxi] This was a progress compared to 1956, when 71.4% of all inmates were detained in camps.[lxxxii] However, at the end of the decade, two third of all prisoners were contracted out to do hard physical work mainly for the timber and mining industries and for the construction sites of nuclear projects belonging to the Ministry of Medium Machine-Building.[lxxxiii] This meant that many colonies were colonies in name only, and functioned in reality like camps, ruthlessly exploiting prisoners.

The conservative shift (1960-64)

At the beginning of 1960, the Soviet penitential institutions held only 582,717 prisoners, the smallest number since 1935.[lxxxiv] The 1960 dissolution of the All-Union MVD remains a highly symbolic event in the political history of the Thaw. The Ministries of the Interior of the republican level inherited the police and penitentiary functions of the former MVD of the USSR.[lxxxv] The decision seems to have been taken quickly and in great secret, as even the minister himself was caught unprepared.[lxxxvi] It could apparently be interpreted as a climax in the period of legal reforms: at last, the all-embracing Leviathan with its terrifying centralized imprisonment structure inherited from the Stalinist past was destroyed. The Ministries of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Republics took over its remains. The absence of the MVD at the all-Union level did not last long, however. In 1966 it was revived under the name MOOP SSSR (Ministerstvo okhrany obshchestvennogo poriadka, or Ministry of the Protection of Public Order of the USSR), and in 1968 it recovered its previous name.[lxxxvii] However, the dismantling of the USSR MVD, this apogee of reform and decentralization, coincide, quite unexpectedly, with the end of the wave of penal reforms that started in

1956. The eviction in January 1960 of the reformist Dudorov gave way to the conservative wing within the Russian MVD officialdom.[lxxxviii]

In the early summer of 1960, data on the ongoing last massive liberation of the decade poured in the CC. The party leadership of the Russian Federation was indignant: 12.7% of the most dangerous crimes registered in the first semester of 1960 had been committed by individuals liberated under the amnesty of summer 1959.[lxxxix] Recidivism occurred in a context of sharp increase in registered serious crimes, after one and a half year of strong diminution. The political leadership attributed the crime wave to the liberated prisoners, and so to a laxity of repression. Reports on the state of mind of the Soviet population were a second element of influence on Soviet decision-making. Supporters of a more rigid detention system were able to prove that fifteen hundred letters to the editor argued against the "privileged life" inmates allegedly led in detention, which a painstaking special report issued in the Russian daily Sovetskaia Rossiia fiercely denounced in August 1960. According to the reporters, as a result of recent reforms, the detainees, even those condemned for dangerous crimes, were so well treated in places of detention that they tried to commit new crimes upon release in order to be sentenced again. In detention, they enjoyed high living standards free of charge, which not every free citizen could afford: plentiful food, high-quality medical care, entertainment (music, sports, games, and movies), and easy work with high wages.[xc] The newspaper article provoked a debate within the CC over the definition and interpretation of the party line in penitential matters. The reformists remained attached to the softening of detention conditions implemented since 1956. They thought this to be the official line supported by Khrushchev. Their conservative opponents leaned on the anti-parasite campaign of

summer 1960 – equally a Khrushchevian venture – with the slogan "who doesn't work doesn't eat," demanding a change in penal matters.[xci] The combination of rough statistical data and staples of indignant citizens' letters allowed the conservative wing to convince Khrushchev to impose a U-turn on punitive institutions.[xcii] In 1961, the First secretary partially recanted the policy of social participation and penal humanness he had advocated since 1956. The militia, the courts and the procuracy were enjoined to display harshness toward every kind of social deviance.[xciii]

On September 1, 1961, the Bureau of the CC for the RSFSR passed a new Statute of places of detention for the RSFSR, which was a real step back in penitentiary matters.[xciv] In 1958 the enactment of its predecessor, the "Statute of corrective labor colonies and prisons of the MVD of the USSR" had been a victory of the reformist camp. It had proclaimed that "prisoners enjoy all civilian rights, apart from the rights they lost by the court's sentence and also from the rights they cannot exercise by virtue of their deprivation of freedom." This meant, for instance, that prisoners were subjected to the same labor rules as free workers, especially to the same workday length. It had bound the penitentiary administration to "a humane, fair attitude to the prisoners," forbidding measures "whose aim is to occasion physical pain or violation of human dignity".[xcv] In the new Statute, these references to humaneness disappeared. It replaced the three kinds of regime – light, common and severe – by a system of four colony types, each with its own regime – common, reinforced, severe, and special. Therefore, it hardened the whole scale of regimes by removing the lightest one and adding an especially tough one. Detainees in special colonies could not receive food parcels, had a right to receive no more than one letter a month and a visit every six months. Common colonies saw a drastic reduction of the

rights granted to prisoners regarding correspondence, use of money, visits etc., compared to the old common regime. Prisons were subjected to a similar hardening of regime. Every convict had to pay for and to wear a uniform.[xcvi]

At the same time, the 1961 Statute did reinforce some reformist tendencies of the past years: strict separation among detainees in different kinds of detention regime, institution of the court as the only instance capable of deciding upon and changing the regime type for a given prisoner (in the 1958 Statute, this was the domain of the administration of penal institutions), organization of labor on intra-colony production facilities, obligation to detain the convicts in the region where they had been sentenced. In this sense, the 1961 Statute was a counter reform but not a return to the Stalinist system. However, there was much political hypocrisy in the introduction of these novelties, because, as we will see, many of them were obviously not enforceable given the repressive drive of 1961, of which the new Statute was a product.

The hardening of criminal and penal policy in 1961 brought new difficulties and adverse reactions. As a direct consequence of the repudiation of the lenient criminal policy of the second half of the 1950s, the number of prisoners went up. The Russian Minister of Internal Affairs, Nikolai Stakhanov, signaled that "the number of prisoners had decreased sharply [in 1959-1960 as a result of the amnesty] and the RSFSR MVD had been forced to liquidate 184 … colonies with 106,900 places … But in the time from August 1, 1960 to April 1, 1961 the number of prisoners grows by almost 60,000 persons."[xcvii] In the summer of 1961, he complained that the corrective labor system had an excess of 24,000 prisoners.[xcviii] As in 1955, 1957 and 1959, this new augmentation was a real financial burden for the MVD. If the MVD

were to respect the legislation, which prescribed to have a colony for each of the four regime types in every region, it would have had to create 70 new colonies in the second half of 1961, their total cost being 100 million rubles.[xcix] The MVD could not afford these costs, given that its request to budget the camps and colonies had been dismissed anew in the summer of 1961.[c]

The rise in penal population, together with the legal obligation to increase the number of colonies, drove the RSFSR leadership to introduce a new, cheaper, colony type, the corrective labor colony-settlement (ispravitel'no-trudovaia koloniia-poselenie) for criminals who behaved well and had already served a significant part of their sentence. Some 20,000 inmates belonged to this category.[ci] In practice, the detention conditions in such establishments were similar to the abolished light-regime colonies: the inmates could wear civilian clothes, meet relatives, receive mail and parcels, and use money with little restriciton. They were paid regular salaries and their working day was of the same length as that of free workers. They had the right to move freely during the day in the territory of the colony and to invite their families to live with them.[cii] For the MVD, this colony type had the financial advantage of saving on the numbers of guard troops.[ciii]

The pathos of convict reform through labor that strongly developed in 1956-1960 was put away in the course of the subsequent repressive shift. The MVD and party leadership henceforth fully accepted the primarily economic purpose of convict labor. This is obvious in the efforts to raise the manufacturing significance of the camps and colonies in Russia. A 1963 party memorandum on the economic activities of penal institutions in Russia hailed the results: "The production volume in the camps and colonies increases from year to year. Whereas in 1956 gross output

amounted to 164 million rubles, in 1962 it reached 359 million rubles and 462 millions in 1963."[civ]

This economic boom (+182% in seven years) was deemed insufficient. The cost of production in camps and colonies was too high and labor productivity too low, as their production was still run on a managerial and economic model "created some 30 year ago", notwithstanding the "big changes that occurred in the national economy" since. The memo proposed to modernize the use of convict labor in order to increase the colonies' output.[cv] In 1961, the party and state headship had obliged corrective labor colonies to produce "more sophisticated and modern goods". The sovnarkhozy had to give them the old "equipment of subordinate organizations freed by the introduction of new technologies." In the textile industry for instance, colonies had to concentrate on low-quality items, leaving the high-quality production to civilian factories.[cvi] In 1963, penal institutions had received equipment for textile and food machine building, electrical industry, and production of spare parts for tractors and cars, etc, from the sovnarkhozy. The colonies were even producing goods for export.[cvii] The political leadership tried to foster economic rationalization by improving the integration of penal manufacturing in the national economy. In 1963, this meant a better coordination with the sovnarkhozy planning. According to the memo, colonies produced too many different things, and this lowered profitability as some goods found no realization in trade. The memo recommended specialization as a means to fit the penal institutions in the regional economic process. The manufacturing industries of the colony system were being reconfigured in 1961-1963, in order to make them more profitable. Their role in the national economy was defined as supplying goods with low added value.[cviii]

The practice of contracting out labor off the penal premises on key construction projects continued. In 1961, the MVD organized new colonies to rent out 33,500 prisoners to sovnarkhoz construction projects. To cite only the biggest contracts, the Ministry appointed 8,000 inmates to the construction of the Plesetskii aluminum factory, up to 3,000 to the construction of the Emtsovskii cement factory (Archangelsk sovnarkhoz), 1,500 to the construction of the Beloretskii mines (Altai sovnarkhoz), and just as many to the construction of a silk-weaving industrial complex and a heat power plant (Orenburg sovnarkhoz). The plan foresaw to contract out inmates not only to construction sites, but also to work in stone quarries, brick, car, oil, wood or mechanical factories all around Russia.[cix]

Convict labor still performed important functions in the 1960s. In construction and other spheres, free labor could be too expensive to employ or virtually unavailable, because of extremely bad working or living conditions. In these cases, the economic organizations continued using convict labor. To give an example, immediately after the enactment of the 1961 Statute, the Ministry of Medium Machine-Building lobbied the CC to keep the reinforced regime at the Pavlovskaia Colony (former Pavlovskoe Camp Subsection), located in Elektrostal' next to Moscow. The colony was supposed to switch to common regime under the new Statute. This change would have endangered the production of Factory no. 12, which produced propellants for nuclear-power stations and nuclear icebreakers, and to which the colony labor force was contracted out.[cx] If the new regulation was put into practice, all qualified 650 convict workers, condemned to long sentences and working there already for three years, would have to be removed and replaced by inexperienced new prisoners, moreover sentenced for short periods only, and this

would have created a dreadful turnover of manpower in this crucial and secret industry. Interestingly, the Minister did not envisage the possibility of using free labor in place of convict labor in these hazardous assignments.[cxi]

The gold-mining industry was the second sphere of economic activity where convict labor was deemed irreplaceable in the first half of the 1960s.[cxii] Yet another striking example of the key role of convict labor in some priority sectors comes from the history of woodcutting industry. By 1960, four timber camps had been shut down in the Russian Federation, but eleven remained. They detained almost 200,000 prisoners, logging 20-22 million cubic meters of timber yearly.[cxiii] At this point, the Russian government ordered the sovnarkhozy to organize the accommodation of the first 35,000 free workers to replace gradually the convicts at timber assignments. However, the fulfillment of this instruction had been delayed, and one year later, in summer 1961 only 7,000 free workers had arrived to woodcutting units, that is 20% of the government prescription. Thus, some 134,000 convict workers from the camps were still needed to fulfill the timber plan, the MVD claimed. The rise in overall detained population following the penitentiary counter-reform of 1961 came as an additional reason not to get rid of the camps. The economic priority (fulfilling the timber plan) and the political priority (sentencing more people to custodial penalty) prevented the dissolution of the camps. The Russian MVD petitioned the CC Russian Federation Bureau in the summer of 1961 to maintain the camps. The minister asked as well for the right to transfer prisoners from one camp to another and from one colony type to another, in direct violation of the 1961 Statute of penal institutions.[cxiv] The Bureau acceded to this demands and gave penal labor with logging enterprises top priority in the RSFSR economic plan.[cxv]

More significantly still, at the same time, in the summer of 1961, the Russian Council of Ministers and MVD asked the Party leadership to allow them to send 10,000 more convicts to the timber camps of the Komi Republic, Krasnoiarsk territory, Perm and Sverdlovsk regions. The Russian sovnarkhozy had not fulfilled the first quarter plan by 1.5 million cubic meters of timber and needed support to clear their backlog.[cxvi] The Russian Bureau instructed the petitioners to catch up with the general woodcutting plan by resorting to forced labor in the old GULag fashion. This practice continued in 1963-64: 24,000 detainees were transferred from all corners of the RSFSR to the timber camps.[cxvii] At the end of 1963, the total number of camps in the RSFSR did not fall, as planned, but instead rose to 15, as opposed to 12 in 1961.[cxviii]

Despite the intention to abandon the forced labor system, the party leadership clearly was not ready to renounce the use of convict labor if this meant endangering the economic achievements it deemed vital.[cxix] The enforcement of legal acts regulating the organization of penal institutions could still be sacrificed to economic priorities. While the conversion of the penitentiary economy toward free labor succeeded quickly in many sectors and regions, in some few others the model of forced labor economy created in the 1930s proved difficult to discard, because the replacement of convicts by free workers was in fact complicated and extremely costly.[cxx] It implied fully new ways of organizing economic activities. During the years of slavery, nobody had to take care of organizing proper working conditions, housing, schooling, transport, health care – in a word, of making life possible for workers and their families in remote and unwelcoming regions. These facts make it necessary to approach carefully the claim that convict labor was universally

recognized as inefficient by the Party leadership after 1953 and that it quickly lost all economic meaning.[cxxi]

At the end of Khrushchev's era, the political leadership sought new ways of mobilizing inmates to provide construction sites with labor force. In 1964, the CC passed a decree that refined the system of convict labor.[cxxii] It prescribed the systematic liberation of small offenders from the colonies with their compulsory transfer to construction sites in the chemical, oil-refining, and petrochemical industries, as well as the chemical and oil-refining engineering industries, and some others (here originates the name "chemistry" (khimiia) given by inmates to this type of early conditional release). These former inmates were subject to common labor regulations with the notable exception that work was compulsory until the end of their sentence. Moreover, they had to register with the local police every three months, and the possibility to be retransferred to the colony hang as a sword of Damocles upon their heads.[cxxiii] This law served on the one hand as securing a permanent source of labor for economic sectors and regions needing it the most; on the other hand, it unblocked the detention system confronted with an increasing penal population that could hardly be accommodated in penal institutions under the 1961 regulations. In the first year of its application, 49,274 inmates were granted transfer to the construction sector, that is 12.4% of the total amount of freed prisoners. In 1965, 29,938 prisoners were also sent to construction sites, and as many were sent there in 1966.[cxxiv] There is evidence that economic managers were satisfied with this new system. Second offense criminality and alcoholism were rare occurrences among the liberated detainees.[cxxv] That is why this system of semi-forced labor was amplified in the following years, to the detriment of other forms of early release:[cxxvi] from 1968 to 1973, 820,659 people

were sent to finish their sentence working in economic enterprises, an average of almost 137,000 a year, representing 27% of all prisoners over this period.[cxxvii]

[Conclusion]

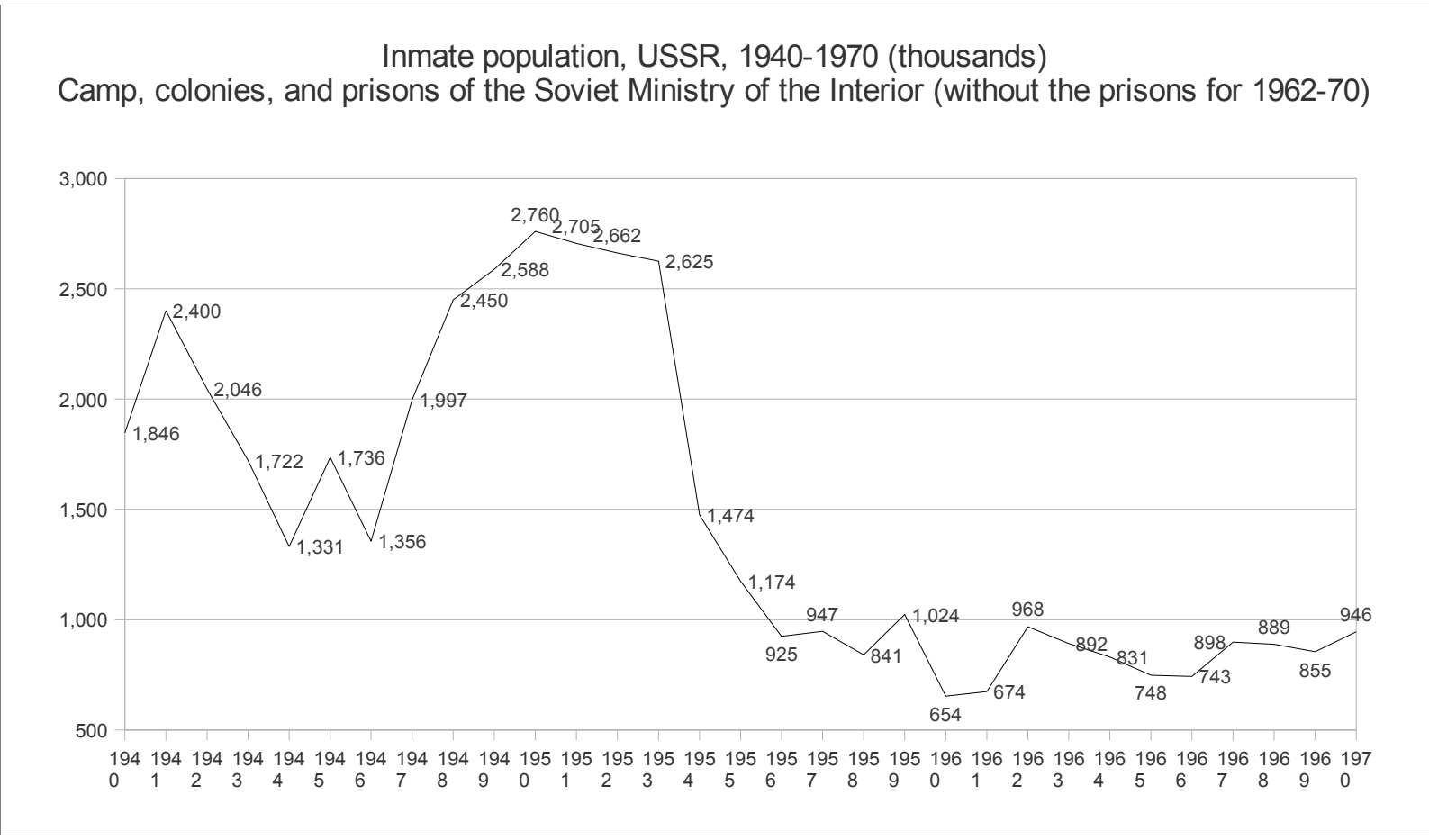
The "big picture" of the Gulag under Khrushchev is one of economic marginalization, shrinking of inmate population, and drastic limitation of penal repression for political crimes. The Gulag underwent a transformation from an economic empire of its own into a supply company of mobile workforce capable of filling vacancies and clearing backlogs. It was not any more in the center of the Soviet economy but rather on its fringes. As its population experienced a four-fold decrease with the political prisoners becoming a statistically very limited convict category, the Gulag evolved from a gigantic and omnipresent repressive machine into an agency of narrowly limited purposes, designed to inhibit public disorder and political opposition.

In the overall context of Soviet history, Khrushchev's Gulag emerges as a transitional and hybrid system, typical for the transformations of the Thaw. It was transitional as it evolved from a specific penal-economic model of giant camps toward a more regular imprisonment system with Soviet features, based on graduated isolation from society according to court decisions as well as on prisoner reforming, understood as social integration through work experience and vocational training. Given the broad consensus that Stalin's Gulag was not viable, but also in a context of political tensions and uncertainty, several projects of reforming the Gulag were tested during these years. There was a functionalist trend, expressed by Beria, who understood the Gulag crisis as a managerial and institutional problem, to be solved by separating to some extent the managerial and penitentiary functions previously

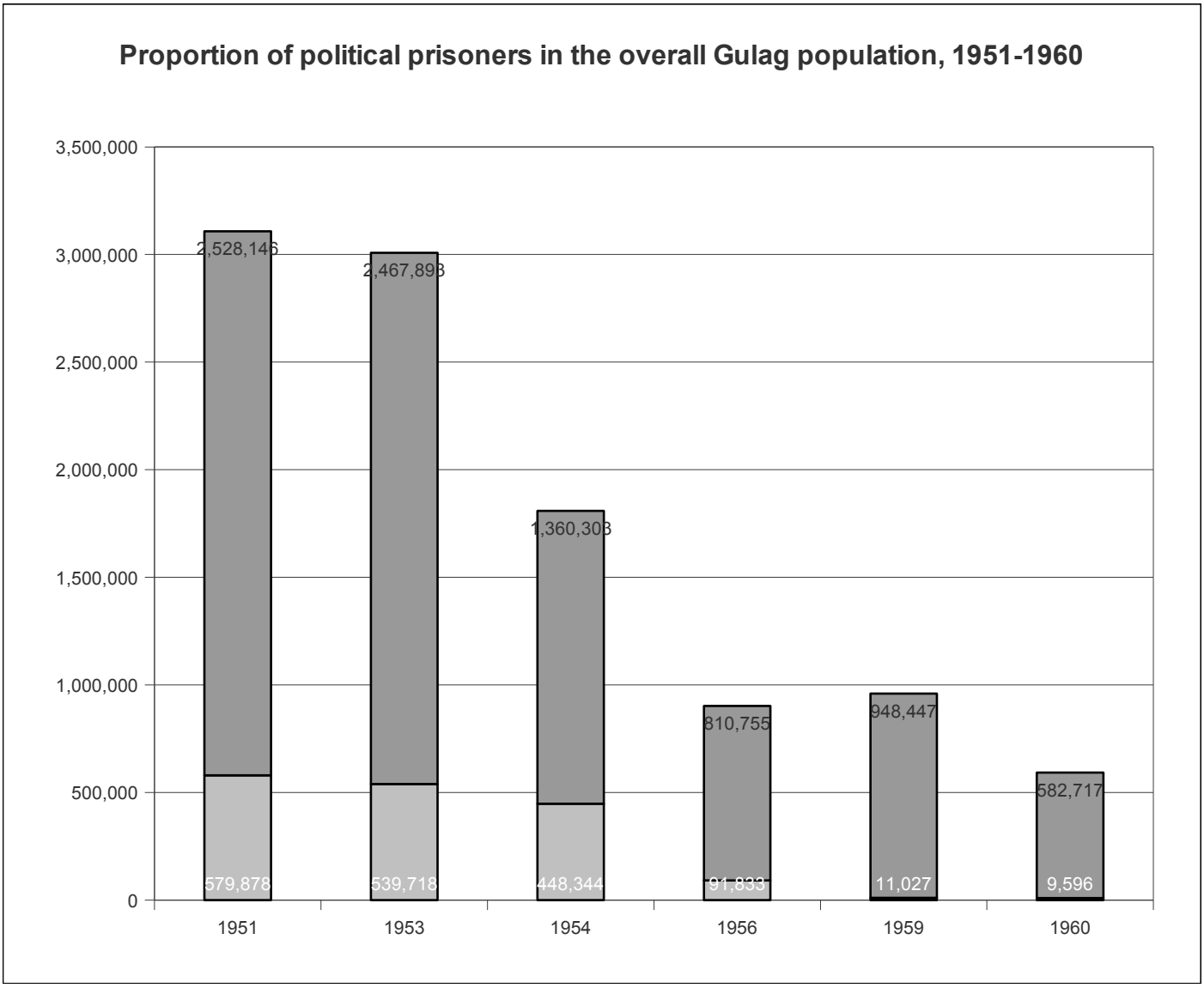
merged in the MVD. Malenkov, Kruglov, and Serov were proponents of a conservative trend, common in the MVD leadership, and envisioned a powerful MVD endowed with broad economic prerogatives as industrial operator and workforce supplier. They diagnosed a crisis of labor productivity and cost control in the Gulag, and they intended to resolve the crisis by introducing proper work incentives and by mass releases from the camps. Lastly, Khrushchev and Dudorov understood the main problem of the Gulag as the prevalence of economic priorities over re-educational goals. This imbalance could be overcome only by breaking up the Stalinist institution of a camp and reorganizing the penal system around smaller, regional units.

The Gulag of the Thaw was a hybrid construct. The inertia of the Stalinist model was so strong that giant camps (even if renamed colonies) in remote regions remained an important part of the system, at least until 1964. Notwithstanding the official insistence on prisoner reform and regionalized colonies, the penal institutions remained profit-oriented, even those that had set up their own work facilities for re-education. Convict labor remained the only way to finance the penal system. Moreover, the economic and political leadership was reluctant to abandon the mobilization capacities of the camp forced-labor system.[cxxviii] The camp paradigm was still haunting the detention system.

Charts



Source: Viktor N. Zemskov, Naselenie Rossii p. 183 (1940-60); GARF R-7523/95a/109/99-101 (1961); R-7523/95a/110/29 (1962) ; R-9492/6/290/3 (1963-70)

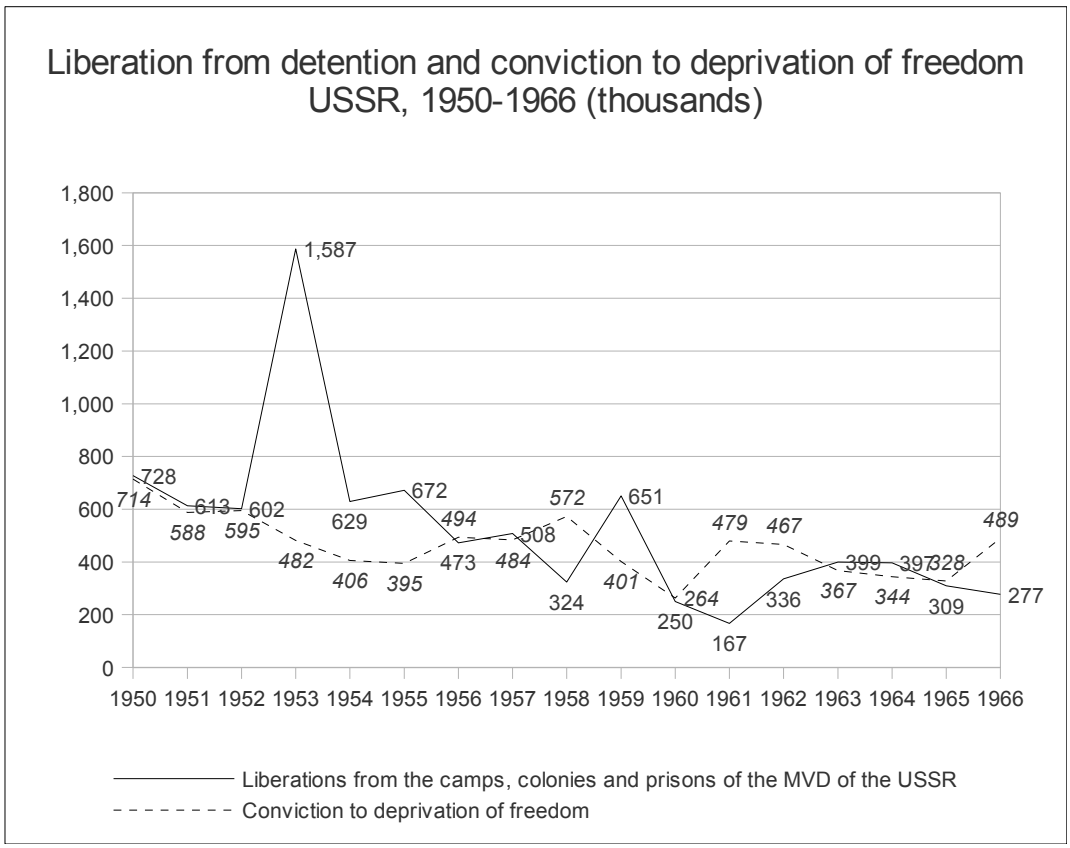


Sources: 1951 and 1959: Viktor Zemskov, "GULAG (istoriko-sotsiologicheskii aspekt), Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia (1991), no. 6: 10-27 and no. 7: 3-16

1953: GARF R-9414/1/507/69-73

1954 (April 1st): GARF R-9401/2/450/463-479

1956 (April 1st) and 1960: Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 401-402 and 443



Sources: 1) Liberation curve: Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga. Konets 1920-kh - pervaia polovina 1950-kh godov: Sobranie dokumentov v 7-mi tomakh, vol. 4, Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004, p. 134-136 (1950-1953); GARF R-9414/1/1426/5 (1954-1958); GARF R-9492/6/133/82 (1959-1966).

2) Conviction curve: GARF R-9492/2/112/111 (1950-1954); GARF R-9492/6/290/3 (1955-1966).

N.B.: This is the lowest evaluation of conviction rates, as it do not include convictions by military tribunals and special courts (camp tribunals until 1954 and tribunals of the line until 1956), nor by unconstitutional justice bodies (Special board until 1953).

[i]This paper benefited from exchanges with Klaus Gestwa, Alan Barenberg, Simon Ertz, Brian LaPierre, and Oleg Khlevniuk. I am grateful to Eleonor Gilburd and Denis Kozlov for their help in reshaping it.

[ii]Prezidium TsK KPSS. 1954-1964. Chernovye protokol'nye zapiski zasedanii. Stenogrammy. Postanovleniia, ed. Andrei Fursenko (Moscow, 2003) 1:22.

[iii]Ann Applebaum, Gulag: a History (New York: 2003): 476-563; Alan Barenberg, "From Prison Camp to Mining Town: The Gulag and Its Legacy in Vorkuta, 1938-65" (PhD, University of Chicago, 2007); Jeffrey S. Hardy, "Khrushchev's Gulag: The Evolution of Punishment in the Post-Stalin Soviet Union, 1953-1964" (Ph.D., Princeton University, 2011); Steven Barnes, Death and redemption: the Gulag and the shaping of Soviet society (Princeton: 2011): 201-53

[iv]Andrei Sokolov, "Forced Labor in Soviet Industry: The End of the 1930s to the Mid-1950s: An Overview", in: The economics of forced labor: the Soviet Gulag, ed. Paul R. Gregory and Valery Lazarev (Stanford: 2003), 23-42, here 41.

[v]Beria had been previously People's Commissar of Internal Affairs from 1938 to 1945.

[vi]The accessible documentation shows no evidence of Beria condemning the use of prison labor for national economic ventures. The famous citation Boris Starkov attributes (with no archival reference) to Beria is dubious: "Beria proposed to 'liquidate the existing system of forced labor given its economic inefficiency and lack of prospects'," Starkov, "Sto dnei 'Lubianskogo Marshala'", Istochnik. Dokumenty russkoi istorii, 4 (1993): 82-90, here 89.

[vii]Sistema ispravitel'no-trudovykh lagerei v SSSR, 1923-1960: spravochnik, ed. M. B. Smirnov (Moscow: 1998), 100-27.

[viii]GULAG: Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei. 1917-1960, ed. Alexander Kokurin and Nikita Petrov (Moscow, 2000), 169; Viktor Zemskov, "Deportatsii naseleniia. Spetsposelentsy i ssyl'nye. Zakliuchennye," in Naselenie Rossii v XX veke: Istoricheskie ocherki, in 3 vols., ed. V. B. Zhiromskaia (Moscow, 2001), 2:183.

[ix]Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 786-9 and Marta Craveri and Oleg Khlevniuk, "Krizis ekonomiki MVD (konets 1940-kh–1950-e gody)", Cahiers du monde russe 36: 1-2 (1995): 179-90, here 181.

[x]Oleg Khlevnyuk, "The Economy of the OGPU, NKVD, and MVD of the USSR, 1930-1953: The Scale, Structure, and Trends of Development", The Economics, 43-66, here 54.

[xi]While "Dal'stroi", the giant construction trust of the Far North-East, and Noril'sk trust, both extracting non-ferrous metals like gold and tin, were handed out to the Ministry of Metal Industry, they retained the principle of undivided management: the chief of Dalstroi industrial complex remained the chief of the regional camp administration. GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation) R-9492/5/196/78. Moreover, the camp networks Karlag in Kazakhstan and Siblag in Kemerovo region did not switch to the contractual system. Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga. Konets 1920-kh – pervaia polovina 1950-kh godov. Tom 3, Ekonomika Gulaga, ed. Oleg Khlevniuk (Moscow, 2004), 356.

[xii]Immediately after the transfer of the timber enterprises from the MVD to his ministry, Orlov petitioned the Council of Ministers for appointing the economic manager edinonachal'nik over the camps and the enterprises. GARF R-9492/5/198/193-201. At the same time, the headship of the North-Ural Camps was lobbying to recover the edinonachalie over the wood enterprises by transferring Glavspetsles to the Ministry of Justice, next to the Gulag. It complained about the "additional expenditures" and "rise in personnel" brought about by the creation of two "parallel apparatuses", one in the Ministry of Justice and the other in the Ministry of Timber Industry. GARF R-9492/5/196/21-3. The end of edinonachalie was contested as well by the party leaders of the Kuibyshev region, who claimed that the hierarchical separation of the Kuibyshev hydroelectric project and the Kuneevskii camp caused a drop in labor productivity. GARF R-9492/5/196/62-3. Similarly, the managers of Vorkuta's mine were dissatisfied with the end of edinonachalie. Alan Barenberg, "Prisoners Without Borders: Zazonniki and the Transformation of Vorkuta after Stalin," Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas 57: 4 (2009): 513-34, here 520.

[xiii]This included the entire central and regional penal administration, all colonies and prisons, labor colonies for minor offenders, the Inspection of Corrective Labor, and all their subordinate enterprises and organizations. Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 792.

[xiv]Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 788, 791-3; Lavrentii Beriia. 1953. Stenogramma iiul'skogo plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty, ed. A. Yakovlev, V. Naumov and Iu. Sigachev (Moscow: 1999), 19. It seems that in Beria's plan the special settlers would stay in the domain of the MVD.

[xv]See the project of "Statute for the MVD of the USSR" he submitted on July 16, 1953 in Kokurin and Petrov, Lubianka: organy VChK-OGPU-NKVD-NKGB-MGB-MVD-KGB. 1917-1991. Spravochnik (Moscou: 2003), 681-4.

[xvi]See the plans that were circulating since 1949 among higher MVD officials, as described by Aleksei Tikhonov, "The End of the Gulag", The Economics, 67-74.

[xvii]Pravda and Izvestia, March 28, 1953.

[xviii]Yakovlev, Naumov and Sigachev, Lavrentii Beriia. 1953, 19-21.

[xix]On the March Amnesty and subsequent mass release operations of the Thaw see Marc Elie, "Les politiques à l'égard des libérés du Goulag : amnistiés et réhabilités dans la région de Novossibirsk, 1953-1960", Cahiers du monde russe, 47: 1-2 (2006): 327-48 and "Unmögliche Rehabilitation. Die Revisionskommissionen 1956 und die Unsicherheiten des Tauwetters," Osteuropa 57: 6 (2007): 369-86.

[xx]GARF R-9414/1a/1331/186-7.

[xxi]Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga. Konets 1920-kh – pervaia polovina 1950-kh godov. Tom 2, Karatel'naia sistema: struktura i kadry, ed. Nikita Petrov (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004), 452-3.

[xxii]Source: Zemskov, "Deportatsii", 183 (1940-60); GARF R-7523/95a/109/99-101 (1961); R-7523/95a/110/29 (1962) ; R-9492/6/290/3 (1963-70).

[xxiii]Most of the prisoners of the MVD special camps could not benefit from the amnesty. In December 1953 205,573 were left. A. N. Artizov, Iu. V. Sigachev, I. N. Shevchuk et alii, ed. Reabilitatsiia : kak eto bylo. Dokumenty Prezidiuma (Politiuro) TsK KPSS i drugie materialy. V 3-kh tomakh, vol. 1 (Moscou: 2000), 83.

[xxiv]Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga. Konets 1920-kh – pervaia polovina 1950-kh godov. Tom 6, Vostaniia, bunty i zabastovki, ed. Vladimir Kozlov (Moscow: 2004), 309-648. On the Rechlag uprising see Barenberg, "From Prison Camp to Mining Town", 227-60. On Steplag see Marta Craveri, "Krizis GULaga. Kengirskoe vosstanie 1954 goda v dokumentakh MVD," Cahiers du monde russe, 36: 3 (1995): 319-44 and Steven Barnes, "'In a Manner Befitting Soviet Citizens': An Uprising in the Post-Stalin Gulag," Slavic Review 64: 4 (2005): 823-50. Large-scale unrest remained common in 1955, as the mutiny of some 600 prisoners of the 20th, 28th and 17th camp sections of Noril'lag on June 23-24 and 27-28 and the three-day strike of up to 900 miners detained in the 5th and 15th camp sections of Vorkutlag on July 18-20 show. GARF R-9401/2/465/342, 259-64.

[xxv]Miriam Dobson, Khrushchev's cold summer : Gulag returnees, crime, and the fate of reform after Stalin (Ithaca: 2009), 21-49; Marc Elie, "Slukh o banditskom razgule v 1953-1954 gg." in Slukhi v istorii Rossii XIX-XX vekov. Neformal'naia kommunikatsiia I krutye povoroty rossiiskoi istorii, ed. Igor' Narskii (Cheliabinsk: 2011).

[xxvi]Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 372-3. The Ministry of Justice and the Gulag were furthermore in a state of permanent conflict. See for instance GARF R-9414/1ch1/151/1-13 and 95-105. In particular the Gulag administration held the Ministry of Justice responsible for the deterioration of life conditions of the prison camp staff. Petrov, Karatel'naia sistema, 455-62.

[xxvii]The special camps were now included in the Gulag. See Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 386-90. Two months later, as a consequence of mass disorders, they merged progressively with the regular camps. Khlevniuk, Ekonomika Gulaga, 365.

[xxviii]Fursenko, Prezidium, 879.

[xxix]Compare to the mere 11% at the beginning of 1953. Khlevniuk, Ekonomika Gulaga, 356 and Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 667.

[xxx]Smirnov, Sistema, 59, 112.

[xxxi]ibid., 59, 113-7. On the Virgin Lands campaign, see Michaela Pohl's article in the present volume.

[xxxii]GARF R-9401/2/451/45-53.

[xxxiii]GARF R-9401/2/463/410a.

[xxxiv]GARF R-9401/2/465/109-18. Atbasarskii Camp was specially created to build these state farms and silos. Karlag was involved, too. Smirnov, Sistema, 259-60, 285.

[xxxv]GARF R-9401/2/450/233-4. The construction of the Kuibyshev power station can serve as another example of the Gulag participation in prestigious projects. In 1957, as the construction works of the power station entered their final stage, 21,484 inmates from Kunevskii ITL were involved. GARF R-9401/2/491/180-1. At the beginning of 1956, 34,594 inmates worked on hydroelectric projects. Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 169.

[xxxvi]Khlevniuk, Ekonomika Gulaga, 292-5 and 361.

[xxxvii]N. S. Zaharov and V. P. Malkov, Sbornik dokumentov po istorii ugolovnogo zakonodatel'stva SSSR i RSFSR 1953–1991 v 2-kh tomakh, vol. 1 (Kazan: 1992), 23.

[xxxviii]Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 156. Prisoners held on the strong detention regime were not eligible to this system.

[xxxix]See for instance how the Ministry of Coal industry and the MVD attempted to stimulate further work productivity in the Vorkutlag and Minlag mines in December 1955. R-9492/2/111/88-94.

[xl]GARF R-9401/2/465/370-4.

[xli]GARF R-9401/2/500/316-23.

[xlii]Between the reincorporation of the Gulag within the MVD in early 1954 and the beginning of 1956, the number of camps diminished somewhat but far less than the convict population: from 53 (with 1521 camp sections) to 47 (with 1398 camp sections) camp complexes and from 700 to 524 regional camps and colonies. GARF R-9401/2/478/264-9.

[xliii]Fursenko, Prezidium, 22. A report of 1920 gives an idea of "Dzerzhinky's system": Petrov, Karatelnaia sistema, 557-8.

[xliv]Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 186.

[xlv]Kruglov had dared to contest the opinion of the Deputy Head of the CC Department of Administrative services, Valentin Zolotukhin, on the scope of one of the 1955 amnesties. Furthermore, he had reportedly concealed unpleasant statistical data on the state of criminality in the USSR. See Fursenko, Presidium, 77 and GARF R-9401/2/467/253-60.

[xlvi]On Dudorov see Tsentral'nyi komitet KPSS, VKP(b), RSDRP(b): Istoriko-biograficheskii spravochnik, ed. Iurii Goriachev (Moscow: 2005), 198.

[xlvii]It was Malenkov who suggested reintegrating the glavki in the MVD in February 1954. Fursenko, Prezidium, 23. As Kruglov lost his position in the MVD, Malenkov appointed him Deputy Minister for the Construction of Electric Power Stations. Later, he insisted in vain on keeping Kruglov at this post. The latter was ultimately downgraded and sent away to Bratsk. Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovič. 1957: Stenogramma iûn'skogo plenuma CK KPSS i drugie dokumenty, ed. N. Kovaleva, A. Korotkov, S. Mel'čin et al. (Moscow: 1998), 245.

[xlviii]Dudorov used Beria's wording to justify the removal of the glavki: to "free the MVD from industrial and economic functions unrelated to its purpose (nesvoistvennye emu)". Among them the Main Directorate for timber industry (GULLP) and the Directorate of the Construction Site no. 304 were handed out respectively to the Ministry of Timber Industry and the Ministry of Medium Machine-Building. Dudorov obtained as well the exclusion of the Gulag from

participation in the Virgin Lands campaign (the construction of the Pavlodar Harvester Plan and of State farms and silos). Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 794.

[xlix]Ibid., 164-8.

[l]Ibid., 402, 435, 437.

[li]Marc Elie, "Banditen und Juristen im Tauwetter. GULag-Reform, kriminelle Gegenkultur und kriminologische Expertise," Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas 56: 4 (2009): 492-512.

[lii]Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 169.

[liii]Ibid., 667.

[liv]Ibid., 165, 166, 174.

[lv]Artizov, Sigachev, Shevchuk et al., Reabilitatsiia 1, 151.

[lvi]Sources: 1951 and 1959: Zemskov, "GULAG (istoriko-sotsiologicheskii aspekt)," Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia 6 (1991): 10-27 and ibid., 7 (1991): 3-16; 1953: GARF R-9414/1/507/69-73; 1954 (April 1st): GARF R-9401/2/450/463-79; 1956 (April 1st) and 1960: Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 401-2, 443.

[lvii]Elie, "Banditen und Juristen".

[lviii]RGANI 89/18/36/1-4; Craveri and Khlevniuk, "Krizis ekonomiki," 188-9. Procurator General Rudenko, also a member of the commission, supported some of the views aired in Dudorov's text, such as the statement on colonies instead of camps, but was against the creation of special prisons and the broader use of imprisonment sentences. See GARF R-8131/32/4577/284-5.

[lix]See, e.g., Petrov, Karatel'naia sistema, 50-1.

[lx]RGANI 89/16/1/86-8.

[lxi]Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 394-5.

[lxii]Marc Elie, "Unmögliche Rehabilitation. Die Revisionskommissionen 1956 und die Unsicherheiten des Tauwetters", Osteuropa 57:6 (2007): 369-86.

[lxiii]Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 187-92.

[lxiv]Brian LaPierre, "Making Hooliganism on a Mass Scale: The Campaign Against Petty Hooliganism in the Soviet Union, 1956-1964" Cahiers du monde russe, 1-2 (2006): 1-28.

[lxv]Golfo Alexopoulos, "Amnesty 1945: The Revolving Door of Stalin's Gulag", Slavic Review, 64: 2 (2005): 274-306.

[lxvi]GARF 9401/2/490/262-3, 492/108-10; and Khlevniuk, Ekonomika Gulaga, 362-3 and 571-2.

[lxvii]Ibid., 363-4 and Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 207. On the sovnarkhoz reform see Natalya Kibita, "Moscow-Kiev relations and the Sovnarkhoz reform", in Khrushchev in the Kremlin: policy and government in the Soviet Union, 1956-64, ed. Jeremy Smith and Melanie Ilic (London: 2008): 94-111 and Valery Vasiliev, "Failings of the Sovknarkhoz

reform. The Ukrainian experience", in ibid., 112-32.

[lxviii]This is the lowest evaluation of conviction rates, as it does not include convictions by military tribunals and special courts (camp tribunals until 1954 and tribunals of the line until 1956), nor by extrajudicial bodies (Special Conference until 1953). Sources: 1) Liberation curve: Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga. Konets 1920-kh - pervaia polovina 1950-kh godov. Tom 4, Naselenie Gulaga: chislennost' i usloviia soderzhaniia, I. V. Bezborodov (Moscow: 2004), 134-6 (1950-53); GARF R-9414/1/1426/5 (1954-58); GARF R-9492/6/133/82 (1959-66). 2) Conviction curve: GARF R-9492/2/112/111 (1950-54); GARF R-9492/6/290/3 (1955-66).

[lxix]Thus, the management of one of the most prestigious hydroelectric projects of the Thaw, the Bratsk hydroelectric power plant construction, energetically dismissed the Gulag administrator's offers to employ convict labor. Prisoners were employed there only for auxiliary construction works. Klaus Gestwa, Die Stalinschen Großbauten des Kommunismus. Sowjetische Technik- und Umweltgeschichte, 1948-1967 (Munich: 2010), 438.

[lxx]GARF R-9401/2/482/196-7.

[lxxi]GARF R-9401/2/480/67-8.

[lxxii]Intaugol' needed 1,650 – 1,700 prisoners for the mines and 2,100 for construction. GARF R-9401/2/481/229-30 and 252-3.

[lxxiii]Khlevniuk, Ekonomika Gulaga, 366-7; Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 443.

[lxxiv]GARF R-9401/490/262-3.

[lxxv]In his 1959 report, Dudorov cited Belorussia as an example of reluctance to construct colonies: the republic had built only two new colonies and was not able to accommodate all its convicts who had to be transported to camps outside Belorussia. Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 208.

[lxxvi]Khlevniuk, Ekonomika Gulaga, 367-8.

[lxxvii]GARF R-9401/2/492/195-6, R-9401/2/506/22-3 and 209-10.

[lxxviii]GARF R-9414/1/1427/1 and GARF R-7523/95/3/169.

[lxxix]GARF R-9401/2/490/262-3.

[lxxx]Khlevniuk, Ekonomika Gulaga, 368.

[lxxxi]Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 207

[lxxxii]Zemskov, "Deportatsii", 183.

[lxxxiii]Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 211, 220.

[lxxxiv]Ibid., 443.

[lxxxv]Kokurin and Petrov, Lubianka, 698-702.

[lxxxvi]Vladimir Nekrasov, Trinadtsat' "zheleznykh" narkomov. Istoriia NKVD – MVD ot A. I. Rykova do N. A. Shchelokova, 1917-1982 (Moscow: 1995), 320.

[lxxxvii]Vladimir I. Ivkin, Gosudarstvennaia vlast' SSSR. Vysshchie organy vlasti i upravleniia i ikh rukovoditeli. 1923-1991 gg. Istoriko-bibliograficheskii spravochnik (Moscow: 1999), 180.

[lxxxviii]The MVD officials have kept an unhappy memory of the Dudorovian era until today. See the negative evaluation of Dudorov by Vladimir Nekrasov, who served in the MVD for 45 years: "It was, of course, hard for a constructor by profession and work experience to run such a ministry as the MVD." Dudorov himself claimed on several occasions having been the victim of "attacks and reprisals" by conservative Party leaders after his dismissal. See Nekrasov, 321-2.

[lxxxix]RGANI 13/1/764/127-32

[xc]Sovetskaia Rossiia, August 27, 1960 (report) and September 19, 1960 (review of readers' letters).

[xci]RGANI 13/1/788/32-75. On the anti-parasite legislation see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Social parasites. How tramps, idle youth, and busy entrepreneurs impeded the Soviet march to communism", Cahiers du monde russe 47, no. 1-2, 377-408.

[xcii]Witnesses have noticed this turn: V. F. Abramkin and V. F. Chesnokova, Tiuremnyi mir glazami politzakliuchennykh, 1940-1980gg (Moscow: 1993): 12-6; Alexander Soljenitsyn, Arkhipelag GULAG, 1918-1956, Opyt khudozheskogo issledovaniia 3 (Moscow: 1990): 171-85; Anatolii Marchenko, Moi pokazaniia, chapter "Vladimirka", [available (June 2006) at: www.memo.ru/history/diss/books/MAP4EHKO/index.htm].

[xciii]"I think that the Presidium was afraid to display courage, it played liberal (sliberal'nichal) [in 1959-1960]. Yes, I publicly took the position that it is cruel (zhestoko) [to execute people]. But now, is it really cruelty? … No, the people are awaiting this, they demand executions", Khrushchev said at a Central Committee session in June 1961. Fursenko, Prezidium, 525-8. On the new role given to the militia in the fight against social disorder see Yoram Gorlizki, "Policing post-Sta1in society. The militsiia and public order under Khrushchev", Cahiers du monde russe 44: 2-3, 465-80.

[xciv]RGANI 13/1/295 "Minutes of the Bureau session N° 134, point 1g, September 1, 1961 'On the measures to carry out the decree of the CC of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR of April 3, 1961 N° 331-143 'On measures to ameliorate the work of corrective labor establishments of the MVD of socialist republics'". The CC had adopted an outline statute in April 1961 that served as a model for all republican statutes. RGANI 13/1/872/44-73.

[xcv]Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 195-207.

[xcvi]RGANI 13/2/894/87-104.

[xcvii]RGANI 13/1/768/25-55.

[xcviii]RGANI 13/1/891/9.

[xcix]RGANI 13/1/891/10-2.

[c]It was not included in the 1961 Statute. RGANI 13/1/872/45-73.

[ci] Organy i voiska MVD Rossii. Kratkii istoricheskii ocherk (Moscow: 1996), 386.

[cii]RGANI 13/2/174/38-40.

[ciii]RGANI 13/2/567/164.

[civ]In new rubles (after the 1961 monetary reform). RGANI 13/2/618/27-31. For the entire USSR the plan assigned the Gulag 380 million of gross output in 1954 and 544.3 million in 1958 (in new rubles). Comparisons in time were complicated though, as the GULag farmed out most of its prisoners in the second half of the 1960s (62.7% in 1958): their work yielded considerable amounts of money (437 million expressed in new rubles) that were not included in the gross output figures. Kokurin and Petrov, GULAG, 217, 220, 378.

[cv]RGANI 13/2/618/26-31, here 27-8.

[cvi]RGANI 13/2/894/79-81.

[cvii]RGANI 13/2/618/27.

[cviii]RGANI 13/2/618/28-31.

[cix]RGANI 13/2/894/83-5.

[cx]Since the mid-1940s, Elektrostal' had become an important center for nuclear projects and had a big uranium plant. In 1945, Factory no. 12 began processing uranium for the first Soviet atom bomb. Paul Josephson, Red atom Russia's nuclear power program from Stalin to today (Pittsburgh: 2005), 284.

[cxi]RGANI 13/2/372/163-8.

[cxii]RGANI 5/30/373/90-2.

[cxiii]RGANI 13/2/891/9-12. Compare with 152,400 prisoners working in forest industry, logging 21.1 million cubic meters in the entire USSR in 1958. Compare as well with the total number of workers employed in forestry – 227,000 and with the total amount of logging – 317 million cubic meters in the RSFSR by 1961 (including self-supply in agriculture). Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1961 godu. Statisticheskii ezhegodnik (Moscow: 1962), 235 and 570.

[cxiv]RGANI 13/1/891/7-21.

[cxv]RGANI 13/2/894/81.

[cxvi]RGANI 13/2/894/133-5.

[cxvii]According to the 1961 Statute, the camps did not have the right to let dangerous prisoners move freely out of the camp territory. However, the advances in mechanization increased the need for convict specialists (tractor and truck drivers, engine drivers) who would be free to move. Therefore, the MVD of RSFSR felt compelled to import from other places of detention prisoners condemned for petty crimes to short sentences who could be permitted to move around without convoy. GARF A-385/26/251/1.

[cxviii]RGANI 13/2/618/26-31 and 13/2/891/10-12. There were 583 colonies in the RSFSR; 390 of them had their own production facilities. The rest had to contract out prisoners to enterprises.

[cxix]Avraham Shefrin reports several high-risk work assignments in decisive industry fields where prisoners were used in the 1960s and 1970s. Shefrin, The First Guidebook to Prisons and Concentration Camps of the Soviet Union (Toronto,

New-York, London, Sydney: 1982), 31-35 and 345-352.

[cxx]See Alan Barenberg's article in the same volume on Vorkuta as an example of a successful reconversion.

[cxxi]Galina Ivanova, Labor camp socialism: the gulag in the Soviet totalitarian system (Armonk: 2000), 124.

[cxxii]Organy i voiska, 387.

[cxxiii]GARF R-7523/83/1184/198-200.

[cxxiv]GARF R-9492/6/122/62-3.

[cxxv]GARF R-7523/83/1184/112-6.

[cxxvi]Whereas 70% of all liberated convicts in 1963 were given an early conditional release, only a third received it in 1966. GARF R-9492/6/122/62-3.

[cxxvii]GARF R-9492/6/210/51-6.

[cxxviii]In 1974 General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev reflected on the need to mobilize the workforce to accomplish the immense railroad construction project of the BAM (Baikal-Amur Mainline). He proposed naturally to his Politburo colleagues to recourse to the “special contingent of comrade Shchelokov”, then Minister of the Interior, that is, to the easy to mobilize and seemingly cheap hands of the prisoners. Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta. Spetsial'noe izdanie: General'nyi sekretar' L. I. Brezhnev 1964-1982 (Moscow, 2006),169.