

Pathfinder

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Russia: Army of Slaves?

“Since they came into being, the Soviet [forced labor] camps have swallowed more people, have exacted more victims, than all other camps—Hitler’s and others—together, and this lethal engine continues to operate full-blast. . . .” *

These words were written by Dr. Julius Margolin, a Polish Zionist who used to be proud of his “benevolent neutrality” toward the Soviet Union. Dr. Margolin changed his mind during five years (1940–45) which he spent in one or another of the Soviet camps at hard labor—for being a Pole and a Zionist.

Eye-Witnesses. He is one of several score of refugees from the Soviet camps who escaped thanks to the accidents of World War II. They have given the world detailed accounts of the slavery to which Stalinism has doomed millions of its citizens and conquered peoples in desolate prison areas.

But these reports, since they come from isolated victims of the Soviet regime, have lacked objectivity and raised more questions. For example:

How many people are actually subjected to forced labor in Russia?

How are the camps run?

What is the real Soviet motive for wholesale forced labor?

Last fortnight the British spokesmen at the U.N.’s Economic and Social Council in Geneva shed some light on all these questions. Part of it came from photostatic copies of an official 8,500-word Russian document the West had never seen before: the basic code under which the slave camps are administered.

The British naturally declined to say how they got hold of the code, which was written in 1940 and promulgated in 1941. They declared, however, that it was still in effect, and offered their own estimate of the number of compulsory workers it covered: 10 million, or 10% of

*See *Forced Labor in Soviet Russia* by Dallin and Nicolaevsky, Yale, 1947.

Russia's entire labor force. (Under the Czars, the largest number of prisoners held at forced labor in the 20th century had been 32,000 persons, in 1912.)

Punishments meted out to prisoners in the USSR are divided by the code into three categories: "Corrective labor without deprivation of freedom," "deprivation of freedom" and "exile combined with corrective labor."

The code also stipulated that sentences can be pronounced not only by the courts but also by "administrative organs"—in other words, the police can condemn people secretly without trial. Confirming statements of former inmates, the code also authorizes use of common criminals as supervisors.

Cheap Labor. But why has the Kremlin reduced so many people to forced labor? A British commentary which accompanied the photostatic copies of the Russian code offered a plausible answer. Revenge and indoctrination, which motivated the Nazis, were secondary to the ruthless and far-planning Russians: "The main purpose is to insure that the government can undertake, at 'cut rates' as regards wages, the great engineering works and the heavy industry demanded by the Gosplan (state planning commission). . . ."

That the Kremlin was rounding up new recruits by the thousands, for its camps in the Soviet interior was reported from Western sources in Berlin, Prague and Lake Success last week. Some of the reported "resettlements": 10,000 Greek Russians shipped from their historic lands near the Turkish frontier to Central Asia; 50,000 Latvians, also sent to Central Asia; an unknown number of Bessarabians, Lithuanians and Estonians; 400,000 Ukranian Jews, transferred to Siberia. A Red China could yield millions more.

A M E R I C A

A · CATHOLIC · REVIEW · OF · THE · WEEK

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Slave labor camps in Russia

The world long since came to know the existence of slave labor camps in the Soviet Union. Neither the exact number of camps and penal institutions nor their location was ever disclosed. Yet upon the war's end in Europe, hundreds of thousands of Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, Kirghiz and Balts remained in the West. Among them were numerous witnesses and former inmates of Soviet penal colonies. Concentration camps were officially introduced in 1918-23 as a means of coercion. In 1929 with the industrialization purges their number greatly increased. The entire system of penal institutions was then grouped into three types: a) "corrective labor camps" for a term of three or more years; b) "corrective labor colonies" for prisoners sentenced to less than three years; c) penal exile, i.e. assigned residence without confinement. The system is under the supervision of the GULAG, a branch of the NKVD, (now MVD—Ministry of Internal Affairs). The word *gulag* is composed of the Russian initials of the title "Chief Administration of Labor Camps, Colonies and Resettlement." The number of camps changes almost monthly. David J. Dallin, in a recent issue of *The New Leader*, attempts a survey of Soviet penal institutions. The latest estimates of prisoners he gives as follows: S. Mora and P. Zwierniak, in *Justice Soviétique*—15,000,000; Victor Kravchenko, in *I Chose Freedom*—20,000,000; Arthur Koestler, in *The Yogi and the Commissar*—17,000,000; W. L. White, in *Report on the Russians*—14,000,000, and Brooks Atkinson, in the *New York Times* July 7, 1946—from 10,000,000 to 15,000,000 people. The newest prisoners include victims of purges in the German-occupied territories and the populations of five liquidated "people's republics" of Volga Germans, Chechen-Ingushs, Kalmyks, Crimean Tartars and Karachayevans. In addition, there are hundreds of thousands of deportees from Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic States. Soviet war prisoners returned from Germany went to slave labor camps. The same happened to displaced persons of Soviet nationality, for whom the search of the MVD in France and Western zones of Germany is systematically conducted with the concurrence of French authorities and some UNRRA officials. Forced labor has become an essential element of the Soviet economy, and a prerequisite of ambitious industrial expansion and military preparedness. For the latter purpose thousands of German POW's are being used. Cardinal Frings, Archbishop of Cologne (the *New York Times*, April 8, 1947) complains that over 2,000,000 German POW's in Russia were never released.