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## The history of the Gulag

The system of concentration camps and forced labor camps, which began to be formed since 1919 in the areas of the future of the Soviet Union and whose most growth for a period of cruel rule of Joseph Stalin. Gulag is an acronym (used since 1930) for the Main Directorate of Correctional Labor Camps (Rus. Głównoje Uprawlenije Isprawitielno-Trudowych Łagieriej and colonics), which is a special branch of the secret police and the Ministry of the Interior of the USSR, which used the convicts as a free physical strength. Among the prisoners in the Gulag camps were criminals, repeat offenders and those totally innocent who were exiled there for political reasons, because of their nationality based on conjecture or even for no reason.

Political prisoners have suffered the most, because in addition to the difficult conditions, slave labor, and ill will caretakers were also terrorized by criminal prisoners. Historians estimate that the total number of inmates in the camps of the Gulag is from 15 000 000 to 18 000 000, of which at least 1 500 000 did not survive the camps. The victims of the Soviet Gulag were not only citizens of the USSR, but also residents of other countries, including Czechs, Poles,

Hungarians, French, or the Americans.

Vast network of camps, located throughout the territory of the USSR, guided by more than 50 boards that oversee the operation of hundreds and even tysiący camps (the total number is likely to be approx. 30 000). From the slave labor of prisoners were used during logging, mining deposits in the mines or on various giant construction sites (Białomorski-Baltic Canal, dams, roads, railways). After Stalin's death in 1953 the number of prisoners has decreased considerably. Network camps of the Gulag was officially closed in 1960. Still, there were many penal colonies, where he held both political prisoners and Soviet dissidents, although not in such appalling conditions and in such numbers as in the days of Stalin. Unfortunately, in recent years, Russia has returned to the sentencing of political opponents to imprisonment in labor camps.

[Sources and literature »](#)

## **Czechs, Slovaks and the Gulag**

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# **How has the Gulag**

1917

After the Bolshevik revolution there is a new kind of criminal, "class enemy". This name could be determined practically every person.

1918

Trotsky and Lenin develop the idea of concentration camps for enemies of the people, which sentenced while serving a sentence will perform simple physical work. The authorities use for

this purpose, among others, former camps for prisoners of war released by the Treaty of Brest. The management of the camps is to perform waiting - secret police, the NKVD and the KGB predecessor.

1919

Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee adopts the decree, under which they have created forced labor camps. The decree takes effect from 15 April 1919 year.

1920

On the islands in the White Sea it formed the first camp, which became the model of camps in the Gulag under the future system. The camp was built gradually in the buildings of the former Orthodox monastery on the Solovetsky Islands. Initially imprisoned there real political opponents of the Bolshevik government (anti-Bolshevik members of political parties (mainly leftist), representatives of intelligence, białogwardziści).

1923

Solovetsky Islands become the center of the network camps in the north of Russia located there are camps soon renamed "Solovetsky camps of Special Purpose" (abbreviated elephant). During this period, it is the only network of camps run by the political police, the GPU.

1929

Stalin there is a program of rapid industrialization and the five-year plan. The Politburo decides on the organization of a unified network of camps to replace the existing double the prison system for class enemies and criminals. The camps are placed under secret police.

1931/2

The camps are frequent in areas where they are processed as such gigantic projects. Canal from the White Sea to the Baltic Sea, mining gold in Kolyma, the construction of various junctions in the second half of the thirties bus Baikal-Amur.

1934

Arises Main Directorate of Correctional Labor Camps (Rus. Głównoje uprawnienije ispravitelniotrudowych łagieriej and colonies, Gulag), subordinated People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the USSR. Its task is to manage virtually all Soviet prison establishments. Name Gulag (used irregularly since 1930) begins to function as a general designation for the Soviet prisons and

camps (the Soviet prison system).

1936/8

It takes a period of the Great Terror initiated by Stalin. Purge affect mostly among the highest representatives of the Communist Party, army command, government officials as well as the board of the Gulag. Many people are lost, the rest were sent to the camps, which, however, can not cope with a massive influx of prisoners. This leads to a threefold increase in mortality among convicts.

1939-1940

The beginning of the Second World War is not only a surge of inmates deported from the territories occupied by the Soviet Union (the eastern Polish territories, the Baltic states, Bessarabia), as well as extend amnesty to some categories of prisoners on the needs of the Red Army.

1945

Followed by another wave of arrests, this time among the members of the Red Army, the former German prisoners of war and minorities etnicznych, including Soviet Jews.

1948/9

Stalin begins construction of new megalomaniacal projects, eg. Channel Volga - Don, new power plants, where water and transportation hubs. Among them they are also still road and railway route to the island of Sakhalin - after Stalin's death, both are immediately suspended.

1953

Stalin dies. Power briefly by Lavrenty Beria, who announces amnesty, but it mainly includes prisoners convicted of minor criminal offenses, completely overlooking those convicted for political reasons.

1954

During the reign of Nikita Khrushchev comes to mass redundancies prisoners and revision of nearly 4 000 000 judgments that were made on political offenses. This period is called the era of thaw.

1957

As a result of the reforms network of gulag camps will be closed and many camps dismantled. The economy of the USSR no longer be based on the slave labor of prisoners.

1960

Political prisoners do not disappear, though their number substantially reduced and dissidents are beginning to be held as true opposition activities against the then authorities. They are usually deported to penal colonies in Mordovia or in the vicinity of Perm in the Urals. They also take the penalty of imprisonment in terrible conditions (hunger, disease, rape), but the camps do not have quite so destructive nature as in previous years. Many dissidents are forcibly directed to psychiatric hospitals, where they are subjected to cruel "therapeutic treatment".

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