

A LOOK THROUGH THE JUDAS HOLE[1]



Significance of the topic. The Imperial Russian prison-and-exile system exerted a profound influence on the empire's development, culture, politics, social and natural sciences. Russia's history cannot be properly understood without taking prison and exile into consideration.

1) Geography and demography. If one were to exhibit Imperial-Russian or Soviet-era Siberia, for example, such an undertaking could not ignore one simple fact: Siberia was for many years the tsars' preferred dumping ground for criminals and those whose politics were perceived by the authorities as a threat, potential or real. Much as Britain used convicts to settle Australia, and France - New Caledonia, so too did Russia use criminal and political exiles in an attempt to populate the Far North, Siberia and Sakhalin. By 1662 more than one in every ten people in Siberia were exiles,[2] and by 1900, when criminal exile to Siberia was finally and drastically curtailed, that percentage had reached considerably higher. The country's demography underwent a radical change in the short span of a century, in large part due to her prisons and places of exile. It was the political exiles that brought Russian culture and civilization to that area, and to a considerable extent, it was prison labor that built the roads and railroads and opened up its expanses.

2) Political history. Any exhibit of Soviet material that touches upon the Soviet Gulag, say, or presents a thematic study of the Communist Party or this or that Soviet leader, must of necessity take the tsarist prison and exile system into account. Many of those who did the imprisoning during the Soviet regime had themselves been incarcerated and exiled under Alexander III and Nicholas II, and they learned their lessons all too well. For instance, the 140 members who attended the 1905 Congress of the Socialist-Democratic Party in Stockholm had between them already spent a total of 138+ years in prison and another 148+ years in exile. "If we take into account the fact that the 140 members had

spent a total of 942 years in the social-democratic movement, we shall see that the periods spent in prison and exile represented about one-third of the time spent actively in the party." [3] Here is just a short list of only the top few tiers of the Soviet pantheon, those who lived to see October 1917 and serve in the new government:

- **V.I. Lenin - prison (St. Petersburg Preliminary Detention Facility - SPB PDF) and internal exile;**
- **L. Trotsky - prison (SPB PDF) and internal exile (Ust' Kut, Obdorsk);**
- **I.V. Stalin (Dzhugashvili) - prison (Bailov Prison in Baku, SPB PDF), internal exile (Solvychegodsk and Vologda);**
- **F.E. Dzerzh'hinsky, the father of the Soviet security police - prison (Aleksandrovskiy Central, Orel Central) and internal exile (Nolinsk and Kay in Vyatka Province, Verkholsk and Kansk in Siberia);[4]**
- **M.V. Frunze - prison (Vladimir) and internal exile (Irkutsk Province);[5]**
- **M.I. Kalinin - prison (SPB PDF) and internal exile (Povenets, Olonets Province);[6]**
- **L. B. Kamenev - prison (SPB PDF), internal exile (Tiflis, Eastern Siberia);[7]**
- **S.V. Kosior - prison (Moscow), internal exile (Irkutsk and Yekaterinoslav Provinces);[8]**
- **V.V. Kuybyshev - prison (Omsk and Tomsk), internal exile (Kainsk, Kolpashevo, Tomsk Province);[9]**
- **M.I. Latsis (Sudrabs) - prison, exile to Irkutsk;[10]**
- **V.M. Molotov - prison and internal exile;**
- **G.K. Ordzhonikidze - prison (Shlissel'burg) and internal exile (Yenisey Province, Olekminsk (Yakutsk Oblast'));[11]**
- **G.L. Pyatakov - internal exile;**
- **Ya.E. Rudzutak - prison (Riga, Moscow (Butyrka));[12]**
- **A.I. Rykov - prison (Moscow), internal exile (Arkhangel'sk, Samara, Saratov, Narymsk Territory);[13]**
- **Ya.M. Sverdlov - prison, internal exile (Narymsk, Kolpashevo, Tomsk Province, among others);[14]**
- **Tomskiy, M.P. - prison (Revel', Moscow (Butyrka)), internal exile (Narymsk Territory);[15]**
- **M.A. Trilisser - prison (Shlissel'burg), exile (Siberia);[16]**
- **M.S. Uritsky - internal exile (Olekminsk (Yakutsk Oblast'), Vologda and Arkhangel'sk);**
- **K.Ye. Voroshilov - prison ("Kresty, "Arkhangel'sk), internal exile (Arkhangel'sk Province, Perm' Province);[17]**
- **V.V. Vorovskiy - internal exile (Vyatka Province);**
- **G.G. Yagoda - internal exile (Simbirsk).[18]**

Nor was it just the coup leaders whose experiences in prison influenced their outlook. As Vladimir Vilenskiy-Sibiriyakov pointed out in 1925,

"The role played by the prison, hard-labor and exile system after 1905 was exceptionally important for the subsequent development of the Russian revolutionary movement. In the past, tsarist prisons were places where revolutionaries were entombed, places of the strictest isolation, but after the first Russian revolution those tsarist prisons turned into a huge cauldron of revolution, where great numbers of professional revolutionary cadres were readied. The Revolution of 1905 drew in the broad masses of workers and peasants; tens of thousands of them poured into tsardom's jails as its prisoners after the collapse of the first Russian revolution." [19]

3) Culture: the arts and literature. Russia's arts and literature have been greatly affected by the Russian prison system. There is a vast corpus of prison and exile memoirs, but whether the authors wrote from personal experience on the wrong side of

the bars - Dostoevsky's Notes from the House of the Dead, Crime and Punishment, Maksim Gorky and D.I. Pisarev (imprisoned in the Trubetskoy Bastion of the Peter-and-Paul Fortress),[20] M.Ye. Saltykov-Shchedrin and V.G. Korolenko (both in Vyatka exile)[21] - or from tours on the better side of the cell doors - Anton Chekhov, V. Doroshevich (Sakhalin), S. Maksimov (Katorga Imperii), A. Svirskiy (Kazennyy dom) - the effect they had on contemporary public opinion was considerable. They also exposed corruption in provincial administration and mocked the red tape that afflicted everyone. Some of their works are still required reading at colleges and universities.

From the authors to the painters, then. The so-called "Society of Wandering Exhibitions," the members of which were referred to as "The Wanderers" - I.Ye. Repin, N.A. Kasatkin, V.G. Perov, V.Ye. Makovskiy, V.I. Yakobi, and N.A. Yaroshenko, to name just some of them - produced works on the prison and court themes. Lesser lights did as well: Zarin, V. Shereshevsky, K. Lebedev, Ye.M. Svarog, and many others. After the Soviets came to power, drawing and painting the theme of tsarist oppression became a cottage industry hitched to the propaganda cart.

There is also a considerable body of prison-related Russian music, most of it surviving in songs. In 1935, for instance, the State Musical Publishing House and the Folklore Section of the Soviet Academy of Sciences issued the "Collection of Revolutionary Songs in Russia," a part of which was devoted to the prisons. "Arestant," "Uznic," "Po pyl'noy doroge telega nesetsya," "Aleksandrovskiy tsentral," and on, and on.[22] These lyrics survived into the Gulag period and were "recycled" by the zeks in modified form; some survived in the original version.

4) The natural and social sciences: anthropology, biology, botany, geology, sociology, etc. Even when the authors weren't writing about their own situation, they were describing, often for the first time anywhere, the inhabitants, history and culture of the remote areas in which they had been imprisoned or exiled. The statistical and natural sciences were considerably advanced in these remote areas when the exiles arrived and began keeping records on everything from temperature to the price of cattle.

Censorship. And we have not even touched upon the field of court, police and prison censorship itself yet. Here, we can watch the politicals attempting to communicate through the mail, and the authorities looking for anything suspicious in hopes of using it against one or both of the correspondents. This was a battle of chemistry (secret inks and reagents), euphemisms, dots above letters, restrictions on writing, handwriting analysis, cell searches and arbitrary mail delays, all waged under the rubric of "mail censorship." Since political prisoners were almost by definition literate, it is their mail we see the most of in our collections (the overwhelming majority of criminals were illiterate or semi-literate), and precisely because the great majority of people sending and receiving mail in this field were politicals, prison mail mirrors the great ideological struggles of the 1870s to 1917 like no other. Much of the correspondence in this exhibit was written by politicals and censored by the authorities: the police, prosecutors, investigators, wardens, and military officers.

Rarity of the material. Insofar as prison, court and police censor marks are concerned, there are a few that are relatively common, including most Shlissel'burg Hard-Labor Prison and St. Petersburg Preliminary Detention Facility handstamps, and some St. Petersburg and Moscow court markings. Everything else ranges from rare to only one example recorded. For usages, mail between prisoners is extremely rare, as is package mail, correspondence by telegram, registered mail from prisoners, mail between convicts and foreign addressees, mail to and from criminals, and forwarded mail.

Production and layout of the exhibit. This exhibit was produced with a PowerPoint program and Microsoft Windows 98.

Outline of the Exhibit

I. The authorities - the police and the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Justice:

- A. **Third Section;**
- B. **Ministry of Internal Affairs;**
- C. **Department of State Police;**
- D. **Department of Police (the "Okhranka");**
- E. **Independent Corps of Gendarmes:**
 - 1. **Major directorates;**
 - 2. **Provincial directorates;**
 - 3. **Special directorates;**
 - 4. **Railroad directorates;**
- F. **Provincial governors;**
- G. **Regular police and adjuncts:**
 - 1. **City police administrations;**
 - 2. **City precinct police;**
 - 3. **City precinct police inspectors;**
 - 4. **Rural district police chiefs;**
 - 5. **Rural precinct police chiefs;**
 - 6. **Zemstvo chiefs;**
 - 7. **Volost' foremen;**
- H. **Main Prison Directorate:**
 - 1. **Resubordination;**
 - 2. **Prison Inspectorate;**
- I. **Jurisprudential establishments:**
 - 1. **Governing Senate;**
 - 2. **Ministry of Justice:**
 - a. **Superior courts;**
 - b. **Circuit courts, "Hauptman" courts;**
 - c. **Justices of the peace;**
 - d. **Rural district courts;**
 - e. **Volost' and "gmina" courts;**
 - f. **Zemstvo courts;**
 - 3. **Ministry of War military courts.**

II. The prisoners - how they went from citizen to prisoner or exile:

- A. **Physical surveillance;**
- B. **"Procedural" surveillance;**
- C. **Clandestine mail surveillance;**
- D. **Surveillance abroad - Paris Agentura;**
- E. **Police search;**
- F. **Arrest;**
- G. **Trial preparation;**
- H. **Conviction and sentencing;**
- I. **Disposal - the transports;**
- J. **Prisoner arrival;**
- K. **Prisoners as labor force;**
- L. **Types of prisoners:**
 - 1. **Drunks;**
 - 2. **Criminals;**

3. **Political:**
 - a. **People's Will terrorists;**
 - b. **Right Socialist-Revolutionaries;**
 - c. **Maximalists;**
 - d. **Bolsheviks;**
 - e. **Latvian communists;**
 - f. **Duma deputies;**
 - g. **Finnish judges;**
 - h. **Soldiers;**
 - i. **Armenians;**
 - j. **Azeris;**
 - k. **Jews;**
4. **Administrative exiles;**
5. **Exile Settlers.**

III. Types of prisons:

- A. **Hard-labor prisons;**
- B. **Temporary hard-labor prisons;**
- C. **Corrective-labor sections;**
- D. **Temporary corrective-labor sections;**
- E. **Transit prisons;**
- F. **Provincial prisons;**
- G. **District prisons;**
- H. **Women's prison sections;**
- I. **Special prisons;**
- J. **St. Petersburg Debtors' Prison;**
- K. **St. Petersburg Preliminary Detention Facility;**
- L. **Investigation prisons;**
- M. **Alekseyevskiy Ravelin (Peter-and-Paul Fortress);**
- N. **Prison hospitals;**
- O. **Camps for juvenile criminals;**
- P. **Naval floating prisons;**
- Q. **Army disciplinary battalions;**
- R. **Army disciplinary units.**

IV. The prison censorship regime - who was authorized to censor the inmates' correspondence, and under what circumstances:

- A. **Superior court prosecutors;**
- B. **Superior deputy court prosecutors;**
- C. **District court prosecutors;**
- D. **District court deputy prosecutors "supervising inquiries into State crimes;"**
- E. **District court deputy prosecutors;**
- F. **Court investigators;**
- G. **Assistant court investigators;**
- H. **Bankruptcy boards;**
- I. **Prison wardens;**
- J. **Acting and deputy wardens;**
- K. **Building wardens;**
- L. **Deputy warden office chiefs;**

- M. **Duty wardens;**
- N. **Chain-gang supervisors.**

V. The "paper battle."

- A. **Inmate and outsider efforts to circumvent censorship:**
 - 1. **Euphemisms;**
 - 2. **Writing inside the envelope;**
 - 3. **Denial of information about the sender:**
 - a. **Location - riding the rails to avoid detection;**
 - b. **Omitting the return address on registered mail;**
 - c. **Typing to avoid identification by handwriting;**
 - d. **"Trust;"**
- B. **Efforts by the authorities to thwart them:**
 - 1. **Chemical washes;**
 - 2. **Stamp removal or destruction;**
 - 3. **Tracking envelope contents;**
 - 4. **The power to issue or confiscate;**
 - 5. **Intentional mail delays;**
 - 6. **Cell searches;**
 - 7. **Cell and building changes.**

VI. Types of mail allowed to convicts, and postal usages:

- A. **Stamp sales at prison commissaries;**
- B. **Correspondence abroad;**
- C. **Limits on frequency of correspondence;**
- D. **Writing in the third person;**
- E. **Receiving mail - no restrictions;**
- F. **Money restrictions;**
- G. **Forwarded money mail;**
- H. **Money orders from abroad;**
- I. **Money orders between prisoners;**
- J. **Money-receipt notification forms;**
- K. **Domestic registered letters;**
- L. **Registered mail abroad;**
- M. **Reply-paid postcards;**
- N. **Address inquiry;**
- O. **Wrongly-addressed mail;**
- P. **Forwarded mail;**
- Q. **Postage-due mail;**
- R. **Package mail;**
- S. **Telegrams;**
- T. **Correspondence between prisoners;**
- U. **Correspondence between prisoners and exiles.**

VII. The aftermath - prisons, camps and courts in the early Soviet period:

- A. **Fontanka, 16;**
- B. **Russian Civil War;**
- C. **Wardens into commissars;**
- D. **"Politicals" in the Soviet era;**

- E. Children of Imperial-period politicals;
- F. The Soviet GULAG.

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* This is a selective listing of the books consulted during research for this exhibit. The full bibliography runs to 10 pages, and can be supplied upon request.



(Picture from Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, vol. 2, p. 269.)

Endnotes:

[1] The "Judas Hole" refers to the peephole in the doors of the cells. It enabled the warders to check on a prisoner to see if he or she was conforming to prison regulations on behavior. A look through the hole at the "wrong" time would betray the inmate, hence the name.

[2] Margolis, A.D., *Tyur'ma i ssylka v imperatorskoi Rossii*, p. 7.

[3] Trotsky, *The Year 1905*, accessed at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1905/ch28.htm> on 8 October 2003.

[4] Luppov, *Politicheskaya ssylka v Vyatskiy kray*, pp. 83, 125.

[5] Skobennikov, M.V. *Frunze (Arseniy) na katorge i v ssylke*, p. 253.

[6] Lur'ye, *O nekotorykh netochnostyakh*, p. 139.

[7] Rumyantsev, *Kamenev Lev Borisovich*, accessed at <http://hronos.km.ru/biograf/tomski.html> on 29 April 2005.

[8] Rumyantsev, *Kosior Stanislav Vikent'evich*, accessed at <http://hronos.km.ru/biograf/tomski.html> on 29 April 2005.

[9] Vinogradov-Yagodin, *Iz zhizni V.V. Kuybysheva*, in *Katorga i ssylka* No. 1, 1935, pp. 25, 33, 35.

[10] Diyenko, *Razvedka i kontrrazvedka v litsakh*, p. 279.

[11] Rumyantsev, *Sergo Ordzhonikidze*, accessed at <http://hronos.km.ru/biograf/tomski.html> on 29 April 2005.

[12] Rumyantsev, *Rudzutak Yan Ernestovich*, accessed at <http://hronos.km.ru/biograf/tomski.html> on 29 April 2005.

[13] Rumyantsev, *Rykov Aleksey Ivanovich*, accessed at <http://hronos.km.ru/biograf/tomski.html> on 29 April 2005.

[14] Vinogradov-Yagodin, *Iz zhizni V.V. Kuybysheva*, p. 35.

[15] Rumyantsev, *Tomskiy Mikhail Pavlovich*, accessed at <http://hronos.km.ru/biograf/tomski.html> on 29 April 2005.

[16] Diyenko, *Razvedka i kontrrazvedka v litsakh*, p. 489.

[17] Diyenko, *Razvedka i kontrrazvedka v litsakh*, p. 102.

[18] These reflect the sentences they received. It should be noted that all of those who were sentenced to internal exile usually sat first in a prison somewhere awaiting trial. Unless otherwise specified, these data were extracted from Ivkin (comp.), *Gosudarstvennaya vlast' SSSR: Vysshiyey organy vlasti i ikh rukovoditeli, 1923-1991. (Istoriko-biograficheskiy spravochnik)*. For Yagoda, see also Diyenko, *Razvedka i kontrrazvedka v litsakh*, p. 573.

[19] Vilenskiy-Sibiriyakov, *Dva yubileya. Dekabristy - Revolyutsiya 1905 goda*

[20] Koz'min, *Po povodu novogo izdaniya sochineniy D.I. Pisareva*, in *Katorga i ssylka* No. 1, 1935, 136.

[21] Luppov, *Politicheskaya ssylka v Vyatskiy kray*, p. 155.

[22] Druskin, *Pis'mo v redaktsiyu, ko vsem uchastnikam revolyutsionnogo dvizheniya*, pp. 158-159.