
THE GULAG ARCHIPELAGO

Also by Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn

The Gulag Archipelago III-IV

The Gulag Archipelago I-II

Prison Nights

Warning to the West

Letters to Zurich

Letter to the Soviet Leaders

Candle to the Wind

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August 1914

A Lenten Letter to Pimen, Patriarch of All Russia

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The Love-Girl and the Innocent

The Cancer Ward

The First Circle

For the Good of the Cause

We Never Make Mistakes

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn

**THE GULAG
ARCHIPELAGO**

1918-1956

An Experiment in Literary Investigation

V-VII

Translated from the Russian by Harry Willetts


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Preface to the English Translation

To those readers who have found the moral strength to overcome the darkness and suffering of the first two volumes, the third volume will disclose a space of freedom and struggle. The secret of this struggle is kept by the Soviet regime even more zealously than that of the torments and annihilation it inflicted upon millions of its victims. More than anything else, the Communist regime fears the revelation of the fight which is conducted against it with a spiritual force unheard of and unknown to many countries in many periods of their history. The fighters' spiritual strength rises to the greatest height and to a supreme degree of tension when their situation is most helpless and the state system most ruthlessly destructive.

The Communist regime has not been overthrown in sixty years, not because there has not been any struggle against it from inside, not because people docilely surrendered to it, but because it is inhumanly strong, in a way as yet undimagnable to the West.

In the world of concentration camps, corrupt as everything within the Soviet system, the struggle began (also, it could not begin otherwise) by terrorist actions. Terrorism is a condemnable tool, but in this case it was generated by forty years of unprecedented Soviet state terrorism, and this is a striking instance of evil generating evil. It shows that when evil assumes inhuman dimensions, it ends up by forcing people to use evil ways even to escape it. However, the concentration camp terrorism of the fifties, out of which heroic uprisings were born later on, was essentially different from the "left-wing" revolutionary terrorism which is shaking the Western world in our days, in that young Western terrorists,

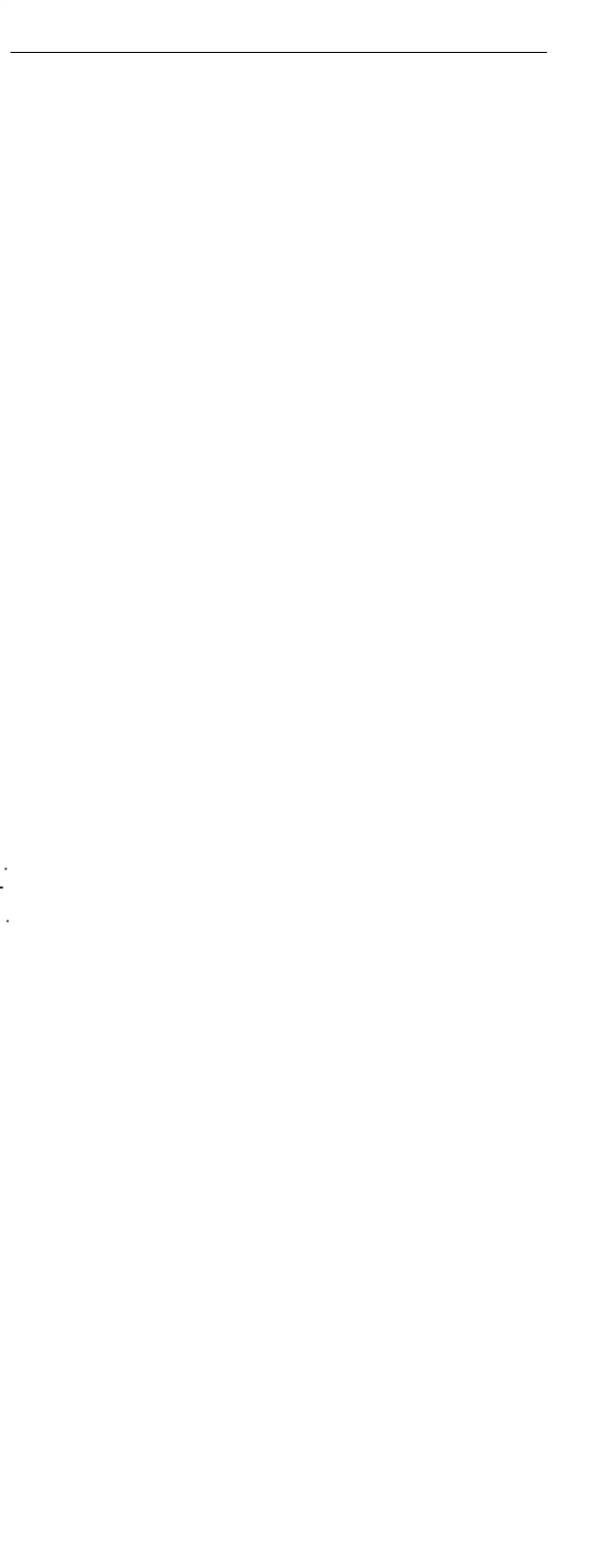
saturated with boundless freedom, play with innocent people's lives and kill innocent people for the sake of their unclear purposes or in order to gain material advantages. Soviet camp terrorists in the fifties killed proved traitors and informers in defense of their right to breathe.

However, there is no kind of terrorism that can be considered a pride of the twentieth century. On the contrary, terrorism has made it into one of the most shameful centuries of human history. And there is no guarantee that the darkest abyss of terrorism already lies behind us.

November 1977
Vermont

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to be 'A. B. ...'.

THE GULAG ARCHIPELAGO



PART V

Katorga

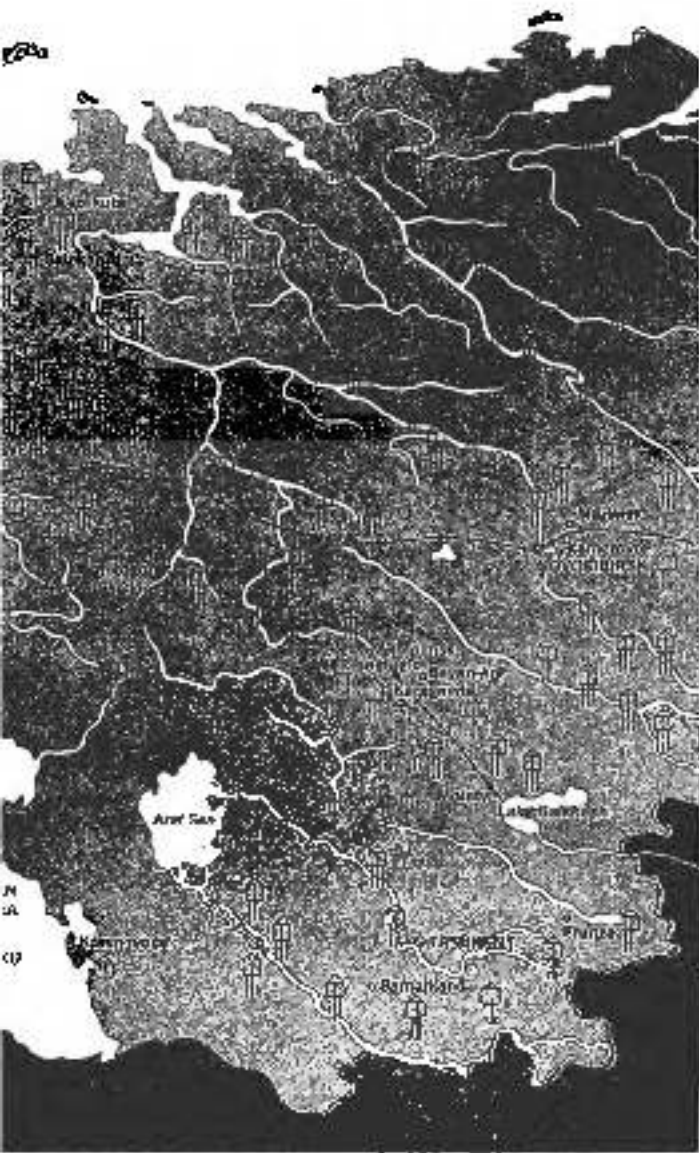
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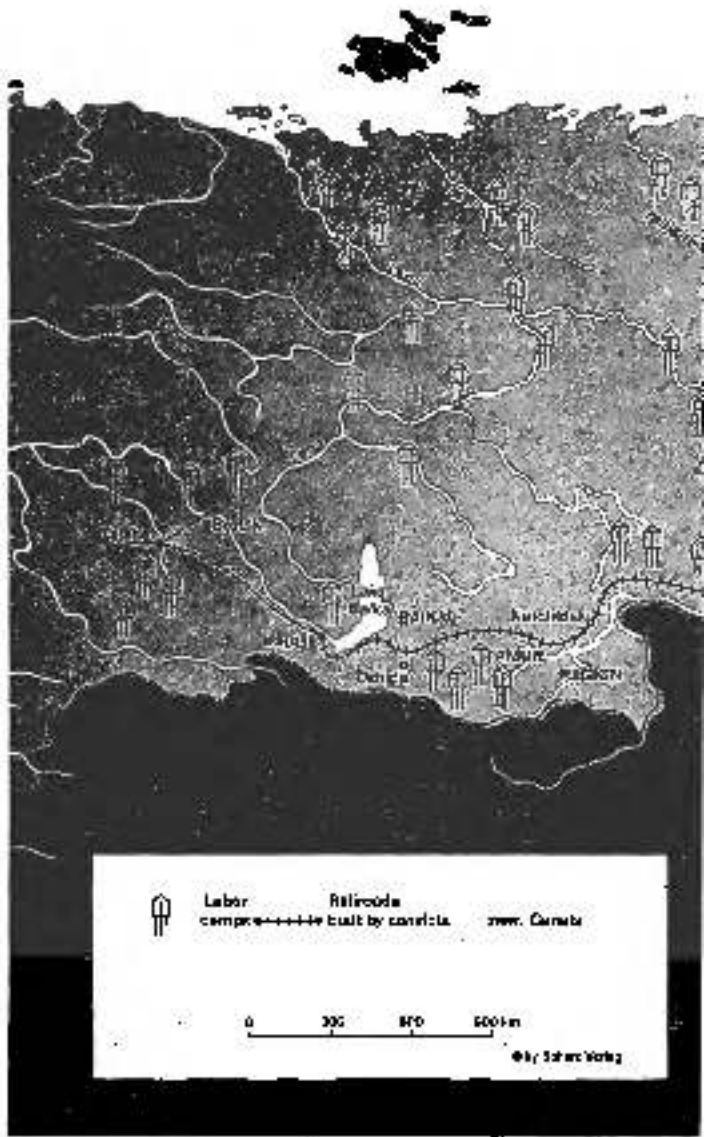
"We shall turn the Siberia of *Katorga*, Siberia in shackles,
into a Soviet, socialist Siberia."

STALIN

THE DESTRUCTIVE-LABOR CAMPS









Chapter 1

The Doomed

Revolution is often rash in its generosity. It is in such a hurry to disown so much. Take the word *katovga*,* for instance. Now, *katovga* is a good word, a word with some weight in it, nothing like the rantish abortion DOPR or the pipsqueak TTL.* *Katovga* descends from the judicial bench, like the blade of a guillotine, stops short of beheading the prisoner but breaks his spine, shatters all hope there and then in the courtroom. The word *katovzhane* holds such terror that other prisoners think to themselves: "These must be the real cutthroats!" (It is a cowardly but comfortable human failing to see yourself as not the worst of men, nor in the worst position. *Katovzhane* wear numbers! They are obviously beyond redemption! Nobody would pin a number on you or me! . . . They will, though—you'll see!)

Stalin was very fond of old words; he never forgot that they can cement a state together for centuries. It was not to meet some proletarian need that he grafted on again words too hastily lopped off: "officer," "general," "director," "suprema"*. And twenty-six years after the February Revolution had abolished "*katovga*," Stalin reintroduced it. This was in April, 1943, when he began to feel that he was no longer sliding downhill. For the home front the first fruits of the people's victory at Stalingrad were the decree on the militarization of the railroads (providing for trial of women and little boys by court-martial) and, on the following day (April 17), the decree introducing the *katovga* and the *galkova*. (The *galkova* is another fine old institution, much superior to a short

*See notes, page 121.

sharp pistol shot: it makes death a leisurely process, which can be exhibited in detail to a large crowd of people.) Each subsequent victory drove fresh contingents of the doomed into *karogga* or to the gallows—first from the Kuban and the Don, then from the left-bank Ukraine and the Kursk, Orel, and Smolensk regions. On the heels of the army came the tribunals, publicly hanging some people on the spot, dispatching others to the newly created *karogga* forced-labor camps.

The first of them, of course, was Mine No. 17 at Vorkuta (those at Norilsk and Dzhezkazgan came soon after). Little attempt was made to conceal their purpose: the *katorzhane* were to be done to death. These were, undisguisedly, murder camps; but in the Gulag tradition murder was protracted, so that the doomed would suffer longer and put a little work in before they died.

They were housed in "bents," seven meters by twenty, of the kind common in the north. Surrounded with boards and sprinkled with sawdust, the tent became a sort of flimsy hut. It was meant to hold eighty people, if they were on bunk beds, or one hundred on sleeping platforms. But *katorzhane* were put into them two hundred at a time.

Yet there was no reduction of average living space—just a rational utilization of accommodation. The *katorzhane* were put on a twelve-hour working day with two shifts, and no rest days, so that there were always one hundred at work and one hundred in the hut.

At work they were cordoned off by guards with dogs, beaten whenever anybody felt like it, urged on to greater efforts by Tommy guns. On their way back to the living area their ranks might be raked with Tommy-gun fire for no good reason, and the soldiers would not have to answer for the casualties. Even at a distance a column of exhausted *katorzhane* was easily identified—no ordinary prisoners dragged themselves so hopelessly, so painfully along.

Their twelve working hours were measured out in full to the last tedious minute.

Those quarrying stone for roadmaking in the polar blizzards of Norilak were allowed ten minutes for a warm-up once in the course of a twelve-hour shift. And then their twelve-hour rest was wasted in the silliest way imaginable. Part of these twelve hours went into moving them from one camp area to another, parading them, searching them. Once in the living area, they were immedi-

ately taken into a "tent" which was never ventilated—a windowless hut—and locked in. In winter a foul sour stench hung so heavy in the damp air that no one dared to go in; it could endure it for two minutes. The living area was even less accessible to the *katorzhane* than the camp work area. They were never allowed to go to the latrine, nor to the mess hut, nor to the Medical Section. All their needs were served by the latrine bucket and the feeding hatch. Such was Stalin's *katorga* as it took shape in 1943–1944; a combination of all that was worst in the camps with all that was worst in the prisons.¹

Their twelve hours of *rest* also included inspections, morning and evening—no mere counting of heads, as with ordinary zeks,² but a full and formal roll call at which each of a hundred *katorzhane* twice in every twenty-four hours had to reel off smartly his number, his abhorrent surname, forename, and patronymic, where and in what year he was born, under which article of the Criminal Code he was convicted and by whom, the length of his sentence and when it would expire; while the other ninety-nine, twice daily, listened to all this and suffered torments. Then again, food was distributed twice in the course of these twelve hours: mess tins were passed through the feeding hatch, and through the feeding hatch they were collected again. No *katorzhani* was permitted to work in the kitchens, nor to take around the food pails. All the serving was done by the thieves—and the more brazenly, the more ruthlessly they cheated the accursed *katorzhane*, the better they lived themselves and the more the camp bosses liked it, as always when the 58's (politicals) were footing the bill, the interests of the NKVD and of the thieves coincided.

According to the camp records, which were not meant to preserve for history the fact that political prisoners were also starved to death, they were entitled to supplementary "miner's rations" and "bonus dishes," which were miserable enough even before these lots of thieves got at them. This was another lengthy procedure conducted through the feeding hatch—names were called

1. We have Chetkov's word for it: the Jewish *katorga* was much less punitive. The *katorzhane* in the jail at Aleksandrovskaya (Sakhalin) could not only go out into the yard or to the latrine at all hours of the day and night (jamie: bookers were not in use there at all), but at any time during the day could go into the lavol Boker, that, was the first to understand the word *katorga* in its original sense—a palley in which the convicts are shackled to their necks.

out one by one, and dishes exchanged for coupons. And when at last you were about to collapse onto the sleeping platform and fall asleep, the hatch would drop again, once again names were called, and they would start reissuing the same coupons for use the next day. (Ordinary zeks had none of this bother with coupons—the foreman took charge of them and handed them in to the kitchen.)

So that out of twelve leisure hours in the cell, barely four remained for undisturbed sleep.

Then again, *katorzhane* were of course paid no money, nor had they any right to receive parcels or letters (the memory of their former freedom must fade in their muddled, dully aching heads, till there was nothing left in the inscrutable polar night but work and barracks).

The *katorzhane* responded nicely to this treatment and quickly died.

The first *alphabet* at Vorkuta—twenty-eight letters,² with numbers from 1 to 1000 attached to each of them—the first 28,000 prisoners in Vorkuta all passed under the earth within a year.

We can only be surprised that it was not in a single month.³

A train was sent to Cobalt Mine No. 25 at Noril'sk to pick up ore, and some *katorzhane* lay down in front of the locomotive to end it all quickly. A couple of dozen prisoners fled into the tundra in desperation. They were located by planes, shot, and their bodies stacked where the men lined up for work assignment would see them.

At No. 2 Mine, Vorkuta, there was a Women's Camp Division. The women were numbers on their backs and on their head scarves. They were employed on all underground jobs, and—yes—they even overfulfilled the plan. . . .³

But I can already hear angry cries from my compatriots and contemporaries. Stop! Who are these people of whom you dare to speak? Yes! They were there to be destroyed—and rightly so! Why, these were traitors, *Polizei*,⁴ *burgomasters*! They got what they asked for! Surely you are not sorry for them? (If you are, of

2. When Chekhov was there, the whole convict population of Solovki was . . . how many would you think?—5,505. Six letters of the alphabet would have been enough for all of them. Ekibastuz, as we know it was roughly as big, and Spassk very much bigger. The name Solovki is ridiculous, just as was really just one Camp Division in Stalingrad as there were twelve companies as big as that of Solovki, and there were two camps like Spassk. You can calculate how many Solovkis we had.

3. On Solovki there was no hard labor for women (Chekhov).

course, further criticism is outside the competence of literature, and must be left to the *Organs*.⁴⁾ And the women there were German bedstraw, I hear women's voices crying. (Am I exaggerating? It was our women who called other women "German bedstraw," wasn't it?)

I could most easily answer in what is now the conventional fashion—by *denouncing the cult*. I could talk about a few untypical cases of people sent to *katorga*. (The three Komsomol girl volunteers, for instance, who went up in a fighter bomber but were afraid to drop their bombs on the target, jettisoned them in open country, returned to base safely and reported that they had carried out their mission. Later on, her Komsomol conscience began troubling one of them, and she told the Komsomol organizer of her air squadron, also a girl, who of course went straight to the Special Section. The three girls collected twenty years of *katorga* each.) I could cry shame: to think that honest Soviet people like these were punished like criminals at the despot Stalin's whim! And I could wax indignant not so much at Stalin's high-handedness as about the fateful errors in the treatment of Komsomols and Communists, now happily corrected.

It would, however, be improper not to examine the question in depth.

First, a few words about our women, who, as everybody knows, are now emancipated. Not from working twice as hard, it's true, but from religious marriage, from the yoke of social contempt, and from cruel mothers-in-law. Just think, though—have we not wished upon them something worse than *Kabanokhs*⁵⁾ if women who behave as though their bodies and their personal feelings are indeed their own are to be condemned as criminals and traitors? Did not the whole of world literature (before Stalin) rapturously proclaim that love could not be contained by national boundaries? By the will of generals and diplomats? But once again we have adopted Stalin's yardstick: except as decreed by the Supreme Soviet, thou shalt not mate! Your body is, first and foremost, the property of the Fatherland.

Before we go any further, how old were these women when they closed with the enemy in bed instead of in battle? Certainly under thirty, and often no more than twenty-five. Which means that from their first childhood impression onward they had been educated *after* the October Revolution, been brought up in Soviet

schools and on Soviet ideology? So that our anger was for the work of our own hands? Some of these girls had taken to heart what we had tirelessly drilled into them for fifteen years on end—that there is no such thing as one's own country, that the Fatherland is a reactionary fiction. Others had grown a little bored with our puritanical Leninist fare of meetings, conferences, and demonstrations, of films without kisses and dancing at arm's length. Yet others were won by politeness, by gallantry, by male attention to the niceties of dress and appearance and to the ritual of courtship, in which no one had trained the young men of our Five-Year Plan epoch, or the officers of Frunze's army. Others again were simply hungry—yes, hungry in the most primitive sense: they had nothing to put in their bellies. And perhaps there was a fifth group, who saw no other way of saving themselves and their relatives, of avoiding separation from their families.

In the town of Starodub, in Bryansk Province, where I arrived hot on the heels of the relocating column, I was told that a Hungarian garrison had been stationed there for a long time, to protect the town from partisan raids. Orders came transferring them elsewhere, and dozens of local women, abandoning all shame, went to the stables and wept as they said goodbye to the occupying troops—wept more loudly, added a sarcastic shoemaker, than "when they had seen their own husbands off to the war."

The military tribunal reached Starodub some days later. It would hardly fail to act on information received. It doubtless sent some of the weeping women of Starodub to Mine No. 2 at Verkhna.

But who is really to blame for all this? Who? I ask you. Those women? Or—fellow countrymen, contemporaries—we ourselves, all of us? What was it in us that made the occupying troops much more attractive to our women? Was this not one of the innumerable penalties which we are continually paying, and will be paying for a long time yet, for the path we so hastily chose and have so stumblingly followed, with never a look back at our losses, never a cautious look ahead?

Perhaps all these women and girls deserved moral censure (though they, too, should have been given a hearing), perhaps they deserved searing ridicule—but to be sent to *katorga*? to the polar death house?

"Well, it was Stalin who sent them there! And Beria!"

I'm sorry, but it wasn't! Those who sent them there, kept them

there, did them to death, now sit with other pensioners on social service councils, looking out for any lowering of moral standards. And the rest of us? We hear the words "German bedstraw" and nod in agreement. The fact that to this day we consider all those women guilty is much more dangerous for us than that they were once *brutals*.

"All right, then, but the men at least were in for good reasons? They were traitors to their country, and to their class."

Here, too, we could prevaricate. We might recall (it would be quite true) that the worst criminals did not of course sit still and wait for our tribunals and the gallows. They made for the West as fast as they could, and many of them got away. While our punitive organs reached their target figures by including people innocent as lamb (denunciations by neighbors were a great help here). So-and-so had Germans billeted in his apartment—what made them take a liking to him? Somebody else carried hay for the Germans on his sledge—a straightforward case of collaboration with the enemy.⁴

We could then play the thing down, put all the blame on the *Stalin cult* again: there were excesses, now they have been corrected. All quite normal.

But since we have begun, let us go on.

What about the schoolteachers? Those whom our army in its panicky recoil abandoned with their schools, and pupils, for a year. For two years, or even for three. The quartermasters had been stupid, the generals no good—so what must the teachers do now? Teach their children or not teach them? And what were the kids to do—not kids of fifteen, who could earn a wage, or join the partisans, but the little kids? Learn their lessons, or live like sheep for two or three years in atone for the Supreme Commander's mistakes? If daddy doesn't give you a cap you let your ears freeze—is that it?

For some reason no such question ever arose either in Denmark or in Norway or in Belgium or in France. In those countries it was not felt that a people placed under German rule by its own foolish government or by force of overwhelming circumstances must thereupon stop living altogether. In those countries schools went on working, as did railways and local government.

⁴ To be fair, we should not forget that from 1946 such people were sometimes regarded and their twenty years of Gaoergo constituted to ten years of corrective labor.

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