

Russian Security State

GOVT-5519 / IPOL-3519 / REES-5519
Lecture 08. Forced Labor and the Gulag

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Today's objectives

1. *Identify:* problems of Soviet economic planning, and motivations to create/intensify coercive labor institutions
2. *Discuss:* why positive inducements for workers were insufficient to meet needs of industrialization
3. *Consider:* role of prison labor in Soviet economic development

Labor in the Soviet Economy
Prison Labor in the Soviet Economy



Figure 1: Where would you most (and least) like to live and work?



Figure 2: Arzamas-16



Figure 4: Makhachkala



Figure 6: Norilsk



Figure 3:
Komsomolsk-on-Amur



Figure 5: Moscow



Figure 7: Severodvinsk

Labor in the Soviet Economy

Problems for Soviet Economic Planning

1. Free movement of labor
 - mass movement to urban areas,
de-population of countryside
 - workers unwilling to move to
areas where labor demand is high
2. Labor turnover
 - workers leave assigned jobs
 - limited economic incentives
available to recruit/retain workers

Many of these problems were self-inflicted,
but others predated the 1917 revolutions.

Solution:

coercion + (some) positive inducements



Figure 8: Doesn't add up

Positive incentives

Wages

1. Piece-rate pay (sdel'naya oplata)
 - introduced in 1928 (5 Year Plan)
 - wage payments based on amount of work completed by individuals
 - fixed rate for 100% of quota
 - bonus pay for exceeding quota
 - bonus pay for overtime work
2. Minimum wage
 - introduced in 1937
 - applied across industries, sectors
3. Wage differentiation
 - different piece-rates across positions, industries, sectors
 - to conceal inequalities, average wages usually not published



Figure 9: Earn your pay

Benefits

1. Housing
 - state-subsidized apartments for “leading workers”
2. Private gardens
 - small plots for household consumption
 - livestock permitted
3. Civilian decorations
 - recognize great achievements in economy and culture (e.g. Order of Lenin, Hero of Socialist Labor)
4. Workplace health and safety
 - factory inspectors
 - factory clinics
 - sanatoriums



Figure 10: Upgrade

Discussion:

why weren't these incentives strong enough?

Shortcomings

1. Incentives to “cook the books”
 - managers inflate production numbers, manipulate quotas
 - workers cut corners to meet quota
 - lots of uncompleted production
2. Bureaucratic overhead
 - costly to calculate, administer payments for task-specific work
3. Recruitment/retention problem
 - factories must keep quotas low to attract workers
4. Inequalities
 - inconsistent incentives across and within industries



Figure 11: Real Stakhanovite

Negative incentives

Permanent record

1. Employment book (trudovaya knizhka)

- (re-)introduced in 1939
 - like an internal passport for jobs
 - deterrent against labor turnover
 - keeps record of:
 - jobs held
 - salaries
 - rewards
 - punishments
 - performance evaluations
 - reasons for dismissal
 - still exists today in some post-communist countries



Figure 12: Wherever you go

Figure 13: We're watching

Criminalization of shirking

1. Tying workers to enterprises
 - June 1940 law
 - criminal punishments for absenteeism, tardiness, indiscipline, laziness
2. "Broken windows" policy in workplace
 - August 1940 law
 - minor infractions criminalized (e.g. drinking on job, theft)
 - workers could now be punished for job search, apartment hunting
3. Vocational training reform
 - October 1940 law
 - prohibited voluntary departures from post-graduation work assignments
4. Wartime measures in defense industry
 - tribunals for departures, idleness



Figure 14: Fair warning

Corrective labor for slackers

1. 6 month sentences for absenteeism
 - 10.9 million sentenced 1940-1952
2. 2-4 months for unauthorized leaves
 - 2.8 million sentenced 1940-1952
3. 5-6 year sentences under martial law
 - 1.1 million sentenced 1941-1947

Did this deterrent work?

- yes (e.g. turnover in metallurgy drops from 7 to 2 percent/month in 1940)
- but turnover bounced back after war
- 1947 turnover statistics, by industry:
 - 64% per year in construction
 - 54% per year in mining
 - 40% per year in oil industry
 - 36% per year in metallurgy
 - 34% per year in light industry



Figure 15: Lock them up!

Prison Labor in the Soviet Economy

Main Administration of Camps (GULAG)

Established 1930; first camps opened 1919.

Parent agencies:

1. 1919-1922:

All-Russian Extraordinary Commission
(VChK)

2. 1922-1923:

People's Commissariat of Internal
Affairs (NKVD)

3. 1923-1934:

Joint State Political Directorate
(OGPU) within Council of People's
Commissars (SNK)

4. 1934-1946:

NKVD (re-constituted)

5. 1946-1960:

Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD)



Figure 16: Hard labor

Types of Gulag facilities

1. Correctional labor camps

Ispravitel'no-trudovye lagerya (ITL)

- for prisoners serving 3+ years
- prison-like, w/ guards, surveillance



2. Labor colonies

- for prisoners serving < 3 years
- in remote regions, fewer guards

3. Labor settlements (trudposeleniya)

- locations of exile for class enemies
- in remote regions, fewer guards

4. Scientific research labs (sharashki)

- for scientists and engineers with special skills

5. Psychiatric hospitals

6. Territorial prison administration system

Figure 17: Rest well



Figure 18: Work well

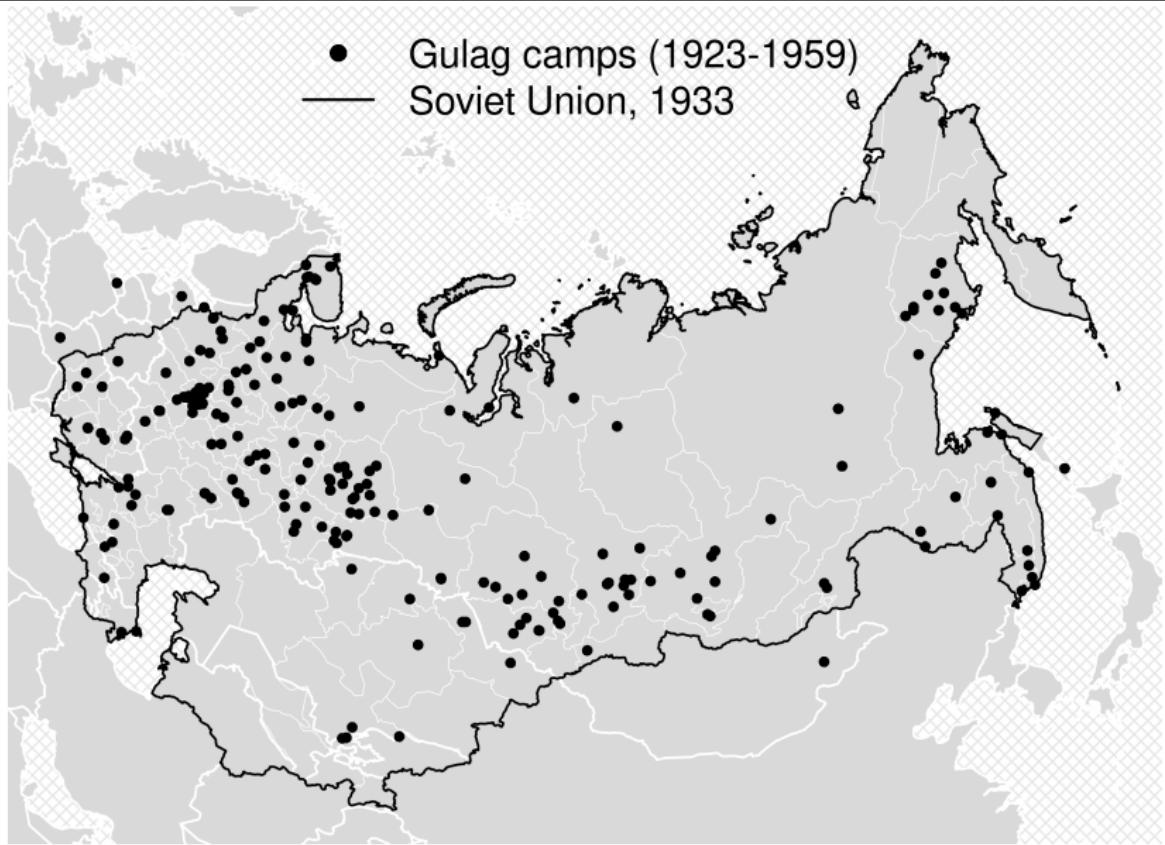


Figure 19: Geographic distribution of correctional labor camps (ITL)

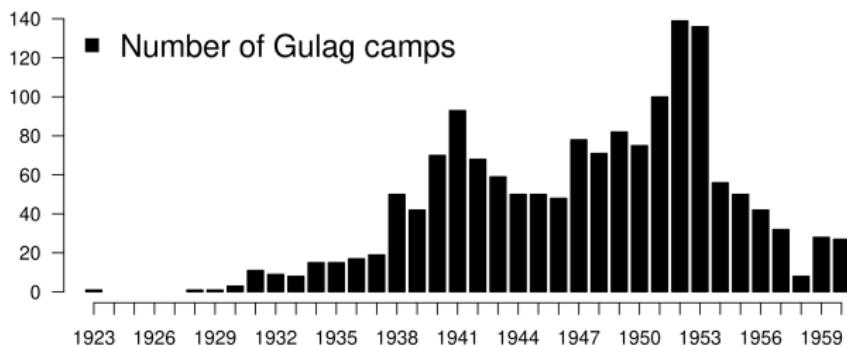


Figure 20: Correctional labor camps (ITL) over time

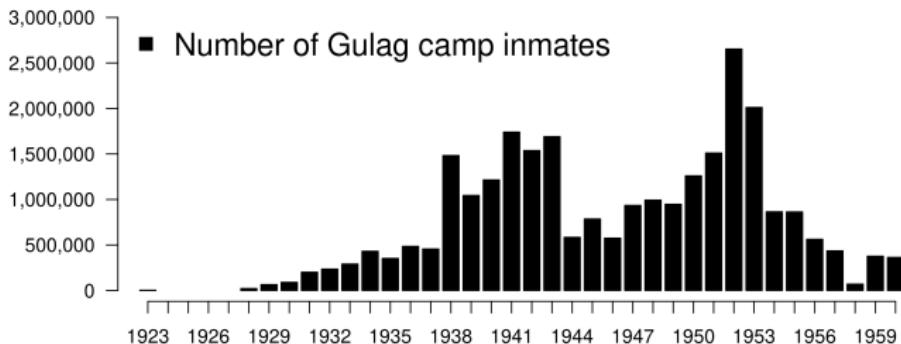


Figure 21: Correctional labor camp (ITL) inmates over time

Gulag as a labor force provider

Why use prison labor?

1. Cheaper than free labor
 - market wages for free labor ≫ subsistence wages for unfree labor
 - remote areas with harsh climate too costly to settle with free labor
 - shortcut to industrial colonization
2. More mobile than free labor
 - workers could be rapidly shifted to regions with high labor demand
3. Address labor shortages in economy
 - deploy workers to industries with high turnover rates

Discussion

What similarities/differences to you see with the motivations for serfdom?



Figure 22: The expendables

Where prison labor was utilized the most

1. Capital construction projects
(e.g. canals, railroads)
 - represented 2/3 of Gulag economic activity
2. Natural resource extraction
(e.g. diamond, metal mining)
3. Forestry
(e.g. logging)
4. Internal Gulag production
(e.g. clothes, shoes, construction)
5. Agriculture
(limited, mainly in special settlements)

Types of employment

1. Internal
(main industrial administrations, glavki)
2. External
(on contract to civilian enterprises)



Figure 23: Gold mine



Figure 24: Belomorkanal

Taking stock of Gulag's contribution

How reliant was Soviet economy on prison labor?

1. Small share of total labor force
 - 2 out of 100 workers were inmates
2. But huge variation by industry
 - 1 out of 5 construction workers
 - almost 100% in some extractive industries (diamond, platinum)
3. Created “addiction” to cheap labor
 - demand for prison labor > supply
 - ministries lobby for more prisoners, NKVD struggle to keep up
 - difficult to replace prisoners with civilian workers



Figure 25: #ZekLife

Inefficiencies of prison labor

1. Low productivity
 - no positive incentives
 - high mortality, deadly conditions
 - low mechanization
2. Incentivizes shirking
 - *tufta*: “we pretend to work, you pretend to pay us”
3. Disincentivizes capital investment
 - why invest in better technology when labor is so cheap?
4. Opportunity costs
 - highly skilled technical workers used for manual labor
5. Many projects were ill-conceived
 - few feasibility studies
 - lots of unfinished construction
6. High cost of unfree labor
 - cost of resettling, feeding often > economic value of project



Figure 26: The cost

Discussion

1. Did economic motives for repression out-weigh political ones?
2. Why so little research on Gulag in USSR?
Didn't they want to know how well the system worked?
3. Compare and contrast:
 - a) use of Gulag labor vs. PMC Wagner recruitment of convicts
 - b) Gulag labor in USSR vs. prison labor in U.S.

NEXT MEETING

Backgrounder: Repression (Th, Oct. 3)

- state repression in comparative perspective
- things to consider:
 - where is the line between repression and law enforcement?
 - why is there a trade-off between reducing government violence and preserving civil liberties?