EXECUTIVE EDITOR OF THE ANNALS OF COMMUNISM SERIES
Jonathan Brent, Yale University Press

PROJECT MANAGER
Vadim A. Staklo

AMERICAN EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Ivo Banac, Yale University
Zbigniew Brzezinski, Center for Strategic and International Studies
William Chase, University of Pittsburgh
Victor Erlich, Yale University
Friedrich I. Firsov, former head of the Comintern research group at RGASPI
Sheila Fitzpatrick, University of Chicago
Gregory Freeze, Brandeis University
John L. Gaddis, Yale University
J. Arch Getty, University of California, Los Angeles
Jonathan Haslam, Cambridge University
Robert L. Jackson, Yale University
Czeslaw Milosz, University of California, Berkeley
Norman Naimark, Stanford University
Gen. William Odom, Hudson Institute and Yale University
Daniel Orlovsky, Southern Methodist University
Mark Steinberg, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
Strobe Talbott, Brookings Institution
Mark Von Hagen, Columbia University
Piotr Wandycz, Yale University

RUSSIAN EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

K. M. Anderson, director, Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI)
N. N. Bolkhovitinov, Russian Academy of Sciences
A. O. Chubaryan, Russian Academy of Sciences
V. P. Danilov, Russian Academy of Sciences
A. A. Fursenko, secretary, Department of History, Russian Academy of Sciences (head of the Russian Editorial Committee)
V. P. Kozlov, director, Rosarkhiv
N. S. Lebedeva, Russian Academy of Sciences
S. V. Mironenko, director, State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF)
O. V. Naumov, assistant director, RGASPI
E. O. Pivovar, Moscow State University
V. V. Shelokhaev, president, Association ROSSPEN
Ye. A. Tyurina, director, Russian State Archive of the Economy (RGAE)

The History of the Gulag

From Collectivization to the Great Terror

Oleg V. Khlevniuk

Translated by Vadim A. Staklo
With editorial assistance and commentary by David J. Nordlander
Foreword by Robert Conquest

Yale University Press
New Haven & London

CHAPTER 4

The Great Terror

Never in Stalin's time was state terror small-scale or insignificant. The years 1937–38, however, saw an upsurge in the extent and cruelty of state repression. "Great Terror"—the term applied to those years, coined by Robert Conquest—has been accepted and used by generations of historians. New archival documents related to state repression in 1937–38 have not altered our understanding of the period, but they have clarified the essence and mechanisms of the Great Terror. It is now understood that the seemingly chaotic mass repressions were in fact a series of centrally directed punitive actions against various groups that the Soviet leaders perceived as real or potential enemies. These operations started in July–August 1937 and were ordered to stop around November 1938. They included bloody actions and mass shootings unparalleled in the entire sweep of Soviet history. The preceding period, from approximately August 1936, had been marked by a broadening of the purge campaigns. Although this prepared the ground for the Great Terror, it did not make it inevitable.

The Terror devastated the country and worsened the situation in the Gulag. Prisoners, including those arrested before the Terror, became its main victims. Mass executions, an unprecedented escalation of violence, starvation, and an increased mortality rate characterized the Gulag in those years.

Plans

Often the mass repressions of 1937–38 are called the *Yezhovshchina,* after Nikolai I. Yezhov, people's commissar of internal affairs from late 1936 to late 1938 and one of the main organizers of the Terror.[1] Historians usually associate him with the radicals of the Stalinist faction, who are believed to have inspired and promoted the Terror. Many try to discern what in the "bloody dwarf's" personality would account for the brutality of the repressions. Some even attribute his behavior to his physical ugliness: he was slightly less than one and one-half meters tall, with an unattractive face and figure, evident even in touched-up official photos. As much evidence shows, however, Yezhov was little more than a faithful executor of Stalin's will, cruel and enterprising though he was.

Yezhov's time came in late 1934, when Stalin selected the forty-year-old party worker, who had risen from secretary of the provincial party committee to the head of a department of the Central Committee, to undertake a special mission. The assignment was to oversee the falsification of charges against Kamenev and Zinoviev in the Kirov murder. Yezhov accomplished this task and, in early 1935, became secretary of the Central Committee and chairman of the Party Control Commission. After that, at Stalin's order, Yezhov worked together with the NKVD in conducting the repression against the "Trotskyists" and "Zinovievites," which culminated in the August 1936 open trial of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and other former oppositionists. This trial signaled the intensification of repression against everybody who had supported, directly or indirectly, any political opposition.

On 25 September 1936, Stalin and Zhdanov, who were in Sochi on vacation, sent a telegram to the Politburo in Moscow: "We consider it absolutely essential to appoint Com. Yezhov as people's commissar of internal affairs. Yagoda was obviously not up to the task of exposing the Trotskyist-Zinovievite bloc. The OGPU is four years late in [accomplishing] this task. All party workers and the most provincial internal-affairs representatives are saying so. Agranov should be retained as Yezhov's deputy at the commissariat."[2] The next day, the Politburo adopted a resolution making Yezhov the people's commissar of internal affairs and demoting Yagoda to people's commissar of communications.[3] Soon after that, Yagoda was arrested and, in March 1938, sentenced to be shot.

Stalin's telegram contained general instructions for the chekists: the

OGPU was four years late in exposing the "terrorist organizations" of former oppositionists. Under Yezhov, the fabrication of new cases picked up steam. On 23–30 January 1937 a second major trial, of the "parallel anti-Soviet Trotskyist center," took place in Moscow. Seventeen defendants (including such prominent statesmen as Yu. L. Piatakov, G. Ya. Sokolnikov, Karl Radek, and L. P. Serebriakov) were sentenced to be shot or were sentenced to long prison terms. The late February–early March 1937 plenum of the CC VKP(b) summarized the results and ordered a continuation of the purge. Yezhov reported on the former leaders of the "right deviation," N. I. Bukharin and A. I. Rykov (another leader of the faction, M. P. Tomsky, committed suicide in August 1936). The plenum considered them guilty of creating a de facto terrorist organization and endorsed their subsequent arrest. In March 1938 these leaders were tried, along with another group, in the third major public trial, and sentenced to be shot.

As was typical, the Moscow trials incited falsification in many cases of "rightist terrorist organizations" throughout the country. On 25 May 1937 the Politburo endorsed a resolution to exile from Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev former oppositionists and former communists expelled from the party, as well as family members of those former oppositionists who were sentenced to death or to imprisonment for five or more years. A 15 June 1937 NKVD instruction toughened these measures further. It added Sochi, Taganrog, and Rostov-on-Don to the list of cities targeted for cleansing and ordered into exile the families of former oppositionists expelled from the party.[4]

The prophylactic nature of the purge was demonstrated by the broad sweep of repression in the army and defense industry. On 29 March 1937 the Politburo issued a resolution mandating retirement or dispatch to civilian work for Red Army officers who had been expelled from the party for political reasons. This was only the initial stage of the purge in the army. Arrests of Soviet military leaders started in 1936 and culminated in the June 1937 trial of the "anti-Soviet Trotskyist military organization." Many high-ranking generals, including the deputy people's commissar of defense, M. N. Tukhachevsky, were sentenced to be shot. Arrests at the top led to multiple arrests in the army in general.

The "exposure" of counterrevolutionary organizations led to purges within the party and government apparatus, including purges of secretaries of regional party organizations accused of lack of vigilance or even direct participation in the conspiracies. Changes of personnel that were particularly drastic prompted the party apparatus in late 1937 to respond forcefully to orders from the center to step up the struggle against enemies and demonstrate its initiative and unconditional support for the new shift in the general line.

Purges of cadres and structural reorganizations affected the NKVD as well. Frequent personnel shifts and arrests in the central apparatus of the NKVD, in the people's commissariats of the union republics, territories, and provinces, and among rank-and-file operatives were precursors of the Great Terror. The threat of being sacked and arrested was the best way to shake up the chekists and promote effective and determined workers. A letter from Yezhov to Stalin asking permission to nominate A. I. Uspensky* the head of the Orenburg department evinces the criteria used to select new NKVD leaders: "This is the first time that we recommend Com. Uspensky for a position of leadership. He is well trained and will, no doubt, master the operative work. He has one shortcoming: he is rather rude with his subordinates. However, I believe that he will overcome this shortcoming once promoted to a responsible position."[5]

The repressions that initially hit former oppositionists and the politically unreliable (from Stalin's point of view) sectors of the Soviet bureaucracy were accompanied by a general toughening of punitive policies and the spread of repression to broad sectors of the population. In July 1937 the Soviet leadership adopted decisions that revealed its intention to spread the purge to all "unreliable" social and national groups. The circumstances and immediate imperatives that led to these decisions remain unclear. Perhaps the best explanation of the spread of the purge was given by Bukharin in his 10 December 1937 letter to Stalin, which he wrote from his prison cell: "There is something great and bold about the political idea of a general purge. It is (a) connected with the prewar situation and (b) connected with the transition to democracy. This purge encompasses (1) the guilty; (2) persons under suspicion; and (3) persons potentially under suspicion."[6]

Apart from the unavoidable praise and mention of democracy, this letter is worthy of serious attention. Bukharin knew Stalin and the realities of political life in the 1930s very well. Throughout the early 1930s a large part of the population had been constrained in various ways (see Chapter 7). Stalin and his supporters viewed them as "guilty," "under suspicion," or "potentially under suspicion."

* A. I. Uspensky, who later became people's commissar of internal affairs in the Ukraine, was one of Yezhov's strongest supporters.

The very first move toward broadscale repression—the Politburo resolution of 2 July 1937, "On anti-Soviet elements"—indicated that the leaders of the country aimed at the physical elimination of a potential fifth column, given the danger of a looming war.[7] At that time, the purge encompassed former kulaks who had escaped from exile and criminals (no further explanation was given). The resolution instructed that the following telegram be sent to the secretaries of the provincial and territorial party committees and the republican Central Committees:

> It has been observed that a large number of former kulaks and criminals deported at one time from various regions to the North and to Siberian districts and then returning to their regions at the expiration of their period of exile are chief instigators in all sorts of anti-Soviet crimes, including sabotage. This has occurred both in the kolhozes and sovkhozes as well as in the areas of transport and in certain branches of industry. The CC of the VKP(b) recommends to all secretaries of regional and territorial organizations and to all regional, territorial, and republican representatives of the NKVD that they register all kulaks and criminals who have returned home in order that the most hostile of them be forthwith arrested and executed by means of a troika and that the remaining, less active but nevertheless hostile elements be listed and exiled to districts [*raiony*] as indicated by the NKVD. The CC of the VKP(b) recommends that the names of those comprising the troikas be presented to the CC within five days, as well as the number of those subject to execution and the number of those subject to exile. Secretary of the CC, I. Stalin[8]

While preparations were under way for this operation, it was decided to conduct a series of smaller operations of the same kind. On 24 July 1937 the NKVD was ordered to start "a special purge of the personnel of the water stations (especially the filtration systems), bacteriological stations, research institutes, and laboratories dealing with microbiology." The following categories of workers had to be immediately arrested: all foreign nationals, naturalized foreigners, "individuals related to foreign countries, [and to] foreign intelligence and its agents," and "active anti-Soviet elements."[9]

On 25 July 1937, Yezhov signed an operative order from the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, no. 00439, which read: "Recent operative and investigative materials have proven that the German General Staff and the Gestapo are organizing broadscale espionage and subversive work at the most important, primarily defense, industrial

enterprises by utilizing German nationals who have taken root there. Agents among the German nationals, who are already engaged in wrecking and subversion, concentrate on organizing subversive acts at a time of war and prepare cadres of subversives for that purpose." Local NKVD administrations, within three days upon the receipt of this order, had to send to Moscow lists of all German nationals working at military plants and enterprises with defense subdivisions, and on the railroads, as well as those who had previously worked at such enterprises but stayed in the USSR after leaving those jobs. Starting on 29 July, all those listed had to be arrested within five days. The order urged "particular carefulness" in conducting investigations, "full exposure of the still-hidden agents of German intelligence," and the immediate arrest of new "spies, subversives, and terrorists" exposed in the course of the investigation. Similarly, the order instructed that by 1 September (by 15 September for Eastern Siberia and the Far East), all German nationals be accounted for who worked at nonmilitary enterprises, in agriculture, and in other offices, along with those who had taken Soviet citizenship and used to work in military enterprises. Each case had to include a memorandum summarizing the compromising materials and the decision to make an arrest. Similar memorandums on German political émigrés who had worked in military enterprises and accepted Soviet citizenship had to be presented by 5 August.[10] The operation against the Germans opened a series of similar actions against other nationalities that became an important part of the Great Terror.

On 31 July 1937, after consultations that took much more than the five days established by the 2 July directive, the Politburo reviewed the draft operational order by the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, "On the operation to repress former kulaks, criminals, and other anti-Soviet elements." Yezhov's NKVD deputy, M. P. Frinovsky, was put in charge of this most significant action of the Great Terror. Order no. 00447, a voluminous document, has been published many times in Russian and other languages, including English,[11] because it became the core of the mass repressions of "anti-Soviet elements" in 1937–38.

Order no. 00447 initiated operations "to repress former kulaks, criminals, and other anti-Soviet elements," starting between 5–15 August (depending on the region) and concluding in four months. It named the "contingents to be repressed," which included all who in some form opposed the Soviet regime or had been a victim of state terror: the kulaks who had completed their terms of exile or who had es-

caped; former members of anti-Bolshevik parties (Socialist Revolutionaries, Georgian Mensheviks, Mussavatists, Dashnaks, etc.); former White Guardsmen; surviving tsarist officials; "terrorists" and "spies" from previous years; political prisoners in the camps, and on and on. Criminals occupied one of the last places on this list.

The order separated those repressed into two categories: those to be immediately arrested and shot and those to be sent to a prison or camp for eight–ten years. Each province, territory, and republic was assigned quotas for both categories. In total, the order commanded the arrest of 268,950 people, of which 72,950 (including 10,000 camp prisoners) were to be shot. The order allowed local administrations to request additional quotas. Beyond that, families of the repressed people could be sent to the camps or exiled. Special troikas decided the fate of those arrested in the republics, territories, and provinces. As a rule, a troika consisted of the people's commissar or head of the NKVD administration, the secretary of the local party organization, and the procurator of the republic, province, or territory. Troikas enjoyed the extraordinary right to pass verdicts unilaterally and carry them out, including death sentences.

Soon after the beginning of the operation to exterminate anti-Soviet elements, on 9 August 1937, the Politburo endorsed another NKVD order, "On the liquidation of Polish subversive espionage groups and organizations of the POW [Polish Military Organization]."[12] The Polish operation came second after the German and was followed by more than ten operations against other "counterrevolutionary national contingents." Besides Poles and Germans, the repressions targeted Romanians, Latvians, Estonians, Finns, Greeks, Afghans, Iranians, Chinese, Bulgarians, and Macedonians. A special operation was conducted against the so-called Kharbinians (workers on the Chinese Eastern Railroad who returned to the USSR after the railroad was sold in 1935).[13] The Stalinist leadership viewed all these groups as fertile ground for spies and collaborators.[14]

The Polish operation was not only one of the largest; it also became a model for conducting similar national operations. NKVD Order no. 00485 on repression of the Poles established a new procedure for conviction, which was used in other actions. According to this procedure, each case was summarized in a short memorandum. Individual memorandums were put together and typed in a list. A *dvoika* (a two-person committee composed of the UNKVD head and the local procurator)

reviewed these lists ("albums") and decided on the sentence: death or five–ten years in a camp or prison. After that, the albums were sent to People's Commissar of Internal Affairs Yezhov and Procurator Vyshinsky in Moscow for them to approve the verdicts and return the albums so the sentences could be carried out.

Another group perceived as potentially dangerous comprised families of the enemies of the people. Another operation was conducted to isolate them, though on a smaller scale than those against anti-Soviet elements or the national operations. According to the 15 August 1937 order by the people's commissar of internal affairs, no. 00486, the wives of traitors had to be arrested and sent to the camps for five to eight years, and children over fifteen who were "socially dangerous and capable of anti-Soviet actions" had to be sent to camps, corrective labor colonies, or special orphanages. The order furthermore commanded the transfer of orphaned children of enemies of the people to an orphanage or to the care of relatives.[15]

These operations, which made up what later would be called the Great Terror, were conducted with varying intensity until November 1938. Complementing them were the regular activities of the Soviet punitive organs, which became more active in this period. In addition to the troikas, which oversaw the mass operations, there were courts, military tribunals, and the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court, all of which contributed to the Terror. There are many descriptions of the numerous trials that were conducted throughout the country. In contrast to the closed troika sessions, open trials played an important propaganda role, and their proceedings were widely publicized.[16] The Politburo directly sanctioned the most important trials, especially in late 1937. It also usually determined the outcome. Between 8 August and 17 December 1937 the Politburo sanctioned approximately thirty-five trials in various parts of the country.[17] The trials of the Great Terror were notable for the frequency of conviction and the harshness of the sentences (usually the death penalty).

In late 1937 a purge of the border regions was renewed. The most significant aspect was the deportation of Koreans from the Far East to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in September–October, following a 21 August resolution of the SNK and the Central Committee, "On the deportation of the Korean population from the border regions of the Far Eastern territory," which aimed "to stop the penetration of Japanese spies in the DVK [Far Eastern territory]."[18]

· 45 ·

N. I. Yezhov's memorandum on the deportation of Koreans
from the Far Eastern territory
29 October 1937[19]

Top secret.

To the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, Comrade Molotov.

On 25 October 1937 the deportation of Koreans from the DVK was completed. In total, 124 trains with Koreans have departed, containing 36,442 families, or 171,781 people. Only about 700 people are left in the DVK (Kamchatka, Okhotsk, special settlers); they will be removed by an additional train before 1 November of this year.

The Koreans sent to the Uzbek SSR number 16,272 families, or 76,525 people. Those Koreans sent to the Kazakh SSR number 20,170 families, or 95,256 people.

Seventy-six trains have arrived and been unloaded, while forty-eight are en route. The NKPS successfully conducted the transfer, and the trains moved on schedule, with rare exceptions. Some confusion took place at the destination points through the fault of the receiving organizations (SNK of the Kazakh and Uzbek SSRs), which in some places failed to prepare for the arrival of the deportees.

The situation in the Kazakh SSR and the Uzbek SSR regarding the placement and economic use of the deportees is clearly unsatisfactory and threatens to place the last parties of deportees in very difficult situations. Gosplan and the republican people's commissariats should be involved in settling the deportees: the People's Commissariat of Land [should] deal with agriculture, irrigation, and the organization of the MTS [machine tractor stations]; People's Commissariat of Education, with organizing the Korean school network; and the People's Commissariat of Internal Trade, with organizing stores in the areas of settlement.

People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR, General Commissar of State Security, Yezhov.

The NKVD orders guiding the mass operations in 1937–38 show that the Great Terror was a centrally organized punitive action, planned in Moscow, against a potential fifth column perceived as capable of stabbing the country in the back in case of war. Substantial evidence shows that the author of these purges was Stalin and that he initiated the operations. The Politburo approved all important orders. The punitive operations were centrally financed through special resolutions, as with any other planned state enterprise or economic undertaking (see Document 48). The main elements of the 1937–38 operations—identifying the categories of those to be repressed, creating troikas and the reporting system, and so forth—had already been used in previous campaigns, such as dekulakization.

Skilled in conducting mass punitive actions, the Soviet leadership was well aware of the inevitable and self-evident desire of local leaders to overfulfill the plans set in Moscow and to demonstrate their initiative and vigilance. The directives from Moscow supported these initiatives as an important means of conducting and expanding the operations by establishing additional quotas. The center, as a rule, fully controlled local NKVD organs. Up to a certain point, Moscow turned a blind eye on the excesses committed by rampant chekists. Excesses, while violating the directives, were important to the plans for repression. On the one hand, they were an effective means of escalating the purges; on the other, they allowed the leadership to terminate the mass operations by condemning the excesses but preserving the main results of the Terror.

In any case, local initiative and excesses did not mean that the center was not on top of the situation, nor that the repressions had spun out of control. The main parameters of the operations, and the signals to start and end them, came from Moscow and were adhered to locally. Excesses would not have happened without orders from Moscow. The circumstances in which mass operations were conducted in 1937–38 support this conclusion.

Mechanisms

Although the Politburo approved Order no. 00447 on 31 July 1937, heads of the local NKVD administrations had apparently been informed about it earlier. The UNKVD of the Western Siberian territory, for instance, held a meeting on 25 July at which the draft order was read. Participants were informed that the draft was being reviewed by "higher authorities"—that is, by the Politburo. Still, plans for the repressive campaign were disclosed, along with an explanation for the reviewing of cases by the troika.[20] The rush to divulge information about an order that had not been formally approved shows that the issue had been resolved before 31 July (Yezhov would not have dared to send out the draft order without Stalin's approval) and that Moscow was trying to accelerate preparations for action.

From the very beginning, the mass operations were designed to exceed the quotas established by the center, as was made clear by the procedure in Order no. 00447 for requesting additional numbers. All the procedures anticipated escalation of the operations and an increase in the number of arrests.

After receiving quotas from Moscow, provincial and territorial NKVD administrations convened meetings of municipal and district NKVD bosses to distribute tasks in connection with the arrests. Local NKVD offices created lists of anti-Soviet elements. The former head of the NKVD department in Kozhevnikovsky district (Novosibirsk province), in a 1956 memorandum, described how the lists were created: "I reviewed all the materials (agent information, etc.) available at the district department and made up a list of I do not remember exactly how many—I believe 150 or 160 people. The list included former kulaks, active anti-Soviet clerics and sectarians, former participants in the Kolyvansk counterrevolutionary uprising, some exiles, former White Guardsmen, etc., who conducted anti-Soviet agitation and exhibited an insurrectionist and terrorist disposition."[21]

Making up lists using existing files and information from agents was apparently typical at the initial stage of the operations. At times, when such preliminary data were missing, the chekists resorted to more creative methods. For example, when the head of the Belozersk operative sector of the Vologda province UNKVD, Vlasov, and his assistants were told to "investigate and expose kulak and anti-Soviet elements engaged in counterrevolutionary activity," they "went to corrective labor colony no. 14 pretending to be a medical commission to select and send prisoners to other colonies. Having selected 100 prisoners, Vlasov and his men fabricated transcripts of their interrogations, at which the prisoners supposedly admitted having committed grave crimes against the state. They obtained signatures on the transcripts by presenting them as medical forms." The fabricated cases were prepared for nonjudicial review by the troika of the Vologda province UNKVD, and all 100 people were shot.[22]

After making arrests, NKVD organs created investigative files for the troikas. The investigative files usually consisted of confessions of espionage, membership in underground terrorist organizations, statements against others arrested, and similar "evidence." No further proof of guilt was necessary. It was not always easy to obtain confessions, however, because many prisoners refused to slander others or

take blame. Various districts used different methods to extract confessions, described in many documents and memoirs.

The most humane was the direct falsification of interrogation protocols: the investigators wrote and signed transcripts themselves without ever talking to the prisoners. Since verdicts were usually passed without even bringing the accused to a troika session, such falsifications could not be exposed. Another widespread practice was adding testimony to previously signed protocols. Provocateurs and false witnesses ready to give any evidence were often used as well. The NKVD recruited "activists" among the prisoners, who engaged in "cell work": they pressured inmates who refused to sign confessions, tried to scare them, and advised them to alleviate their situation by confessing, playing up to the prosecutors, and so forth.[23] The chekists called these agent provocateurs "clowns."[24]

Living in overcrowded, unsanitary prisons on meager rations was a torture in itself that broke many people. But often it was not enough to obtain confessions, so the NKVD turned to physical torture. There are many documents and published testimonies about this.[25] Memoirs and archival documents show a gruesome picture of crimes committed in NKVD prisons. One of the most frequent forms of interrogation was the "conveyor" method, where several investigators took turns in the nonstop interrogation of a prisoner for several days without sleep, forcing the prisoner to stand or sit in uncomfortable positions. Often such conveyor interrogations involved beatings and other forms of torture. Descriptions of NKVD tortures could fill many pages. Some evidence is extremely depressing and difficult to read.

For example, an investigation of the NKVD administration in Chita conducted by the VKP(b) party control commission in late 1939 revealed multiple cases of falsification of evidence and torture in 1937–39. "Investigator Trofimov systematically beat" prisoner K., arrested in December 1937. He "knocked K.'s teeth out and kicked her. As a result, he damaged [her] spine, and K. could only 'stand' on her hands and knees." K. survived and even got back her freedom, and was able to tell about her interrogation. According to the investigators, "she was a broken invalid, unable to move on her own, with a shaking head, dislocated cheekbone, and shattered nervous system." At the time of this memorandum, Trofimov was still working in an NKVD organ.

Another victim of the Chita chekists, prisoner Sh., was arrested in

April 1938 and continuously interrogated for twenty days, including eleven days without sleep. Besides being forced to hold uncomfortable "stances," Sh. had to sit on the edge of a chair with extended hands and legs while investigators hit his legs with rulers. On 17 April 1938 "his head was squeezed between the steel bars of a sink, and he was beaten with sticks on his back and legs for two days and nights. After the beating, he was put in a stance and beat on the head with a paperweight, a bottle [. . .], a chair leg [. . .] until unconscious, and then thrown in a lockup."

Another example is the case of the Vologda chekists, mentioned before. On 27 December 1938, Vyshinsky forwarded to Stalin and Molotov a copy of the statement by a worker of the Vologda UNKVD, I. V. Anisimov, who reported the 1937 violations by the agents of the NKVD department in Belozersk. Anisimov claimed that they "applied fascist methods of interrogation and murdered, through physical violence, those who sternly refused to sign the minutes prepared in advance. [. . .] They broke the nose of one accused man with a metal hook, poked out his eyes, and then dumped him under the floorboards. [. . .] They killed [. . .] two citizens with a sledgehammer and buried them under the floorboards."[26]

This and several other high-profile cases were fully prosecuted in 1939. After the investigation, nine people from the Belozersk regional department and the Vologda provincial administration of the NKVD were arrested. The Vologda chekists were accused of falsifying cases and convicting the innocent. In a report to Stalin and Molotov, Vyshinsky suggested that three of the arrested be shot and the rest sentenced to long prison terms.[27]

Such determined measures against NKVD agents were exceptional, even though crimes in the NKVD prisons were routine. Abundant evidence shows that cruel tortures were used almost everywhere on a regular basis. Aside from never being gentle, Soviet punitive agents were at that time members of one of the most criminalized and brutal security services in history.

Confessions extracted by torture provided new names for arrest. Also, from the very beginning of the operation, the government expected a high volume of flashy revelations. Following the example of the Moscow show trials, local authorities tried to fabricate as many collective cases as possible in order to expose a large number of counterrevolutionary organizations. The people's commissar of internal affairs in Tataria, V. Mikhailov, gave his deputy, M. Sheludchenko, the following written orders (which became known after the arrest of both of them in 1939): "The case is worth nothing unless we connect it to foreign countries, in particular Japan, Germany. [. . .] We need facts proving preparation for terrorist activity. [. . .] All attention is paid to group cases connected to the center or abroad. [. . .] Apprehend the rank-and-file immediately, connecting them to a group of 150–200 people. [. . .] Arrest individuals only as a last resort; do not overload yourself with individuals. [. . .] I think that in the category of counterrevolutionary nationalist formations alone, we should take 2,000–3,000. I will ask for 5,000–8,000,* because we have been working ineffectively and have not really started on that sector."[28]

The resolve to fabricate big cases involving counterrevolutionary centers and far-flung organizations was characteristic of all NKVD divisions in those years.

· 46 ·

Statement by prisoner P. A. Yegorov
20 December 1938[29]

To the CC VKP(b), Moscow, Comrade I. V. Stalin.

From Pavel Andrianovich Yegorov, former chekist, imprisoned for five years in the Ust-Vymsk Corrective Labor Camp, under article 193–17, paragraph *a*, of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR.

One cannot overestimate the merits of the UGB NKVD organs in destroying and physically eliminating the enemies of the people, Bukharin, Rykov, and their associates—Trotskyist-Japanese-German agents. In general, the merit belongs to you and the party, under whose leadership the UGB organs successfully began and completed this extremely complex operation, having shown the entire world the monstrous and traitorous essence of the Trotskyist-Bukharinist hirelings, who were unprecedented in the history of humankind. The entire progressive world rightfully admired the work of the UGB in 1937–38 and esteemed the punitive organs of proletarian dictatorship. This esteem was cultivated in the minds of the workers by the party and our press. Along with these glorious acts, that have forever found a place in the history of humankind, some local UGB

* Mikhailov refers to his request for Moscow to increase the quota for arrests and executions.

organs, having ignored your repeated reminders about showing love and concern toward humanity, took the wrong path of fabricating false cases of arrest. Unlike the hostile elements, these people were selflessly devoted to you and the party, true compatriots, who had never thought of any hostile actions against the Motherland. They arrested honest employees, artisans, and ordinary citizens whose interests did not go beyond their families. Many thousands of such people ended up being shot or imprisoned in the corrective labor camps.

I myself am a former chekist, having worked for sixteen years, from 1922 until the time of my arrest, on 25 January 1938, in ChK [Cheka]-OGPU-NKVD organs in Siberia. In 1937, I took an active part in liquidating the hostile elements in Novosibirsk province and the Altai territory. Lately I have worked as head of the special UGB NKVD office in Tomsk, at the rank of lieutenant major of state security.

We received the first NKVD USSR directive to prepare for a mass operation in July 1937. This directive made us put together lists of all counterrevolutionaries, socially alien elements, and criminal recidivists dangerous to society. After that a signal came to start the operation and organize judicial UNKVD troikas to review those cases. Thus, the main strike against the counterrevolutionary and criminal elements registered in our files was delivered in August 1937.

The successive directives from the leaders of the NKVD administration, delivered at the meetings and in the reports, implied the need to associate the entire operative contingent registered in our files with counterrevolutionary organizations, different in name but similar in goals, connected to the foreign intelligence of hostile countries as well as white émigré centers abroad. The operative workers of the organs interpreted these directives as calling for the immediate physical liquidation of all counterrevolutionaries, including passive manifestations, that served as the basis for various insurgent formations. Vigorously following these directives, the agents fully comprehended the historic necessity of purging our country of this contingent.

The starting point in accomplishing this task had to be the headquarters of these organizations, and operative groups were dispatched to different locations with the goal of finding these headquarters. Lieutenant Major Popov, temporarily filling in as head of the fourth department of the UNKVD, was sent to the Narym district in command of an operative group. Upon arrival in Narym, he buried various weapons in different locations and then arrested a group of former White officers headed by former Colonel Mikhailov. In the course of contrived investigative procedures, Popov elicited their admission to the existence of the Russian General Military Union (ROVS) in Siberia. Those arrested "pointed" at the hidden caches of arms, which were discovered in the presence of witnesses from

Soviet and social organizations. The arrested "center" of the organization provided extensive testimony about the supposed organization having a large number of members.

A junior lieutenant of state security, Golubik, head of the third department of the UNKVD, was sent to the Kuzbass region with a similar task and conducted an equally successful operation there.

Following the examples of Narym and Kuzbass, the UNKVD brigade and the local apparatus of the city department discovered a ROVS in Tomsk. There they created a "headquarters" using our agents, the former White officers Sitnikov and others, who were told that the Motherland required that they give such testimony and that they would be temporarily arrested to conduct operations inside prison cells with people arrested as members of this "organization." Later they were all shot.

In the Biisk and Altaisk branches, the apparatus of the third UNKVD department successfully conducted an operation against an insurrectionist Japanese espionage organization, headed by the former leader of the Altai partisan forces, Tretiak. This operation obliterated all the leaders of the partisan movement from the reactionary rule of [Admiral] Kolchak in Siberia, as well as a large number of Red partisans.

The individual counterrevolutionaries arrested, as well as separate groups and whole organizations under our investigation, were concatenated into entire networks with sizable branches.

Until approximately late September or early October 1937, this operation had merely been a matter of destroying all counterrevolutionary cadres and did not affect the population at large. Since September 1937, however, demands started pouring in to step up the operations, and cipher telegrams ordered the arrest en masse of all deserters, Poles, Latvians, Iranians, and people arriving from the KVZhD [Chinese Eastern Railroad] (Kharbinians), etc.

The UNKVD started allocating to the periphery the "minimum control figures" for arrests, which indicated just the starting point. For example, Tomsk repeatedly received control figures of 1,500, 2,000, 3,000, etc., [which encouraged] competition to arrest even more.

To assist the cadre workers in the [security] organs in this colossal, unprecedented operation, a large number of police, mid- and higher-ranking officers of internal and border troops of the NKVD, Komsomol members, the heads of special sectors of various offices, former chekists, etc., became involved.

In late September–early October, after we finalized all our calculations, the operation came down on innocent people who had never taken part in any anti-Soviet or counterintelligence affairs and had never compromised themselves through any such connections.

Many of us failed to understand the reason for continuing this opera-

tion, which scared us. But only the CC VKP(b) or you could stop the wild tempest of it.

The sincere efforts of some chekists to save innocent people only resulted in their arrest and death. The number of suicides among the chekists soared.

At that time in Tomsk, a certain Pushkin conducted the cell work. [. . .] Pushkin's "assistance" was enormous. [. . .] It was done as follows. Heads of the investigative groups divided the arrested into groups of five to ten people each. For the most part, these people had not known each other prior to arrest. They were then distributed among different investigators. The investigators, after receiving assurances from Pushkin that the arrested were ready to sign anything that the investigators would give them, called them in, filled out personal information questionnaires, got lists of friends from them, and sent them back to the cell. At the second meeting, investigators asked for their signature on the standard statement about their membership in the ROVS or a similar organization. Thus, according to the official papers, five–ten people who had not known each other turned out to be well acquainted, and had been recruited by one another to join a certain counterrevolutionary organization of which all the friends of the arrested also became members.

In Novosibirsk a similar approach was used, along with other techniques. For example, the third UNKVD department, headed by Junior Lieutenant of State Security Ivanov, used big, thick, old albums with heavy bindings, steel rulers, etc. All these objects were categorized as "first degree," second degree," and "third degree." They used these objects as a brutal means of beating those arrested. They widely utilized the technique of positioning the arrested on their feet for several days, often tying them to safes and doors to keep them from falling down, until they signed the protocols and wrote a confession about membership in the [counterrevolutionary] organization. A certain Malozovsky, who worked in the third department, conducted investigations of Germans, Latvians, and Lithuanians. He only put on paper what he considered necessary for the investigation and read to the arrested, off the top of his head, that they were devoted people, and asked to release them. Malozovsky always ended these protocols with the slogans "Long live Soviet power!" and "Long live Comrade Stalin."

They were then made to sign blank sheets of paper, and [Malozovsky] wrote the protocols [or] forged the signatures on the protocols.

The majority of those arrested were shot.

They used various methods to hunt down the Poles, Latvians, and other national minorities subject to mass arrests. They reviewed the lists of workers in offices, address lists at registration centers, etc. They often arrested people unlucky enough simply to have Polish, Lithuanian, etc., names but who had nothing to do with that particular nationality. Such people were listed as members of monarchist insurrectionist organizations (however, an oral instruction came from Novosibirsk not to mention nationality on troika agendas in such cases). A former peddler or artisan became a large trader or proprietor, an accountant became a tsarist official, agent provocateur, etc.

In the Altai territory, a troika reviewed cases without properly processing the paperwork. The investigation methods there were even more terrifying.

A huge operation was conducted in railway transport. The head of the sixth department, Captain of State Security Nevsky (aristocrat, former officer), boasted that he managed, through confessions, to nail a member of the Central Committee.

In general, it became fashionable for some of the chekists to attempt to bring down the big people. In the process of fabricating accusations and forcing the arrested to sign them, many chekists included the names of high-ranking party and government officials in the statements. The practice was considered of great merit, and such people quickly rose and advanced professionally.

This statement clearly described the main stages of the operations in 1937, as well as the relations between Moscow and the regions. The mass fabrication of group cases, encouraged by the NKVD leadership, caused a chain reaction. Each falsification brought in new cases and added new names to the lists of counterrevolutionary organizations. In case the confessions did not provide enough material to arrest a sufficient number of enemies, the chekists used roundups and indiscriminate street arrests. Such methods are described in a review of the Turkmen NKVD in 1939.

· 47 ·

Report on the mass operations in Turkmenia 23 September 1939[30]

Top secret.

To the Procurator of the USSR, Com. M. I. Pankratiev.

To the Chief Military Procurator of the RKKA, Brigade of Military Justice, Com. Gavrilov.

[. . .] The NKVD TSSR [Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic] apparatus started mass arrests in August 1937, i.e., after the announcement of

NKVD USSR Order no. 00447. [. . .] After they used up the meager operative list of anti-Soviet elements, they started mass unjustified arrests only to fulfill the quotas established by Nodev and Monakov. At the time of the arrest, neither the age nor the past and present activities of the person were taken into account. One could go to the market and be indiscriminately rounded up, arrested, and interrogated, accused of anti-Soviet activity—espionage, membership in a counterrevolutionary organization, etc.

The inquiry into the activities of the former workers of the third NKVD department of the TSSR [. . .] revealed that, to fulfill the quotas, the workers of the third department repeatedly organized roundups at the markets of Ashkhabad, Kizyl-Arvat, Mary, etc. During the roundups, all suspicious-looking people were arrested. At the time of a roundup, they did not check documents, and after that, the arrested were put on a "conveyor" and beaten, and they provided information requested by the investigator. [. . .] In the course of the roundups in February–May 1938, [. . .] 1,200 people were arrested, most of them workers, including party members, deputies of the soviets, etc.

On the eve of the May Day celebration in 1938, Monakov gave special quotas for arrests. These quotas specified the exact number of people to be arrested but did not give a list of them. As a result, to fulfill Monakov's assignment, the workers of the third department, operative groups of the UPVO NKVD, etc., started arresting people on the streets whose appearance seemed suspicious for some reason. As a rule, arrests were conducted without the sanction of the procurator. Without the appropriate procurator's sanction they arrested VKP(b) members, high-ranking Soviet and party workers, scientists, and specialists—college and university professors and teachers, engineers, agronomists, etc. [. . .]

II. Illegal methods of investigation

The NKVD TSSR, city and regional NKVD departments employed beating, the "conveyor," and other refined tortures to extract confessions from the arrested, on a wide scale bordering on provocation. Investigators beat and put on the conveyor all the arrested without exception, irrespective of the kind of material that the investigator had on them. [. . .]

In February 1938 the NKVD TSSR for the first time introduced the "mass conveyor." After a while, owing to the high effectiveness of this interrogation method, the mass conveyor was adopted by other people's commissariat departments. [. . .] For the mass conveyor, dozens of arrested people were lined up facing the wall in a special room. A designated person on duty for the conveyor prevented them from falling asleep or lying down until they agreed to give the testimony required by the investigator. The stubborn individuals under arrest were also subject to beating, handcuffing, or bonding. A large number of cases have been uncovered

where the arrested were kept on the conveyor for thirty–forty days without sleep. [. . .]

At these mass conveyors, also called conferences, drunk officers periodically beat the arrested without distinction, often with great cruelty. For example, the investigation revealed that the head of the fifth department, Glotov, inebriated and accompanied by other workers, repeatedly beat the arrested on the conveyor with an airplane cable. He insisted that they all confess to espionage. [. . .] Sadist Glotov went so far as to scoff at the arrested on the conveyor by making them dance a *barynia* [Russian dance], "cheering up" those who danced badly by pricking them with a hot awl. [. . .]

The third department put on the conveyor women with babies, professors, and scientists [. . .] and even arrested Iranian and Afghan consular officials without the imprimatur of the NKVD and the Procuracy of the [Soviet] Union. In the NKVD department of the Kerkinsk district, its chief, Lopukhov, and officer Ovcharov systematically beat inmates on the conveyor. According to his own testimony, Ovcharov, while drunk, broke two stools over the heads of prisoners, and within one hour made all fifteen people confess to espionage.

Agents from the roads and transportation department of the GUGB NKVD of the Ashkhabad railroad, Alekseenko, Semendiaev, and others, while exhorting confessions from the arrested, pulled out hairs from their heads and beards, pierced their fingers with needles, pulled out toenails, etc.

The beatings of the arrested often ended in murder. The investigation revealed about twenty cases of murder during interrogation at the departments of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the TSSR and on the periphery. [. . .] To conceal the murders of the arrested in the apparatus of the NKVD TSSR, the physician of the medical ward, Nikitchenko, who also took part in torturing the arrested, wrote false death certificates. On the periphery, officers wrote false certificates themselves, without the help of doctors, and stamped them with seals stolen from medical installations. Sometimes [. . .] they fabricated a case, reported it to the troika, and then used the troika resolution to create a false report on the execution performed.

One of the most outrageous means of exhorting confessions was, of course, interrogating those arrested "at the ditch." This meant [. . .] taking a detainee who, despite the conveyor and beatings, obstinately refused to confess, out of town to a place of execution, alongside those sentenced to death, and starting to shoot those sentenced to death in his presence and threatening to shoot him if he did not confess. [. . .] Such interrogations usually resulted in the slander of tens and even hundreds of mostly inno-

cent people. In addition, the NKVD operative groups and the central apparatus of the NKVD TSSR widely employed "cell work" with those arrested. This involved one or several inmates beating or intimidating other inmates to make them behave as the investigator desired. [. . .]

The Maryisk operative group used one of the arrested Afghan consular workers for cell and conveyor work with the arrested. He was also a headman of the conveyor. Normally, when an arrested person was brought to the conveyor, this man met him and showed him his back and buttocks, red and black from beating. He recommended making all confessions and statements required by the investigator to avoid beating and other tortures.

The roads and transportation department of the NKVD of the Ashkhabad railroad maintained a "wet cell" where heavily beaten inmates were kept. To pressure a resistant prisoner, he was put in the wet cell to intimidate him.

Obviously, cell work with those arrested led them to slander themselves and tens of other people mentioned in the investigator's notes. [. . .]

III. Provocation, forgeries, and falsification of investigative materials and cases

Criminals among the former leaders of the people's commissariat, in order to fabricate cases, widely used beatings, the conveyor, interrogations at the ditch, cell work, interrogations of "staff witnesses," and "corrections" of the statements of the accused—i.e., adding to the protocols, on behalf of the accused, the most unreal and fantastic of inventions.

Lower-ranking agents, less experienced with such provocations, used cruder forgeries. They wrote interrogation protocols on behalf of nonexistent witnesses and signed them. They created fictitious protocols of searches and discoveries of large sums of money, weapons, etc. They wrote false affidavits on the social and material situation of the accused, converting collective farmers and former poor and middle peasants into kulaks; workers into former White Guards, members of anti-Soviet parties, etc. [. . .]

Cases of "individual anti-Soviets" were fabricated by the hundreds, and the process was rather simple. As a rule, to prove the "guilt" of the arrested, two–three fake witnesses were interrogated, who provided no relevant information but signed the protocol already prepared and composed by the investigator. A forged affidavit about the social background of the accused was added to the file, the accused was interrogated, and the case was submitted to the troika for review.

The investigation of cases involving violations of socialist legality uncovered hundreds of "staff witnesses," who, pressured by threats, deceit, or sometimes money, provided testimony against any person, as instructed by the investigator. [. . .]

Group cases, fabricated by officers-provocateurs, deserve special attention. [. . .] The entire Greek population of Ashkhabad—forty-five people—was arrested in the case of the "Greek insurrectionist organization in Ashkhabad." [. . .] A foul slander that was the basis [. . .] for this action asserted that the forty to forty-five Greeks living in Ashkhabad, including teenagers and the elderly, were planning to start an armed struggle against military units spread throughout Ashkhabad, to disarm and exterminate those units, and to overthrow Soviet power. In practice it was supposed to look like this: the Greeks purchase hunting and small-caliber weapons in the Dinamo stores; having armed themselves with small-caliber rifles and shotguns, they start an armed confrontation with the infantry division and the NKVD military units in Ashkhabad. [. . .] The character of any "testimony" from the arrested participants of the insurrectionist organizations [and] their plan of action does not require any commentary.

In June 1938 there was a fire at the Bairam-Aliisk butter factory. The cause of the fire was unknown, and the plant was brought to a halt for six days. Monakov, Balanda, and Akimov went to Bairam-Ali and arrested the entire shift that was working in the shop at the time of the fire, and then Balanda and Akimov set out to fabricate an SR organization at the factory. After heavy beatings, the arrested named over 100 workers and employees at the factory as members of counterrevolutionary organizations. They were immediately arrested. Among them were forty party members, i.e., 65 percent of the entire factory party organization. The investigation of the case of the agents of the third department undoubtedly proved the provocative nature of the case of the "subversive SR organization in Bairam-Ali." Of the 103 people arrested in this case, 101 were released, one died in prison, and one was charged with malfeasance. [. . .]

Military Procurator of the NKVD troops of the Turkmen border district, Military Justice First Degree, Kosharsky.

The CC VKP(b) reviewed the case of the Turkmen chekists in 1939 as part of a hypocritical campaign to "restore socialist legality" (see Chapter 5). Although we do not possess similarly detailed investigative materials for other regions, it can be said that the Turkmen chekists' crimes were rather typical. The growing scale of the repressions and the activity of the local NKVD bosses were inspired by the position of the supreme leadership of the country and the NKVD, who spurred the advancement of the mass operations and eagerly issued additional quotas for arrests and executions. By 1938 more than 500,000 people had been convicted under Order no. 00447.[31] This meant that the original figures, established in July 1937, had been sig-

nificantly surpassed. As Order no. 00447 stipulated, local NKVD departments requested additional quotas on arrests and executions from Moscow. According to available documents, only a few additional quotas were approved by the Politburo. The majority of the approvals were issued by Yezhov without the formal approval of the Politburo but with Stalin's consent. On 15 August 1937, for example, the head of the NKVD administration for Omsk province, Gorbach, sent Yezhov a telegram reporting that as of 13 August, 5,444 people had been arrested in the first category,[32] and requested the increase of the first-category quota to 8,000 people. Yezhov forwarded the telegram to Stalin, who scribbled on it: "To C. Yezhov. I support [*za*] the increase of the quota to 8,000."[33]

Arrests and executions reached such a large scale in 1937 (see Document 91) that the mass operations seemed to have reached their peak, especially since they had been planned for late 1937. Nevertheless, on 31 January 1938 the Politburo adopted two new resolutions that determined a new surge in terror in 1938.

First, the Politburo allowed the NKVD "to extend through 15 April 1938 the operation to destroy the espionage-subversive contingents among the Poles, Latvians, Germans, Estonians, Finns, Greeks, Iranians, Kharbinians, Chinese, and Romanians—both foreign and Soviet citizens. [. . .] Recommend that the NKVD, until 15 April, conduct a similar operation to destroy the cadres of Bulgarians and Macedonians, both foreign and Soviet citizens."[34] Second, the Politburo endorsed the NKVD proposal "to set an additional number of former kulaks, criminals, and active anti-Soviet elements to be repressed." The resolution instructed that by 15 March (1 April for the Far East) an additional 57,200 people be repressed and that 48,000 of them be shot. The powers of the troikas were extended accordingly to fulfill this task.[35] Thus, the operations based on Order no. 00447, originally meant to be concluded in four months (by December 1937), were extended by another four months. On 1 February 1938 the Politburo also approved a quota for executions for the Far Eastern camps—12,000 people—and, on 17 February, allowed the NKVD of the Ukraine "to conduct arrests of kulaks and other anti-Soviet elements and have those cases reviewed by the troikas, having increased the Ukrainian NKVD quotas by 30,000."[36]

There were two reasons for the extension of the mass operations into 1938: the inability of the chekists to cope with the sheer number of those arrested or earmarked for arrest in 1937, and a new set of

goals and targets. The 1938 operations were not just an extension of the 1937 repression: they had their own goals and involved new categories of people whom the leaders of the country considered to be potentially dangerous. Stalin gave appropriate instructions to the NKVD. On 17 January he wrote to Yezhov:

> The SR line (both left and right) has not been fully uncovered. [. . .] It is important to keep in mind that there are still many SRs [Socialist Revolutionaries] in our army and outside the army. Can the NKVD account for the SRs (the "former") in the army? I would like to see a report promptly. Can the NKVD account for "former" SRs outside the army (in civil institutions)? I also would like a report in two–three weeks. [. . .]
>
> What has been done to expose and arrest all Iranians in Baku and Azerbaijan?
>
> For your information, at one time the SRs were very strong in Saratov, Tambov, and the Ukraine, in the army (officers), in Tashkent and Central Asia in general, and at the Baku electrical power stations, where they became entrenched and sabotaged the oil industry. We must act more swiftly and intelligently.[37]

Stalin thus provided new targets for repression and ordered the continuation of the operations. Most likely, there are other letters of this kind still to be found. According to the following memorandum by Yezhov, the NKVD had been actively planning for large-scale operations under Order no. 00447 to continue at least until mid-1938.

· 48 ·

Letter from Yezhov to Molotov on financing mass operations
18 February 1938[38]

Top secret.

To the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, Com. Molotov.

In my letter, no. 63072, from 24 December 1937, I requested that you give instructions to provide the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the USSR 22 million rubles to cover the costs of the operation to repress former kulaks, criminals, and anti-Soviet elements and 8 million rubles to cover surplus spending in 1937.[39]

The 22 million rubles allocated for 1938 is not enough to support the entire operation.

Preliminary calculations show that, in the first quarter, 47,000,000 rubles will be needed, including:

Maintenance for 167,000 people, at 2 rubles per day	30,000,000 rubles
Transfer of 100,000 people, at 100 rubles each	10,000,000 rubles
Escort, automobile and carriage transport, etc.	7,000,000 rubles

For the second quarter, the estimated expenses will be 46,100,000 rubles, including:

Maintenance for 108,000 people, at 2 rubles per day	19,400,000 rubles
Transfer of 217,000 people, at 100 rubles each	21,700,000 rubles
Escort, automobile and carriage transport, etc.	5,000,000 rubles
Total expenses for the first and second quarters	93,100,000 rubles

Considering the already allocated 22,000,000 rubles for 1938, an additional 71,100,000 rubles are needed, including:

In the first quarter	25,000,000 rubles
In the second quarter	46,100,000 rubles

I am asking you to order an allocation for this amount.
People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR,
General Commissar of State Security, Yezhov.*

On 25 February the people's commissar of finances reported to the government that, for 1938, the NKVD received 70 million rubles to conduct the operation "to repress former kulaks, criminals, and anti-Soviet elements."[40]

Apparently, the operation under Order no. 00447 did not proceed as broadly in 1938 as in 1937, even though it took twice the allocated time (the Politburo approved additional quotas for the repression of "anti-Soviet elements" repeatedly, and again in August 1938). That year the most significant operations were those against "national counterrevolutionary contingents." They were so extensive that Moscow had a hard time approving the large number of albums, the lists of those arrested. So it was decided to abandon the practice of approving the album verdicts at the center and to give local NKVD organs the power to approve the verdicts. On 15 September 1938 the Politburo endorsed the NKVD proposal to establish local special troikas, consisting of the first secretary of the territorial and provincial party committees or Central Committee of the national party, the head of the appropriate NKVD administration, and the procurator of the province,

* The document was signed by Yezhov's deputy, Frinovsky, who was responsible for the operation under Order no. 00447.

territory, or republic. The troikas had the authority to approve the remaining albums within two months (until 15 November) without sending them to Moscow. The resolutions of the special troikas were carried out immediately.[41] Between September and November 1938, special troikas sentenced 105,000 people, among them 72,000 to death. According to the Memorial society, in the course of the "national operations" between 25 August 1937 and 15 November 1938, a total of 335,500 people were convicted, and 247,200 among them were shot.[42]

The end of the mass operations was ordered from the center, just as their beginning had been. On 15 November 1938, Sovnarkom and the Central Committee forbade the review of cases by the troikas.[43] On 17 November, Sovnarkom and the Central Committee forbade "mass operations of arrests and deportations."[44] On 24 November, Yezhov was relieved of his duties as people's commissar of internal affairs. The Great Terror was over.

Victims

Thanks to the high level of centralization and the regular delivery of reports, the NKVD office in Moscow amassed extensive information about the victims of the various operations. These figures provided the basis for a secret compilation of reports for the Soviet leaders after Stalin's death. The archives have allowed access to these reports in recent years (see Document 91). According to these memorandums, in 1937–38, NKVD organs (not including the police) arrested 1,575,259 people, 87.1 percent for political crimes. Of those arrested in cases investigated by the NKVD, 1,344,923 people were convicted in 1937–38.* More than half of them (681,692) were shot (353,074 in 1937 and 328,618 in 1938). These figures probably reflect the true scale of the operations of the Great Terror. A careful examination of documents in different archives, mainly the Federal Security Service (FSB) archive, by Memorial Society activists increased these figures only marginally: "In only two years of the Great Terror, all NKVD organs (excluding the police) arrested more than 1,600,000 people."[45] There are no reasons not to trust these secret figures, which were used by NKVD leaders. Apparently they accurately reflected information com-

* The difference of 200,000 between the number of those arrested and those convicted is due to some people being convicted in later years, having died during the investigation, or being released.

ing from the provinces and regions. Of course, it is not clear how accurate the local reports were.

Data about those physically eliminated during the Terror need to be updated. Besides those officially executed, others died under torture or of extremely harsh living conditions, or both. Some of those deaths were evidently backdated as executions (see Document 47), but many were registered as caused by illnesses. Of the 13,044 people arrested for political crimes in Novgorod province in 1937–38, for example, 6,183 were listed as executed and 102 as having died during the investigation.[46]

Executions and murders during investigation characterized the Great Terror, setting it apart from other bloody events of Soviet and world history. If we assume that 700,000 people were executed or otherwise killed in August 1937–early November 1938, on average 1,500 people were exterminated every day. Even hardened chekists could not always effectively maintain this bloody pace. For the most part, the executions were individual. According to existing documents, no means of mass extermination (such as gas chambers) were used. However, regular shootings were sometimes supplemented by various sadistic methods of execution.

· 49 ·

Memorandum about the former people's commissar of internal affairs of Dagestan, V. G. Lomonosov
30 December 1954[47]

Former Commissar of Internal Affairs of Dagestan ASSR Vasily Georgievich Lomonosov was sentenced to the ultimate penalty on 26 September 1939 by the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR. At his 25 March 1939 interrogation on the violations of socialist legality in the NKVD Dagestan ASSR, he testified:

"I plead guilty to the fact that in 1937–1938 a series of crimes and hostile actions took place in the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the Dagestan Republic, for which I, as the former head of the commissariat, bear full responsibility at the state level. These crimes are as follows:

"1. A violation of revolutionary legality by replacing, on my personal orders, in October–November 1937 in two operative groups, in Kizliar and Khasaviurt, the legally established extreme penalty—shooting—with killing by strangling for those sentenced to the ultimate penalty during a fake medical examination. I personally was in charge of this operation. In the Khasaviurt district we thus strangled 120 people and buried them in two ditches in the yard of a house in the center of town, where workers of the Khasaviurt RO [district] NKVD lived. [. . .]

"The accused were summoned as if being prepared for a transfer; I conducted a brief questioning about the indictment materials and the social background of the accused; then it was announced that to prevent escape during the night trip to the railway station [the accused's] hands would be tied. After that, the accused was moved to a room next door and strangled there with a thin wire in a matter of seconds. Then the body was moved, through a hole in the wall, hidden behind a piece of felt, to a shed. From there, once the bodies accumulated, they were put in ditches near the shed." [. . .]

The former head of the Khasaviurt RO NKVD, Viktor Anukhovich Makhaev, sentenced to the ultimate punishment, testified:

"Lomonosov decided to strangle with ropes those sentenced in the first category and to bury them in the yard where my family lived. [. . .] It was organized like this: The arrested was led to a room, and there was another empty room next door, the so-called headquarters. [. . .] Our task was to tie the hands of the accused. Lomonosov personally reviewed each case one more time, despite the existing troika resolution, and always talked to the arrested while reading the file. Thus, we announced to the accused that he would be loaded in carriages no. 2, 4, etc. Then he was led through one room into another, where the actual stranglers, Sergeant Boychenko and Top Sergeant Romanenko, were waiting.

"They put the prisoner in a chair and asked him: If you are ill, tell us. One worker told the accused: Lift your head, show your neck. Why don't you have clean underwear? At that time, the other—Romanenko—put a loop [around his neck] and strangled him. Each person took about five minutes. [. . .]"

Those arrested by the regular police were not among the 1.6 million listed as arrested by NKVD organs. Most of them were sentenced by courts of regular jurisdiction and by police troikas. In 1937–38, according to statistics from the organs of justice, regular courts processed the cases of about 2 million people, and sentenced 730,000 of them to prison terms (others were sentenced to corrective labor, received suspended sentences, or were acquitted, or their cases were remanded, etc.).[48] Only a small portion of these people were arrested for political crimes by organs of state security. There are no data about the activity of the police troikas in 1937–38. In 1935 these troikas sentenced 123,000 people (see Document 94).[49]

Apparently, in 1937–38 about 2.4 million people were arrested.

Various nonjudicial organs and courts dealt with about 3.5 million people (a large number of those given a suspended sentence or sentenced to corrective labor had no previous arrests). In the course of these two years, more than 680,000 people were sentenced to death, and 1.5 million to various prison terms.

The number of those deported and exiled in 1937–38 also needs adjustment but probably totaled several hundred thousand people. The largest of the actions, the deportation of Koreans from the Far East, involved more than 170,000 people (see Document 45).

About two-thirds of those sentenced to death or prison in 1937–38 were convicted for political crimes. That does not mean that the rest were ordinary criminals. It was difficult to distinguish ordinary criminals among the victims of Stalinist punitive system because of its extreme brutality and injustice, especially in the periods of mass terror. Even NKVD documents provide some indirect evidence for this. For example, an order by the people's commissar of internal affairs dated 21 May 1938 on the work of police troikas (created to fight crimes) mentioned convictions of "collective farmers who, though with a history of prior arrests and convictions [. . .], were not engaged in criminal activity and were not connected to criminal groups."[50]

According to the many regional martyrologies and books of memory (lists of those shot in 1937–38) that have been published in recent years, the majority of victims of the Great Terror were not the bosses, as it was sometimes said, but ordinary people accused of political crimes only because the leaders of the country decided to conduct mass operations. "Aleksandr Dmitrievich Abanin, born in 1878, [. . .] non-party member, Russian, blacksmith in the fourth mining section of the Kirov mine [. . .]"; "Pavel Fyodorovich Abbakumov, born in 1885, [. . .] non-party member, Russian, inspector in the ninth section of the financial department of the Kirov railroad [. . .]"; "Aleksandr Abramovich Abramov, born in 1882, [. . .] non-party member, Russian, individual peasant," etc. These are the first entries of the *Leningrad Martyrology,* a compilation of information about 40,000 people shot in Leningrad and Leningrad province between August 1937 and November 1938.[51]

Besides the direct victims of terror (those imprisoned, shot, deported, etc.) there were many people affected indirectly. Hundreds of thousands of people, while not being arrested, lost their jobs or were expelled from universities, the party, or the Komsomol. The reason could be "connections to the enemies of the people," relatives living abroad, an "alien" social background, or something else equally tenuous. The fate of these outcasts was dire. They suffered not only economic setbacks but also grave psychological stress, being under the constant threat of arrest.

Children of those repressed were always the first victims of the Great Terror. The principle "the son is not responsible for his father," proclaimed about two years before the Great Terror but never truly implemented in practice, was replaced by another principle: isolation of and discrimination against all close relatives of the arrested. According to the 15 August 1937 order by the people's commissariat of internal affairs, wives of "traitors" and their children over fifteen were to be arrested. A large number of young orphaned children were either taken in by relatives or sent to orphanages.[52]

· 50 ·

Note from Yezhov on sending the children of repressed parents to orphanages 1 June 1938[53]

Top secret.

To the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, Com. V. M. Molotov.

In accordance with the CC VKP(b) resolution, from the beginning of the operation* through 10 May of this year, the NKVD has sent 15,347 children of repressed parents to the People's Commissariat of Education orphanages in Moscow and in the [Soviet] Union.

As suggested by the NKVD USSR, up to 5,000 more people should be apprehended and accommodated. To accommodate this contingent, [republican] Commissariats of Education should provide additional space: in the RSFSR, for 3,000; in the UkSSR [Ukrainian SSR], for 2,000, for a total of 5,000 people.

Owing to an increase in the size of the contingent, the NKVD will require additional funds to conduct the transfer of children to the People's Commissariat of Education orphanages in the amount of 1,525,000 rubles, according to the attached calculation. [. . .][54]

People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR,
Commissar General of State Security,
N. Yezhov.

* Refers to the operation against the families of traitors conducted in compliance with the 15 August 1937 order by the people's commissar of internal affairs.

Branded as offspring of enemies of the people, these children could not enjoy a normal life; indeed, they could face arrest after coming of age. Mass repressions were one reason for the growth in the number of homeless children and the surge in juvenile crime. Thus, in 1936 judiciary organs convicted more than 15,000 juveniles aged between twelve and sixteen; in 1937, more than 17,000; in 1938, more than 20,000; and in the first half of 1939, more than 13,000. The number of juveniles arrested for going about unattended was 156,000 in 1936, 159,000 in 1937, 175,000 in 1938, and 91,000 in the first half of 1939.[55]

The majority of the population of the country was, in various forms, strongly affected by the bloody terrorist policies in 1937–38. As was typical in an age of terror, both mean and mediocre people, as well as scoundrels, had a better chance of survival, even promotion, than ordinary, decent people. This factor was of great significance for the consequent development of Soviet society.

Extermination Camps

Although the 1937–38 operations were aimed at the physical liquidation of anti-Soviet and counterrevolutionary elements, as well as potential wreckers and spies, the majority of those arrested were sent to camps, colonies, and prisons. The influx of many new victims of the Great Terror swelled the numbers of inmates and, consequently, brought a sharp deterioration in the already dismal living conditions and helped spread arbitrariness and repression in the Gulag.

Like the rest of the population, inmates in the prisons and camps were targets of repression and purges. Order no. 00447 specified that 10,000 people in the camps had to be shot. The quota increased with time, along with regional quotas. As part of the operation against anti-Soviet elements, Yezhov ordered, within two months from 25 August, "an operation to repress the most active counterrevolutionary elements in the GUGB prisons": all of them had to be shot. The quota for the Solovki prison was set at 1,200.[56] Between October 1937 and February 1938 more than 1,800 Solovki prisoners were shot.[57]

Many former prisoners remember stories about executions in the camps and how they amplified fear. Particularly terrifying memories were left by the mass shootings in 1937–38 in the Kolyma Sevvostlag, dubbed the Garanin shootings after the head of the camp, Colonel S. N. Garanin. According to A. G. Grossman, Garanin brought "several armed guards with him from Magadan to the mines and asked the

camp administrator about the best workers who fulfilled the plan. Naturally, there were political prisoners among the best [workers]. He ordered the camp administrator to take those prisoners beyond the perimeter of the camp, where they were taken and shot. This was done at night, when all prisoners were asleep. The news spread to other camps, which produced great panic among the prisoners, who literally hid under the bunks, fearing for their lives."[58]

E. M. Lvov recalled that "Garanin had a headquarters. Farther down, the highway bends like a serpent. Near one of the turns, away from the road, there was an ordinary prison barrack encircled by barbed wire. The entrance to the zone was guarded. This mini-camp was called Serpantinka. There the Garanin troika convened. There it handed out prison terms, which were called Garanin [terms]. They also passed death sentences, which were carried out on the spot. All the Kolyma prisoners talked about it."[59]

These testimonies are supported by evidence. In 1938 alone, the Dalstroi troika sentenced 12,566 people, of which 5,866 were sentenced to death.[60]

Besides executions, Gulag bosses toughened the regimen and denied prisoners the small privileges that they had retained. In May 1937 the NKVD issued two circular letters: "On measures to strengthen the regimen in prisons and colonies" and "On the isolation and strengthening of the regimen in the camps for particularly dangerous prisoners."[61] The letters ordered lockups in all prisons and colonies, regular searches of prisoners, and harsh punishments even for small violations of the regimen. All political prisoners had to be removed from administrative and managerial positions. Exceptions were made only for technical managers (foremen, taskmasters, supervisors). Even they had to be guarded at all times, en route to work and at work. All political prisoners who, out of economic convenience, had previously enjoyed certain privileges and a relative freedom of movement within the camp, were now escorted. Unescorted movement around towns was prohibited for all prisoners, regardless of their crime. Prisoners who had been lent out to other enterprises and who were not guarded had to be returned to the camps, and so on.

The arrival in the camps of a large number of new prisoners, exhausted by incarceration and torture, ill, and often without clothes, had catastrophic consequences. Since the mass operations started in August 1937, the peak of the new arrivals came in the winter. Contrary to the rules demanding that only physically fit and employable prison-

ers be sent to the camps, the new contingents were mostly sick and unable to work. In late 1937 large groups of elderly, disabled, and emaciated people arrived in Bamlag, and 953 inmates of Ukrainian prisons were sent to the Kaluga camp. When the train arrived, on 6 October 1937, it carried 200 emaciated prisoners and 77 disabled and sick people among the rest. The arriving prisoners had no clothes (89 people wore only underwear) and were lice ridden. Often the provincial and republican penitentiary departments in charge of prisons and colonies sent to the camps more prisoners than the instructions from Moscow required.

All these facts were cited in a 19 December 1937 special order by the people's commissar of internal affairs, "On violations of the instructions on selection and transfer of prisoners to the NKVD camps." The order threatened that charges, "including criminal prosecution," would be pressed against the heads of prisons and colonies for permitting such violations.[62] The threats, however, had no effect, and a new order was issued on 17 April 1938. The order stated that, in Bamlag alone, in the last quarter of 1937, more than 10,000 new prisoners were unemployable because of health problems.[63] This order was not complied with either. A memorandum from the accounting and distribution department of the Gulag, written soon after that, registered several new instances in which large numbers of sick, lice-ridden, and unclothed prisoners were transferred from prisons to the camps. Among the 986 prisoners sent from the Ukraine to Arkhangelsk, none had underwear, and 197 had no shoes. From Mari ASSR and Tataria to Soroka camp were sent "elderly people aged fifty-seven to seventy-two, unable even to move."[64] Sending large numbers of emaciated, sick, and disabled people to the camps, as well as exceeding the set quotas, were natural results of the general disorganization of the entire Gulag system in the years of the Great Terror. Overcrowded prisons and colonies tried to get rid of prisoners, but the camps could not accommodate them.

The Siberian and Far Eastern camps faced a real crisis. Many prisoners, sent to a completely ill-prepared Bamlag in the last three months of 1937, found themselves in terrible conditions. Mass deaths and the spread of typhus put a stop to sending prisoners there. Ten thousand prisoners rejected by Bamlag in October–December 1937 were taken off trains in Novosibirsk and sent to Siblag, the Siberian corrective labor camp.[65] This, however, led to the overcrowding of Siblag and epidemics of typhus there.

· 51 ·

Memorandum from Vyshinsky about epidemics in the Siberian camp
27 February 1938[66]

Top secret.
CC VKP(b)—to Comrade I. V. Stalin.
SNK USSR—to Comrade V. M. Molotov.

An inspection by the Procuracy of the [Soviet] Union has established that eight sections of Siblag are affected by typhus. As of 24 February, 314 people are infected, and another 203 are suspected of having typhus. At the Mariinsky distribution center, there were 110 infected people and 157 suspected of being infected. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the Mariinsky distribution center, with a maximum capacity of 3,000 people, keeps 10,000 people under guard.

In sending along this information, I am asking that you instruct the NKVD to take immediate and urgent measures to prevent a further spread of typhus among those imprisoned.

Procurator of the USSR, A. Vyshinsky.

The instruction by the Gulag administration to move some of the prisoners from the Siblag to other camps had to be called off because typhus patients were found on the very first trains carrying them away. The epidemics spread to the Far Eastern camp, Ushosdorlag, and to Sevvostlag. Several inspections made in early 1938 showed that the old camps were overwhelmed by the newly arriving prisoners.

· 52 ·

Memorandum from Vyshinsky on the results of the inspection of the NKVD camps
19 February 1938[67]

Top secret.
To the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the Union of the SSR, Commissar General of State Security, Comrade N. I. Yezhov.

The inspection of the prisoners' conditions in the Baikal-Amur, Far Eastern, Ussuriisk, and Ukhta-Pechora camps, conducted by the Procuracy of the Union, has established that in some camp divisions the prisoners' conditions are unsatisfactory and, in some cases, absolutely intolerable.

For example, there are 500 prisoners in the fifty-second unit of the seventeenth division (near Bikin station, eight kilometers from the border with Manchuria). They live in cold, dirty barracks with dirty bunks. In the absence of a classification of prisoners at the time of their placement in the barracks, the most reprehensible inmates have established the best conditions for themselves and have taken the best bunks (near the furnace), and they continually rob the working prisoners of food rations and clothes. As a result, prisoners have no incentive to report to work: 222 prisoners completely fail to report to work. Of those, 98 people do not work because they have no clothes or shoes at all. Among the prisoners there are some so ragged and lice ridden that they pose a sanitary danger to the rest. These prisoners have deteriorated to the point of losing any resemblance to human beings. Lacking food (on a punishment ration), they collect orts and, according to some prisoners, eat rats and dogs. The head of the unit informed me that only one dog (belonging to him) was left alive around the unit. As a result of inadequate food rations, there are extremely emaciated prisoners in the infirmary, and prisoners with frost-bitten extremities. [. . .]

In his 26 January 1938 letter, the procurator of Bamlag informed me about the situation of prisoners in the fourteenth division of that camp: "In the infirmary, there are prisoners lying naked on long bunks, literally packed like sardines in a barrel. They are not taken to the bathhouse for weeks owing to the lack of underwear and bedsheets. In some rooms, women are lying on the bunks in the same room as men. A syphilis patient lies side by side with a tubercular patient. In a common room, there are patients with erysipelas (infectious) packed with stomach patients. Tubercular patients, with surgical patients. They take people who froze to death off the arriving trains (Moscow train).

"Those arriving have no underwear, nothing but rags. The terrible thing is that there is not a single change of underwear, boots, or clothes in the Bamlag. Their bodies are covered with scabs, but they do not take a bath, because they are not provided with underwear. Their tatters are full of hundreds of lice. There is no soap. Many have nothing to put on to go out to the bathroom. The so-called recovering team is in fact [. . .] in a dark barrack. People there completely lack underwear and pea jackets and only have ragged light jackets. They resemble humans or, more likely, savages, or people of the Stone Age. And new trainloads of people without clothes keep coming, and people go on the road barefoot, unclothed, and we have minus twenty to minus fifty degrees Centigrade here. There are no houses. There is nothing to build houses with, no tools, no saws or axes. What is to be done? Typhoid patients arrive with the recent trainloads. Somebody—obviously hostile—is arranging for people to die en route and to die upon arrival.

"In order not to hold up cars and in order to prevent a jam on the railroad, zealous bosses of the fourteenth division decided to have the arriving people walk seventeen kilometers. As a result, in the first group of 750, five people died of cold, and ninety-two were frostbitten (mostly their feet). In the second group, forty-two people were frostbitten, and in the third, thirty.

"Fats are not supplied for long periods of time. Patients with weak stomachs eat from the common cauldron. There is no sugar in the infirmary (fourteenth division). The food situation is catastrophic. Now, 60,000–70,000 prisoners will be placed deep in the taiga in winter, with only one month's worth of food. People may find themselves without food, separated from the rest of the world by impassable marshes until November. Hundreds of telegrams sent to the GULAG about the catastrophic situation in the camp go unanswered. People become brutalized, and some are nearly insane. There are no fresh vegetables. In two–three months, scurvy may start, but new prisoners keep coming and coming. In three and a half months, 75,000 arrived, and the same number on wheels." [. . .]

Inspection of the Ukhtpechlag has shown that the living conditions of prisoners in this camp are also clearly unsatisfactory. Only 60 percent of prisoners have a place to live. The rest stay in tents, which are not adequate for living during the winter. Prisoners are not getting even 50 percent of the required warm clothes and shoes. As a result, during the 4 November 1937 transfer of 2,086 prisoners from the Sindor camp center to Tobys division, ordered by the Ukhtpechlag chief engineer, Maksimovich, sixteen people got frostbitten on the way and died of cold and exhaustion. The camp procuracy has indicted Maksimovich and other perpetrators of this crime. [. . .]

Procurator of the USSR, A. Vyshinsky.

· 53 ·

Report on the results of the inspection of the Ukhta-Pechora camp of the NKVD 20 January 1938[68]

Top secret.

[. . .] The living conditions of the prisoners (except at the first and second works) are exceptionally appalling. Particularly unsatisfactory is the state of affairs in the camp divisions at the construction of the Kniazhy Pogost–Chibiu railway and the Chibiu–Krutaia highway.

The filth is extensive and overwhelming and, in some camp centers (Sidiu, fifth, sixth, etc.), simply catastrophic. There are almost no bedsheets, and prisoners sleep on bare, dirty bunks. In some camp centers (Sidiu, fifth, fourth, etc.) the stink in the barracks is unbearable because people almost never go the bathhouse. With rare exceptions, underwear is dirty, not laundered for months. Camp divisions have almost no changes of underwear, and thus where people go to the bath, bathing does not fulfill its purpose. Clothing is badly insufficient, and in some camp centers many prisoners cannot work because they lack clothes.

In the camp divisions with emaciated prisoners (Sidiu, Tobys, twelfth, fifteenth, and sixteenth divisions), the conditions are such that they can become havens of infectious disease and mass death (in December thirty-eight people died at the twelfth camp center).

In most camp centers on the Krutaia–Chibiu highway, prisoners are so crowded in the barracks that they sleep on top of one another. There is no extra space either on the bunks nor under them.

Foods supplied to the prisoners are exceptionally bad. Almost all kitchens are unsanitary. Throughout December, most camp centers did not receive meat, fish, or fats, and in some places soup was made without vegetables (by adding flour—so called blending). Some camp centers bake underdone bread that is almost impossible to eat. In some camp centers (sixth camp center, twelfth camp center, and sixteenth camp center) prisoners have no spoons or bowls, which literally brutalizes them.

The ill (the scabbed, diarrheal, and venereal patients, etc.) stay in common quarters with other prisoners (at the railroad and highway construction sites, etc.).

Naturally, this situation has led to catastrophic physical conditions for the camp population and the minimal employment of prisoners. [. . .] Even the Ukhtpechlag sanitary department, in its report on the physical condition of prisoners from 1 December 1937, which gives far from the real state of affairs, shows a rather unpleasant situation:

Second category*	17,831
Third category†	11,132
Disabled	1,332
En route	471
Emaciated and sick	6,656
Total	54,947

As a result, the employment rate of prisoners in the camp is very low. [. . .]

The administration believes that the growth of group C [third category] is a result of GULAG authorities sending to the camp a large number of sick prisoners and disabled ones in 1937. However, while it is true in general, the decisive factor is the appalling living and sanitary conditions, which lead to the growing numbers of emaciated people. [. . .]

* Prisoners capable of medium-rated labor.

† Prisoners capable of just limited work or unemployable (including invalids, the elderly, and the emaciated).

The difficult situation in the old camps was easy to foresee. Even before mass operations started, it was clear that the existing camps would not be able to accommodate an influx of prisoners. The 31 July 1937 Politburo resolution that approved Order no. 00447 ordered the construction of an additional network of camps "in remote regions of Kazakhstan," in the forests of the North, in the Urals, and in Siberia. Plans to build camps in Kazakhstan were never implemented owing to insufficient funds. The main effort was concentrated on organizing a network of forest camps.

There were several reasons to select the timber industry as an area of employment for the new prisoners. First, it was relatively easy to set up forestry farms quickly and with minimal investment. Second, the timber industry was experiencing certain difficulties. On 6 June 1937 the chairman of the State Planning Committee (Gosplan), G. I. Smirnov, reported to Stalin and Molotov that in the first half of 1937, timber production by the People's Commissariat of Forestry had achieved only 48 percent of the amount specified in the annual plan; because of the seasonal nature of the work, the amount was normally 75–78 percent. According to Smirnov, the production of the People's Commissariat of Forestry during the first eight months of 1937 had decreased by 6 percent, compared to the same period in 1936.[69]

According to the governmental decree, the Gulag had to establish, by 1 January 1938, seven timber camps with 103,000 people in them.[70] As a result of hasty decisions connected with mass repressive actions, along with insufficient funding, the prisoners who were brought into the new forestry regions found themselves in an extremely difficult situation. Gulag statistical reports on the new camps provide some scanty information about the tragedy that took place in the forestry regions of the North and Siberia.[71]

For the first two months after the organization of the seven new camps (October–November 1937), the reports registered a large number of escapes (more than 700) and a relatively small number of deaths (532).[72] The arriving prisoners, forced to fight for survival, still had strength to escape. The weather conditions also contributed. In December the death rate went up, and the number of escapes decreased. Later (we have data for only January–March 1938) this trend became more pronounced. The winter left the emaciated prisoners little chance

of survival if they escaped, nor even if they stayed. As of 1 January 1938 there were 91,500 prisoners listed in the seven new forest camps. Among them, 41,200 were able to perform heavy work, 20,700 could do medium-level work, and 22,700 could only do light work or were altogether unemployable (including 4,900 invalids). Quite a few prisoners, 6,900, were not categorized at all, which probably means that they were also sick. The death rate among the new camp prisoners was astonishing. According to the report, in December 1937 the number who died was 2,415; in January 1938, the number was 3,343; in February, 3,244; and in March, 3,040. On average, the number was slightly less than half of the entire number of prisoners who died in all the camps (about 26,000 between December 1937 and March 1938).[73]

Creating the new camps had horrifying consequences. In the first six months more than 12,500 died, 1,272 escaped, and more than 20,000 were unemployable, including 5,000 invalids. The original plan to place 103,000 worker prisoners in the camps by 1 January 1938 proved to be unachievable. The new forest camps, organized in 1937, became in fact provisional death camps. Soon afterward, four of them were closed and one was relocated; only two survived for a while.[74]

As was evident from the situation in the old and new camps in late 1937–early 1938, the Gulag was unable to support the mass operations as planned. As of 1 February 1938, there were 1,126,500 prisoners in the camps (including those en route), compared to 786,595 prisoners as of 1 July 1937, before the start of the mass operations. In addition, there were 545,331 inmates in prisons and 339,872 in the colonies.[75] The majority of the prisoners had to be transferred to the camps. With these plans in mind, the government decided, in late December 1937, to organize six more forest camps to accommodate 150,000 prisoners.[76] By March 54,000 prisoners had been brought to those camps, and 22,000 were on the way.[77] According to February 1938 calculations by the Gulag accounting and distribution department, just the excess camp prisoners and prison inmates to be transferred to the camps amounted to 200,000 people, whereas the camps could accommodate only 57,000–60,000.[78]

The excess 140,000 prisoners were created during the first stage of the Great Terror. Even though a large number of prisoners were shot, the Gulag did not have the capacity to support the four-month operation planned for mid-1937. The scale of the repressions in 1938, however, surpassed the scale in 1937. Despite the executions, which were

in large degree a result of overcrowding in the camps, 800,000 new prisoners arrived at the camps in 1938, while only 330,000 were released or transferred to other prisons. Consequently, as of 1 January 1939 there were 1,317,195 prisoners in the camps, 355,243 in the colonies, and 352,508 in prisons. The total number exceeded the number of all prisoners on 1 January 1938 by almost 150,000.[79]

These numbers would have been bigger had it not been for a high death rate in the camps, colonies, and prisons, which, in 1938, far surpassed the death rate of previous years (except during the 1933 famine). According to the NKVD, 25,376 people died in the camps in 1937, and 8,123 died in prisons and colonies. In 1938 these numbers were 90,546 and 36,039, respectively.[80]

However large these numbers are, the Gulag reports were incomplete. First, because of the leap in the number of prisoners, there was more opportunity for falsification. The number of prisoners officially listed as "departed for various reasons" grew rapidly, for instance. In earlier years this category included, on average, 1,200 to 2,700 people. In 1938 there were 16,500 (see Document 97).

Second, during the period of mass repressions and mass movement of prisoners, deaths en route greatly increased. We do not have sufficient data for analysis, but Gulag statistics show not only a large number of prisoners being moved from prisons and jails to the camps but also a significant movement between camps. In 1937 about 215,000 prisoners were transferred between camps; and in 1938, more than 240,000. There was also a reverse movement from the camps to colonies and prisons: about 44,000 in 1937 and almost 56,000 in 1938 (see Document 97). For prisoners, these moves were sheer hell. Congestion, filth, terrible heat in the summer and extreme cold in the winter, and the presence of ill (and sometimes dead) fellow passengers contributed to the spread of disease and high mortality. People died on the trains, on the road from the railway stations to the camps, and along every step of the way. Although Gulag documents do not provide a compilation of deaths en route, the difference between the number of prisoners sent and the number received is telling. In 1938 the difference was 38,000 (see Document 97).

High mortality was not the only manifestation of the crisis in the camp system as a result of the Great Terror. A large number of prisoners were on the verge of death and were listed as unemployable or full invalids. According to Gulag reports, in 1938 (mainly in the third and fourth quarters), over 9 percent of the camp population (100,000-plus

people) could not work owing to illness, emaciation, or disability.[81] It is possible that this number was artificially reduced. In April 1939, L. P. Beria, the new people's commissar of internal affairs, reported to the government that, besides invalids, there were up to 150,000 "emaciated and disabled workers" (see Document 61).

Another category of prisoners that revealed the crisis in the camps was the group of the unclothed. One can only imagine what being officially unclothed meant in the Gulag, where nobody was well dressed. The lack of clothes was caused by administrative excesses, theft, and the general shortage of consumer goods in the country. In the long line of those waiting to obtain the limited clothes and footwear, prisoners were among the last. The NKVD regularly prepared, and People's Commissar of Internal Affairs Yezhov signed, petitions to the government to provide additional textiles and footwear for the many new prisoners. These petitions were only rarely satisfied. By September 1938 the number of prisoners in prisons and colonies had reached 2,000,000, whereas they received (in early 1938) only 422,000 pairs of shoes and 213,000 pairs of felt boots. "This situation impedes full utilization of the workforce owing to the resulting lack of clothes," wrote Ezhov to the head of the government, Molotov.[82]

Gulag statistics distinguished the *otkazchiks,* prisoners who refused to report to work, from other nonworking prisoners. In 1938 about 1 percent of the camp population were otkazchiks.[83] Among them could have been ill or unclothed prisoners. As gang crime spread, the number of otkazchiks reflected the regimen in the camps. With the mass repressions, the cruelest and most aggressive criminals increased their influence, terrorized the political prisoners, and often imposed their own rules.

An important indicator of the situation in the camps was the rate of escapes, always closely watched by the leaders of the country and the NKVD bosses. Despite draconian measures to prevent escapes of most of the prisoners, the number who managed to flee remained significant—58,200 in 1937 and 32,000 in 1938. According to camp reports (not quite reliable), most of the escapees were apprehended (see Document 97). As a rule, the camp administration blamed the escapes on a guard system overtaxed by the massive increase in the number of prisoners. As of 1 August 1938, there were 55,300 camp guards (including 12,800 prisoners). This number represents 4–5 percent of the total number of prisoners. The NKVD bosses considered it essential to increase the number of guards to 90,000 (7 percent of the total number of prisoners).[84]

But for the leaders of the country, the main sign of trouble in the camps was their failure to fulfill economic tasks. The plans for industrial production and capital construction, imposed on the NKVD, continued to grow in 1937–38. In August 1937 the NKVD was charged with the construction of the Kyibyshev hydroelectric complex on the Volga River and of similar projects on the Kama,[85] as well as the construction of the 5,000-kilometer-long section of the Baikal–Amur railway, between Taishet and Sovetskaya harbor.[86] On 5 September 1937 construction of the Ulan Ude–Naushki railroad was added to this list.[87] In April 1938, as a result of increased railroad construction in the Far East, the government resolved to establish a railroad building department of the Gulag in the Far East, which would include six railroad camps.[88] In February 1938 the NKVD assumed administration of the Raichinkinsky and Bukachachinsky coal mines, previously under the auspices of the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry.[89] In May 1938 the NKVD was charged with the construction of ten sulfide-cellulose plants (to be opened no later than February–April of 1939),[90] the Arkhangelsk and Solikamsk paper-cellulose industrial complexes,[91] and other projects. As a rule, those were complicated tasks, which the people's commissariats of industry had failed to carry out.

In almost every case, the NKVD was ordered to accelerate construction. Theoretically, the new tasks and the expansion of the existing enterprises were supported by rapid growth of the camp population. In reality, however, the expected production growth and new capital investments could not be achieved because of the disorganization of the camp system and the emaciation of the workforce. The NKVD proved unable to meet the construction plans for the new projects and usually blamed it on the lack of workers.[92] Some internal NKVD documents are more straightforward and shed light on the true reasons for the economic failures.

· 54 ·

Memorandum on the situation at the construction sites
of the GULAG of the NKVD
[Before 17 November 1938][93]

To the Head of the Political Department of the GULAG of the NKVD USSR, Brigade Commissar Comrade Vasiliev.*

Since I was dispatched to work in the GULAG of the NKVD in late 1937, I have encountered in my practical work in the planning and financial department, as well as in the entire GULAG, a number of rather suspicious facts, which I consider imperative to report to you:

I. The work to realize capital investments in 1937, and the work of the majority of the construction sites in general, has been ineffective and quite unsatisfactory.

The 1937 plan was fulfilled by only 71.6 percent. In particular:

a) Hydrotechnical works—80.5 percent
b) Railroad construction—62.7 percent
c) Industrial construction—63.2 percent

At almost all GULAG construction sites, the main work is expensive, and the productivity of labor is low. [. . .]

III. The cost of the main types of work is as follows:

	Measurement Unit	In the Plan	In Reality
1. Volgostroi			
a) earthworks	cubic meter	2 rubles, 86 kopecks	4 rubles, 61 kopecks
b) concrete	cubic meter	106 rubles, 10 kopecks	177 rubles, 71 kopecks
c) provisional civil construction	cubic meter	18 rubles, 35 kopecks	22 rubles, 47 kopecks
2. Second railways			
a) building of the main route	kilometer	50,040 rubles	76,960 rubles

[. . .]

* On 17 November 1938, the head of the Gulag political department forwarded this note to the deputy people's commissar of internal affairs, Filaretov, and on 22 November, to Yezhov.

V. At some construction sites, overhead expenses are enormously high, especially to support administrative staff. For example:

	Plan	Reality
1. Volgostroi		
All construction overhead expenses		
a) in relation to direct expenses	21%	22%
b) including support of administrative staff	8%	13.5%
2. Second railways		
Administrative expenses	8%	11.73%
—Overspending here alone came to 12,767,000 rubles		

[. . .]

VI. In addition to the high cost of work, low productivity, and extremely high overhead expenses, almost all construction sites have a low ratio of utilization of the workforce and an excess of the latter [the workforce]:

	Plan	Reality
1. Volgostroi		
Group A*	89.2%	80.5%
Groups C and D (resting)†	2.2%	10.1%
2. Second railways		
Group A	77.5%	75.3%
Groups C and D (resting)	10%	12.25%

[. . .]

VII. Use of mechanized equipment.

The use of mechanized equipment and vehicles in 1937 was quite unsatisfactory. As of 1 January 1938, 87 percent of the machines went unused. Construction machines and transport vehicles were used as follows:

a) Excavator yield:
1. At Volgostroi—77%
2. At Southern Bay—44%
3. On secondary route—65% [. . .]

b) Auto transport yield:
1. At Norilskstroi—54%

* Refers to those working in production.

† Group C—those who are ill, emaciated, or disabled. Group D—those not working for other reasons (in this case, resting).

2. On line no. 2—80%
3. At Segezhstroi—81%
4. At Southern Bay—87%

A similar substandard situation can be found with other construction machines and equipment and at other construction sites.

VIII. Losses.

Because of the awful work at the construction sites, the GULAG spends more than the planned, or even estimated, capital investment. In total, the GULAG overspends 240,400,000 rubles against the planned cost. [. . .]

IX. Overstocking.

In addition to the above, and thanks to the awful work (to say the least) at the construction sites, which is evident, construction materials were supplied irrespective of the fulfillment of construction plans. As a result, several sites received deficit materials, supplies, and foodstuffs not according to plan, thus withdrawing such resources from circulation. [. . .]

XII. Why all this happens?

Most important, the GULAG does not conduct an adequate fight to improve the work at the construction sites, to eradicate and liquidate the consequences of wrecking. Often in the GULAG, things happen that are virtually indistinguishable from real acts of wrecking. For example:

1. It is obvious that the enemies of the people had their filthy hand in planning capital investment at GULAG construction sites: capital investments are outlined in varying figures, the control figures are provided late, the structure of capital investment is frequently modified, etc. All this led to undermined construction work because of a lack of finances and materials or because of overstocking, locking up funds in unnecessary equipment, materials, etc.

Thus, in 1938 the GULAG changed the capital investment plans for Volgostroi (specifically, to 660, 610, 550, 300, and 330 [million rubles]). The situation is similar at other construction sites. [. . .]

Similar planning took place in 1937. As we have already pointed out, thanks to such planning methods, most construction sites locked up capital investment in materials and closed their current accounts because of the lack of finances. [. . .]

Only nine out of twenty-eight GULAG construction sites have approved technical plans and financial appraisals. The rest are working without these. Technical plans take so long to create that the construction is almost over by then. For example, the construction of the Moscow–Minsk highway will be completed by November 1938, but they do not have a technical plan yet. Financing of construction sites is secured by special resolution of the government.

Most of the GULAG construction sites, because of their scale and importance, are considered special-quota sites and are under special governmental control. As such, according to the 23 October 1934 SNK resolution, their plans and financial appraisals can be approved only by the SNK. This SNK resolution established a special procedure for approval of plans and appraisals, forbade uncontrolled spending of state resources, and required that the Sovnarkom approve each alteration of the capital investment [plan].

The GULAG leadership, i.e., Pliner, decided to overlook this resolution. To obtain money not involving the government, he reassigned a number of construction sites, which had to be under SNK control, as lower-priority projects, thus permitting the head of construction to approve construction plans and financial assessments. The head of construction transfers his rights to the chief engineer of the construction site. Thus, financial assessments that had to be approved by the government ended up not being reviewed by the party committee, the GULAG administration, or even the head of construction, but were entrusted to the chief engineer of the construction site.

Party bureau organizer [of the financial and planning department of the GULAG],
Chugunikhin.

On the whole, failure of the Gulag to achieve the intended industrialization goals was inherent and predictable. The Gulag economy was never effective, and it survived only through the massive, uncontrolled exploitation of forced labor. The Great Terror, though mainly shaped by political goals, exacerbated these tendencies. The 1937–38 repressions converted Soviet camps into extermination centers instead of promoting productivity by supplying additional workers.