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SLAVE LABOR IN THE SOVIET UNION.
HUNGARIANS IN THE GULAG.

I. HISTORICAL SETTING

In the spring of 1945 — after four years of war and one year of German occupation — Hungary was freed from the Nazi German occupying forces, only to be subjugated by the “liberating” Soviet Red Army. In the course of the next forty-six years this Soviet control became a permanent feature of Hungarian life. Soviet presence was feared and detested by most Hungarians, yet it had to be portrayed, taught, and touted as the “Liberation of Hungary.” For over half a century, on April 4th every year, Hungarians were forced to celebrate this alleged “liberation” of their country by the Soviet Union. Although these celebrations ceased in 1990, the Soviet troops did not leave Hungary until June 19, 1991.

To most Hungarians — particularly to those who had experienced firsthand the circumstances of this Soviet conquest and occupation — this “liberation” appeared more like the rape of their nation and their families. In private, this view was often expressed through a slightly different pronunciation of the expression “szabadulás” (=liberation), which with the appropriate emphasis came out as “szabad dúlás” (=free ravaging). Naturally, this view does not negate the fact that for some people — at least for a while — the Soviet conquest was in fact liberation. These include the Jews and those non-Jewish Hungarians who openly opposed the Germans and their Hungarian cohorts, the members of the Fascist Arrow Cross

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Party. In the course of time, however, even these anti-Nazi groups began to feel the heavy hand of Soviet occupation.

One of the best examples of this “liberation-turned-into-oppression” is the case of Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera (1929-2001), the scion of a well-to-do Hungarian Jewish family, who survived Auschwitz only to be taken to the Soviet Gulag soon after his return to Hungary. Allegedly, this was done because he was born into a well-to-do upper bourgeoisie family, and thus counted as one of the “oppressors” in Hungarian society. Nagy-Talavera also survived the Soviet Gulag. Soon after his repatriation, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 broke out, when he took the opportunity to flee Hungary and emigrate to the United States. Ten years later he acquired a Ph.D. at Berkeley, and then became a professor of history at California State University at Chico.²

No Hungarian knew and felt the pain of Soviet “liberation” more than those tens of thousands of innocent civilians who were collected during this “liberation process” and then deported to the slave labor camps of the Soviet Gulag. As observed by Tamás Stark, a respected scholar of the period of World War II: “Who would have thought that in the immediate past century — in our own century — the institution of slavery would be reinstated? We may even assert that in the twentieth century more people were enslaved than in all of the previous centuries together. Furthermore, in our age slavery became ‘more sophisticated’ than in ancient times, not only in its organization and quantity, but also in its quality. In those days the goal was simply the exaction of labor. Nowadays it was extermination for which labor was ‘only’ an instrument. The goal of German national socialism was to weaken and to annihilate certain ‘races’ or ethnic groups. The goal of Stalinist socialism, on the other hand, was to use forced labor for the decimation of Soviet subjects, and for the intimidation of the neighboring states.”³

² CSABA NAGY, *A magyar emigráns irodalom lexikona* [Hungarian Emigré Literary Lexicon] (Budapest: Argument Kiadó, 2000), pp. 730-731. Nicholas Nagy-Talavera told me story of his life and of his family at the International Conference of Southeast European Studies in Anakara, Turkey, in the summer of 1979.

Before continuing, however, we should perhaps say a few words about the term GULAG (in Hungarian usage *Gulág*), whose origin and meaning is often misinterpreted even by some learned individuals. This misconception is generally derived from Alexander Solzhenitsyn's monumental *Gulag Archipelago* (1973). Being that the traditional meaning of the term "archipelago" is a "group of islands," many assume that the Gulag was a group of islands somewhere in the far northern region of Soviet Russia, which had been designated by the Bolshevik leadership as penal colonies for hundreds of thousands of unfortunate political prisoners.⁴ In reality, however, Gulag is simply an acronym for the Soviet administrative apparatus *Glavnoye Upravleniye Ispravitelno-Trudovykh Lagerey* [Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps], which was established in 1934 to combine under one powerful bureaucracy the administration of the thousands of slave labor camps in the Soviet Union. Like most everything else, the Gulag also functioned under the watchful eye of the Soviet Secret Police, which during the 1930s was the NKVD.⁵

We have no clear-cut picture of the number of Hungarians — military personnel and civilians — who ended up in captivity during the last phase of the war, but generally it is assumed that their number was above 900,000. Of these, somewhat less than one-third were captured by the Western Allies (Americans, British, French), while over two-thirds or 600,000 to 640,000 ended up in Soviet forced labor or prisoner-of-war camps. Of the latter, 220,000

³ Tamás Stark's study in ILONA SZEBENI, *Merre van a magyar hazám? Kényszermunkán a Szovjetunióban 1944-1949* [Where is My Hungarian Homeland? Forced Labor in the Soviet Union, 1944-1949] (Debrecen: Széphalom Könyvműhely, 1991), p. 302. Stark's study is found on pp. 302-310. (Hereafter cited as Szebeni, *Merre van hazám*.)

⁴ That this is a widespread belief has been demonstrated in July 2004, when discussing our research with a retired professor at the University of Pécs in Hungary. Until we explained it to him, he was convinced the "Gulag" is the name of a group of islands, containing penal colonies, somewhere off the northern coast of the Soviet Union.

⁵ This is thoroughly explained by ANNE APPLEBAUM in her book, *GULAG. A History of the Soviet Camps* (New York: Doubleday, Division of Random House, Inc., 2003), 677 pp.; reissued in paperback (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 3.

(or perhaps 270,000) never returned home.⁶ About half of these internees — possibly 120,000 to 140,000 — were innocent civilians who had been taken captive in the period between November 1944 and March 1945. Of these 120,000 to 140,000 civilian captives from within Hungary's current borders only about 10% survived.⁷ If we consider the territory of enlarged Hungary as it existed during World War II, then the number of civilian internees moves up to between 180,000 and 200,000, most of the extra ones coming from Northern Transylvania and Sub-Carpathia or Carpatho-Ruthenia.⁸

Internees were either convicted on some trumped-up charges, or were taken without being accused of any crime for *malenky robot* [little work] to the Soviet Union. According to some sources about 90% of the political prisoners perished in the Gulag camps under the most gruesome circumstances. (We should add here that the grammatically correct term should be *malenkaya robota*. Repeated Hungarian usage or misuse, however, made this incorrect expression the accepted term for this phenomenon in Hungarian popular, and even scholarly literature.)⁹ The mostly unsuspecting

⁶ According to Tamás Stark's calculations somewhere between 270,000 and 370,000 Hungarian civilians and prisoners of war perished in the Soviet Gulag camps. See TAMÁS STARK, "Magyarok szovjet kényszermunkatáborokban" [Hungarians in Soviet Forced Labor Camps], in *Kortárs* [Contemporary], vol. 46, nos. 2-3 (2002), pp. 69-81; also available on the Internet: <http://www.kortaronline.hu/0202/stark.htm>. In one of his earlier works Stark calculated that the number of Hungarians who perished in the Gulag camps was between 250,000 and 300,000. Cf. TAMÁS STARK, "Megfogyva bár... Háborús népességmozgás Magyarországon, 1941-1949" [Diminished... Population mobility in Times of Belligerency], in *Hitel* [Credit], vol. 5, no. 4 (April 1992), pp. 14-20.

⁷ See *Magyarország a második világháborúban, Lexikon* [Encyclopedia on Hungary in the Second World War], ed. PÉTER SIPOS and ISTVÁN RAVASZ (Budapest, 1997), p. 498. See also LAJOS FÜR's relevant work, *Mennyi sok sírkereszt? Magyarország embervesztése a második világháborúban* [How Many Headstones? Hungary's Human Losses in the Second World War] (Budapest: Püski Kiadó, 1989). Für claims that Hungary lost close to one million persons, which include also the victims of the Holocaust.

⁸ See TAMÁS STARK, "Ethnic Cleansing and Collective Punishment: Soviet Policy Towards Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees in the Carpathian Basin," in *Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed., S. B. VÁRDY, T. H. TOOLEY, A. H. VÁRDY (New York: East European Monographs, Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 489-502, statistics on pp. 498-501. (Hereafter cited as VÁRDY, *Ethnic Cleansing*.)

⁹ In common usage, including popular and scholarly publications, Hungarians speak of the *malenky robot*, even though grammatically it should be *malenkaya*

victims of *malenky robot* were collected in villages and towns, after having been called to a public meeting under various pretexts.

According to the most reliable statistics, in the period between the summer of 1945 and the fall of 1948 somewhere between 330,000 and 380,000 Hungarians — most of them members of the military — were repatriated. Between 100,000 to 150,000 of these arrived before the summer of 1946, 202,000 returned home between July 1946 and November 1948, another 20,000 to 25,000 in the course of 1949 through 1951, and a further 3,000 between 1953 and 1955. This comes to between 330,000 and 380,000 Hungarians who survived, leaving as many as 220,000 to 270,000, or even 310,000 who did not.¹⁰ Those who were repatriated between 1946 and 1948 also included 9,425 documented civilians, most of whom were victims of the *malenky robot*. They represented perhaps only 10% of the innocent civilians who have ended up in the Soviet Gulag in wake of World War II.¹¹

Those who were convicted for espionage or for some other imaginary “crime” were not so “fortunate” as the *malenky roboters*. They were generally taken much farther into Soviet Siberia, and they had to stay there for several more years after the surviving *malenky roboters* had already returned. If the political prisoners survived, they were permitted to repatriate only after eight, ten, or even fifteen years of Soviet slave labor, in the period following Stalin’s death in 1953.¹²

robot. This may be connected with the fact that the term *robot* — the work obligation of the serf for his lord — has been in use in Hungary ever since the Middle Ages. Cf. STEVEN BÉLA VÁRDY, *Historical Dictionary of Hungary* (Lanham-London: The Scarecrow Press, 1997), p. 596.

¹⁰ Totally different statistics are given by Ignác Romsics in his synthesis of twentieth-century Hungarian history. He claims that by the end of 1946 300,000 returned, followed by 128,000 in 1947, and 170,000 in 1948. This comes to 598,000 out of the approximately 600,000 that Romsics claims as having been captives in the Soviet Union. These figures on repatriation are so unrealistic that they can only be attributed to some mixup. Cf. IGNÁC ROMSICS, *Magyarország története a XX. században* [Hungary’s History in the 20th Century] (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1999), pp. 297.

¹¹ On these estimates, see Stark’s study in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, pp. 303-310; and TAMÁS STARK, *Magyarország második világháborús embervesztése* [Hungary’s Human Losses during the Second World War] (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 1989), pp. 79-80.

¹² On these convicted political deportees, see GUSZTÁV MENCZER: “A szovjet hadbíróságok

According to Father Placid Olofsson (b.1916), a member of the Benedictine Order — who had spent ten years in the Soviet Gulag, and who after his repatriation founded the Association of Former Gulag Prisoners — in 1945 Soviet military tribunals convicted around 31,000 Hungarian civilians to hard labor in the Soviet Union. Of these only 6,500 or about 20% remained alive and returned home.¹³ This number does not contain the malenky roboters. Even so, most experts view these numbers as being considerably below the actual number of the victims

As an example, Gusztáv Menczer (b. 1921), the President of the General Directorate of the Central Office of Compensation [*Központi Kárrendezési Iroda Társadalmi Kollégiuma*] established after the collapse of the communist regime in Hungary, the number of the Hungarian deportees was close to 700,000 (680,900), of whom about 400,000 or 60% perished in Russia. This number, however, has to be amended by the addition of 120,000 persons who perished during transportation to the slave labor camps, and about whom very little information is available.¹⁴ If credible and provable, then the number of those Hungarian slave laborers who succumbed to the vicissitudes of deportation is above half a million.

But statistics about these deportations are scarce and often contradictory. This can easily be demonstrated even with the writings of such recognized experts of this mass deportation as Tamás Stark and Gusztáv Menczer. As an example, in one of his relevant writings entitled "Gulag," Menczer summarizes the statistical data of the various deportees as follows: "According to researchers, of the 750,000 Hungarian deportees at least 200,000 perished during the death march, in consequence of the horrendous conditions of

által magyar állampolgárok politikai okokból történt elítélése és e tény jogosságának néhány kérdése" [The Sentencing of Hungarian Citizens for Political Reasons by Soviet Military Courts, and Some Questions of the Legitimacy of this Deed], in *Magyar kényszermunkások és politikai rabok a Szovjetunióban a II. világháború után* [Hungarian Forced Laborers and Political Prisoners in the Soviet Union after World War II] (Budapest, 2000), pp. 15-33.

¹³ The authors' interview with Father Placid Olofsson, Budapest, October 16, 2003.

¹⁴ The authors' interview with Gusztáv Menczer, June 23 and July 6, 2004. This statistical information is also available in one of the typescripts authored by Mr. Menczer and given to the authors of this study.

their deportation. An additional 150,000 Hungarians succumbed to various diseases in the concentration camps. The primary culprit among these was alimentary dystrophy, tuberculosis, and malaria caused by shortage of protein."¹⁵ As is evident, the statistics in this statement — which speak of 350,000 Hungarians who perished in the Gulag — do not quite coincide with the statistics given in the earlier summary, where Menczer speaks about the death of 520,000 Hungarians. This proves conclusively that even the most astute researchers are confused by the various contradictory statistics on this topic.

Although scholars inevitably disagree about the number of the deportees and the number of those who perished during deportation and in one of the many Gulag slave labor camps, we can all agree with Gusztáv Menczer's following conclusions that touch all Hungarians: "The two horrible dictatorships of the Twentieth Century [Nazi and Bolshevik] show a "strange" similarity not only in their methods of operation, but also in the number of Hungarians who have fallen victim to them. As such, placing special emphasis on the victims of only one of these dictatorships offends the victims of the other dictatorship. It puts a dividing wall between two groups of Hungarians, who have suffered so much in the twentieth century."¹⁶

Statistical disparities about the number of deportees and deceased vary significantly. But there is a general agreement among scholars that the survival rate among prisoners of war was much higher than among the civilian deportees. The former also returned in much greater numbers than the latter. And this is true both in case of the malenky roboters and the political internees.

Survival rates among the civilian deportees is usually quoted as being in the vicinity of 10% to 20% percent, although occasionally we also hear about a 40% survival rate. At the same time in certain localities, this survival rate was even lower than 10%.

¹⁵ In addition to the above interviews, this information is also available in Gusztáv Menczer's typescript entitled "Gulág," that was presented to the authors of this study on the occasion of one these interviews.

¹⁶ Quoted from Gusztáv Menczer above-cited typescript entitled "Gulág."

An example is the case related by Márton Varga, who was taken at the age of sixteen in October 1944, along with about 300 other young civilians from the Upper Tisza region of Hungary. Of these 300 he alone managed to escape from a holding camp in the city of Debrecen, barely a few hours before their embarkation on their fateful journey to the Soviet Union. According to Varga, of these 300 young Hungarians only about eight or ten returned alive. All of the others perished in the Soviet Gulag.¹⁷

A nearly similar situation was described by Ferenc Kiss of Hajdúböszörmény, according to whom of the 265 persons taken from his hometown in October 1944, only twenty-four returned three years later. Moreover, by 1989 only one of the returnees was still alive. Even these handful returnees died much before their time because of the torturous hardships they had experienced in the slave labor camps.¹⁸

The situation appears to have been very similar with those 2,000 men who in November 1944 were deported from the city of Nyíregyháza. Only an unspecified small fraction lived to see their native country again, and many of them died within days or weeks after repatriation. By 1989 only six of them were still alive.¹⁹

A somewhat better rate of survival is reported by the twenty-four year old widow, Mrs. Ádám Wild, whose husband died in the battles of the Second Hungarian Army in the vicinity of the Don River in early 1943. Being of German extraction, she was deported from the small Transdanubian Swabian village of Babarc, along with 34 of her fellow villagers. Of these 34 deportees seven remained alive, which represents a 20% survival rate.²⁰ A similar rate of survival is reported by Katalin Ambach, also from the village of Babarc, who was a member of a group of 42 deportees, of whom 11 returned home.²¹ Mortality, however, began already

¹⁷ Márton Varga's reminiscences in SZEKENI, *Merre van hazám*, pp. 293-295.

¹⁸ Ferenc Kiss's reminiscences in SZEKENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 321.

¹⁹ See the relevant footnote in SZEKENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 345.

²⁰ Mrs. Ádám Wild's reminiscences in MIKLÓS FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság. Magyar állampolgárok a Szovjetunió munkatáborában* [Modern-day Slavery. Hungarian Citizens in Soviet Labor Camps] (Budapest: Formatív Kft., 1990), p. 70. (Hereafter cited as FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*.)

²¹ Katalin Ambach's reminiscences in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 71.

during the process of deportation. The cattle cars used for deportation were jampacked with human beings who were totally unprepared physically, as well as mentally for what awaited them during and after deportation. One of the younger girls died within a few days of being crowded into the wagon. "She was there among us for three days. We hardly had space for ourselves, yet there was this dead body amidst us, until finally we informed [the guards], who then disposed of the poor soul by casting her out. The same thing happened a few days later to another girl. Thus, two of the girls died already during the journey."²²

Based on the above, we can state without reservation that the great majority of the Hungarian citizens who were deported to the slave labor camps of the Soviet Gulag never saw their homeland again. It may be that insistence upon a mere 10% survival rate goes beyond the prudent level,²³ but it is reasonable to assume that about 75% of the civilian deportees fell victim to the Stalinist Gulag system. And the worse thing about all this was that these young people had absolutely nothing to do with the war, nor with any of the barbarities committed during and in consequence of the war by either of the two major combatants.

In light of the above, we can rightfully pose the questions: Why and how were these young Hungarian civilians taken? How did the Gulag, this gruesome collection of Soviet forced labor camps, evolve into such a brutal institution of coercion? Why did many millions have to die under the most miserable circumstances? These are questions that need to be answered in this study, which in the course of time will evolve into a full-scale book, to be published in English as well as in Hungarian.

Recent Scholarship and Memoir Literature on the Soviet Gulag

In recent years, the institution of the Soviet Gulag has been ably chronicled by a number of Western scholars, among them

²² Katalin Ambach's reminiscences, in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 71.

²³ This is the figure cited in the *Magyar Nagylexikon* [Great Hungarian Encyclopedia], 19 vols. to date (Budapest: Magyar Nagylexikon Kiadó, 1993-2005), vol. 8. p. 883.

Robert Conquest (1965, 1992),²⁴ Nanci Adler (1993, 2002),²⁵ and Anne Applebaum (2003).²⁶ Most of these syntheses were born in wake of the monumental works by the world-renowned Alexander Solzhenitsyn (b. 1918), whose account of life in Soviet forced labor camps (1963, 1973-1978) had earned for him a Nobel Prize in 1970.²⁷ There were, of course, many other survivors who have recorded their frightening and torture-filled experiences in the Soviet Gulag, but none of them were able to do so on the aesthetic level, and with the political impact of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*.

Among the scores of Hungarians who did so, the earliest was Áron Gábor (1911-1982) and the best known is János Rózsás (b. 1926). Both of these former Gulag prisoners wrote powerful descriptions of their experiences in the Soviet death camps. Áron Gábor had spent fifteen years in the Soviet Gulag (1945-1960), and then five more years under controlled political circumstance in his homeland. Only after his illegal emigration in 1965, was he able to recount his trials and tribulations. Only then was he able to publish memoirs in the form of his *Siberian Trilogy*, whose individual volumes appeared between 1967 and 1971 under such titles as *Az embertől keletre* [To the East of Man], *Szögletes szabadság* [Squared-off Freedom], and *Évszázados emberek* [Men of Centuries].²⁸ These volumes were also published in English, German, Spanish, and Portuguese. But as they were put out by small obscure publishers

²⁴ ROBERT CONQUEST, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (London: Pimlico, 1965; 2d rev. edition, 1992).

²⁵ NANCI ADLER, *Victims of Soviet Terror: The Story of the Memorial Movement* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1993); and *idem*, *Beyond the Soviet System. The Gulag Survivor* (New Brunswick-London: Transaction Publishers, 2002).

²⁶ ANNE APPLEBAUM, *GULAG. A History of the Soviet Camps*, cited above.

²⁷ ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, trans. Ralph Parker (New York: Dutton, 1963); *idem*, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney and H. Willetts (New York: Harper and Row, 1973-1978); and *idem*, *The Gulag Archipelago*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1985).

²⁸ ÁRON GÁBOR, *Az embertől keletre* [To the East of Man] (Los Angeles—Munich: XX Század Kiadása, 1967); *idem*, *Szögletes szabadság* [Squared-off Liberty] (Los Angeles—Munich: XX Század Kiadása, 1968); and *idem*, *Évszázados emberek* [Men of Centuries] (Los Angeles—Munich: XX Század Kiadása, 1971).

that lacked the necessary tools of mass publicity, these books were never able to penetrate Western social and political consciousness.

The situation with Rózsás — the author of the first Hungarian *Gulag Encyclopedia*²⁹ is somewhat different in that his works were never published in any language other than Hungarian. But because of the unfriendly political atmosphere in his homeland, the first edition of his voluminous memoirs had to be published abroad in Germany (1986-1987).³⁰ Only in 1989, at the time of the change of the political regime in Hungary, was he able to have them republished in his native land.³¹

Of all the Hungarian-experienced Gulag-memoirs Rózsás's reminiscences are by far the most detailed. Yet, not even these memoirs were able to penetrate the Hungarian mind, which had been conditioned to forget these mass deportations instituted by the Soviet conquerors in and after 1945. The nearly half century of Soviet domination has left its mark upon Hungarian society. The memory of these mass deportations was virtually obliterated from the collective memory of the nation. Moreover, those who were fortunate enough to survive and return home, were received as war criminals, and not as the victims of a vicious political system. They were forbidden to speak about their Gulag experiences, and in this way they were unable to pass through the catharsis that would have made their lives more bearable in their declining years.

The situation was somewhat different with George Bien (1928-2005), who spent over ten years in Eastern Siberia, in the province of Kolyma, and soon after his repatriation he left Hungary to the United States. In contrast to those who remained at home, George Bien was free to speak about his life on the Soviet Gulag, but he never got around writing about his experiences there until after

²⁹ JÁNOS RÓZSÁS, *Gulag Lexikon* [Gulag Encyclopedia] (Budapest: Püski Kiadó, 2000).

³⁰ JÁNOS RÓZSÁS, *Keserű ifjúság* [Bitter Youth] (Munich: Új Látóhatár, 1986), and *Éltető reménység* [Living Hope] (Munich: Új Látóhatár, 1987).

³¹ JÁNOS RÓZSÁS, *Keserű ifjúság* [Bitter Youth], 2 vols. (Budapest: Szabad Tér Kiadó, 1989). The most recent edition of this work is: *Keserű ifjúság - Éltető reménység. Szovjet fogságom naplója* [Bitter Youth - Living Hope. Diary of My Soviet Captivity] (Budapest: Püski Kiadó, 1999).

his retirement in the 1990s. His work entitled *Elveszett évek [Lost Years]* appeared both in Hungarian and in English.³² But it was by virtue of the English edition of his work that he was discovered, interviewed, and cited by Anne Applebaum for her history of the Gulag.³³ Bien also appeared in a number of documentaries about Siberia and the Soviet Gulag. As such, his reminiscences made much greater impression upon Western scholarship than those of any of his predecessors. This is true notwithstanding the fact that his work is much shorter and more cursory than those of Áron Gábor and János Rózsás. His graphic portrayal of the “Death Ship to Kolyma,” in which he describes the torturous six days between Vladivostok and Magadan without a drop of drinking water, is a particularly impressive and frightening picture of the inhumanity of the Soviet Gulag.³⁴

This incredible lack of information, disinterest and disregard is evident from the various major syntheses of modern Hungarian history that have been written by respected scholars several years after the fall of communism and the reestablishment of Hungarian sovereignty. Naturally, under communist rule and Soviet military occupation, even the mention of these deportations of civilians to the Soviet Union was off-limits to all Hungarian historians. In most instances the authors of major syntheses barely mention, let alone discuss, this major Hungarian tragedy that had landed nearly 700,000 — or perhaps even more — Hungarians in Soviet slavery, and resulted in the cruel and unnecessary death of nearly — or at least — quarter million human beings. They simply gloss over this tragedy in a few sentences.

A good example is the highly regarded 662 page synthesis of twentieth-century Hungarian history, authored by a respected historian, who has this to say about the Hungarian victims of Soviet conquest: “In the Second World War about 900,000, that is

³² GEORGE ZOLTÁN BIEN, *Elveszett évek. Egy magyar diák raboskodása a GULÁG kelet-szibériai lágereiben*. 2d expanded edition (Budapest: Püski Kiadó, 2000), 184 pp.; and its English version, *Lost Years. A Hungarian Student's Ten Years in the Siberian Gulag. Kolyma 1945-1955* (Fairfax, Virginia: Published by the Author, 2003), 235 pp.

³³ ANNE APPLEBAUM, *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps*, cited above.

³⁴ BIEN, *Lost Years*, pp. 63-67; Bien, *Elveszett évek*, pp. 61-64.

6.2% of the country's 14.5 million inhabitants died. Of this number 340,000 to 360,000 were soldiers, and nearly 500,000 were Jews.... 600,000 [Hungarians] ended up in Soviet captivity, the majority of them soldiers, but about 100,000-120,000 were civilians".³⁵ No attempt is made in this volume to describe how these Hungarian civilians ended up in Soviet captivity, what their fate was in the Soviet slave labor camps, how many of them survived their torturous enslavement, how many of them returned to their homeland, and what was their fate after repatriation?

This amazing lack of attention is repeated by the authors of a major university textbook written by professors at the Eötvös University of Budapest [ELTE], where these deportations are also given short shrift: "Military actions lasted until mid-April 1945.... [Soviet] occupation was accompanied by grave atrocities. Violence and robberies were commonplace, and in total disregard of the laws of combat, about 170,000 to 180,000 civilians were deported to Soviet labor camps."³⁶ Again there is no mention about the fate of these civilians, their life in the slave labor camps, and their survival rate. In other words, how many of them made it back home, and what was their fate after repatriation?

The same holds true for another university textbook authored by a highly respected scholar, Zsuzsa L. Nagy, a former professor at the University of Debrecen. She summarizes these events as follows: "[Hungary's] total population loss was around 810,000-900,000. Of these 140,000-160,000 died in combat, 230,000-280,000 died as prisoners of war, 80,000-100,000 were civilians..., 400,000 were Jews, and 50,000 were gypsies."³⁷ Based on this brief mention, only the initiated reader could tell that the majority of these civilians — outside the Jews, who were deported to Germany — died not as victims of military actions at home, but rather as forcible deportees in the slave labor camps of the Soviet Gulag.

³⁵ ROMSICS, *Magyarország története a XX. században*, p. 268.

³⁶ FERENC PÖLÖSKEI, JENŐ GERGELY and LAJOS IZSÁK, eds., *20. századi magyar történelem 1900-1994* [Twentieth-Century Hungarian History, 1900-1994] (Budapest: Korona Kiadó, 1997), p. 269.

³⁷ ZSUZSA L. NAGY, *Magyarország története, 1918-1945* [History of Hungary, 1918-1945] (Debrecen: Multiplex Media, 1995), p. 256.

The same lack of attention to these mass deportations and exterminations is also evident in the various one-volume syntheses of Hungarian history that appeared in the years since the collapse of communism. A good example is the multi-authored *Millenniumi magyar történet* [Millennial History of Hungary], which describes these deportations as follows: "The invading... Red Army..., between October 1944 and March 1945, captured nearly 300,000 persons, of whom about one-third were civilians who were deported to the Soviet Union. By the end of 1945 the number of Hungarian citizens who had been deported to the East increased by another quarter million... Of the approximately 600,000 who fell into Soviet captivity, 150,000 returned... [by the summer of 1947], and ... another quarter million... by 1951. One-third of these deportees had disappeared or had died abroad [Soviet Gulag]." ³⁸ Again, all we get here are a few lines of bare statistics, without any attempt to describe the nature and results of these mass deportations, and without any effort to point out the enormity of the crime that had been perpetrated against innocent Hungarian civilians by the brutal Stalinist system that had inundated the lands of Western Christian Civilization at the end of the war. The violence, the rapes, the mass tortures, and the resulting loss of innocent lives by the tens of thousands all remain unmentioned by these historians who had been educated without any reference to these dark and painful events of Hungarian history.

Among the senseless violence committed by the members of the Red Army when conquering Hungary at the turn of 1944-1945, none was more vicious and reprehensible than the mass rape of women of all ages. The rape of Hungarian women was so widespread that their number may have passed one million. The various sources that mention these rapes include the memoirs of the former Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy (1903-1979), who presided over the Hungarian Government between February 1946 and June 1947. "Ruthless red soldiers have captured and infected with venereal disease tens of thousands of women and young girls." ³⁹ At the

³⁸ *Millenniumi magyar történet* [Millennial History of Hungary], ed. GYÖRGY ISTVÁN TÓTH (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2001), p. 562.

³⁹ FERENC NAGY, *The Struggle Behind the Iron Curtain* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1948), p. 62.

same time "Russian female soldiers raped many thousands of Hungarian men, who were forced to perform unnatural acts. [These soviet women]... congregated in gangs, attacked surrounding villages, and collected men, whom they held captive for several days."⁴⁰ Ferenc Nagy also mentions that these allegations were examined by the Swiss Embassy in Budapest, which then published the results of this inquiry in May 1945.

Another historical work also discusses the mass rape of Hungarian women by members of the Red Army. The author of this work claims that in August 1945 the Hungarian Government was forced to seek help and medication from several West European states to deal with the 470,000 women who were suffering from the so-called "Lenin disease."⁴¹ If this allegation is correct, then the number of women who have been raped should be at least around one million. After all it is prudent to assume that not all women who had been raped contracted the disease. Moreover, those who did, did not wish to go public, but tried to hide their shame from public scrutiny.

One may also mention the case of the small town of Felsőzsolca in the vicinity of the industrial city of Miskolc. In 1945 it had a population of approximately 2,500, among them perhaps 500 adult women. Of these women, according to local historian Sándor Zsíros, well over a 100 were the number of those who were raped, or nearly so, under the most gruesome circumstances. As related by him, "we... know of cases where on the very first night of our 'liberation' Russian soldiers marched into the cellars...and raped crying-shrieking young girls, next to a corpse, within the sight of thirty or so frightened adults."⁴²

This lack of attention to the terrorization and deportations of Hungarian civilians by the Soviet conquerors after World War II is evident from virtually all historical syntheses and textbooks

⁴⁰ NAGY, *The Struggle Behind the Iron Curtain*, p. 63.

⁴¹ ÖDÖN MÁLNÁSI, *A magyar nemzet őszinte története* [The Frank History of the Hungarian Nation], 2d ed. (Munich: Mikes Kelemen Kör, 1959), p. 218. See also STEVEN BÉLA VÁRDY and DOMINIC G. KOSÁRY, *History of the Hungarian Nation* (Astor Park, FL: Danubian Press, Inc., 1969), pp. 292, 369-370.

⁴² SÁNDOR ZSÍROS, *A front alatt. 1944 ősz. Felsőzsolca-Miskolc* [On the Front. Fall 1944. Felsőzsolca-Miskolc] (Felsőzsolca: Örökségünk Felsőzsolca Alapítvány & Dominium BT Közös Kiadása, 2004), p. 47; see also pp. 46, 58, 61.

published in post-communist Hungary. These include even the nineteen-volume *Magyar Nagylexikon* [Great Hungarian Encyclopedia], which devotes a whole column to the description of the Soviet Gulag, but only a single sentence to its Hungarian prisoners: "In addition to various Soviet nationalities, many foreign citizens also lived and died in the camps of the Gulag, among them hundreds of thousands of Hungarian prisoners-of-war, and after 1944 also civilians who had been deported from Hungary, of whom 90% never returned home."⁴³ While very brief, here at least the low survival rate of Gulag-prisoners is mentioned, which may give an indication to the reader of the nature of these Soviet slave labor camps.

It is interesting and even frightening that this lack of attention to the Hungarian victims of the Soviet Gulag are short-shrifted even by some prominent Western authors, as well as by Hungarian historians who had spent considerable time in the West following the collapse of communism.

An example of the former is the highly praised book, *The Hungarians*, by the Hungarian-born publicist-historian Paul Lendvai;⁴⁴ and the example of the latter is the equally outstanding synthesis of Hungarian history, *A History of Hungary*, by László Kontler, an intellectual historian at Central European University in Budapest.⁴⁵

In addition to mentioning the large number of Jewish victims of the Holocaust (564,000 in Greater Hungary of 1941, and 297,000 in Trianon Hungary), Lendvai dismisses the fate of the unfortunate Hungarian Gulag-victims with the following short sentence: "About 600,000 Hungarians, including 100,000-120,000 civilians, were captured by the Soviets, and 300,000 soldiers capitulated to British and US troops."⁴⁶ What happened to these 100,000 to 120,000

⁴³ *Magyar Nagylexikon* [Great Hungarian Encyclopedia], 19 vols. (Budapest: Magyar Nagylexikon Kiadó, 1993-2005), vol. 8. p. 883.

⁴⁴ PAUL LENDVAI, *The Hungarians. A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). This book was originally written and published in German under the title: *Die Ungarn. Ein Jahrtausend Sieger in Niederlagen* (Munich: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1999).

⁴⁵ LÁSZLÓ KONTLER, *A History of Hungary. Millennium in Central Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

⁴⁶ LENDVAI, *The Hungarians*, p. 425,

civilians in Soviet captivity appears to be beyond the author's interest, just as much as it seems to be beyond the interest of most Hungarian historians in today's Hungary. These Gulag-victims seem to have simply disappeared, not only from the body of the nation, but also from the scope and scholarly interests of the chroniclers of the Hungarian past.

This phenomenon is also evident in Kontler's otherwise brilliant synthesis, where the Hungarian Gulag is given an equally short shrift: "Whereas the 300,000 [Hungarian soldiers] who surrendered to the Western Allies were released during 1946, half of the nearly 600,000 captives (over 100,000 of them civilians) deported mostly to forced labour camps in the Soviet Union only returned in 1947 and after."⁴⁷ Apparently, according to Kontler, the other half of the 600,000 captives never returned. Yet, they and their fate does not seem to be worth even a few extra sentences in this otherwise worthy volume by an intellectually gifted historian. And all this around the year 2000, a whole decade after the collapse of the communist regime in Hungary, which forbade even the mention of the fate of these Hungarian victims of Soviet communist barbarism.

This lack of attention to the victims of the Soviet Gulag is all the more surprising as in addition to a few specialized studies by scholars such as Tamás Stark and Lajos Für,⁴⁸ at least five dozen memoirs of Gulag-survivors and documentary collections have appeared in Hungary and in the neighboring Hungarian-inhabited lands in the course of the past fifteen years.⁴⁹

The most important of the latter were the interviews with former prisoners, who for the first time since their repatriation were permitted to speak openly about their torturous experiences. One

⁴⁷ KONTLER, *A History of Hungary*, pp. 387-388.

⁴⁸ The two examples of such studies are: LAJOS FÜR, "Magyarország embervesztesége" [Hungary's Human Losses], in *Magyar Hírlap* [Hungarian News], June 23, 1984; and TAMÁS STARK, *Magyarország második világháborús embervesztesége* [Hungary's Human Losses during the Second World War] (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 1989).

⁴⁹ See the appended bibliography to this study. Much of this bibliographical information can also be found on the Internet. Cf. <http://www.gulag.hu/konyvek.htm>, which lists around seventy volumes. See also GYÖRGY DUPKA's bibliography in his book, *Kárpátalja magyarsága* [Hungarians of Sub-Carpathia] (Budapest: Magyar Nyelv és Kultúra Nemzetközi Társasága, 2000), pp. 197-209.

of the first of these interview volumes was edited by Ilona Szebeni, an amateur historian, who published her interviews with 74 former Gulag-prisoners in a book entitled *Merre van a magyar hazám?* [Where is My Hungarian Homeland?] in 1991.⁵⁰ She also appended the names of 3,230 malenky roboters who had been collected and deported from the Upper Tisza region, the large majority of whom perished in the Soviet Union. Szebeni was aided in her work by the professional historian Tamás Stark, who wrote a postscript to this volume, which essay placed the whole Gulag-experience into the proper historical perspective.⁵¹

Miklós Füzes's volume *Modern rabszolgaság* [Modern-day Slavery] (1990) appeared a few months before Szebeni's work.⁵² Although both of them are interview volumes, there are certain differences. In contrast to Szebeni, Füzes is a professional historian and archivist, who wrote an extensive historical introductory study to the volume. His work contains twenty-seven interviews and reminiscences by Hungarian Germans, commonly known as Swabians. Similarly to Tamás Stark, Füzes also makes an attempt to synthesize the many contradictory statistics about the number of the deportees and survivors. In light of the scarcity and the unreliability of the existing sources, he too had to conclude that it is really impossible to come up with reliable figures for the deportees. At the same time he does conclude that "about two-thirds of the deportees perished."⁵³

1994 saw the publication of the already cited work by Sándor Zsíros, *A front alatt* [On the Front]. This book was the result of the reminiscences of eleven former Gulag prisoners from the town of Felsőzsolca, who were still alive in 1994. The author, who himself had been a fourteen year old witness to the collection and deportation of nearly two-hundred civilians from his hometown, combined these reminiscences with information derived from other

⁵⁰ SZE BENI, *Merre van hazám?* For full bibliographical citation, see note #3, above.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 302-310.

⁵² MIKLÓS FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság. Magyar állampolgárok a Szovjetunió munkatáborában, 1945-1949* [Modern-day Slavery. Hungarian Citizens in Szovjet Labor Camps] (Budapest: Formatív Kft., 1990).

⁵³ FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 39.

sources. The latter included some official documents, along with a few fragments of written memoirs. The result is a microcosm of the mass deportations of Hungarians to the Soviet Gulag that took place in late 1944 and early 1945.⁵⁴ This work was subsequently published in an expanded form in 2004, and there are plans for its publication in English.⁵⁵

Ten years after Szebeni's and Füzes's, and six years after Zsíros's work, there appeared another interview collection by the journalist Valéria Kormos, entitled *A végtelen foglyai* [Prisoners of Endlessness].⁵⁶ This book is much more selective in its coverage, for it contains interviews with less than a dozen survivors, but it was put out by a Budapest publisher in a much more attractive format. The interviews are more professional, and they are placed into more easily readable literary form. This book is likewise embellished with several dozen photographs, which compares and contrasts the appearance of the survivors before their deportation, and how they looked five decades later.

Notwithstanding these numerous publications, the history, and even the very existence of the Gulag camps and their Hungarian inmates continue to remain largely unknown and unrecognized in Hungary. This may be the result of the fact that most of these memoirs and interview collections were published by small regional printing houses, or they were printed privately by the authors themselves. But the survivors' inability to have their memoirs published by major Budapest publishers may be the result of these publishers' lack of interest in this topic. This lack of interest, in turn, may be connected with the fact that this whole question of mass deportation of civilians to Soviet slave labor camps has been so expurgated from the Hungarian mind during the half century of Soviet domination that not even trained historians

⁵⁴ SÁNDOR ZSÍROS, *A front alatt. 1944 ősze* [On the Front. Fall 1944] (Felsőzsolca: Örökségünk Felsőzsolca Alapítvány, 1994).

⁵⁵ SÁNDOR ZSÍROS, *A front alatt. 1944 ősze. Felsőzsolca-Miskolc* [On the Front. Fall 1944. Felsőzsolca-Miskolc] (Felsőzsolca: Örökségünk Felsőzsolca Alapítvány & Dominium BT Közös Kiadása, 2004).

⁵⁶ VALÉRIA KORMOS: *A végtelen foglyai: Magyar nők szovjet rabságban, 1945-1947* [Prisoners of Endlessness. Hungarian Women in Soviet Captivity, 1945-1947] (Budapest: Kairosz Kiadó, 2001).

know very much about it. And apparently, they do not even wish to deal with this topic in their works.

Given this reality, established publishers do not seem to believe that there is a market for these publications at a moment of history when most Hungarians wish to forget about their oppressive and violent past. They simply want go on with their lives in the direction of political freedom and material well-being. This may all be true, but this truth is hardly an excuse for professional historians to disregard this phenomenon of mass slavery in modern Hungarian history. By doing so, they assign this great national tragedy to total oblivion. This approach, however, is just as wrong and unjust, as trying to deny the Jewish Holocaust. The Gulag and the Holocaust are human tragedies on a previously unheard-of scale, which need to be remembered again and again by all succeeding generations.

The Origins and Development of the Soviet Gulag

As mentioned earlier, GULAG is the acronym [abbreviation] of the Russian expression *Glavnoye Upravleniye Ispravitelno-Trudovyykh LAGerey* [Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps].⁵⁷ In this shape and form it was established only in 1934, but its roots reach back to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The vast system of labor camps for political prisoners and common criminals was developed right after the Bolshevik takeover of power. It was placed under the direction of the *Cheka* [*Chrezvichaynaya Komissiya* = Extraordinary Committee], the first version of the Soviet Secret Police.⁵⁸ It was brought into existence in December 1917 by the renegade Polish Bolshevik, Felix Dzerzhinski (1877-1926), who headed it from the moment of its inception until his sudden death in 1926.⁵⁹

Although some corrective labor camps had come into existence earlier, the system that held these camps together was created by

⁵⁷ On the GULAG see the following *Encyclopedia Britannica* article: "Gulag" - <http://geocentral.net/be/archive/be/gulag.html>.

⁵⁸ On Cheka see the following articles on the Internet: "The Cheka during the Russian Revolution" -<http://flag.ackened.net/revolt/talks/cheka.html>.

⁵⁹ On Dzerzhinski see the article "Felix Dzerzhinsky" - <http://geocentral.net/be/kgb/dzerzhinsky.html>.

a Soviet decree of April 15, 1919. This decree gathered together a number of these punitive labor camps that sprouted up during the Russian Civil War. Being short of prisons, and not wanting to execute all captured prisoners, the captives were placed into various labor camps in regions under Bolshevik control. Some of these camps were new, while others were inherited from the czarist regime.

The first of these Bolshevik-founded camps was located in the far north on Solovetsky [Solovki] Island in the White Sea. In the course of 1918-1922 thousands of political prisoners were ferried to this remote and frigid island. Many of them were put to work to transform a local monastery into a vast prison. Others were tortured or shot to death, while still others were permitted to waste away from lack of food and other amenities of normal life.⁶⁰

In the course of the 1930s the organizational structure and administration of these labor camps underwent several changes. In 1934 they were gathered together under the administration of the newly founded GULAG, which soon gave its name to the whole system of these slave labor camps. Eventually these camps numbered in the thousands throughout the vast reaches of the Soviet Empire. At its height in the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s the Gulag embraced a territory that was 5,500 miles long and 2,500 wide, and it may have included up to forty-thousand camps of various sizes. The GULAG stretched from the Ukrainian Donbas region to the Kamchatka Peninsula in the Far East, from the Lapp-inhabited Kola Peninsula to the Kuril Islands next to Japan, from the Caucasus Mountains in the south to Vorkuta beyond the arctic circle, and from Mongolia to the mouth of the Lena River on the Arctic Sea.

Although the GULAG was a separate administrative system, it always remained under the direct control of the Soviet Secret police, even though the latter was repeatedly reorganized and frequently renamed. The most important of these names after the *Cheka* were *GPU*, *OGPU*, *NKVD*, *MVD*, *NKGB*, and finally *KGB*, which remained intact until the very end of the Soviet Union.

⁶⁰ JÁNOS RÓZSÁS, *Gulag Lexikon* [Gulag Encyclopedia] (Budapest: Püski Kiadó, 2000), p. 3. See also Nanci Adler, *The Gulag Survivor* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), pp. 16-22; and Anne Applebaum, *Gulag. A History* (New York: Random House, 2003), pp. 3-115.

In 1939 the Soviet Government also established a parallel organization, the *GUPVI* [*Glavnoye Upravleniye Voyennoplennih i Internyirkovannih* = Chief Administration of Prisoner-of-War and Deportee Camps], which was formed to handle the hundreds of thousands of military and civilian prisoners collected during the invasion of Poland on September 17th of that year. According to the Austrian historian Stefan Karner, within a very short period of time the system of camps placed under the *GUPVI* consisted of 340 major and 4,000 minor forced labor camps.⁶¹ Naturally, just like the *GULAG*, the *GUPVI* was also under the control of the Soviet secret police.

The earliest inmates in these forced labor camps came from the ranks of the old Russian elite: aristocracy, nobility, czarist military officers, czarist bureaucracy, well-to-do urban classes involved in manufacturing, trade, and finances, the clergy, leaders and members of former czarist political parties, members and leaders of rival leftist political parties, village elders, and then virtually anyone who stood out in any manner in Russia's backward rural society. But these were only the first to feel the wrath of the new rulers, who were bent on transforming the backward Russian state into a Utopian socialist society, and to do so with the use of inexpensive slave labor. In the 1930s and 1940s, these earlier victims were followed by the peasants — rich or poor — who resisted collectivization; by the members of the Bolshevik leadership who were in Stalin's way or who may have challenged his power; by the executors of the Stalinist purges during the 1930s who happened to know too much about the nature of the purges; by the members of various national minorities who were distrusted, or who lived in regions coveted by some of Stalin's more favored nationalities; by Russian prisoners of war who had fallen into German captivity and then were returned — willingly or forcibly — to the Soviet Union; by German, Hungarian and other Axis military personnel who had been captured by the Soviet Armed

⁶¹ Cited by TAMÁS STARK, "Magyarok szovjet kényszermunkatáborokban" [Hungarians in Soviet Forced Labor Camps], in *Kortárs*, vol 46, nos. 2-3 (February-March 2002), pp. 69-81, citation from p. 71. Also available on the Internet: <http://www.kortaronline.hu/0202/stark.htm>

forces; and finally by millions of civilians from the countries under Soviet military control, irrespective of the role their countries had played in the war. The latter were the most unfortunate ones, because even though they were totally innocent bystanders of this struggle between Nazism and Communism, they were still forced to endure Stalin's wrath and face possible extermination.

As has been pointed out by several scholars earlier, these forced labor camps had two purposes: First, they were meant to punish those who may have represented danger to the Bolshevik founders of the Soviet Union and especially to Joseph Stalin; second, they were intended to provide cheap labor for the transformation of a primitive rural economy into a major industrial economy within a relatively short time. In point of fact — as pointed out by the author of a recent work on the Soviet Gulag — “contrary to popular assumption, the Gulag... continued to expand throughout the Second World War and the 1940s, reaching the apex in the early 1950s. By that time the camps had come to play a central role in the Soviet economy. They produced a third of the country's gold, much of its coal and timber, and a great deal of almost everything else.... The prisoners worked in almost every industry imaginable — logging, mining, construction, factory work, farming, the designing of airplanes and artillery — and lived, in effect, in a country within a country, almost a separate civilization.”⁶²

In other words, the mostly innocent victims — men and women — who found themselves in one of these forced labor camps were put to work on every possible physical labor. They were forced to work under the most inhuman conditions, which decimated them very rapidly, forcing the authorities to replenish these camps periodically. In point of fact, in the course of time they devised a system of work and replenishment which appeared to them to be the most effective means in exacting work from the inmates. The person who devised this system was a certain Naftaly Aronovich Frenkel (1883-1960),⁶³ who in the course of time was awarded the

⁶² APPLEBAUM, *Gulag*, p. xvi.

⁶³ According to Solzhenitsyn, Frenkel was a “Turkish Jew born in Constantinople.” Cf. *Gulag Archipelago*, II, p. 76. According to Malsagov, Frenkel was a “Hungarian

Order of Lenin, and was also promoted to the rank of a general in the NKVD. These promotions were his rewards for his ability to exact work most efficiently from the helpless inmates in the forced labor camps.⁶⁴

Frenkel's method was to "substitute hunger for the knout," or to put it another way, "to link the prisoner's food ration... to his production."⁶⁵ But this was only one of Frenkel's methods of labor exaction. He also became aware of the fact that the prisoners were most productive during the first few months of their incarceration. After those initial months, they became increasingly enfeebled and drained of their energies. As such they became progressively less productive. Based on these observations, Frenkel came to the conclusion that production levels of camp inmates could only be kept on a high level by repeatedly culling them — killing them off — and replacing them with newcomers. This culling process was also applied in a different way. When called out for the daily work detail, the laggards who were not fast enough and thus brought up the rear of the line, were simply shot from behind. They were judged to be useless for the building of socialism, and consequently were simply replaced by new prisoners. This culling and weeding out process continued for decades through much of the life of the the Soviet GULAG in Stalin's Russia.⁶⁶

With his well-oiled methods of exacting the maximum amount of work from the hapless slave laborers, Frenkel had endeared himself to Stalin so much that in 1931 he was put in charge of the construction of the infamous White Sea Canal, which was completed in 1933. Moreover, in 1937 he was appointed director of the newly

manufacturer." Cf. S. A. MALSAGOV, *Island Hell. A Soviet Prison in the Far North*, trans. by F. H. Lyon (London, 1926), pp. 161-73. Still others claimed that Frenkel came from Austria, or from Odessa, or from Palestine. Cf. APPLEBAUM, *Gulag*, p. 52.

⁶⁴ DAN MICHAELS, "The Gulag: Communism's Penal Colonies Revisited," in *The Journal of Historical Review*, vol. 21, no. 1 (January-February, 2002), pp. 29-38. Also available on the Internet at: <http://www.ihr.org>. Reference here is to the Internet version, p. 3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

founded *GULZhDS* [Chief Administration of Railroad Construction Camps], and in 1939 he was entrusted with providing railroad transportation for the Red Army for its invasion of Poland and then of Finland in the so-called "Winter War." Frenkel's proven methods of labor exaction were successively applied to many other large construction projects, including the Baltic-Amur Railroad Project, the Far Eastern Construction Project, and to the construction and running of such infamous slave labor camps as those of Vorkuta, and in the Kolyma region of Eastern Siberia.⁶⁷

Following World War II, the population of the countries occupied by the Soviet forces were depleted of able-bodied young people and taken to the Soviet Union. They were deported there as a form of punishment, and also to rebuild the country after the devastation it had suffered in the war. Both of these two goals were important, although their relative importance may have changed from time to time.

It is very difficult to estimate the number of inmates in these forced labor camps, and even more difficult to assess the number of prisoners who died during their incarceration. Solzhenitsyn claims that between 1928 and 1953 "some forty to fifty million people served long sentences in the Archipelago."⁶⁸ The estimates on those who perished range up to thirty million, although one of the recent estimates stopped at 23 million.⁶⁹

Up to the outbreak of the war in Europe in 1939, the inmates of the Gulag camps came almost exclusively from the territories of the Soviet Union. Starting in 1939, however, the camps were being replenished by an increasing number of other nationalities, including Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Finns, Poles, Germans, Italians, Hungarians, Romanians, and Japanese. Moreover, at the end of the war a new set of prisoners were transported from the various defeated and conquered nations. Not counting those military

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 4.

⁶⁸ Quoted in the cited *Encyclopedia Britannica* article: <http://geocentral.net/be/archive/be/gulag.html>.

⁶⁹ See the following set of estimates: "Victims: People Dead from 'Violent Conflicts' in the Twentieth-Century," at <http://www.nsu.ru/filf/pha/hist/Victims.html#FORMER%20SOVIET520UNION>

personnel who were treated as prisoners-of-war, during the half century of their existence, at least thirty million prisoners have entered the Gulag camps. Naturally, they were not all there at the same time, but in succession. Although a minority managed to return to civilian life, the majority of them did not survive. In fact, accepting the figures of forty million inmates and thirty million deaths means that 75% of those who entered the Gulag never made it back into the world of normal human existence. If we go with the lower figures of 23 million deaths, then the percentage of those who perished is closer to 60%.

It must be mentioned here that in addition to the many millions who ended up in the Gulag, there were a good number of others who, while not taken to these slave labor camps, were also deported from their homelands to the vast stretches of Central Asia. Among them were the Baltic nations (300,000-350,000), the Chechens (315,000), the Crimean Tatars (191,000), the Ingushes (81,000), the Balkars (33,000), as well as a number of smaller nationalities. These deportations were especially hard on the anti-communist intellectual elites of these nationalities, which nationalities were thus in effect decapitated.

We have to note here that in addition to those Hungarians who were carried off to the Soviet Gulag, there were many other Hungarians who came to be incarcerated in Gulag-like forced labor camps in Hungary. One of the most infamous of these camps was at Recsk, where between 1950 and 1953 several thousand "unreliable elements" were incarcerated.⁷⁰ At the same time 12,700 upper middle class persons were uprooted in Budapest and scattered throughout the primitive peasant villages and homesteads of the Great Hungarian Plain.⁷¹ This is a topic, however, that requires a separate study.

⁷⁰ Between 1950 and 1953, the inmates at the Hungarian slave labor camp of Recsk numbered around 1,200. Cf. *Magyar Nagylexikon*, vol. 15., p. 349. See also the following relevant works: ZOLTÁN BENKŐ, *Történelmi keresztutak, 1941-1956* [Historical Crossroads, 1941-1956], with GYÖRGY FALUDY's introduction and BÉLA POMOGÁTS's postscript (Miskolc: Felsőmagyarország Kiadó, 2000); SÁNDOR ERDEY, *A recski tábor rabjai* [Inmates of the Camp at Recsk], 6th ed. (Budapest: Püski Kiadó, 2000); and ZOLTÁN SZTÁRAY, *Csákánykő. A recski kényszermunkatábor* [Stone Quarry. The Forced Labor Camp at Recsk] (Budapest: Püski Kiadó, 1997).

⁷¹ FERENCNÉ BEKE, *Három év Hortobágy poklában* [Three Years in the Hell of Hortobágy] (Pomáz: Kráter Kiadó, 2002); IVÁN JESZENSZKY, *Kitelepítettek. Dokumentumregény* [Exiles.

The Background to the Hungarian GULAG

In the course of late 1944 and early 1945 Hungary and its defenseless population fell progressively under the control of the Red Army. And even though the military conflicts within Hungary's Trianon-frontiers continued until mid-April 1945 (the official date of April 4th is wrong and arbitrary), the country's reorganization and Sovietization had already begun in November of the previous year. Soviet military authorities completely disregarded the presence of the powerless Hungarian Provisional Government (established on December 21, 1944) and went ahead with their set goals to denude the country of all movable industrial machines, as well as to collect and transport to Soviet forced labor camps as many young Hungarians as was possible up to the time of the cessation of hostilities.

The collection of innocent civilians for the Soviet Gulag was done in accordance with a tacit understanding among the victorious allies that Soviet Russia would have to be compensated for its losses during the war. The Soviet Foreign Minister, V. M. Molotov had alluded to this policy already two years before the end of the war, when in a letter to the British Ambassador dated June 7, 1943, he stated clearly that "the Soviet Government is of the opinion that the responsibility for the military help that Hungary had given to Germany...has to be borne not only by the Hungarian Government, but to a lesser or greater degree also by the Hungarian people."⁷² Molotov repeated this Soviet position on December 14, 1943, to the strongly anti-Hungarian former president of Czechoslovakia, Edward Beneš, when he stated firmly that "the Hungarians will have to be punished."⁷³ This statement came in response to Beneš's insistence for Soviet participation in the conquest

A Documentary Novel] (Budapest: Alterra Kiadó, 1998); and *idem*, *Kitaszítottak* [Expellees], ed., IVÁN JESZENSZKY (Budapest: Alterra Kiadó, 2001). Concerning the number of the expellees, see *Magyar Nagylexikon*, vol. 11., pp. 100-101.

⁷² GYULA JUHÁSZ, *Brit-magyar titkos tárgyalások 1943-ban* [British-Hungarian Secret Negotiations in 1943] (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1978), p. 158; also cited by Stark in several of his relevant studies.

⁷³ Quoted by PÉTER GOSZTONYI, *Háború van, háború* [There is War, There is War] (Budapest: Népszava Kiadó, 1989), p. 26; also cited by Stark in his relevant studies.

of Hungary. As he said: "Your participation in Hungary's occupation is very important for us. Our intention is to reestablish the pre-Munich borders."⁷⁴ The Soviet response to Beneš's request was naturally affirmative.

This policy of forced labor for the citizens of the defeated states was reaffirmed by a Decree of the Soviet Union's Committee of State Security on December 16, 1944, which stated that "all German men between the ages of 17 and 44, and all German women between the ages of 18 and 30, who are residents of the territories of Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia have to be mobilized and transported to the Soviet Union. The implementation of this deportation is to be handled by the NKVD, and more specifically by Comrade Beria. The organization of the holding camps, the reception of the deportees, and the formation, departure, and guard duty over their marching columns will also be handled by the NKVD. In accordance with the provisions of the current decree, Comrades Malinovsky and Tolbuhin in Hungary, and Comrade Petrov in Czechoslovakia are obliged to carry out the collection of the German population by enlisting the local military commanders in the name of the army commanders."⁷⁵

As we shall see, the Soviet zeal to collect slave laborers went much beyond the intent of this decree. As a matter of fact, Soviet military authorities, with the enthusiastic cooperation of their local cohorts and opportunists, collected not only Germans and Hungarians with German names, but also ethnic Hungarians who had nothing to do with the war except as suffering bystanders. At various places they collected Hungarians simply because their names ended in the letter "r." As remembered by ninety year old Mr. Imre Kolozsi in 1989: "Some stupid person came up with the idea that every family name ending in the letter 'r' is German, because Hitler's name also ended in an 'r.' This is how Pásztor, Molnár, Bodnár, Csiger... and even Gyüker got on the list.... But

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷⁵ GYÖRGY DUPKA and ALEKSZEJ KORSZUN, *A "malenkij robot" dokumentumokban* [Malenky Robot in Documents] (Ungvár-Budapest: Intermix Kiadó, 1997), pp. 33-34.

the surname was not really important.... A certain number of people had to be deported, and the quota was filled with whomever could be caught."⁷⁶ They deported Hungarians with pure Hungarian names such as Bodnár, Bognár, Kádár, Fehér, Kövér, Vincellér, and so on, also from numerous other localities.⁷⁷

The Collection of Prisoners

In Hungary the occupying Soviet forces collected two kinds of prisoners — *malenky roboters* and political convicts —, and they did so in two distinct waves.

The first wave of deportations took place almost immediately after the occupation of a particular region, town, or city. Within two or three days after the conquest, Soviet military authorities began to collect able-bodied young men and women, allegedly for cleanup, reconstruction, and other temporary work. Statistics on these early deportees are either absent or very scant. Therefore we are compelled to rely on local data and personal memoirs about their numbers. We do have some idea in case of such larger towns as Kolozsvár [Cluj] (5,000 persons), Nyíregyháza (2,000 persons), and Hajdúböszörmény (1,300 persons). We also have a fairly good idea about the prisoner situation in Budapest, because Marshal Malinovsky, the commander-in-chief of the Soviet Forces in Hungary, mentions that about 138,000 "prisoners of war" had been captured in the capital city. But as the Hungarian and German military personnel together could hardly have been more than 40,000, the remaining close to 100,000 of these prisoners were undoubtedly Hungarian civilians.

While the first wave of the deportations was rather haphazard and disorganized, the second wave was a well-planned and well-carried out operation. It took place about a month or two after the first wave, and its goal was twofold: To supply free labor for rebuilding the Soviet economy, and to apply collective punishment to Hungary's civilian population, particularly those of German

⁷⁶ As remembered by Mrs. Imre Kolozsi, née Erzsébet Herényi, in 1989. Cf. SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 24. See also *idem*, p. 317. (Stark, 4).

⁷⁷ For a list of 3,230 deportees from the Upper-Tisza region, see SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, pp. 311-346.

ethnicity. This policy was to be applied not only to small rump Hungary that had been created after the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, but also to those largely Hungarian-inhabited territories that had been regained in the course of 1938-1941. This is evident, among others, from the deportation of about 5,000 ethnic Hungarians from the city of Kolozsvár [Cluj], the capital of Transylvania, which in 1940 had been returned to Hungary, but then in 1945 reverted once more to Romania. But it is also evident from the mass deportations that took place in Sub-Carpathia [Ruthenia],⁷⁸ as well as in the southern fringes of interwar Slovakia that had been regained by Hungary in 1938.⁷⁹

This process of organized collection of Hungarians began in the Upper-Tisza Region of Northeastern Hungary. From there it proceeded partially toward Debrecen, and partially toward Miskolc and Eger, and then on to Budapest and its vicinity. After that it

⁷⁸ Concerning the situation in Sub-Carpathia or Carpatho-Ruthenia, see the following rich memoir and documentary literature: GYÖRGY DUPKA and ALEKSZEJ KORSZUN, *A "malenykij robot" dokumentumokban* [Malenky Robot in Documents] (Ungvár-Budapest: Intermix Kiadó, 1997); GYÖRGY DUPKA, *Kárpátaljai magyar GULAG-lexikon. Lefejezett értelmiség 1944-1959* [Sub-Carpathian Hungarian GULAG Encyclopedia. Beheaded Intelligentsia, 1944-1959] (Ungvár-Budapest: Intermix Kiadó, 1999); *Sötét napok jöttek. Konceptiós perek magyar elítélteinek emlékkönyve 1944-1955* [Dark Days Descended. Memorial Volume of the Victims of Sham Political Trials, 1944-1955], ed. GYÖRGY DUPKA (Ungvár-Budapest: Intermix Kiadó, 1992); *Élő történelem. Válogatás a meghurcolt magyarok visszaemlékezéseiből 1944-1992* [Living History. Selections from the Victims' Memoirs, 1944-1992] (Ungvár-Budapest: Intermix Kiadó, 1992); *Egyetlen bűnük magyarságuk volt. Emlékkönyv a sztálinizmus kárpátaljai áldozatairól 1944-1946* [Their Only Sin Was that They Were Hungarians. Memorial Volume in Honor of the Sub-Carpathian Victims of Stalinism, 1944-1946], ed. GYÖRGY DUPKA (Ungvár-Budapest: Intermix Kiadó, 1992); *Istenhez fohászkodva, 1944, Szolyva. Verses levelek, imák a sztálini lágerekből, szemelvények a hozzátartozók visszaemlékezéseiből*. [Praying to God, 1944, Szolyva. Poetic Letters and Prayers from Stalin's Camps. Selections from the Memoirs of Relatives]. Preface and Postscript by GYÖRGY DUPKA (Ungvár-Budapest: Intermix Kiadó, 1994); and *A haláltáborból. Badzey Pál szolyvai lágernaplója* [From the Death Camp. Paul Badzey's Camp Diary from Szolyva, compiled and edited by IMRE BADZEY (Ungvár-Budapest: Intermix Kiadó, 1996).

⁷⁹ For the situation in the reclaimed territories from Slovakia, see the following studies: KÁLMÁN JANICS, *Czechoslovak Policy and Hungarian Minority, 1945-48*, ed. STEPHEN BORSODY (New York: East European Monographs, Columbia University Press, 1982); KATALIN VADKERTY, *A reszlovakizáció* [Re-Slovakization] (Pozsony, 1993); EDWARD BENESCH, *Präsidentendekrete oder die Rechtsberaubung der Ungarn und Deutschen* (Pressburg, 1992); *Beneš Decrees. Taking Victims in 2002*, ed. MIKLÓS PATRUBÁNY (Budapest: World Federation of Hungarians, 2002); and Róbert Barta, "The Hungarian-Slovak Population Exchange and Forced Resettlement in 1947," in VÁRDY, *Ethnic Cleansing*, pp. 565-574.

moved to the lands between the Danube and the Tisza Rivers and to Transdanubia. It seems that this process was carried out in accordance with a grand central plan that had been devised in Moscow for Soviet-style reconstruction of postwar Hungary. Apparently, each section of the country had to supply a certain number of victims in accordance with a predetermined quota system. But once that quota had been filled, collections generally ceased. Not even people of German ethnicity were collected any more. At the same time, if not enough Germans were found, the quota was simply filled with Hungarians, or with anyone who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. On one occasion they even arrested and deported the members of a communist delegation that was on its way to the Provisional Parliament in session in the city of Debrecen.

While official documents concerning these mass deportations are sporadic, the nature of this policy can be deduced from various other sources as well. It is substantiated even by some of the personal papers of a number of top communist leaders. As an example, there is the letter of Hungary's future communist cultural czar's, József Révai's (1898-1959), written to Hungary's "Little Stalin" Mátyás Rákosi (1892-1971), who at that time was still in Moscow. Révai recognized and readily pointed out the shortcomings of this meticulously planned deportation program: "Sadly" — he wrote — "the plan concerning the deportation of the able-bodied German population did not have the effect it was meant to have.... In most places local commandants implemented this policy on the basis of family names and quotas. If there were not enough Germans, they collected Hungarians. They harvested even people who did not speak a word German, who were proven anti-Fascists, and who had even suffered imprisonments and internments. No matter. They were all taken."⁸⁰

The collection process itself depended heavily on misinformation and outright deception. The majority of the internees were told

⁸⁰ Révai's letter to Rákosi, January 7, 1945, in *Moszkvának jelentjük. Titkos dokumentumok* [Reports to Moscow. Secret Documents], ed. MIKLÓS KUN and LAJOS IZSÁK (Budapest: Századvég Kiadó, 1994), p. 35. See also STARK, "Magyarok," pp. 3-4; and STARK, "Kortárs", p. 73.

that they would have to perform a “little work” [“malenky robot”] for a few days to clear away rubble, clean the streets, help distribute food, restart production in the local shops and factories, or to receive documents attesting to their innocence in matters relating to Nazi activities. They were promised that after a few days, or at most a couple of weeks, they would be permitted to return home to start rebuilding their own communities and their own future. That, however, is not what happened.

The role of the Lumpenproletariat

The collection of future Gulag-prisoners was performed by Soviet soldiers and their Hungarian cohorts, who usually bore the title “polic.” The latter generally came from the ranks of the so-called *Lumpenproletariat*, the shiftless and lowest segments of Hungarian society.⁸¹ These lumpen elements were distrusted even by Karl Marx, the father of communism, who regarded them as alienated, unproductive and useless members of human society.

These *Lumpenproletariat* generally lived off society, utilizing various illegal and extralegal means, and as such they were always eager to catch the wind of new political trends.⁸² With the triumph of the Red Army they became early and eager converts to communism. They jumped on the communist bandwagon partially for opportunistic reasons, and partially to save themselves, because a few months earlier they still constituted the rubble of the Hungarian Arrowcross Party and were running around in the green shirts of

⁸¹ On the social composition of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party and of the various other related Nazi-like political organizations, and in particular on the presence of the lumpen elements, see MIKLÓS LACKÓ, *Nyilasok, nemzetszocialisták, 1935-1944* [Arrow Crossers, National Socialists, 1935-1944] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1966), pp. 117-136. See also NICHOLAS NAGY-TALAVERA, *The Green Shirts and the Others. A History of Fascism in Hungary and Rumania* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1970); and MARIO D. FENYŐ, *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary: German Hungarian Relations, 1941-1944* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972).

⁸² In 1943, of the 4,292 officers and activists of the Hungarian Nazi Movement, about 29% (1,228 persons) had a criminal record. They had been convicted of such crimes and misdemeanors as stealing, defrauding, embezzlement, receiving stolen goods, sexual assaults, slander and defamation, use of force against others, causing injury to others, participation in social upheavals, and even high treason. Cf. LACKÓ, *Nyilasok, nemzetszocialisták*, p. 134.

the Hungarian Nazi movement. In the course of 1944 they had been vocal and destructive Nazis and anti-Semites, but because they were invisible by virtue of their low social position, they were able to shift political affiliations very rapidly. Once Hungary came under Soviet occupation, all they had to do was to change the color of their shirts, from green to red. They were welcomed with open arms by the Hungarian Communist Party, whose membership before and during the war consisted only of a few hundred dedicated souls. In the period between the fall of the Old Regime and the rise of the New, these *Lumpenproletariat* had emerged as the champions of the new communist ideology and became willing servants and executors of Soviet interests. They knew their localities and their inhabitants, they knew where and how to find prospective deportees, and they carried out the wishes of their new masters with extreme zeal.⁸³

In the villages and smaller towns, the prospective Gulag-prisoners were told to assemble at one of the local public buildings — school, town hall, church, or armory — for the purposes of being informed about new developments and for receiving their assignments to one of the many public work projects. Those who declined to come, were collected personally by members of the “polic” — who were usually accompanied by an armed Soviet soldier. Most of the victims were not even given enough time to dress properly, nor to prepare themselves adequately for the so-called “little work” that allegedly awaited them.

Those who went to the town meetings willingly were under the assumption that this would only be a preparatory meeting, where they would be informed about the details of their assignments. Thus, they were likewise unprepared for a long stay. Once there, however, they were surrounded by Soviet military guards, forced to remain there for days, and then force-marched to one of the “receiving camps” or “holding camps” in their region.

⁸³ The destructive role of the lumpen elements is evident from the interviews we conducted in Hungary in June-July and October 2003, June-July 2004, and July-August 2005. It is likewise evident from the earlier interviews published by Ilona Szebeni. Cf. SZEKENI, *Merre van hazám*, pp. 16-302.

In Hungary there were approximately eighty receiving camps and ten holding camps, scattered all over the country.⁸⁴ In northeastern Hungary — which is the primary focus of our research — such receiving camps existed in Balmazújváros, Szerencs, Tiszaluc, Tokaj, Gömör, Ceglédbercel, and a few other places.⁸⁵ The primary holding camp was the university town of Debrecen, which was also a major military base. Moreover, on December 21, 1944, it also became the seat of the Provisional Hungarian Government, and remained so until moving to Budapest in late February 1945. There the deportees were collected in the Pavilion-Armory, and from there they were shipped off via cattle cars to their destinations in the Soviet Gulag.

Those who were collected under the pretext of having to perform a little reconstruction work came to be known as the *malenky roboters*. They were generally taken to the Donbas region to the east of Ukraine, where they were put to work in mines, factories, farms, railroad building, and various other reconstruction work. If they survived, they were generally repatriated within three to five years. The problem was that only a fraction of them lived through those terrible years of hard labor under the most gruesome circumstances. How many, is a matter of debate among scholars, but it is generally assumed that well over three-quarter of them — in some instances over 90% — never returned to their homeland. They perished under the most gruesome circumstances during their transfer or in the course of their stay in one of the Soviet Gulag's many slave labor camps.⁸⁶ Similarly to the thirty-odd million Soviet citizens who perished on the Gulag, these innocent Hungarians became victims of the inhuman and insensitive Soviet-

⁸⁴ The most important "holding camps" were located in Baja, Cegléd, Debrecen, Gödöllő, Gyula, Jászberény, Kecskemét, Szeged, Székesfehérvár and Vác. Cf. STARK, "Magyarok," p. 4; and STARK, "Ethnic Cleansing," p. 498.

⁸⁵ These receiving camps were identified by our interview subjects, as well as those of Ilona Szebeni.

⁸⁶ In addition to the examples given above, see also the interview with Mrs. Gyula Kéky of Hajdúböszörmény, who claims that of the well over 200 persons deported from her hometown, only about 18 or 20 returned. But because of their physical conditions, even most of these few died fairly soon after repatriation. Cf. SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 22.

communist political regime. They were driven to their early death by the cruel Stalinist system that evolved in the Soviet Union under the aegis of the ideology of Marxism.

The convicted political prisoners

The *malenky roboters* constituted only one segment of the deported civilian population. The other, perhaps slightly smaller segment was made up of the political prisoners, that is of those who were actually tried and convicted for an alleged crime and then sent off to Siberia for a period of ten to twenty-five years. If at all possible, the conditions of their deportation and confinement were even worse than those of the *malenky roboters*: They had to travel under identically harsh conditions for a much longer period of time; their period of incarceration was much longer; and they were taken to the northern Ural region or to the far reaches of Eastern Siberia, without reasonable hope of ever returning to their homelands. Thus, among these political prisoners the number of those who survived was even smaller.

These political prisoners were convicted for a wide variety of so-called political crimes including alleged Nazi affiliation, fighting against the Soviet forces, spying, being involved in sabotage activities, uttering critical remarks about the behavior of the occupying Soviet forces, or simply being listed on the personal papers of one who had already been arrested for any of the above alleged crimes.

This is what happened to the sixteen-year old Magdolna Rohr, whose name was found in the address book of one of her passing acquaintances. He was a young man by the name of István Herczeg, who was only a couple of years older than Magdolna. In the summer of 1945 István tried to cross the Austro-Hungarian border illegally to flee to the West. He was caught, interrogated, and his possessions searched. His address book contained the names of a number of his acquaintances, all of whom ended up in Soviet captivity, including Magdolna Rohr, her friend Borbála Marczin, as well as another young man by the name of Kornél Tiefenbeck. The members of this "gang of four conspirators" — all of them between sixteen and nineteen years old — were accused "of spying,

treason and anti-Soviet activities.”⁸⁷

The hearings and trials of the accused were all quickie sham affairs that were conducted in Russian, a language that hardly anyone understood in Hungary in those days. (The most commonly spoken second language in Hungary in those days was German, French, Italian and English, in that order.) The interpreters who were employed during the interrogations knew very little Hungarian. As such, the accused could barely understand what they were accused of. Moreover, upon the completion of the so-called “hearings” and “trials,” they were presented with a Russian language document written in Cyrillic, which was totally incomprehensible to them. Yet, they were told to sign it. Of course, they had no idea what they were signing. But even if they had understood the content of the documents, by that time they were so broken in body and in spirit that they were ready to sign anything just to get it over with. Also, many of them were given the impression that upon having done so, they would be permitted to go home.

By the time of her trial on January 31, 1945, sixteen year old Magdolna Rohr was completely terrorized into submission. This was partially the result of her long incarceration, but probably even more so because she had already been raped by the “liberating” Soviet soldiers before being accused of espionage.⁸⁸

Rape of women — an occasionally of men — was an ever present phenomenon of the Soviet “liberation” of Hungary. As already described earlier, rape was a common Soviet method of intimidation and submission. The conquering Red Army — celebrated by Marxist historians as the liberators of Hungary — was responsible for the mass rape of hundreds of thousands of Hungarian women. Among them was also Alaine Polcz, who described her experience with the “liberators” in the following manner: “They took me back to the kitchen and threw me to the ground... I lost consciousness.

⁸⁷ István Stefka’s interview with Magdolna Rohr, published in the Budapest daily *Magyar Nemzet* [Hungarian Nation], and translated by Erika Papp Faber. This interview appeared in one of the January 2001 issues of the above daily. Its English translation was published in the *Magyar News*, January 2002, pp. 4-5.

⁸⁸ Concerning the mass rapes inflicted upon Hungarian women by the soldiers of the Red Army, see above the section on the Soviet occupation of Hungary.

— I regained consciousness in the archdeacon's larger inner bedroom. The panes were broken, the windows boarded up; nothing was on the bed but bare boards; I was lying on it. One of the Russians was on top of me. I heard a woman's voice ricocheting from the ceiling, 'Mommy, Mommy!' I shouted. Then I realized it was my voice, that I was shouting. When I realized this, I stopped; I lay motionless. My physical feeling had not returned with my consciousness; it was as if I had become petrified with fear or grown cold. I had reason to feel cold... with the lower part of my body naked. I do not know how many Russians worked me over... When day began to dawn, they left me there. I got up, I could move only with great effort. My head, my entire body ached. I was bleeding profusely."⁸⁹

Before her conviction, Madalena Rohr also passed through this "initiation to liberation." Following her rape and other forms of intimidation, her "trial" took the following form: "On January 31st, 1946, the military tribunal of the 7th Soviet Army sentenced us to ten years, to be spent in a correctional and reformatory concentration camp. As there was no interpreter, we figured this out only when they showed the ten years with their fingers. To this day we don't know exactly what the military judge had read against us."⁹⁰

After having been sentenced, Magdolna and her friends were taken to the West Hungarian town of Sopronkőhida, where, along with several thousand other prisoners, they were loaded into cattle cars and then transported to the Soviet Union. Their trip took several months in three separate stages. First, they traveled for three and a half weeks to the former Austro-Hungarian outpost of Lemberg in Galicia (now L'viv in Ukraine). From there they were taken to the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine. Then, after several weeks of work in the potato fields, they were loaded into cattle cars again, and then transported to Eastern Siberia. It took them at least a month and a half to reach their destination, where

⁸⁹ ALAIN POLCZ, *A wartime memoir. Hungary 1944-1945*, translation, introduction and notes by Albert Tezla (Budapest: Corvina, 1998), p. 106. This book appeared in Hungarian under the title *Asszony a fronton* [A Woman on the Front] in 1991.

⁹⁰ Magdolna Rohr's interview in the *Magyar News*, p. 4.

they were put to work on the construction of the Baykal-Amur Railroad line. This was only the first of Magdolna's several posts. She even worked in the gold mines of the dreaded Kolyma province, before she was finally permitted to repatriate to Hungary. But that repatriation had to wait a whole decade.

Conclusions

The trials and tribulations of the prisoners of the Soviet slave labor camps — be they *malenky roboters* or political deportees — represent another important chapter in the portrayal of the Hungarian presence in the Soviet Gulag. It is a story that needs to be told. We will attempt to do so in a follow-up study to this introduction to the Soviet Gulag and to the lives and experiences of its innocent Hungarian victims.

II. LIFE IN THE GULAG CAMPS

Arrest and deportation

The arrest, deportation, life, and survival of the Gulag slave laborers in the forced labor camps of the Soviet Union is a perpetual living component of the memories of those repatriated Hungarians who have survived their torturous lives in the "Soviet Paradise." They dream about it, they relive their tormented and hopeless years repeatedly, and they are often awakened by these dreams from their sleep. For many years they were forbidden to speak about their experiences. Only after the collapse of communism were they able to do so, and thus pass through a catharsis, which made their lives bearable.

Circumstances of their arrest and deportation were very similar.⁹¹ The *malenky roboters* were collected and brought together through

⁹¹ This applies to virtually anyone whom we have interviewed, as well as to those interviewed by other researchers. Among the former are the following persons: In Budapest Gusztáv Menczer, Mrs. Károly Pintér, née Magdolna Rohr, and Father Placid Olofsson; in Nagykanizsa János Rózsás, Ferenc Hársfalvi and Zsigmond Szabó; in Milota Sándor Járai and Árpád Szabó; in Rakamaz Mrs. Sándor Somló, née Irén Képes, Mrs. József Turkó, née Erzsébet Pásztori, Mrs. István Sándor, née

various misleading information. These misconceptions landed them unwittingly in the captivity of the Soviet occupiers, and eventually in the Soviet Gulag slave labor camps. Similar was the fate of those who were accused of various political crimes, and then convicted by Soviet military courts to long periods of forced labor. The difference was that the latter also had to endure several months of interrogation and occasional tortures, before landing in one of the collections camps, from where they were taken in cattle cars to the Soviet Union, and then to the remote forced labor camps of Soviet Siberia.

Those who survived the camps returned to Hungary, and lived on to see the collapse of communism and the end to Hungary's Soviet military occupation, gave us a detailed description of their march to captivity. Their collection was done by Russian soldiers directed by Hungarian collaborators, known in everyday language as "polic," who performed their task with considerable brutality. They shouted and used their rifle butts to gain the compliance of the unfortunate prisoners, and many times they were more vicious than the Soviet occupiers themselves.⁹² As related by Piroska Pásztor (subsequently Mrs. László Homolya), "The guards drove us, they shoved us with their rifle butts, they constantly shouted 'davay, davay, bistra, bistra [move, move, forward, forward].... When I fell, they kicked me repeatedly."⁹³

Margit Ruba, Mrs. Ferenc Szőke, née Borbála Rudolf, Károly Jung and Mrs. Károly Jung, née Mária Bodnár; in Gávavencsellő Mrs. Ferenc Vojtó, née Ilona Vinnai, Béla Labanc, Mrs. Béla Labanc, née Rozália Türk, Mihály Rák, András Türk, Mrs. András Türk, née Ágnes Labanc, and Mrs. József Varga, née Éva Türk; in Balkány Béla Réti and Mrs. Béla Réti, née Gizella Csatlós; and in Magyarboly Károly Szabó. Only segments of these long interviews were transcribed. Once done, they will all be published. In addition to our own interviews, we also relied on well over a hundred additional interviews conducted by Ilona Szebeni, Miklós Füzes, Sándor Zsíros, and Valéria Kormos; as well as on scores of memoirs published by the survivors.

⁹² We described the treacherous activities of these so-called "polic" in the first part of our study. Their despicable role was also mentioned by most of our interviewees, among them Mrs. András Türk, née Ágnes Labanc (Gávavencsellő, June 23, 2003), Mrs. József Varga, née Éva Türk (Gávavencsellő, June 24, 2003), Mrs. István Sándor, née Margit Ruba (Rakamaz, June 28, 2003), Károly Jung (Rakamaz, June 28, 2003), and Mr. & Mrs. Béla Réti (Balkány, June 29, 2005).

⁹³ Reminiscences of Mrs. László Homolya, née Piroska Pásztor, in SZEKENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 30.

The situation was very similar to what happened to the Hungarian Jews only a few months earlier. A number of the deportees to the Gulag recognized this similarity immediately and made known their views as soon as they could. Mihály Zöldi, for example, who ended up on the Gulag as a *malenky roboter*, had this to say about the parallel situation: "When in 1944 we as paramilitary forces were ordered by the gendarmerie to guard the unfortunate Jewish families [who were being deported], none of us thought that within a short time we too will be in the same situation.... Neither they, nor we were guilty. It was the law and human viciousness that was guilty."⁹⁴

Some of the cattle cars were equipped with berths on both sides, and they generally crammed sixty persons into a wagon. Both sides had to accommodate thirty persons. In the middle there was a wooden stove with some pieces of wood. The bottom of the wagon had a round hole which served as the toilet. There were no possibilities for cleansing oneself. Drinking water was stored in a standing barrel, but most of the time there was hardly any water in it. One of the deportees described their situation as follows: "In the middle of the wagon there was an empty space as wide as a door. This space held the wine barrel that had its top removed. This was our water tank. Next to it was a small square hole that had been cut with an axe, which served as the toilet. Immediately next to it was a round stove, but without any firewood.... To the left and right were the two rows of wooden shelves, above one another. These were our sleeping bunks, where we lay with our heads toward the walls, or wherever we were able to find space. The windows were covered with a tight web of barbed wires."⁹⁵ Moreover all of the doors were locked, and therefore there was very little possibility for escape.

⁹⁴ Reminiscences of Mihály Zöldi, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 159.

⁹⁵ Reminiscences of Imre Kolozsi, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 61. This situation was described almost exactly the same way by most of the ex-Gulagers from the towns of Gávavencsellő, Rakamaz and Milota, whom we interviewed in the Upper Tisza region.

Attempts to escape during the deportation

One such escape attempt took place in the vicinity of Püspökladány. As described by the seventeen year old Imre Kolozsi: "On the second night, in the vicinity of Püspökladány, suddenly there were shouts and gunfire. The train came to a sudden halt.... We tried to look out the window. Initially we saw nothing, except much running to and fro.... Later we could see that two men were being dragged on the snow by their legs. They were either dead or unconscious. The gunfire and shouting were accompanied by fights and scuffles. They were beating the captives. Later we learned that in the second wagon in front of us the prisoners made a hole in the board next to the door, where they reached out and unlocked the door. A number of men carefully slid down, jumped off the wagon, and then escaped.... There remained only six of them. But when one of these readied himself to leave, he didn't dare to let go of the wagon door, which dragged him on. In this predicament he began to shout. That is when the guards spotted him. The remaining six were beaten and tortured mercilessly.... The purpose of this beating was intimidation, so as to prevent future escapes."⁹⁶

Later there were some other successful escapes, at least for a few. This occurred when a "kind hearted" Hungarian engineer of the train gave the prisoners some tips as to where and how to escape: "My friends," he said, "I have been running this line for twenty-five years. I know the spot suitable for escape very well. There I will slow down and give a long whistle."⁹⁷ As István Jászai relates: "The train did slow down, there was indeed a whistle, but we were under the assumption that we were simply approaching a station. We did not try to escape. But ten to thirteen men did escape from almost all of the other wagons."⁹⁸ When the Russians realized this mass escape, they forced the engineer to back up the train slowly. They followed the train on foot on both sides and fired off fusillades at everything that moved. "I don't know

⁹⁶ Reminiscences of Imre Kolozsi, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 62.

⁹⁷ Reminiscences of István Jászai, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 149.

⁹⁸ Reminiscences of István Jászai, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 150.

who was or wasn't killed. Nor do I know how many escaped. But I know that one of our fellow prisoners, András Frenkó, got it really badly. [After being captured] they threw him into the wagon. His skull was cracked in four-five places, he had nine stab wounds on his body, and as it turned out, several of his ribs were also broken. He was bleeding so badly that he had to be transferred to the first-aid wagon. I encountered another of my assaulted friends in Ploiesti [Romania], who was beaten because he was in charge of the wagon [from which several men escaped]."⁹⁹ As to the fate of András Frenkó? No one knows what happened to him. In all probability he died in transport, and then was simply cast out of the wagon, as were so many others who were caught in this great sweep for slave laborers.

There were a number of Hungarians who tried to escape while already on Romanian territory. We know of such a mass escape just before the train reached the large collection camp in Focsani [Foksani]. At least fifteen of the prisoners were shot while trying to escape. But as related by Lajos Gömöri, many still continued to try. This is what happened at a station in Moldavia, where the train remained standing for a whole night. "About fifteen or twenty men pried open the flooring and escaped. But the following day they were caught by the Romanians who brought them back to the train. The Russians shot them dead, right in front of us. Those who remained in the wagon, were beaten horribly for not having prevented the escape."¹⁰⁰

Replacing those who escaped

Every escape was followed by brutal punishments, and every successful escape by replenishment. The numbers had to match. If three people escaped then three new ones were caught to replace them. Following the above-mentioned escape related by Imre Kolozsi, the Russian guards began to replenish the vacancies even before the train resumed its journey. "They caught two men on the station and threw them into the wagons. One of them was thrown into

⁹⁹ Reminiscences of István Jászai, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 150.

¹⁰⁰ Reminiscences of Lajos Gömöri in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 301.

our wagon. His name was Asztalos and he was a railroad man, who was just leaving for home. For many days the unfortunate man could not believe what happened to him."¹⁰¹

Another case was described by Mrs. Ferenc Vojtó, née Ilona Vinnai: "I witnessed a dreadful incident in the vicinity of a train station. We did not reach the village yet and our train was standing at a railroad crossing. On the other side of the barrier stood a horse-drawn wagon transporting tobacco leaves, with a driver and his young son. The driver must have been about thirty-six or thirty-eight, his son about thirteen or fourteen. A Russian soldier ran over to them, yanked them off the wagon, and shoved both of them into one of the cattle cars. It was terrible to listen to the hysterical screams of the man who shouted: 'Take me anywhere you want, I don't care, but let the boy go so that he can drive the wagon home. My wife will never know what happened to us.' They did not heed his plea, but took them away. The train started to roll. I looked back as long as I could, and I saw the two horses standing there stock still, without their master. They did not move at all. The wife would have to wait in vain. Except for us, there were no eyewitnesses."¹⁰²

Other successful escapes were handled similarly by the Soviet guards. The escapees were replaced by anyone who happened to come their way. Piroska Pásztor, who likewise tried to escape, described one such episode. When their train stopped at Ohat-Pusztakócs to pick up some water, several of the girls left their wagons under the pretext of getting some water. They entered the restroom, hoping that they would not be discovered. But they were found. In Piroska's own words: "They broke down the door and they kicked us out. They beat us, they threw us into the cattle cars, and locked us in with crossbars and padlocks.... Before starting off, we heard rifle-fire.... They discovered that a few young men were able to escape by mixing in with the railroaders. But the quota had to be filled. At Balmazújváros they saw three young

¹⁰¹ Reminiscences of Imre Kolozsi, in Szebeni, *Merre van hazám*, pp. 62-63.

¹⁰² Reminiscences of Mrs. Ferenc Vojtó, née Ilona Vinnai, in SZEKENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 138.

women... who came to fetch some water from the village well in the vicinity of the railroad station. They were probably making noodles. They were already on the way home with their water pails when the Russians caught them and threw them into the cattle cars, the way they were, without any winter clothing. One of them was followed by her two small children..., and then by the grandmother, and finally also by two men. The two men were also caught and thrown into the wagon. Only the grandmother and the two children remained free, shouting and crying."¹⁰³

Such escapes and replenishments have also taken place when Gizella Czinner was being transferred to the Gulag: "We were always thinking of ways to escape, and some of the boys actually succeeded. Once, while in Romania, we were permitted to bring water and also to throw some firewood into the wagons. On this occasion three boys escaped. Several also escaped while still in Hungary, but there they were soon replaced by passers-by. In Romania I never saw escapees being replaced."¹⁰⁴

It is evident that Romania's successful switch to the Allies on August 23, 1944, brought many benefits to that country. Not only did they regain the Hungarian-inhabited territories that had been returned to Hungary in 1940, but they also escaped the mass deportation of Romanians to the Soviet Gulag. In return for this special treatment, however, they became willing collaborators of the Soviet conquerors, particularly when it came to the deportation and mistreatment of Hungarians.

The long weeks of travel in the cattle cars made all of the deportees very nervous. Many of them were unable to survive the tribulations and died on the way. They suffered from being confined to a tight space, from the inability to move, from lice and other vermin, and from hunger and thirst. But from all these sufferings, the constant and unending thirst was by far the worse. They rarely received water, and when they did it was never enough. They tried to quench their thirst by removing snow from the roof

¹⁰³ Reminiscences of Mrs. László Homolya, née Piroska Pásztor, in *SZEBENI, Merre van hazám*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁴ Reminiscences of Mrs. Sándor Csipi, née Gizella Czinner, in *SZEBENI, Merre van hazám*, pp. 84-85.

of the wagons and then eating it. As described by one of the survivors, “those who were close to a window and had long arms would reach out between the barbed wires and collect snow from the roof of the wagon. We would snatch it, gobble it up, devour it, and also pass it from hand to hand, because it was impossible to change places.”¹⁰⁵

That thirst was the most torturous experience of the Gulag inmates during the process of their deportation is mentioned and attested to by virtually all former prisoners who were fortunate enough to survive. Especially appalling and shocking is its description of thirst by George Bien during his transfer from Vladivostok to Magadan — the latter being the capital of the province of Kolyma in Eastern Siberia. On this occasion six-thousand souls were crammed into the rusty freighter commonly known as the “Death Ship to Kolyma.” George and his fellow prisoners traveled for six days without a drop of drinking water. The jampacked human bodies created such a heat in the steerage that scores of the prisoners suffocated every day. By the time they arrived, many were dead and others close to death. On this occasion even the young George Bien gave up all hope for survival: “I simply waited for death to come. I grew delirious. I no longer had any digestive juices and couldn’t swallow the bread they gave us. Thirst is the most horrible of torments. In 1968, in the United States, I had a kidney operation and was forbidden, for a short time, to drink water. I grew delirious after the surgery, and I imagined myself back on the death ship. It was only with great difficulty that the doctors and nurses were able to persuade me that I was actually in an American hospital.”¹⁰⁶ Upon their arrival to Magadan, the prisoners who were still able to walk, clambered ashore. There — as recalled by George Bien — “we fell to our knees and began to eat and drink the dirty snow. I forgot the cold and ate the white crystals like a madman.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Reminiscences of Mrs. László Homolya, née Piroska Pásztor, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁰⁶ GEORGE ZOLTÁN BIEN, *Lost Years. A Hungarian Student's Ten Years in the Siberian Gulag. Kolyma 1945-1955* (Fairfax, Virginia: Published by the Author, 2003), pp. 93-97), p. 66. Hereafter: Bien, *Lost Years*.

¹⁰⁷ BIEN, *Lost Years*, p. 67.

This long travel, which in the case of malenky roboters lasted three to four weeks, and in the case of political deportees who were taken to Eastern Siberia perhaps as much as eight weeks, totally exhausted the prisoners. A significant number of them was unable to take the horrors of the deportation and died on the way. One of the malenky roboters recalled his own deportation as follows: "During transport we became increasingly restless, increasingly irritable. The privations, the uncertainties, and the confinement had an unfavorable impact on everyone. We lay day after day on the hard wooden planks. Being squeezed in between the planks became increasingly intolerable. Most people lost their self-control. In addition to the feeling of helplessness we were also tormented by lice. We had no water to wash ourselves, we became filthy.... The hole that was designated as the toilet fulfilled its function most of the time, but the urine flooded and soaked the whole area..... The trip lasted twenty-one days.... When we disembarked we were so dizzy that only the strongest among us was able to stay on his legs. We stumbled left and right, because the long recumbent position made us very weak. We also suffered from hunger."¹⁰⁸

These slave labor transports are described in an even more dramatic fashion by the Soviet writer Gennadi Beglov, who spent nine years in one of the Gulag's Siberian forced labor camps. On one occasion he was present when a new transport had arrived. He watched as the guards, equipped with machine guns and fierce dogs, flooded out of the lead wagon to unlock the cattle cars to let the prisoners out. The prisoners who exited slowly were more dead than alive, but at least they still lived. When the guards reached the sixth wagon, however, no one emerged. Upon inspecting it, they realized that all of the prisoners were dead. They were frozen together in groups of three or four. Apparently, in trying to protect themselves against the Siberian cold, they cuddled and then froze together like blocks of ice.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Reminiscences of Imre Kolozsi, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, pp. 64-65.

¹⁰⁹ This event is described by Gennadi Beglov in Part 3 of a documentary about Joseph Stalin. The documentary was prepared by Public Media Video in 1990.

Life in the Gulag Camps

The lifestyle, surroundings, the living and working conditions of the workers in the forced labor camps were as diverse as the camps themselves. These conditions depended on the camp's geographical location, nature of the work that inmates performed, climatic conditions, as well as on the composition of the camp leadership. Political prisoners sent to Vorkuta, Norilsk, or to one of the Kolyma camps in Northern and Eastern Siberia faced conditions that were far different from those encountered by the malenky roboters in Eastern Ukraine and the Don River region.

One of the most revealing descriptions about these remote labor camps has been left for us by Illés Zsunyi, who during his eight years in the Soviet Gulag went through half a dozen camps. The latter included camps in Odessa, Vinyitsa, Kamerovo, Marinsk and Tayset.¹¹⁰

According to Zsunyi, "the barracks were sunk halfway into the earth. Before construction, the earth was removed, and then we dug wooden posts into the bottom all around. We then sunk wall boards into these posts on both sides. These walls held the earth [that was piled up all around]. With some heating, this made the inside temperature bearable even when it was very cold. In the center of the barracks was a row of posts that held the rafters, which in turn held the roof made of split wood. This was topped off with 50 centimeters [20 inches]... of foliage — in the summer with mowed grass or perhaps straw — which we then covered with a thick layer of soil.... We also prepared wooden berths."¹¹¹

The wooden berths were 60 centimeters [24 inches] in width, and in three layers. Most of the prisoners slept on the bare boards, without any padding. Occasionally, however, some of them were able to secure some straw, and at times even a straw bag to put over their bunks. Keeping oneself clean and getting rid of lice, however, was a constant and ongoing problem. Success was impossible, except in some of the more permanent camps.

¹¹⁰ RÓZSÁS, *Gulag Lexikon*, p. 415.

¹¹¹ ILLÉS ZSUNYI, *Nehéz idők* [Difficult Times] (Bágybodrog, Hungary: Self-Published, 2001), p. 59.

Work requirements and daily quotas were very high. A normal workday consisted of twelve hours, but occasionally it was pushed up to fourteen. This heavy workload, combined with such other factors as "inhuman treatment, constant hunger, inappropriate clothing, dismal living conditions, and not the least, the merciless and forbidding climate, claimed its victims steadily in ever increasing numbers."¹¹² But this created no problems for the camp administrators, for they were assured of a constant flow of new prisoners. "Replacements were assured by the incessantly functioning state security organs, people's courts, and military tribunals. By turning nights into days in political show trials, based on false accusations, they were handing down arbitrary and severe sentences at the victims' expense."¹¹³ This is how many tens of thousands of Hungarians also ended up in the Gulag. They were convicted by Soviet military tribunals on various trumped-up charges and then sent to Soviet slave labor camps for ten to twenty-five years.

The prisoners' chances of staying alive depended to a large degree on the type of work they were forced to perform. Much greater were the chances of survival for those who were employed in agriculture or in manufacturing in the more civilized parts of the Soviet Empire. This was just the opposite for those who were taken to remote Siberian lands and forced to clear forests, build railroad lines, or mine gold in far northern Vorkuta or far eastern Kolyma. There the temperature would often dip down to minus 60° Centigrade. Minus 36° C was normal for much of the year, when the prisoners were routinely marched out for work. During the daily marches many of them collapsed and then froze to death without anyone caring until the next thaw in the summer.

Under such conditions it took much courage to want to stay alive. Those who gave up hope, soon perished. Remaining alive therefore required a system of self-delusion and self-hypnosis that had to be followed systematically and methodically by all prisoners. The currently 89 year old Benedictine friar, Father Placid

¹¹² JÁNOS RÓZSÁS, "Rabszolgamunka a Gulag táborában" [Slave Labor in Gulag Camps], manuscript, p. 1.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Olofsson, who had spent ten years on the Gulag, defined the conditions for survival as follows: 1. Suffering must not be dramatized. One must not complain because complaint weakens a human being. 2. Happiness is absolutely essential for survival, and therefore one has to search consciously for the small joys of life. 3. We are not perfect, but here and now we have to demonstrate that we are better than our jailers. It is this knowledge that mobilizes one's life-energies. 4. Life is easier for one who has something to hold onto. We believers, who cling to God, soon come to realize that He too wants us to survive."¹¹⁴ And then Father Placid continued: "These four rules emerged out of our discussions..., which then saturated our whole life in the camp. We never permitted anyone to complain....And we organized competitions to find small joys of life. All day long we sought out these little joys, and then in the evening..., one who was able to enumerate the most, became the winner."¹¹⁵

A few years ago the British writer, Colin Thubron, traveled through Siberia to visit some of the former forced labor camps that have since been abandoned and are in various stages of decay. He wrote about his experiences in his book entitled *In Siberia*.¹¹⁶ After visiting the far eastern province of Kolyma, he described his experiences as follows: "Kolyma was fed every year via the sea with tens of thousands of mostly innocent prisoners. At the landing spot they built a seaport, then the city of Magadan, and then the road inland to the mines where they perished. People still call it the 'Road of Bones.'... Kolyma itself was called 'the Planet,' and it was detached from all reality beyond its own — death."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Father Placid Olofsson (b. 1916) enumerated these rules to us when we interviewed him in his Budapest apartment on June 16, 2003. They can also be found in ERZSÉBET ÉZSIÁS, *A hit pajzsa. Olofsson Placid atya élete*. [The Shield of Faith. The Life of Father Placid Olofsson] (Budapest: Papyrusz Book, 2004), pp. 104-105.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ COLIN THUBRON, *In Siberia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999).

¹¹⁷ Quoted by DAN MICHAELS, "The Gulag: Communism's Penal Colonies Revisited", in *The Journal of Historical Review*, vol. 21, no. 1 (January-February 2002), pp. 29-38, quotation from p. 36. Also available on the Internet: http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v21/v21n1p39_michaels.html

In Vorkuta Thubron visited and explored the remains of a number of mines, and then he recorded his impressions: "Then we reached the shell of Mine #17. Here, in 1943, was the first of Vorkuta's *katorga* [hard labor] death-camps. Within a year these compounds numbered thirteen out of thirty: their purpose was to kill their inmates. Through winters in which the temperature plunged to —40 Fahrenheit, and the purga lizards howled, the *kathorzhané* [prisoners in hard labor camps] lived in lightly boarded tents sprinkled with sawdust, on the floor of mossy permafrost. They worked for twelve hours a day, without respite, hauling coal-trucks, and within three weeks they were broken. A rare survivor described them [the inmates] turned to robots, their grey-yellow faces rimmed with ice and bleeding cold tears. They ate in silence, standing packed together, seeing no one. some work-brigades flailed themselves on a bid for extra food, but the effort was too much, the extra too little. Within a year 28,000 of the were dead....Then I came to a solitary brick building enclosing a range of cramped rooms. They were isolation cells. Solzhenitsyn wrote that after ten days' incarceration, during which the prisoner might be deprived of clothing, his constitution was wrecked, and after fifteen [days] he was dead."¹¹⁸

When Thubron said good-bye to Vorkuta, he encountered a rock, on which was written: "I was exiled in 1949, and my father died here in 1942. Remember us."¹¹⁹ How many innocent prisoners must have had similar thoughts, and how many must have whispered the same words, without any one hearing or caring for their sighs? They all died far away from their loved ones in that hell on earth. In most instances not even their names are know. And among them were tens of thousands of Hungarians, who also died thousands of miles form their homeland and their weeping families.

Tamás Stark, who has studied the inner workings of the Soviet forced labor camps, summarized the food intake of the Gulag prisoners as follows: "According to Soviet rules, the prisoners'

¹¹⁸ MICHAELS, "The Gulag," Internet version, pp. 8-9.

¹¹⁹ MICHAELS, "The Gulag," Internet version, p. 9.

daily food ration should have consisted of the following: 600-700 grams of bread-biscuit, 90 grams of barley-mush, 600 grams of potatoes and vegetables, 40 grams of meat, 120 grams of fish, and 20 grams of sugar."¹²⁰ This regulation, however, was seldom observed. "Based on revelations by former German prisoners returning in the early fifties, the German Red Cross has been able to ascertain the actual daily bread ration. It became clear that they received the required quantity only from potatoes and vegetables. Vegetables generally consisted of cabbage and turnip. The actual bread portion was between 400 and 500 grams of sticky-hard bread. Returning Hungarian prisoners, however, spoke only of 200-300 grams per capita daily portions. The prisoners seldom saw meat or fish, and even then only a small portion of salted fish. Often, they were also given soup made of barley or nettle. The always hungry prisoners supplement their daily ration with whatever they could. Those close to water caught shellfish and other aquatic animals. While in the other camps they hunted for gophers and crows."¹²¹

Sickness and the medical support system

The primitive living conditions, the inadequate portions of food, and the exacting and oppressive working conditions, soon led to the deterioration of the prisoners' physical condition. Many of them died already during the first month of their incarceration. In addition to the demanding work and the constant hunger, most of them died by contracting typhus, malaria or scurvy. Frequent beatings and equally frequent industrial accidents caused many wounds and sores, which almost invariably resulted in untreatable infections. Many of them became victims of the ever present mine mishaps, landslides, workplace accidents, as well as being frozen to death. As described by Tamás Stark: "For all practical purposes, medical care was nonexistent. Most camps did have a so-called

¹²⁰ TAMÁS STARK, "Magyarok szovjet kényszermunkatáborokban" [Hungarians in Soviet Forced Labor Camps], in *Kortárs*, vol. 46, nos. 2-3 (February-March, 2002), pp. 69-81; quotation from p. 77. Also available on the Internet: <http://www.kortarsonline.hu/0202/stark.htm>.

¹²¹ STARK, "Magyarok szovjet kényszermunkatáborokban," p. 77.

'medical office,' but the doctors were also prisoners without any supply of medical equipment and medications. The prisoners were fed charcoals against diarrhea, and chalk powder against stomach ache. Various other infections were cured with potassium permanganate. But there were some 'extraordinary' cures. As an example, in Camp #6 in Berkul, Siberia, the prisoners ate raw rat liver against snow blindness. In an other camp in the Donets Basin they drank tea made out of burned bread to cure various sicknesses. In the same camp, scabies were treated with a mixture of sulfur and machine grease. In a number of camps they made tea out of pine needles as a source of the needed vitamins."¹²²

Many of the "camp doctors" were not really full-fledged physicians. They acquired their medical skills either by working in hospitals, or by having been medical students at the time of their arrest. These captive "camp doctors" were generally highly regarded even in the forced labor camps. In many instances the fate, and even the life of a prisoner depended on their kindness or willingness to help. If they decided to assign a prisoner to the "hospital," this decision usually meant a temporary relief from the life-exacting mine work, and at the same time an increased hope for survival.

Gusztáv Menczer, the current President of the General Directorate of the Central Office of Compensation in Budapest, was among the elite of such "camp doctors." He was a fourth year medical student at the University of Budapest when convicted to hard labor in Siberia. During his eight years as a Gulag prisoner, Gusztáv Menczer lived in about half a dozen forced labor camps, but his medical knowledge always elevated him above the ordinary prisoners. And he used his privileged position to help other prisoners many of whom found themselves in desperate situations, at times even close to death.¹²³

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ The authors interviewed Gusztáv Menczer at his office on June 23 and July 6, 2004. In addition to these oral interviews, Mr. Menczer also supplied the authors with a number of important printed sources. Concerning Gusztáv Menczer, see Rózsás, *Gulag Lexikon*, p. 244.

To a lesser degree this was also true for György Kölley, a Catholic seminarian, who had spent eight years in the Gulag for his continuing work in the Hungarian Scout Federation in the traditional spirit of "God, Homeland, and Family." By the time he reached the forced labor camp in Medvezhugorsk in Karelia, close to the White Sea, he was close to death. He was saved only by the kindness of a Lithuanian physician (himself a prisoner), who cured him and then named him a Medical Assistant by forging on his personal papers that he had been a medical student in Budapest. This placed Kölley into a special category, but it also compelled him to perform medical work, including dissection of human bodies. And dissection became an everyday activity for him, because according to the rules of his camp, all deceased prisoners had to be dissected, with the goal of finding out the cause of their death. But there was only one permissible cause that could be entered on their death certificates: "The cause of death was an illness contracted in his homeland, and he died in spite of our careful devoted care."¹²⁴ The results of this "devoted care" can be best demonstrated by the fact that when György Kölley entered the camp there were 210 Hungarians there. But when he left five years later for another camp, the number of Hungarians dwindled to 3, including himself."¹²⁵

This situation also applied to George Bien, who was arrested with his cardiologist father at the age of 16. Although he was too young to have finished even high school, by virtue of having been a physician's son, he eventually landed a position that made him into a "feldsher" [medical orderly] and thus a virtual "camp doctor." After this fortunate turn of events, his position improved significantly. He was even permitted to grow his hair and a mustache. Naturally, he too was in a position to help some of the less fortunate inmates of his camp.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ GYÖRGY KÖLLEY, *Értetek és miattatok* [For You and Because of You] (Munich: A Nemzetőr Los Angeles-i Baráti Körének a Kiadása, 1986), pp. 69-74.

¹²⁵ KÖLLEY, *Értetek és miattatok*, pp. 75-76.

¹²⁶ GEORGE ZOLTÁN BIEN, *Elveszett évek. Egy magyar diák raboskodása a GULÁG kelet-szibériai lágereiben*. 2d expanded edition (Budapest: Püski Kiadó, 2000), pp. 82-85, hereafter: BIEN, *Elveszett évek*; and its already cited English version, *Lost Years*, pp. 93-97.

Although most “camp doctors” were decent and helpful people, there were a number among them who were cruel and vicious. Among them was a certain Loránd Endrei from the provincial Hungarian town of Ceglédbercel. He was generally known among the camp inmates as “Lenci doktor” or “Dr. Lenci.” According to the malenky roboter János Kohlmayer, “we were treated by a doctor who didn’t know the difference between diarrhea and arthritis. He was from this town of Ceglédbercel. He used to be a stretcher-bearer before he became a coach polisher.... He was the camp’s chief doctor. He was also the one who admitted one [to the hospital]. If he felt like it, he hospitalized you, if he didn’t feel like it, he chased you away. It made no difference how sick you were, he drove you off to work.... This Dr. Lenci... one day made a visit to my hospital bed and ascertained that I am not alive any more. He declared me dead. He also had me put into the collection ditch, next to five or six dead bodies. He had me thrown into their midst.... I did not feel anything... because I was unconscious.... Next day came the cadaver collectors with their dump truck to take the dead to their final resting place.... They were dragging the bodies around, but then one of them... shouted: This man is still alive, he is breathing!”¹²⁷ This is how János Kohlmayer was saved from being buried alive as a result of “Dr. Lenci’s” medical incompetence.

Havoc perpetrated by criminals in the labor camps

With very few exceptions, life of the unfortunate Gulag prisoners was living hell. They had to struggle and strive for everything to say alive. As described by János Rózsás, “Every working day was filled with quarrels, altercations, often accompanied by violence. To this must be added the fact that the overseers designated by the camp command were usually ruthless slave-drivers. In order to retain their privileged positions, they forced the half-dead prisoners to fulfill the norms. Life in the forced labor camps was made even worse by the fact that until the 1950s political prisoners were mixed in with the common criminals, such as gangsters,

¹²⁷ Reminiscences of János Kohlmayer, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 261.

robbers and murderers. Political prisoners were placed at the mercy of these criminal elements. They freely took their fellow prisoners' garments, cheated the peaceful inmates out of their food, and even forced the latter to work in their place to fulfill the norm."¹²⁸

This widespread problem was treated recently by Anne Applebaum in her book, *GULAG*, which is a complete synthesis of the Soviet Gulag-system.¹²⁹ She separates the inmates of the Gulag camps into two major groups: criminals [*urki, blatnye*] and political prisoners [*kontriki és bytovye*]. According to her, these two categories were further divided into several sub-groups that made up the camp hierarchy.

Common criminals included several sub-groups, from the Mafia-like professional felons to the small-time pickpockets. But these two groups made up only a small portion of the so-called "common criminals." Actually, most of the latter were convicted for "crimes" that would hardly have been categorized as such in the Western World. Thus, there were some who were given five years of hard labor for having been late for work on a number of occasions. Some received six years because need compelled them to steal some clothing or a pair of shoes at the bazaar. Others were convicted to seven to ten years for having appropriated a couple of bottles of wine or a few loaves of bread during store deliveries. Still others were convicted for having stolen a few pencils and some writing paper from the office where they worked. These were the types of "felons" who constituted the largest segment of the "criminal elements" in the forced labor camps. Naturally, they had little to do with the above-mentioned Mafia-like professional felons, robbers and murderers.

The various criminal groups functioned under their own acknowledged leaders, and they could be identified by the various identification marks on their bodies. These professional criminals conducted virtual hunting expeditions against the defenseless political prisoners. They took away the latter's best clothing and shoes, they robbed them of their food rations, and they also took the

¹²⁸ RÓZSÁS, "Rabszolgamunka a Gulag táborában," p. 2.

¹²⁹ APPLEBAUM, *Gulag*, pp. 261-272.

largest share of the gift packages sent to them by their families. At the same time they refused to work, and they often forced their less fortunate fellow prisoners to work in their place. Anyone who resisted was beaten, maimed, or even killed mercilessly,

Similarly to the common criminals, political prisoners were also divided into several groups. The most favored among them were the “bablers,” who had been sentenced for telling political jokes at their place of employment, or for making critical remarks about the Soviet regime. Below the babblers were those who ended up in the Gulag for “counterrevolutionary activity.” They were followed by those who were convicted for “counterrevolutionary terrorist activity.” On the very bottom were the “Trotskyites” who had been accused of having been involved in “Trotskyite terrorist activities.” The latter were generally assigned to jobs that led to certain death within a few months.¹³⁰

A significant portion of the inmates came from the ranks of various non-Russian ethnic minorities. The prisoners generally formed “clans” based on their nationality or place of origin. Thus, some of the most visible clans within the Gulag camps consisted of Poles, Ukrainians, Estonians, Finns, Baltics, Jews, Chinese, Koreans, Japanese and Chechens. The Russians also had their clans, but these were organized primarily on the basis of their places of origin. Thus, there were “Muscovites,” “Leningraders,” “Nizhni Novgorodians,” and so on. These clans were formed partially because of the psychological need to be with people of the same nationality, language, or place of origin, and partially as a protection against the common criminals who constantly assaulted the political prisoners.¹³¹

There are no written sources that would indicate that Hungarians also had their own “clans.” One of the reasons may be that — in contrast to many of the Soviet nationalities — Hungarians were scattered among hundreds or perhaps thousands of camps. As such, they were never numerous enough in any single camp to

¹³⁰ ANNE APPLEBAUM, *GULAG. A History of the Soviet Camps* (New York: Doubleday, Division of Random House, Inc., 2003), reissued in paperback (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 273.

¹³¹ APPLEBAUM, *Gulag*, p. 273-283.

be able to form meaningful ethnic-based interest groups. The other possibility is that they lacked powerful and effective leaders, who could have brought them together into well-organized and effective interest groups. Not having their own clans, they lacked the organizations that could have defended them against the exploitive lawlessness represented by common criminals and their powerful leaders.

This exploitation, maiming, and even killing of defenseless political prisoners by various well-organized criminal elements in Siberian forced labor camps was recorded by a number of writers, including Dostoyevski in his *Notes from the House of Death* (1862). Many former Gulag prisoners also remembered it in their memoirs and personal letters. These included János Rózsás, who wrote about it in his *Memoirs* and in his *Duszja nővér* [Sister Dusya] — the latter having been a kind of “guardian angel” who saved his life.

When writing about the arrival of gift parcels sent by family members, Rózsás describes the scene as follows: “The prisoners were awakened.... The initial gift packages have arrived.... Packages were received mostly by Ukrainians, who came from better endowed regions.... None of the criminals received packages. But how could they have received anything? Most of them were offspring of criminal dynasties.... If the robbers were ready to take forcibly one’s sacred bread ration, ..., how could they have refrained from terrorizing those who received packages in this hunger-filled camp? Poor family members, poor relatives! They had no idea that with this package they were in fact sending to death their much beloved father, husband or son, whose return they were praying for!.... The first tithe was removed by the commander of the guards.... But this was not the greatest loss and danger! As soon as he stepped through the narrow door of the guard house with his jampacked sack, the chase began. The robbers and pickpockets... sneaked out from behind the barracks. They surrounded the frightened muzhik.... One could hear stifled cursing, blunt blows, moaning and groaning, and the gang was already gone with the plunder. The groaning and usually knifed victim was left whimpering in the snow. Even if the guards at the gate happened to see it,

they refused to intervene. Not even they were willing to confront the robbers. Moreover, those who received packages were viewed as 'Fascists,' while the robbers were only 'misled Soviet citizens.'.... Everyone had to fight his own war, without help, without companions. Therefore it was always the robbers who emerged victorious.... If anyone dared to confront them against overwhelming odds, he was beaten to a pulp, his blood flowing profusely through his nose and mouth.... This was how an old Ukrainian paid for his package with his life....[After the package arrived] a very influential bandit instructed him that upon receiving it, he should immediately take it to him.... He went to the guard room with a heavy heart, where he received his package.... He immediately set off with the cherished possession in the direction of the barracks indicated by the bandit. But while on the way, other bandits were waiting for him.... They stopped him and attacked him.... His package became the spoil of the bandits.... The original bandit who ordered him to deliver the gift parcel to him, when seeing that he came without the package, became very angry.... He fell upon the old man, beat him and kicked him repeatedly.... He, or rather his already cold body was found under the stairway by those returning from the dining hall. Given the above, it was not surprising to see men break into open wailing upon being informed that they have received a package."¹³²

Taming the depredations of criminal gangs

Ravages connected with the presence of professional criminals in the Gulag slave labor camps began to unravel in 1948 when they started to separate the dangerous criminals from the political prisoners, and transfer them to special criminal camps. But this process had begun even before this separation, and it gradually undermined the position of the professional gangsters. This was connected with the appearance of Polish, Ukrainian, Baltic, German,

¹³² JÁNOS RÓZSÁS, *Duszja nővér* [Sister Dusya] (Nagykanizsa, Hungary: Canissa Kiadó, 1994), pp. 252-254. With slight changes, the same text can also be found in JÁNOS RÓZSÁS, *Keserű ifjúság - Éltető reménység. Szovjet fogságom naplója* [Bitter Youth - Living Hope. Diary of My Soviet Captivity] (Budapest: Püski Kiadó, 1999), pp. 305-307.

and even Russian military prisoners — but not prisoners of war — in the Soviet Gulag camps. Most of them used to be members of the Polish National Army or the anti-Soviet Ukrainian Vlasov-divisions,¹³³ which landed them in the Gulag. These battle-hardened veterans or ex-partisans [guerrillas], who for years have fought against the Soviet or the German armed forces, unlike the political prisoners, were unwilling to tolerate the outrageous excesses and the bullying by the criminals. They began to organize themselves into defensive clans, and then went on the offensive, both against the Mafioso gangsters, as well as against the collaborators, whom they called *sukis* [bitches]. The latter of these generally came from the ranks of various minority nationalities, who were willing to sell themselves for a slightly improved treatment. These veterans and ex-partisans — who in the Vorkuta region called themselves 'red hats' [*krasnye shapochki*] — went on the offensive and soon undercut the dominant position of the criminals.

In the winter of 1954-1955 the Gulag leadership decided to break the back of the ever more recalcitrant political prisoners at the Inta Gulag camp in the Vorkuta region by bringing in a group of sixty bandits. But as the criminals began their badgerings and robberies, they suddenly found themselves against a well-organized group of veterans. The seasoned soldiers attacked the barracks of the bandits and began to beat them up, even to the point of killing a few of them. Sensing defeat, the prison authorities immediately transferred the remaining criminals to more pliable camps.¹³⁴

On another occasion a group of former Russian officers launched an attack against the collaborating *sukis* and used a chain saw to kill their leader. The *sukis* fled to their barracks hoping to save themselves. The attackers, however, told them they would all be killed unless they delivered the severed head of their second-in-command. The *sukis* soon complied, and threw the head of the

¹³³ The Vlasovists were anti-Soviet Ukrainian fighters under Gen. Andrei Valasov, who had defected to the Germans. Their presence in the Gulag camps is also recorded by GEORGE Z. BIEN in his *Elveszett évek*; and in the slightly different English version of his work, *Lost Years*. Certain sections of this book can also be found on the Internet: <http://www.gulag.hu/bien/gzbien43.htm>

¹³⁴ APPLEBAUM, *Gulag*, p. 419.

decapitated leader out the window. Apparently, they valued their lives more than the life of their leader.¹³⁵

Although Hungarians were generally not concentrated in large numbers in any single Gulag camp, but at least on one occasion they also rose in rebellion against the professional criminals. As related by the already cited György Kölley, in one of the far northern Siberian labor camps there were about one hundred Hungarian gendarmes, one of whose members was beaten up by two Russian criminals. Upon hearing this, the gendarmes quickly attacked the bandits and beat them up thoroughly. Sensing defeat, the bandits fled to the gates and begged the guard to let them out. But the guards refused. Thus the gendarmes were able to finish the job. After things settled down the commander of the camp held an inquiry. Eventually he decided in favor of the Hungarian gendarmes, saying: "Against such gangsters there is no other solution, except thrashing them severely."¹³⁶

Death was a frequent occurrence inside the barbed wire fence of the forced labor camps. People died by the scores every day. This was not only the result of the unbearable living and working conditions in the camps, but also because sifting out the prisoners was part of the overall efficiency plan devised by Nataly Aronovich Frenkel.¹³⁷

Death became part of the everyday lives of the inmates. And because they could do nothing about it, they began to use it to their own advantage. Thus, they usually waited several days to report the demise of their comrades so that they would be able to secure and eat their food rations. Most of the deaths in the camps were recorded, but seldom was the real reason of death given. Moreover, because some prisoners tried to escape by feigning death, before throwing them into the mass grave the guards made sure that they were in fact really dead. This was done by either breaking their skulls or piercing their hearts. Only in this way

¹³⁵ APPLEBAUM, *Gulag*, p. 423.

¹³⁶ KÖLLEY, *Értetek és miattatok*, pp. 100-101.

¹³⁷ Concerning Frenkel's activities and methods, see the first part of this essay. See also the already cited study by DAN MICHAELS, "The Gulag," which can also be found on the Internet: <http://www.ihr.org>.

could they be certain that the dead inmates were in fact really dead.¹³⁸

Janissaries of the Forced Labor Camps

Ruthless brigade leaders generally came from the ranks of those inmates who were willing to prostitute themselves by collaborating with the Gulag authorities, and thus become *sukis* or bitches. They were present in virtually all of the camps. This was recalled, among others, by Henrik Pfaffenbüchler from the Trans-Danubian village of Véménd, who was picked up as a *malenky roboter* in the latter part of 1944. Soviet camp commandants “always found people who were willing to carry out their orders. They were sadists, who would beat us regularly. Most of them came from Romania, from among the Saxons, but there were also some Czechs. I never encountered a Hungarian.”¹³⁹

This view is counterbalanced by the camp experiences of Rózsa Nagy, who was collected and deported to the Soviet Gulag at the age of fourteen. She remembers that denunciation of fellow prisoners and collaboration with camp authorities “was a very widespread phenomenon.”¹⁴⁰ There were many who for more food or better treatment were willing to squeal on their fellow prisoners. As an example, Rózsa herself was reprimanded and punished by her Russian brigade leader — who was serving a fifteen-year term in the Gulag — for smuggling a letter from the camp for one of her fellow prisoners. Rózsa Nagy also has some bad memories about her fellow Hungarians. She recalled that in contrast to Gypsies and Jews, who were generally helpful, some fellow Hungarians were unwilling to help their less fortunate fellow prisoners. While Gypsies willingly shared the food they had smuggled into the camp in their trousers, this was hardly true for her own nationality.

¹³⁸ This practice is described, among others, by Alice Mulkigian, an American-Armenian girl, who was arrested during a family visit to Soviet Armenia, and then sent to the Gulag. See Part 3 (“Generalissimo”) of the documentary on Stalin’s life, prepared by Public Media Video in 1990.

¹³⁹ Reminiscences of Henrik Pfaffenbüchler, in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 149.

¹⁴⁰ Reminiscences of Rózsa Nagy, in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 271.

“One tends to remember such things” — concluded Rózsa in her reminiscences.¹⁴¹

The traitors or so-called “Janissaries,” who were willing to join the ranks of the torturers of the Gulag prisoners also appeared in the ranks of the malenky roboters who had been collected and deported from the Upper Tisza Region of Hungary. One of the worst among them was a certain Transylvanian woman, who had married someone in the village of Böcs, from where she was taken to the Gulag. In Imre Kolozsi’s reminiscences she is depicted as a horribly cruel and brutal person, who appeared to enjoy torturing others. Within the camp this vicious Hungarian woman from Transylvania was appointed an overseer and then joined her Romanian lover by the name of Korushchuck to torment the camp inmates. She placed her female victims into a partially water-filled small concrete den, where they were “kept for days without food and drink, standing in the water in their undergarments..... This woman from Böcs and her Romanian lover devised various methods of torture beyond one’s imagination.”¹⁴²

This also holds true for Juci Schubert, a Slovak girl from the Nyírség region of Hungary, whose name is remembered by all of those who had been tortured by her, but who managed to survive. In Imre Kolozsi’s words, “the Romanian man, the woman from Böcs, and the Slovak girl, these three were the terror of the camp. They were not satisfied with constantly harassing and beating the prisoners. Some of them were punished by being placed into the disinfectant room with temperatures above 100 degrees. By the time they were removed, most of them were dead.”¹⁴³

Kolozsi also related the case of a Polish escapee who was brought back to the camp and then tortured to death by this infamous trio: “It was difficult to speak with him, his face and his mouth were scarred everywhere. Within two or three weeks he escaped once more, but they caught him again. They brought him back to the camp that same night. Then they began to torture him under

¹⁴¹ Reminiscences of Rózsa Nagy, in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 279

¹⁴² Reminiscences of Imre Kolozsi, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 77.

¹⁴³ Reminiscences of Imre Kolozsi, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 77.

the stairs. They beat him and pounded him repeatedly. By next morning he was dead.... His liver had been kicked to pieces."¹⁴⁴

The activities of this vicious trio remained embedded in the memory of many other Gulag prisoners. Among them was Margit Rozgonyi (later Mrs. Lajos Gulyás), who enumerated many of the methods of torture employed by these inhuman Janissaries against their fellow prisoners. On one occasion, for example, they caught Margit Suller from the town of Rakamaz, while she was trying to escape. Upon recapture, "she was placed in a pit and doused with cold water. Then she was forced to walk barefoot in the snow."¹⁴⁵ In another instance, István Kovács, who also escaped, hoping to return to his wife and his six children, "was beaten to death right in front of us by these mad dogs."¹⁴⁶ The prisoners had to lineup and were forced to witness his torture. The torturers were again the above mentioned threesome: "The red headed Juci [Schubert], beautiful Rózsika [woman from Böcs], and her [Romanian] lover. They were indeed a horrendous threesome."¹⁴⁷

Mrs. Péter Schmidt from the Transdanubian town of Feked also recalled one of these vicious Janissaries. He was a lame man from Becskerek, whose name began with the letter K. "He was much worse than the Russians, for the latter generally did not hurt us.... [This man] always carried a rubber baton and he would use it [to beat us]. [One one occasion] a young boy from the town of Bikal, who had been working in the woods, fell asleep. The rest of the workers came back, but the boy did not. They assumed that he had escaped.... Then they found him. All of us had to stand in the courtyard. The Russian officer was also there. But he only stood there, while [the lame man from Becskerek] beat the boy. He pounded him until the boy died.... He beat him to death right in front of us."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Reminiscences of Imre Kolozsi, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 77.

¹⁴⁵ Reminiscences of Mrs. Lajos Gulyás, née Margit Rozgonyi, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 270.

¹⁴⁶ Reminiscences of Mrs. Lajos Gulyás, née Margit Rozgonyi, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 270.

¹⁴⁷ Reminiscences of Mrs. Lajos Gulyás, née Margit Rozgonyi, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 270.

¹⁴⁸ Reminiscences of Mrs. Peter Schmidt, in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 165.

There were some prisoners who tried to escape even though they knew that being caught would mean death. But such attempts were seldom successful. And when they were, this could only happen in the Don River region. To escape from Eastern Siberia was absolutely impossible. Such an attempted escape is described by an American-born Armenian girl, who, upon visiting some of her relatives in Soviet Armenia, was accused of spying and sent to a Gulag forced labor camp. She spent five years there, before — following Stalin's death — she was permitted to return to the United States. She recalled an incident when upon being recaptured, two escapees were thrown to a pack of wild dogs. As she recalled: "They were torn to pieces by the dogs, and human flesh was being scattered all over the place. We were forced to stand there and watch their torturous death so as to put all thoughts of escape out of our minds."¹⁴⁹

Of course, occasionally even these vicious and treacherous Janissaries tended to stumble and ended up in the same place as their former victims. Such a case was described by János Rózsás during the time when he was working in a railroad construction camp: "One day, when we were lined up and ready to leave for work, I saw a brigade leader dragging a short, familiar looking man toward the gate. The man's face was wrapped in rags, his large eyes protruded from his face, and under them his skin was hanging baglike. Who was this person? Whom did this desperately gesticulating man resemble?... He was pleading in a squeaking voice with his merciless superior, who in turn was pounding him with his baton.... The brigade leader was impatiently shoving the frightened man toward the exit, until finally they both disappeared among the crowd. Who was this man? — I was searching feverishly among the mental images of my former associates. Suddenly it came to me: It was Goncharov, my former brigade leader! What a change! Where was his pock-marked red face, his strong hoarse voice, and his cocky demeanor? Now he was but a pitiful wreck

¹⁴⁹ Alice Mulkigian narrated this horrendous event when she was being interviewed for a documentary on Joseph Stalin. See Part 2 of Stalin's biography ("Generalissimo"), prepared and published by the Public Media Video in 1990.

of a man like the rest of those who congregated in front of the gate, to be driven beyond the walls by the baton-wielding brigade leaders. So, this is what became of this human slave driver! Having seen what has become of Goncharov, and remembering the way he used to be when in power as a cruel brigade leader, I could not hate him. Nor could I gloat over his misfortune.... I had no anger in my heart. Yet, through his fate I was shaken emotionally, because I felt very uncertain about my own future: If even such unscrupulous men lose their way and are destroyed, what is to become of me?"¹⁵⁰

Such was the fate of men in the Gulag. Not even the shrewdest and cruelest overseer could be certain of his future. He may be a cocky and cruel overseer one day, and an exploited and mistreated slave the very next day. This was the reason why these unscrupulous Janissaries tried to comply with, and often over-fulfilled the expectations of their own masters, even at the expense of the death of many of their fellow prisoners. The sword of Damocles was always hanging above their heads, and they never knew when that sword would fall.

Examples of cannibalism in the Gulag camps

While thirst was by far the worst form of torture that drove thousands of prisoners to insanity and death, at times hunger also produced incredible situations. As described by Anne Applebaum in her highly regarded work on the Gulag, there were many occasions when protracted hunger led to cannibalism. Such events took place, for example, when small groups of prisoners escaped under circumstances and in regions where successful escape was almost impossible. Such planned escapes usually involved three persons, one of whom was designated as the "walking food." When their normal food supplies had been exhausted, the one designated as "food" was killed and consumed.¹⁵¹

Applebaum also mentions a situation when one of the "death ships" on the way from Vladivostok to Magadan was stuck in ice

¹⁵⁰ RÓZSÁS, *Duszja nővér*, pp. 282-283.

¹⁵¹ APPLEBAUM, *Gulag*, p. 362.

for several months. In light of the absence of regular food, the guards simply fed the dead to the living.¹⁵²

One of our interviewees, Magdolna Rohr, also related such an escape attempt. After collecting a large supply of food two men decided to escape. Given the terrain and the climate in the Kolyma province of Siberia, they were only able to reach a nearby forest, where they got stuck and could not continue. There they consumed all the food they had brought with them, and then one of them ate the other. (We don't know whether the "food" was killed first, or simply died before being eaten.) After having eaten his fellow prisoner, except his head, the remaining escapee had no choice but to return to the camp and give himself up. Upon doing so, he was taken back to their hiding place, where he was forced to pick up the frozen head of his colleague and carry it around in the camp to show to the others what happens to one who tries to escape. Magdolna Rohr did not know the ultimate fate of this "cannibal," but we can safely presume that ultimately he was executed.¹⁵³

Another example of cannibalism is related by Lajos M., who survived thirteen years in the Soviet Gulag. He spent most of these years on the remote island of Novy Zemlya in the Arctic Ocean. Earlier he had been exiled to the Kamchatka Peninsula to the north of Japan. Because of Kamchatka's proximity to Japan, many prisoners tried to make it to that island state on various makeshift boats. Most of them never made it. But even if they did, there was no escape for them because the Japanese authorities routinely handed them back to the Soviets. On one occasion a group of twelve escaped, made it to Japan, but ten of them were returned. The two missing prisoners could not be returned, because they had been eaten by their fellow escapees during their escapade.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² This is related by Anne Applebaum in the documentary "*Siberia*", A&E Television Network, 2004.

¹⁵³ The authors' interview with Mrs. Károly Pintér, née Magdolna Rohr, Budapest, October 30, 2003.

¹⁵⁴ ZSOLT CSALOG, *M. Lajos 42 éves* [Lajos M., Aged 42] (Budapest: Maecenas Kiadó, 1989), p. 14.

Such examples of cannibalism, however, occurred also within the forced labor camps, without the attempt to escape. Extreme hunger was an ever present phenomenon in these camps, and it often led to extreme actions on the part of the prisoners. The above mentioned Lajos M. describes, for example, how a group of prisoners — among them a certain István Béres from the town of Mezőkövesd — regularly consumed human flesh, which they stole from the camp's dissecting room. They were particularly keen on eating internal organs, such as lungs and livers. This is how they survived. Lajos M. claims that Béres was repatriated sometime after Stalin's death. But he did not stay at home for very long. He took the chance to leave Hungary at the time of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and then settled in one of the Western countries, where he may still be alive today.¹⁵⁵

One of the most shocking examples of cannibalism is also described by this same Lajos M. as follows: "I've eaten human flesh too. He was chief cook Ivan Vassilyevich. This happened in a prisoner of war camp. They prepared bran soup every day, which also required some oil. Sunflower-seed oil, or something like that. But this Ivan always stole the oil. Instead of adding it to the bran soup, he sold it to civilians. Two or three of us decided to do something about it and punish this cook! After all, we were always hungry. The soup was prepared in an unusually large cauldron. It was so huge that the sacks-full of bran was being dumped into it from a platform. Ivan was in charge of stirring the bran from this platform.... Well, as Ivan was stirring the soup, two men grabbed his legs and shoved him into the hot liquid! They quickly put the lid on, and then screwed it down. By morning his flesh was nice and tender. So, we ate him, without much ado! We were actually very happy that finally there was some meat in the soup. Of course, some who knew about it, would not eat it, but they kept silent. His bones and his jacket were found at the bottom of the cauldron. There was much chaos. They counted us five times to see who was missing.... Finally it was clear that it was the cook who was missing. But they never found out who

¹⁵⁵ CSALOG, M. *Lajos 42 éves*, p. 9.

cooked him.”¹⁵⁶ Then Lajos M. added: “Cannibalism did take place off and on. If there is nothing else to eat, you have to eat something.... An old Ukrainian, who had been incarcerated for life ever since 1933, told us that... there was nothing to eat in his village, no corn, no wheat.... They ate the children. They had to eat something! First the dog, then the cat, and then finally their own children.... This is why they ended up in Siberia.”¹⁵⁷

Compassionate overseers — Humane Russians

While life in the Gulag was cruel, prisoners did occasionally encounter compassionate camp overseers. Such a humane commander was a Russian Jew by the name of Milligram, who had been a military officer before being appointed camp commander in the Donbas region of Russia. According to Imre Kolozsi, “he was the most decent and most humane [commander] in the camp.... We still speak of him with respect and reverence.”¹⁵⁸

When becoming aware that some of the prisoners were very weak, Milligram would remove them from the mines and send them to collective farms, where they could live and work under much better conditions. Their diet was also improved significantly. When he was informed about the cruelty and viciousness of the above-mentioned threesome — Juci Schubert, the woman from Böcs, and her Romanian lover Korushchuck —, he ordered an inquiry. The result was that Korushchuck and another Romanian “war criminal” were sent off for ten years to Siberia.¹⁵⁹

Imre Kolozsi never learned what happened to the two women, Korushchuck’s bestial cohorts. From another source, however, we know that “red-headed Juci” — the woman from Böcs — eventually returned to Hungary. Based on what her husband had heard about her life in the camp, he refused to take her back. That alone, however, was a rather light punishment for her vicious crimes. She probably left her village and melted into the crowd in one of

¹⁵⁶ CSALOG, *M. Lajos 42 éves*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁵⁷ CSALOG, *M. Lajos 42 éves*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁵⁸ Reminiscences of Imre Kolozsi, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 77.

¹⁵⁹ Reminiscences of Imre Kolozsi, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 78.

Hungary's larger cities. And if she was still alive at the time of the fall of the communist regime, she probably presented herself as the victim of communism and applied for compensation offered by Hungary's first post-communist government. She would have been able to do this because the former Gulagers were so frightened and intimidated that upon their return they did not dare to say anything about their experiences, let alone seek out and punish people who collaborated with their captors forty-five years earlier.

Based on the above, it is evident that the former prisoners who managed to stay alive, returned to their homeland burdened with oppressive memories. These memories, however, were about forced labor camps, cruel and inhuman prison guards, insensitive camp commanders, and the above-described unscrupulous Janissaries, but not about the Russians themselves.

The situation, therefore, was different with the simple folk of the Russian countryside who were as hungry and almost as badly off as the prisoners in the Gulag camps. Of course, because of their inability to communicate with the deportees, and because of the vicious propaganda they were fed night and day, initially most of the locals viewed the inmates as "murderous Fascists." But as soon as the prisoners learned enough Russian to make themselves understood, and were able to explain how they ended up in the Soviet Union, their relationship changed. Hate suddenly turned into compassion and the desire to help. Naturally, this was true only in regions where the Gulag camps were located close to settlements. Such relationships were impossible on the frigid Siberian steppes, without any human habitation. As remarked by historian Tamás Stark, "the majority of the reminiscences emphasize the benevolent and generous nature of the Russian people."¹⁶⁰

This view is substantiated by the experiences of Margit Rozgonyi, who encountered both good and evil among the Russian population. After a while, when the prisoners were permitted to leave the camp to visit nearby villages to beg for food, Margit and one of her friends knocked on the door of a peasant hut. Upon entering

¹⁶⁰ STARK, "Magyarok szovjet kényszermunkatáborokban", p. 79.

they found themselves face to face with an old woman, who was in the process of eating corn grits. Seeing the girls, she stopped eating and told them that although she has nothing else to eat, she will be glad to share the remaining grits with them. The girls were elated at this offer. So the old woman divided the remaining grits in two and handed one half to each of the girls. "We were so happy, and we thanked her profusely,"¹⁶¹ said Margit, after having finished her story.

Katalin Ambach, who worked in a mine in the Donets region, along with many Russian forced laborers, had similar experiences. "The Russians were really good to us. We cannot complain. They felt sorry for us, and they shared their food with us, but they had very little themselves."¹⁶²

The same view was also expressed by Katalin T., who had been deported from the Trans-Danubian town of Babarc and spent three years in various mines of the Donets region. "I would lie if I claimed that the Russians had hurt us or raped us. They were told they could not do so.... We were actually lucky.... When being transferred from one mine to another, we were always under the guard of a very decent Russian.... He would always tell us: 'Ladies and Gentlemen! If you are good to me, I will also be good to you.'... He then shepherded us to the mine and left for the day. But he expected us not to squeal on him. Moreover, when on the way home from work we stole some vegetables, he would always tell us to tie our long pants at the bottom. [At the same time] he would serve as a lookout. We only stole squash and corn., just something to eat."¹⁶³

Anna Havasi, who worked in the same mines as Katalin T., expressed similar views about the Russians. On one occasion, for example, she contracted typhoid fever, from which twelve or fourteen girls have already died. She too was close to death, but with a little help she managed to survive. The local Russian commander, who was actually a "morose officer," was overjoyed upon Anna's

¹⁶¹ Reminiscences of Mrs. Lajos Gulyás, née Margit Rozgonyi, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 267.

¹⁶² Reminiscences of Katalin Ambach, in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 72.

¹⁶³ Reminiscences of Katalin T., in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 79.

recovery. "He took me to his home.... He was a family man. He had three children. He was not young any more, but he was a wonderful person. Following this event he ordered the camp cook to give me more food so that I would regain my health."¹⁶⁴

Similar views were expressed also by Éva H., who was deported to the Caucasus region of Southern Russia to do some earthwork and excavation. She worked in Chechniya in the vicinity of Grozny until 1947. Her first overseer proved to be a kind man. After completing the daily norm, Éva and the other prisoners were allowed to return their living quarters, even if this meant shorter working days. She claimed that most of the overseers were decent people. "They never beat us, never kicked us, and they would never use foul language when speaking to us.... They were completely amazed why and how we ended up there.... Many of the women among us told them that they had been forced to leave their small children back home.... They were really surprised at this, particularly an old officer who was with us. This old man would often cry along with us."¹⁶⁵

On another occasion, when the prisoners were digging trenches for oil pipes, Éva became very sick. As she related: "My body, my hands, my face, my legs became swollen with water. I could not even sleep inside [the barracks]...because I was suffocating. The officer would often visit me to see how I was doing."¹⁶⁶ When on one occasion this officer realized that Éva was very sick indeed, he put her into his official car and took her immediately to the local hospital. "I was crying," recalled Éva. "'Don't cry,' he would tell me. 'Once you recover, I'll pick you up and bring you back.' And he did. I was in the hospital for six weeks, and toward the end I was already helping with the cleaning. He was really glad to see me healthy again. He drove me back to the camp. On the way, he stopped and bought me a kilo [2.2 pounds] of apples."¹⁶⁷

References to such generous actions in the reminiscences of former Gulag prisoners are almost as frequent as testimonials to the inhuman

¹⁶⁴ Reminiscences of Anna Havas, in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 157.

¹⁶⁵ Reminiscences of Éva H., in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 136.

¹⁶⁶ Reminiscences of Éva H., in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 139.

¹⁶⁷ Reminiscences of Éva H., in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 139.

actions of cruel overseers and brutal Janissaries. János Rózsás, for example, dedicated a whole volume to Sister Dusya, who protected him and nurtured him back to health. It was her care that made it possible for Rózsás to survive, to see his homeland again, and to write about his Gulag experiences. Rózsás regards Sister Dusya as his “guardian angel” and his “savior,” whose real identity he never learned. “I am really sorry to this day that I never learned Sister Dusya’s real name and address. I only remember her nickname [the name by which she was generally known], her kind personality, and her friendly black eyes. They radiated so much love toward me at the time when I was unimportant to everyone else.”¹⁶⁸

These reminiscences point to the fact that human beings are the same throughout the world. Every nation harbors good and humane individuals, as well as villains and scoundrels. Given the above, one can hardly deny that in Russia and the Soviet Union — like everywhere else — the problem was and is not with the people, but with the political system. And it was irrelevant whether the system was headed by a “holy” czar or an “infallible” communist dictator.

Women on the Soviet Gulag

About one-third of the deportees — at least those from the Upper Tisza Region — were women. This is how the deportees themselves remember it.¹⁶⁹ This ratio was probably also true for those convicted for various political crimes.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ JÁNOS RÓZSÁS, *Duszja nővér* [Sister Dusya] (Nagykanizsa: Canissa Kiadó, 1994).

¹⁶⁹ See for example the reminiscences of Mária Hardicsai, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 99.

¹⁷⁰ Concerning this topic, see the following studies by AGNES HUSZÁR VÁRDY, “Magyar nők szovjet kényszermunkatáborokban, 1944-1949” [Hungarian Women in Soviet Forced Labor Camps, 1944-1949], in *Valóság*, vol. 45., no. 11. (November 2002), pp. 29-35; “Elhurcolt magyar nők kényszermunkán a Szovjetunióban - 1944-1949” [Deported Hungarian Women on Forced Labor in the Soviet Union], in *A XLII. Magyar Találkozó Krónikája*, [Proceedings of the 42d Hungarian Congress], ed. LÉL F. SOMOGYI (Cleveland: Árpád Kiadó Vállalat, 2003), pp. 161-171; “Rabszolgák az Uralnál. Magyar nők ‘malenykij robot’-on” [Slaves at the Urals. Hungarian Women on Malenky Robot], in *Új Horizont*, vol. 31., no. 6. (December 2003), pp. 92-98; “Forgotten Victims of World War II: Hungarian Women in Soviet Forced Labor Camps,” in VÁRDY, *Ethnic Cleansing*, pp. 507-516; and “Forgotten Victims of World War II: Hungarian Women in Forced Labor Camps,” in *Hungarian Studies Review*, vol. 29., nos. 1-2. (Spring-Fall, 2002), pp. 77-91.

The majority of the women deportees were between 16 and 25 years of age. Naturally, after their unexpected arrest by the Soviet forces they were even more frightened than the men. After all, in their case there was also the possibility of being raped. And even though this was not common among the malenky roboters, it did happen, especially among political prisoners. This is illustrated, among others, by the case of Magdolna Rohr, who was raped by several Russians before being sent off to the Gulag.¹⁷¹

During the process of deportation all sorts of wild stories were circulating, which frightened the women even more. By the time they reached Focsani in Moldavia (Romania) it was believed that the reason they were being deported was that they should give birth to little Russians. "There is a need for women" — so the story went — "because many Russians have died and women are essential to give birth to children." This is how one of the survivors recalled it. Upon hearing this story "everyone of us began to cry," even though we thought it "impossible that such a thing could take place."¹⁷² Fortunately, this rumor turned out to be false. Upon reaching the destination camps, all prisoners were subjected to disinfection and depilation. This process caused panic among the women: "They grudgingly agreed to the shearing of their heads, but further depilation could only be carried out after a hand to hand combat. Women also protested violently against the shearing of their locks.... After that the women were lined up... and were given injections to stop their menstruation.... The reason behind this was the belief that these 'Fascists' were brought here to work.... And because this was a joint camp, they could not discount the possibility of sexual relations. Women were therefore injected to prevent the possibility of child birth."¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Based on the authors' interview with Mrs. Károly Pintér, née Magdolna Rohr, Budapest, October 30, 2003. See also István Stefka's interview with Magdolna Rohr in one of the January 2001 issues of the *Magyar Nemzet* (Budapest), which appeared in an English translation in the *American Magyar News*, January 2002, pp. 4-5, translated by Erika Papp Faber.

¹⁷² Reminiscences of Mrs. László Homolya, née Piroska Pásztor, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 34.

¹⁷³ Reminiscences of Mrs. László Homolya, née Piroska Pásztor, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, pp. 41-42.

Many of the surviving women mentioned that they had been given injections. There is Mária Szauter of Gödre, for example, who worked as a miner in the Donets Basin. She related that all women in her group were given injections every six months. After each injection she would always faint.¹⁷⁴

Others believe that something was mixed into their food, which stopped their menstruation. Rózsa Nagy, who was only 14 years old when she was deported, described this phenomenon as follows: "We women could not care for ourselves. That is, we did not even have to, because after a while we did not menstruate. I never had a period until I came home. How and why? I don't know. Perhaps because of the food we ate."¹⁷⁵ It is possible that in certain instances Soviet authorities mixed something into the food of the female prisoners, but most women claim that they were given injections. They were very much afraid of this treatment, because they feared that this injection may destroy their ability of ever having children. This turned out to be an unnecessary fear in most instances, although some women were in fact disabled because of these injections.

There were those who felt the negative effect of these injections already in the camps. Some of the side effects included skin rashes and severe blisters. Among them was Erzsébet Pásztor, the future Mrs. Joseph Turkó, whose body was covered with large, ugly and painful boils, especially under her arms. And these boils lasted for many weeks.¹⁷⁶

The same story was repeated by Magdolna Rohr, but she also added that the depilation of women was always performed by men, while the depilation of men was done by women. This was a horrendous experience for them, because they all had been reared with traditional ethical and moral values. And this open violation of their modesty made their lives even more miserable than it already was.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Reminiscences of Mária Szauter, in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 207.

¹⁷⁵ Reminiscences of Rózsa Nagy, in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 275.

¹⁷⁶ The authors' interview with Mrs. József Turkó, née Erzsébet Pásztor, June 28, 2003.

¹⁷⁷ The authors' interview with Mrs. Károly Pintér, née Magdolna Rohr, Budapest, October 30, 2003.

After a while a number of children were born in the Gulag camps, but almost exclusively to women who were already pregnant at the time of their arrest and deportation. There is the case of Mrs. Frigyes Muszbek, née Mária Szloboda, who was in her fifth month of pregnancy at the time she was taken to the Gulag, where she gave birth to a baby girl.¹⁷⁸ Meanwhile, Soviet authorities realized that they could not expect much work from pregnant women and breast-feeding mothers. As a result, a few weeks after the birth of their babies, they were collected and sent home.

There were thirteen young mothers and thirteen babies who began their repatriation to Hungary on October 20, 1945. The conditions of their travel, however, were such that there was little hope that the babies would make it home. As a result of malnutrition most mothers had very little milk. And the unheated cattle cars were hardly fit to house newborn babies. "Diapering took place by removing one rag from under them, putting another soiled rag back that had already dried. We were unable to bathe them, or to wash them. We tore apart whatever rags we had so as to prevent them from being kept in wet rags in the unheated wagons. Meanwhile we hardly ate anything... The mothers' milk went dry. It became less and less. Our children slowly withered away..., and at the end they died of hunger."¹⁷⁹

The mothers were forced to see the dying off of their children, one after the other, and also witness when the guards would toss their little corpses onto the snowy Russian prairie next to the railroad tracks. At the end, of the original thirteen babies only two survived. One of the lucky ones was Mrs. Frigyes Muszbek's daughter, Nórika. Her father, Frigyes Muszbek, remained at the Gulag for five more years, and returned only in December 1950. By that time Nórika was already a healthy and happy nursery-school child. In those days she had no inkling of the circumstances of her birth, nor about how lucky she was to have survived.

¹⁷⁸ Reminiscences of Mrs. Frigyes Muszbek, née Mária Szloboda, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, pp. 121-125.

¹⁷⁹ Reminiscences of Mrs. Frigyes Muszbek, née Mária Szloboda, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, pp. 121-123.

Following their repatriation, women who made it, faced a number of additional problems; namely the universal belief that they had been repeatedly raped in the forced labor camps. Because of this assumption, young men hesitated to marry them. This was a problem that Gizella Czinner faced after her return. In her own words: "I came back exactly as I was when I was taken.... [Yet] one day, in the town of Emőd, a woman confronted me and asked the following question: 'Is it true that we were permitted to return only after giving birth to three children?' I told her: 'Dear lady, if you find it displeasing that your son wants to marry a girl who experienced what I went through, then you should calm yourself. I can tell you with all honesty that in our camp no one was raped.... Undoubtedly, circumstances compelled some girls [to give in].., because they wanted to move from a difficult job to a better one. But this was not rape. Those who were like that back home, did not have to be forced, nor raped. They just walked into the bushes with one of the guards, and sometimes also with someone higher up in ranks."¹⁸⁰

Whatever the truth, however, there always lurked a general suspicion among the population that the girls who had been repatriated from the Gulag were sexually exploited women. This was another reason why ex-Gulagers generally married among themselves. They were bound together by their common experiences, common sufferings, and common fate. They got along better and trusted each other more because of their similar experiences. They would never have been able to develop a harmonious relationship with one who had not experienced the trials and tribulations of the Gulag camps.

There are a number of other issues about female prisoners that have to be mentioned here. One of them is the fact that women were able to survive the misery, torture, and hardship of Gulag life better than men. As stated repeatedly by the Ilona F. from Trans-Danubia, "for every single female who died, twenty men perished. Women were able to adjust better, even though they received no special considerations. They performed the same

¹⁸⁰ Reminiscences of Mrs. Sándor Csipi, née Gizella Czinner, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 97.

work, but somehow they had more will to survive.”¹⁸¹ Maria Sch., who was already a mother of two when she was deported, expressed similar views: “Women were able to endure more, much more. Many more men died than women. We saw dead [male] bodies every day.... Every morning the truck was there to carry the corpses away.”¹⁸²

Some believe that this phenomenon was partially due to the fact that women’s bodies are tougher, because they are built to withstand child birth. But of equal importance is the fact that food portions in the Gulag camps were all of equal size. Thus, it was the heavier and larger individuals who suffered most from the lack of nourishment. Being consistently underfed, they were the ones who perished first. Those with smaller bodies — be they women or men with small frames — had a much greater chance to survive.

Repatriation and Reception at Home

As noted in the first part of our study, those who survived the vicissitudes of the Gulag were repatriated in several waves. Most of the *malenky roboters* returned after three years toward the end of 1947 or early 1948. Political prisoners, however, were released only after Stalin’s death in 1953. Of course, there were exceptions in both instances. Some of the former returned only in 1950, while some of the latter as late as 1960.

Desire for the homeland was so great among the prisoners that they did not even feel the vicissitudes of their return voyage. They only wanted to be at home with their families. The great expectation and joy of repatriation, however, turned sour immediately upon reaching the borders of Hungary. Hungarian communist authorities received them not as innocent victims of an oppressive political system, but as criminals who deserved everything that had been meted out to them. And the nature and tone of this reception accompanied them throughout their lives, right up to the collapse of communism, and in some instances even beyond.

¹⁸¹ Reminiscences of Ilona F., in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 303.

¹⁸² Reminiscences of Mária Sch., in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 128.

János Rózsás, who spent eight years on the Gulag — for a while in the same camp with Alexander Solzhenitsyn — described his homecoming as follows: “The transfer of prisoners took place on November 25, 1953, in the border town of Csap on the Soviet side. They read our names and transferred us to the passenger cars on the narrow-gauge rail lines without much ado. The train began to roll at noon and the weaponless Soviet soldiers jumped off the cars, waved us good-bye with their caps, and wished us good luck. Slowly the train rolled across the temporary bridge over the Tisza River. We were singing the national anthem, and we decided that wherever we would be told to get off, we would kiss the ground of our beloved Hungary. We reached the Hungarian side.... Suddenly from the bushes on the side of the railway embankment soldiers in Russian uniforms emerged and jumped on the railroad cars, and began to commandeer us: ‘All windows up! Everyone in from the entrance way! Everyone sit down!’ Then we saw that fully armed, forbidding looking soldiers inundated the landings, with their machine guns in hand, ready to shoot. The ominous thought came to us that they will probably take us to a prison.... We sat frozen and silently on our seats.... Then we arrived someplace. The train stopped away from a station, and we were crudely ordered to get off quickly and line up. No one among us had the strength to kneel down and kiss the ground of our homeland.... They directed the sad and miserable group to one of the boarding houses of the Sóstó Spa in the vicinity of Nyíregyháza. There we were received by an emissary of the Ministry of Interior, who delivered a very tough speech, telling us how to behave.... Our building was surrounded with guards in tight formation. They watched our every move with hostile or startled eyes. We were detained for five days for medical examination, long autobiographies, and many senseless questions. Then on November 30th they began to release us.... They gave us a day’s portion of cold food and 30 forints. First we thought we received a fortune, but we soon learned ... that we couldn’t start a new life with that paltry sum.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ JÁNOS RÓZSÁS, “A volt Gulág rabok sorsa hazatérésük után” [The Fate of the Former Gulag Prisoners after their Return], manuscript, pp. 2-3. Rózsás also described

This unexpected reception described by János Rózsás is corroborated by many other returnees. These include György Kölley, who detailed his reception as follows: "We reached the Hungarian border at [the town of] Záhony. We barely left the railroad station, when the train came to a skidding halt. 'Out with you,' shouted the guards. All of us got off quickly. Within minutes we were surrounded by members of the secret police... and they began to beat us with their rubber bludgeons. - 'This is what you deserve, you Fascist pigs! Finally we have gotten hold of you!'... After thirty minutes... they stopped the beatings. One of their leather-coated [commanders] climbed on top of the train and began to shout: 'Listen you scoundrels! For once we were generous to you, you were able come home. But remember that we don't forget! Anyone of you who fails to behave the way we expect you to behave will be severely punished!' After this we got on the train again — much beaten up, and covered with blue and green spots (some of us lost two or three teeth) — and resumed our journey toward [the city of] Nyíregyháza."¹⁸⁴

Many returning malenky roboters — some of whom we have interviewed personally — also had similar tales to tell. They were received like criminals when reaching their beloved homeland. Following their return, they were warned not to speak to anyone about their experiences in the Soviet Union. If they did, they would be shipped back immediately. This is what happened to Gizella Czimmer, when she began to complain about her Gulag experiences. She was immediately warned not to speak about her life in the Soviet Union. They told her openly that from the point of view of Hungarian authorities, she and her companions were criminals and would always be viewed as such. "They even told me, I should be happy to have been able to come home.... That I should hold my mouth, otherwise I'll be taken back to where I came from. I was told officially: 'Shut your mouth!' Even one of my neighbors told me so."¹⁸⁵

this event to us personally, when we interviewed him on October 24, 2003, in his hometown of Nagykanizsa.

¹⁸⁴ KÖLLEY, *Értetek és miattatok*, pp. 103-104.

¹⁸⁵ Reminiscences of Mrs. Sándor Csipi, née Gizella Czimmer, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, p. 97.

In light of the above it is evident that following their return the former Gulag prisoners were officially chastised, given a few forints — from five to thirty, depending on the year and circumstances of their return — and then sent home. There were many who upon reaching home found their houses occupied by strangers, with their own family members gone. During their absence, some parents and spouses died, while others went insane,¹⁸⁶ Still others were declared Germans [Volksdeutsche] and then summarily deported to West Germany. There were also those who found new partners, and even had children with their new spouses.

Those who were classified as Germans with German names often failed to find their parents, because during their absence they had been deported to Germany. This is what happened to Magdolna Fieder, who was only sixteen when taken to the Gulag. During her absence her parents were deported to West Germany, and upon her return she found strangers living in their family home. Only after thirteen years was she finally able to visit her parents in Stuttgart. Meanwhile, however, they all changed so much that they did not even recognize each other.¹⁸⁷ It was her fortune — or misfortune — that following her repatriation she had not been deported to Germany. Those who were classified as Germans were separated from the rest of the returnees, taken to Budapest, and from there shipped off to Germany.

According to the returnees, Hungarian authorities dealt more harshly with those of German nationality than their Russian captors. This is substantiated by Katalin Ambach, who described her reception in her homeland as follows: “Those whose relatives have been deported to Germany were given a very rough reception. They were called all sorts of names, like Swabian dogs.”¹⁸⁸ Notwithstanding this cruel reception, however, most of these so-called “Swabians” felt so much Hungarian that they wanted to

¹⁸⁶ This is what happened to Piroska Pásztor. Her mother went insane and did not recognize her, while her father died only a few months after her return. See the reminiscences of Mrs. László Homolya, née Piroska Pásztor, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, pp. 57-58.

¹⁸⁷ Reminiscences of Mrs. József Fajta, née Magdolna Fieder, in SZEBENI, *Merre van hazám*, pp. 228-229.

¹⁸⁸ Reminiscences of Katalin Ambach, in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, p. 75.

be repatriated to their own villages. There were many among them, who after being deported to Germany, sneaked back to Hungary, facing considerable vicissitudes and hardships. They felt like strangers in Germany, and could not find their place among the Germans. They suffered from homesickness and nostalgia. Among the latter were Katalin T. and Margit R. from the village of Babarc. After being deported to Germany, they found their way back to Hungary. But back home they concealed their true identities for decades. Not even during the 1980s did they dare to reveal who they really were, because they still feared the possibility of deportation.¹⁸⁹

There were those among the returnees, who found a new wife, a new husband, or perhaps also new children in their family. This was the direct result of the absence of communication between the Gulag prisoners and their families. The deportees had not been able to correspond with their families for many years. Thus, with the passing of years — especially in the case of the convicted political prisoners who spent ten or more years in the Gulag — their wives or husbands presumed them dead. After a number of years they wanted some security, some order in their lives. Thus, as summarized by János Rózsás: “The lonely wife with several small children eventually bound her life to a step parent. After three, four or perhaps five years, no one could blame her for this. But then the husband, who had been declared dead, suddenly appeared! As it turned out, both marriages were legal. According to the law it was the wife who now had to decide with whom she wanted to spend the rest of her life. But it was usually the returned prisoner who solved the problem: He left and disappeared from the life of the family. His children were already older, while those from the second marriage younger... Most of them left the country in 1956.”¹⁹⁰

Another problem faced by the surviving Gulag prisoners was that most of them came home with various illnesses, or without

¹⁸⁹ Reminiscences of Katalin T. and Margit R., in FÜZES, *Modern rabszolgaság*, pp. 76-87.

¹⁹⁰ JÁNOS RÓZSÁS, “A volt Gulág rabok sorsa hazatérésük után,” pp. 2-3. Rózsás also described these developments to us personally, when we interviewed him on October 24, 2003.

a limb or two. They received no help from Hungarian communist authorities. And if they did, it was so minimal that they could barely survive on it.

There is the case of Mrs. András Balak, née Mária Kocsis, who lost one of her legs above her knee in a mine accident in the Donets region. Upon returning home in November 1947 she was called into the mayor's office in the town of Szerencs so that they can assess the level of her disability. They decided that she was 95% disabled. When she inquired why she was not judged to be 100% invalid, they responded with the question: "Then how would we categorize someone who lost both of her legs?"¹⁹¹

In fact, it was even difficult for them to secure and hold on to a job. They were viewed and treated as dangerous criminals. In many instances their only solution was to leave their native village or town, relocate to a major city, and then try to conceal their past and their identity.

Above and beyond this, however, the worse thing from a psychological point of view was that they were not allowed to speak about their horrendous experiences. They had to keep everything to themselves. They were even denied the possibility of a spiritual catharsis that would have occurred had they been permitted to discuss their sufferings with their family members, their friends, and the community at large. They lived in constant fear of being discovered, and they had to suffer the contempt and scorn of their homeland, which had been the object of their dreams during their captivity. As mentioned above, this was the reason why most of them married only among themselves. They found mutual understanding in such unions, because of their similar sufferings and shared memories.

Some Conclusions

The tormented life and often excruciating death of the former Gulag prisoners — be they malenky roboters or political prisoners

¹⁹¹ MÁRIA KORMOS, *A végtelen foglyai. Magyar nők szovjet rabságban, 1945-1947* [Prisoners of Endlessness. Hungarian Women in Soviet Captivity, 1945-1947] (Budapest: Kairosz Kiadó, 2001), pp. 45-46. See also the section entitled: "Hadifoglyok csalódásai" [Disappointments of Prisoners of War], in *ibid.* pp. 50-53.

¹⁹² MICHAELS, "The Gulag," Internet version, p. 1.

— constitutes an important, but mostly forgotten chapter in the history of humanity. This is a topic that is little known by the average citizen — be he a Hungarian or a member of another nation. Therefore, this topic needs to be researched, written about, and taught to people within and outside the borders of Hungary, as well as in all countries around the world.

It is true that since the collapse of communism in 1989, an increasing number of publications and documentaries have appeared on the Gulag. But compared to the coverage of the other great tragedy of the twentieth century — the Jewish Holocaust — people still know very little about the history of the Soviet Gulag and of its tens of millions of prisoners who lived, suffered, and died in the slave labor camps of Leninist and Stalinist Russia. In point of fact, we may even conclude that we have hardly made any progress in our understanding of this institution of mass extermination since 1944, when US Vice President Henry Wallace visited one of the worst and most brutal of the Soviet penal camps in Magadan, and returned to the West “lauding its sadistic commander, Ivan Nikishov, and describing Magadan as ‘idyllic’.”¹⁹² Like many other intellectuals and politicians of that period — including the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw — Wallace was also blinded by his mistaken adoration of “Uncle Joe,” otherwise known as Joseph Stalin.

It is our hope that with time ignorance about this cruel institution will gradually disappear, and that it will be replaced by a consciousness that equals the consciousness of the Jewish Holocaust. We anticipate that during the next few years we will be able to contribute to knowledge about this inhuman institution. We plan to write about it both in Hungarian and in English, so that the results of our research will reach people all around the world.
