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Regional Oral History Office

Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera

RECOLLECTIONS OF SOVIET LABOR CAMPS, 1949-1955

An Interview Conducted by
Richard A. Pierce

Copy Number

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Miklos Nagy
Grand Canyon - Summer 1958



Istvan Borbas (left), Miklos Nagy



Left to right: Istvan Borbas, Kazis
(Kasimir) Zilenas, Miklos Nagy

Resheti, Krasnoyarsk region (Central Siberia)

July 1955

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PREFACE

California-Russian Emigre Series

The following interview is one of a series of interviews with Russian emigres sponsored by the Center for Slavic and East European Studies and produced by the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library.

Although numerically a small proportion of the population, the Russian-Americans have for a long time been a conspicuous and picturesque element in the cosmopolitan make-up of the San Francisco Bay Area. Some came here prior to the Russian Revolution, but the majority were refugees from the Revolution of 1917 who came to California through Siberia and the Orient. Recognizing the historical value of preserving the reminiscences of these Russian refugees, in the spring of 1958 Dr. Richard A. Pierce, author of Russian Central Asia, 1867-1917, (U.C. Press, Spring 1960) then a research historian at the University working on the history of the Communist Party in Central Asia, made the following proposal to Professor Charles Jelavich, chairman of the Center for Slavic Studies:

I would like to start on the Berkeley campus, under the auspices of the Center of Slavic Studies, an oral history project to collect and preserve the recollections of members of the Russian colony of the Bay Region. We have in this area the second largest community of Russian refugees in the U. S., some 30,000 in San Francisco alone. These represent an invaluable and up to now almost entirely neglected source of historical information concerning life in Russia before 1917, the February and October Revolutions, the Civil War of 1918-1921, the Allied intervention in Siberia, the Soviet period, of the exile communities of Harbin, Shanghai, Prague, Paris, San Francisco, etc., and of the phases in the integration of this minority into American life.

The proposed series of tape-recorded interviews, as a part of the Regional Oral History Office of the University of California Library, was begun in September 1958 under the direction of Professor Jelavich and with the assistance of Professor Nicholas V. Riasanovsky of the Department of History.

At that time Dr. Pierce conducted three interviews and arranged for a fourth. Each interview lasted several recording sessions, was transcribed and if necessary translated, edited by the interviewer and the interviewee, and then typed and bound. In addition he began assembling papers to document

the California-Russian emigres. In 1959 Dr. Pierce left to become Assistant Professor of Slavic History at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, but returned in the summers to continue his research in recent Russian history.

In 1966 a second unit of the series was undertaken by Boris Raymond, who conducted three interviews, prepared a bibliography of Russian emigre materials in California, and arranged for the establishment of the California-Russian Emigre Collection in The Bancroft Library. He subsequently left to become Assistant Director of the University of Manitoba Libraries in Winnipeg, Canada, but returned in 1970 to conduct one more interview.

A third unit of the series was authorized in the spring of 1969 by Professor Gregory Grossman, chairman of the Center for Slavic and East European Studies, with Professor Nicholas Riasanovsky serving as chairman of the committee in charge of the series. The unit included three interviews conducted by Richard Pierce, one by Boris Raymond, and the continuing collection of papers for the California-Russian Emigre Collection. A listing of all interviews done under the series follows.

This series is part of the program of the Regional Oral History Office to tape record the autobiographies of persons who have contributed significantly to the development of California and the west. The Office is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, director of The Bancroft Library.

Willa K. Baum, Head
Regional Oral History Office

15 April 1971
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INTRODUCTION

Miklos Nagy-Talavera, a Hungarian emigre, survived the infamous Nazi death camp of Auschwitz only to be seized by the Soviet secret police in Vienna in 1949, tried for espionage and sentenced to 25 years at hard labor. During the next seven years, he traveled from one end of the Soviet Union to the other, from the western border to the Pacific, and from the Arctic to Central Asia, amidst unremitting hardship and privation, until he was released under a post-Stalin amnesty granted foreign prisoners. To survive this ordeal required unusual endurance, and an indomitable spirit. His vivid description of the infamous regime of the Soviet slave labor camps gives a side of Soviet life that is little known in the West--certainly unmentioned in any Intourist brochure--and scarcely spoken of in the U.S.S.R. to this day.

The account was tape-recorded in five interviews during the summer of 1958, in my apartment in Berkeley. At the time I had hoped to include the series with several other accounts of emigres from Russia which I was to do for the Regional Oral History Project of the University of California Library, but a rule-bound administrator in one of the higher echelons of the Library saw fit to strike this series from the list, evidently on grounds that Mr. Nagy was not a Russian.

I considered compiling the interviews in a book, but other commitments forced both Mr. Nagy and me to leave off the enterprise, and the tapes remained unedited until now. During that time various memoirs and analyses of the Soviet labor camps have been published, but this is a vast and complex part of Soviet life and this account will be found valuable for facts not to be found elsewhere, and for the narrator's own particular point of view. In order that this account may be preserved and available for use by interested researchers, I am turning it over, with the narrator's consent, to the Oral History Project.

At the time the interviews were made, the narrator was still only three years away from camp life. He spared precious time from studies, as he was taking, with special

permission, to expedite completion of requirements for the B.A. degree, an unheard-of 28 course units (15 is considered a normal load). He obtained the B.A., and the M.A., and Ph.D. followed. His dissertation has been published and he has been teaching Russian history for the past several years in the Department of History of Chico State College, Chico, California

Richard A. Pierce
Professor of History

May 1971
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

I EARLY YEARS

Nagy: I was born in Budapest, Hungary, on February 14, 1929. My parents had a furniture factory and three big department stores where they sold furniture made in the factory. Originally we were a land-owning family in Transylvania, but after World War I that region came under Romanian rule and because my parents had very strong Hungarian feeling and the Romanian agrarian reform and other administrative measures caused us much trouble, they decided to move to what was left of Hungary. The furniture business was very prosperous at this time, so we quickly expanded and after a few years became very well known not only in Hungary but in surrounding countries as well.

I received the education which was usual in our class; it meant that although we were not aristocrats I received an education corresponding to the aristocratic classes. At the age of two I had my German fraulein, a sort of governess; when I was six she was replaced by a French madame; when I was ten years old, just at the beginning of the war, we brought an English governess educated at Oxford. So, by the time I was fourteen I spoke the three most important European languages.

My youth was passed in the manner usual in our class. In the spring my parents went to the Riviera and then to Grado on the Mediterranean, in Italy, the Adriatic Sea, etc. At Easter they came home and picked us up with my fraulein. The factory ran itself; it didn't require too much attention from my parents; it was well advertised and an automatic thing. In the summer we had long tours; in autumn we went hunting on the old estate--or at least on what was left of it after the agrarian reform--in the park or hunting

Nagy: ground around the castle. In the winter came the ski season. It was the same, one year after another, the great summer tours, the spring tours, all over Europe. Even though I was only a child, I remember quite a bit of it.

I went with my parents sometimes, and sometimes with my aunt if my parents wanted to go separately, sometimes with my educator or my governess. Part of the family lived in Romania because they were married there to a Romanian officer, to the great desolation of the Hungarian part of the family.

World War II

Nagy: Then came World War II. Naturally travel was already restricted. There came the first minor restrictions on the Jews; we were not affected by it.

My family are Sephardic or Spanish Jews. They came to Hungary after the expulsion from Spain in the 16th century, so we belong to the really old, old families in Hungary, many in military service, and these old families were more or less respected.

But in 1944, when at 14 I was in the fourth year gymnasium, the Hungarian government made a very ill-considered attempt to conclude a truce with the allies. The Hungarian government was full of spies, Nazi sympathizers, Fascists who denounced the armistice in preparation to the Germans. Hitler occupied the country overnight with his army in the style of the 1956 crushing of the Hungarian revolt by the Russians, overthrew the government and put in power a marionette puppet quisling government which was completely subservient to the Germans, and delivered all the Jews without any restriction or precaution in the Nuremberg fashion. When you couldn't prove four Christian grandparents then you had to wear the yellow star, and soon, although they were very much pressed, the deportations began also. The allied armies were approaching and they wanted to finish this glorious task before the allies arrived. Out of 800,000 Hungarian Jews they succeeded in doing away with 631,000.

Nagy: My parents were hiding with one of their Christian employees, and I was also with them, but because my parents were very well known in Budapest I had to go out to buy and fetch food for them, so they wouldn't have to go out. But unfortunately I was also very well known because once in July 1944 in the market they came to ask for my documents. I showed them the false documents, but it didn't help. They told me my name, and I was taken in a police car and immediately, without further question, added to the transport of Jews prepared for deportation, and was sent to Auschwitz/Birkenau.

At Auschwitz/Birkenau

Nagy: In Auschwitz I was relatively lucky, because Dr. Mengele, the chief physician, somehow took pity on me and got me a better job in the camp. I spoke German perfectly and this helped because he was a Transylvanian, and I was also. Who knows what his motives were? But as a matter of fact I got a relatively better and easier job and good food. But naturally I had to witness the whole thing that was going on in Auschwitz, the work of the gas chambers. I was working in Krema-3, that is, Crematorium No. 3.

Then in January 1945, after opening the Vistula offensive, the Russians approached Auschwitz. We were evacuated just before their arrival. They were already shelling the camp with artillery. And then I left Dr. Mengele and was in the death march to Ratibor, Lower Silesia, the last line of the railroad where the Germans could organize any transport at all. There we were put in wagons, and there followed four days with no food at all, with very low temperatures, in which we were transported to Austria, and then unloaded. There fortunately the people with whom I had been working in the camp found me.

In Austria, in the spring of 1945, there was complete disintegration. I was already only nominally in the prison camp because we were just overnight in it. My job was to go around the surrounding countryside with the Germans and to load and unload trucks. They were saving the furniture of the SS officers

Nagy: belonging to the different camp administrations, in territories that were endangered by the approach of the Russian and the American troops. They wanted to organize a last resistance somewhere in central Germany, in the Alps, but nothing came of it. In doing this job I was one day in the Elbe line, on the western front, and would hear the American guns, and the next day I would be on the Hungarian front area and would hear the Russian guns. On April 16 I was in Berlin for the last time when the Russian heavy artillery began to shell the city. It was very successful.

And then in 1945, on April 29, Munich fell, and then the two SS people told me I should try to get out from the camp, because I must expect that before the collapse the Germans might make a last attempt to exterminate everybody and I would not escape. This was in Ebensee, Upper Austria. I should take refuge with one of their girl friends in Salzburg. So we ran to this grande dame, one of the lowest prostitutes on earth. But they were very nice to me; they were against the Nazis and they were hiding the boys. I was not so much in danger, but they were of military age and there were always military patrols. And so we waited. And finally after different things the happy day came when Patton's Third Army entered Salzburg and I was liberated. This was May 5, 1945.

Then I worked for the Americans for awhile as an interpreter, because of my English. It was hard to obtain a permit from the Russians to return to Hungary in the Russian zone.

Return to Hungary

Nagy: Finally I solved this by returning through Czechoslovakia, where the Russians had no authority at all, and from there entered Hungary, and nobody bothered me.

I saw my parents again. There was great happiness. They had already been under Russian rule since December when their district of Budapest fell. They lost quite a bit in the war, but there was

Nagy: freedom at this time in Hungary, and we could somehow start our work again. But then the Russians began operating through the Hungarian Communists, falsifying the free elections, splitting the opposition, making terroristic arrests, and fabricating show trials, charging with treason everybody who opposed them.

I became a member of an underground group. We contacted the United States military attache in Budapest, offered our services, and informed the U.S. of Russian troop movements of the organization of the secret police, economic tactics, and political measures.

Arrest and Trial by Smersh

Nagy: Ours was naturally the fate of every such group. In September, 1948, we were denounced, discovered and arrests began. I escaped for a while, because they began with others. When my best friend was arrested, I fled to Vienna. There I tried to hide, thinking that if I was not in my apartment, they would leave me alone and would not find me.

I registered at the University of Vienna and studied there for a while. Occasionally a Hungarian refugee came to me, asking aid, getting my confidence. I helped too many people. We were something like an island in the Russian zone, so everybody wanted to get out to the main American and British zone, which was a hundred miles away. It was very dangerous to leave Vienna and go through this hundred miles of Russian ruled territory.

I helped many people through. Through my connections, I recommended them to the Americans, and they left via the Mozart Express, a train which the Russians couldn't control. I helped so many to do that that I was not suspicious when someone came to ask my help. But I should have been because this man was a Russian agent. He made an appointment with me to pick him up with his family in a cafe. When we stepped out from the cafe, the Russians kidnapped me. Three people stepped out of a car at a gate and surrounded me. They overpowered me and kidnapped me in the center of Vienna on January 27, 1949.

Nagy: Then I was brought to Baden, where the investigation began, conducted by Smersh.

Pierce: What was Smersh?

Nagy: This was the war-time Smert Shpionam, the counter intelligence agency of the Russians. I know, because I was arrested by the Smersh and tried by Smersh. No. 28,118, this was the group that investigated, examined, and tried me.

Pierce: How did that time go?

Nagy: It was a very bad period. Hopelessly bad.

Pierce: What were the means of extracting information?

Nagy: Most varied--threatening, threatening harm to family members, promising you everything, trying to promise you that they will use you as a counterspy against the Americans. Naturally they were lying! I was too old for this sort of thing.

They try to tell you that if you prove your loyalty then you are a very valuable man and then they will use you, but the idea above all is to get you to confess, and when you do, you are lost.

You can't cash the check that they give you. They use any method, torture, etc. They always observe you a bit before by a whole committee of officers, a week or two weeks if necessary.

They try to be master psychologists, but the main trouble is that, in general, they don't understand European psychology too well. They are used to Soviet psychology. But if they see that the case is more important they get specialists in European psychology too; they get everybody who can be of use in this.

A committee of officers observes this and what category you are in and then you return and get the investigation fitting to you. The more important you are, the more carefully it is selected. They used very good methods, 59 days and nights of torture. I still have scars from this torture--burns. They used every trick they had on me. They wanted more names. I was then 18.

Nagy:

Then I was handed back to the Hungarian secret police for a little more treatment. To impress me with what they wanted, they informed me that my mother and father had been arrested and kicked out of their apartment.

The prison in Baden was very primitive, but very carefully done, in a former sanatorium-hotel, with a basement. Upstairs were the investigation cells with the officers, and they put you down in the basement when the examination was over. Very poor these fellows, miserable.

The cells were of various sizes, but always overflowing. Regardless of how big or small they were, there were always more people than there were supposed to be.

The trial was a farce. It was in an ordinary room. The windows opened on the street and you could see the streetcar going to Vienna, reaching the American and British sector, and standing by the streetcar line were beautiful girls in skirts and the boys in Austrian costumes. And it was spring and I knew that I would go to Siberia and these girls were going to Vienna. I felt very sad and worse, when I notified the guards that I was hungry, I got a wiener.

In the meantime the judges on the tribunal were sitting down. The table was covered with red cloth and on the wall were pictures of Kalinin, Stalin and Lenin and some slogans about Soviet justice. Two guards with machine pistols were standing in the room at all times, and I was in the box. And this box where the prisoner had to be was in fact the most horrible. There were things written on it in four languages, in German "Gott hilft mir" and "Gott steh mir bei," because they were giving death sentences here also, and in Rumanian and Hungarian, "Goodbye, my mother, forever," etc. They should have put it in a museum.

The trial begins. My trial was something of a mess because I first asked that they should tell if Hungary was a sovereign country and why I should be tried here instead of by the authorities of my own country.

Nagy: "We know why!" was the answer.

"But I have also the right to know it!"

"We know why. Be quiet! We have the right to try you!"

But I still didn't believe them. And then they took out the receipt by which they had handed me over to the Russians, giving the Soviet Union the right to investigate and to punish me. So this part was over.

And the next didn't take long. I knew very well what my sentence would be, and the rest was only hypocrisy, going over the material. And then the judges went out, supposedly to confer, but everything was planned in advance. They went out to eat, and when they came back, this swine had one part of his mouth still covered with fat, and another judge had a bag of cherries--the first ones, I don't know how they got them but anyhow the Red Army got it. So there they were eating cherries. They asked me if I regretted anything I had done. I said I regretted only what this had done to my parents, and told them, "If you have any conscience, then sentence me with conscience, and if you don't have any, then sentence me without conscience."

And that was all. They didn't make a fuss about it particularly, arguing with me. And they sentenced me to 25 years of slave labor.

Pierce: What was the indictment?

Nagy: Helping the Americans was the main charge. I was sentenced on Paragraph 58, Article 6.

Then I was taken back to a special cell until my sentence could be carried out. They cannot mix people who are sentenced with those who are not yet sentenced. Naturally this was a nice aftermath. I had made it up with my former people in the cell that if I get ten years I remain silent; if I get 15 years I cough so, and if I get 20 years, so, and if I get 25 years I would have a storm of coughs. So when I went back to get my clothes I couldn't speak but I could do this. So I did. But one of the people had told them all these secrets, a rotten Hungarian gypsy, and they knew very well what this coughing meant.

An NKVD Prestige Operation

Nagy:

An incident during my stay at Baden may illustrate how the NKVD, the great materialist, which does almost everything for material interests, sometimes also acts purely for prestige.

Thus, in 1949, in the prison at Baden we had just heard that the North Atlantic Treaty had been signed. Newly arrested people always brought such news in, because we couldn't get any news...

So afterward the door flew open in our room, because it was always a little dark (there was only one window) and a young fellow was in the usual way kicked in. And he stood there, naturally coming in from the light. His eyes didn't get immediately used to the darkness but after a while he began to tell his story. He had American type clothing, naturally with no tie or shoelaces and buttons cut off and taken away. You can always tell them--the shoes, shirts, etc. And he looked around. We were all foreigners, including myself.

"Does someone speak Russian? (Kto to govorit po-russkii?)" Silence.

I spoke a little Russian, but I didn't want him to know that I did.

Then, "Does anyone speak Spanish? (....habla espanol?)" Again silence.

Finally, "Who speaks English?" So then I said, "I do."

And he sat down and told the following story. He was evacuated by the Germans from Rostov during the war, for slave labor, when the Nazi took the people away. He came to Dortmund, in Germany, worked there, went through the usual privations. He found out that his mother and father had been arrested in Russia. They wanted to repatriate him to Russia. He got advice pro and con, and finally refused. And then, there were some rich Russian emigrant families in South America who were looking for Russian children in these camps. And accidentally a rich Russian family from Venezuela took him under their wing, brought him

Nagy: to Venezuela, and educated him like their son; he learned Spanish in school. They were very rich people, with a large estate, and the boy had a grand future before him.

Then came the turning point. A big limousine stopped before the hacienda. "We are from the Soviet consulate in Caracas." They came in, very pleasant. "You have a little compatriot here; we have just brought him some Soviet literature." Some journals, periodicals, etc. "So that he won't forget his fatherland." And they went on their way. What kind people they seemed. And they came again, in a week or a month; they didn't do it very soon; they were tactful, so as not to seem provoking or tiresome. "And how is our little countryman?"

The Russians are great patriots, so they stressed the great achievements that were being made in the Soviet Union. Everything was wonderful, rising from the ruins, everything was being built up. "We are now the strongest country in the world." And everyone was joining the camp of socialism--the Romanians, the Poles, the Hungarians, even in China the victory of socialism was assured. Again they brought newspapers, and in the newspapers and periodicals everything was so beautiful. And they went away.

After two months they came again. "We have some beautiful films. If you come in to Caracas we shall be very happy to see you in the building of the consulate; we shall project the pictures for you. You shouldn't forget that you are a Russian." This was the main operation, you see, knowing very well that the Russians are very proud to be Russians. You shouldn't forget that you are a Russian and that the fatherland does not forget you, either.

And really the child became a little bit tempted, and the next time they went into Caracas they went to the Soviet representation. (He was at this time about 20 or 21; he had been taken away from Russia in about 1942.)

He looked at the pictures, and came home, and then after a couple of months they were prepared for the next step. "Well, we have a wonderful job for you. You speak English, Spanish and Russian, and German.

Nagy: You will be an interpreter, a wonderful job with 6,000 rubles monthly, in one of the international hotels in Moscow. You will have free food, a wonderful room, international atmosphere, allowances, etc. You shouldn't miss this opportunity, think it over."

The boy went home, and he began simply to think about it, and to discuss it with his stepparents. The stepparents warned him, "You fool, you will regret it a thousand times, don't go anywhere near them. There is an air of ruin around this building (the consulate). You don't know them; you lived there only as a child; you couldn't see things as they really were!"

Then they came again, and he visited them again; he was welcomed with open arms, and visited them more and more. And finally, he took the offer. They paid his way, everything, to go back to the Soviet Union to get the wonderful job. Six thousand rubles a month as an international interpreter in one of the great Moscow hotels.

So he took the plane. The stepfather was not even speaking to him, but his stepmother was crying, taking him out to the airport. He took the plane from Caracas to another city. At the airport he met two other adopted boys, one from Cuba and one from the United States. They made the flight, everything in a very gay mood--Casablanca, Algiers, Rome, to Milan. In Milan airport a Soviet consul accepted them, because the next stop was the Soviet airfield at Baden, in Austria. They were greeted warmly. "You are on your way to the fatherland!" They were given a bottle of vodka, and then boarded a plane provided by the Russian military mission from Rome for Baden. They landed. One of them said, "See the soldiers in blue uniforms (the MGB troops). What are they doing here? Why aren't there regular troops?"

When the airplane set down, they got out with broad smiles, ready to greet their compatriots. But the compatriots were standing like statues, with tommy guns in their hands. Then when they came out from the planes they began to smoke, they were ordered roughly: "Hands behind your backs! Throw away your cigarettes! It is forbidden to smoke! Where do you think you are?"

Nagy: "But tovarishchi!"

"Hands behind your backs!" And they were thrown into a black prison van without windows, for special prisoners, which was waiting for them, and a half hour later he landed in our cell, and was telling me the story.

Why did they get this special treatment? They were not American CIC or CIA representatives; they were not endangering the Soviet Union. The answer is prestige, to show that the NKVD could pick up anyone they wanted. One must understand their psychology. They are materialists, but sometimes they want to prove that they can pick up somebody, even in Venezuela, and he had come voluntarily. This was the biggest triumph of all.

This was in the prison at Baden. I don't know what happened to him after that. And his people in Venezuela heard nothing more from him, and probably concluded that he had a good living, and didn't write because he was not interested in contacts with capitalists.

II SIBERIA

Nagy: From Baden we went to Neunkirchen to the transport prison, from May 10 to August 23, 1949. Every three months a transport of 4-500 was leaving.

In Neunkirchen there was much trouble; they struck. They suppressed it; there were some traitors. The food was bad, they refused once to eat, they made a strike.

Pierce: How much could you talk?

Nagy: Everyone would tell his whole roman--it gets on your nerves; I never did it, they tell everything. They lie, adventurers, there is much trash gathering there.

Then the transport--Italian cars, remade. Doors in the middle, European fashion. Prisoners were put into the two ends of the car. The doors were always kept open. You could see only soldiers--like an innocent military transport. Because they were separated from the prisoners by barbed wire.

There were 22 prisoners on each end, separated from the center compartment by barbed wire, or iron bars. We were not allowed to speak, and we were so pressed together that we had to sign with our hands, from one side to the other that we were turning over. And miserable food. Beaten up terribly. This lasted for nine days.

We were quickly taken through Austria and Hungary but in Chop, on the border station we waited eight days till we got cars with broad rails. This was already on Soviet soil. The door was open and a person could stand before the car and see some soldiers

Nagy: and think this was an innocent Russian military transport. Camouflaged unbelievably.

Once over the border, we were unloaded into Stolypinskie vagony and taken to Lemberg (L'vov). The Stolypinskie type are only for short transportation.

At Lemberg we were unloaded into regular railroad cars, with watch towers built on them and telephone lines and soldiers running on the tops. Control every few miles, so they don't try to open the floor. From Lemberg I was taken to Siberia.

I went there in the usual prison transport, in the usual crude way, and usual people dying during the transport. There were the usual remarks when we complained that they should not deal out such treatment to valuable state property such as cattle. The most polite remark was usually "Gde rubliat les' letaet shchepki," When they cut the forest, branches are breaking. There was the usual transportation--dogs and with hammers and the beatings, and swill water that we got to drink.

Camp Life

Nagy: Central Siberia was a most interesting area. Completely restricted; off limits even to Soviet citizens. Perhaps it is not open even today, with completion of the Taishet-Lena railroad. I built it. It goes through Kirensk to the Lena R.

Where there are no railroads, everything is transported on the rivers. Now that they have a railroad, they bring things there, then load them on ships and they are brought to Yakutsk and the Arctic. It is a very important area. There are hidden military deposits and stores in the jungle (taiga). Most of their atomic experiments are performed there.

That was in 1950, but I was once again in that area, in 1955, after the revolt at Dzhezkazgan-Kingir. This is what I would like to point out to some dumb Americans--what a change had taken place. I didn't recognize it when I went back, after five or six years. It was unimaginable what they had done there, and the

Nagy: whole Siberian railroad had changed in the years between. Rebuilt new. Incredibly built. The railroad was incredibly modernized, with everything automatic and electrified. When the new power stations, which they are building everywhere, are ready--Angara and Irkutsk, OB & Irtysh & Novosibirsk & Omsk--they want to electrify the whole Trans-Siberian railroad.

Transport in Russia is mostly by rivers and railroads. Road transport is very poor. There are good roads only around cities. (Paved streets, except in large thoroughfares in main cities, mostly end at the Urals.) But the railroads are wonderful.

We stayed first in a couple of camps on this mystery railroad between Taishet, Bratsk, Kirensk and Ust-Kut--all along the railroad. I was rather often thrown from one camp to another because I refused to work and nobody wanted to keep such good material. When there was a transport possibility the commander was very happy to get rid of me. And I was not against it because when we came to a new camp, we could always try out new tricks against work that they didn't know yet.

Anyhow every day it was a frightful existence. It was something terrible.

Camps were alike and unlike. Maybe camp areas were alike; it depended on what work was done there. It depended on the person of the commander very much; he could improve a lot or he could make it a lot worse. It made a terrific difference if he was a good man, an indifferent man, or an evil fellow. If he was a good man, he could make life more or less tolerable and with not such a great percentage of fatalities. Naturally he couldn't cure basic things, as for instance if Moscow was not providing medicines, if Moscow gave for instance instructions that invalids were not to be cured in hospitals, only people who are worthwhile because they can work.

Someone could die of TB without a drop of penicillin or streptomycin. It was out of fashion till 1955. In whole TB colonies, of 250 people 80 might have an open form of TB, spitting blood and everything, and not a gram of streptomycin or penicillin. If someone got it from home in parcels,

Nagy: then they gave it. Those who didn't get it were dropping dead.

But when it was an evil commander he sent these open forms of TB out to work. That he should have a big percentage at work. They found out that TB is not an illness.

"Why shouldn't you work in the fresh air?"
(A ty na vozdukh ne rabota li?)

But in the fresh air there should be entirely different conditions; you should have a choice of work, entirely different food, entirely different medicine and care.

The camp commander was called Grazhdanin nachal'nik. But every little warden, every little nadziratel' liked to call himself grazhdanin nachal'nik.

The camp commander, however, did not have such great power as the oper-upolnomocheny', the political officer. The camp commander couldn't do anything without the signature of the political officer on the document. So the real power, even when the commander was a major or a colonel of the MVD and the political officer was only a lieutenant, the final work was his in everything, in liberation from work, in putting somebody in the kitchen to work, in putting someone in the medical sanchas to work, or making someone a brigadier, or in putting someone in the camp prison (izoliator). Everything lay with him, sanctified, and the commander couldn't change it.

This changed somewhat after the destalinization, but not very much. The political officer was still an important personality.

And with the third type of commander, the indifferent ones, then the criminals took over. This was the most disgusting of the whole situation, the criminal rule. Because the commander was interested mainly in getting the percentage of work, and that people did not escape. As a matter of fact the whole administration was interested in this. That was all. But what went on inside the camp in the so-called zona in the lager, about that they did not care, and the criminals took over completely and they established

Nagy: such a regime there that I shall never forget for the rest of my life.

This was the worst of the whole experience. We always called it the second punishment (vtoroi nakazanie). Well just concerning the Russian criminology, the criminal mir, a special session is worthwhile for the west doesn't know anything about it. It is a special caste. They call themselves urki, vory (thieves). They have connections with free thieves and murderers and they are in one group, in and outside.

Their great patron was Stalin, who was also something like a half criminal element in his youth, and so he had sympathy for this element and he didn't allow any strict or drastic measures to be taken against them. While he lived any order of the MVD or ministry of justice was impotent against them because Stalin was their patron. To him a murderer or a vor could have a clear conscience, but a capitalist or bourgeois element could not, for the former committed a crime against only one person, but the latter a political crime against 200,000,000.

With such sophisticated theories this rabble established themselves as somehow proud, and when political prisoners arrived in criminal camps-- sometimes there were only criminals--they greeted us with tyrki--tools used for breaking stones--and loma--breaking irons--and they wanted to kill us, shouting that the Fascists are coming--fascists such as myself, a Jewish fascist.

And that become worse because of anti-Semitism. They made our life impossible in general. They were murdering each other, causing fights every day, they were for anti-discipline, homosexuality, whatever you want. Homosexual raping of young boys or anything. They had no taste, compunction, or feeling of decency at all.

It was not unusual to have sexual intercourse in the middle of the barrack. Some people would be playing cards, some quarreling, some sleeping, and there on the side of the table on these koikis, these navy beds, two or three high, some people would be openly having sexual intercourse. Perhaps he would

Nagy: be drunk and couldn't get a climax, and you would hear the poor woman say, "Enough already, how much can you?" (Nu ay Sasha ne khvatit, naskol'ko mozhno?) And he: "Shut up bitch!" (Molchi suka! Molchi pizda!), beating her and continuing his efforts. Such things were going on, and this was nothing.

But the women were no better, for I get disgusted even today when I think of what they were doing. They were worse than the men. Because women were, for instance, raping men. This was the atmosphere. And then fights among nationalities. The MVD on the principle of divida et impera used with pleasure everything possible to make fights.

And inside this thief caste there are two castes, the vors and the sukas. The thieves (vors), are remaining thieves, and the sukas (bitches) surrender to the commander and cooperate. As a rule when these people see each other they kill immediately. Because if a suka does not kill a vor when he has the chance, the other sukas will kill him for letting the other live. When transports arrive they are divided strictly between suka camps and vor camps, for you cannot keep them together--it's a mutual massacre. Sometimes a transport arrives and as they know each other the suka may see a vor so he says "I don't go in this camp." The commander doesn't let him come in the camp, but lets him wait outside till the next train comes, and then sends him to a thief camp. Same thing when a suka arrives in a thief camp.

It was something unbelievable, and it was remarkable that the high command tolerated such circumstances. More than 15,000,000 slave workers all over the USSR, and 10,000 camps, and it was everywhere the same. And the guards had very good relations with these murderers and criminals.

And when the criminals came in--this was the most remarkable--they took away immediately from the other prisoners the good clothing, good food, etc. If someone got a parcel it was only his if the nadziratel' gave it to him at the gate. Inside it was immediately taken from him. And they knew such circumstances. Criminals began in criminal camps to make money. They simply took away half of what you had, saying "It was owed to us." (polozhenoi u nas.) And when we protested it was hopeless; they beat you

Nagy: to death, or they stifled you, urinated in your mouth...it was hopeless.

The commanders knew about it but they were powerless. They were not interested because they made a very good business with the criminals. The clothes of the prisoners were sold for high prices outside because in the Soviet Union there is an unimaginable shortage of clothes. Naturally the high commander took part of what they could make for it outside, and then they smuggled in exchange vodka, better food or anything that they wanted.

Pierce: Was it usual to have a mixture of men and women prisoners?

Nagy: Not everywhere. In the political camps they were not mixed at all, but they were in the criminal camps. In the so-called "other" camps, special closed political camps (osobenyvi zakrytie rezhimami lageriami), where I was at first, there was none of that kind of mixing. They could come together in hospitals, or at work, or in persylkas in the transportation camps.

Pierce: Were children born in the camps?

Nagy: Sure, and how! And this was the real tragedy--I witnessed such cases. Because they left the child with the mother for approximately six or seven months. Then after a period prescribed by law it would be separated from the mother and taken to a detskii sad, or nursery. Then you can imagine what a fight there was with the mother. Sometimes all the women got together and drove out the guards, with hot irons and brooms and poured urine and fecalia on them--this was the solemn reception--but finally naturally the guards got them because they held back food and the mother couldn't give milk for the child and that was all.

But it is a long story and I could give many such pictures of it. It is a special world. If you can imagine, seven or eight percent of the Soviet population was living in such circumstances. It would be very strange if a similar percentage of the United States population would be sitting in camps. It is remarkable that the free world doesn't know anything about this and not even enough. And it is

Nagy: so peculiar and so unique; you find nothing like it in any other penal system anywhere in the world.

Every criminal world, of course, has its own traditions, but that in Russia is unique because there they created it; they made crimes in order to get working power needed for the five year plan. People in the Soviet Union are not in jail but in camps, because the emphasis is not on punishment but on work.

For a time there were the special camp areas for the political prisoners, but after five years they were abolished. One of the so-called "other" camps was in Europe, in the so-called Mordovian republic, a second was the notorious Vorkuta, a third was Norilsk, a fourth was Kolyma, in the Arctic north in Magadan area, and the fifth was Karaganda. These were the centers, for to every such point belong 90 to 100 camps. A sixth was somewhere in the Altai region, and a seventh was Taishet. Then later they raised the number to 11. There was a camp in Kazan, another in Mongolia, in Central Asia, etc.

The katorzhan list--a special way of punishing from Tsarist times. Not only hard labor but a whole way of punishing which was introduced again during the war. They abandoned it in 1947. But what is the difference?

The tough life began in 1948. Then they began to pick out the political criminals. It was decided in Moscow. Not everyone with a political paragraph was picked out, only they supervised a certain commission, all the formuliars and the lichnoe delo, the ordinary crimes (prostye prestupleniia), and then they decided to pick it out and it was not too liberal? Many people with political crimes remained even after this spets kontingent rule, remained in ITL, the regular camps (ispravitel'nye trudovye lagerei), corrective labor camps, and many of the political prisoners, and harder criminals--those who had murdered eight or nine times--these people came over also, to make us happy there. Par. 59, point 3, attempted murder, and also not everyone, only those who were disturbing too much. There is a great consequence how they are doing things. The NKVD is the single organization that knows what it does.

- Nagy: (Of course it is no longer the NKVD but the MVD, but the memory lives on because of the trials that made it notorious, and everyone even today calls it the NDVD.)
- Pierce: What was the MGB?
- Nagy: The MGB was the main group, the former MKGB. The MGB officers came to spy on the MVD officers, and in every camp the MGB officers had their own sukas, denouncers, spies, and they were spying on the oper-upolnomocheny'. The officers, with their blue shoulder plates, came to the camps every two weeks to receive their special spies, and then the commander and the other prisoners and the political officer wondered what they would report about them.
- Pierce: What could these prisoner-spies report?
- Nagy: To denounce someone is a privilege in the Soviet Union not denied to the lowest criminal, or the lowest enemy of the party. This is holy, an inalienable right. It was really remarkable that criminals were spying on officers who were supposed to run the camp. It is even more remarkable than the fact that the political officers were doing business with the prisoners, with the murderers, etc. Selling for them what they were robbing in the camp. Crime takes uniform and is the state, as the Europeans state.
- Pierce: Did you ever see anyone of any prominence among the prisoners in the camps?
- Nagy: I met some of the Moscow doctors in the alleged doctors' plot. Then I met Kovaács Bela, the Hungarian peasant party leader who was kidnapped and accused and was later repatriated. He took part in the Hungarian Revolution as a minister of the government. I don't know what became of him later. He'd disappeared. I saw some generals, and some very prominent Jewish personalities.

I was together with only one of the Moscow doctors, Dr. K___. A very nice man, highly intelligent; he spoke French and German. A product of the tsarist St. P. Medical School. He told me very interesting things, of the new class, as he called it, of the dynasty of Kaganovich. His wife was

Nagy: a famous singer in the Bolshoi theater. Naturally she was immediately deported to Novosibirsk, and there she was in the opera theater when he was arrested. He told me about Shostakovich, and Khachaturian, Prokofief, Muradei, and all these musicians, because he belonged to one society and especially when the "cosmopolitan" thing came out, what a fright and horror there was. People were going around like living dead, frightened.

He told me a very long story, but I wouldn't like to state his name, because he was later released.

I know that people behind the Iron Curtain never refrain from using something when it gets in their hands. It was that way during the Hungarian revolt. LIFE magazine helped to bring about many deaths when they printed pictures of the lynching of secret policemen; it was a great sensation, they didn't cover the people's faces and afterward they were identified. I have read in a Hungarian newspaper how many got eight or ten years or hanging or strangulation.

I was with many people--thousands--who had sat since 1935, 1936, 1937, even 1930, all Trotskyists, when the great purges began. They told me quite a bit, and many of them and most of the political prisoners in the Soviet Union come from the Ukr and Lith and Esthonia, Latvia and Central Asia. Not so many Russians are against the regime; it is seldom that you see Russians among the politicals. They are mainly there on the criminal paragraphs. The majority who are on criminal paragraphs are Russians.

Most of the Russians were there for wartime offenses, when they deserted by the mass defection of the Red Army. The Russians have a special way of sentencing people. You could fall in German hands as wounded, unable to retreat and they sentenced you because you were taken prisoner. They often sentenced not individuals, but whole units, looking at maps and the history of the war and noting especially cowardly behavior in one area, or lack of resistance. They would sentence everybody who was in the unit, not with relation as to whether the individual was responsible, but by unit. This seems strange, but there is nothing special about it in a country which

Nagy: disregards individuality. You disobeyed the order of your commander and surrendered to the Germans, so you and your entire unit got 25 years.

The people repatriated after the war were treated likewise. They were left alone one and one-half or two years and then they were picked up almost entirely. Armenians who returned home from the West, Russian emigres from Shanghai. It is a very sad story. Sometimes they brought along their wives who were not even Russian citizens, who did not speak a word of Russian, and they left them with young children.

Popov-Vy'rodov, for instance, a Russian aristocrat from Paris, left young children and his French wife in a kolkhos in the Kuban. She was not even allowed to write him in that camp. He was very ill. I do not know what became of him. Many people died.

Those Red Army men who had been prisoners of the Germans, if sentenced before the death penalty was outlawed in 1947, got ten years. Afterwards they got 25 years.

Most of the Vlassov people were shot in 1945, and the rest were all sentenced. Those who escaped repatriation should be very happy--they don't know what they missed.

Pierce: Did you work on any airfields in Siberia?

Nagy: I don't know of many of them. In general I can state that the airbases there are very modern, along with their weather stations all over the Arctic and Kamchatka. They have there simply wonderful things, and they are completely ready and able to strike at any moment. Since my departure these bases have undoubtedly become even better, because they are constantly building them up. And even then it was remarkable what they had done.

Pierce: What did they do about winter conditions?

Nagy: The hangars are mostly underground. They lift up the planes, only the air strip is on the surface. And they are tremendous installations. For this there is no limit of money. They are spending as much as necessary. Most important, it is not easy to steal from the buildings, for everything is under

Nagy: military rule, and stealing from the installations is regarded as treasonable and you can be shot.

But they do steal of course, though not so much. On an average building site 25% of the material is already considered in advance as being lost by theft. Officially, but they steal a lot more. They give out the material three or four times, but everything melts away like snow. Because nobody is interested. Most of the workers in the Siberian region for example are from ssylka, deported. And so what, they are working there, while living in lachugas, in dirty holes, in earth dugouts, covered with wood, and building these modern apartment buildings for the party officials and the NKVD and for workers that come from Russia, and they are building these for ten years before they can get an apartment. So they steal material and then you see the same material appear in the form of private houses around the new district, from materials that they have stolen.

Everybody knows it. Russian public morals don't condemn stealing from the state as a crime. You steal from the state: "Good fellow! You are wonderful. You can make a living for yourself." (Molodets! umeet zhit') They even praise you. But when you steal from an individual the public opinion is very much against it, because other people are as poor as you are, and stealing from them is much different.

But if you are caught stealing from the state, it has another opinion, the state reverses the thing. The state is less interested about stealing from individuals. You can get four years for stealing an apple or two kilograms of potatoes from a kolkhoz. They have to do it, because otherwise people would steal everything.

Pierce: Would things have changed with the abolition of the MTS?

Nagy: I was already away, but this should make a tremendous difference. Khrushchev is very interested in agriculture, and had this funny view of agrogoroda-- agricultural cities. But you see you can improve or add or take away, but the basic thing, the forced labor in these kolkhozy, the kolkhoz system remains still the achilles heel of the whole Soviet system.

Nagy: People try to escape from the kolkhoz, and life there is still miserable.

Not many of the Russians have been sent up as political prisoners. It is mostly the nationalities, and of the nationalities, very exactly definable groups--the Baltic and the western part of the Ukraine, the Polish Ukraine, and some from Central Asia. But not so much there, because there is a great deal of oriental conformism and submission there. Orientals are generally conformists. The orientals look much differently on many things. Sometimes they are disgustingly cooperative. Because for them the Bolsheviks are just a kind of giaours, impious. To deliver or sell out a giaour is nothing. They don't do this with each other, but they sell out with pleasure a Christian or a Jew.

But really these are not the most vital areas of the USSR. The real backbone is the RSFSR. In their propaganda they are always emphasizing that the great Russian people or nation is the backbone, the leading power of the Soviet Union (velikii Russkii narod rukovodiashchii sil Sovetskogo soiuza). And so it is. Even Stalin recognized all this. He flattered and patronized the Russian people.

Jews have always been a very sad target in the last years, since 1950. And a very great number of Jews, proportionally, are sitting for political crimes.

Stalin started this campaign about 1950, and it continued till Stalin's death, on a very large scale. Khrushchev made many changes from this openly anti-Semitic policy, and Madame Furtseva (Minister of Culture) is a leading anti-Semite. As a matter of fact, the Jews are very much restricted in education and working opportunities, and are considered officially as cosmopolitan and anti-party, and not even as second-rate citizens. This remains, even after Stalin's death. I had very good information that the school restrictions, and military officer restrictions, military and air force academy--all these still stand. No Yiddish theaters were reopened, no Jewish newspapers have reappeared since Stalin's time. Birobidzhan was disbanded and all the leaders arrested.

Nagy:

This is, of course, not on the statute books, and the open attacks of the time of the cosmopolitan campaign and the doctors' trials are not now present, but there are veiled hints in the local press as to who is meant, and the people know who is meant. They know exactly what is meant when the fatherland and cosmopolitanism are compared.

I read in the New York Times recently a statement by Madame Furtseva in an interview with a New York Times correspondent--and when such a thing is said to the leading newspaper of the city with the largest Jewish population in the world, it is said with a purpose--that they recently discovered that more than half of the employees of one of the ministries in Moscow was Jewish. They discovered this! Like a plot! And they were dispersed. I know how they disperse in the Soviet Union. They do not give them a passport.

No contact with any relative outside the Soviet Union is allowed. Contact with Israel in any way whatsoever is taboo. Zionism is taboo. And the Jews even like to get away from strongly Jewish inhabited places; they like to move away and submerge. Thank God there is no compulsory religion or nationality there--you can say that you are Russian and that is all. So they go to less Jewish inhabited areas. Siberia, Ural, and there they try to submerge. I met many of them. At least when I was there they could do it. But it is not always so easy, for sometimes they just indicate their nationality, and to do this they must indicate evrei and for this reason it is not so easy.

The Special World of the Criminals

Pierce: You have said that the criminal element in the labor camps merits a separate treatment. Can you speak of it today?

Nagy: I shall speak first of the Russian criminal world in outline, and then we can perhaps go into it deeper.

The Russian criminal world, as I told you already, is a special world, because it differs so much from

Nagy: the criminal worlds of other countries outside the Soviet Union. First, because of the number of criminals, which is far bigger than in other countries. Second, the Russian people's attitude on crime is entirely different from other countries. One of the products of the Soviet system is the lack of a general morality, and of inhibitions such as faith or religion, and family life. The traditions of a thousand years of respect for the father and mother were replaced in many by the teaching of the state that you should denounce your brother or parents. This made the general conditions for the broad way of crime in the Soviet Union.

Naturally, it would be ridiculous to speak about this question without telling the real reason for it, the economic reason. The economic reason is not a depression but a living standard dictated by the government from very cynical points of view: in this state they simply don't want people on a very high living standard, and if they did want it, they couldn't have it.

They do it just to force everybody to work; it is a simple thing; they put down the wages so that mothers of the children--the women--are forced to work. The man cannot support the family alone. This is the basic thing. They know that money is power and they take the power out of people's hands. The children are supposed to be taken care of in these children's homes (detskie iasly), youth organizations, Pioneers, etc., but this is not the home, and they are mixed with children coming from different types of homes. Children are always looking for something new, for freedom from discipline, so rather than the good influencing the bad, it is the wickedest punks who are from the earliest youth influencing the other children in a bad way.

So the normal basis is created by the two factors I have mentioned--the godlessness and loosening of the family ties, and the economic misery and the general situation, of people being reared out of the control of parents. And the most important is the senselessness somehow of life. They have taken away everything in life that is beautiful and have made people into robots. And people see that the social injustices in the Soviet Union are so big that people who are closest to the Party or the NKVD or who can

Nagy: can conform in any way are making money. So people have no faith in the social order, and if, meantime, they see that everybody steals, and who gets along. So all of this together, and the knowledge that honesty is not enough, that you can't make an honest living for yourself, this may be the worst thing now. An honest worker simply can't make it.

Life isn't as it is depicted in the socialist-realist novels--everybody laughs about it in the Soviet Union. They don't dare to say it loudly, but in their heart they don't believe in it. So, to steal something from the state isn't counted as a crime in public opinion, everybody has to steal to survive. When you steal from a private individual that is considered worse, although not too bad--it depends on who you steal from. If you rob the apartment of a party official, everybody laughs about it and they are very happy about it. Or some youngsters from better families--this is the tragedy, the sons of colonels, or of party officials sometimes, they form hold-up gangs in the outskirts of Moscow, or Rostov or Odessa or Leningrad (these four cities are the worst).

Naturally, this did not improve in recent years, but was very far from being complete. This is the main reason for the development of crime. Now in the camps the criminals are forming mainly in two groups--there are the thieves, the vor, the blatnye. In the Moscow argot, to have blat means that someone has a protection, so blatnoi means protectionist. U nego khoroshii blat--he has a good position in the communist society.

But in the camp, as far as the criminals who are ruling are concerned, they are not going to work and they get special food from the kitchen, and they are not doing anything. In the camp they call them the protectionists. So the blatnoi were picking on the vory.

The vory are divided into two main groups, the so-called vory--the thieves--and the sukhi, literally bitches, but having the same meaning as bitches in English; not women, but a very derogatory name in Russian for thieves who work for the NKVD--or MVD--inside the camps. Because the vory have a very strict law. They are supposed to be where they can

Nagy: keep their laws, but everything is conditional on a very honest organization. Their first law is that they are not to work--they must not work in the camp. No work at all, and once the commander succeeds in driving them out to work that is a shame and ruins their status completely as vory. They can redeem themselves later [but for the time being] their status as vory is ruined completely.

In the meantime not only they don't have to work, to do camp work, or any work, or for the commander, but they have not the right to take the slightest work for the commander. Sometimes because the inmates have a horrible reputation; the commander takes pleasure in having them organize the slave work, but the vory have not the right to take it. If he takes it then he becomes sukha. The principal difference is that it is the vory who are criminals--nothing political--and thieves, and never had to serve the NKVD inside the camp, and the sukhi are also criminals but are bowing before the NKVD and serve them.

Pierce: Were there any other groups?

Nagy: The vory and sukhi I consider as one group. A second group were less important criminals who were convicted on a criminal paragraph but were not professionals. A third group was the political prisoners. And the fourth group are the katorzhany, those with a special sentence. The katorga was from the old Tsarist times, abolished by the Soviet Union and during the war they reestablished it--a special criminal group. They are also political but very special.

The official system on the other hand had only two categories: spets and not spets--that means dangerous political crimes, and others, and bytovye stat'ia. For instance, not every political criminal got in the spets contingent, or special contingent, and they were getting some very dangerous criminals also in the spets contingent--incorrigibles.

Thus, the four category system is the realistic or actual classification, made by the prisoners. Many political prisoners were in the spets category who were easier cases, of political crimes or political actions. Some very dangerous criminals--murderers, etc.--were brought over with the politicals,

Nagy: so the politicals were considered as very dangerous criminals.

Pierce: Were there homosexuals?

Nagy: There were homosexuals, but not too many, a very small group; I didn't meet many. There is a great deal of homosexuality inside the camps but people are not sentenced because of homosexual crimes. Homosexuality is considered as a crime in the Soviet Union. In most places they get five years for it, but in the Central Asian regions and in the Caucasus they are greatly infected by homosexuality because of their Moslem traditions; there they give eight years for it, because the authorities want to persecute it more.

Inside the camp it is a crime--sometimes when they have nothing else to do and somebody is caught they give him a second sentence for it but I haven't met more than two or three such cases.

Pierce: But was it not a useful means of exchange between prisoners?

Nagy: It was. In a certain way yes, but in the main people didn't care too much about it, they were too tired. They knew of many people who were homosexual in the camp, and they were accepted in society; they didn't bother too much about it. It is not as it is in American prisons.

It is interesting that in the Soviet Union outside the camps it is very rare. They are somehow not as decadent as in the West. It is very rare that you hear of it there except with regard to the Central Asian and Caucasus regions, and that is habit. But inside the camp naturally it was very acute. People of all classes had 25 year terms and they were going for this. The criminals are also very prone to homosexuality because they have no moral inhibitions whatsoever.

The [other prisoners] were simply not interested in it from a social point of view. Sometimes they would not interfere, but if someone tried to rape a young boy they would sometimes take action, but if [the perpetrator was a person of influence] no one would dare do anything. But on the other hand

Nagy: sometimes a whole barracks would beat the guy and chase him out of the barracks, throw his mattress from the barracks, etc. And then some other cases, especially during the transportations, when you had no friends around you, then you could be raped very easily. Then the criminals fought you with knives, it was really bestial.

So these were not as in American prisons; these were the main groups. The real professional criminals were the vory and sukhi, and the criminals made by law, the politicals, and the katorzhány, who were also political.

So again about the organization of the vory and sukhy. The vor laws are very strict. As I said, they were never to work. They must not perform any service for the NKVD and the commander. They must not pay for anything which is available inside the camp, and they have such an authority that if they get anything outside the camp, they have to pay only money for things, and they always have money.

They take anything they want from you, and like the Japanese samurai, they have the right to kill you always. The only thing they have not the right to take is your daily food ration (dnevnyi poek), the food that you get from the administration; they have not the right to touch it. They have not the right to take away your clothing without giving something in return. They can take good clothing and give you rags for it, but they must always supply something.

When they regain their freedom, they must immediately resume thieving. This is the only way that they can live; they can never go to work in freedom either. If after five years you have not been arrested again then it is suspected that you cooperate with the NKVD, and you go through a thorough investigation. They have contact with each other all over the Soviet Union. It was remarkable that when we arrived, for instance, from Kolyma at the jail in Omsk, to go to Central Asia the criminals arrived with us at five o'clock, and at seven o'clock in the evening the duty warden (dezhurnyi) came in with a big bunch of cigarettes and canned food and fruit and white bread and cakes and everything. The criminals of Omsk immediately brought in a full transport because they knew they were coming. And I saw the same in

Nagy: Moscow and everywhere else.

Then what else? So after five years they can investigate you. When you get in the camp they immediately surround you, and if you have not been arrested in five years it's "Pavla, where have you been in these five years, you bitch (Pavla, gde ty sukha byl?), what have you done?" For it was impossible that you could always steal and in five years not be arrested. You could only have gotten by by being a provocateur for the NKVD. It was logical.

Then they have a certain moral code; they are responsible for every killing. They have always in every camp a so-called senior avtoritetnyi, or ataman, the chief. They must blindly obey him. He is the boss. Inside every camp they elect him in a very democratic way themselves. Not by votes, but by public consent; and it is very democratic, everybody can tell what he has against him, but this democracy is only for the thieves.

Like in Greece, everyone is considered garbage (musor) outside of the vory class. Except for sukhys, they remain sukhys, the enemies. Political prisoners, or anybody else--you can be a university professor, a general of the army, or kolkhoznik (collective farmer)--you are musor. They are the aristocracy. The whole world is reversed; what was on the bottom before comes to the top. They cannot take part even in plays that are organized in the club, or theater ensembles, activities (samo-deiatel'nost') of the different camps because this is also degrading; it is not for an aristocrat. They support culture, like Maecenas. They gather money even from their own sources; they buy clothes for the artists, and they look for plays, and they give all support to every cultural activity in the camp; they rent films, for example, from their own pocket to show pictures when they want to see them, they are really generous, but they have not the right to take part in anything.

If they murder somebody, even not a vory, they must give a strict account for every human life taken. If it is not approved, they must be punished. When they play cards, they must pay their debts immediately. When they play cards it is not for money, it is for clothing. If they do not pay their debts at that time, they lose their status as vory and they can be killed.

Nagy:

In an argument a vor shouldn't let himself be offended by any musor. I have seen with my own eyes an argument with a new camp inhabitant, who didn't know this law yet, he was a Lithuanian and these Balts are very honest and they were very much concerned about this life that was going on, they didn't want to recognize it, and they had an argument, word by word, and he said, "Shut up! (Zamolchi!) Shut up, you whore!" and worse. And the Lithuanian talked back in same manner saying some words and grappled with the vor. And he went down, and two vory jumped immediately to help him and put out the Lithuanian's eyes. I witnessed this thing.

So, he must keep his authority. Sometimes they are playing cards and have nothing else to pay for, and there is some wicked commander or commissar, or oper-upolnomocheny' (political officer), and they play for his life. They are put on the card, and if you lose then you will zarubit' ego, you will cut his head with an axe. This could be the camp commander or the nachal'nik rezhima or warden or anybody. And he must do it. I was in such a camp where the nachal'nik rezhima's head was cut in two. He survived the whole war as a partisan in the rear of the German army and then he was assigned to this camp. He was a very strong man and very successfully fighting against the criminals.

For instance, the criminals put taxes on everybody else; they simply come to you and you must give up half or all of your salary. And if somebody gets a parcel, he must take it first to the criminal and he takes out from the parcel whatever he wants and the rest is yours; you can't even open this parcel; he opens it. It is hopeless to resist; you can make only trouble for yourself.

They are terrifically organized. They get contributions from the kitchen; they get whatever they want from the prisoners, special food, everything. Zalozhena. When they come to the barracks they can go to anybody and get them up from bed because they are sleepy and want to occupy a good place. They have an absolutely homogeneous, strong and efficient organization. When they are four or five they can terrorize five hundred people, and it is the old principle that organized violence can do anything against an unorganized majority. It is the best proof.

Nagy:

We were unorganized; they were organized. It is the best proof for me; the whole communist system of Stalin was similar, and he learned very much from them; he was a great patron of them; it was impossible to do anything against them when Stalin was alive.

They have constant fights, and they are killing people; they are forbidden to carry any sort of fire weapon; but they can carry knives or an axe.

They could be of any age, from 17 to 60. Authority doesn't depend on age; it depends on what you have done outside, and they know your activities. The life of a thief, a life of violence, how many people you have killed, who you have killed. If you kill a guard that meant you did such a great service for your fellow prisoners that you were exempted for the rest of your life from working in the camp. And if you killed a political officer that was the highest possible thing. In principle they are the greatest enemies of the system; they hate communism and they are against the whole thing. It's something like an automatic but a very ill considered revolt against the Soviet system.

Now the sukhys are considered to have been formerly criminals, and they have all the evil and recklessness of the criminals, but they have not their laws. So the Russians say that Vors are 25 times shit, and sukhys are 100 times shit. (Vor dvadsat' piat' raz govno--sukha sto raz govno.) This is the difference, because they have all the recklessness, ruthlessness, experience, strength, organization, and cruelty and inhumanity and insanity but they are not restricted at all. The sukhys are serving the commanders, they are the brigadiers--most were brigadiers--they are killing people, they are oppressing people, taking every parcel, denouncing people, whatever you want.

For the sukhy no law exists, only one law that they are afraid of the vory because if the vory met sukhy they began immediately to fight. If war is declared and two hostile vessels meet at sea, they have to start to shell one another, they can't bypass each other. And so there are such cruel fights as I can recount, that I have seen and that I know about--massacres, mass murders--that they are officially separated by law, by the directive of the MVD. When you form a camp you have to declare it principally a

Nagy:

sukhy camp or a vory camp, and you can never send a vor to a sukhy camp and you can never send a sukhy to a vor camp. And if one should come by accident, you have to keep him separate in solitary confinement in the camp jail until he is taken away the next day, giving him armed protection in taking him in or out of the camp. They don't even go in; if they look in and say, "There is the hunchback Nikolai" (O tam Nikolai Khramoj), whom they know very well, they refuse to go in, and then they declare that they are sukhys and they are taken away.

When some commanders have wanted to eliminate them mutually, they let them into the camp. Such a case occurred in a camp between Krasnoiarsk and Kemerovo, there was a massacre in the bath house. They wanted to get rid of the vory. The sukhys were out at work and they came in and he informed them-- actually by "accident"; they left open the instrumental'ka, as they always do when they want to do such a thing, where the axes and all the tools for work are kept. The instrumental'chik got the order from the commander just before closing that he must do a half hour work somewhere else. They were informed already what was going on, even that the instrumental'ka would be open. So they came in, armed with axes, and you can imagine it, with these naked people, standing in the shower, and they went in and slew, I think, 32 or 35, I don't remember which. You can imagine that they were defenseless and helpless, washing themselves in the shower, and suddenly the sukhys stormed in with axes.

So the vory are not always the most powerful. The terrible fights usually take place in the peresyl'ka, the transit camps, where they can't separate them. Then they make a vor zone and a sukha zone, etc., and there are other lower groups, the tsvetnye, the polutsvetnye, the urki. These are groups under the vory or the sukhy. The tsvetnoi means colored, it means that they have something to do with the vory, they help them, for not everybody can enter this aristocracy class; if you help them then you get titles for it. Polutsvetnoi means a little cooperation, ul'ki are the young thieves, of 17 to 24. And then you can work your way up, but a vor must be a real vor. You can't be accepted in the vors from the camp. You must be a vor in freedom, a thief. You can help them, and get more respect; they are grateful for any help.

Pierce: How can you tell one from another?

Nagy: They know each other very well from outside. They have no signs; they are well informed from freedom; they check immediately when you come in, who you are. If you are from Moscow or Leningrad, and people are sitting [in prison] everywhere; they ask who you know from Moscow, or from Leningrad, and if they try to lie that means certain death. You can cooperate, you can help them, and they are grateful, as I said, and these are the tsvetnye and polutsvetney.

Besides these and the urki there are the bezzakonnyi, also a kind of vor, who are not working for the commander and not creatures of the movement, but they don't keep the laws very strictly; they sometimes violate the laws. Of course, not the fundamental laws, such as not to cooperate and not to work.

Pierce: How do they get away with this?

Nagy: The commanders are incapable of stopping them, because they are organized. When there are 30 or 40, or even 20 or 10 in a thousand slave workers, they can raise the whole camp in rebellion if they want, so they leave them alone.

Pierce: Then while everyone else is out working this little group is always around the camp doing nothing?

Nagy: Sure, always! They can go out to work; they are always changing laws temporarily; before it was that you could not even go outside the camp, but now they can go out but they must not work outside; they can sit down beside the fire or koster. The commanders in other days supported them because they made good business with them; because they could sell only through the commander the things which they were getting inside. Sometimes the commanders are against them; but most they cooperate.

Pierce: Are they hated by most of the rest of the prisoners?

Nagy: Mostly they are hated and held in contempt, but the others are unable to do anything because they are well organized.

Pierce: Even if there are only five out of 500?

Nagy: Nobody dares to touch them because they are organized not only in this camp but in others. You can defeat them in this camp but when you go in another camp they simply would chop off your head. Because they send orders to another camp that this man is coming who was doing this and this. Incredibly quick; and you don't know how. Because they are connected with free people and they are able to send letters illegally, and you can arrive in another camp and five years later they chop off your head for a thing that you have done there. The punishments are always for 15 or 25 years and you always have time to see them again.

Pierce: So actually it isn't only five out of 500, because they have these other categories of helpers.

Nagy: Even if they are only five, they are terrifically organized all over the Soviet Union.

Pierce: How many tsvetnoi would there be?

Nagy: This is the trouble, naturally. The tsvetnoi are many, sometimes 50 or 60, and they are allies--serving allies. The vory can count on them and they can count on the commander and they can count on the cowardice and disorganization of the other prisoners. Mostly this is the main thing, unfortunately, that they can surely count on.

Women Prisoners

Nagy: And the same organization exists among women. The woman thieves are exactly the same. And it is a very interesting thing, if a woman of the thief aristocracy class meets a man of the corresponding class the woman has immediately to give him sex. This is the law, but you have not the right to give sex to anybody else, only to thieves. Immediately.

For instance, when you are travelling on the train, you know the Stolypinskie vagony (Stolypin cars) they are divided in little cells, sometimes mixed together. They can put in the political with the vory because they don't care about each other. Otherwise there is a sukhy vagon and the vorys living

Nagy: together with the politicals, and mixed, but little cells, with a corridor, and then the guard marches on the corridor. Then you hear voices, and the thieves begin to call out: "Girls, girls!" (devki, devki).

And you hear them answer. "Are there zhuchki among you?" (U vas tam zhuchki est'?) Zhuchki--beetles--is the name of the women thieves.

"Yes!"

"How many?"

"Two!"

The guard says Shut up! (Zamolchi!) They reply with insults, calling him garbage, telling him, "Get out of here!" When he sees that, he can't shoot; he is singlehanded, so he leaves them alone.

"So there are zhuchki among you?" Then the conversation begins again.

"Yes!"

"When are we going to f--k?"

"When we arrive at the camp! There is no possibility in the train!"

And then, "What is your name?"

Answer: "Natal'ia" or "Tania," etc. "Do you know us?"

"The one I know is an old whore, I f----d her in the Vorkuta camp two years ago. The other one is a new piece of meat." And so it goes on.

Once I observed between Dzhzhkazgan and Karaganda a very noble scene. Because there are two kinds of transports, where you are in a big vagon all the way, completely free--a freight wagon--and you are guarded only from the outside, and there is the shorter transport, a zakvagon, or zakliuchennyi vagon, with a corridor, and the cells separated, and in the corridor the guard is marching, and in the cells there may be 10 or 20; they are supposed to have a

Nagy: maximum of ten people but there are sometimes 40. They are not supposed to travel in these longer than two days because there are impossible conditions, for instance, no facilities to do your needs, etc. They let you out principally in the corridor, but sometimes the best way is to piss in your shoes and to pour it through the window, because they don't let you out.

But this scene that I was telling about; the girls were separated and not allowed to speak to the men, and what happened? They were asking the way out to the toilet, and the one soldier is standing in the corridor, guarding, and the other is standing by the door of the toilet, only he is not going in with you when you go inside. In fact he is always keeping the door open when you go inside. And there was this girl, a very nice gracious woman, and she lifted her skirt, and it was diarrhoea, and all over the boots of the soldier, a gracious move! And he was stinking for the rest of the week. He called her a string of names, but what else could he do?

Pierce: He couldn't punish her?

Nagy: What could he do? He has not the right to touch anybody during a transport. He can give a note to the guard who is taking her over, but it doesn't mean anything. He can call for handcuffs to be put on but... They are hopeless cases to deal with. This is the difference between men and women. The guards hate women prisoners because they are inconsiderate to them. A man, you know what he may do, he may attack you with a knife or hit you with his fist, but a woman--she will find out something else; she will pour a plate of shit over you, or press you down to the ground and piss in your mouth. If they are united, and 20 or 30 jump you it is hopeless.

We were going away from one camp--I shall never forget it--and women were supposed to come instead of us in the camp, and the commander was out of his mind, saying, "I got along somehow with the men, but now they bring these whores to me, what shall I do?" He knew very well that there would be a great deal of trouble for him.

Pierce: Do the women have the same sort of organization as the men?

Nagy: Not identical, they belong to the same organization.

Pierce: They are the molls, then, as with gangsters?

Nagy: The same. But the women are different in the homosexual business than the men. The women have a special homosexual organization; they are somehow more shameless than the man, because when a man is homosexual he tries to hide it somehow, he doesn't flaunt it, but the women are not ashamed of it at all, and they are united in a homosexual group, the kobl'y, the whores for women. And they dress in men's clothes, openly; they cut their hair and they put on these Leningradskie kapki, these little Russian caps, and boots, and they bind down their breasts, and they are thus trying to be completely like men, aping the attitudes of men, smoking, cursing. But this is only in the slave labor camps. Outside there is nothing about it. And these kobl'y make a terrible mess in the camp; it is the worst thing. What do they not do?

"Reform" Measures After Stalin

Nagy: We must not forget that now after the death of the criminals' patron, Stalin, the situation of the camps is somewhat different. He was their patron in the sense that he made impossible any decisive moves from the communist party and the NKVD against them, because they were simply demoralizing and affecting badly the work of many camps, with their terrorism and anything else. The NKVD didn't like that and wanted to move against them several times and crush them, but it was impossible because of the old gentleman.

After his death immediately there was an ukaz issued that so-called camp banditism (lagernyi banditizm) was punishable by martial law and by death by shooting. And that meant very much, although they immediately found that camp banditism is when you kill somebody; it doesn't apply when you put out his eyes or make him a cripple. For something like that they got five days of solitary confinement or were sent to another camp.

So this was the first step. And they were beginning to pick out the most notorious cases and

Nagy: transport over to closed jails (zakrytyi tiurmi) for very strict punishment. And this they didn't like because they can exist in the camp, and they can get a wonderful life in the camp, like a king, and be aristocrats, but when they put you in solitary confinement and give you black bread through the window and salt fish, etc., you don't know what kind of way out you have. I have been there, for short periods. And the treatment is very harsh, especially for them. But it was a great problem because naturally they had to build some jails for them--Verkhne-ural'sk, Novosibirsk, to enlarge the Aleksandrovskii tsestral', the old one, in Irkutsk, and in Yakutsk there is a very notorious jail--all over and they are now filling up.

But this doesn't concern unfortunately the sukhys, and the sukhys are more dangerous and more disgusting.

Pierce: Have they no comparable organization?

Nagy: The sukhys also have an organization, as far as all sukhys hold together wonderfully. They also have an ataman, an avtoritetnaia sukha. Every sukha camp has one. The same thing. Only that they have no laws at all.

Unfortunately, it is the tragedy that sometimes too many vorys are gathering, and then they have no way of existence and they must offend people because of their high living standards, etc. The kitchen is the main issue, because they take away the best products. And unfortunately because they are criminals and have no morals basically, vor law is very flexible, even for vorys. They do anything, they kick over all of their laws except for the basic constitutional ones, the rights, the inalienable things. But they begin by saying that "We are honest thieves; we don't touch the food that you get from the administration; that's the law for us, we eat only what is in the parcels." But when the parcels are already eaten then it's "We'll take only your sugar portion," and when it was a bigger hunger, then they took away black bread as well, and soups and everything. The vor are not responsible for things that they do in emergency; there is a clause. There are many constitutional debates between them. There are often congresses when they get together with the avtoritetnyi and determine and make different demands, etc.

Nagy:

For instance, there was a special group. You know the "Rokosovshchina," that Rokosovskii gathered during the war from criminals from all camps, a whole army group from volunteers. They were released by the hundreds and thousands in 1941, to make an "honest fight for the Fatherland to pay for the crimes that they had committed." This was the most insidious gang that ever entered Europe. And the famous Rokosovskii, sitting also in a slave worker camp, sitting because of disciplinary measures because as a Polish general in the Red Army he attacked the Germans near Brest-Litovsk, and was given ten years in a slave worker camp. And then he was released and he was the chief of this Rokosovshchina, organized from criminals, vor divisions, and armies and army groups. There were so many.

And now these people naturally--you can imagine; I don't go into details what they did when they came into Europe, it was fantastic, unbelievable. Vienna and Budapest and Belgrade and Prague--for them it was the same to be in a Czech city which was an ally, as in a German city which was an enemy, raping and robbing and killing. Fantastic! They told the stories in the camps. When they were demobilized naturally they began to rob again, because this is something which is somehow in the blood; they never leave this life.

It may have been a carryover in part from the pre-Communist era, but the Communist system, as I told you, introduced these new factors, furthered it. So they immediately began to rob again, and then they got back in the slave worker camps. Now they had violated the basic rule that they took firearms, and they went in the government service. So it was a grave constitutional issue, how were they to receive this Rokosovshchina.

One party that was vigorous considered that if they took arms in their hands, they worked for the government in some form, so they were to refuse. And the other people said that anyhow they took arms in their hands to defend their fatherland--Russia, not the communist system itself, because this is the system of the secret police (chekisty), because these are the main enemy. (Even today, when it has changed from Cheka to OGPU to NKVD to MGB to MVD, they call them even today Chekisty.) So the other party said they were just fighting for mother Russia,

Nagy: and then in case anybody had any doubts, they redeemed everything; they had begun to steal again, so they were complete gentlemen again, and here they were again. It was a great issue, a great debate, and they were never completely reestablished in their rights. When I left the debate was still going on. There were some regions, as in the north, where they were refused completely. Noril'sk and Vorkuta and Kolyma refused them. Karaganda and Mongolia and Altai accepted them. Siberia was between.

Pierce: How does a camp where there are suky differ from the camps where there are the vory?

Nagy: The suky have a terror regime, unbelievable swineries are going on unrestrictedly if the commander is not an honest man. And it is very rare that he is. Unimaginable things are going on, and there is complete outlawry. There is a wonderful feeling of mass psychology. When there were Banderists-- Ukrainian partisans--they were united because they were many, because they felt such an affinity for each other, and sometimes they took action against the criminals.

Pierce: This would be the only group that could stand out against them?

Nagy: The only group that ever stood out against them! United as a group. Banderists were Ukrainian nationalists who fought against the Soviets for two years so after the war, until they were crushed. Most of them were sent to the camps. The main thing is that they were standing strictly on a political basis, and that means that they were rendering help to any political prisoner. And they were outspokenly against any kind of criminals, because the criminals were principally Russian.

There is no prejudice at all in the criminal world. You can enter it as a Jew, a Russian, a Ukrainian, a Kazakh, a Kirgiz, a foreigner, anything. You must just have a good record as a murderer or thief.

The vory sell things to the commander--the suky do too--but this is the only way that they cooperate with the commander. Cooperation is denouncing; they deal with the commander personally to make him rich

Nagy: because he helps them, but not with the system. The commander in fact is strictly forbidden to have such transactions; there is a special paragraph in the law about contact with the prisoners (sviazny s zakliuchennymi). They are not supposed to have any contact whatsoever except in their official duties.

Pierce: You mentioned entertainments, can you describe those?

Nagy: There were, but not in the so-called spets kontingent. The spets kontingent is another story, from the ITL camps, or trudovy'e lageria, the other camps. The spets kontingent are a different story. They are mostly politicals, and very few murderers or vory, and they are rather good psychologists. They survey the situation, and if they are in a minority they never provoke; they go over to autocratic behavior only if they feel that they can take over.

Pierce: Then the vory don't rule in the stats camps?

Nagy: They have a great authority but not such an absolute and unchallenged rule. The stats camps are full of Ukrainians and banderovtsy, but they realize they are not in authority; they get certain privileges anyhow, but they don't force their authority.

The entertainments are not in those camps but in the ITL camps.

Pierce: What does the entertainment consist of?

Nagy: It depends on what kind of kontingent gets together and how difficult the work is, because when the work is very difficult everybody is drawn into the work, and they have no time for rehearsals, etc., and there are many invalids and they can form from the invalids anyhow a good brigade.

The programs are mostly propaganda, and some musical instruments. Violins, guitars, balalaikas, one act pieces, three act pieces even. I was in a camp with former Russian emigrés from Shanghai, including Count Segedi, the son of the former governor of Orél province and the intendant of the Russian theater in Shanghai. They put on very nice pieces of Ostrovskii and Griboedov.

Pierce: What was he in for?

- Nagy: He had voluntarily repatriated himself from Shanghai when the Russians gave this amnesty for the emigrés, and then he came home, but after two years he was arrested for nothing, or for having joined an emigré organization 20 years before.
- Pierce: Do most of the camp inmates feel that they belong there?
- Nagy: For the vory the camp is the birthplace (rodnoi dom) where they expect to be. There are the teenage criminals (the maloletkas), who are also in camp; these are the special group. For these it is a school of crime.
- Pierce: These are the bezprizornyi (homeless waifs)?
- Nagy: Bezprizornyi, yes. It is unbelievable what is going on. There are mass sex parties between vorys, 50 or 60 at once, in the barracks, catching a guard, jumping on him, pissing on him when they hold him down, etc.
- Pierce: What happens?
- Nagy: Nothing! The children have a great deal of privilege. I saw the following in Lemberg (L'vov): They asked-- 12 or 13 year old punks--if they would add some mahorka (tobacco) to their quota of food. Not even the older people dared make such a request; tobacco is not a necessity of life. The commandant refused them. He saw the gendarmes through the window. And there was a wonderful new roof, just after the reconstruction of the barracks, that the Germans had destroyed. And they began to throw down the tiles, one after the other, from the roof.

And the commander called out, "What are you doing?"

"Are you giving us the tobacco or not?"

Naturally the guard couldn't shoot because they were inside the camp and the whole population was outside watching. (This was a peresyl'ka, a transit camp, in the center of the city, in former barracks.)

And the commander stood there calling, "Stop it! Stop it! You're doing damage to the nation!"

Nagy: "Nation? You are doing damage to the nation! We the Soviet Union, the greatest and biggest country in the world. So rich! We won the war against the Fascists! We are the victorious power, and you are depriving us of a little mahorka. We shall destroy the whole building if you don't give it! We'll not stop the bombardment of the tiles till the evening, and if you give us the tobacco we shall keep quiet and not destroy the rest of the building."

And he gave it to them.

Pierce: Then in a way the camp commander doesn't really have a lot of power.

Nagy: Well, what should power mean in this case, it is the power to shoot everybody. It is not the case unfortunately.

Pierce: Why couldn't he put them in solitary?

Nagy: There aren't too many solitaries, unfortunately, and they also make a mess. These are such reckless people that you can only discipline them with the strongest possible punishment, to shoot them.

Pierce: Couldn't they extend their sentence?

Nagy: They don't give a damn about it. They are already under sentence of 20 or 25 years, what can you extend? If there should be an amnesty it would involve them. But short of that, five days of solitary would mean more to them than a 50 year extension on their sentence.

Pierce: Then in a way it wasn't as harsh as the Nazi camps?

Nagy: No, it was only harsh in the sense that it was hopeless to get out of it because of the carelessness of the commander. They didn't kill you, but they let you die yourself. The worst was the criminals, who robbed and murdered. Ninety-five percent couldn't act this way, so for them it was very hard, especially for the political criminals who had no legal protection whatsoever. Not everybody can do what they did, to fight his way through, and murder to get a piece of bread.

It was 95% of those who were political--the biggest percentage were criminals, but criminals in the sense

Nagy: that they stole a pound of apples, or were found ten rubles short in their accounts, and were sentenced. Therefore the biggest part of these people were not professional, but the professional criminals rule the camps.

Pierce: How many were political?

Nagy: Not too many. Ten or fifteen percent. Maybe twenty. It is difficult to estimate. You can't call most of the others criminals; they are products of the Soviet economic system.

I got along with the criminals; you have to if you want to exist. You can get along with them if you have nothing, and I had no parcels, so they gave to me rather than taking from me. They never injure indifferent people if you don't get in their way. They are mostly against traitors, and I was having a very firm behavior and they respect those things.

Sentences run from four, six, eight years, to twenty-five. I knew a Tatar boy from Novosibirsk, Mukhammedov. He was a 19 year old boy, a very good looking, intelligent kid; we met in the hospital. He was in for guliganstvo (hooligan behavior), the paragraph concerning it.

"What did you do?" I said.

"I was drunk, and while going home in Novosibirsk on the streetcar I smashed the window with my fist-- three years!" So he got in the slave worker camp when he was 17 years old and in those inhuman conditions he was spoiled for a whole lifetime.

Pierce: You mentioned that in the Lemberg (L'vov) incident the guards did not shoot because they were inside the camp. Is there a rule about that?

Nagy: You can't shoot inside the camp. At least the commander's zvod can't, because there are two completely different organizations in the camp, the camp administration and the political service, under the command of the commander and the political officer. And the guards in the tower are the kommandir zvod, armed soldiers, of the MVD. Nobody gets arms besides them. You can't bear arms inside the camp; it's a regulation, a precaution. They are always independent,

Nagy: and sometimes the kommandir zvod is arguing many times with the commanders. There are very rarely good relations between the zvod (troop) commander and the camp commander.

So the kommandir zvod has to give a certain permit agreeing to introduce armed soldiers inside the camp. And you can't do it immediately. But, when you are trying to escape from the camp their duty is immediately to open fire. But to shoot in the camp requires a permit.

Pierce: What means would they take to quell a riot among the prisoners?

Nagy: In case of a riot they would immediately introduce injunctions. It is simply that inside the camp, just because the commander that wants it does not mean that they have the right to open fire.

Pierce: But what kind of punishment can they use?

Nagy: They have very nice punishment, don't worry! First, there is solitary confinement, when you are sitting for five days with a piece of black bread and a glass of hot water. They can't keep you there more than five days, but of course when you get out, they can give you immediately another five days, and this can go on for thirty days. And then sometimes they put the cuffs on you, and sometimes tighten it almost to the point of death. You have to sleep and do everything in them, and you can imagine how cold the iron gets.

Then if that is not enough they put the rubashka (shirt) on you, a strait jacket. The political officer can put this on you, but only in the presence of the oper-upolnomocheny' and a qualified physician, because it is a terrible experience. They put your legs and hands together and pull. And the physician must immediately watch your heart. They do it once, twice, and three times. They break you so thoroughly that you are never a human being any more. And if the physician says to stop they must immediately stop. It's a terrifying experiment I can tell you.

I never had it done to me, but was twice on the edge of it, but the physician forbade it. But the whole camp had it done. I weighed only 72 pounds, and

- Nagy: I had a heart condition and tuberculosis. Principally they can do it only to the first category of health, and there must be certain junctional crimes inside the camp.
- Pierce: They had classifications according to health?
- Nagy: 1, 2, 3, and 4 (invalid). I was all at various times.
- Pierce: When are you not allowed to work?
- Nagy: This is absolutely terrible again. Mainly only the first and second categories were obliged to work outside the camp, in projects, but sometimes in the camp they drive out the tuberculars and the invalids. And the third category does the work inside the camp and the fourth category doesn't do anything--the invalids.
- Pierce: What is done if an inmate refuses to go outside?
- Nagy: The first measure is solitary confinement, cuffs, and deprivation of food.
- Pierce: Do the guards inside the camp all carry guns?
- Nagy: Prohibited. They carry nothing, not even a truncheon.
- Pierce: Then how can they move you about?
- Nagy: Because they have the authority! Of course, I have been in camps where nobody cared to come in. They lowered the food down from the watchtower. They went to the corner of the camp under the watchtower and handed it over because they knew that every commander and every freeperson's life had been played away in cards in advance, and that they had only to come in to the camp to be killed. I was in such a camp. The prisoners were such a law unto themselves that they ruled the camp, and they took over the food and they distributed it. From the camp nobody went to work. They were mostly vory. Sometimes they burned down the camps.
- Pierce: Did they wreck the camps very often? Here as a protest measure they sometimes break the windows, etc.?
- Nagy: They do.

Pierce: Did all the prisoners know each other? Did many rumors spread?

Nagy: Always. Rumors about whether there would be salmon or herring for the evening meal, or whether there was fighting between the commander and others on the outside; always the expectation of amnesty, and whether someone would be released or not, or a new commander--bad news, good news, new instructions to the NKVD, there is a transport going away or a transport coming, whether we will go to work here or there, improvements or getting worse, who has homosexual connections, whether you heard them or saw them, are they bringing parcels or not, because every two weeks they are going to the post office and it is far away sometimes. I never took part in this; I just got nervous when I heard it.

Pierce: Did you make any close friends?

Nagy: I was sent out together with my underground movement with whom I was arrested, and we were always so lucky that one or two were around me. There were usually some of them in most of the camps we were in, because our group was very big.

I had some very good friends also, besides these, mostly among the Orientals, as a matter of fact because they were the most honest--Japanese, Koreans and Chinese, specially the Japanese. Koreans were also very nice. The Japanese were mostly former army officers. The Kwantung army. When the rest of the Japanese were repatriated those who had been in counter-intelligence were sentenced as anti-Soviet spies, and fitting war crimes on them, the most idiotic things, just to keep them from returning. Murderers.

Pierce: Can you tell something of the criminal jargon, the blatnoi iazyk?

Nagy: Yes, the blatnoi are commonplace words, with special meanings, but there are sometimes more interesting things too, just as with a language. They use some gypsy expressions, and some real underworld expressions.

Pierce: Is this slang formed within the camps, or does it come from outside?

Nagy: It comes from Odessa, Rostov, Moscow, Leningrad--from the underworld of these four cities. It is a special world.

Pierce: Was there much difference between the Soviet camps and the Nazi concentration camps that you were in earlier?

Nagy: Yes. Naturally the Russian camps were entirely different in organization, and in aim, in every way. Firstly, in the Nazi camps the basic difference was that there was a war on. Naturally there were many brutalities in Dachau, for instance, in 1936 and 1937, and 1938 but no gas chambers and no mass executions. And besides the Russian camps were principally not aimed to exterminate the people. They let people deliberately die, whom they couldn't use, but those they could use they tried to keep up, because the whole slave worker system which at its peak embraced 14 or 15 million of the Soviet people was not aimed at killing those numbers, but to have them as a labor reserve which they knew that they had and could put them to work on any of the five-year plan objects regardless of their will, regardless of their material needs, or anything else. And it was quite useful really.

The Arctic riches were enormous--coal, oil, gold, nickel, etc.--and naturally to do something there you had to first make preliminary living facilities so that human beings could live there and produce because there had been no population at all in this tremendous region except a few primitive nomads. To make those primary conditions of life you needed only slave workers to build houses and factories and railways, because nobody went there.

They tried at first, offering good salaries and allowances and six hour work and two or three months leave, but nothing helped, because people preferred lower living standards in the Ukraine or the Caucasus or any place else, because the conditions are incredibly inhumane. Naturally now when they have built big cities like Magadan or Noril'sk or Igarka and the conditions are better now, people are going there and they can use free labor, though still not completely. But to make the first conditions in these places, 2,000 or 3,000 miles distance from the nearest city, as they did for instance at Noril'sk, Anadyr, Magadan, etc. is another matter.

Conceive, for instance, of unloading the ship on the Enisei, or unloading the train, as they did in

Nagy: Vorkuta a thousand times. They built the railroad to the region where the coal mines were, and when the train came in with people everything was covered with snow a meter high. The commander went out, stepped up to his waist in snow, and put sticks (prikholki) in the snow: 4 sticks, and a 5th in the middle. "This will be the fence around, and this will be the watchtower at the entrance, the gate. Cut the wood and make your barracks and we'll have the camp."

You can imagine how many people died because they had only tents and constant fire. Naturally the stronger people fought their way near to the fire, and then you could see exactly who was the weaker and who was the foreigner and who was not a criminal--the politicals--they were always around, more away from the fire. Hundreds of people died while these camps were being built up. They established thousands of camps in this way. This was in 1936 and 1937; I was not there but the people told me. And then it happened also in my time in 1949 and 1950.

All the Japanese, for instance, told the same story about this railroad when it was built--it is not even marked on your map. Almost all the cities were built in this way--Komsomol'sk-na-Amure--they call it Komsomol'ks as if it was built by the Komsomols--Komsomols like me! And all the big projects.

This was the real reason for the slave labor camps, and this is the most awful truth about it. You shouldn't imagine that the Russian NKVD officials are sitting and deporting to the slave worker camps and deporting political enemies to the camps. No, this is a misunderstanding of communist theory. On the contrary they reformed their whole jurisdiction, reformed their whole code of law to create for ridiculous little offenses very great and long term punishments, so that it would be worthwhile to transport the men away, to get the men and achieve other objectives. First they discipline enormously--the NEP was a very undisciplined period--they had to get this idea out of them, and secondly they got a cheap and mobile huge working force on which they could rely. This is the essence of the thing. Most of the prisoners are not political prisoners; most of them are not even horrible criminals. "I stole a pound of potatoes from the kolhoz"--four years--this kind of thing.

Pierce: You mentioned the figures of 14 and 15 million. I've heard all the way from five million to 20 million.

Nagy: Fourteen million. Fifteen million in the period just before the death of Stalin. I saw a comparative study of it in Khabarovsk, a directive for the MVD organs, with statistics. Not for publication. In Russia that is one of the things that everybody knows and nobody speaks about.

It's only now, in the novel Not by Bread Alone that they dare to touch the question, and then only in a very feeble way. He told about the trial only in a sentence. Khrushchev brought it up carefully because there could have been such a violent outbreak of anti-Stalinist reaction. There was not a single family that didn't have someone in the camps, so when they touched the whole question a volcano would erupt.

Pierce: The reaction abroad seems to be that slave labor is no longer a factor since Khrushchev took power. Is that true?

Nagy: I don't think it can be said that it isn't a factor at all, but in the meantime they have seen two things--that the slave labor is not very efficient, and besides they have created everywhere the primary conditions, so that they don't need it actually.

Already in my time they began to reduce as many of the slave labor camps as possible, but it doesn't mean that they have been abolished. I think that even today four or five million people are in slave worker camps. They can't exist without slave work, from economic or political reasons, only then they released many political prisoners who were almost absolutely innocent, and they don't sentence people so much for stupid trivial political crimes as they did before.

Moreover, they drastically disciplined the criminal elements, because they are incorrigible and were terrorizing the workers. They adopt a level of production which they must meet, and they simply shoot them when they do anything inside the camp--after this ukaz about which I told you--or, they transfer them to jails where they can't influence and they can't demoralize, because their effect was so tremendously demoralizing. The main is that Stalin is dead; the main father; they didn't dare touch the question of criminals in his time.

Pierce: Did anyone ever escape?

Nagy: Escape was almost impossible. I saw some escapes and I saw the results. Ninety-nine per cent were brought back dead or alive, but if he was dead this was the better for him.

Once at Colony No. 20, immediately after arrival in 1949, on the Taishet railroad I saw a Lithuanian brought back alive. He was not brought back on foot-- he was creeping on the ground. They called us out to take a look at him. He was just crawling. His backbone was broken; and his skin was like a rainbow, all colors from the beating he had had. He was groaning, and moaning as he crept along. The next night he died. This was a warning. Many times they were brought back shot.

Some tried out of sheer desperation. Everybody hopes he can get away. Dogs? Sure. Everywhere. Wolf dogs. Even when they took us to work they always had dogs.

In Far North, escape is almost impossible. But they have the same number of guards and dogs. They are determined by law and are everywhere the same, even when there is no hope of escape.

At every camp there is an obligatory dog house (pitomnik) where there are always two or three dogs, trained and kept all the time. It belongs to the installation. It is systematic. The trainer is part of the set-up.

Pierce: How do they train them?

Nagy: They train them always with meat. I wish we could have got the food they had. Almost a pound a day. I never had a pound of meat in seven years in the whole Soviet Union. They are trained to accompany convoys and to attack. Sometimes a man couldn't go to work fast enough, and it was always very bad to be at the back of the convoy, because they were setting the dogs on you. Tearing your clothing, nipping your feet, it was humiliating; we were like slaves.

III THE ARCTIC

Kolyma

Nagy: From Siberia we went to Outer Mongolia, to build a railroad. From Outer Mongolia to Vladivostok and the Arctic gold mines, and building an air base there. Not really Vladivostok--Vladivostok is very closed--for security reasons--next to it Bukhta-Vanya is the port of embarkation.

In 1951-1952 I was in the Kolyma region. This is the most horrible part, the horror of horrors, and the saddest part of all. The climate conditons are not balanced by human treatment, so it's terrible.

There were two big groups of this type: the Norilsk group and Vorkuta. The latter is famous because of Jimmy Noble, the American. Norilsk is in the Eenisei area. Yet get there only by river when it is not frozen. The Krasnoiarsk peresilka into Norilsk is something horrible.

You reach Kolyma by sea, by plane, or by road. The road to Kolyma is through sopki, low hills. Often there were purga, sleet, even in summer. It was windy and the wind was penetrating, very hard on our undernourished bodies as we were on the truck.

Kolyma has wooden buildings. It is miserable and monotonous. Street paving mostly ends at Urals. There are only slave workers there and those who come for the lone ruble, dlinnaia rubl'--adventurers and grafters.

Pierce: What did you wear on your feet there?

Nagy: Everybody wore those felt boots, valenki. They were everywhere, but in Kolyma it was somehow not enough. They were supposed to give us some more clothing, but

Nagy: though they gave out some shubas (overcoats) and felt stuff, it was very bad quality. Very few people got back from Kolyma without a frozen finger or frozen leg or amputated hand or something. And with the machinery it was also technically dangerous. The working conditions were so unsafe that the workmen had many accidents that could so easily have been avoided.

Pierce: How big was the camp you were in?

Nagy: The same size, maybe a little bit bigger than in some other camps. These camps, you know, are all built on an average plan of the MVD. Almost all are between 600 and 1,000 men, on an average. Every camp has a kitchen connected to a dining room (stolováia) and in ITL camps (not in political camps) a club, too. Then there is a bath with immediately beside it a disinfection place by great heat (prozharka). They produce there more than 100 Celsius of hot dry air. They put in the clothes, and this hot air is supposed to kill all germs. It is not a steam bath or sauna. But it ruins the clothes completely and doesn't kill the germs.

So it is very primitive, so that when you take your bath they also try to disinfect your clothes by this means.

Pierce: How often could you have a bath?

Nagy: Once every ten days. No oftener. There is a schedule. Of course sometimes it is longer. Perhaps sometimes only once in four weeks. When you came into a camp that was half ruined, disused for eight or ten years, with walls collapsed, etc. then you had to build up everything before you could have a bath. And moreover it was harder in the winter.

Pierce: What were the buildings made of? Logs?

Nagy: At Kolyma? They are mostly of wood, dug in. Wooden buildings generally because if they tried to build of stone at Kolyma, they would have to make the walls one and one half yards thick.

Pierce: Double windows?

Nagy: Yes, the typical Russian windows, just a rama or frame.

- Nagy: In summer time they take down one. All windows have small panes, and you open one from a little frame.
- Pierce: What was being done there?
- Nagy: Construction work and gold washing. The latter was the main work, for the slave workers.
- Pierce: That of course couldn't be done during the winter, could it?
- Nagy: And how it's done! And how it's done! With hot streams. Only your hands are freezing and you get rheumatism. So what does it matter? And how it is done! It never stops. It doesn't matter to them how cold it is. They give the order, and to give the order is very easy.
- Pierce: Hot streams? How do they heat the water, with wood?
- Nagy: No, no. Good coal, anthracite. They had very good coal from Sakhalin. Since I was there they have adopted some modern procedures also. I heard that from some Hungarians who came back in 1955. They told me that it was more modernized, but the conditions were still very inhuman.
- Pierce: Was this hydraulic mining, as we call it here in California? Where they have a high pressure jet of water directed against a bank, which washes it down?
- Nagy: That's more or less it. But they have a basin which is perforated, so that the gold will remain.
- Pierce: Are these rich gold fields?
- Nagy: Very rich. For instance, some of the brigades had a daily norm of 400 grams worth of gold for 30 people and the people starved. They had to produce that in one day, so you can imagine how rich they can be. And more. Sometimes the people tried to smuggle out gold, and were very much persecuted for it. But sometimes they succeeded, but it was not a happy success, because when the criminals discovered it they simply killed you for it.
- Pierce: What could they do with the gold, though?
- Nagy: They sold it to the free people--dentists, etc. who needed it.

Pierce: But how did they get in touch with them?

Nagy: Oh, they were already in touch with them. The commander bought it also, the doctor in the hospital, the free people. They made all sorts of deals with the slave workers. It is very much persecuted, but anyhow their living standard is so low they seem to risk it.

Pierce: Was this the place where you told how they were starving people.

Nagy: They are always starving people!

Pierce: No, but you told of that one terrible incident of the professor who ran into that pool of sewage after stealing someone's food.

Nagy: Oh this pool, that was at Kolyma. There was such permafrost that during the summer they couldn't pour out this fill and urine and everything couldn't penetrate the ground. Only a half a yard or a yard and then it's permafrost. Such a thing was unique because mostly they would catch anyone who tried to steal before he ran away and killed him. He was lucky that he could get there.

Pierce: Were there many such cases where they did kill each other?

Nagy: Oh, this happened all the time. It was something terrible. This was always the way. Where these criminals were present it was always a constant fight. The criminals--the vors and the sukis, the two parties--killed whoever they didn't like.

Pierce: There was never a chance for the politicals to gang up or form their own group and hold their own?

Nagy: Sometimes, very rarely, as when the West Ukrainians were present, because they were very tough and political. Mostly however when you were political you were not tough, and where you were tough you were not political. But the Ukrainians were both. And if they were in a sufficient number, then it was possible.

I remember for instance one thing in the Karaganda peresylka, Stantsia Karabass, an unforgettable scene. You know these blatnoi ruled the camp as an aristocracy. And they for instance reserved several rights. When

Nagy: you arrived with clothing on you which was more or less decent, they had the right to go and "Take it off!" (Snimai!) You must take them off then and hand them over. It could be a pair of boots, or a shirt, or whatever it should be. And the Western Ukrainians are always coming in whole transports, full trainloads, from jails in Lvov, etc. And they came in you know in their good civilian clothing right from the jails. When the transport came in, they knew that they were coming. The commander would have notified them, because they were dealing with the commander in advance: "We will take the clothes, and you will take half and sell it outside for us."

So they were hand in glove with the commander. He couldn't take the clothes, but if they took them he could take half and sell them outside in the city, and there was a very great lack of clothing, and then they would divide the dividends.

This was very common, this was the way they did it. When they came in the gangsters surrounded them with sticks and with knives. They were only 30 or 40 because the commander let them in only in such groups so they could be overcome. I saw it all in an hour-- I had, thank goodness, nothing that they could take away from me. In an hour I saw them already measuring the pants, trying on the hats, trying on the jackets, until it was cleaned up completely. Just measuring already, trying on, like Macys, Florsheims, City of Paris.

Well, naturally when the Ukrainians came together, they were 250, they found out what was going on, they were not stupid, and they were divided in brigades.

Now, it is the great tragedy of the political criminals that when they come in the camp [they don't know the system]. It took us a year till we found out what "Sanchast'" (the medical part) means, what the "Oper-upolnomocheny'" (the political officer), where to go, how to turn around, and we were really helpless.

So, the Ukrainians were divided into brigades and they went out to work, and the life was miserable, also the food, because the chief of the kitchen was also a criminal, and had it arranged together with the commander that the commander put in the list many different foodstuffs from the sklad (magazine) which he

Nagy: never gave to the camp and the kitchen chief signed for it, that he had taken it over, and the commander sold it in the free market. So for the population, there was a great lack. Thus it was going on, very well organized.

The Ukrainians were helpless till they found out what was going on, and then they went to the commander one evening, and said "Look, commander, the kitchen chief, not even his breath should be in the zone any more. You should fire the nachal 'nik banyak, all this corrupt gang, and fire the brigadiers and clean up the criminals from the camp, etc. etc."

The commander laughed. "Ha, ha! Take account of it where you are. What do you think, that you can give me the orders. Do you realize where you are?"

They didn't argue with him. They went away.

"So you don't do it! You will be sorry that you didn't fill it out!"

In half an hour I saw what reminded me of the time of the breakthrough, when the American troops were arriving in Salzburg, when they liberated me from the German camp. It was "Hurrah, hurrah!" (ura! ura!) and all 250 of the Ukrainians were running with knives and tearing up the water pipe lines, tearing up the fences, on the way they could get bricks, stones, the fences, the water pipe lines, knives, axes, and they were storming the criminal barracks, and the fight started.

Well, the commander realized the situation. Naturally fire was immediately opened from the watch-tower but he was a very old commander, a very routine commander, with great experience, and he opened the gates and formed a line of guards around the gates, so that any of his criminal associates who were in danger could run out from the camp and really one after another the criminals were running out of the camp, that is anyone who was alive yet, and who was not wounded. Whoever was wounded was trampled to death and cut in pieces. And so they cleaned up the camp from the criminals. They took 35 or 40 of these murderers and thieves and gangsters away and the Ukrainians took over the camp.

Nagy: After this life was better. We could get normal food, etc. but the commander was very unhappy about it, and the criminals could take no clothing with them, so everything was taken that was not already sold in the bazaar in Karaganda.

Pierce: Was there any chance to inform against the commander when there was an inspection?

Nagy: In principle yes, but in practice it worked out that way only when a Moscow commission came. When someone came from the inter-camp area (the camps were located in districts), perhaps he also got dividends from this job, or was the friend of the commander so when you made any complaint you only made trouble for yourself because the commander had you in the palm of his hand. You see, when you made a just complaint, naturally this gangster was the inspector's friend; he knew how really just the complaint was, but he gave it officially back to him for investigation (na issledovani), and the complaint was so investigated that a guard would shoot you the next time you were at work on the excuse that you were trying to escape.

In case a Moscow commission came they did take steps, but you couldn't get a letter to Moscow out because all mail was officially censored, through the commander.

Pierce: So the commanders were just as criminal as anybody else?

Nagy: Not always but mostly.

Pierce: But these Moscow commissions then were more in accord with the law or with the intent behind the law?

Nagy: There was always something cynical about it, to show by an example that Moscow was still in existence but there were so few cases where they really interceded or did something.

For instance, once there was a shooting in the camp, and when the commission investigated, they found they had killed the son of a colonel, a very important one. He was one of the greatest criminals and he had defied the authority and killed the nachal'nik rezhima with an ax. Then they had opened fire, and he was shot. Then they got interested and investigated, but if he

- Nagy: had been anyone else they wouldn't have bothered. There was such social equality that sometimes there were sons of high officials of colonels, of generals. In the camps I have met such.
- Pierce: You mentioned mail, how many letters were you allowed to send out?
- Nagy: Until 1954 the foreigners could send no letters at all. The Russians, twice in a year. In the political camps I mean, the other camps. Then later after the destalinization, it was reformed.
- Pierce: You could write then to your parents after this time?
- Nagy: Oh no. I could write to my parents, but only two of my letters got through. One to my parents, and one to Vienna. The censorship was so polite that they corrected the German grammatical mistakes which I made in the letter. They used another type of ink. Moreover, we did not have the right to get the letters back. They always went to the Moscow post box, so that we didn't even know when we couldn't get an answer.
- Pierce: Did your parents know you were still alive?
- Nagy: My parents knew nothing about me until 1954. From 1949 to 1954--five years. Once I succeeded in getting out a letter from the Carpathian Ukraine, with a protestant priest who had been in the slave worker camp, just a notification to my parents. He was considered as in the Soviet Union, and he wrote directly from civilian life to Hungary.
- Pierce: Where did you go from Kolyma?
- Nagy: From Kolyma into the interior of Chukotka. These are absolutely naked hills, without any vegetation. A very sad region. This was the saddest period of my prison time, in the sense that it was the worst.
- In Chukotka, as in the rest of the far north, there is scarcely any civilian population. Some of the natives, the Chukchi, went across to America in the winter, not spying, but trading, and they got sentenced for this. Some were in the camps where I was. They spoke Russian very primitively.
- Pierce: Were the Chukchi the most primitive people you saw?

Nagy: No, the Central Asians are the most primitive morally. Culturally it is the Tungus, Yakuts, Chukchi, and Samoedy (now called Nentsy).

Pierce: Were you ever in Kamchatka?

Nagy: There are many camps there. I wasn't there but I knew many people who were, and I had a bad impression of it. The climate is very severe.

At Sakhalin they have some bytovychnaia camps, but not many. It is a border zone (pogranichnaia zona), so it is off limits.

A border zone requires a special entry permit to travel there. There are three zones, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. Zone No. 1, 500 meters around every border, is off limits for everyone except border guards (pogranichniki). Villages in this zone are demolished and the people deported. The second zone is about one mile (1-1/2 km). You can enter it with a special permit. The third zone is 30 kilometers. Here you need a special permit. If you are caught in this zone once without a permit, they warn you; the second time you can be sentenced.

Everywhere it is the same; along the borders of the peoples' democracies, it is less. Against hostile borders--Japan, Iran, Turkey--it is more. A whole island like Sakhalin is declared a border (pogranishnyi) Maritime Zone, and the ports are closed off. You can't enter them anywhere. Vladivostok is the same. It is surrounded with barbed wire.

I went past Sakhalin by boat, through the Tatar Straits, which separate it from the mainland. The sea was stormy. Sakhalin doesn't have much on it. The Japanese did more with their half.

IV CENTRAL ASIA (1953)

Nagy: In October 1953 we were thrown back from Siberia to Central Asia. We were a good two or three weeks in Omsk and then went to Petropavlovsk and Karaganda by railroad.

The railroad to Karaganda is quite modern and very good. I can only describe this one, because going down as far as Uspenskii, it then branches, and one branch goes to Balkhash and the other to Dzhezghazghan, and Kingir. It is doubletracked to Karaganda. Steam trains. The main line (magistral) is electrified only in the Ural mountains and around Novosibirsk and Tomsk, but there are preparations to extend it in the Kurgan and Petropavlovsk and Omsk lines too, because when the power stations on the Irtysh and Ob are ready they will have the energy for it. But in Karaganda there is no energy except from coal, and steam generating plants (teploelectrocentrals), not water power; so this is too expensive, so they don't even think about it.

Karaganda

So the first camp I was in in Central Asia was Karaganda, not exactly in the city, but outside. It was not a big camp, but there are many hundreds of such camps. In every camp there are 300 to 500, perhaps 800, a maximum of 1000. It is not as it was in Germany, where they had much bigger camps. There, I believe, there were in all only 180 camps, but in Russia there are thousands. They are more effective that way. There are some bigger camps too, but they are the transit camps (peresytkas). Every oblast,

Nagy: according to law, has to have a peresyilka. Because the traffic and the turnover (oborot) is so big.

The camp was typical in the Central Asian sense, which means that the barracks were not of wood but of brick and sometimes not even that; they needed brick for building. So they dug a big trench and covered it with corrugated iron or a stove and put in beds also of iron and then when there was a great shower everything poured in, and we had to go on stepping stones, as bricks, to get to our beds. They were little valleys; we made jokes about it.

Principally the camps are organized in the same pattern whether there are brick barracks, or wooden barracks, or tents, as in many cases, temporary quarters. You can freeze to death in the meantime, but they don't give a damn about it.

Our duties at Karaganda were mostly in Churban Ura, a suburb 20 kilometers outside of Karaganda. There is an Ura river outside a town, running close to this area, from which it gets its name, so in this area there were new houses two or three floors high, standard, with eight apartments in every house, and we worked on these. Each had one room and a sleeping room, and a primitive little kitchen and a bathroom, actually a shower. It was anyway better than before the war. The standard houses were not very beautiful from the outside, and had one kitchen for ten apartments, and one bathroom for 20 apartments. Anyhow it's progress. Whether they would get water piped in is a more difficult question.

The flush toilets in those apartments were very poor and very primitive, but in Soviet conditions they show a tremendous progress, only there are so few of them that this hardly counts. Only a drop in the sea.

The countryside around Karaganda is absolutely bare. Like Nevada or Arizona, but not like Mojave or Death Valley, not so bad. Not so hilly, an endless steppe, with some vegetation, grass, but no sandy parts.

Our camp had only a few hundred, but we constantly met people from other camps at work, so I have a good and clear impression of the entire region. These camps surround the town and are in the town. Everywhere.

Nagy: Karaganda is a typical confinement (zakliuchennyi) and deported (vysilka) area.

Karaganda is not open to visitors at all. It really is a prison town. Mostly deportees and slave workers and controlling MVD administrative personnel.

Karaganda is an immense big city, though not in the western sense. There is something like a civic center with the Gosugolpromyshlennost', new buildings, the NKVD, the Party, some schools, and new apartment buildings, and Panfilov Street, Timiriachev Street, Lenin Street, and Lenin Square. This is the center of it.

But there is also a Kazakh Karaganda, the original one, a kishlak, (a village of adobe houses). And then there is the new settlement of Karaganda where most of the deported people are living, very widely and generously studded with slave worker camps everywhere. The usual sight in the city--a group of slave workers going to work--especially in the morning hours. And the coal mines are in the middle of the city, sometimes, immense black mess around. But the most striking sight are the holes or caves in the ground. You wouldn't think human beings were living there. Outside you see only the chimneys. You dig a cave in the ground, make some steps and then you cover it with some wood, or, as there isn't too much wood in Karaganda, with some aluminum or canned food tins--pieces of tin cans. It is miserable, and this sight for miles.

They have naturally bus transportation and some halfway cleaned up paths, because they want to get these people also to work, but that is all that they do for them. And the children are playing around in this mess, and really hundred thousands of people are living thus. This is the greater part of Karaganda.

These people are free laborers; the slave laborers live in camps, and their conditions are even worse. The others are mostly deported persons. Quite a few Caucasian people were deported to Karaganda; there are many Chechen and many Ingush there. It is very interesting to see the man walking before and the woman two or three steps behind. There are many Volga Germans there too. That is characteristic of all Central Asia by the way--Novosibirsk also has many. There are Balts--Esthonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians.

Nagy: And Moldavians from Bessarabia. Most of the population is thus. They are restricted to the Karaganda area; they cannot go beyond a radius of 30 kilometers, and they have to report every two weeks at the NKVD (MVD).

The food supply is very bad. Sometimes certain items are missing for months. Everything is imported. They may have some agriculture when the virgin lands program is developed, but so far nothing. They don't have much meat; most of the animals were killed or died during collectivization and the herds have never recovered. There are no fruits around Karaganda; it is desert and makes a miserable impression.

When a streetcar passes a gang of slave workers someone sometimes cries out "Salute to the Fascists--death to the chekists!" (Privet fashistam--smert chekistam!) meaning death to the guards. Knowing that probably everyone around them was of deported people and no one would give them up. However, the NKVD has a very tight network of spies everywhere.

This is, of course, much different than the picture of Karaganda which you see in the Soviet journals--the impressive new public buildings in the Gorki street style--the new Soviet architecture, with columns. When one of these buildings is going up they photograph it from all sides, but they don't show the surroundings in which they are situated. Slums, incredible slums. I have seen the slums of the Near East, and after the war the slums that the Germans were living in, but never such slums as these in the Soviet Union and especially in Karaganda.

The MGB was mainly in control at Karaganda during my stay there. It had more control there than the MVD and was hated by everybody.

It is very bad to feel the presence of an omnipotent organization. Once, while I was not there, there was the famous terror in Karaganda. They yielded to their distrust of the many deported people there, and took a map of the city and visited every three or four habitations, taking people away at night so that no one should know. This is of course a key tactic and conception, that people will not know the others were taken away and they will be afraid to speak even to each other. It was to make them stop their agitation, as there was a great deal of complaint against the state bonds, the "voluntary" bonds, a terrible oppression.

Nagy:

These, then, were the deportees, distinct from the workers in the slave labor camps. If the deportees were rounded up in such a manner as the above they were put in slave worker camp. If the deportees went out without permits from their areas they could also be sentenced to eight years. Many times also the deportation is a sort of preliminary arrest, they take them out in that status, and then the local MGB looks once more through their formuliar and considers that this personality should not be allowed to go around even with such limited freedom, and then he is picked up. There are many countless cases like this. Naturally a deportee must take a thousand times more care than anybody else for he can very easily be arrested. He has to report every two weeks to the police. If he misses it, that is also a cause for arrest.

The conditions in the whole area are very bad, especially as everything is very expensive, in the sense that you can't get necessary things. There is no private enterprise, so for a city of 500,000 which under capitalist economy would have 4 or 5000 stores, which would compete and go everywhere to pick up the best, there are only 40 or 50 big department stores. So, nobody is interested, store managers are appointed for their party connections, and not because of any interest in making the enterprise run well. So what happens? Sometimes four or five months go by with no sugar in the city. When I was there, you couldn't get a razor blade anywhere in the city. Sometimes margarine disappears and then it may come, they bring three or four wagons of margarine for 500,000 people; then the people queue up before the stores from morning to night, and during the night in preparation for the next day. Everybody gets a pound, a half kilogram, and then there is no more for two months. Everything else is the same. You must sign up for bicycles, or radio sets six or seven months ahead.

Churban Ura is the new city built near Karaganda. We were engaged in building the standard apartment houses there.

There is terrible drunkenness and prostitution in Karaganda. There is movement in the city during the night. They told us that the slave workers should be happy that they were behind the fence, because it was unimaginable what was going on. Gangs of the Chechen-

Nagy: Ingush, savages from the Caucasian mountains, were roving about. The criminal world was terrible. There was really a sort of frontier atmosphere there, like Dodge City or the Sheriff of Cochise.

The militia is weak. They care about the MGB more than the police. The MGB is more the political control, looking after the property and public order. The militia disappear during the night. They were afraid for their own life. It isn't for your money that you need fear, because nobody needs the money; this is the Russian way of robbery--it is for the clothes. When they waylay you, they leave you in your shorts. They have a beautiful expression for this--razdevat' nakhui--I don't go into details as to the translation of this.

The Revolt at Dzhezghazghan

Nagy: From Karaganda I went to Dzhezghazghan. It is even drier than Karaganda, with low flat hills around. The camp was in a hillside location.

There are two towns, Kingir and Dzhezghazghan, 2-1/2 kilometers apart. We were in Kingir. There are many camps all around. It was the same story elsewhere in Kazakhstan. Maybe in the Dzhezghazghan area there are more Kazakhs than in the Karaganda area. And many Ukrainians, Balts, Chechen, Ingush, etc., etc. and many slave workers.

Dzhezghazghan had the famous copper mines. They were British. It was said that the British blew them up or flooded them before they gave them over in 1928. I don't know if it was true or not. When the Ukrainians (the Banderovtsy) went down to work, they entrusted them with a very precious machine to work with, and they wrecked it so they never let them down anymore with it. They did a million rubles damage in half an hour.

The Banderovtsy were followers of Stepan Bandera. They were a very strong partisan movement until 1950-1951. It was so strong in 1946-1947 that they controlled full areas in the Carpathian mountains. They hoped at that time that there would be a war and

Nagy: they would get complete support, but after Korea they saw that the United States and other countries would make no effort to liberate them, especially when the United States took this slap in the face. It depressed these people very much, because this was a true strong resistance movement. There was one in the Ukraine, and another in Lithuania. The latter had no name. It was not as strongly organized and connected with the emigration as the Bandera movement. But they were very tough.

When these movements were broken up, not only the participants were rounded up and tried and sent to slave labor camps, but the populations of whole areas which had given them support. Through these things, and disobeying the order to join the collective farms, two-thirds of the population of Lithuania and the Western Ukraine and even more in Esthonia, and Latvia (a little luckier, about one-half) were sent away.

Now they have allowed some to come back--thank them for the mercy! When these people went away their property was taken away, and more important their furniture, and their apartments, and were given to Russian settlers, Riga had a population of 2,000,000, a city that had 500,000. In Russia, it takes a half a lifetime to buy furniture and necessary household things. To get an apartment means another half lifetime. So they came here, settled down, found a job, in a way Soviet prosperity, though with very low living standards by comparison with American prosperity, but anyhow you can exist more or less, so why should these people now leave these places and go back when the best they can do is look around? They can't settle there. Nothing to do. Everything is so calculated, in a hypocritical way. They get better wages where they are, they have already found homes, so they stay.

It is the same thing everywhere in the Soviet Union, the same NKVD control. There was a question of repatriation to Gomulka's Poland, and many went back even after 20 years because it was a question of relaxation, but many away from Lithuania and Esthonia would not go back even after only five years, because it would be no improvement.

Of the political prisoners, 90 per cent were Ukrainians, and most of those from this area in the Capathians which the Soviets had taken over. And the

- Nagy: rest were mostly from Central Asia. A ridiculously small part were Russians.
- Pierce: There is quite a controversy about Ukrainian nationalism; the Russians say it is only in the Western Ukraine, in Galicia, etc., whereas Ukrainian nationalists, wherever they are from, say it is entire Ukraine.
- Nagy: The truth is in the middle. It is undoubtedly strongest in the Western Ukraine, but no one can say that the rest of Ukraine is completely pacified, in Russian hands and everything is all right there. It is absolutely a mistake to consider Kiev like Moscow or Kostroma. There is much Ukrainian feeling there too, but after 200-250 years of Russian rule, it is not as strong as in the west.

The Banderovtsy were some of my best friends. You could argue with one of them, but they would never never deliver you to the NKVD, so they were absolutely beyond all doubt political. This was not true of the Russians, not even those who had been war prisoners, sentenced because of their activity during the war-- the Vlassovtsy, etc. (They were the fewest, but there were many who had cooperated with the German occupation.) That was during the destalinization, and at Dzhezghazghan some major riots took place. There was really a romantic and a political reason why it started, but the truth was that it started by a very prosaic way.

It became a little easier after Stalin's death and we felt that some change must come and that we must help it along. The situation was intolerable. The food was abominable, medical care was nothing, we had not the right to correspond, we were kept in the greatest heat by closed windows in barracks for the night, and everything smelled, the brigadiers were beating us; sometimes they created a case of someone attempting to escape, but it always turned out to be the rebellious element, making trouble for them with their disobedience. They were sent to another camp during the night and then under guise of an attempt to escape they were simply shot. The discontent was growing and growing, and finally, the ridiculous part of the thing, there was a fence between the women's camp and the men's camp--not a very high fence, because they were interested that we shouldn't jump out. That meant that we could jump over this fence from the women's camp to the men's. And we were doing so.

Nagy:

So what happened--one day they warned us, but we didn't care about it. We told the guards "You rotten characters, etc. (Ty podla, ty suka...). Your duty is to watch when we jump outside. It is none of your business what we are doing inside."

"I shall shoot you if you jump once more."

"Go ahead and try it!" (Akh, ty poprobui) for we saw that he had no authority--really he had none--to do that. Then he felt we were defying the authority--he was the authority--and the next time somebody jumped over--it was a Polish prisoner--he opened fire and shot him. Next day we demanded punishment, so the commander sent us to a warmer climate, with some ugly words.

So, what happened, next time the women--they were more offensive and more aggressive--we caught on their advice a rezhim officer, a discipline officer coming into the camp, and we choked him--we didn't kill him--we put a string around him like a piece of steak and put a stone on the end and threw it over into the women's camp. And the women pulled him in in this fence area and under his body protection jumped over the fence again. The guards couldn't shoot because he was crying, "Don't shoot! I am here!"

This was the start of the rebellion and then came the more serious part. A Polish colonel organized it; we made a list of demands. We wanted nothing to do with the Karaganda command. They were washing their hands; they were covering their crimes; we wanted a Moscow commission, a member of the central committee of the party, or the Minister of Interior Kruglov, to come and to see what was going on here. We were doing the hardest work, the most important work, for the five-year plan, at least we thought it was important, that we were very important, but it turned out that only our work was important, and we wanted to open the barracks, and to correspond--many after five or six or ten years absence--with our relatives, normal food--so that we wouldn't starve--and medical care.

So, what happened? First they tried persuasion; they sent someone from Karaganda. First they didn't let anybody from the Karaganda command in the camp. We would kill them; we would crush their heads in with stones, clubs, and axes, and we organized ourselves.

Nagy: All the denouncers, the sukas, were put in jail. So the camp was really pleasing. And then after six weeks they sent in the last warning; the Secretary of the Dzhezghazghan party organization came also to persuade us. They said that if we didn't go out to work and if we didn't stop our resistance the Alma-Ata Military District would crush us with tanks. We didn't believe them because they had been lying so much in the past year, but the point is that when they promise something good, it is always a lie, and when they promise something bad, it is always true.

And so it happened. We heard on the hillside the tanks, with open power, because they had no reason to close it. We had no arms to hit them. They simply came through the fence, crushing it, and they went first against the women's barrack. I was on guard, a prisoner guard, you know, just an observative guard, an alarm, a Paul Revere. I couldn't even hide myself. They were crushing in the women's barrack.

There was a terrible cry, and the whole barrack collapsed, and they went through the ruins and the bodies. Coming out the treads of the tanks had women's hands and feet and hair on them. Then they went to the second barracks and came to the hospital in the men's camp with the ill and the wounded and killed them all--more than 500 dead. Then we capitulated. They made no investigation; they were not interested in who, or why. The organizers were taken to a punishment camp, straflager, and the rest of us were dispersed to other camps.

Women, how many there were, and how they were treated. They suffered more than the men. They had one single advantage; a woman's body is built with fewer cells; they require less to eat; they are not so hungry. But I didn't envy them; I was sorrier for the women than for the men.

The situation of women in the Soviet Union in general is really inhuman and disgusting, and they are taken into the slave worker camps by the millions. This is the worst that has ever happened to women in human history...

To Frunze, Stalinabad, and Tashkent

Nagy: After the crushing of the Dzhezghazghan revolt (May 1954), our group was dispersed and sent farther into Central Asia, never unloaded, just sent from one area to another, because no one wanted to take them after the revolt.

Pierce: What route did you take?

Nagy: From Dzhezghazghan we went by rail, part of the way on the Mointy-Chu railroad, still with only a single track. They were building earthworks on one side of it, mostly with slave labor.

We went to Pishpek junction, the railroad station for Frunze, the capitol of the Kirgiz republic. The town is now called Frunze, but the railroad station still bears the name of Pishpek. The railroad stations always stay the same. Orenburg for example is still the name of the railroad station, but the city is Chkalov. Vernyi is the railroad station and Alma-Ata the city.

This was the Chu valley (Chuiskaia dolina). Here we were in a happier situation. There were not so many deported people, the climate is better. There are many fruits, grapes and apples in this valley, surrounded by high mountains beside Issyk Kul, a lake. It was very primitive, with Kirgiz and Uighurs, all around, in their national dresses, and very nice cities, like Tokmak, looking more European than oriental, rooftops, etc. It is a nice region, not so many slave worker camps, though there were still some. But with people with shorter terms, and they therefore get around more, they can get out of the camp and are not under such strict control as originally.

From Frunze we went to Tokmak, a small city. Of all the nationalities I saw the Kirgiz seem the less civilized. They are much more Asiatic than the Kazakhs. The Kirgiz are the most "dark" Asiatic type. This is darkest Asia. I don't know what is going on on the Chinese side, in Tien-Shan, Tibet and in Yarkand (Chinese Turkestan), but here they are the most backward. The Uzbeks are the most cultured. The Turkmen are not too bad. The Tadzhiks, well I don't like them, but it's perhaps personal. I was in Tadzhikistan for only a very short time.

Nagy: Next I went to Stalinabad (capitol of the Tadzhik republic). There is beautiful, spectacular scenery there. But although it is a very rich region there is much to be done. Everybody thinks the Soviets have done much there, and they have, but they haven't really changed the life very much; they haven't given high living standards, and it is nothing like American farms, etc., as they present it in their pictures. But Stalinabad is a nice city. I liked it. It is quite new, and there are many deported Germans in Tadzhikistan, and in Stalinabad. They cleaned the city and built the buildings. At the same time they are living in dugouts.

Pierce: Why didn't you like the Tadzhiks?

Nagy: It is a personal impression; it doesn't mean anything in particular. There are naturally many different nationalities there besides Tadzhiks. Uzbeks, Badakshans, and many others. The Tadzhik are subservient to the Soviets. Not so much, however, as the Kazakhs, who are the most subservient. This is my impression and I think everybody's. Of course if there were a change, I have no doubt that they would cut the throats of every commissar not a Kazakh national. But they have a general hatred of everything that is western, and this I abhorred very much in Central Asia. The Uzbeks, however, are somewhat more cultured, and are not so bad, more intelligent. The Kirgiz, Tadzhiks and Kazakhs are really dark Asia, the darkest.

At Stalinabad I was doing nothing, just waiting for further transportation. I was in a peresylka there. The central Tadzhik peresylka. There are not so many labor camps in Tadzhikistan. They are too near the border. The Afghan, Indian, Pakistan and Chinese borders are not far, and the camps would have a bad propaganda effect. There is theoretically a possibility of escape, only a possibility however. There are few such cases, but they don't take chances.

Then I left Stalinabad by Leninabad to Tashkent. I was there for only a few days. Going around a little bit to work till the transport left, sometimes in the peresylka. In the peresylka were also driven out to work, but could get in contact with the population and see what was going on, what the economic status of the city was, what factories had been built. If

Nagy: you are there you can see a great deal.

From Tashkent we were sent to Kokand, where we were in a camp, and from there we were finally transported back to Karaganda and Chuiban Ura. That was already in the autumn.

We were very unhappy that they had brought us back to Kazakhstan for the winter. Nothing funny about it. Burans (blizzards). Such a buran came immediately after we got back to Kazakhstan. Trains were not heated yet because we had no coal and no wood. It was miserable. Rail transportation is always something terrible.

At Chuiban Ura those of us who were foreigners made a mess and refused to work. We heard that something was in the air, a change of administration, or amnesty, and we simply refused to work. There was much talk and threat of punishment, but they didn't dare, because in Moscow there were already instructions that foreigners were not to work, and preparation for repatriation. But the commanders wanted to suppress this news, to press out from us as much as they could for their own little needs, as long as possible, for there were very good craftsmen among us, but they didn't succeed. There were many Koreans and other orientals; the foreigners were all very united.

V SIBERIA AGAIN (1955)

Nagy: Finally they got tired of us at Karaganda and sent us back to Siberia, to the Krasnoiarsk region. Krasnoiarsk is in very spectacular country, where the Enisei breaks through the mountains, not such high mountains, but quite good colored and very peculiar nice scenery. The Enisei is a beautiful clean river, I love it, absolutely clean and beautiful. And Krasnoiarsk is also developing quite a bit. It has a beautiful new river port (rechnoi port); I liked it. Quite a bit of shipping, but then it is frozen in. I was there in March, 1955, and then it was just beginning. There is a good deal of shipping, because at the end of the Enisei, Norilsk and this whole area is gathering. The last rail point is in Krasnoiarsk, so there is a great deal to unload. It is a great river port (rechnoi vokzal).

This was in 1955, and I have already mentioned the great change which had taken place in the region in the five years since I had been there.

An Atomic Test

Nagy: In the Krasnoiarsk area one of the guards who had taken part in this experiment told me about an atomic explosion he had seen. He was then serving in the Red Army. One day they told them they were to be sent on a special mission, and they should write letters to their relatives saying that they were going on a special maneuver and they would not be able to write for four weeks. That day they took them on trucks and took them deep into the country. This is an immense, unimaginable region. They drove them around only at

Nagy: night time, and in day time they rested, so finally after one week by truck over different forest roads (vlinevkas) they got there on the spot and they took away from them all documents, all pictures, everything. One lieutenant, who didn't deliver one of his girl's pictures, was demoted, broken, for this simple offense.

And then the guard told me, the experiment was a little later. There was supposed to be an explosion somewhere in the lake areas; he described it. And they told them all precautions they should take, that they should cover their tents with certain material against radiation. They didn't tell them what was going to happen, just that it was so, and they were to take great care. If they would sit quietly and not go out, for example, nothing would happen to them.

And then a plane came. They didn't see it, but they were told a member of the central committee of the politburo came on it for the experiments. And then next day, in the morning, a plane dropped the first atomic bomb. It completely demolished this terrible big rock or mountain, so that the next day there was nothing there.

The next day they made another explosion, under the water, because the whole lake simply disappeared. This time some people got nervous and left their tents, and this water splashed down on them.

These people had to be immediately isolated from the others, and their clothing was taken away--some medical personnel came and very carefully arranged it--and these people were transported away and nobody knew what happened to them. And when the rest of them were released, they had to sign a document that they would not tell nobody nothing. They were warned of the death penalty, so they came away and that's all. He described to me approximately the place where this was, not far from Eniseisk, in the central Krasnoiarsk area, where the Angara flows into the Enisei. Naturally, the jungle stretches for hundreds of miles.

Pierce: So close to a populated center?

Nagy: Oh, this is not so populated. On the map these places appear close, but actually they are hundreds of miles distant. In Nevada they are closer to populated places than this one.

- Nagy: He said that terrible fires were raging in the forest after the explosion. The whole area was surrounded with barbed wire.
- Pierce: The troops were there then to simulate wartime conditions, when a bomb would be dropped. But this mountain which you say disappeared.
- Nagy: A mountain of hard stone. I didn't have time, unfortunately, to ask him for further details. I didn't have much time to speak to him and ask him more about it.
- Pierce: Did you find the guards very often informative in that manner?
- Nagy: At times. Sometimes they were very bad, sometimes nice, sometimes informative. Of course these guards were the MVD, not the MGB. In Russia you can be drafted into the MVD national army to serve your regular service time if you are drafted, just as with the air force or the navy. And so they have a certain selection; they have a tremendous army.
- Pierce: What about friendships within the camp? Could the average individual form close friendships with anyone else?
- Nagy: Very close and very nice friendships. And the most marvelous in the whole thing was that sometimes if you couldn't get along with your own nationals, you could get along in the meantime with people like the Koreans, or an Estonian or anyone. Yes, really because it was such a hard life the best in individuals came out. My best friends were, for instance, Koreans or Japanese. I couldn't get along very well with the Hungarians, because many were fascists from 1945, sitting for war crimes. Not everyone was a political hero who was sitting there. They gave me a very nice reception when I arrived.

Not all were hostile, but some were. When I came they knew that I was Jewish and they accepted me, nicely. You know that in Hungary there are Jews on the Central Committee of the party, so they said, "Ah, you came also!" I had fought them, but if you are a communist or an anti-communist, it means always Jew. "Now you came also; you have arrived. Rakosi didn't help you." (He was not helping but sending me to

Nagy: Siberia, but anyhow...) "You will drop dead here."

I answered them: "I will not drop dead here, but I would like to know how it is that you haven't dropped dead here since 1945. In Hungary we all think you are long dead already. It is about time you should drop dead. How come you are still alive and you haven't dropped dead yet?"

So the conversation went. Anyhow they made trouble for me; they denounced me to the Secret Police, I mean to the commissar to the oper-upolnomocheny' for they had already been in the camp three or four years and knew how to do various things in really effective manner and how to make trouble at work. I had much trouble with them.

Pierce: From your own countrymen?

Nagy: Yes, but they were fascists. If someone is a fascist or a communist what does it mean if he is our countrymen or not.

Pierce: I read today of an American priest who returned from China after long imprisonment there. And one sentence in his account impressed me very much. It said that you can't refer to them as Chinese, because they are not Chinese, they are just communists. Once you are a communist and you accept this you have no nationality anymore, you are just a communist...

Nagy: That's right. And when the fascists beat me they already paid me no honors. They were terrible. In the meantime they were behaving so meanly and were so characterless in political business that they could so easily turn from fascist to communist, and they were so conforming in so characterless a manner that when we tried to organize a resistance or anything they were the first to refuse to cooperate, and when it was any hunger strike or any little issue they were always the first to go over. "It has no sense," they would say. They always called the others, in Hungarian, "the vaseline knights," because they wanted to protest some rotten margarine and stuff. This Russian margarine is very bad, something like mederlein, you know, and we always joked that "You want to put some mederlein on your bread, and therefore you refuse all decency and all character and backbone."

Nagy: Really I didn't like them. As a Jew I had no reason to like them, but really I hated them in the camps, and not only because of their anti-Semitic attitude, but because they were so characterless, and because of this opportunistic attitude. You know then what these two things, fascists and communists really mean.

In Russia the margarine is incredibly bad. They don't call it vaseline, they call it kombezir (combined fat) because they put all the trash from sheep and goat fat and everything in this. It breaks like charcoal, and they give the cheapest sort sometimes to the slave worker camps.

Pierce: What else did you have, besides this maslo or butter?

Nagy: This was not our food, you had to buy this. We got only this cottonseed oil, of a very bad quality.

Pierce: Was the cottonseed oil in solid form, or liquid?

Nagy: We just poured it out. But sometimes it disappeared for months, and then when we got it, it came in such ridiculous quantities.

Sometimes we had kasha (porridge). Sometimes we had only cabbage and no kasha. We had vegetables, and then it was worse because it had no calories, and it was hard to work on it.

"The food," they told us, "Now it's malina (literally, raspberry). Now it's wonderful. You should have seen how it was some years before immediately after the war and during the war when the people died by the hundreds of thousands."

Into the Taiga

Nagy: From Krasnoiarsk I went 200 kilometers to the east to the station Rizhoti, and then into the taiga, into the jungle. There I was not working, and I think every foreigner mostly refused to work. So it happened that they messed around, and then I came to a hospital, and there I was again in the jungle, a good 20 or 30 miles from the railroad. There are thousands of people

Nagy: around there and maybe hundreds of camps. Lumber cutting and the Derevo-Obdelochny'-Kombinat. Lumber work, it was very very messy again.

Pierce: Were the camp hospitals any good? One hears much of the cheapness of life in the camps. Did they make any attempt to rehabilitate a sick worker, to make him productive again?

Nagy: Only in cases when he was useful for production. If he was in a working category they took care of him; when he was not, they didn't pay too much attention to him. There were four working categories. Anyone in the first and second got medical care, in the third, not any more, and in the fourth, not at all. Sometimes he was not even brought to the hospital. Sometimes I was first category; later on I had tuberculosis, and then I was classed as an invalid, but it was not always TB. Sometimes I followed a very aggressive policy, so that when they saw that I messed around so much they let me alone. For such a gentlemen's agreement that I keep silent, that I wouldn't stir up the others, then they would leave me alone.

I got lung TB there, but fortunately not badly. I came early to the hospital, forcing my way in there, and I was anyhow sick. I was treated there by a Jewish doctor. He gave me such a category, such a fictitious case history (istoriia bolezn) that it always protected me. He gave me false X-ray shots, and everything, and these protected me.

But they didn't have any medicaments. The commanders were so conscienceless that they simply drove you anyhow. They were interested only in getting the work out of you.

Pierce: The doctor was Jewish? He was a prisoner too?

Nagy: Yes. Sure he was a prisoner. You couldn't have Jews in the prison camp who were not prisoners. They were not loyal to the Soviets. Only when they were prisoners did it make no difference who was or was not Jewish.

Pierce: What about the personnel of the camps--were most of them Russian, or were they of all nationalities?

Nagy: Most were Russians, but there were also Ukrainians, Central Asians and Georgians. But the greater part were Russians. There is no doubt about it.

Pierce: Was the commander always a Russian?

Nagy: Not necessarily, but 99 per cent were. I remember, for example, some Kazakh commanders, and some political officers from Georgia, etc., including a very disgusting one from Azerbaidzhan.

Pierce: Would they be worse than the Russians on the whole?

Nagy: Sometimes yes, sometimes no. It depended. You know the NKVD or MVD is a special organization. You see, when someone is in that organization it means that he has given up all loyalties but one, and this is to the Party.

Pierce: Was there any attempt to indoctrinate you while you were in the camp?

Nagy: Not until the destalinization. After that there was a general effort to do it. Before the destalinization they were not interested. You see the prisoners were selected in the "other" camps, special camps, in which they were not allowed to have a theater, they were not even allowed to make a flower bed in the camp, or a little grass. Everything that would make us happier. We were not even allowed to sing or to play any instrument, not even allowed to see a movie. In the other camps they sometimes brought in propaganda movies.

Once some overzealous prisoners tried to make some red stars in the middle of the camp, using bricks, etc. A commission came and they kicked them apart, and they said "This is for us; not for you!" Of course, we didn't need this sort of thing very much, but the point was, as they told us, "All right, maybe you have good intentions, setting up these red stars, but who knows that some fascists may come during the night and urinate on these red stars. So you don't need them; it is better then not to have the red stars."

Pierce: Was there grass in front of the camp commanders' houses?

Nagy: Oh, it was something miserable how these officers lived. It was remarkable how dirty they were, when

- Nagy: you saw how they required the barracks to be, in the greatest purity, so that if they saw a little dust they gave five days of solitary confinement, extraordinary bad food, handcuffs, and everything, but you should have seen their houses, what was going on there. Unbelievably primitive and--oh well, it was just terrible.
- Pierce: Was this the usual thing among the guards and commanders?
- Nagy: Yes, mostly. Naturally there were some more decent people who were sent there, for punishment mostly.
- Pierce: Could they have their wives and children there?
- Nagy: Yes, most of them had, but they had such miserable little houses. As I tell you, they were zealous to have us bring wood to them, etc. But they did not pay for it and used our work for their own needs. It was a dirty trick.
- Pierce: This (pointing to map) was where you saw this tremendous change, the electrification, etc., on the railroads?
- Nagy: Yes, everywhere it was a great change, especially in these areas. Because for the most part the pioneering works in this region were built by slave workers.

VI THE CAMP VERSUS THE HUMAN SPIRIT

Pierce: In what you have told me so far, there is one thing that seems to be lacking, the personal element. You have told your story in a general sense, as an observer; could you tell more of how this life affected you?

Nagy: I don't like to speak of it very much; I had a bad and a very rough life in the camps because I am a nonconformist by nature, a born rebel. I have tried to tell this from a more general angle because these are very deep spiritual things, but I can work it out for you.

There were many disillusionments, and many good friends, wonderful people I met, and many deeply moving things that I have seen and have had the possibility to see, and at the same time I was also getting adjusted to the life. Along with the terrible experiences I had very good experiences along the way to find out more about my soul and spirit. It is a long thing.

From every camp I had some memories, and from different times, how they affected me, moments, etc. We must work on it, but would have to start from the beginning. And I don't know if it is very diplomatic in America, because I have seen many mean sides, many very dirty sides, and I don't know if it is the proper thing to speak about, because it is perhaps better not to give the very disillusioning side.

There the things were understandable, but when I narrate it here in Berkeley and you have never seen what brought the people so far down, even in cases when I give the reason it may be incomprehensible. I am very strongly inclined because I suffered very much

Nagy: from Fascist gangs just from being a Jew. They were cruel and merciless as always, and what was terrifying to me at the same time that I was suffering was that of 800 or 1000 people in one camp there would be three or four who were really western minded. There would be many, of course, who were anti-Soviet because the Soviet Union had done something to them, but they were so far from the western spirit--like the sukhy.

A real westerner has suffered the most, for instance, the conformism, and the humiliation, necessary for the slightest advantage and not the slightest conscience. They call them political prisoners but they haven't the slightest dignity in their behavior. So it was a crucifixion for a western-minded person to be in these camps, with the prisoners, this dirty little place, a 25 year sentence for political slave workers, are standing out on the stage and roaring "We are defending peace!" (My zashchishchaem mira). It was so disgusting.

And I remember a man, a Trotskyite, in camp since 1937, he had tuberculosis, and he made the dirtiest jokes about America, about the germ warfare and about Truman and about MacArthur and everything. It was so humiliating and I was so furious that when I spoke against it they thought first and told me that I was Don Quixote, and second that because they felt that I may be a Don Quixote but I am not a mean bastard, and I am not prostituting myself for a plate of soup--dirty cabbage water--and they began to intrigue against me. And finally when they saw they couldn't frighten me...

This was the main point, that I was living all of the time in my spirit, and ideas, while they were living in the camp. For me I felt that either I shall get out or I shall die. Because I didn't accept what was going on around me, by no means was I ready to conform to it, for this was an intolerable way of life for me. Even the freedom of the Soviet Union, because at one time they were going to release us to live within the Soviet Union. I didn't want it; I didn't want their rights, and told them so. And this was the main thing, that everything that I lost through this behavior didn't matter for me, because I never accepted it.

What they could offer me in exchange for this little conforming behavior was so little and so

Nagy: disgusting for me that I didn't give up this great ideal. And in the meantime they felt a double complex, a guilt complex because they saw that there was someone who could behave in another way, not only me but three or four of my friends, and so do you know what happened in this case? This hurt them even more, and so they were going to go to the oper-upolnomocheny' and subvert against me, but even when not doing this, this dumbness [they followed] this century old method of terrorizing, everything...

It is a long story spiritually. I don't know; I have thousands and thousands of memories, and few bright ones. If I would really tell it the reader wouldn't take a justifying argument, because all of these things are understandable. I don't think that many Americans would behave in a better way than this, either. I know very much that this Southern white trash, for instance, are exactly these types, stupid, narrow-minded, egotistic. But in the meantime I don't know if it is a fair thing; my aim is not to attack from a comfortable point here in Berkeley, with some kind of future, in every way better than what these poor people had and faced, to moralize against them, because I don't find it moral. It is not a fair thing.

There are some motives, because I belong in some ways to these people, some motives which in western bourgeois circles living in this narrow-minded petty bourgeois milieu, they would never understand. They would think, well do we spend foreign aid and do we fight to liberate this kind of people? I don't want to idealize either. The real hero of my account should be truth, but told so that it would be acceptable for 1958 in the United States and still remain truth.

I have a very good co-worker in Munich, a Greek Orthodox priest--he saw a hundred thousand times more, because he had an American education, and was a chief physician in the hospitals. I worked under him partly, but not the whole time. In a very decisive time, 1947-1948 he was in the Altai camps, and in this Mongolia region it was a horror.

Pierce: Did you meet any high party officials in the camps?

Nagy: I met many. They usually kept it a secret in the camps, and you had to find it out in a roundabout way. There was such a strong anti-party feeling and

Nagy: anti-administration, but I met many. For example, a minister of the Tatar Autonomous SSR, Nikanitulin, put away as a Trotskyist in 1937 and still there. Like many he had been put away without trial and without any particular offense.

And then there was an old man, secretary of the Saratov obkom. Even so, when Stalin died he was crying. Then there was a colonel of the NKVD, a Jew, a very disgusting guy. Of course, when a Jew becomes a communist he is no longer really a Jew. They are the most disgusting types, they are even demonstrating that they are not Jewish, they are especially hard.

The highest never became slave workers. There was a general with me, a professor of the Russian military academy, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Armaderov. When Stalin died he was liberated by Voroshilov, to be reinstated, a very nice old gentleman.

Pierce: How long had some of these people been in? Were there any earlier than '37?

Nagy: 1932, some of them.

There were Japanese and German officers. For instance the commander of the staff of von Paulus, Colonel General Petzholdt. I had a terrific adventure with him, unforgettable. We had a little warden (nadziratel'), a young punk without any rank, I called him always "Mandavoshka," wanting always to prove that he is big. And he had an idea for instance that nobody should sleep in clothing. And this German, a man with a tremendous figure, like a real Prussian junker. Von Paulos organized a Free German Committee, as you know. Everybody who took part in it was liberated immediately. He refused to take part in it, and like everybody else had been in the Nazi Party, so he became automatically a war criminal.

This man was sleeping on his bed, when the nadziratel' Prokof'ev came. He went to the bed. I was unfortunately there. And this German had in his whole ten or twelve years since Stalingrad not learned a single word of Russian, so it went like this:

"Get up!"

The bed was too small for him, so his feet were hanging out. The German thundered out something in

Nagy: German...

"Take your valenki off, Fascist...!"

Again the reply in German.

The nadziratel' turned to me:

"What does he say?"

For both sides I didn't dare to translate.

"Tell me precisely, precisely, what he says!"

And it went for an hour. I could hardly keep from laughing, and the whole barracks was listening. Of course I couldn't translate what the Colonel General was saying, because any report against him by the nadziratel' would have brought severe punishment, and the prisoner is never right. He is now in West Germany.

Von Paulus remained in the East Zone because he didn't dare return to the west. He behaved so mean in the prison that the other prisoners swore that they would make him pay for this. He was pro-Soviet. His attitude during the war was understandable, but after the war it was not. He was working for the "Free Pieck-istan" committee as they called.

Pierce: We were talking about people and types...

Nagy: As I told you, it is always a question of whether we should be realistic or socialist realistic, whether we should tell what was there, or, as I mean by 'socialist-realistic' if I should tell what would further the cause, so to speak. For what was there was not very pretty. I shall tell first the realistic picture.

I shall start with a very sad statement. This is that in general the more civilized man was, and the higher the level of society from which he came, the worse he behaved. The lower class people in general stood all the privations of camp life better because they were in a sense not humiliating themselves and not giving up their principles and remaining more human and more pure politically than the higher classes. This can be explained by the fact that the lower class people got used to the hardships more easily than the upper class. They were more like what they were used

Nagy: to. For the higher class people the change was too great.

But this was not the case with regard to the orientals--the Chinese, Japanese and Koreans. In those groups the higher class, the intelligentsia was in general standing sky high above the Europeans. By orientals of course I don't mean those from this Central Asiatic garbage can--your research area!--because these were the worst that you can imagine. I mean the extreme orientals.

Why? Maybe they have higher resistance and higher moral principles in their everyday life than we have.

Their lower classes, too, stood sky high. But there you could observe the ranks because high as the lower class were, they were still lower than the intelligentsia... I refer to the Japanese, especially because the Japanese prisoners were mostly from the higher classes, officers at least of the Kwantung Army. I cannot find words how to describe their dignity, their honesty, and you could never find a traitor amongst them. The Koreans were all young people of every class. The youngest were freedom fighters and partisans against the Russian occupation, most of them from North Korea. These people were all very well-behaved and deeply idealistic. The Chinese were not as good; you could find traitors amongst them, but still they were incomparably better on the average than the Europeans.

Of the peoples of the Soviet Union, the best were the Russians, the Great Russians. The worst were the Central Asians. Let's distinguish between the Caucasus and Central Asia, because the Azerbaijan Turks mostly behaved well, as did the Georgians and the Armenians, but the Central Asians--the Kirgiz and the Tadzhiks and the Kazakhs--but the worst were the Kazakhs. Most of the traitors and cooperators came from the Kazakhs. They were very Soviet minded, and just cooperate, if there is a question of selling out a non-Kazakh or a non-Moslem, it is nothing for them.

The Turkmen and Uzbeks? Garbage--the Uzbeks perhaps weren't quite so bad. They are a bit more intelligent. The Kirgiz were the most bezobraznyi (worst) that you can imagine. The Tadzhiks were also very bad.

Pierce: What of the intelligentsia of Central Asia?

Nagy: I haven't seen much of them. What they call intelligentsia were actually washing the floors of those buildings. Perhaps there are some well educated ones, that are shown in these Russian periodicals in Kazakh national costume, naturally. Those are donned only for the photographic record, but it doesn't mean anything in the real situation.

All the Caucasian tribes--the Chechen-Ingush, etc.--of the smaller groups, not the three great nations the Turks (the Azerbaijanians--they are pure Turks), Armenians and Georgians--these tribes are mostly exiled, and they are very disorderly from the human point of view.

A special group are those of the Baltic--the Letts, Lithuanians and Esthonians. Here you can see psychologically and spiritually the contrast between the attitude of the Russian concept and that of the Central Asiatic and other nations under Soviet rule, and the petty bourgeois European attitude. They are extremely honest, but they are honest in such a way that with all their honesty and decency they gained only the hatred and contempt of everybody. They don't abuse anybody; they don't steal; they don't even think of doing such things. For a Russian it is nothing to steal something from someone who has it. It is nothing for a Russian to take the clothes from someone, if he is a rascal, or if he has enough. But the Balts do not do that; they would rather starve. But when they get a parcel, they stick to their own principle--"It is mine; it is mine; I paid for it; I got it." And you could starve beside him and he would give you a piece of sugar, and he makes up a little sandwich for his best friend and he eats the standard 8 kilo--20 lbs--parcel alone. But by the Russians this does not exist. When a Russian gets a parcel he gets his friends and puts it in the middle of the barracks and everybody comes there and smokes whereas with a Balt--a Latvian, Lithuanian or Esthonian--he would have to ask his best friend for his sugar portion or for a cigarette.

And then one must mention the Germans. We observed them when they were getting their parcels. The Germans behaved very badly. Hungarians, Rumanians, Czechs, Poles were in the middle range between this

Nagy: Baltic and German attitude and this absolutely open-hearted attitude of the Russians.

The comradeship between the Chinese, Japanese and Koreans inside and outside was absolutely above everything also. Whatever one had he would share without any condition and with everybody, not only with his own. You should have seen what there was when a Japanese or a Korean was ill. Delegations; the whole Korean colony didn't eat sugar; they brought him such a bag of sugar everyday. It was the only product ill people could eat. Food for somebody who had a real temperature was not to be devoured.

Ukrainians were not bad, nor Hungarians, Czechs, Rumanians or the Poles. Yugoslavs--traditionally very open-hearted.

But the Balts and the Germans. The Germans didn't get parcels, for five years, and when they were allowed because of the intervention of the Federal Republic. So what happened? Two Germans, one got parcels, the director of the Dresdener Bank, one of the greatest concerns in Germany, and the second, a chemical engineer for I.G. Farben at Leverkusen--they were of the upper middle class, almost of the aristocracy. von Platen and Obhauss. Obhauss didn't get parcels because they were from the eastern zone. von Platen got every week four or five parcels because his family moved from Dresden to Hannover. von Platen ate every week the best products and canned food that exist in West Germany--chocolate, milk powder, condensed milk, and a big box full of sweet crackers, everything that you could imagine and on the next bed lay Obhauss, lying there eating some dried sukhari, black bread dried, with kipitok--hot water. von Platen didn't even think of handing anything over to the other bed. That was something unknown for Russians.

The others observed all of this with terrible contempt. You know, the Asians recognize power whether it is a just power or not--the Germans had the power to come as far as the Volga, so they had at least for the Germans sine ira et studio at least recognized the facts and had respect--but from all that they witnessed in the concentration camp they lost all respect. They had been taught what a wonderful nation the Germans were, and now for those

Nagy: that they had seen then they had only contempt. For instance, the Russians had a certain dignity. A Russian, for example, never eats what someone else leaves--the remains (ostatki). Either offer him a full original plate of soup or anything if you want to help him, but he will never eat what you have touched already. But the German officers of the General Staff went to the mess hall (stolovaia) and would get the remnants of the cabbage soup, because they had almost no calories--the dregs, that everyone had already spit in, or his snot going in, and syphilitic people, gathering from 50 to 60 plates one big plate--a big plate of syphilis they called it--and drinking it up. You can't imagine what contempt this awoke in the Russians. I, too, was hungry, and others, but I don't think I would have ever done that, and the Russians would never do so.

I am speaking of course of the average. There were also very noble Germans, good Germans, who were disgusted by this and tried to educate their countrymen to make them a little more organized and disciplined. So really we saw this old thesis of Hitler that the Germans must be kept so, you know? Then maybe from 60 million trash you can make maybe one big striking power and good.

And could they intrigue! Against everybody. There were four or five parties at the German colony. If there was a quarrel in any of the other groups, as the Japanese, Koreans and Chinese, you would never even find out who was quarreling with who. But the Germans were going to Russians and to everybody to complain. The Hungarians arranged it always. You could always find an authority--a colonel, a priest or anybody who had a certain authority.

There were many Iranians there, and those were the scum of the earth. Incredibly dirty, physically and spiritually. They were there for illegally crossing the border. Arrested with contraband. And also when the Russians withdrew from Azerbaidzhan they took many people. The Russian military administration is unimaginable with their mass arrests and deportations. There was someone from everywhere, including someone from the Danish island of Bornholm--they left too quickly to take all the people. Wherever they were everyone was for them prisoners. Austrians, Poles, Azerbaijanians, Jews, Koreans, and

- Nagy: they took anything of Rumania, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia, everywhere, even Finland.
- Pierce: What about the Volga Germans, were they like the other Germans?
- Nagy: No. Much Russianized. Still very allied in traditions. But they didn't understand the Reichs Germans too well. As a matter of fact they in a certain degree accused them of victimizing them by their attack so that they were deported.
- Pierce: What was the attitude of such people toward their imprisonment?
- Nagy: On the one hand they accepted it because they couldn't do anything about it; on the other they accepted it as a great injustice that had continued already for a hundred years. Always hoping for one day the liberation coming. All to their depths were completely convinced to the bottom of their heart about the complete ineptness and failure of the communist system.

The politicals had had ideas before they got into the camp, but the camp convinced everybody, the so-called corrective labor camps that were supposed to strengthen the Soviet attitude, and to correct them and make them better members of Soviet society; it convinced them that everything is an unimaginable blunder, hypocrisys and lies. They became convinced over everything. The slave labor camp is the best anti-Communist school.

On the other hand there was a young boy who because of a little error got in the slave labor camps. His parents had had him up to the police station, and there he got a three year term. And one thing was sure, however small the mistake that got him in, he emerged as a qualified criminal, who would never be an honest human being again, because they convinced him in the camp that to work in the Soviet Union is a stupidity, it is dangerous, you are not paid enough for it, whereas if you steal you have for a certain while a good life.

The political criminals of course abhorred crime, but the majority of the criminals, the bytoviki, had

Nagy: this attitude. The latter knew that they were endangered, but the political criminals were most in danger. The latter knew exactly and very well who was the guilty party, not honest work, but the system. They remembered from the Polish time, and the Latvian, and from the Hungarian that there was a time when you could get a position in society not for the crimes which you did or for your connections in the Secret Police, but through honest work only. And they preferred this time to this. So they knew that it was not the work but the system that was guilty.

Pierce: Do any particular personalities stand out in your memory above all others of the people you saw?

Nagy: Personalities? Above all a Japanese captain. Yamamura Eyeske. He is dead; I should like to speak in his memory. I always felt that if I should have the opportunity I should do so.

I met him in 1950 at Camp 28, on the Taishet-Bratsk Trass (rail line). We were in different camps together. He was the best worker, though the man was very small, only a little higher than five feet. He was young, 32 or 33 years. He was an intelligent man and had never worked in his life before. He was from Japan, from a very good family. His wife was left in Manchuria, and knew nothing about him when he was made prisoner. He was sentenced for spying because he was in the Japanese intelligence. A spy! From the regular army as prisoner of war, he was sentenced as a spy. He never argued, he spoke rarely. He didn't want to get in an argument with anyone. Some of these political Russians were provocateurs.

He had already been in prison more than five years when I met him. He could perhaps have got better work, which would have brought him far better food and far less trouble, but he never took the opportunity. He wanted to be in the hardest work, for he knew well that better work meant to offer services and get in touch with the NKVD people more often, and he didn't want even to see them or talk to them. When a comrade was in need, he was the first to help. When I got in the camp I was a new camp inhabitant and didn't know the habits so much yet. He saw my situation and spoke with me and for me, and he gave me very valuable advice, for he saw that I was too innocent and that I could get into much trouble.

Nagy:

He was the only man who cared about me, and who was nice to me. Only once did I see him get in an argument, and it was for me when someone offended me because of my being a Jew. There was no one else, not even a Jew, in the brigade of 50 men, to rise to my defense. Captain Yamamura Eyeske did it. Few people knew that he was a captain, because his file was in the headquarters and he didn't advertise the fact. He formed the Japanese in a little working crew (zvenok), and they were among the best workers. When he came home, silent, he was always keeping his clothing clean in the worst circumstances.

We were transferred together from Camp 28 to Camp 7 and from Camp 7 to Camp 30. There through a Bulgarian doctor Vashchinsky, who was very near to me, I tried to get him a job in the sanchast, but I didn't succeed. So he was going out with the timber crews.

You know that this work in the timber was terribly dangerous, without any care or precaution concerning the felling of the timber. They crowded many workers in a small area because the convoy wanted to control the people and in order that someone didn't slip away into the woods preferred to have them all concentrated in as small an area as possible. So often when they felled those tremendous big spruces someone couldn't clear out in time because there was no contact at all and you could never tell who was in the way. There were never two or three days that passed without a man being killed.

I was once saved only in the last instant, and even then the branches swept my shoulders as the tree brushed past and crashed into the snow. Because there was no warning. Someone would cry "Boi-i-siia!" (take cover), but it was hopeless. The commanders weren't interested, so one day there was news that someone else had been killed in the woods. At noon the convoy had a changed guard which brought the news. But they knew nothing about it, who it was, and they didn't care too much, nobody cared. After all, what was one more or one less. The news was like saying that it was raining today. You'd be interested, but for two minutes. In the evening Komori--you know I have never seen a Japanese cry--stormed into my barracks crying. He called "Miklos, come, come! Yamamura is badly hurt but is still alive."

Nagy: Without a coat I ran out into 40° of cold into a snowstorm to the sanchast (sanitarnyi chast'). I got a permit to get in with great difficulty and we went in. And there he was, entirely unconscious and I couldn't speak to him. He was breathing heavily, this inner bloody breathing, his head was struck in pieces, he was lying with his little face absolutely white, his head bound over. We stood there; I was making a salute before his bed, and officer Komori was crying too, both of us, and then we had to go out and in the morning he was dead.

In my eyes--and I can't really tell you so much about him--he was really the perfect man in the camp. Never humiliating himself, and at the same time not provoking, and he didn't offend anyone. He never occupied any position and he had nothing to expect from anyone. He, unlike others, could get respect without power, without anyone expecting any advantage from him, or without having to punish or terrorize someone. Even in the hardest work he never complained. When I remember perfect men, I think of Captain Yamamura Eyeske. He always behaved the same, and this was hard.

Pierce: This was the best. Who was the worst?

Nagy: Scores of them. Linzmeyer, a Volksdeutscher from the Bukovina, was one of the worst. Criminals. Zaharov, a criminal. Salamatin, murderer. There was really no end to their dastardliness. And when I say that they did so much it doesn't mean anything, because only the opportunity was lacking; if there had been any advantage for them they would have done a hundred times more.

Pierce: Were these suki or vory?

Nagy: Either, or pikapchennyi friary who made themselves great criminals. There were terrible examples.

There was a very mean Hungarian too, unimaginable, a moral idiot, already morally insane.

Pierce: Then these are breeding spots for more criminals among the young?

Nagy: Yes, for the young this was a disaster.

VII AMNESTY AND FREEDOM

Nagy: From the taiga region I went to Magaden. You reach Magadan by sea. Boats go from Vladivostok to Bukhta Nakhodka and Bukhta Banya to Sovetskaia Gavan, or sometimes to the rail connection there.

Magadan is quite built up (and is even more so now, since I was there). There are stone buildings and docks.

From Magadan came the order to repatriate us. We were sent first to a gathering point 50 or 60 kilometers south of Sverdlovsk--Kliuchi--you will not see it on any American map. There is a small river there, and slave labor camps.

Pierce: Were you ever allowed out on your own at this time?

Nagy: Oh, I was already free. In the Sverdlovsk area I was able to go into Sverdlovsk and buy things. We were supposed to be handed over to the authorities, but nevertheless we were free.

Pierce: How did you get money?

Nagy: Because this Hungarian doctor under whom I had worked in the Krasnoiarsk area--the one who saved my life from tuberculosis--had made a great deal of money working in the hospital. He gave me some.

Pierce: Did he have a high salary?

Nagy: He had quite a high salary in prison terms, but besides this he made much money on the side treating the civilians and getting fees from the NKVD people and their families.

Pierce: Like a private practice!?

Nagy: Something like that.

Pierce: That would be his normal duty, however, wouldn't it?

Nagy: No, no, on the contrary. There would have been only enough to take care of the camp personnel, but you know anyhow the Russians are not too bad people and they gave. Only you trusted the lives of their families in his hands, so they naturally felt like rewarding him. It is logic, the Russians are not too bad people.

The amnesty turned out to be a very curious amnesty. All foreign citizens were pardoned, but were handed over to their own authorities "for further punishment", severe punishment, as the Russians say-- for continuation of their punishment in Hungarian or any other jails. This was September 1955, the time of the spirit of Geneva.

The proportion between the pardoned and the continuously punished people was such that of those who went to western countries the proportion was 95% pardoned and 91% Germans--the most guilty war criminals-- and 10 or 5% handed over to Austria or Turkey or Japan, because they knew very well that no one would respect their orders, but as for the Hungarians, it was 55% came to jail; the Poles 40%, Romanians 50%, the Bulgarians 70%. So it was done in a very Machiavellian way. They knew very well that they were going into good hands and that they could afford to make such "magnanimous" actions.

I came home in November. I was with three other people and we spent one month as free people in the Sverdlovsk area because we waited for arrival of all Hungarians and Rumanians. The Sverdlovsk area was the Hungarian-Rumanian gathering point for repatriation. Then we went to Moscow, where we spent also a couple of days as free people. Then we were sent to Hungary and naturally as we expected, we were taken as we crossed the border. We were taken Jászberény jail. There we were thoroughly checked. The first group, with whom I was, was liberated on parole on April 4, 1956; the second group in June, the third group in September, and the last group was freed only when the revolution opened the doors.

Nagy:

When I went home I found out that my parents had been arrested in my absence, that they had lost everything and were pressed into one room, which they had to enter through the bathroom, and three other tenants were in their apartment. My father at 64 had to set to hard physical work, unskilled, in a chemical factory and my mother had to sew; they made together maybe \$50 a month.

I couldn't find a job, in spite of the fact that I speak several languages. I passed all the tests, but I was always refused by the personnel department or section--the polit section in communist countries. I was very weak and ill; I went to a sanatorium but they always asked why I was not working. I could have got the roughest physical job, but I was too weak and was in no mood to do rough work for them because they paid only 25 or 30 dollars a month.

However finally, 23 October, 1956, the revolution came. It came as a surprise, but anyhow I was fighting from the first moment, and we were crushed. Then, knowing very well what was in store for me if I stayed, I went to Austria. There I worked as an interpreter in the Hungarian refugee camps and then I asked if I could come to this country.

Here I worked in Los Angeles, first at Max Factor's, then in the Bank of America as a teller, and then I got a scholarship through World University Service and entered the University of California in September, 1958. I was allowed credit for my work at the University of Vienna, and by taking double the usual number of course units, and credit by examinations, have now [by the summer of 1958] nearly finished requirements for the BA degree.

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