

CRIMES OF COMMUNISM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR ESTONIA'S FREEDOM



*Museum Dungeons of the KGB*



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Photographs from the collection of Tartu City Museum

Cover photo: Exhumation in July of 1941 of innocents murdered by the Communists in the basement of the infamous "gray house."

Museum *Dungeons of the KGB*

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## CRIMES OF COMMUNISM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR ESTONIA'S FREEDOM



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## DUNGEONS OF THE KGB

A large modern building was constructed in 1938 on the corner of Riia and Pepler Streets in Tartu. Shortly after the Soviet occupation of Estonia in 1940 the NKVD, later born again as the KGB, moved in. The building became known as the “gray house,” a site of extraordinary evil. Top floors were occupied by NKVD interrogators, and the basement was converted into a veritable dungeon for those suspected of anti-Soviet activities. Innocent people by the thousands passed through on their way to jails and prison camps in Siberia. Many did not make it beyond the courtyard. Among those subjected to inquisition and torture was Jaan Tõnisson, a prominent Estonian statesman. In July 1941, the Communists murdered most of the prisoners held in the Tartu town prison and in the “gray house.” While the massive deportations of 1941 and 1949 represented the height of Soviet terror, arrests and deportations on a smaller scale continued throughout the Soviet occupation.

The owner of the building was Oskar Sõmermaa. He was arrested on June 14, 1941, and shipped to Sosva prison camp in Sverdlovsk *oblast* where he died in July 1943. His family was deported to Tomsk *oblast*. After restoration of Estonia’s independence, the survivors of the Sõmermaa family regained ownership of the building and offered Tartu City Museum rent-free use of the basement. It is the only original KGB site in Estonia that has been restored to reflect its infamous purpose. Initial funding for the restoration was provided by the Estonian American Fund from a bequest of Tiit Lehtmets in memory of his father, Elmar Lehtmets, an attorney, newspaper editor, and a member of the Estonian parliament, who was arrested in 1941 and subsequently shot.

As a museum, *KGB DUNGEONS* presents restored cells and torture closets. Numerous exhibits deal with Estonian resistance and the history of Estonia’s fight for freedom. Also shown are artifacts made by inmates of Gulag prison camps, fliers distributed by the anticommunist underground, and plans prepared by the Soviet security apparatus to deport Estonia’s politicians, clergy, educators, entrepreneurs, managers, veterans of the War of Independence, skilled workers, and farmers to ensure the country’s total subjugation.



The “gray house” as it stands today.



## PRELUDE TO AGGRESSION

The Soviet drive to occupy Estonia and the other Baltic States began in earnest in 1939. A grand scheme to divide Central and Eastern Europe into spheres of interest was formalized by the Soviet Union and Germany on August 23, 1939 in the secret Nazi-Soviet protocols that accompanied the nonaggression pact between the two totalitarian powers. The Molotov-Ribbentrop (MRP) or Hitler-Stalin Pact gave Hitler a free hand to wage war against Poland. In return, Germany recognized that the Soviet Union's sphere of interest included Finland, eastern Poland, Moldova, and the Baltic States. Hitler and Stalin wasted no time.

The first victim of armed aggression was Poland. Attacked without warning on September 1 by Germany, Poland was then betrayed by a Soviet strike on September 17. Shortly thereafter, Germany and the Soviet Union celebrated their cooperation with a joint triumphal military parade in occupied Brest. To ensure its neutrality, Estonia considered general mobilization. The idea was dropped because it might have been viewed as provocative by the Soviet Union.

Estonia hoped in vain to have its neutrality respected. The Soviet Union claimed that Estonia could not guarantee its neutrality. To make that case, a campaign of disinformation was launched. When the Polish submarine *Orzeł* that had been interned and disarmed in Estonia managed to escape to England, the Soviet Union falsely claimed that the sub had torpedoed and sunk the Soviet cargo vessel *Metallist*. Violations of Estonia's airspace and territorial waters by the Soviet Navy and the Soviet Air Force increased, and there was overwhelming Soviet military buildup at the border. The Red Army had 136,245 men, 1535 artillery tubes, 1318 tanks and 156 armored cars poised to strike. In addition, the Red Banner Fleet and the Red Air Force were also prepared for action against Estonia.

Estonia had no choice but to sign a mutual assistance agreement with the Soviet Union on September 28, 1939 that allowed the Soviets to establish military bases in Estonia. The Soviet Union solemnly promised to respect the independence of Estonia and not to interfere in its internal affairs. A harbinger of things to come was Hitler's invitation



Stalin smiles as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is signed in Moscow on August 23, 1939.



The Red Army crosses into Estonia, October 1939.



to Germans in the Baltic States to return to the *Reich*. And maps that showed the Baltic States as parts of the Soviet Union had already been drafted in Leningrad. Red Army units 25,000 strong crossed the border on October 18-21. Total collapse of the notion of Estonia's neutrality came on November 30, 1939 when the Soviet Union attacked Finland for having refused to yield to Soviet demands and threats, and used its bases in Estonia to launch air attacks against Finland.

The naked Soviet aggression against Finland was condemned by the rest of the world, with the exception of Germany. The League of Nations voted to expel the Soviet Union. Hanging on to an ever so slim hope for protective neutrality, Estonia remained neutral in these proceedings.

## THE SOVIET OCCUPATION

Europe was in turmoil in the spring of 1940. Stalin considered the time ripe to occupy the countries in his sphere of influence. Red Army troops could be redeployed from Finland, as peace with that country was concluded in March. The terms were very harsh, although Finland was able to hang on to its sovereignty. The West was reeling under Hitler's blows, as Denmark, Norway, The Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg were quickly occupied and the major offensive against France got underway.

Moscow demanded additional military bases, accused the Estonian government of hostility towards Germany and of excessive sympathy for the Allies. On June 14, 1940 the Soviet Union gave Lithuania an ultimatum demanding a pro-Soviet government and entry for the Red Army. By that time, Estonia and Latvia were completely surrounded. The Red Banner Fleet of 120 warships had received orders already on June 9 to capture naval vessels of Estonia and Latvia, to disrupt connections between these two countries, to organize troop landings, to prevent evacuation of the governments of these countries or of their troops and property, and to deploy Red Air Force planes to prevent Estonian and Latvian air fleets from flying to Finland or Sweden. In the course of cutting off Estonia from the West, the Soviets shot down the last civilian airliner to take off from Tallinn heading for Helsinki. A Soviet submarine picked up diplomatic post from the wreckage in the Gulf of Finland.

On June 16, the Soviet news agency TASS spread disinformation to the effect that Estonia and Latvia had formed an anti-Soviet alliance. A little later, on the same day Estonia and Latvia received the same ultimatum that had sealed the fate of Lithuania. Faced with overwhelming odds, the Estonian government accepted the terms. The Red Army began crossing the border in force on June 17, even before final agreements accepting Soviet terms were signed. The Red Army strength in Estonia rose to 115,000. Estonia was cut off from the rest of the world as the Soviet military took control of air fields, sea ports, railway stations, post offices, ammunition depots, armories, and local government offices. Estonia fit the international law definition of an occupied country.

The Soviet Union was determined to manufacture a legal pretext for its actions. To paint the occupation as a manifestation of the will of Estonian workers, it was necessary to stage demonstrations that would pave the way to a *coup d'état*. To direct the course of events, a prominent member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, A. Zhdanov, was dispatched from Moscow in a special train.

On June 21, Red Army patrols and armored cars watched over a meeting on Tallinn's Freedom Square. A crowd of 5000, consisting of factory workers pressed into service by Communist agents, Red Army soldiers in civilian clothes, and members of Soviet labor battalions, was led to chant for work, bread, and a new government. Then the crowd, dwindled to the hard Soviet core, moved under the protection of Red Army tanks to shout demands at the President's residence in Kadriorg.

Comrade A. Zhdanov was at hand to present President Konstantin Päts a list of acceptable members of a new, Soviet-friendly government. At 10. p.m., the President announced the new government. Leftist J. Vares-Barbarus, a physician and poet, was prime minister. Real power was exercised by A. Zhdanov, working out of the Soviet Embassy. Before midnight June 21, the site of government at Toompea Castle, editorial offices of the media, and police stations were taken over. Cadres of Soviet citizens, groomed for the task, had followed on the heels of the Red Army.

Soviet style democracy demanded Soviet style elections. The constitution of the Republic of Estonia was ignored. New elections were held July 14-15.

The bicameral legislature was abolished leaving the lower house to represent “the will of the people.” Candidates who were deemed “enemies of the people” were disqualified. The results of the elections, declaring a 92.9 percent win for the Communists, were announced in Moscow even before the votes were tallied. The first act of the new parliament was to name the country the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic and to appeal to the Soviet Union to be incorporated into the USSR. On August 6, 1940 the Supreme Soviet of the USSR approved the request, allowing the Estonian people to start their new Soviet life in the family of peoples of the USSR.

Officials of the Republic of Estonia, members of parliament, mayors, county governors, and all police chiefs were removed and replaced with members of a resurrected Communist Party of Estonia or Communist sympathizers. Civic and student organizations, and labor unions were shut down. The President of the Republic of Estonia Konstantin Päts and General Johannes Laidoner, commander-in-chief of the Estonian Defense Forces, had already been arrested and deported to Russia prior to August 6, 1940. Subsequently, other senior Estonian officers were arrested and either deported to prison camps in Siberia or executed. The Penal Code of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic was adopted. The 14 sections of its Article 58 gave the secret police *carte blanche* to arrest and imprison anyone. Convictions were quick and easy. Participation in the Estonian War of Independence 1918-1920 was regarded as a criminal act along with having had an active role in the creation of the Republic. Mass arrests and deportations of “enemies of the people” were planned for the spring of 1941.

## MASS DEPORTATIONS IN 1941 AND 1949

Deportation as a technique for dealing with “socially hostile elements” was developed into a massive means of repression by Soviet authorities. In 1941 local Communists in Estonia listed 11,102 people to be deported. There was no due process of law. Groundless anonymous denunciations were all that it took to be included in deportation or arrest lists. Men were declared under arrest and were separated from their families.

The deportations started on June 14, 1941. Over 10,000 deportees were crammed into cattle cars for the long journey to Siberia. Of the 3500 men

sent to death camps in Siberia, some 200 were alive in the spring of 1942. Women and children were shipped to the Kirov and Novosibirsk *oblasts* to work under harsh conditions. Hunger, hard labor, lack of medical care, and sheer exhaustion decimated their ranks. When the deportees were permitted to return in the late 1950s, only 49 percent of the women and children had survived to make it back home.

A new round of mass deportations took place in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in March 1949. More than 100,000 people were torn from their homes to make room for immigrants from Russia, to speed the collectivization of agriculture, and to eliminate potential adversaries of Communist rule. Code-named Operation Surf (*Priboi*), the responsibility for its execution lay with the temporary headquarters that the USSR MGB Interior Forces Chief Administration set up in Riga. Over 70,000 activists were involved, the majority of them local Communists.

Collectivization of farms started in Estonia in 1947. The farmers opposed it. By 1949, a very small number of collective farms had been formed. And the guerilla fighters popularly called Forest Brothers (*see Forest Brothers in WWII COMES TO ESTONIA* below) continued to challenge Soviet authority. There was widespread belief among the rural population that the Soviet regime would be short lived. The Soviet rulers decided that mass



A group of Estonian women, deported in 1949, posing in front of their sod hut in Siberia



Rear view of a one-room hovel in Novosibirsk oblast. An animal shelter is on the right, and the entrance is on the left. Visible in the wall are sticks and twigs used in the construction. Building materials had to be scavenged.



Erika Mardisoo, cradling daughter Marge, and Dagmar Ülenurm, cradling her daughter Merike, Krasnojarski krai. Tailings of Pihatsi gold mine are in the background.

deportation would persuade the rest of the population to follow the party line. Driven to meet the deportation deadline and quota by March 29, the activists resorted to grabbing people at random, regardless whether they were on the list or not. Neither did it matter whether the victims were the aged, the seriously ill or children whose parents were not at hand. By the end of 1951, 95 percent of the farms were in collective ownership (*kolkhozes*) or in state farms (*sovkhozes*). This was a huge setback for Estonian agricultural production, which did not reach prewar levels again until after the 1960s.

Although one-third of those slated for deportation managed to avoid capture, 32,500 persons—three percent of Estonia's population—were actually shipped to the Krasnojarsk *krai* or to the Novosibirsk *oblast*. Most of the deportees were women and children. The male heads of households had been previously arrested and deported. The deportees' property, including personal property, was confiscated, and sold, with the proceeds distributed to collective farms.

## WW II COMES TO ESTONIA

The German attack on June 22, 1941 took the Soviet Union by surprise. German forces captured Riga on July 2, and crossed into Estonia on July 7. Immediately, the Soviets implemented their “scorched earth” policy. Hardcore Communists were enlisted in “destruction battalions” to blow up infrastructure, destroy food and energy supplies, crops and livestock. The retreating Red Army and the destruction battalions terrorized the countryside, raping, torturing, and killing farm families. As the front approached, the combined fury of Soviet army units and security organs intensified. Men, women, and even children were indiscriminately arrested and murdered. On July 9, 1941 the Soviet security forces shot 223 detainees in the Tartu town prison, dumping bodies into the prison well and two makeshift graves. People were also killed in the “gray house” courtyard.

To combat the Communist terror, guerilla groups emerged spontaneously, consisting at the core of “enemies of the people” such as farmers and men with military background. Popularly called “metsavennad” or “Forest Brothers,” these groups coalesced into “green battalions” to battle





The Red Army demolished the Freedom Bridge.



St. Mary's church was destroyed by fire started by Red Army artillery.



War damage in Tartu, 1941.

the Communist destruction battalions and marauding Red Army units. Although the Forest Brothers took substantial casualties of their own, they inflicted considerable losses on Soviet units and managed to prevent the worst of the Soviet scorched earth policy. The Forest Brothers liberated the south bank district of the university town Tartu well in advance of the arrival of German troops. Estonians hoped for an immediate restoration of Estonia's independence once the country was free of the Soviets. With this thought in mind, the "green battalions" fought on to liberate the rest of the country.

In mid-July the German advance halted temporarily. While the Germans waited for reinforcements, the Soviets stepped up terror in northern Estonia. Again, the Forest Brothers fought back. A well-equipped Estonian reconnaissance group, code named Erna, was launched from Finland. It joined with the "green battalions" to fight fierce battles with Red Army units. German forces reached Tallinn on August 28. It wasn't until December 2 that the Soviet occupation ended with the capture of the island Osmussaar. The red terror was especially brutal and extensive on the two most populated islands, Saaremaa and Hiiumaa. In just one year of Soviet rule 18,000 people were wrongfully sent to their deaths, 2000 were murdered during the few months the war raged on Estonian territory.

## THE GERMAN OCCUPATION

Repressions of the Communist regime had affected practically every family in Estonia and sparked efforts to stave off the return of the Soviets. Most Estonians hoped for the restoration of an independent Estonia, even if it meant using the German military. The Forest Brothers were eager to fight for the cause, and soldiered on alongside German formations. To guard against sabotage by Communist agents and infiltrators, a self-defense force, *Omakaitse*, was organized. By the end of 1941, 40,000 men had joined *Omakaitse*. The rural population was especially vulnerable to predations of saboteurs dropped by parachute and the remnants of the Red Army still loose in the forests and bogs. About 10,000 men, drawn mostly from *Omakaitse*, enlisted in so-called east battalions or police battalions for combat duty.

Little did Estonians know of Hitler's intentions. Because Estonia had signed a nonaggression pact with Germany as well as with the Soviet Union, the Estonians had hopes of benign treatment by the Germans. Soon enough it became clear that one occupation had simply replaced another. The Nazis liquidated the 951 Jews who had stayed in Estonia, and transported many thousands from Lithuania and from as far as Belgium to meet a similar fate in a concentration camp located near Klooga. Minor offenses incurred severe penalties, and activists who dared promote the idea of an independent Estonia were persecuted by the Nazis. Instead of independence, the Germans installed their own civilian administration, a General District (*Generalkomissariat*) under the Ministry for Occupied Eastern Territories. Estonians were permitted a self-government (*Eesti Omavalitsus*) with very limited powers, headed by Hjalmar Mäe. Neither he nor the *Omavalitsus* gained favor with the population.

As the war on the Soviet Union did not turn out to be a *Blitzkrieg*, and took a heavy toll on the *Wehrmacht*, the Germans resorted to mobilizing Estonians in clear violation of international law. Still, many Estonians clung to the hope that Germany's policy might change to allow for an independent Estonia. Thus, creating Estonian units within the framework of the German armed forces was seen as a step toward creating an Estonian Army. In 1942, the Estonian Legion was formed under the *Waffen SS*. By then the enthusiasm for German style liberation had waned, and recruitment lagged. Only one battalion was formed, the heroic and legendary *Narva Battalion* that scored impressively against a Red Army of unlimited manpower and outstanding weaponry. Still, the Germans turned a deaf ear to any attempt to discuss independence.

By the end of January 1944, the Leningrad front had all but collapsed and the Germans were retreating in haste. With the Red Army again at the Estonian border, yet another mobilization was ordered, this time with the concurrence of Estonian nationalist circles. About 38,000 men were recruited and formed into six haphazardly equipped border defense regiments. The Estonian Legion was renamed the Estonian 20th *Waffen SS* Division. Its strength was boosted to 20,000 men by folding in the east and police battalions. All Estonian units were deployed on Estonian soil in the summer of 1944.



Draftees line up at a train station in Tallinn, 1944.



Raids by the Soviet Air Force intensified in 1944. Tartu was hit hard on March 26, 1944.



Air raids were frequent before Tartu fell to the Red Army in August 1944. Photographing war damage was forbidden. It's remarkable that this picture of bomb damage on Riia street on August 13, 1944 also shows a man in a German officer's uniform.

The Soviet Union unleashed its air force against the civilian population. It bombed Narva into oblivion, and extensively damaged Tallinn and Tartu. Despite fierce resistance by Estonian and German units, especially on the Narva front, and later in the Sinimäed region, the end was clearly in view. Thanks to the valiant efforts of the troops about 90,000 Estonians were able to flee abroad, to escape the red terror that was to accompany the second Soviet occupation. A last-ditch effort to defend Tallinn proved unsuccessful, as did a declaration of independence and neutrality by a government of the Republic of Estonia formed a couple of days before Tallinn fell on September 22. Fighting on Estonian territory ended on November 24, 1944.

WWII and its aftermath cost Estonia one-fifth of its prewar population.

### **ARMED RESISTANCE OF THE FOREST BROTHERS**

As the Red Army completed its conquest in the fall of 1944, the Soviet repression started all over again. Members of the self-defense force *Omakaitse* were arrested for collaboration with the Germans, and former members of the Defense League (an organization much like the National Guard in the U.S.) were again judged according to Article 58 of the Penal Code of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic. Moreover, family members of those deported and arrested back in 1941 were subject to repression by the Soviet security apparatus.

By the end of 1944, Estonian forests harbored as many as 30,000 endangered men and women. Many of the men had served in Estonian units with the German army, many more had avoided being drafted into the Red Army. For Estonians, Soviet military draft meant hard labor in the labor battalions where conditions were similar to those in the Gulag. These desperate men constituted the core of the Forest Brothers in the period following 1944. They clung to the hope that the Allies would persuade the Soviet Union to withdraw from the Baltic States. They set great store by the Atlantic Charter proclaimed by Roosevelt and Churchill in August 1940. Alas, as far as the Baltic States were concerned, the Atlantic Charter was more honored in the breach.



Forest Brothers led by Ülo Altermann were active from 1948 to 1954. They are shown here cleaning their weapons.



Forest Brother Jakob Ellervee, standing on the ruins of his bunker.



The Forest Brothers were convinced that war against the Soviet Union would start soon. In 1945, the Forest Brothers started to raid Red Army units and security detachments, local Communist executive committees, and to call to account Communist party activists, tax collectors, and other eager collaborators with the Communist regime. In 1945 alone, the NKVD registered 340 raids by the armed resistance groups. The NKVD term for these raids was “manifestations of banditry.”

The Forest Brothers fought in small groups of six to ten men. Using guerilla tactics, they posed a serious challenge to Soviet authority in the countryside. The mass deportations in March 1949 increased rapidly the number of fugitives seeking refuge in the woods, but in the long run the massive removal of the rural population dealt a serious blow to the Forest Brothers by cutting off much of their support. The Soviets mounted major offensives against them. Military units and special security forces conducted widespread sweeps so that by 1953 most of the active resistance was wiped out. Enticements were used to lure Forest Brothers into giving up, amnesty was promised but not delivered. Some Brothers soldiered on for decades. The last known Forest Brother was found dead in 1980. All told, about 2000 Forest Brothers were killed in action. Estonians regarded the Forest Brothers as freedom fighters. They symbolized a resolve never to knuckle under Communist rule.

## THE YOUTH RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

Patriotic students formed secret societies as early as 1939 after Soviet military bases were established in Estonia. The majority of the young people had been brought up to believe that Estonia would not relinquish its independence without a fight. Their heroes were the brave men and women who had defeated the Soviet forces in the War of Independence 1918-1920. Young people watched in powerless anger as the Red Army streamed into Estonia. The country's leadership had acquiesced to Soviet demands that the population surrender rifles and pistols, that the Defense League be disarmed and disbanded, and that the Estonian army units be confined to barracks.

When the occasion rose in the summer of 1941 to challenge the destruction battalions and Red Army units laying waste to the countryside, the



Ahto Liik and Päivu Kull, members of the underground Blue-Black-White youth organization, served their sentence in a prison camp in Omsk.



Blue-Black-White member Riita Vint, photographed for the KGB arrest records.

students were eager to join the resistance. With the return of the Soviet occupation in the fall of 1944, resistance movements among high school students became widespread. The Forest Brothers were their role models. They controlled many rural areas into the late 1940s. Fighting the Communist regime was not considered a hopeless enterprise.

Young people formed secret societies complete with mission statements, bylaws and oaths. The discipline was strict. A strong patriotic sentiment was reflected in the names of these underground organizations: *Sini-must-valge* (Blue-Black-White, the Estonian tricolor), *Eesti Vabaduse Eest* (For the Freedom of Estonia), *Salajane Kuperjanovlaste Organisatsioon* (The Secret organization of Kuperjanov, a hero of the War of Independence), *Tasuja* (The Avenger), *Põhjala Noored* (Youth of the North), *Skautlus* (Scouting). Resistance groups were especially active in Tartu, Võru and Viljandi.

The main goal of all secret youth organizations was to preserve Estonian patriotism and customs, and to deepen the spirit of freedom in young people. Fliers were distributed, symbols of Soviet power were torn down, the Estonian tricolor was raised at hard to reach locations. The secret societies hoped to establish contact with likely supporters abroad, to procure arms and supplies, to assist the Forest Brothers however and wherever possible. In schools, they sought to identify Soviet security agents and informers. Intelligence was gathered on the numbers and activities of Soviet forces and repressive organs. The hope of driving out the Soviets and ending the occupation lived on.

A 1953 Soviet Interior Ministry report labeled the Tartu-based *Sini-must-valge* organization as “the most representative of the abolished nationalistic organizations.” This 40-member organization collected weapons, distributed fliers, and blew up a monument to the Red Army. Its members were rounded up, interrogated and incarcerated in the “gray house,” and declared criminals by the KGB. In accordance with Article 58 of the Penal Code of the Russian Socialist Federal Republic, members of the organization were sentenced as traitors to long terms in Siberian prison camps. Entire classes of high school students were sentenced to serve multiyear terms at hard labor in Siberian camps. Merciless repression enabled the Soviet regime to end the student underground activities by the 1960s.

## RESISTANCE RESORTS TO HUMAN RIGHTS

The principles of human rights and political freedoms were recognized by the Soviet Union as Leonid Brezhnev joined the heads of 34 other governments in signing The Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975 in Helsinki. Human rights activists all over the Soviet Union took heart, and formed groups to monitor adherence to the Helsinki accords. They pointed out that human rights were also guaranteed by the Constitution of the Soviet Union, and demanded that the Soviet rulers actually abide by their own laws. The dissidents in the Soviet Union decided to conduct their campaigns as openly as possible. They dared to write and sign their names to open letters, the first time such tactics were used in the Soviet Union.

The Communist system was under serious stress. The Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia to stamp out the “Prague Spring” in 1968 caused widespread revulsion to Communism. The brutal Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956 had not been forgotten. The stirrings of labor unrest in Poland led the country’s Communist rulers to declare martial law. But there was no stopping the Solidarity labor movement that was instrumental in ridding Poland of Communist rule.



The grave of the dissident Jüri Kukk in Vologda cemetery. Clandestinely photographed in 1981.



Widely publicized appeals from Estonian dissidents date back to 1972 when the Estonian Democratic Movement (*Eesti Demokraatlik Liikumine*) and the Estonian National Front (*Eesti Rahvusrinne*) sent an unsigned, but appropriately sealed memorandum to UN General Secretary Kurt Waldheim. It was an appeal for the restoration of an independent Estonia with the help of the United Nations. That enraged the KGB, which stepped up its surveillance and persecution of Estonians. Not just known dissidents but also suspected dissidents were arrested and imprisoned.

The dissidents' plight attracted support from organizations abroad. Prominent among them was the Baltic Appeal to the United Nations (BATUN), a coalition of Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians founded in New York in February 1966. Its mission was to inform the members of the United Nations of the illegal occupation of the Baltic States and to provide updates on the conditions there. BATUN also monitored the treatment of national and human rights activists, organized letter-writing campaigns on behalf of prisoners of conscience, and informed the public of cases of repression.

Members of the resistance in Estonia concentrated on the right of self-determination of nations and the restoration of independence to the Baltic States rather than monitoring the Helsinki accords. Overt support for anti-Soviet activities from the intelligentsia and artists appeared in 1988. In 1978 the resistance movement began clandestine publication of *Lisandusi mõtete ja uudiste vabale levikule Eestis* (*Additions to the Free Flow of Ideas and News in Estonia*). Issues of *Additions* and other illegal literature were distributed widely, petitions and appeals were addressed to governments abroad. Especially noteworthy was an appeal signed by 45 Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians and sent on August 23, 1979 – on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hitler-Stalin Pact – to the governments of the Soviet Union, the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic, to the governments of the countries that had signed on to the Atlantic Charter and to the United Nations. The appeal called for making public the secret protocols of the Hitler-Stalin Pact that divided Central and Eastern Europe, and demanded that independence be restored to the countries that were deprived of it as a result of the deal between two dictators.



Vorkuta camp for women. Brick factory, 1956.



Penal camp in Norilsk. Members of the third brick layer brigade.



Prisoners went on strike in Vorkuta in 1953. The KGB suppressed the uprising at a great loss of prisoners' lives. Their graves are shown in the photo.

Haunted by the specter of increased flow of information to the mass media abroad, as well as strengthened ties between Baltic pro-independence movements and a greater number of people joining the ranks of freedom fighters, the KGB redoubled its repressive measures. Many freedom fighters died in prison camps even as campaigns were organized abroad to pressure Soviet authorities to release these prisoners of conscience. In 1988, as the Communist system was unraveling, the freedom fighters who had survived were released and permitted to return to Estonia.

## THE SOVIET TERROR MACHINE

Lenin declared after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 that any “class enemy” – even if there was no evidence of any crime against the State – could not be trusted and should not be treated better than any criminal. Thus, on December 20, 1917 the Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage (*Cheka*), the Soviet secret police, was organized. The policy of Red Terror was instituted and explained by Felix Dzerzhinsky, the first head of all Soviet security organs. In June 1918, Dzerzhinsky wrote in the newspaper *New Life* “We represent ourselves as organized terror – this must be said very clearly – such terror is now very necessary in the condition we are living through in a time of revolution.”

The “time of revolution” did not end until the Soviet Union itself went out of business in 1991. Repressions killed 20 million people in the Soviet Union.

The *Cheka* was also put in charge of prison camps, originally called concentration camps. The Politburo decided on June 27, 1929 to put them under a new organization, The Chief Directorate of Corrective Labor Camps, Gulag for short from the organization’s long name in Russian. It was a tool of terror, a means to populate the Far North, and to provide cheap labor. To supply manpower for the Gulag was the task of the secret police that had its name changed from *Cheka* to GPU, OGPU, NKVD, MVD, and finally KGB.

The job was greatly facilitated by Union-wide adoption of Article 58 of the Penal Code of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic.

Its 14 sections cast a wide net over “enemies of the workers,” traitors and saboteurs, propagandists and agitators. The secret police had a free hand to arrest and imprison on mere suspicion and anonymous denunciations. People were framed as the secret police staged an “anti-Soviet” event, and then accused innocent bystanders of conspiracy. Convictions were quick and simple. Sentences were harsh, up to 25 years of hard labor or death. Even the Red Army POWs, many returned by the Allies, were severely punished. The fact that they had not fought to the death was considered proof that they were anti-Soviet. Family members of “traitors” convicted under Article 58 were to be deprived of their voting rights and exiled to remote parts of Siberia for five years.

The Gulags ranged from virtual death camps to special camps for scientists and engineers. Lavrenti Beria, the head of the NKVD, was also in charge of the Soviet Union’s atom bomb project. Gulag labor built the White Sea-Baltic Canal and parts of the famous Moscow subway. Mining and logging camps were notorious for their harsh treatment. Prisoners faced extreme production quotas, hunger, brutality, and inhuman living conditions. Camps in the Far North had mortality rates of 80 percent during the first months. Especially infamous were the camps of Vorkuta and Norilsk.

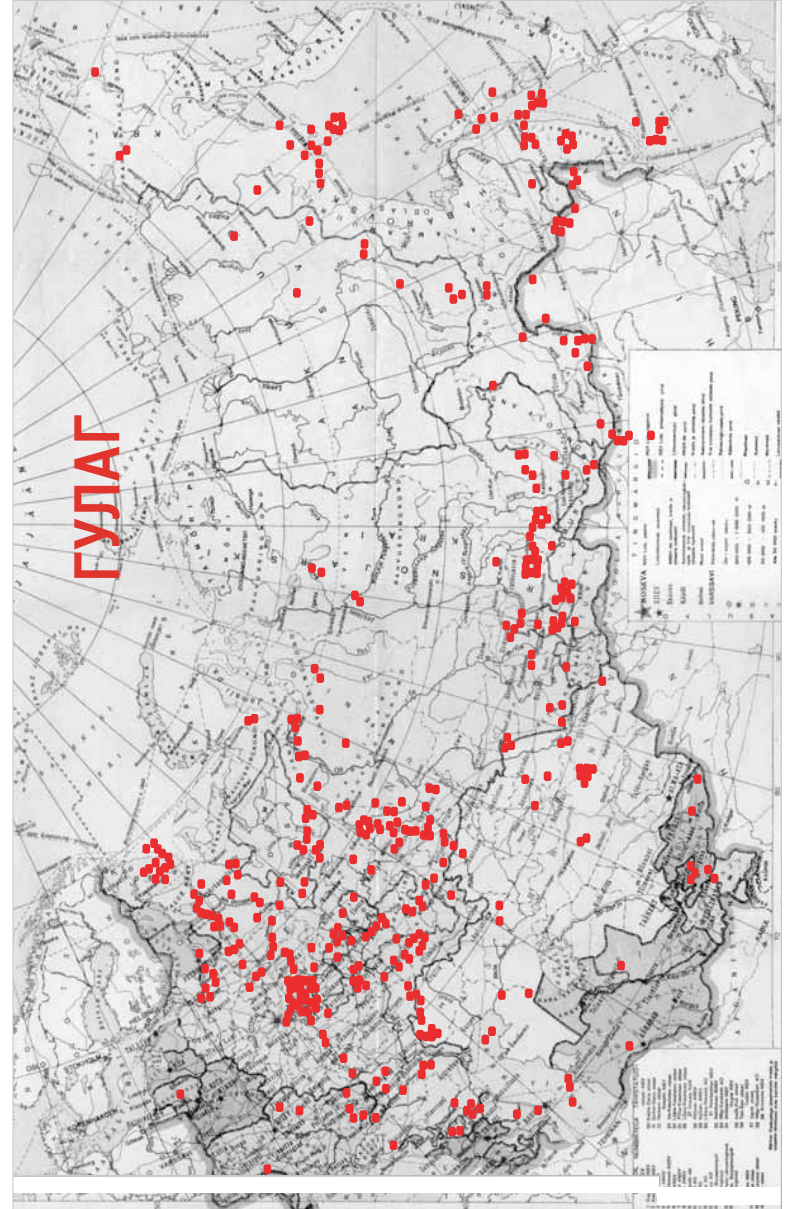


Felix Dzerzhinsky, the first head of all Soviet security organs, 1917-1926.



Lavrenti Beria, chief of Soviet security, 1938-1953.

Those released from the Gulags faced severe restrictions. They could not return to their homes. They could not settle in larger cities. They were restricted from taking a wide range of jobs. Their property had been confiscated. And if they concealed their previous imprisonment they were guilty of violating the law.



Gulag.

## **The first period of Soviet occupation, 1940-1941**

Arrested and imprisoned – 8000  
98% were executed or perished

Deported – 10,000  
60% perished in Gulag

Conscripted into the Red Army – 34,000  
70% were killed in action or perished  
in logging camps in Siberia

Evacuated into the interior  
of the Soviet Union – 25,000  
20% perished

Missing persons – 1100

Escaped abroad – 500

## **The second period of Soviet occupation, 1944-1991**

Arrested and imprisoned – 30,000  
33% were executed or perished

Deported – 23,000  
13% perished in Siberia

Resistance fighters killed in action – 3000

Arrested and imprisoned for advocating to restore  
Estonia's independence – 500

Escaped abroad – 90,000

