

CHAPTER VI

" COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARIES "

Hardest Labour Done by " K.R.'s "—Counter-revolutionary: a Comprehensive Term—A Variegated Multitude—Special Persecution of the Clergy—Prominent Clerical Prisoners.

ON Solovetsky Island the " politicals and party men " live in separate cells—hermits' caves—and on Popoff Island in a special hut. Both at the monastery and in the Kem camp the " K.R.'s " live in company with the ordinary criminals. The cells of the monastery and the huts of the camps are filled to overflowing with a carefully mixed crowd of " counter-revolutionaries " and *shpana*.

The " K.R.'s " not only do all the hardest labour, and have to keep their own quarters clean, but are obliged to cleanse the criminals' bedsteads of dirt, remains of food, spittle and lice. Whenever a new party of " K.R.'s " arrive, they are compelled to clean out the huts, which the *shpana* have made so

filthy that the task makes many of the " K.R.'s " sick. In 1924, it took 1,500 " K.R.'s " two whole months to clean out the camp on Popoff Island. It is sufficient to say that the criminals very often fulfil the requirements of Nature on the spot, i.e., in the huts.

The *shpana*, of course, are not in the least grateful for having all this done for them. On the contrary, this work of the " K.R.'s ", so utterly degrading to human self-respect, is accepted by the criminals as a matter of course, and only exposes those who do it to fresh outrage from the *shpana*, supported by the camp *personnel*.

For example, when we had cleansed the hut indicated by the authorities of all the filth that was in it, the grateful *shpana* sent us an ultimatum, with a detailed schedule of the quantities of bread, sugar, tobacco, tea, etc., which were to be handed over immediately to the criminal who brought the ultimatum. If we failed to comply with the ultimatum, we were told, we should be first beaten and then plundered in more thorough fashion.

We had to hand over the things demanded. Ultimatums of this kind are very fashionable among the *shpana*; the "K.R.'s" are snowed under with them, both at the monastery and in the Kem camp.

It is very hard to give an exact account or analysis of the prisoners labelled "K.R.'s." Their number is considerable—there are nearly three thousand on Solovetsky Island—and they are composed of such variegated elements that a general definition of a "K.R." is very hard to arrive at. A division of them into groups, even an approximate one, will enlighten the reader in a general sense as to who the "K.R.'s" are, and why they are in the Solovky, but it is bound to be incomplete; there are in the camps many "K.R.'s" whom one does not know where to place.

There are in the Northern Camps for Special Purposes many representatives of the so-called liberal professions—engineers, barristers, literary men, artists, teachers, doctors. There are many teachers from the primary and secondary schools

and from the universities, both men and women; the latter are in a majority. There are a considerable number of non-party peasants and workmen, artisans and small employees. The Cossacks of the Don, the Kuban and Siberia, and the peoples of the Caucasus, are strongly represented. Of the non-Russians who are Soviet subjects the most numerous are Estonians, Poles, Karelians (some of those who returned from Finland on the strength of an "amnesty")* and Jews. The last-named are sent to the Solovky, in most cases with their families, either for adhering to Zionism, or for "economic counter-revolution," or for so-called "armed banditism"—by which the Gpu understands anything it pleases, from membership (even in the past) of a Monarchist party to the manufacture of counterfeit notes.

There are many foreigners in the Solovky; I will allude to them in greater detail later.

The largest categories of all consist of officers

* They had taken refuge in Finland after the suppression by the Bolsheviks of the rebellion in Eastern Karelia at the beginning of 1922.

of the old and the new armies, business men, pre-Revolution and of the "Nepman"* order, important representatives of the old regime, the bureaucracy and the aristocracy, and also the clergy.

At the present time there are some three hundred bishops, priests and monks in the Solovky; to this number should be added several hundred laymen who were sent to the Solovky along with them, generally under Clause 72 of the Criminal Code—"ecclesiastical counter-revolution, resistance to the confiscation of church valuables, propaganda, the education of children in a religious sense," and so on. The clergy at the Solovky, though more oppressed and humiliated by the camp authorities than any other category of prisoners, are remarkable for the submissiveness and stoicism with which they endure their moral and physical sufferings.

Being accustomed to hard bodily labour from childhood, the clergy are rightly considered to be the best workers in the camps, and from this point

* The term "Nepman" was applied to business men who grew rich under the "N.E.P." (New Economic Policy), introduced by the Soviet Government in 1922.

of view are almost valued by the administration, though it exploits them infamously. Priests are sent to do all the most exhausting tasks. For example, whole sections of the narrow-gauge railway were laid entirely by clerics.

All kinds of religious services, of course, are forbidden. One of the priests in the camp on Popoff Island, a feeble old man, died. He begged the commandant with tears in his eyes to allow the Vladika Illarion to administer the Holy Sacrament to him. The commandant refused in abusive terms.

Every day in the year is counted as a working day, and at Easter and Christmas the authorities endeavour to give the clergy the most degrading work possible—for example, cleaning out the latrines.

Among the most prominent clerics confined in the Northern Camps for Special Purposes are the following:

The Vladika Illarion (Trotsky), head of the diocese of Moscow and the right-hand man of

the late Patriarch Tikhon. Neither when at liberty nor in prison has the Metropolitan Illarion ever entered into conflict with the Soviet power; but he has always been a vehement champion of pure Orthodoxy as a counterpoise to the "living Church," which is liberally subsidised by the Gpu. For the defence of his faith, and for his intimate connection with the Patriarch Tikhon, the bishop was sent to Archangel for three years and served his term of punishment under the most horrifying conditions. He returned to Moscow and again vigorously opposed the "living Church," took a skilful part in religious discussions, mercilessly shattered the Communistic babble of his opponent Lunatcharsky,* and was transported once more—this time to the Solovky.

The Vladika Masuil (Lemeshevsky) directed the affairs of the diocese of Petrograd after the shooting of the Metropolitan Venianin. Sentenced to transportation under Clause 72 of the Criminal Code—"ecclesiastical counter-revolution"—by

* People's Commissary for Education in the Soviet Government.

which the Bolsheviks understand, *inter alia*, the defence of Orthodoxy against the destructive attacks of the "living Church," the bishop arrived at the Solovky in September, 1924. Six other bishops and monks and twelve laymen were sent there at the same time and for the same cause.

Bishop Seraphim (Kolpinsky), Bishop Peter (Sokoloff), Acting Bishop of Saratoff, and Bishop Pitirim (Kryloff), the Igumen of the Kazan Monastery, as well as about fifteen members of the black and white clergy from that monastery, were all sent to the Solovky under this same Clause 72. Hundreds of other bishops, priests and monks were transported, not only because the religion they professed was "opium for the people,"* but because they would not approve the plundering of the churches for purposes which had nothing to do with the relief of the famine victims, and which they denounced to the public as the work of the supporters of the "living Church," bought by the Government.

* Lenin's phrase.

polish. He had an impediment in his speech, and was malignant and cruel in his dealings with "K.R.'s." When the prisoners passed him on their way to work, Popoff used to say to his suite of Tchekists—in a loud voice, so that the "K.R.'s" might hear:

"There's a pack of criminals—do you hear?—criminals! They're our enemies. We'll put the wind up the whole crowd of them!"

The "change of cabinet" made little difference to the situation of the prisoners. The only modification was that "putting the wind up" them, and the thieving of State funds and their modest rations by the administration, became more constant than before. Gladkoff stole openly, Kirilovsky under a camouflage of "honesty."

The Solovetsky life and regime in general—the heavy toll of labour, the reprisals, the self-indulgent manner of living of the *personnel*—remained as they had been.

CHAPTER XII

DAILY LIFE, WORK AND FOOD

"A Place in the Lamp-light"—"Outside" and "Inside" Work—No Exemption for Illness—Horrors of Wood-cutting—How We were Fed—Prisoners Starved and Government Cheated.

THE huts in Popoff Island camp are about forty yards long and ten yards in breadth. The politicals' hut is twice as large as the others. From two hundred to three hundred persons are as a rule quartered in each hut; in Nos. 5 and 6, occupied mainly by *shpana*, there are over seven hundred persons.

One cannot breathe as night approaches; the stench is awful. In the evening, when the prisoners return from work, the huts, full of cracks, holes in the roofs, and draughts from all quarters, are so cold that the inmates shiver like men with fever. It is impossible to sleep at night for the stuffiness

and human exhalations. We used to strip naked and pile all our clothes on top of us.

The board-beds are arranged along the walls in two tiers. Everyone tries to get an "upper berth," for if you lie below a continual shower of lice, remains of food and spittle descends on you. Sanguinary fights take place for beds in the upper tier.

The electric power station was not constructed till the end of 1924. Until then an apology for a lamp—a tin containing a wick slightly damped with paraffin—flickered in the middle of each hut. This gave light to the three or four beds nearest to it; all the rest of the hut was in darkness. Now every hut is lighted with a small electric light globe (16 watts), but this is quite inadequate for such large huts. There is always a crowd under the one tiny lamp, trying to read, or write to their relations. The absence of light is particularly trying in winter. The headmen of the huts profit by the situation to take bribes, either in money or in kind, for "a place in the lamp-light"!

"Nep"—the New Economic Policy—affected even the Solovky. They were placed on a "self-supporting" basis, and the sum granted annually by the central Government for the upkeep of the camps was considerably reduced. Thus in the present year (1925) the Solovky received only 250,000 gold roubles as against two millions demanded by Boky and Nogteff.

There is no need to feed the prisoners, even on a semi-starvation diet. But it is quite indispensable that the administration should pocket large sums of money. Therefore the Natchuslon and his minions have crushed the last drops of energy out of the prisoners and turned them all into dumb slaves.

Work in the Solovky is divided into two categories—"outside" (outside the wire fence) and "inside" (inside the camp). For outside work the prisoners are generally taken from Solovetsky and Popoff Islands to the mainland. Among the tasks which come under the head of outside work are: fetching wood, draining the

marshes, laying, clearing and keeping in order railway lines and roads (earth and wooden), cutting timber for the necessities of the camp and for export, and loading and unloading timber, stones and supplies. The names of the vessels used for transporting cargo are the steamers *Gleb Boky* and *Neva* and the barge *Klara*, so named in honour of the German woman Communist Clara Zetkin.

By inside work is meant clearing away snow, helping in the kitchen and workshops, removing refuse from the latrines and the huts occupied by ordinary criminals, and performing services for the Tchekists. The women scrub the floors of the huts and offices, cook food, do the Tchekists' and Red soldiers' washing, sewing, etc.

Work begins at 6 a.m. both summer and winter. According to the regulations work stops at 7 p.m., but in the Solovky there is a twelve hours' working day, with an interval for dinner at 1 p.m. Actually work goes on much longer than this, at the discretion of the supervising Tchekist. This is particularly the case in summer, when the prisoners

literally have to work to fainting point; in that season work often goes on from 6 a.m. to 12 or 1 the following night.

There is *no Sunday in the Solovky*, nor is there any other day of rest in the week. Every day is a working day. On the great festivals, Easter, Christmas, etc., the hours of work are usually lengthened in order to insult the feelings of the religious prisoners.* Only *one* day in the year is set apart as a festival . . . the First of May.

Illness, physical weakness, old age and extreme youth are not taken into account in the slightest degree. A refusal to work on the ground of illness, even when the illness is obvious to the Tchekists themselves, involves, for a first offence, removal to the "Sekirka" (the place of punishment), and, for a second offence, shooting, although, according to law, the punishment for refusal to work—and even then only without adequate cause—is the extension of the term of imprisonment by one year.

* cf. p. 99.

The most exhausting labour is fetching wood in winter. This work is absolutely insupportable. You stand up to your knees in snow, so that it is difficult to move. Huge tree-trunks, cut away with axes, fall on the prisoners, sometimes killing them on the spot. Clad in rags, with no mittens, with only bast shoes on your feet, hardly able to stand for weakness caused by under-nourishment, your hands and whole body are frozen stiff in the bitter cold.

The minimum daily task is as follows: four men have to cut, split and pile four cubic sajenes (a sajene is about two yards), and till they have done this they are not allowed to return to the camp. An extra hardship attached to all outside work is that if the prisoners do not get through their minimum task up to time and return to camp punctually, the *shpana* take the kitchen by storm, and they get no dinner.

Once I was sent to the shore near Kem to cut wood with a party of other "K.R.'s." The wood was urgently needed, and we were chased out of

our huts at 5 a.m. As a rule sentries are changed at 12 p.m. But this time, for some reason or other, no relief for our escort was sent to the wood where we were at work. The Red soldiers, not remarkable for discipline, took us back to the camp, demanding to be relieved. Toropoff cursed them and called up a fresh escort of Tchekists. Then we were driven straight back to our work in the same wood without any interval for dinner, and did not return till 4 a.m. In other words, we worked for nineteen hours in severe cold without food, and without interruption save for our two extra marches to and from the camp!

Everything in the Solovky that could be plundered was plundered long ago, and everything that could be sold was sold. To obtain new resources, the authorities made various big labour contracts in the territory of the "autonomous" Karelian Republic—for example, for the construction of a road from Kem to Ukhta. But seeing that unemployment menaces Karelia itself, the Karelian Vtsik continually complained to Moscow

that the Slon was taking the bread out of the mouths of the Karelians. The agreements were cancelled, but the Solovetsky administration profited by them nevertheless. This is what happened. Nogteff submitted to Moscow more or less fantastic schemes for labour undertakings on Karelian territory, and asked the Gpu for a money subsidy and spirits, the latter for the workmen, toiling chin-deep in the marshes! The money and spirits, when they arrived, were divided among the Tchekists, those most intimate with Nogteff receiving the larger share.

As constructional and commercial schemes did not yield a large enough profit, the Solovetsky authorities saw the only way out in a reduction of the rations. This they proceeded to carry out.

Every prisoner, however hard the labour he was engaged on, was henceforward given 1 lb. of black bread daily. The bread is issued for ten days ahead, so that at the end of this time it is as hard as a stone. The bread is badly baked; the flour is stale and has a bitter taste.

Hot food is issued twice a day. Dinner is a plate of soup, made of mouldy codfish—evil-smelling water, without groats or butter; supper a tureen of millet or buckwheat gruel, again without butter. The "K.R.'s" often get no supper, because the *shpana* prisoners, who have lost their own portion at cards, go and rob the kitchen.

In the camp accounts every prisoner is entered as receiving 3 zolotniks of sugar a day, or (as this also is issued for ten days in advance) 30 zolotniks per issue. (A zolotnik is $\frac{1}{96}$ of a Russian lb.) What each prisoner actually gets every ten days is a half-glass of half-frozen liquefied sugar containing 10 or 12 zolotniks. The Tchekists mix the sugar with water and thus steal 18 to 20 zolotniks on each ration, which, in a camp containing several thousand prisoners, means a profit of two or three score poods every day of issue.

It is also stated in the accounts that the prisoners receive one-eighth of a lb. of butter and one-eighth of a lb. of tobacco. In reality no butter or tobacco at all are issued in the camps. Casks of

butter and hundreds of poods of tobacco are sold at Kem by the authorities, who pocket the money.

Lastly, according to the regulations, every prisoner engaged in hard bodily labour is supposed to receive, besides his food ration, 35 kopeks a day pocket money. The money for this purpose is sent by the central Government and is additional to the ordinary budget. No prisoner has ever received these 35 kopeks. Every penny of this "bonus" goes into the pockets of the Tchekists.

It is possible that before the "change of cabinet" the feeding in the Solovky was better than it is now. Then the prisoners got preserves, large quantities of which—enough for two years—were left behind by the British. The present ration amounts to nothing else than the murder of the prisoners by a slow death from starvation. I calculate, on the basis of the requirements of a man engaged in hard bodily labour, that this ration, issued for ten days, is barely sufficient for two or three days!

As I mentioned earlier in my narrative, the

politicals receive the "improved ration," which is almost sufficient.

The Red soldiers get the "northern ration," with plenty of butter, fats, white bread, and even spirits.

his profession of Tchekist, Brusilovsky is a very nice, sympathetic fellow. He decided to do what he could for the victims of toothache, and somehow got hold of an ordinary blacksmith's pincers, with which he pulls out teeth.

Of course, nothing can be done to cure the teeth while they are decaying, for there is nothing to do it with, neither drugs nor instruments; all that can be done is to pull them out, to which the sufferers always readily consent. Brusilovsky never takes any money for his services. He has a huge practice, especially among the *shpana*, whose teeth he pulls out rows at a time. The first time he pulled out quite sound teeth too, for practice.

This compassionate Tchekist treats syphilis too. His method of dealing with this complaint is also the last word in Solovetsky science. A compound of infusions of herbs, spirit and something else is injected with an ordinary syringe. He evidently still needs practice in this branch, for syphilis is on the increase in the camps, and the mortality from it is growing steadily.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW "USEFUL CITIZENS" ARE MADE

Chief Punishments—A Freezing Dungeon—"To the Mosquitoes!"—A Medieval Torture—Mass Shootings No Longer Necessary.

THE leaders of the Communist Party declare that the Northern Camps for Special Purposes are something in the nature of a reformatory. The punishments administered in these establishments, they would have the world believe, are intended to make the prisoners mend their ways and become useful citizens of the Soviet Republic.

In reality, the camp punishments, like the camp medical arrangements, are based upon no other calculation than that of sending the largest possible number of prisoners, more or less swiftly, to "the other side."

Refusal to work, insubordination towards the authorities, "counter-revolutionary propaganda,"

insulting words or behaviour to the *personnel*, the discovery of a "criminal past" (this is Vasko's occupation), attempted escape—for these offences there are a number of punishments, in accordance with the heinousness of the offence. I will mention the chief punishments:

- (1) The "Sekirka."
- (2) "To the Mosquitoes!"
- (3) Prolongation of the term of imprisonment.
- (4) "Stone sacks."
- (5) Shooting.

Such corrective measures as blows in the face, the confiscation of parcels from relations for an indefinite time (for the benefit of the confiscator!), flogging with the whip or only "Smolensky sticks" without "stone sacks," etc., are so common in the Solovky that there is no need to dwell on them.

The "Sekirka" is a prison on the notorious Sekirova hill, on Solovetsky Island, two miles from the Kremlin. In bygone days it was the cave of one

of the most honoured of the legendary heroes of the Solovetsky Islands. The "guilty" prisoner is sent to the Sekirka for a term of from two to six months. The regime there is as follows. The prisoner receives daily half a pound of bread, a jug of cold water, and nothing else. All the doors and windows of the cave are fastened. He has no communication at all with the outside world. The dungeon is absolutely unheated. As a rule, when the term of his punishment comes to an end, there is nothing left of the prisoner but a frozen corpse. In rare cases a half-dead skeleton emerges from the Sekirka.

"To the Mosquitoes!" is a form of punishment very popular with the Solovetsky Tchekists. The manner of its infliction is as follows. The prisoner is stripped naked and made to stand on a particular stone opposite the commandant's office. He is ordered, with threats of "stone sacks" and shooting, to stand absolutely still, not to move a finger and not to drive away the mosquitoes, which cover the poor wretch's body as

with a thick black crust. The torture is continued for several hours. When the punishment is over, the victim's body is one huge sore from the bites of the poisonous insects. The weaker prisoners die, and the stronger cannot sit or lie down for many weeks after the punishment.

Prolongation of the term of imprisonment is a punishment now comparatively seldom applied, for the simple reason that the orders recently circulated by the Gpu have made every prisoner *a convict for an indefinite term*. When he has served his two, three, five or ten years, he is sent on from the Solovky to the Petchersk region, then to the Narym, then to the Zyriansk, and so on, unendingly. For more serious "offences," therefore, the Tchekists send the prisoners to the "sacks."

In the old times, every monk in the Kremlin, and every holy man in the caves, had a small cellar cut in the rock near his cell, in which he kept his food supplies. These cellars, three or four feet in depth, have no doors, and the food

was placed in them from above through small openings.

These are the famous "stone sacks." The Tchekists take the prisoner to the "sack," and ask him:

"How 'll you get in—head first or feet first?"

If the prisoner gets into the "sack" head first, he is beaten with "Smolensky sticks" on the back and legs; if he gets in feet first, he is beaten about the head and face. The beating goes on till his whole body is inside the "sack." The "sack" is too narrow for him to sit, and too low for him to stand up straight, so that he is obliged to stand with his knees bent and his head poked forward. He is imprisoned in the "sack" for a period varying between three days and a week. The rations are the same as at the Sekirka. Few people can endure this mediæval punishment.

There are no mass shootings at the Solovky like those carried out at the "White House," but individual shootings are very frequent, and are regarded as an ordinary occurrence. A larger or

smaller number of prisoners are shot whenever the Soviet Government retaliates for measures of suppression against Communists in foreign States by a terrorist outburst on its own part. Thus, over a hundred persons, both Russians and foreigners, were shot after the suppression of the Communist revolt of December 1st, 1924, by the Estonian Government, and a rather smaller number after the suppression of the rebellion in Bulgaria.

I gathered from the candid statements of the Tchekists that the Gpu has now no need to make a regular practice of mass shootings, because more humane measures—slow murder from starvation, work beyond the prisoners' strength, and "medical help"—are perfectly adequate substitutes.

It would be a mistake to suppose that one must commit some kind of offence to be sent to the Sekirka, the "sacks" and the mosquitoes, or to be shot. The prisoners are handed over by the central authorities to the unchecked caprice of the camp administration. If the Tchekists dislike

your face, if you are seen crossing yourself on the sly, if you have said anything about your hard lot in your letters to your relations—the Sekirka and the "sacks" open their dreadful doors to you.