book to tell. "Dekulakization brigades," sent to the countryside and in collaboration with locals, engaged in excesses every bit as dreadful as anything seen during the civil war. City radicals joined up in brigades known as the "25,000ers"—with individual representatives called "Comrade Thousander" by the peasants.

These activists were workers and young members of the Komsomol, or Communist Youth, and included many with disdain for the peasants and hatred for anyone deemed a kulak. The brigades, numbering up to 180,000 in 1930 and assisted by assorted others from trade unions, the Red Army, and the secret police, convinced themselves they had "History" on their side in the war against the kulaks, whose identity was as vague as could be. Stalin himself scribbled on a note at one point during all this: "What does kulak mean?"[40]

By 1929–30, when most peasants were already impoverished, "rich" kulaks could hardly be found, so it became enough for a family to own two samovars, or have a "status symbol," to be condemned. These goods served as "signs" of a kulak, and any peasants so identified were robbed of their every possession down to their underclothes and turned out in the streets. Local priests, resented for their religion, connections with the people, or reservations about Communism—whether expressed or not—were attacked and driven from their homes in the dead of winter.[41]

The "dekulakers" were supposed to confiscate everything and pass it along to the kolkhoz, the new collective farm, but in fact, the confiscations were little more than state-sanctioned looting. The brigades consumed much of the food and drink they found, and their campaigns involved widespread rape and all kinds of other abuses.[42]

Locals took advantage of these brigades to get rid of troublemakers, social outsiders, habitual drunks, or people who did not fit in. Rumor or hearsay that someone was a "harmful element" was sometimes enough to have the peasant deported. The attitude of some spiteful people was: "You've had a good coat on your back. Now it's our turn to wear it!"[43]

In some districts there were too few kulaks for the brigades to meet their quotas, so their wrath fell on "middle-income" peasants, who were barely removed from dire poverty. Their "crime" might be that they made "excessive visits to the church."[44]

This was man-made hell and embittered millions, who lost whatever trust they might have had in the Communist regime.

10

STALIN SOLIDIFIES HIS GRIP

The scope of the upheaval in the countryside can be estimated by looking at the numbers affected. In 1930 alone 337,563 families were dekulakized, or well in excess of a half million people. It is not clear whether these figures include those subjected to sentencing by troikas of the OGPU. A separate document for 1930 lists 179,620 individuals who were sentenced by these "courts." Of these, 10.6 percent (18,966 people) were executed; 55.3 percent (99,319) sent to a concentration camp; and the rest "exiled" (21.3 percent, or 38,179) or "banished" (4.3 percent, or 8,869). Exactly 7.9 percent (14,287) were sentenced "conditionally" and handed over to the Commissariat of Justice or "freed."[1] The data are incomplete, as some areas had not sent in reports.

In 1930 the dekulakization campaign turned the countryside upside down. Some regions—for example, the North Caucasus—went from less than 10 percent of their farms collectivized in 1929 to over 50 percent by mid-1930. Similar if not quite such dramatic changes affected the other major farming areas.[2] Even then, the pursuit of the kulaks and collectivization continued.

"DIZZY WITH SUCCESS"

Stalin signaled a temporary halt by publishing a notorious article, "Dizzy with Success," carried in all newspapers on March 2, 1930. According to this account, the government's efforts had been unexpectedly easy, with no less than 50 percent of the farms collectivized by February 20. The country had "overfulfilled" the goals of the Five-Year Plan by more than 100 percent. The conclusion was that the "radical turn of the countryside toward Socialism may be considered as already achieved."

Stalin admitted in a backhanded way that some Party activists had become "dizzy with success" and foolishly thought they could accomplish anything in the wink of an eye. Acknowledging that some collective farms existed only on paper, he explained that the local officials, all too eager to boast, had apparently been exaggerating their accomplishments. Moreover, some of the overzealous went so far as "to register all the poultry of every household." That was nonsense, he said, and disrupted collectivization. Just as it was important not to lag behind the Communist movement, no one should run too far ahead.[3] Far from accepting responsibility for the dystopia in the countryside, Stalin was proud that the collective-farm movement was supposedly working out so well and that it was "voluntary."

The message was to slow down the collectivization drive—at least for the time being. The peasants had seen enough of the kolkhoz and did not relish being robbed of every possession and forced to join one. They had protested what was happening all along. Stalin now said frankly that some places were not yet ready for collective farms.

After March 1930, the volume of protests fell off, but for all of that year an estimated 2.5 million peasants participated in approximately fourteen thousand protests, revolts, riots, or demonstrations. There was resistance on all kinds of grounds, especially based on hatred of collectivization and the rejection of dekulakization. These protests were linked to others, like those against church closings, taxes, and food problems. The massive opposition, often overlooked by historians, reached a scale not seen since the civil war.[4]

Most affected were the better-off areas such as the Black Earth region, the North Caucasus, and western Ukraine. Some of the borderlands temporarily eluded the control of the central Soviet authorities. "Primitive rebels," often led by women, used traditional weapons to attack and kill officials and to demand the return of their property and the dissolution of the kolkhoz. Against them the authorities used the harshest forms of terror. The protests never solidified into a united mass movement, but fell prey to the concerted actions of secret police. Beaten but not broken, the peasantry persisted in trying to preserve the little autonomy that remained as Stalinism encroached ever more on their lives.[5]

GULAG

Forced-labor and concentration camps were an established part of the Soviet system under Lenin. The camps did not fade away once the civil war ended and a tenuous peace returned.

In the context of the Five-Year Plan, great new building projects, and collectivization, the camps took on a new function. Once primarily a prison system, they now also became a provider of slave labor. The almighty plan and the ambitious projects drawn up without regard to human suffering created an insatiable need for workers. Whereas earlier the Soviets had preached the idea of rehabilitation of criminals by way of forced labor, under the new schemes prisoners were driven until they dropped dead.

Resistance to collectivization produced an enormous number of prisoners, and the Politburo set up commissions, beginning in 1928, to study what should be done.

The OGPU—the newest name given the secret police—was formally adopted in the context of the new constitution of the USSR on July 6, 1923. What was important was that the OGPU was linked directly to Sovnarkom and given all-union status. Felix Dzerzhinsky was named first chairman on September 18, 1923, with Vyacheslav Menzhinsky and Genrikh Yagoda as first and second deputy chairmen.[6]

In early 1929, at one of the meetings of a commission on the future of labor and the camps, Yagoda said larger ones would take advantage of the windfall of new workers and that camps would be used as developmental tools in the north. He said it was difficult to attract workers to

those areas, and putting camps there would make it possible to exploit the region's natural resources. Using administrative and other techniques, he thought it would be possible to "force the freed prisoners to stay in the North, thereby populating our outer regions."[7]

The creation and control of the camp system emerged over several months in a haphazard fashion, and there were some turf wars within the commission over which commissariat should control the camps. On April 13, 1929, the recommendation was to create a system in which the old distinction between "ordinary" and "special" camps no longer held. The Politburo adopted a resolution titled "On the Utilization of the Labor of Criminal Prisoners." It called for a network of camps to supplement the already-established Solovki camps. Accordingly, on June 27, 1929, the Politburo decided to transfer all "criminal prisoners" serving three years or more to the OGPU, whose concentration camps were to be expanded. The secret police already ruled the lives of untold thousands who were swept up in the collectivization of agriculture, so that it became one of the largest employers in the country—not to mention the cruelest.

On July 11, 1929, Sovnarkom gave its blessing to these changes, renaming the concentration camps corrective labor camps (*ispravitel' no-trudovye lagerya*). New ones were to be situated in northern, remote regions "for the purpose of colonizing these regions and tapping their natural resources through the exploitation of prisoner man power." The initial plan was for the new camps to hold up to fifty thousand, but that turned out to be far too modest. Some prisoners were to remain in the camps of the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs), but the matter was far from settled.[8]

Soviet leaders had not worked out precisely what part the camps were to play in the economy beyond the vague notion of developing the north. The OGPU began using prisoners on projects like the construction of railway lines and in forestry and fishing. Initial successes "whetted the appetite" of the regime for larger projects to capitalize on the growing pool of cheap labor. From January 1930, Yagoda issued orders for concerted action to pick up the three categories of kulaks, beginning with those of the first category and working down. An unknown but large number of other "socially dangerous elements" were also apprehended.[9]

This second wave of dekulakization in 1930–31 was less dramatic than the first but affected even larger numbers and by the end of 1931 had reached a grand total of 1.8 million. This slave labor was now put at the disposal of the expanding concentration camp system.

Sovnarkom decided on April 7, 1930, to establish the Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps and Labor Settlements, a title shortened to Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei, or Gulag. Sovnarkom attempted to justify setting it up, brazenly publishing a statement to the effect that the camps were designed to "isolate especially dangerous lawbreakers and to make them conform to the conditions of the society of toiling people." All prisoners began by serving hard time. As they proved themselves to be useful, their conditions were to be improved, but everyone had to work to eat. There was mention also of how prisoners' labor would contribute to their "struggle for Communist morals."[10]

Stalin intervened in how the camps would fit into the larger scheme of things. At his urging the Politburo decided on May 5, 1930, to construct the White Sea–Baltic Canal (Belomorkanal or Belomor). It would be 141 miles long, with dams and locks traversing extremely difficult terrain. Stalin was keen on using concentration camp labor to build it cheaply and in the impossibly short time of two years. There was a conflict, however, between the OGPU and the Russian Federation NKVD. Both were developing plans and were competing over the supply of slaves. They appealed to higher authority. In the first instance, on August 31, Sovnarkom decided to permit the NKVD to keep prisoners sentenced to three years or longer—as the NKVD wished. The OGPU chairman, Menzhinsky, wanted more and on September 3 complained to the Politburo, and the matter came to Stalin's attention.

Leaders of the OGPU got word to Stalin that if the NKVD kept "their" prisoners, then construction of his pet project of the moment—the White Sea–Baltic Canal—would fall still further behind schedule. In the event, Stalin was distinctly not pleased. On September 7 he wrote Molotov, urging him to set matters straight by giving the OGPU all the prisoners and removing those of the NKVD. By October 5 the Politburo had decided that was indeed the proper course and overruled itself as Stalin wished.[11]

This turn of events was significant in that it increased the power and influence of the OGPU, which was then firmly put in charge of the Gulag. There were also political ramifications within the elite. Up to this point Stalin was still facing some "right opposition" in the Politburo and Sovnarkom but demonstrated he was able to get his way with ease.[12]

The camps now expanded rapidly. The number of prisoners increased from around 30,000 in 1930 to 179,000 the next year. On January 1, 1933, there were 334,300 prisoners, and the next year there were 510,307. By January 1, 1936, the number had grown to 839,406. This massive increase came even though life expectancy in the camps and on the building sites was low—as little as one year, according to some estimates. The severe treatment and impossibly harsh working conditions on various pet projects left even those who were released in a debilitated condition and shortened many people's lives.[13] By the mid-1930s prisoners were scattered across the entire USSR, with some of the largest clusters in and around major cities like Moscow and Leningrad.[14]

To combat atrocity stories about the camps circulating inside and outside the Soviet Union, the regime opened "model facilities" for the inspection of the curious, including foreigners. Stalin wanted the public to believe that the kulaks were not convicts and worked freely. Supposedly, they had "all the rights of voluntary labor."[15]

Some regional bosses were driven by the plan and their own ambitions to brush such paper distinctions aside. They were desperately short of labor and not at all unhappy with Stalin's decision to "eliminate the kulaks as a class." In the Urals region, for example, there was no way to meet the quota demands for forestry products without more labor. Regional officials ignored all concerns about the fate of the kulaks and "insistently requested" far more prisoners than they could possibly care for. Many were soon worked to death.[16]

As per the blueprint outlining the three categories of kulaks and what should happen to each, some were sent on journeys into the farthest reaches of unoccupied northern and eastern parts of the country, where they would have to work on "poor land." In fact, many were put on trains and then deserted in uninhabited places in what was called, with exaggerated understatement, "abandonment in deportation." Just what was meant by this concept was hinted at in a later report, from May 1933, sent to Stalin. This account pertained not to kulaks but to yet another stigmatized group—"outdated elements"—but it showed well enough what "abandonment in deportation" really meant.

The report concerned two trainloads of these unfortunates, presumably members of the bourgeoisie, nobility, or clergy—more than six thousand in all—who originated in Moscow and Leningrad. In late April 1933 they were sent to the distant and uninhabited island of Nazino. The trip alone caused the deaths of many. The emaciated survivors were weakened by hunger and mistreatment. They were then left on an island in the middle of nowhere, with no tools, no grain, no food. They could not even light a fire. It began to snow, and hundreds died of exposure or malnutrition the first day. Only on the fourth or fifth day did a convoy arrive and dole out a minimal amount of flour to each person. Driven by delirium from exhaustion and hunger, many tried to mix the flour with water in their hats; most tried to eat it straightaway, with the result that they choked to death on the foul mixture. Once their last resources were gone, survivors resorted to cannibalism.

The authorities returned and resettled the unfortunates in one failed "colony" after the next before concluding that the region was uninhabitable. By July these "outdated elements" were finally sent to a more settled area, but were desperate enough to eat "moss, grass, leaves, etc.," and reports of cannibalism persisted. By August 20 more than two-thirds of the original six thousand or so had already died. Thus, the meaning of "abandonment in deportation" was for some four thousand the equivalent of a death sentence dragged out through months of useless suffering.[17]

An official census, on January 1, 1932, of the 1.8 million kulaks deported in 1930–31 counted only 1,317,022. Even supposing the figures were accurate, they indicated nearly a half million missing people. Some had escaped, but many were dead.[18]

Far from solving recurrent grain crises, forced collectivization, with all its attendant heavy-handedness, made the situation even worse. Stalin determined there was no turning back, and the pace was accelerated. Every move was justified by relating it to one statement or another from Lenin. Stalin's address of February 4, 1931, to industrial executives again sounded the drums of war:

> To slacken the tempo is to fall behind. And those who fall behind get beaten. But we do not want to be beaten. No, we refuse to be beaten! Old Russia suffered continual beatings because of its backwardness. It was beaten by the Mongol khans, by the Turkish beys, by the Swedish feudal lords, by the Polish and Lithuanian gentry, by the British and French capitalists, by the Japanese barons. All beat Russia—because of its backwardness, its military backwardness, cultural backwardness, political backwardness, industrial backwardness, agricultural backward-

ness. They beat it because doing so was profitable and could be done with impunity.

He urged the industrial executives to put an end to the economic backwardness of the "Socialist fatherland" in the shortest possible time. He expected them to employ a "genuine Bolshevik tempo in developing its Socialist economy. There is no other way. That is why Lenin said on the eve of the October Revolution: 'Either perish, or overtake and outstrip the advanced capitalist countries.' "[19]

He ended the speech by saying: "There are no fortresses that Bolsheviks cannot capture. We have solved some very difficult problems. We have overthrown capitalism, taken power, and built up a huge Socialist industry. We have put the middle peasants onto the path of Socialism. Already we have met the most important requirements for construction."[20]

THE LEADER

Stalin had emerged as the victor for Lenin's succession and defeated all rivals by 1929. He was still not the dictator he was to become. He exercised power by arguing his point of view and maneuvering policies through the upper echelons of the Soviet system of Party and state. By 1929–30 he had gained powerful positions in the Politburo and was secretary general of the secretariat and the decisive figure on Sovnarkom, the Council of People's Commissars. He wanted more.

Lenin's death left a political-psychological void within the Party and to some extent in the country, a yearning for a strong hero figure, a charismatic leader around whom all could rally. Charisma—"the gift"—conferred authority on the leader by virtue of who he was, not because of the positions he held. Thus, even though Stalin controlled significant leadership positions, the magic of charismatic authority escaped him. The task of assuming Lenin's mantle was made more difficult because the great man had never taken a prominent office, such as supreme leader of the Party or head of state. There was no alluring title to be passed on.

The first major opportunity to establish a Stalin cult along the lines of

the one created for Lenin came on Stalin's "official" fiftieth birthday on December 21, 1929. This was by coincidence the year of the "great breakthrough," or turning point of the Five-Year Plan.

For most of 1929, *Pravda* had carried few articles about or by Stalin, or pictures of him. Some people, though, most likely inside the upper echelons of the Party, thought it was about time to bring public attention to the leader. In the course of 1929, and in line with the tradition in the country of celebrating important anniversaries, birthdays, and such occasions, they decided that some tribute would be paid to Stalin.

A wide array of people, numbering in the thousands, were mobilized from all walks of life, major organizations, factories, and military units to show their fealty and devotion by writing letters to *Pravda.* Such a "spontaneous" expression of joy had to have an international dimension. Leaders of Communist parties abroad were encouraged to write about Stalin's accomplishments.

Many of these birthday greetings were published in Soviet newspapers. *Pravda* alone printed 200 messages of congratulations, 117 of them between December 21 and 28. The letters were culled from hundreds more. Some were similar enough to suggest they were tampered with. Thus they cannot be taken as a "scientific" sample of public support for Stalin, but nor can they be dismissed as meaningless.

James Heizer's analysis of the 117 *Pravda* letters shows that there were 483 different terms used to designate Stalin's preeminence, with 201 (42 percent) referring to various leadership roles. Russian has two main words for leader. The first, *rukovoditel',* was used 76 times. The root of the word refers to guidance or direction, and in this case mostly related to tasks Stalin performed in his capacity as head of the Party, leader of the Central Committee, and so on.

The second word for leader in Russian is *vozhd'* and was commonly used for Lenin. This was the title Stalin coveted, even as he piously disclaimed all interest in a cult of leadership. The *vozhd'* was the undisputed charismatic hero-leader and near-religious prophet of the movement. The word was used in forty-nine greetings on Stalin's birthday, eight of which were translations of messages from well-wishers abroad. Only twenty-eight Soviet letters used *vozhd'* to refer to Stalin. Moreover, to the extent they did, the word applied to his role as leader of the Communist Party. In late 1929, then, he was far from being viewed as the vaunted leader on par with Lenin.[21]

Henceforth the Stalinist cult would be developed with more care. The framework was already sketched out, and no doubt some people sincerely began to look to Stalin as the blessed leader. There were social expectations of many kinds, and there were hints at least that many welcomed the return of the strong leader who would set things right. Stalin himself took a hand in filling in the details during the stormy decade to come.

Lenin had been chairman of Sovnarkom from 1917 to 1924 and was a kind of unofficial premier of the government. He ended up working through the Politburo, as did Stalin, who turned down the chairmanship of Sovnarkom and preferred to have one of his yes-men assume that role. He craved the adoration showered on Lenin, and as the years passed, he dared hope for that kind of glory for himself.

In the course of the 1930s the tradition of collective leadership faded, and Stalin emerged still more as an autocrat and dictator, in fact if not in name. He took a hands-on approach to the minute details of government and administration in many spheres. He became, as was to be expected in such a complex party-state system, not the person who made every single decision, but the one who acted as the "supreme arbitrator" within the hierarchy of power.[22]

Stalin did not openly proclaim his dictatorship, but even as he veiled it carefully, the aura around him deepened. He frightened his inner circle and those who were close to the center of power. The balled fist was covered with a silk glove for the public, who were shown pictures and statues of him in state buildings. He was held up as a great father figure who always knew best, a man who wanted nothing for himself, everything for his people. He remained distant, mysterious, and fearful. When he visited his aging mother (as he rarely did) in the early 1930s, she asked him humbly: "Joseph, what exactly are you now?" He answered, perhaps more honestly than he intended, "Well, remember the Tsar? I'm something like a Tsar."[23]

PART FOUR

GERMANS MAKE A PACT WITH HITLER