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The Great Return: The Gulag Survivor and the Soviet System
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Chapter VI

The Effect of Repression and Re-adaptation on Both the Returnees and the Political System

Thus far we have explored the nature of the terror, the experiences of early and late return, the passive aggressive behavior of the Procuracy and other officials, the psychological and moral impact of repression, the practical problems, i.e., living and working conditions, attendant to re-assimilation, and the discrepancy between official policy and unofficial practice with regard to returnees. Throughout this discussion we have presented evidence of the system's dependence on and adaptation to repression. Moreover, the fact that the persecution of returnees continued even after the putative reforms of the XX Party Congress, indicates that repression and the threat of repression were still used by the Soviet regime as maintenance tools and as a prophylaxis.

Considering all of the personal, social, and ideological frustrations endured by those who had survived the Gulag, the subsequent allegiance to the Party by some of them is counter-intuitive. That allegiance was displayed by their motivation and efforts to gain re-instatement in the Communist Party. The behaviors of this group spanned the spectrum from those who died singing Stalin's praises and ex-zeks who waxed poetic about the restoration of their Party membership, to those who merely sought career advancement. As would be expected, different people sought Party rehabilitation for different reasons. Their motivations included fear of persecution, a conviction in the rightness of the system, the practical necessity for social adaptation, and the belief that only when the Partbilet (Party membership card) was returned would their rights be fully restored. For balance, it should be noted that some returning zeks made no request for rehabilitation, because they wanted nothing more to do with the Soviet system. Many of their later rehabilitation appeals resulted from the circumstance that they changed their minds as the political situation began to change in 1989.1
In considering the impact of the policy of repression on the political system it is relevant to examine the impact that the returning Stalinist era zeks had on dissidents or the dissident movement. It might have been expected that many ex-prisoners would have been so politicized by the camp experience that they consequently challenged the legitimacy of the Soviet system in the form of protest (i.e., active dissidence). This expectation was only partially realized. Returnees of the fifties as well as dissidents of the sixties have described themselves as constituting two completely separate groups, with separate histories and separate agendas.\textsuperscript{2} This is not entirely correct because there was considerable overlap between the groups. While not all returnees became dissidents, a number of them did, and it also happened that the children and grandchildren of some returnees became dissidents and human rights activists. Still, there were other survivors who became Party activists, and their children followed in their footsteps. The vicissitudes of the returnees can be most clearly illustrated by examining some of their individual stories.

Fear, belief, and disillusionment

Iosif Bogoraz

It might seem that one could infer the sentiment of individuals toward the Soviet system by noting their attitude toward Party membership, but in a repressive system that deduction could be misleading. Iosif Aronovich Bogoraz was arrested on charges of Trotskyism and spent from 1936-1957 in camps or exile.\textsuperscript{3} Upon release he was rehabilitated, and he applied for and was granted reinstatement in the Party. Considering his history of incarceration and his later activities, which included writing such works as \textit{Otshchepenets} (see Chapter V), published in samizdat, one wonders what impelled him to re-join the Party.

On a cold Moscow night in the late 1990s, at a gathering reminiscent of the atmosphere of the dissident era, this question was raised with his grandson, Aleksandr Daniel, who runs a Memorial project covering the dissident movement from the fifties to the eighties. After agreeing that his grandfather’s behavior
was puzzling, Daniel accounted for it by explaining that Iosif Bogoraz was not motivated by a desire to support the Party, but rather by a fear of the consequences of not requesting re-instatement. The official ideology at the time dictated that everyone was supposed to want to be part of the Communist Party. Added to this pressure was the fact that Bogoraz was also weary of fighting against the persistent impediments that resulted from his not having the legal status of Party rehabilitation. According to Daniel, his grandfather’s new-found Party membership did not last long. Bogoraz left the Party in the early seventies.

(The political course of the next generation tells its own compelling story of what resulted from the convergence of returnees with dissidents. Bogoraz’ daughter (and Daniel’s mother), Larisa, true to her heritage, went on to become a major dissident and human rights activist. She was also first married to Yuli Daniel and then to Anatoly Marchenko, two well-known dissidents (see Chapter V).)

Present at this gathering was also another former dissident, Andrey Grigorenko, son of General Pyotr Grigorenko whose own dissident activities resulted first in his internal exile, then in his incarceration in a Soviet psychiatric hospital, and finally in his expatriation to New York. Andrey Petrovich concurred with Daniel’s assessment that fear was a primary motivating factor for many returnees. Still, as Arseny Roginsky correctly pointed out, the memoirs do not tend to reflect this sentiment. In fact, the writings of many returnees profess a genuine desire for re-instatement on ideological grounds.

**Lev Kopelev**

Lev Kopelev received a ten-year term of incarceration in the wave of post-war repressions of the military, and then was released and rehabilitated in 1956. He was restored to Party membership in 1957. Kopelev and his wife Raisa Orlova, also a dissident, continued to believe in the "healthy socialist nature of society," and thought that the illness of the cult of personality could be cured. In his memoirs Kopelev rationalizes his (earlier) steadfast stance, "my Party, right or wrong," by
recalling that he had always been an honest communist. Elsewhere he claims that "none of us returnees felt the need for revenge," an attitude that is consistent with his early attempts to work within the Party. He and his wife were initially convinced that the reform movement of the Soviet system was irreversible. In 1964 Kopelev wrote: "the movement begun by the XX and XXII Party Congresses could not be stopped ... liberated thoughts and awakened consciousness would not permit a return to Stalinism." He was wrong.

Early on, it might have been apparent to Kopelev that in spite of official pronouncements to the contrary, governmental behavior had not changed in any significant way. For example, at a spring 1956 meeting of translators and critics, his recommendation that Kafka be published was considered strange and inappropriate. (Kafka's depictions of the robotic tyranny of bureaucracy were always a little too close to the Soviet Communist reality for political comfort.) Things did improve, though. What Kopelev could not do for Kafka he did for Solzhenitsyn by promoting the publication of *Ivan Denisovich*. These two former camp-mates shared a similar political history. Indeed, Solzhenitsyn's character, Lev Rubin, in *The First Circle* was based on Kopelev. Because of their opposition to the governing policies, they were also to share a similar political future.

Up until the mid-sixties, Kopelev tried to maintain his faith in the reform movement, but the Brodsky affair and the trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel changed his thinking. Then, in May of 1968 his "hopes of thaw" were decisively crushed when he was expelled from the Party, ironically, for expressing his fears about a return to Stalinism. Indeed, this and subsequent actions confirmed his fears. In short order, he was fired from his job and no longer permitted to publish, even though his works at the time were primarily translations of German literature. Kopelev's petitions for the freedom of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Andrey Sakharov further jeopardized his standing with the government, and he was expelled from the official Writer's Union in 1977. By then he reluctantly came to realize that the
absolute power wielded by the Communist Party was inherently corrupt, that it stifled self-correction, and that it led inevitably to repression, mass arrests, and the camps. The system was at fault and so, too, were those who helped construct it. In a 1979 interview Kopelev expressed this rueful sentiment: "The more I thought things over, the more I became convinced that we had embarked on the wrong road from the very beginning, that the way things turned out was not only Stalin's fault but mine, ours."

No longer willing to support the regime, Kopelev was pushed to the periphery of Soviet society. After the returnee-dissident emigrated to West Germany in 1980, he was stripped of his Soviet citizenship in 1981. In the West, Kopelev remained true to his former countrymen while actively opposing the system under which they still lived. He supported fellow human rights campaigners by helping translate and publish dissident East European writers. In 1990 he participated in the Henrich Böll Stiftung's cooperation programs with Memorial.

Still, there were among ex-prisoners those who continued to believe in the system. Some of them fared better than Kopelev. Some of the returnees who were restored to Party membership were elevated to prominence, and were subsequently used by the regime for propaganda purposes to counter such figures as Solzhenitsyn and the forces that were released by Ivan Denisovich. Galina Serebryakova, who spent 21 years in Siberia, is cited by one author as "one of the regime's pawns in the tragi-comedy of the aftermath of the Stalinist camp system." Rather than addressing her incarceration by the Stalinist (Soviet) system, Serebryakova instead focused on her release and praised the "Leninist Central Committee" for her liberation. In an article in Molodaya Gvardiya in 1964 she gushed, "of course I am in love with my time, with my generation. Practically every day new cities and waterways emerge, important scientific discoveries are taking place.... New relationships between people are developing, the new man of the communistic tomorrow." Those returnees who praised the Party were the most useful
for propaganda purposes -- for Khrushchev and for the regime that long outlasted his reign. Such ex-prisoners as Dora Lazurkina, who attested to her belief in the Leninist cause at the XXII Party Congress, provided especially effective propaganda support for the Party. If ex-prisoners could still profess faith in the system after everything that they had endured, so reasoned the ideologues, then the system must really be good. In 1962 Izvestiya published a poem written two years earlier and dedicated to the "beloved Party". Its author, Sofiya Dalnyaya, had been arrested in 1937 and spent nearly twenty years in prisons and camps. The poem's theme was that the Bolsheviks had been successful in their struggle to become a world force. Poetry expressing the joys of the restoration of Party membership can even be found in the Memorial memoirs, an unlikely place in which to praise the regime. These expressions were quite probably heartfelt, since this is a non-public-oriented venue.

Pyotr Yakir
The story of Pyotr Yakir, in contrast to many of the biographies presented in this work, is rather well known. It is, however, a unique and tragic tale of the effect that repression can have on the returnees' political views, their physical health, and their emotional stability, and will therefore be included in our examination. Pyotr's father, Iona, was a celebrated Red Army commander who was shot in 1937 as an "enemy of the people." Iona Yakir's last words before his execution were reportedly "Long live Stalin!" We will never know whether he was expressing his true belief in the leader, simply hailing the system with a customary expression, or protecting his surviving, incarcerated family. It may be that he died still believing in the Soviet system that he had helped to construct. It is unlikely, however, that, as a high military man, Iona Yakir would have been unaware of Stalin's role (or for that matter his own) in the terror.

Also in 1937, the same year that his father was executed, Pyotr Yakir, then age 14, was arrested as a "socially dangerous element". He was forced to grow up in the Gulag -- spending the next seventeen years in orphanages, prisons, camps, and exile. After Stalin's death, he and his parents were eventually
rehabilitated. Iona's rehabilitation was posthumous. Pyotr's history caught Khrushchev's attention, and he even referred to the fate of the executed general's son at the XXII Party Congress. Pyotr was subsequently to become one of "Khrushchev's zeks", that is, a returnee who received privileges, and was used for propaganda purposes to promote Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign. He was given a post at the Institute of History and offered a good apartment in Moscow.

By 1969, however, concern over the emergence of neo-Stalinism compelled Pyotr to actively support the dissident movement. Yakir wrote a letter to the Party journal Kommunist in which he outlined all of the crimes of which Stalin would have been guilty under Soviet law, concluding that Stalin was one of the greatest criminals of the century. Thereafter, as he continued his human rights campaigning, he was subjected to increasing harassment by the KGB. Still vivid in his mind was the nightmare of an adolescence and young adulthood spent in the camps. The fear of arrest constantly plagued him. Finally, the inevitable did happen; Pyotr Yakir was arrested in 1972. His testimony, together with that of Viktor Krasin, provided the KGB with more than 200 names of fellow dissidents. In addition to the consequences that these disclosures had on the individual lives of the targeted dissidents, the dissident movement itself suffered a setback because the KGB was able to force the suspension of an important underground journal of human rights activities -- Khronika Tekushchikh Sobytiy (The Chronicle of Current Events).

At his 1973 trial Pyotr Yakir pleaded guilty to charges of "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda". This returnee's last words to the court were: "I do not want to die in prison." In exchange for his cooperation, he received a reduced sentence of three years of incarceration, and three years of internal exile. He was pardoned after one year. After liberation, Yakir was unable to pursue his profession, because he had become physically debilitated as a result of alcohol abuse. Nor could he return to his former friends or to human rights activities. Pyotr Yakir, a consummate victim of the Soviet system of terror, lost
his father, his youth, his friends, his integrity, his self-esteem, and his health. Broken in body and spirit, he died in 1982. Pyotr’s personal and political trajectory provide a microcosm of the repressive times in which he lived.

In the post-Soviet era, Pyotr’s life and fate could be reevaluated in light of what was learned about the treacherous workings of the system. A 1995 article in the journal Kengir, written by L.P. Petrovsky, former dissident and grandson of an "Old Bolshevik," argues in favor of posthumously conferring the degree of Candidate of Historical Sciences on Yakir, who was never given the opportunity to defend his completed dissertation. The author further supports granting an honorary diploma to Pyotr’s daughter Irina, also a former dissident, who was not re-admitted to the Historical Archive Institute. The story of the Yakirs demonstrates the intergenerational reach of the Soviet political system -- from Iona, a general who helped fight for it, to Pyotr, a historian who believed, however briefly, that it might work, to Irina who experienced her own share of KGB harrassment for her work on the Khronika. The saga of this family also illustrates the Soviet system’s reliance on ruthless repression as a maintenance tool. The system betrayed the trust of its early architects and disillusioned its most passionate believers. Little wonder that it was weakened by lack of support.

Ruf Bonner

The Bonners are another family whose early commitment to socialism ended in disillusionment. Ruf Bonner, Yelena Bonner’s mother and Andrey Sakharov’s mother-in-law, grew up in a family so devoted to the revolutionary cause that they chose to live in an exile town in eastern Siberia in order to be close to relatives incarcerated in Tsarist prison camps. She went to Moscow as a teenager in 1917 to support the Bolshevik revolution, joined the Red Army in the Civil War, and later worked at the Institute of Marxism. Ruf was arrested in 1937 and spent 17 years in camps and internal exile. Her husband, Gevork Alikhanov, was a highly placed Comintern official who was arrested and executed. Ruf’s daughter (and Alikhanov’s step-
daughter), Yelena, despite her status as the daughter of a "traitor to the motherland" was accepted as a volunteer to defend the country in the 'Great Patriotic War'. Both mother and daughter were rehabilitated after Stalin's death. Subsequently, Mikoyan arranged for medical treatment for Yelena's war wounds (an eye injury), and provided a good apartment for Ruf. In anticipation of a new political thaw following Khrushchev's overthrow, Yelena joined the Communist Party in 1964. That thaw did not materialize.

The Soviet tanks that rolled into Prague in 1968 dispelled the Bonner family's belief in humane socialism. As Ruf recalled "for people with social sentiment, it caused a complete crushing of all hope for any change from within. They had to seek something outside of the system [i.e., the dissident movement]." Ruf Bonner asserted in a 1984 interview that when the Kremlin retreated from de-Stalinization, many returnees fell silent, but those who continued their criticism became the earliest dissidents. Her own family's political history reflected the erosion of faith in Communism caused by the Soviet system's continued dependence on repression. Even as she spoke, her son-in-law Andrey Sakharov was on a hunger strike in internal exile while her daughter, Yelena, struggled to obtain travel permission for medical treatment in the West. (In recognition of the contributions of Sakharov to the dissident movement, he was later to become the honorary chairman of Memorial.)

Builders of socialism

A number of returnees maintained a "parental" faith in the Soviet system because they had participated in constructing it. Ideologically committed Party members could use their enduring belief in the Communist Party that they helped build as a source of solace to help them bear the deprivations of the camps. More altruistically, some even considered their camp labor to be a direct contribution to the Party's welfare. One ex-prisoner, who served 13 1/2 years of a fifteen year sentence, described his sentiments thus:
Right up until 1951 I manually extracted so many precious metals that I could have become a multi-millionaire. That is my contribution to the communist system. But the most important factor that secured my survival in those harsh conditions was my unflinching, ineradicable belief in our Leninist party, in its humanist [!] principles. It was the Party that imparted the physical strength to withstand these trials. [The Party] nourished the brain, [and our] consciousness, helped us fight. Reinstatement in the ranks of my native Communist Party was the greatest happiness of my entire life!"  

Numerous camp memoirs contain similar declarations couched in similar laudatory phrases, extolling patriotism to the motherland and loyalty to the Party. Witness the final sentence of a short autobiography written in 1967 by a female returnee who had spent from 1937-1954 in camps and exile: "during all the years of prison I never lost faith in our Great Communist Party and hopes for restoration of the truth and my good name as a communist and as a fighter for the Soviet regime." She was reinstated in the Party in 1956.  

One returnee memoirist describes how another ex-zek even waxed nostalgic about his camp experience: "in recent years Leonid Artyemevich lives in Kislovodsk and, like all the Norilskians from that time, always remembers with a sense of sorrow and patriotic pride the years he spent in this city, where his labor went into every meter of the street and every building." (A contrasting view is presented by the grim statement of some returnees that these frozen, inhospitable Arctic cities were literally "built on top of prisoners' bones." )  

It is easy to understand why people who have been repressed by a system turn away from it. One such returnee referred to ex-prisoners who maintained their belief in the Party as "maniacs". But the continued and sometimes reinvigorated commitment of those who have been imprisoned seems paradoxical. From a commonsense point of view, it would seem that a political system should deliver on its political promises and if it does not, faith in that system should be abandoned. However, as the endorsements above attest, allegiance to a belief system can have
deep non-rational (not irrational) roots which have little to do with political promises kept. The emotional satisfactions attendant to membership in a belief system may be unrelated to material outcomes.

Indeed, people may persist in supporting a system that oversees their physical suffering so long as it provides them with a sense of meaning, an apparently essential ingredient for the quality of life.36 For many idealists, the Communist Party was the only institution that provided their lives with a sense of meaning. In other countries this sense of meaning could be provided by the institution of religion -- another act of faith that does not depend on good material or political outcomes for continued devotion. Once one accepts the assumptions of a belief system -- such as the conviction that God or Communism is good, then everything that subsequently happens can be interpreted to support it. Organized religion, which is the most widespread institution for providing meaning to people's lives, had been systematically debilitated by the Soviet state, leaving the field of "meaning" to the Party.37

At root, comprehensive belief systems such as religion and communism provide two psychosocial essentials: a conceptual framework for making events meaningful and a supportive social group -- actual or imaginary.38 After the Holocaust, many people questioned the existence or the nature of God, but in spite of this cataclysmic event, many, although not all, persisted in believing in the existence of a force larger than themselves that they entrusted to govern them. As Viktor Frankl argued, people cannot live in a world that they consider meaningless.39

Once a belief system comes to satisfy the need for meaning, that system cannot easily be given up, even if its adherents suffer hardship under it, and maybe especially if they suffer hardship, because the hardship may make people even more needy. For ex-zeks as well as for the Soviet citizenry in general, there were not many alternative systems of meaning to which they could legitimately subscribe. Therefore, even when the Communist Party could be seen as the overseer of so much individual and mass
misfortune, it could still be perceived as a transcendent force that provided a set of guidelines for living and a package of material and social benefits that could accompany the status of being a good Communist. Moreover, when a Party controls its members' social lives, livelihood, physical existence, and the panhuman need for "meaning," it is difficult to challenge.

Other sources of reinforcement for hewing to the Party line were the thick journals of the sixties. They propagated "heroic epoch" tales which extolled the virtue of victims of the terror who, despite it all, "returned home having preserved the flame of their devotion to the revolution." What is largely absent from these devotional accounts is a critical examination of what it was that these victims were preserving, and how disparate the modus operandi of the Soviet system was from the ideals of its founders as well as the ideology putatively espoused by its leaders.

For believers, if there was any reason to assign blame, the blame was directed at individuals such as Yezhov or Beria or Stalin, viewing their behavior as an abrogation of the 'humanist principles' of socialism on which the Soviet Union was supposedly based. It is true that such individuals did contribute to, and were responsible for their role in the terror. However, it is also true that the system of government was indeed responsive not to the governed but only to the governors. Under these circumstances, there was no accountability to the citizenry and governmental repression became an integral part of the system.

While the continued devotion of some returnees to the Communist Party was something akin to religious faith, it still required reinforcement. Convictions of Party loyalty were exploited wherever possible. The Soviet propaganda machine persistently extolled the virtues of the "builders of communism." In 1959 Pravda published a number of letters on 'awakening benevolence and consciousness in the builders of communism'. According to the Khrushchev Files, active discussions of these letters were promoted in the correctional labor institutions. We do not know how assertive the prison authorities were in
encouraging prisoners to write politically correct responses, but we can assume from other prison practices that they were under some pressure to do so. The Ministry of Internal Affairs used selected responses of prisoners for propaganda purposes. These responses were reported to the Council of Ministers and to the editor in chief of Pravda. One [criminal] prisoner’s statement includes the following text about how they were still full Soviet citizens despite their physical status:

...If you are a Soviet citizen, then you remain a Soviet citizen under any conditions and you can always make your contribution to the construction of Communism. The letters published in Pravda ... inspire me to work even better, give me the assurance that after liberation I will be able to find work, and if I have any trouble, I will go to Party and Soviet organizations, they will help me.43

Assuming this was not coerced -- in itself an act of faith -- it would be another example of the cruel disappointments that lay ahead for ex-zeks (political or criminal). We have seen how little help and how many impediments they experienced from the Party and other Soviet organizations. Still, if we are to accept this statement as an authentic attestation of loyalty, then we must understand it as part hope, part faith, and part practical accommodation.

Party membership as social status

Despite their anti-Stalinist sentiments and hostility toward the Soviet system, some ex-prisoners and children of ex-prisoners sought Communist Party membership or reinstatement as a means of re-assimilating into Soviet society. For those with a stigmatized personal or family history, membership in the CPSU was instrumental to career advancement.

Andrey N. Sakharov

Professor Andrey Nikolaevich Sakharov, who rose to the position of director of the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, was the son of an "enemy of the people." Other members of Sakharov's family also had a history of repression. His grandfather, a poor village clergyman who
resided in the church, had been arrested and executed in 1937. Sakharov's father had studied at a seminary before the revolution, and was later trained as a social scientist. At the end of the twenties, however, it became apparent that people who were in any way connected to pre-revolutionary Russian ways of life, or, like his family, had suspect backgrounds, were particularly vulnerable to persecution. So Sakharov's father retrained himself for a profession that seemed more neutral. He became an engineer. Even so, as the son of an executed priest, he began to have problems with the authorities at the end of the thirties. According to Andrey Nikolaevich, the person responsible for informing on his father was someone who was motivated by a romantic interest in his mother. It was not uncommon for people to turn their friends and neighbors over to the authorities for personal as well as political motives. The co-opting of spouses ranked high on the motivation list, along with the opportunistic acquisition of jobs and apartments. Sakharov's father was arrested in 1940.

The family who stayed behind -- Andrey, his brother, and his mother -- suffered all the usual restrictions imposed on relatives of an "enemy of the people". They were not permitted to live in any big cities, the three of them had to share one room, his mother was excluded from the Party, and she had trouble finding or keeping a job as a history teacher. Sakharov's father survived the camps and was liberated in the wave of post-war releases. After release, he worked as an engineer in a small town in the province of Gorky where many other ex-zeks resided. Sakharov noted that his father did not seek Party membership, since he no longer needed to advance in his career and apparently felt no particular allegiance to the CPSU. It is also doubtful that he would have had the option of Party membership at that time.

In spite of his superior qualifications, Andrey Nikolaevich had difficulty gaining admission to Moscow State University in 1948. Even after he got in, he had trouble staying in and advancing in his studies. Despite a perfect grade point average, he had to wage a battle for acceptance as a graduate student in
the history department, because his father was an ex-zek. This same stigmatized family history foreclosed Andrey Nikolaevich's ability to join the Party. This was important to his career because Party membership was a necessary prerequisite to getting into the Academy of Sciences and getting a good job as a historian. In spite of these obstacles, he managed to complete his studies. When Stalin died the situation improved for Sakharov and his family. His father was rehabilitated in 1956-57 and Andrey was permitted to join the Party under Khrushchev.

Despite the impediments associated with his family background, Andrey Nikolaevich Sakharov was successful in climbing the career ladder, and eventually rose to a very prestigious position in his field. In fact, he was one of the few who was able to succeed in spite of the pervasive social and political handicaps imposed on the repressed and their families. We should note that while Sakharov suffered from the social and political consequences of a stigmatized family history, he did not have the additional social burden of being himself an ex-prisoner.

Sakharov claims that he lost his belief in the system during the regime of Brezhnev. In a 1997 interview, Sakharov said that he concluded that the system should have been set up by the elite leaders of society, i.e., the intelligentsia. (Though Lenin was a member of the intelligentsia, Sakharov apparently did not consider him a good example.) They might have cultivated better instincts in people. Instead it was created by Lenin, who was essentially no different than Stalin. They were equally ruthless. Furthermore, while the repressive system had been created by Lenin, it was implemented by hordes of self-serving bureaucrats, and it found an excellent breeding ground in the mentality of the people. Instead of stimulating the development of the best qualities of people, the historian maintained, the Soviet system brought out the worst in them.

In essence, Sakharov asserted, the Soviet system was adapted to the people, but it maintained itself not just by repression but by misshaping its citizens to adapt to repression. The state encouraged people who were struggling for apartments and jobs to
cultivate their most selfish and vile tendencies. Thus the culpability for massive repression lay not just with the Party or with Stalin, but with the millions of impoverished, ill-informed individuals who rose to positions of authority, and with the workers and peasants from the countryside who aspired to live like the people in the cities. He did not quarrel with their aspirations but with their methods. They had been indoctrinated to mistakenly believe that they could improve their lives by destroying others. Sakharov went on to observe:

In Russia a man's life was cheap ... today you can kill a priest, a nobleman, an entrepreneur, tomorrow [that same system will lead you to] inform on your friend, and on your comrade ... the mentality of the people played an integral part in this repressive apparatus, they never learned the system of respect for the individual that is necessary to setting up a civil society and rule of law state."

Sakharov's perspectives on the nature of the system gain credence from his position as a student of history and from his own family's history. His post-Soviet reflections and condemnation of the system should, however, be considered in light of how much and how well he would have had to accommodate to that system in order to ultimately reach one of the highest academic ranks in the country in his field. These views are now politically correct. Sakharov could not have ascended to his present position unless his previous views were also politically correct for the previous times.

Memorial and Vozvrashchenie
In the mid-nineties, questionnaires for this project were administered to people who had some connection to the organizations Memorial and/or Vozvrashchenie. In response to the question of whether they had ever been members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, approximately 75% of the respondents answered with an emphatic "No, never." While these post-Soviet responses may not necessarily have been truthful with regard to the past, at the very least, they represented present sentiments that were clearly anti-Party. Those in the survey who admitted to having been members of the Party said that they had been primarily motivated by "self-preservation" i.e., fear of the
consequences for not accommodating to the system. As one ex-zek explained, he rejoined the Party, "because adaptation would have been even harder without it."49

'Full-fledged citizens'
Arseny Roginsky, historian, ex-dissident, and chairman of Memorial's Scientific Research Center cautioned that the requests for reinstatement in the CPSU by the returning zeks of the fifties should not be misinterpreted as evidence of mass loyalty to Communist ideology. Nor did questions of ideology particularly interest the applicants. Such requests were often attempts to achieve an otherwise unobtainable social status. Only after the restoration of Party membership could one participate in Party meetings and would one's rights (along with lgoty -- the privileges that constituted the material expression of rehabilitation) be truly restored.50 This sentiment is reflected in a number of the memoirs with phrases like, "only after I got Party membership did I feel like a full-fledged citizen of my motherland!"51 The power to grant or withhold privileges proved to be an effective way of forcing support of the Party.

For some ex-zeks, CPSU membership was connected not just with their external social status, but with their pride and their sense of self. Consider the case of Anna Larina, Bukharin's widow, whose determined struggle for her husband's party rehabilitation continued into the Gorbachev era.52 Ordinary citizens were similarly motivated. One ex-prisoner in Norilsk, for example, recounted that after rehabilitation, his dismissal from work was overturned. Armed with his rehabilitated status and a job, he explained, "Now my biography became completely clean, and I could leave Norilsk to request Party reinstatement with a clear conscience."53 As so often happened, this former prisoner's equation of a clear conscience with a clean political biography illustrates the hold that the political system had on the interior lives of its citizens. In the absence of viable competing institutions such as religion or rival political parties to validate the individual's self-esteem, the Party had a monopoly control over it.
A letter of gratitude to Khrushchev in 1959, published in Pravda, used this very public forum to convey a similar confirmation of the Party’s ownership of social validation and, through it, individual self-esteem:

I am not a [Party] member because 20 years ago, when I had already obtained recommendations for membership, my father was jailed. Now he has been posthumously rehabilitated. For this let me voice tremendous thanks to the Party and to you personally, the initiator of the review of many old cases. Even though it be posthumously, a man’s memory has been cleared.... I am writing you the truth that I have told to no one (except my husband, before we linked our lives). I concealed this from people... From the time of my childhood Father did not live with us. None of my friends knew anything about him. But I did not join the Party. I could not mark my entrance into the Party with a lie. And who would have recommended me for membership if I had told the truth?54

The satisfaction connected with the restoration of Party membership sometimes required a degree of politically correct amnesia. The wife of an "enemy of the people" who spent twelve years in Akmolinsk described her sense of pride after receiving her husband’s pension and (posthumous) Party reinstatement thus:

I finally felt that I was a politically and civilly full-fledged person. Moreover, I was in a certain sense a ‘hero of the day’. We rehabilitated persons were ‘elevated’, we were given first place in line for living quarters, trips, financial assistance, etc.55

As her subsequent problems attest, the Party also developed a degree of amnesia for the benefits that it had promised to rehabilitated people. She goes on to admit that these benefits were short-lived. However, as often happens with a totalitarian mindset, she, like the state, blames the victims. Not only did the state betray its promise of benefits, but it faulted the victims for bringing this to their attention. This author opines that the change in attitude toward returnees can be attributed to "the immodesty and criticism of certain comrades" which ultimately had a negative effect. "Gradually we went ‘out of fashion’. The Party and government still helped us, but not as readily as in the beginning. Having exposed the cult of
personality of Stalin, the Party nevertheless acknowledged his achievements in the construction of socialism and especially his role in the Great Patriotic War." This rehabilitated, reinstated returnee’s memoirs were not to be found in the Memorial or Vozvrashchenie collections. She donated them to the Institute of Marxism-Leninism.

The Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 resulted in a major setback to the Party’s prestige, at least among the critically-minded. As one of the detractors put it, "the Party wasn’t worth five kopecks after Hungary." However, others were reappraising their country from a more differentiated perspective. In the late fifties and sixties, writers like Yevtushenko were trying to rekindle the revolutionary ideas of 1917 and promoting the point of view that while Stalin was bad, the Party was still good. Arseny Roginsky pointed out that "placing blame for mass repression on the system itself was only a later construct."

In the fifties and sixties the ex-zeks and Party propagandists who preferred to focus on the ‘heroism of Communists’ rather than on the repression of the communists greeted Khrushchev’s efforts toward liberation with great enthusiasm. In turn, prominent Party and Komsomol returnees were accorded the status of heroes. These Party people focused on efforts to reform the political system and put aside the issue of how Stalin should be judged. Their criticism was directed at particular, correctable deficiencies in the system. Following Khrushchev’s lead, individuals like Shatunovskaya and others maintained their loyalty to the Party, while still advocating reform. Their ideas were rejected by the conformists after Khrushchev’s ouster.

Party membership application in the second half of the fifties

Not everyone who applied for Party membership or reinstatement received it. Among the requirements were: good recommendations from known Party members, a clean record (i.e., rehabilitation), timeliness of the application, proof of work in local Party
organizations, demonstrated loyalty, partinost (Party-mindedness), etc. At their discretion, Party officials could delay or block reinstatement on the grounds of long-term (in some cases 18 years) absence from its ranks. The officials were technically correct in holding that the applicant had not participated in Party life during the years of incarceration, but considering the involuntary circumstances of their absence, the withholding of membership on these grounds was an example of blatant discrimination against former zeks.

A 1957 report of the Central Committee Party Control Commission covering the year 1956 states that 55.5% of the appeals of individuals who were "excluded from the Party on unfounded political accusations" were honored with reinstatement. From another statement that appeared in that same report, there is evidence indicating that Party membership was withheld from applicants who were deemed to be too critical of the Party's history. Witness the reason for the following rejection:

The Party Control Commission confirmed the exclusion from the CPSU of P.I. Gudzinsky (member of the CPSU since 1918), senior engineer ... who during a Party meeting where the conclusions of the XX Party Congress were being discussed, expressed anti-Party revisionist sentiments. He slanderously asserted that in the course of thirty years the Party and the country experienced a [dark chapter] in the history of its development and that this history was not condemned at the XX Party Congress, that the report on the cult of personality at the XX Party Congress 'doesn't teach the Party anything.'

Consistent with its history, the Party was continuing to respond to the message by banishing the messenger. Moreover, even the status of juridical rehabilitation did not help applicants who "during the period of heated struggle with Trotskyites, Zinovievites ... actively acted against the Party in defense of the opposition." Their exclusions were upheld.

In some instances, when officials could not legitimately reject an appeal, they found administrative means of postponing the process of reinstatement. A 1957 inquiry into practices of the Party Control Commission based on letters and declarations of workers revealed that many appeals were "artificially delayed"
in the *apparat* of the Central Committee, because they were sent for implementation to [officials] who were on business trips, were sick, or were on vacation. In consequence, processing of these requests was delayed for long periods of time. The same bureaucratic obstacles were used to impede appeals for assistance. This was a particularly egregious betrayal of the government’s promises because sometimes these appeals came from rehabilitated victims who had been reinstated in the Party, but needed help in arranging pensions or better living conditions.\(^6\)

While such practices occur in every bureaucracy, their application to returnees is consistent with the passive aggressive policy of the Soviet Procuracy in the early years of the rehabilitation process.

In spite of these obstacles, during the period following the XX Party congress, thousands of Party rehabilitations were applied for and granted. Between February 1956 and June 1961, according to a report of the Party Control Commission, 30,954 Communists, many posthumously, were reinstated. This group included Party and Komsomol leaders.\(^6\) The same report undertakes to assess accountability for the apparently illegitimate exclusions. Not surprisingly, the focus was on who was to blame rather than what was to blame, i.e. the system itself:

Great responsibility for the massive exclusion from the Party of Communists based on flimsily falsified materials lies with the former staff of the ... Central Committee Party Control Commission. Materials of the Party Control Commission indicate that in the past, especially from 1936-1940, the Party Control Commission did not verify the grounds for the political accusations made against Party members, and basically, indiscriminately excluded them from the Party with the formulations: ‘enemy of the people,’ ‘counter-revolutionary’, etc. In many cases the decision on exclusion from the Party was made on the basis of lists of arrestees sent by the NKVD.\(^6\)

If there had to be a culprit in the system, the Party wanted it to be the NKVD.

Thus far we have explored a number of psychological and emotional reasons why former zeks would seek CPSU membership or
reinstatement but put very simply and pragmatically, Party membership made Soviet life a lot easier. Roginsky pointed out how something as routine as filling out a questionnaire -- a common Soviet requirement -- rendered rehabilitated status (preferably with Party rehabilitation, that is, restored membership) particularly relevant. When applying for apartments or jobs, or for admission to the university, for example, applicants had to fill out forms detailing their personal history. Roginsky observes that this was a defining psychological event: "Just imagine the eternal instability that returnees felt every time they had to fill out a questionnaire ... their status was a little similar to that of being a Jew [a group against whom discrimination was the rule]."67 A rehabilitation certificate or Party card could permit a returnee to avoid revealing the details of a stigmatized history. Arseny Roginsky spoke not only as a historian, but as a participant-observer. He could speak from experience.

The effect of repression on the formation of a dissident: Arseny Roginsky

Arseny Borisovich Roginsky is the chairman of Memorial's Scientific Research Center, an authority on victims of Soviet terror, a former victim, and the son of a father who was a victim. The organization he heads is the most wide-reaching in representing victims. During our interview, conducted in 1996, he joked, "I should be a lagernik (camp inmate) in my blood, but I'm not."68 In this and other statements, he denied that the camp was still a part of him. To the question of whether the returnees he met had significantly influenced his development, he answered "those old people [fifties returnees] who sat on the bench quietly singing Civil War songs in the apartment building courtyard when I was growing up had no effect on me at all."

Furthermore, the subject of Stalinist repressions did not interest him at that time of his life. Let us examine his personal history in light of his assertion that this group's experiences did not influence his thoughts and actions with
regard to the system.

Roginsky’s father was a Jewish engineer and a Talmudic scholar. He was arrested in January 1938 and sentenced to six years in camp. While incarcerated he was able to do some work in his specialty as an electrical engineer. He served eight years -- two years longer than his sentence -- because prisoners who were due for release in 1944 were sometimes retained because of the war. Arseny was born outside the camp, in the ‘zone’ -- a territory under the jurisdiction of the NKVD, in 1946. At first the family was forced to live in this remote area, three-hundred kilometers from Leningrad, because of the ‘minuses’ in his father’s passport. But by 1948 the family decided to leave and began to move to different places. In January 1951, Roginsky’s father was arrested again, probably for violating his passport restrictions and living too close to Leningrad. This time he did not survive the incarceration. Boris Roginsky died in prison, three months after his second arrest.

In spite of her status, which she never tried to conceal, Roginsky’s mother got a job as a German teacher in 1952. Her German was not fluent, but there was a shortage of people who could speak foreign languages. She started working in the village, and then four years later moved to the city. By then the family finally acquired a room in a communal apartment where Arseny, his mother, his sister, and his grandmother shared a living space of 17 1/2 meters. Roginsky recalled that a neighbor, who was a building representative, complained to his mother about how badly he behaved, “I was a real street hooligan, I was always anti-society”. He was accepted as a Pioneer in the fourth class, but by the time he reached the seventh class, was dropped from its ranks for hooligan acts. Unlike most young people of his generation, Roginsky did not become a Komsomolets.

In 1962 when Arseny wanted to continue his studies, he could not gain admittance to Leningrad University and so went to Tartu University instead. Roginsky attributed this rejection from his native city to his own biography but not to his father’s status. "After all, this was the time of Ivan Denisovich," he explained. Roginsky was relegated to studying in the Estonian
SSR because he was a Jew, because he was not a Komsomolets, and because he did not have a sufficiently long record of work achievement. By 1966 when he was 20 years old, the young student started to become skeptical of the regime, but his skepticism was not accompanied by an interest in politics. He began associating with other students who, for various reasons, had not been accepted at Moscow State University. Among these students was Aleksandr Daniel, whose father was Yuli Daniel, the man whose Moscow trial sparked the growth of the dissident movement. At that time, also, Roginsky met Nikita Okhotin, with whom he would later develop Memorial.

Roginsky graduated in 1968. In the sixties and seventies Arseny befriended Natalya Gorbanevskaya, and a number of other Leningrad poets and philosophers who were subsequently arrested. The human rights movement started to grow, and though he says he was not particularly involved at the time, Roginsky submitted materials to Khronika Tekushchikh Sobytiy (see also above), a journal of current human rights offenses. It had been started by Gorbanevskaya in 1968 and dealt with the persecution of dissidents and related issues. Larisa Bogoraz and Sergey Kovalyov were also active in the development of Khronika. Up until then Roginsky’s activities were primarily academic with a special interest in 19th century history and the preservation of history through archives. However, his growing awareness of what was happening to his circle of friends and, by extension, to the country, made him realize how limited was the ideological vacuum in which he lived. So, using his interest in history, he began exploring the early alternatives to Bolshevism and the roots of the repression. Subsequently, Roginsky started to develop his own political point of view: "I found my heroes. They were somewhere in between Social Democrats, Mensheviks and Popular Socialists. There was a third way that wasn’t White or Red." By integrating their perspectives, Roginsky formulated an instrument for measuring the Soviet system.

In pursuit of his new interest, Roginsky met many former zeks in the following years. He collected materials from people who were connected with any kind of opposition such as
Troskyites, Anarchists, Mensheviks, and those who had taken part in the resistance at Solovki or the camp strikes. He was only interested in the stories of these particular groups. The history of ordinary citizens who landed in the camps for no particular civil infraction or for no particular political orientation, and who did not participate in acts of resistance, seemed to him to be too undifferentiated to find a pattern that interested him.

By 1976 Roginsky and his circle of friends -- Aleksandr Daniel, Larisa Bogoraz, Mikhail Gefter, and others connected with the Chronicle -- were moving in the direction of a historical inquiry which would eventuate, a decade later, in Memorial. Their focus was on the history of the repression rather than the immediacy of the repression, but the relevance of their work to the political agenda of the dissident movement did not escape the government. The power to write history is the power to control whose story is told. The Soviet system maintained itself not only by repressing people but by repressing ideas; the state's power was used to control the flow of knowledge. Roginsky, his friends, and the regime understood that there is no politically neutral pursuit of history, so Roginsky anticipated that he might be arrested. He was already being harassed regularly by KGB searches of his apartment. Finally in 1981, Roginsky was summoned to OVIR, the visa office, and told he had permission to emigrate within ten days. Roginsky did not accept the offer, nor did he mistake it for a gesture of good will. On August 12, 1981 Arseny Roginsky was arrested on Article 196 -- "the forgery and the production and sale of forged documents", and also accused of sending materials abroad to anti-Soviet publications such as Pamyat, a historical journal. The documents in question were letters needed to obtain permission for the use of the Leningrad archives for research. (Roginsky had been barred from working in Soviet research institutions because he was a Jew and the son of a former political prisoner.) Roginsky was sentenced to four years in a labor camp. Considering his family history of repression and the experiences of his current social group, it might have been expected that
Roginsky would have been prepared for the experience of incarceration. He confessed that he was not:

I probably knew more about the Gulag than all the dissidents combined, but the first time I entered a cell -- that horrible world -- despite all of my erudition and all of my knowledge I felt like I was an absolutely helpless child who knew nothing. I had never really asked about the camps, I asked about internal life and philosophy and heard about the external horrors. But I never realized the main thing -- that camp is degradation from the first moment to the last, and all of camp life comes down to a struggle to resist humiliation.... People talk about the rats, but what is not in a standard memoir is that the individual is completely trampled upon. The camp is a place for collective loneliness.  

After surviving five camps in four years and down to 50 kilograms, Roginsky went back to Moscow at the end of his term in 1985. Even with camp jargon and all, he was received as a hero. It was the fashion for returnees of the eighties to be received as heroes. Roginsky lamented about his father’s generation, "No one applauded them when they came back." Only after enduring his own incarceration four decades later did Roginsky fully understand why his father told his mother that he could not survive a second arrest. This hypersensitivity to a repeated experience of trauma, a characteristic of the Post-traumatic Stress Syndrome, may provide some insight into the reluctance of returnees to resume their ideological pursuits with its attendant exposure to re-arrest.

In the early nineties Roginsky joined with Sergey Kovalyov on a human rights inspection of the Butyrka, but he did not accompany him when he visited the camps. He could barely tolerate the prison visit, so nightmarishly reminiscent were its smells and sounds.

Roginsky’s early tendency toward rebelliousness manifested itself in later life as ‘anti-Soviet’ activity. He now works as a historian and as the supervisor of Memorial’s research. In this capacity, he has irregular access to the KGB archives, and oversees an organization that defends the interests of returnees and ensures that stories of Soviet repression are recorded and preserved. In view of Roginsky’s current mission in life, it
would seem that he has underestimated the impact on his life of his family history and of his youthful exposure to those old people in the courtyard. However, given his sincerity in discounting such early influences on his formation as a dissident and on his present life, it is relevant to note that people often deal with the effects of early experience through behavior rather than words.

The Gulag/returnee legacy

Throughout this chapter we have explored how the Gulag, as an experience and as a threat, continued to influence and politicize survivors, their families, and the larger society. More specifically we have cited a number of examples that attest to both a direct and an indirect connection between returnees and the dissident movement. Organizationally, they were two separate groups, but their membership overlapped: many dissidents were incarcerated; after release from prison, especially if they were not granted full rehabilitation, a number of returnees were politicized into the dissident movement; the presence of returnees and the stories they told generated a societal revulsion to the lawlessness with which the Soviet government governed.

Yuri Aikhenvald (see also Chapter V), a Stalinist era returnee and the son of repressed parents, was fired from his job in the late sixties because of his involvement in the human rights movement. Aikhenvald's offence consisted of the fact that he had signed some petitions to the courts on behalf of accused writers and activists. In his writings, Aikhenvald makes it clear that the demands made by the returnees and dissidents that the law be observed and applied equitably were a direct response to the Stalinist lawlessness under which they had suffered. It was the painful knowledge of what had happened to them and their social networks as a result of Stalinist repression that led them to support the human rights movement in the post-Thaw era. Calls for reform also came from people who had been part of the apparatus that administered the repression. These
included former interrogators of the Procuracy, who had previously dealt with rehabilitations and subsequently became dissidents. Some returnees never flagged in their opposition to the system despite a continuing series of re-arrests and reincarcerations. Other returnees never looked back and had nothing to do with the previous generation of prisons and prisoners.

Leonard Borisovich Ternovsky
Leonard Ternovsky's story is that of a true idealist whose dissident behavior stemmed more from liberal convictions than from personal experience with repression. As a dissident who had no personal connection to fifties returnees, Ternovsky's tale offers insight into the motivation of this group. Based on his own experience, he does not believe that the majority of later human rights defenders developed their convictions as a result of Stalinist repression. No one in Ternovsky's family had suffered under the Stalinist repression, and until Stalin's death, almost until Khrushchev's "unmasking" of his "cult," Ternovsky grew up believing in the basic righteousness of the Soviet system. In 1956, however, at age 23 he experienced an intellectual awakening through which he came to realize that "it was the system itself, that is, the totalitarianism and the absence of freedom that begat the monstrous repression." It was then that he felt impelled to make a commitment to civic responsibility.

Ternovsky completed his medical studies and worked as a radiologist in the sixties. He became increasingly disturbed by what was happening in the world around him -- the persecution of Pasternak, the trial of Brodsky on charges of "parasitism," the trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel. For him, the last straw was the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in September 1968. The handful of courageous citizens who demonstrated in Red Square made a great impression on him. Ternovsky could no longer remain on the sidelines. He wrote an article under a pseudonym in samizdat sharply criticizing the Soviet invasion. Soon Ternovsky was openly signing petitions in defense of the convicted demonstrators.
This "taste of freedom" inspired Ternovsky with an even greater feeling of dedication and motivated him to become engaged in further acts of defiance. He was a signatory to a number of letters in defense of human rights, joined the Moscow Helsinki Group, and in 1978, he became a member of the working commission to investigate the abuse of psychiatry for political purposes. By that time the doctor had become convinced that this branch of medicine was being appropriated by the government. By that time, also, Ternovsky's motivations were more personal. Some of his friends were imprisoned, others were incarcerated in psychiatric hospitals, still others had saved themselves only by leaving the country, and one, unable to withstand the persecution, committed suicide.

Ternovsky's own arrest was inevitable. In 1980 he was sentenced to three years of camp on article 190-1 (deliberately circulating fabrications defaming the Soviet political and social system). Ternovsky was placed with common criminals in order to isolate him from his peers. Witness his final words in court:

I anticipated my arrest and this trial. Of course that does not mean that I tried to get into prison. I am not fifteen, but almost fifty and I don't need that kind of 'romance'. I would have preferred to avoid years of imprisonment. But to have done so would have meant acting in a way that would have been unworthy of what I consider my duty.... I am going to prison with a good conscience.

Reflecting on his prison years Ternovsky later said, "I was free in an unfree country." The sentiment that had developed in this dissident's consciousness is reminiscent of Henry David Thoreau's words in his 1849 tract on Civil Disobedience: "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison ... the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor."

Though his initial entrance into the dissident movement may not have been influenced by Stalin's zeks, his own imprisonment created a setting in which he was forced to think about their experience. In contrast to many of Stalin's zeks, Ternovsky knew why he had been incarcerated, and in knowing why, he had a sense of purpose that was often absent from their experience. He also
knew that when he came out his friends and family would be waiting for him, even the West would be waiting for him. Ternovsky realized that the contrast between his experience and that of Stalin's zeks was considerable, because they could not depend on anyone or anything when they came out. Still, re-adapting to the "big zone" in 1983 required an extensive effort for Ternovsky as well. He was not permitted to live in Moscow, he was a professional outcast, and he was unable to get formal employment. The only work the radiologist could find was temporary, so he experienced long periods of unemployment. This, of course, made him vulnerable to charges of "parasitism". Ternovsky decided to apply for retirement, since the eligibility age in his field of specialization was fifty. After pursuing this for almost a year, he attained this status. The fact that this was granted at all in the Brezhnev era was more likely determined by the government's desire to remove him from circulation than out of any adherence to the principles of justice. Ternovsky was rehabilitated in 1991.

In the sixties and seventies those who could not openly petition for their rights could still express their protest in the form of Aesopean language in fiction and samizdat -- an increasingly political venue after 1964. Throughout this study we have looked at a number of these literary works with thinly veiled political messages. Literary criticism was yet another effective means of addressing tabooed topics. A 1964 essay on Kafka describes the surroundings in which Kafka's protagonists find themselves as "deformed and conditional". It inveighs against a robotic, labyrinthine bureaucracy with its own rules and its own momentum, which Soviet citizens must have recognized as all too familiar. Moreover, the article discusses The Trial, a theme that must have been on the minds of many a victim. Given the timing and the subject matter it is reasonable to assume that this publication reflected some implicit criticism of the Stalinist repression and the regretted end of de-Stalinization.
The camp regions

The camp regions, of course, experienced their own "haunting of the present by the past". In his Arctic Tragedy, written in the first half of the seventies, Grigory Svirsky, whose critical writing was banned in the Soviet Union after 1964, provided some insight into the atmosphere of this "land whose terrain and population are permanently scarred by the marks and memories of the Stalinist labor camps." One of the main points of these short stories was that little had changed in Siberia since Stalin died. Many of the zeks stayed on as employees for lack of any other place to go or means to get there. According to Svirsky, the command structure and the arbitrary use of power were still the same. In its review of Svirsky's work, Radio Liberty provided the following commentary on the persistent problems which continued to influence life in the Yenisei region: "Former prisoners still continue to settle scores with former camp guards, state law still contrives to make criminals of the innocent, protest is suppressed, and there is a general sense of misrule by authority and grievance and demoralization among the ordinary citizens."

This raises the question of why some former prisoners remained in spite of the often harsh climatic conditions and generally hostile sociopolitical environment of the remote camp regions. (These cases would be subject of a study in itself.) Let us briefly explore their reasons for staying. Svirsky's answer to this question is that the prisoners were conditioned to hopelessness. In his documentary short story "Lyova Soifert, Friend of the People..." someone asks the ex-prisoner Soifert what kind of masochism it is that makes one stay in this Northern city, 'where even the clay on the hillocks seems to be soaked with blood.' He grinned and said, "and where is there not a prison?... The only good places are where we aren't!" This explanation seems to suggest that no matter where ex-zeks end up, they carry their prison with them and the good life is elsewhere. It may also allude to the fact that the Soviet society itself was a prison.

Mordovia and Dolinka (Karaganda, Kazakhstan) are fairly
representative examples of what life is like after the camp experience when people still live near the camp sites. Mordovia was a part of the Gulag that was also widely used to incarcerate dissidents. The camps later functioned as penal colonies rather than political prisons. According to a 1997 article in Nezavisimaya Gazeta, every family in that region was in one way or another still connected with the camp zone. Some even counted three or four generations of camp laborers. While earlier generations had served time in the camps for anti-Soviet activities, their children and grandchildren were now employed by the Dubravlag (Dubravny lager, Mordovia) system. In Dolinka, the capital of the Karlag (Karaganda camp complex), the post-Soviet residents were people who had once been either prisoners or guards, or were the children of prisoners or guards, or were the children of both. However, neither side of the prisoner-guard divide talks much about the past. The pragmatic motto is, "the less you say, the more peaceful your life will be." Regardless of whether or not old attitudes are expressed in words, they persist. A former guard claimed in an interview that only criminals were incarcerated in the Karlag. Moreover, he maintained that they were well taken care of, that they were fed "three times a day, 5250 calories per person. In the morning bread, tea, soup or oatmeal. At lunch an appetizer and main course," etc. Interestingly, the 1993 pension of the NKVD veterans was rather high -- comparable to that of soldiers who served at the front. It was higher than the meager compensation and pension allotted to former prisoners. One incentive for families to remain in the area of the camps was the relatively good wages and benefits available for those who were still able to work. Other factors included the socialization to the camp, travel restrictions, and the lack of alternatives. Some prisoners went into the camps and did not come out until five, ten, or even seventeen years later. They had spent their youth and young adulthood in these areas and felt too old to leave. As we have seen, the prisoners who left the camps were not the same people they had been when they entered,
and many lacked skills or initiative to start over in another place. Moreover, when they initially came out of the camps they were usually held back by passport restrictions which limited or prohibited travel outside of the region. In addition to the special restrictions attendant to their ex-prisoner status, the residency registration (propiska) -- a tsarist regulation that applied to everyone in the Soviet period -- superimposed further impediments on their mobility. It was also the case that many former prisoners had acquired camp-spouses with whom they established new families, and for reasons referred to in earlier chapters, they either did not have the option of returning or did not want to return to their old families in the places from whence they had come. Hence, even if the camps had politicized the prisoners and motivated them to challenge the legitimacy of the government that had incarcerated them, the physical, psychological, and social means to do this were not always attainable. As one former prisoner noted when asked why he remained, "You'd have to ask Stalin why we are still here."\textsuperscript{96}

Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored the effect that repression had on the attitudes of former prisoners toward the Soviet system. We have also examined whether former prisoners influenced the way others viewed the system as well as whether they had a more direct effect on the system itself. Some former prisoners who had once embraced the Party were not embittered by their camp experience to the extent that they subsequently rejected the Party. Evidence for this conclusion is based on their written memoirs and their acts of petitioning for restoration of Party membership. While some of those who requested membership did so out of fear of the social and professional consequences of not doing so, others requested reinstatement out of a lingering belief in the system. Some of this group became very disillusioned.

To all outward appearances, in the immediate aftermath of release, the political system was not significantly weakened by
the presence of these survivors of the repression or by their activities. And though returnees may have had some influence in stimulating the dissident movement and adding to its ranks, there was little progress toward real political reform. On the contrary, the retrenchment of the Brezhnev years made it seem as if the presence of returnees had no corrective effect, and certainly no de-stabilizing effect, on the Soviet political system. Apparently, and "apparently" is an important qualifier, the system of repression was not changing in response to its casualties and failures. As the propaganda machine continued in its efforts to erase history, the people were not permitted to openly examine the past or be critical of the present. But some did, and they formed a nidus for future change. Under Gorbachev, when the populace were finally permitted to look back at the past lawlessness of their government, the explosion of revelations combined with the burgeoning discontent to make it no longer possible for the Soviet propaganda machine to continue steamrolling the facts into a fraudulent version of history. In our next and final chapter we will explore how the returnees re-emerged in the eighties and nineties, eventually to become a powerful force in challenging the legitimacy of the Soviet system.
References

1. For example Izrail' Mazus, who was imprisoned from 1948-1954 for being a member of an anti-Soviet organization. Interview held at Vozvrashchenie headquarters in Moscow, November 26, 1996. See also Mazus, Gde Ty Byl? (Moscow: Vozvrashchenie, 1992).

2. Semën Vilenskii (Stalinist-era zek), Arsenii Roginskii (dissident), and many others from both groups maintain this stance.


4. Discussion held at the home of Arsenii Borisovich Roginskii in Moscow, October 14, 1997.


9. Ibid., p. 77.

10. Ibid., p. 104.

11. Ibid., p. 133.

12. Viktor Nekrasov, "Twenty years since the publication of Ivan Denisovich,” RFE-RL (radio liberty research) v. 27, no. 1, 5 January 1983, p. 2.


15. See also International Herald Tribune, 19 June 1997.

16. He spoke, for example, at an April 1990 Memorial-Böll Stiftung workshop in Köln attended by, among others, Arsenii Roginskii, and East German historians. Memorial was struggling at the time for legal status. Such support made it more difficult to officially ignore the organization.


23. According to his daughter, Irina (also a former dissident), Pëtr Iakir was even offered a larger apartment. He modestly declined, because a three-room apartment was suitable for himself and his family (conversation with Irina Petrovna Iakir, October 8, 1997). At the time of our meeting, Irina still lived in that same apartment with her husband, Iuli Kim, and her daughter and grand-daughter.


25. Ibid., p. 4.


27. See Elena Bonner, Mothers and Daughters (London: Hutchinson, 1992).


29. Mikhail Baitals’skii, for example, was still supportive of the October Revolution and Bolshevism under Lenin and Trotsky -- even after two incarcerations. He still believed that socialism would ultimately triumph when he died in 1976. See Mikhail Baitalsky, (edited and translated by Marilyn Vogt-Downey), Notebooks for the Grandchildren. Recollections of a Trotskyist Who Survived the Stalin Terror (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995). See also Europe-Asia Studies Vol. 49, No. 7 (1997): 1362-65.

Baitals’skii’s notebooks were donated to Memorial (f. 2, op. 1, d. 8).

Aleksei Kosterin had similar views. This veteran of the Civil War who spent seventeen years in camps from 1938 on was a committed Marxist-Leninist Bolshevik. See Tamara Deutscher, "Intellectual Opposition in the USSR," New Left Review 96 (March-April 1976): 105.

31. Evgeniia Martinovna Borian, Memorial, f. 1, op. 1, d. 556, l. 0011 0113 0913.

32. Vasilii Aksënov, a writer and the son of Evgeniia Ginzburg, also included in at least one of his stories the true to life image of a former political prisoner who did not return depressed, broken or embittered. On the contrary, after camp the returnee maintained his former patriotism and belief in the system. Vasilii Aksënov, "Pravo na ostrov," (St. Petersburg: Ermitazh, 1983), p. 157.


34. This expression can be found in numerous memoirs, but is here excerpted from a letter from D. Glikshtein to Stephen Cohen, May 23, 1983.


37. American communism has also been placed in the religion niche. Witness one writer's observations: 'American communism seems best understood not as a political movement but as a quasi-religious one, whose members lived in a world where strategies and tactics were accepted as matters of faith, where only very narrow debate was ever permitted, and where even a hint of public skepticism was regarded as punishable heresy.' Sam Tanenhaus, "Keeping the Faith," The New York Review, June 25, 1998.


39. Frankl, Man's Search...

40. Looking back on his belief in communism, a Spanish communist later admitted to having rationalized much of Russia's misbehavior, thereby falsifying his perception (See Angela van Son and Mireille Sennef, "Vrouwenoorlog om Ravensbruck," Historisch Nieuwsblad (May 1998): 25.)

41. These journals were guided by the spirit of the times. They also served as a medium for political communication in the absence of competing political parties, civic organizations, and a free press. Thus, camp stories (Ivan Denisovich) or 'fictional' returnee tales were also "thick" journal readers' fare in the sixties.

43. GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 506, l. 236.

44. Andrei Nikolaevich Sakharov, interview held at the Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, September 30, 1997.

45. Ibid.

46. We should add that almost everyone, high and low, has a relative who was in the camps. Gorbachev, for example, had a grandfather who was a victim of the dekulakization campaign.

47. Sakharov, interview.

48. The survey was not large-scale, and is mostly an indication of sentiment in the ranks of the respective organizations, rather than a representation of popular sentiment.

49. Anonymous responses to questionnaires especially designed for this project.

50. Arsenii Roginskii, interview held at Memorial headquarters in Moscow, April 26, 1996.


52. See Anna Larina, This I Cannot Forget: the Memoirs of Nikolai Bukharin’s Widow (London: Hutchinson, 1993).

53. Sagoian, Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 104, l. 1993 1510 1633.


55. RTsKhIDNI, f. 560, op. 1, d. 37, (tom II), l. 487.

56. Ibid.

57. Roginskii, April 26, 1996.

58. Ibid., May 7, 1996.

59. Ian Rachinskii, co-chairman of the Moscow Memorial and chairman of the council of the Memorial Human Rights Center, interview held at Memorial, May 4, 1996.

60. A number of ex-zeks reported trouble with re-instatement in the Party because they applied for it a few years after return. The irony was that they could not apply earlier because of the cumbersome rehabilitation process which had to be successfully negotiated first. See, for example, Memorial, f. 1, op. 1, d. 5224, l. 0034 1002 1593.
61. This was the response that one former prisoner received in March, 1956. He was eventually reinstated. Gagen, "Vospominaniia," torn 3 and 4, Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 44 and 45, 11. 1993 0510 1123-1124, 0001 2909 1866.

62. TsKhSD, f. 6, op. 6, d. 1077, 11. 4-5.

63. Ibid., d. 1165, l. 10.

64. Ibid., d. 1099, 11. 3-4.

65. Ibid., d. 1165, 1. 2.

66. Ibid., l. 9. The collusion of the NKVD and the Party was not further examined in this document. Nor did the Party necessarily need the NKVD data since it kept its own archives. One former prisoner asserts that the Party archives contained much more information on his "opposition past" than the NKVD ever knew. This ex-zek believed that if the NKVD had known what was in the Party archives on him when he was arrested, then he might have been shot. E. Osipov, "Partiinaia Reabilitatsiia," Pamiat' 1 (New York, 1978), pp. 348-350.

67. Roginskii, interview held at Memorial headquarters, April 26, 1996.

68. Ibid., May 7, 1997.

69. Ibid.

70. He did not, however, indicate his father's status on his university application.

71. In the 1990s when he was given access to his KGB dossier, Roginskii found the decision to arrest him -- it was dated December 1980.


73. Roginskii, interview, May 7, 1996.

74. Roginskii claims that he was the only Jew in the camps where he was placed.

75. Aikhenval'd, Po Grani Ostroi.

76. See Khronika Tekushchikh Sobytiï no. 9, p. 232.

77. Many of these arrestees were "nationalist oppositionists" who continued their battle for recognition throughout the Soviet period. See, for example, Antanas Terliatskas, "Eshchè raz o Evreiakh i Litovtsakh," Kontinent 21 (1979): 213-227.

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78. Leonard Borisovich Ternovskii, letter to this author, June 1997.

79. Id., interview held at Vozvrashchenie headquarters in Moscow, May 15, 1996.


81. Id., letter.


83. Ternovskii, interview.


86. Ibid., p. 238.


88. Ibid., p. ii.

89. Grigorii Svirskii, Poliarnaia Tragediia (Germany: Posev, 1976).

Interestingly, the city of Norilsk requested re-instatement of its status as a "closed city" in 1998. Norilsk’s intention to re-introduce the travel restrictions that were eliminated in 1991 was unprecedented. See Frank Westerman, "Russische stad wil communistisch blijven," NRC Handelsblad (Rotterdam), 28 January 1998.

90. "Grigorii Svirsky and His ‘Arctic Tragedy’," p. iii.


92. Svirskii, Poliarnaia Tragediia, p. 145.


96. Ibid. For more on how both former Stalin-era prisoners and ex-guards share a common lot as hostages of the North, see Sjifra Herschberg, "De gijzelaars van het Russische hoge noorden," Vrij Nederland, 5 June 1999, pp. 34-38. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the special financial incentives that motivated many people to stay in the region were eliminated. Moreover such resources as heating oil became scarce. In the brutal Magadan winter, many residents were forced to endure indoor temperatures of no more than 4 degrees Celsius.
