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The Cultural – Educational Work in the Camps of the GULAG of the NKVD During the Great Domestic War (on the Example of the CHELYABLAG)

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In the article we consider the specificity of the organization of the cultural – educational work in the camps of the GULAG of the NKVD during the Great Domestic war (1941-1945) on example of the Chelyablag. Instructive and survey documents of device of the GULAG of the NKVD are compared to the documents generated in the jails: the reports, the materials of wall and the large-circulation seals etc. The analysis of the information allows us to draw a conclusion that the cultural-educational work in the Chelyablag was a major factor of mobilization of the prisoners to the performance of urgent and large-scale tasks of the rise of the national economy during the war.

Keywords: the GULAG, the Chelyablag, the cultural-educational work, camps of the GULAG of the NKVD, the KVO, the KVCH.

The prisoners' contribution to the victory in the war of the 1941-1945, the patriotism and the selflessness of the Soviet people appeared behind a barbed wire in corrective-labour camps by the disposition of a management of the country is not reflected till now in spite of the huge work by the state, scientific and the public organizations.

The Corrective-Labour Establishments of the Main Directorate of the Camps (the GULAG) of the National Commissariat of Interior (the NKVD) on the territory of the modern Chelyabinsk region have arisen in the intense period of the Great Domestic war when the German-fascist aggressors stood on the approaches to the Moscow when there was a sharp decrease of the industrial outputs of the important

for the equipment of the Red Army production. In particular, the manufacture of the steel was sharply reduced because of the occupation of the industrial regions of the USSR. The necessity of restoration of the economic potential has caused the evacuation of some factories in the heart of the country and creation of the new capacities on the new mastered platforms.

The Baykal Corrective-Labour Camp (the ITL) was created on November 17, 1941 with the purpose of developing the iron-ore deposits in the Chelyabinsk region. The ITL was also called the «Bakalstroy» or the «Bakallag» in the various documents. On this basis, in January, 1942, the ITL of the Chelyabmetallurgstroy (the Chelyabinsk's ITL) was formed. Then it became

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the largest chapter between the divisions of the GULAG of the NKVD deployed on the territory of modern Chelyabinsk region¹. As of January, 1942, there were 4,237 prisoners in the Bakallag. This figure decreased to 2,419 by March, 1942. The quantity of labour mobilizations (basically – the Germans) was 13,234². The number of prisoners that were contained in the Chelyablag were as follows: Camp Zone № 1 (2,600 persons), № 2 (1,200 persons) and № 3 (500 persons). These prisoners were kept on the territory of the basic building site of the Chelyabinsk metallurgical works, and also in the two camp zones near the city of Miass (300 person) in the 1942. By January 1, 1944 the number of the prisoners in the camp had reached 11,482 persons³. The ITL of the Chelyabmetallurgstroy received the further documentary and everyday name the «Chelyablag». It kept the largest number of prisoners and volume of made works producing unit with well advanced infrastructure. Archival documents kept and ordered that. It allows to investigate the various aspects of activity of the camp, including the cultural – educational work. The value of the last was connected with the necessity of volumetric and dynamical escalating manufacture of a raw material, industrial and agricultural production. The habitual in the Soviet conditions the extensive increase of volumes was impossible because of the limitation of the human resources and absence of the new staff for attraction in the spheres of a national economy. The greater duration of a working day, bad material conditions of life, scarcity of the material stimulus caused the search of any additional means of influence on the labour productivity. The basic source of its growth in all spheres of a national economy became the personal

human factor. Mass agitation and propagation in the USSR in a combination with a politics of terror formed the feelings of labour selflessness and unreciprocated service to the business of a victory. Taking into account, that in the jails of the GULAG of the NKVD, which being the specific industrial enterprises, was 1,777,043 prisoners, the activation of their work was represented the important component of increasing of the labour activity in the scale of the country on January 1, 1942 (Morykov, 2006). An appeal «All to the battlefield, all for the victory!» was distributed to jails also. The main form of influence on the moral and psychological qualities of the prisoners was the cultural – educational work.

By the 1942 the cultural – educational work in the camps of the GULAG of the NKVD was already built as a system, with the military, party and industrial hierarchy, a precise regulation of the functions, the strict reporting, the adjusted document circulation (Kokurin, 2002, 117).

The party management was carried out through the political departments (politdepartments) cooperating by a vertical-territorial principle as it was accepted in the party's construction. The political department of construction of the Bakal metallurgical combine was created in the 1942, and in April, 1942 the first general building party conference was held. In the August, 1942 the Chelyabinsk metallurgical combine and accompanying objects of the «Baikalstroy» was reorganized and renamed in the «Chelyabmetallurgstroy» because of the complication, integration and acceleration of the decision of tasks of construction⁴. The fields of activity of a political department have accordingly changed also. There were the initial Communist Party organizations of construction of the metallurgical combine, housing construction and corrective-labour camp in its conducting.

¹ SARF. F. R-9414. In. 1d. B. 381. P. 7; SARF. F. R-9414. In. 1. B. 49. P. 762.

² SARF. F. R-9414. In. 1d. B. 379. P. 13, 57, 104.

³ SARF. F. R-9414. In. 1. B. 179. P. 194; ISACR. F. P-1619. In. 1. B. 3. P. 148-149; B. 5. P. 1-37; B. 6. P. 3.

⁴ ISACR. F. P-878. In. 1. B. 1. P. 1.

The functions of the political departments of the GULAG were:

- Maintenance of education of civilian structure of the ITL of the Department of the Correctional Labour Camps and Colonies (the UITLK) / The Department of the Correctional Labour Colonies (the OITK) in the spirit of utter devotion of a party and the socialist Native land;
- Rallying staff around a party and its mobilization on the ruthless struggle against the enemies of the people;
- A management of all the complex of the party-political actions directed on the maintenance of the conscious attitude to the work;
- Strengthening of the political-moral condition of the workers of the ITL of the UITLK/OITK;
- A management of all the cultural-educational work;
- Performance maintenance of the decisions of a party and the government, the NKVD orders, the operative and production plans and tasks.

The major task of political departments of all levels was also the organization of party propagation, work on perfection of knowledge by employees of bases of Marx – Engels – Lenin – Stalin's doctrine (Kokurin, 2002, 305).

Except for the political department of the Chelyabmetallurgstroy of the NKVD and the Chelyablag of the NKVD of the USSR, existed a political department of the Management of the corrective-labour establishments, carrying out a party manual of the ITL's activity and the colonies treating in the considered period of time on subordination to the Management of training schools (the UITLK) of the Management of the NKVD on the Chelyabinsk region¹. There were

initial Communist Party organizations of the corrective-labour camp, militarized guards, the department of the railway enterprises, camp items and subsidiary farms in conducting of the political department of the Chelyablag. The political department included the party's commission and the komsomol branch. The political department of the Chelyablag Submitted in it's activity to the political department of the Central administrative board of corrective-labour camps, work colonies and places of imprisonment (of the GULAG) of the NKVD of the USSR. The political department of the Chelyablag supervised over the party-political and educational work among the builders, the civilian workers, the mobilized Germans – toil soldiers, guards and prisoners. Also it issued the large-circulation newspapers «For Stalin's metal» (during the 1942-1947), carried out a political management of the run of a newspaper «The Bulletin of KVO» (during the 1944-1949). The last one covered only within the limits of the camp.

On the structure of the GULAG of the NKVD existing in 1941 the cultural – educational branch (the KVO) was allocated from the structure of the political department and reorganized in the independent cultural – educational department subordinated directly to chief of the GULAG (Kokurin, 2002, 340). According to that the cultural – educational branches on places should be allocated from the political departments and are reorganized in the independent departments of camp sector subordinated directly to the chief of camp or its assistant either.

Separated out the structure of political departments the KVO' apparat completely bore the responsibility for a condition of the cultural – educational work in a camp.

Taking into account the special value of mass-political work among the prisoners in conditions of the military situation, political departments should not only carry out the general

¹ ISACR. F. P-878. In. 1-3.

management of the policy–mass work, spent the cultural-educational apparatus on places but also to render it the necessary help. For this purpose the political departments should allocate the necessary number of the checked up politically mature communists and komsomols to work among the prisoners to help the KVO. Also it should strictly supervise their work, like it was the basic party's or komsomol's assignment of the allocated workers¹.

The basic regulating document at the moment of formation of the Chelyablag were «The Regulations about the cultural – educational work in corrective-labour camps and colonies of the NKVD», appeared in the 1940 and commissioned by the NKVD's of the USSR order № 0161 which was dated to the April 20, 1940. As it was specified in the document, the cultural – educational work in corrective-labour camps and colonies of the NKVD of the USSR had the next purposes:

- Re-education of the prisoners condemned for household and official malfeasances on the basis of high-efficiency social activities;
- Assistance to the most effective and rational use of work of all prisoners on the manufacture for performance and overfulfilment production plans (Kokurin, 2002, 117).

As follows from logic of the document it was not supposed the re-education of the condemned for anti-soviet activity which number made about 30% from among all prisoners in the ITL of the NKVD. Also they were considered only as a labour resource (Morykov, 2006).

The cultural – educational work was recommended to make in the following ways:

- A daily explanation of bases of the Stalin's Constitution and actions of a party and the Government to the prisoners;

- Inculcation to the prisoners of labour skills during the organization among them the labour competition, high-powered work practice and introduction of the Stakhanov's methods of work;
- Introduction among the prisoners of the rules of a regime and a labour discipline established in camps;
- Organization of political and general educational study and the cultural leisure of the prisoners. Strict differentiation of propaganda, mass-political and actually the cultural – educational work did not exist. And despite of some terminological difference, all the methods of influence on the person were the ways of influence over the human in the conditions of imprisonment. It coincided on subjects (contingent), and on object (a problem of increase of labour productivity).

The basic kinds of the cultural – educational work in camps and colonies of the NKVD were:

- Political – mass work;
- Production – mass work;
- A wall seal;
- School work; - Club-mass work;
- Library work.

Besides disclosing the maintenance of kinds of the cultural – educational work The Regulations established the number of staff, political and professional requirements to employees of the cultural – educational departments and the cultural – educational parts (the KVCH) depending on a post. The same Regulations defined the order of financing of activity of the KVO and the KVCH. The forms and terms of the reporting were established either.

First instruction directives about the cultural-educational work in the Chelyablag (that was after the Bakallag) were dated January, 1942. It's happened when the telegram of the chief of the KVO of the GULAG of the NKVD

¹ SARF. F. R-9414ch. In. 1. B. 1477. P. 60.

of the USSR about realization in the Sverdlovsk sectional meeting of chiefs of the KVO of camps, constructions, the UITLK and the OITK of the NKVD, the UNKVD, devoted to tasks of the cultural – educational work in conditions of war time was sent to the Chelyablag. The telegram recommended sending of the KVO's chief with the report about a condition of the cultural – educational work in the camp to participate in meeting. Then the circular letter told about an exchange of experience of the cultural – educational work in the North-Ural camp was directed in the Chelyablag¹. In the analytical review of the reporting about the cultural – educational work including the UITLK of the UNKVD in the Chelyabinsk region, was specified, that in January, 1942 was carried out 129 political talk, 224 political information and 2402 loud readings of newspapers by the forces of the cultural – educational workers and agitation staff. Scope among the prisoners made by all kinds of political-mass work has made 82%². The basic lecturing active was made by 204 persons from among civilians who have passed preparatory courses. The major result of activity of the KVO was strictly carried out production targets and plans in the majority of the brigades attached to educational political workers.

The information about the work of the Central cultural team of the KVO of the KRASLAG goes to the Chelyablag by the way of an exchange of experience in December, 1942. The communication of an artwork with industrial and household life of camp was especially marked In the letter. As the basic purpose of activity were mobilization of the prisoners to performance of production plans, a raising of labour productivity, reduction of amount so-called «failers» – the prisoners, refusing to come to work.

Conditions of the wartime were felt in the documents sent from central device of the GULAG. The telegram of the Political Department of the GULAG was received in the Chelyabinsk's UITLK of the UNKVD in December, 1942. It directed to report about presence of cinematographic equipment which could be transferred for needs of workers'-and-peasants' of the Red Army.

In February, 1943 the Curriculum and the program of fifteen-days rates – seminars on preparation and retraining of the cultural-educational workers of the camps and colonies of the NKVD goes to the Chelyablag. The program consisted from the cycles, fully complying the basic directions of the cultural – educational work. The political cycle included the lectures reflecting the heroic past of the native Land, the specificity of a present situation, the maintenance of Stalin's speeches and reports, a state of affairs at the warfront, the attitude of Soviet peoples to the German-fascist aggressors and to the fascism as ideology. The cycle of political-mass work included the lectures concerning not only specificity of educational work with the prisoners, but also mass-industrial subjects, including activity in creation of emulation in the labour staffs. The questions of a wall seal, library work, struggle against illiteracy were mentioned in the program also. The questions of planning, reporting and the account of the cultural – educational work were an important point. Duration of employment should make 10 hours per day, that practically corresponded to duration of a working day in camp.

The program of rates of retraining of the cultural-educational workers of the camps and colonies goes to the Chelyablag in July, 1943. The curriculum should include three cycles: political, general educational (economic and political geography) and special (political-education work among the prisoners in camps and colonies of the

¹ SARF. F. R-9414ch. In. 1. B. 1439. P. 6.

² SARF. F. R-9414ch. In. 1. B. 1458. P. 19.

NKVD). The basic volume of a political cycle was made with studying of the book of Stalin «About the Great domestic war of the Soviet Union». Rates were designed for duration in 20 days for 10 hours each.

The KVO's of the GULAG of the NKVD instruction № 42/B/422254 was received in the Chelyablag in July, 1943. It reflected the specificity of performance of the the NKVD's of the USSR order № 0177-1943. This order put a task to the cultural-educational workers of camps and colonies. They has to development the amateur performance of prisoners by involving the last in various sections (mass-industrial, sanitary – household, cultural – mass, sports and others). It was not recommended to organize the section of the food block in the instruction. The letter contained instructions about selection of candidates in the structure of sections, necessity of a section's protection from the influence of counterrevolutionary elements. Further the tasks of creation of sections were changed by the instruction №42/369511, published in January, 1944. The role of the sections, called public, as the forms of mass participation of prisoners in public work in camps and colonies was underlined in the new document¹.

Requirements to observance the conditions of a regime were contained in the sending documentation also. So, for example, a political department and the KVO of the GULAG explained the necessity of use only employees of the NKVD for lecture work with the prisoners to the subordinate chiefs of the political departments and the KVO in the letter dated October 14, 1943.

Absolutely not peculiar functions were assigned to the KVO sometimes. However, in some cases they were directed on a real improvement of the material – household position

of the prisoners. So, the KVO of the GULAG of the NKVD focused the workers of the KVO of camps and colonies on necessity of realization of some actions of mass character connected to preparation of camps to winter in one instruction of June, 1943.

The recommendations of the KVO of the GULAG of the NKVD addressed to the chief of the Chelyablag were received in November, 1943. They directed to organize the competition in the organization of the cultural – educational work with among the prisoners between camp divisions and a colonies. Also they has to pick up the best comfortable barrack, the best food block, the best household placement.

In the November of the same year the chiefs of the KVO of the ITL, the UITLK and the OITK of the NKVD-UNKVD have received a command to report in January, 1944 about realization of the NKVD's of the USSR circular № 69 dated November 22, 1943. That document was about reception of personal means of the prisoners to increase of arms of the Red Army.

The KVO of central device of the GULAG of the NKVD made the general management of realization of the cultural – educational work. It paid attention to staff, and was engaged in administration of this work among the prisoners. This way the 36-hour program of rates of preparation and retraining of the cultural organizer from the prisoners of camp divisions and colonies of the NKVD has sent in camp². The program included the sections of a production-mass work and mass-technical training, mentioned questions of the organization of a life of the prisoners and observance of a camp mode, cultural – mass work, questions of concrete realization of separate kinds of last. For example, preparation, registration and manufacturing of evident propaganda – slogans,

¹ SARF. F. R-9414. In. 1. B. 1459. P. 9.

² SARF. F. R-9414ch. In. 1. B. 1458. P. 125.

boards of parameters, photoshow-windows, photonewspapers, windows of TASS, comical lists, were considered. A lot of time was given to the specificity of the organization of a wall seal.

The official style and absence of any panic moods were typical for all documents of the period of the Great Domestic war sent by the central device of the GULAG of the NKVD. The GULAG of the NKVD analyzed and generalized the reporting acting from places, paying attention of the workers of the KVO and the KVCH on the positive device and negative moments of various directions of activity: emulation in labour, evident propaganda, a wall seal¹. Some of documents opened dual from the point of view of morals character of spent ideological work. So, for example, in the letter dated 1943 addressed to the chiefs of the KVO which maintenance was the requirement to give the information on the former prisoners battling at the front, it is spoken that many of them support written communication with jails². It is difficult to imagine, that the person who has escaped from hell of the GULAG, could write letters to the former security guards, supervisors. However in the 1944 in the nine months – review of the GULAG of the NKVD, it is specified, that the prisoner of 4-th column of the Chelyabmetallurgstroy read the letter of the soldier of the Red Army Nuzhnenko, served a sentence in the given division. Red Army soldier asked to increase the labour productivity. This way he wanted to help the warfront. Prisoners, having joined in competition, became winners among all columns, having provided growth of productivity on 226 %³.

Transfer of former prisoners to the Red Army was considered as the major result of work of the KVO and the KVCH. So, on one of the sites of the Chelyabmetallurgstroy has acted 410 applications

for sending on front in the first half-year of 1944. 370 of them were satisfied⁴.

Planning, characteristic for all socialist system of a national economy, was distributed to the sphere of the cultural – educational work. So, for example, instruction from the GULAG, asked to write the proved applications on necessary cultural stock was sent in Chelyablag in the beginning of 1944. There were movie cameras, radio receivers, loud-speakers, record players, musical instruments, including for jazz bands, a paper, paints, a red cloth for slogans⁵. In the 1944 the good organization of work and successes in re-education of prisoners of the Cheljabmetallurgstroy was marked in the analytical review of activity of the KVO and the KVCH of camps and colonies. This conclusion were made by the KVO of the GULAG of the NKVD on the basis of the acted reporting for the period of 1943⁶. In the same review it is specified, that it was made 52 reports devoted to review of the organization of the work, was issued 30 bulletin board newspapers, 101 «lightning» by the workers of the KVO-KVCH. Allocation on each object of the representative on rationalization of manufacture was the positive experience. As a result of it 226 efficiency proposals was marked. It allowed to transfer 1994 persons from the auxiliary works to the basic⁷.

Promoted in the Chelyablag large-circulation newspapers «Uraletz», «For Stalin metal» worked to mass scope by labour competition and distribution of the best practices. Besides there was «The Bulletin of the KVCH».

Notes to this edition were written, basically, by the cultural organizers. They reported about performance of the plan by members of the brigades. Headings helped to estimate intensity of a present situation: «The Red banner of the State

¹ SARF. F. R-9414ch. In. 1. B. 1458. P. 150.

² SARF. F. R-9414ch. In. 1. B. 1458. P. 107.

³ SARF. F. R-9414. In. 1. B. 1459. P. 77.

⁴ In the same place.

⁵ SARF. F. R-9414. In. 1. B. 1459. P. 1.

⁶ SARF. F. R-9414. In. 1. B. 1459. P. 26.

⁷ SARF. F. R-9414. In. 1. B. 1459. P. 80.

Committee of Defense calls us to the new labour feats in the 1944», «Any task is feasible», «Mass work has solved success», «Everybody work in a front way», «To the fund of defense of the country», «Malfunctions reduce productivity», «All forces and energy on performance of a January production plan», «Labour every day» etc.

It was difficult to find stronger motivation for self-denying work: «the Country and the warfront wait for the prompt start-up from us ...», «Successes of armies of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts inspire us on a new labour successes». The prisoners were enabled to feel itself as a part of struggling people: «All camp brigades justify a high rank of the warfront's with honour»¹.

The special subject of activity of the KVO and the KVCH were «refusers». The KVO of the GULAG of the NKVD has issued and has dispatched on the places the brochure «Returned to the life» in July, 1944. It intended for distribution among the civilian cultural-educational workers. M. Loginov was the cultural-educational worker of one of the camps. He has described a forms and methods of individual work with the difficult prisoners². These methods of work were recommended to use in the work with the young employees of the KVO. For example, an individual conversation in which cultural worker proved the uncommon psychologist and collective boycott.

Instruction of the GULAG of the NKVD informed about the introduction of the cultural organizers of brigades among the prisoners at the camps and colonies was sent on the places in May, 1944³. It was offered to pick up a prisoners among checked up peoples showed samples in work with the excellent behaviour in a life and active

participation in public life of camp division on a posts of the cultural organizers. It was offered to lead the brigade assemblies to choose the cultural organizers within October – November. In October, 1944 the Regulations about the brigade organizer of the cultural – educational work (the cultural organizer) have appeared⁴.

Basic local active of the KVO and the KVCH were cultural organizers (cultorgs) of the brigades, allocated to the aid of foremen. A higher step on a scale of ranks stood the cultural organizers of the columns⁵. The cultural organizers which also named the cultural agitators, chosen among the prisoners, carried out the following tasks: the political-mass work, the work on a manufacture, study and individual work⁶. Also the number of functions of the cultural organizers included convincing and intelligible propagation of the grandiose tasks of the Stalin's five years' plan, struggle for performance of labour obligations, organization of the cultural leisure of the population and increase of the self-education⁷.

The maintenance of the cultural – educational work in jails varied after the process of approach of fundamental change in the Great Domestic war and escalating of economic potential of the country. It was shown 815 films and was given 383 concerts, 10 clubs – dugouts operated for a 9 months of 1945 in the Chelyablag⁸.

As it was marked in the report of the GULAG' chief V.G. Nasedkin to the public commissar internal affairs L.P. Beria called «About work of the GULAG at the years of the war», construction of the Chelyabinsk Metallurgical combine was one of the major, taking place in attention of the State Committee of Defense. All tasks of the government and civilian staff were executed

¹ ISACR. F. P-878. In. 3. B. 2, 7, 10.

² SARF. F. R-9414ch. In. 4. B. 145. P. 1.

³ SARF. F. R-9414. In. 1. B. 1459. P. 64-65.

⁴ SARF. F. R-9414. In. 1. B. 1459. P. 65.

⁵ ISACR. F. P-878. In. 3. B. 7. P. 64.

⁶ ISACR. F. P-1075. In. 1. B. 116. P. 80-87.

⁷ ISACR. F. P-878. In. 3. B. 7. P. 37.

⁸ SARF. F. R-9414ch. In. 6. B. 28. P. 12.

(Kokurin, 2002, 117). The GULAG prepared to the transition to the peace rails.

Thus, the cultural – educational work in the Chelyablag of the NKVD was added to the following forms during the Great Domestic war:

- In a production-mass part firstly there was labour competition for banners of the State committee of defense under the appeal «All to the battlefield, all for the victory!»; secondly there was a movement of front brigades;
- In a cultural – mass part firstly there were releases of the fighting lists devoted to the labour successes, releases of the satirical posters which were castigated the «objectors» and the prisoners not carrying out the norm; secondly there were releases of the wall newspapers and large-circulation devoted both victories at the front and labour victories;

- In a political-mass part firstly there was studying of the tasks of the following works and speeches of heads of a party and the state; secondly there was selection of volunteers for transfer to a field army; thirdly there was gathering of money resources for transfer to fund of defense; fourthly there was reading the letters from the battlefield.

Set of all kinds and forms of the cultural – educational work in a combination to patriotism of prisoners, and also the advanced system of forced measures has allowed, for example, in February, 1943 – in 9 months after receipt of the first echelon with the equipment – to finish the first turn of construction of the Chelyabinsk Metallurgical combine, and in April, 1943 to give out the first melt. In the spring 1944 on a blast furnace № 1 the first pig-iron was received. World practice did not know such rates of construction.

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List abbreviations:

SARF – State Archive of Russian Federation

ISACR – Integrated State Archive of Chelyabinsk region