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Nicolas Werth: Cannibal Island

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CHAPTER 1

A “grandiose plan”

In early February 1933, Genrikh Iagoda, the head of the OGPU, and Matvei Berman, the head of the Gulag,¹ presented Stalin with a vast plan for deporting millions of “anti-Soviet elements in the cities and the countryside” to Western Siberia and Kazakhstan. They explained that the experience acquired over the preceding three years, during which more than two million “kulaks”² had been deported, made it possible to move on to a new, much more extensive effort to deport “all the elements polluting the socialist society currently being constructed.” In 1933–34, a million “elements” were to be settled in Western Siberia, and as many in Kazakhstan.

Six categories were targeted:

1. kulaks who had not yet been “dekulakized” in the course of the preceding years;³
2. peasants (including those who had joined kolхозes) who were “sabotaging the state’s procurement plans and other politico-economic campaigns undertaken by the state”;
3. “kulaks who are hiding in firms and workplaces or escaping from the countryside”;

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4. “individuals expelled in the context of cleaning up the USSR’s western frontiers”;
5. “urban elements refusing to leave cities in the context of “passportization”;⁴
6. individuals whom the courts and the OGPU’s special jurisdictions had sentenced to terms of less than five years, with the exception of “elements particularly dangerous from a social point of view.”

All these “elements” deported as “labor colonists” (a new label) would have the same status as the “kulaks” deported in 1930–31 (labeled “special settlers”): they would be deprived of their civil rights, put under house arrest in a “labor village,” and put to special—and specially harsh—use within state economic structures responsible for exploiting the timber, mining, and agricultural resources of the Soviet “Far East.”

According to Genrikh Iagoda’s plan, 75 percent of the labor colonists—that is, about one and a half million people—were to work on farms and in the forests. Within two years, they were supposed to have “freed the state from any expense for their support and begun producing merchandise that would allow the state to recover the expenses incurred in the operations of deportation and settlement of the contingents.” The rest—some five hundred thousand people—were to work in the sectors of fishing, crafts, and mining, “while at the same time conducting a small side operation in order to feed themselves.”

To ensure the success of this deportation-colonization,

which was intended to bring into production at least a million hectares of virgin land, one thousand labor villages (at the rate of one village for every two thousand “elements” or about five hundred families) would be built. Each village would consist of a hundred living units of 650 square feet each, sheltering twenty people (each deportee thus being allotted 27 square feet of living space). During the first year, baths, an infirmary, a hygienic station for removing “lice and other parasites,” stables, and a garage for machinery were to be constructed; during the second year, a school, a cafeteria, a reading room, a store, and so on. For the construction of these labor villages, the managers of the OGPU and the Gulag estimated that they would need 3,385,000 cubic meters of wood, 10,288 metric tons of iron and sheet metal, 6,929 metric tons of nails, 2,591 square meters of glass, and other materials.

These labor villages (which differed only in name from the special villages to which dekulakized persons had been sent over the preceding three years) were to be administered by a “chekist-commander” with very broad powers. Some 3,250 of these chekist-commanders and “assistants” were to be recruited, along with 5,700 militiamen, 1,000 technicians, 500 agronomists, and 470 physicians and health officers. The whole administrative, police, and economic management of the labor villages would be the exclusive responsibility of a main managerial office specially created to run the labor villages.

“The most delicate problem,” the head of the OGPU and the head of the Gulag acknowledged, “is the transportation of the human contingents and equipment—construction materials, livestock and tools, the food sup-

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plies authorized to ensure the contingents' survival—from the point where the rail lines or waterways end to the places assigned for the contingents' residence and economic implementation. Since these places are all situated in practically uninhabited regions, we cannot count on local means of transportation. Preliminary estimates drawn up by our offices set the needs, so far as transportation goes, at 2,416 trucks, on the basis of a daily transportation of three metric tons of freight over a distance of 250 kilometers roundtrip per day; 90,000 horses, considering that one horse should be able to plow ten hectares and that in addition to this work, the horses will be used to transport wood; 1,200 tractors to be used both for agricultural work and for transporting freight and contingents."

The plan presented by Iagoda and Berman ended with a long list of expenses and the contributions, in cash and in kind, to be asked from a half-dozen ministries and other state committees. The total expense—described as "absolutely minimal, based on the experience acquired during the operations of deportation and accommodation of special settlers in 1930–31, but in absolute numbers, truly grandiose, since it covers no less than the settlement of two million almost completely deprived individuals in virgin territories hundreds of kilometers away from any railway"—was estimated at 1,394 million rubles.

The highest officials in the repressive system were probably aware of the enormity of the sum requested and the "grandiose scope" of the project envisioned. This is shown by a few concluding lines typed in capital letters:

THE SUM OF THESE MONETARY EXPENSES, CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS, LIVESTOCK, MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION, AND FOOD SUPPLIES FOR PEOPLE AND ANIMALS COMMITTED TO THE PROJECT IS SO GRANDIOSE THAT A SPECIAL COMMITTEE MUST BE SET UP TO REFINE THE NEEDS AND PLANS FOR THE DEPORTATION AND SETTLEMENT OF THE CONTINGENTS.⁵

To understand the meaning, place, and scope of this “grandiose plan,” we must briefly recall the context at the beginning of 1933. The situation had been very tense since the summer of 1932. In order to guarantee large-scale exports of grains and other agricultural products that would make it possible to import the equipment required for accelerated industrialization in the country, the Party leadership once again raised the targets for obligatory deliveries imposed on the kolkhozes as well as on “individual” peasants—despite the fact that a poor harvest was predicted and that many reports from Ukraine, the North Caucasus, the Volga region, Western Siberia, and Kazakhstan mention “isolated areas where there are problems with food supply”—a formula that masks a far more dramatic reality: genuine shortages pointing toward a coming famine. The 1932 procurement campaign, begun in July, was stalled; in mid-October, only 15–20 percent of the planned obligatory deliveries from the main grain-producing regions of the country had come in. The peasants, often with the complicity of the kolkhoz’s management, used all kinds of stratagems to avoid delivering part of the harvest to the state: “thefts of the collective harvest” multiplied (de-

spite the promulgation in August 1932 of a draconian law punishing theft of “social property” by ten years of forced labor in camps—or the death penalty. Wheat was buried in pits, hidden in “black granaries,”⁶ ground in homemade “hand mills,” and stolen during transportation or weighing. What was particularly disturbing for the Stalinist ruling elite was the solidarity many kolkhoz managers showed with the people they were supposed to be managing, and even overt opposition to the state’s procurement plans on the part of a certain number of local Party and Soviet officials, especially in the great agricultural regions that were most heavily levied, such as Ukraine, the Kuban, and the Volga area. In order to put an end to this resistance, in 1932 the highest level of the party leadership, the Politburo, sent two “extraordinary committees” to Ukraine and the North Caucasus. One of these committees was headed by Vyacheslav Molotov, the other by Lazar Kaganovich. Thousands of OGPU agents and Party “plenipotentiaries” were mobilized and dispatched from urban to rural areas in order to compensate for the failures of the local Communist authorities. During the summer of 1932, the country was overtaken by a climate of extreme violence that recalled the worst aspects of the “dekulakization” campaign of early 1930: hundreds of thousands of “saboteurs of the procurement plan” were arrested. The repression was so excessive that it sometimes lost all meaning. One of many similar reports on the situation, addressed by an official from the grain-producing region of the Lower Volga to his superiors in early 1933, bears eloquent testimony to this fact:

Arrests and searches are carried out by anyone at all: members of the rural soviet, emissaries of all kinds, members of the shock brigades, any komsomol who isn't too lazy. . . . According to calculations made by the former assistant prosecutor in the district, Comrade Vassiliev, over the past year, 15 percent of the adult population has been the victim of one kind of repression or another. If to that we add that in the course of the past month about eight hundred farmers have been expelled from the kolkhozes, you'll have some idea of the scope of the repression in this district. If we exclude cases in which the repression is justified, it has to be said that the efficacy of the repressive measures is constantly diminishing, since when they go beyond a certain threshold, it becomes difficult to carry them out. . . . Yesterday I met a large number of kolkhozians who had been expelled from the kolkhoz at the beginning of February, and then taken back at the end of the month. Expelling people from the kolkhoz no longer has any effect. It's almost the same with criminal prosecutions. In February, more than four thousand persons were convicted in the district. All the prisons are jammed full. The Balachevo Prison is holding five times as many people as it was planned for, and at Elan, the district prison is currently holding 610 people. Over the past month, the Balachevo Prison "returned" to Elan seventy-eight convicts, forty-eight of whom were under the age of ten; twenty-one were immediately released. What effect on the population can be produced by our extremely repressive laws and judges, when we know that at the

prosecution's suggestion, 120 persons sentenced to two years' and more imprisonment for sabotaging the procurement campaign have had to be set free because of the overcrowding of the prisons and have gone home? . . . To close my remarks on this method, the only one in use here—the method of force—a few words about the individual peasants⁷ with regard to whom everything is done to discourage them from sowing and producing. . . .

“The individual peasant—he’s an enemy of Soviet power, and so he can be treated however one wants”—that’s the opinion of the local officials regarding this question. The following example shows how terrorized the individual peasants are: in Mortsy, an individual peasant who had nonetheless met his planned target 100 percent came to see Comrade Fomichev, the president of the district’s executive committee and asked to be deported, for, in any event, he explained, “you can’t live under these conditions any longer.” Similarly exemplary is the petition, signed by sixteen individual peasants of the rural soviet of Alexandrov, in which these peasants ask to be deported outside their region! Mass labor is nonexistent. The only form of mass labor is the “assault”: seeds, funds, livestock raising are “taken by assault,” people “launch an assault” on work. Nothing is now done without an “assault.” You can no longer count all the “shock brigades.” The latter usually consist of a district official, a member of the rural soviet, a team leader, and two or three kolkhozians. They “attack” at night, from nine or ten in the evening until dawn. The

“attack” takes place as follows: the “shock brigade,” using a hut as its headquarters, “convokes” one after another all the people who have not fulfilled one or another obligation or plan and “convinces” them, by various means, to honor their obligations. In this way, each person on the list is “attacked,” and this goes on all night. The kolkhozians have become so accustomed to this practice that they no longer do anything without a “shock brigade.”⁸

Thanks to “assaults,” the procurement plan was completely fulfilled at the beginning of 1933, but at what cost! In the producing regions most heavily levied, the kolkhozes were able to meet the targets only by giving up their “seed stocks,” their last reserves that allowed them to provide for the next harvest and to give emergency aid to starving kolkhozians. Starting in 1933, shortages and then famine swept over a large part of Ukraine, the North Caucasus, and the Volga region.

It was in this context that an important plenary meeting of the Central Committee, a major annual session bringing together the Party’s leading officials, took place in Moscow, January 7–12, 1933. On the agenda were especially the balance sheet for the first five-year plan and the future outlook. Despite a particularly alarming situation in the agricultural sector and an “overheating” of industrial investment, all the political officials, including the leaders of the Ukrainian Communist Party, some of whom had tried to resist Moscow’s pressure, celebrated the “triumph of socialism” and the “spectacular success of the first five-year plan, carried out in four

years and three months." In his speech, Stalin developed a new "theory," which can be summed up in a simple idea: with the triumph of socialism and the liquidation of the exploiting classes, oppositions did not disappear; they took different forms. Defeated, the enemies of socialism no longer acted overtly. Masked, veritable mutants, they were carrying on a particularly vicious "war of sabotage" that could take forms that were unexpected and difficult to recognize. Some would carry out their sabotage within the kolkhoz itself; others would leave the kolkhozes in large numbers and spread false rumors to discredit collectivized farming, while still others would infiltrate factories or major construction sites in order to carry out acts of sabotage. Weakened, the "debris of the exploiting classes" would seek to ally themselves with "déclassé elements," criminals, and other marginal groups. Henceforth, criminality and social deviance would constitute the chief threat to the construction of socialism.⁹

At the very time that this plenary session was taking place, the exodus of peasants from areas affected by the famine was growing. The OGPU's regional directors were certain that all these departures were "carefully organized by counterrevolutionary organizations." "In one week, our services have arrested five hundred hardened agitators who were urging the peasants to leave," wrote Vsevolod Balitski, the head of Ukraine's political police, to Genrikh Iagoda.¹⁰ On January 22, Stalin composed, in the name of the Party's Central Committee and the government, a secret directive ordering that an end be put to the massive exodus of peasants fleeing Ukraine and the North Caucasus "on the pretext of going to look

for bread." "The Central Committee and the Council of the People's Commissars," Stalin wrote, "has proof that this exodus from Ukraine was organized by enemies of Soviet power, by socialist revolutionaries and Polish agents, for propaganda purposes, in order to discredit, through the intermediary of peasants fleeing toward regions of the USSR north of Ukraine, the kolkhozian system in particular and the Soviet system in general."¹¹ The same day, Iagoda sent the OGPU's regional directors a circular ordering that special patrols be set up, especially in railway stations and on highways, to intercept all "runaways" coming from Ukraine and the North Caucasus. After "filtering" the intercepted individuals, the "kulak and counterrevolutionary elements," individuals "propagating counterrevolutionary rumors regarding alleged food shortages," and all those who refused to return home should be arrested and deported to labor villages (or, for the "most hardened among them," dispatched to a camp). The other runaways would be "sent home"—a measure that condemned them to certain death in villages that were suffering from famine and had been left entirely to their fate, without the slightest aid in securing food.¹²

As early as the following day, January 23, the operation seeking to prevent starving people from fleeing (and from spreading news about a famine denied by the authorities) was completed by directives suspending the sale of train tickets to peasants.¹³ In the course of the last week of January, some twenty-five thousand refugees were arrested. A report drawn up two months after the operation began mentioned more than two hundred twenty-five thousand persons apprehended. Although

the great majority of the peasants intercepted were “sent home,” tens of thousands of them were interned in improvised “filtering” centers while waiting to be deported as labor colonists.¹⁴ Also waiting to be deported were tens of thousands of other peasants (and also minor rural officials) arrested since the end of 1932 for “sabotage of the procurement campaign.”¹⁵

Simultaneously, vast police operations were launched in January–February 1933 in the western border regions from western Ukraine to Belorussia, and also in Karelia, on the border between Finland and the USSR. Since the great peasant insurrections that had taken place in the spring of 1930, the frontier districts of western Ukraine, which bordered on Poland, were considered to be “lairs of Petlyurians”¹⁶ in the pay of the Polish government. Stalin’s obsession with the “Polish enemy” was permanent, as is shown, for example, by his directive of January 22, 1933 cited above. In a few weeks, the OGPU arrested, in the borderlands of western Ukraine, some 9,500 persons, most of them peasants described as “kulaks” and accused of belonging to “Petlyurian-Polish insurrectional organizations.”¹⁷ Similar operations led to the arrest of 3,500 persons in the border districts of Belorussia. Finally, more than 2,000 persons, again most of them peasants, were arrested in Karelia on the pretext that they belonged to “insurrectional cells set up by the Finnish general staff.”¹⁸ For the head of the OGPU, the operations launched in early 1933 obviously constituted only the first stage of a broad “cleansing” (*ocistka*) of the western borderlands, which explains the inclusion of the contingent of “individuals expelled in the framework of cleansing the USSR’s western frontiers” as one of the six

categories targeted by the major deportation plan of February 1933.

The conjunction of all these repressive campaigns led to massive “congestion” in the prisons, especially in areas where the operations of agricultural collection had been the harshest—Ukraine, the North Caucasus, along the Volga, and in the Black Earth. Since the establishment of labor camps and special villages for “relocated peasants,”¹⁹ the prisons, whose maximal capacity was on the order of 180,000 inmates, commonly took in prisoners sentenced to short terms (less than three years) and arrested individuals who were awaiting judgment. Starting in the summer of 1932, under the impact of the massive arrests connected with the procurement campaign, which was particularly tense, the number of people incarcerated increased exponentially, reaching the enormous figure of 800,000 in the spring of 1933. In February 1933, Nikolay Krylenko, the people’s commissar in the Justice Department, proposed to “decongest” the prisons and to settle several hundred thousand inmates in labor villages. At the beginning of March 1933, the Politburo approved Krylenko’s proposal.²⁰ Priority was to be given to the prisons in Ukraine, the North Caucasus, the central area of the Black Earth, and the lower Volga, all regions where the concentration of inmates was such that it could at any time lead to serious disturbances of public order, since the overcrowded prisons were scarcely guarded and the prisoners received ridiculously scant rations at the very moment when famine was spreading rapidly in the countryside and in the cities. Over the following two months, 57,000 inmates sen-

tenced to terms of more than three years were to be transferred to labor camps; 83,000 inmates serving lesser terms were to be deported to labor villages, with the same status as the kulaks deported during the preceding years.²¹

In reality, these transfers represented only the first stage of a larger process that was to expand considerably in the course of 1933. Naturally, this policy of “decongesting” the prisons was also applied to places of detention in large cities affected by the “passportization” of the urban population begun in January 1933. In connection with this policy, hundreds of thousands of “undesirable elements” were driven out of the cities, and many of them were deported to labor villages.

The “passportization” of the urban population, a bureaucratic and police operation of unexampled breadth (in a little more than a year, no less than twenty-seven million city dwellers received a passport, which was to replace all other attestations of identity previously delivered by the most diverse authorities), had several objectives.

The first objective was to control migratory movements and to limit the immense rural exodus triggered by the forced collectivization of the countryside. The massive influx into the cities of millions of peasants²² fleeing the “second serfdom” threatened the whole system of rationing for the urban population that had been laboriously set up since 1929. At the beginning of 1930 some twenty-six million city dwellers had a claim on these rations; by the end of 1930 the number of claimants rose to almost forty million.

The second objective was to better identify individuals, “to establish with exactitude their social position” in a society where up to that point there had been no standardized document of identity, the use of an interior passport having been rejected in 1917 as one of the most odious legacies of the Czarist regime. In order to prove their identities, Soviet citizens could present a birth certificate; a certificate provided by the soviet of their place of residence; a professional, trade union, or Party card; a certificate of residence provided by the cooperative of their apartment building; or any other official document delivered by a government office.²³

The third objective was to “cleanse Moscow, Leningrad, and the other great urban centers of the USSR of superfluous elements not connected with production or administrative work, as well as kulaks, criminals, and other antisocial and socially dangerous elements.”²⁴ This measure, significantly, was also to affect the main resorts frequented by the *nomenklatura*, Sochi and Tuapse on the Black Sea and the spas of the Caucasus (Mineralnye Vody, Kislovodsk).²⁵

“The passport,” Iagoda emphasized, “is the first and chief line of social defense against criminals and socially harmful elements.”²⁶ The idea of “purifying” cities—and especially Moscow and Leningrad, the strategic loci of power—by cleansing them of their “antisocial elements,” also designated by the terms “parasites,” “déclassés,” “socially dangerous,” and “socially harmful,” recurrently appears in Bolshevik discourse and practice, even in the years of the New Economic Policy (NEP), which were marked by a relative relaxation of political and social tensions.

What did the notion of “social dangerousness” mean in Bolshevik political culture? The term began to appear explicitly in 1924, when a secret resolution passed on March 24 of that year by the Soviet state’s highest authority, the Central Executive Committee of the USSR, authorized a special jurisdiction, the OGPU’s Special Conference, to ban, exile, expel outside the country, or put in a concentration camp for a maximum term of three years any “socially dangerous” individual. Such persons were defined as those who had been found guilty or suspected of “crimes of state” (“counterrevolutionary activities,” larceny, counterfeiting); certain individuals “without fixed occupation and not engaged in productive work,” such as “professional gamblers,” “wheeler-dealers,” pimps, drug dealers, “hardened speculators”; and all individuals who were “socially dangerous because of their past activities, that is, who had at least twice been found guilty of crimes or who had been arrested at least four times because of their suspected involvement in crimes against goods or persons.”²⁷ This text is remarkable in several respects, not only because of its very elastic definition of “social dangerousness,” which went beyond the well-known amalgamation—carried out at the beginnings of the regime—of “political offenders” and “nonpolitical offenders,” but also because of its deterministic vision of “social dangerousness” as situated in the past and present history of “hardened” recidivists “connected with the crime world,” a vision very different from the utopian approach fashionable in certain judicial and pedagogical circles that preached the “redemption of the criminal through labor.”

Until the end of the 1920s, the impact of this law remained relatively limited, at least on the scale of the re-

pression that would be carried out during the following decade. As early as the summer of 1924, however, the OGPU’s new prerogatives were applied to some forty-five hundred “socially dangerous elements” expelled from Moscow and Leningrad upon completion of a vast police roundup.

Two years later, in May 1926, Feliks Dzerjinski sent his assistant, Genrikh Iagoda, an ambitious program for cleaning up the capital:

It is necessary to cleanse Moscow of its parasitical elements. . . . I’ve asked Pauker²⁸ to collect all the available documentation concerning the creation of files on Moscow residents with regard to this problem. For the moment, I haven’t received anything from him. Don’t you think that within the OGPU a special colonization department should be created, financed by a special fund drawn from confiscations? The parasitical and socially dangerous elements in our cities (including their families) have to be used to populate the country’s inhospitable areas, in accord with a plan prepared beforehand by the government. We must at all costs cleanse our cities of the hundreds of thousands of parasites that are flourishing there and eating us alive. . . . The OGPU must grapple with this problem, with the greatest energy.”²⁹

Analogous plans for “cleansing” cities of their “socially dangerous elements” or “parasites” (beggars, vagabonds, homeless children, minor delinquents, “speculators,” traffickers, and also recidivist criminals) were drawn up in various provincial cities (in Leningrad in 1926; in Kharkov and Odessa in 1927; in the main Siberian cities, Novosibirsk, Tomsk, and Omsk, in 1928–29).³⁰

Nonetheless, until the end of the 1920s the number of “socially dangerous elements” banished by decree of an OGPU special jurisdiction remained relatively modest on a national scale: about eleven thousand in 1927, twenty-eight thousand in 1929. Of this number, the “political offenders” represented a small minority—between 20 and 25 percent of the exiles, most of the latter being “nonpolitical offenders.”³¹

In reality, the banishment and exile of “socially dangerous elements” raised more problems than it solved. “Under the current circumstances,” in 1927 an official in the Interior Ministry wrote,

the exile of socially dangerous elements, far from attaining its goal, is proving harmful to public order: its only result is to shift these elements from one province to another. . . . In general, socially dangerous elements are unable to find work in their place of exile, and so they immediately return to their criminal or suspect activities, rejoining the army of local criminals, whose ranks they further strengthen, transforming whole districts into zones in which Soviet power becomes incapable of maintaining public order.³²

However, in late 1932, confronted by the growing chaos resulting from the influx of millions of peasants fleeing collectivization and besieging the large cities, the authorities decided finally to implement, within the framework of the policy of the passportization of the urban population, the ambitious program of “cleansing Moscow” Feliks Dzerjinski had recommended in 1926. But this program of identifying individuals was now to be far broader and more systematic, including expulsion

of undesirable elements and in some cases their deportation to special villages.

On December 28, 1932, *Pravda* published the decrees, which the Politburo had ratified on the preceding day, instituting an internal passport, henceforth obligatory for Soviet citizens over the age of sixteen who were permanent residents of the cities or the worker's housing complexes, or were active in transportation or certain major construction projects considered to be strategic. The passport holder had to present his document at the local police station in his place of residence in order for it to be duly registered. Only registration (*propiska*) validated the passport, thus setting up a double monitoring of the passport holder's identity and legal place of residence. The operations of passportization were to be carried out first in the cities of Moscow, Leningrad, Kharkov, Kiev, Odessa, Minsk, Rostov-on-the-Don, Vladikavkaz, Magnitogorsk, and Vladivostok.³³ In these cities, designated as subject to a "special regime," the operation was to proceed by stages, beginning with people employed in firms and ending with the "nonorganized population," that is, those who had no strong connection, or no connection at all, with a workplace, a population that was a priori suspicious in the eyes of the authorities.

A secret directive defined seven vaguely delimited categories of individuals to whom passports should be refused in these "special regime" cities:

1. Individuals not working in production or an institution and not engaged in some form of socially useful labor (with the exception of retirees and the handicapped).

2. Kulaks and dekulakized individuals who had fled the place to which they had been deported, including those who were working in a firm or Soviet institution.
3. Individuals who had come from the countryside or another city after January 1, 1931 without a formal invitation issued by a firm or Soviet institution, and currently without employment or who are employed but are clearly good-for-nothings, or who had been fired in the past because they had disturbed production.
4. Individuals who have been stripped of their civil rights (*lichentsy*).³⁴
5. Individuals who have been sentenced to deprivation of their freedom or to exile, as well as all antisocial elements maintaining relationships with criminals.
6. Refugees of foreign origin, with the exception of political refugees.
7. Family members of individuals designated above and living in the same household.³⁵

Persons to whom a passport had been denied were required to leave the city and its environs within ten days (in the case of Moscow and Leningrad, the operations of passportization included a suburban and rural zone 100 kilometers in diameter). These persons were authorized to settle in any other locality not subject to the "special regime." To implement the population's passportization, the government created a new general department of the militia, directly under the OGPU. More than twelve thousand additional police officers were hired. "Passport offices" were set up in each firm, government agency, and local police station.

As might be imagined, the issuance of passports gave rise to countless abuses and irregularities, given the vagueness of the definition of the categories of people considered undesirable.³⁶ During the first two months of the passportization campaign (March–April 1933), seventy thousand persons who had applied for a passport were refused and had to leave Moscow; in Leningrad, more than seventy-three thousand refusals were registered.³⁷ As one OGPU official—G. Prokofiev, the head of the militia—noted, this left unresolved the problem of

the enormous number of déclassé and socially dangerous elements living illegally in Moscow and Leningrad and polluting these cities. When the passportization operation was announced, these individuals, knowing perfectly well that they would not be issued a passport, did not spontaneously present themselves in the passport offices and instead hid in attics, sheds, cellars, gardens, etc. . . . In order to capture and immediately and permanently expel all these individuals, the passport office’s special militias, operating under the aegis of the inspector of the relevant sector, check the lists kept by concierges and building superintendents, make the rounds of the barracks for seasonal workers, places where unsavory elements hang out, illegal overnight shelters, attics and cellars, and conduct roundups in train stations, markets, bazaars, and other populous places in order to extirpate the déclassé elements, beggars, and thieves.³⁸

Thanks to these operational steps, Prokofiev concludes, 85,937 individuals living in Moscow without a passport, along with 4,776 individuals living in Leningrad without a passport, had been arrested and sent to a

camp or deported to a special labor village between March and July 1933.³⁹

Individuals arrested without a passport were subject to a particularly summary administrative procedure. Within forty-eight hours, the sector inspector sent a list of the persons arrested to a special police committee (called *passportnaia troika*) whose sole task was to “deal in an extrajudicial manner with matters connected with passportization.” These committees were authorized to sentence offenders, without having to summon those who had violated passport laws, to several kinds of penalties: immediate expulsion, with a prohibition on residing in thirty cities; deportation to a special village, where they would be under house arrest; or being sent to a labor camp for a maximum term of three years. These penalties were effective immediately and could not be appealed.

In reality, many of the people arrested during the police roundups did not even go through these summary procedures, and were directly deported after a short stay in a transit prison. This was the case for many individuals deported from Leningrad and Moscow, in the framework of the “cleansing” of the USSR’s two largest cities on the occasion of Labor Day, May 1, 1933. They were sent to Tomsk, and then, after a short stay in the largest transit camp for special settlers en route to Siberia, to the island of Nazino.