

Zhanna Popova: From Revolutionary Camps to the Soviet Gulag: paths to the Soviet penal system

Abstract

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This article discusses the building of the early Soviet penal system. Its central question is the following: how did these early developments prepare the ground for the establishment of the later Soviet 'corrective' labour camp system? Taking into account the obvious centrality of the Gulag to the Soviet system of forced labour in longer historical perspective, the author does not rely primarily on political explanations of its construction and issues of the inter-departmental rivalry are also left aside.

The Gulag's historiography still lacks systematic studies exploring the conglomerate of this system's precursors. Here, the author attempts to look into how the imperial heritage of prison development and the revolutionary experience created predispositions for the Bolsheviks to make certain choices in the gradual creation of the 'corrective' labour camp system.

Analysis of forced labour and its modalities is at the centre of this article. This focus makes certain continuities particularly salient: forced labour has been crucial for the pre-revolutionary penitentiary reforms, and it acquired an ever-growing importance throughout the 1920s in order to become in the 1930s the foundation of the Gulag economy.

Über die Autorin

Zhanna Popova, geb. 1989. Doktorandin am International Institute of Social History an der Universität Amsterdam/Niederlande mit dem Thema »Four centuries of labor camps« (IISH/NIOD), einer Untersuchung zu Kontinuität und Veränderung der russischen Strafpolitik vom späten 19. Jahrhundert bis in die 1950er-Jahre. Zuvor Studium der Sowjetischen Geschichte und quantitativer Methoden in der Geschichtswissenschaft an der Lomonossow-Universität in Moskau, anschließend Masterstudiengang der Sozialwissenschaften an der École normale supérieure in Paris. Forschungsschwerpunkte: russische Sozialgeschichte, internationale Geschichte sowie Geschichte der Bestrafung und Zwangsmigration.