

The Siberian Exile System—
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Contents

	Page
I. Brief History	7
A - Three centuries ago	
B - The beginning of this century	
C - The present day.	
D - The number of exiles	
II. Sorrows and pains of the exiles	1 - 2
A - On their march	
B - Trying to escape from Siberia	
III. Classes of Exiles	2 - 3
A - The hard laboring convicts	
B - Penal colonists	
C - Simply banished	
D - Women and children	
IV. Trial by Court	4 - 6
A - The Russian Prison	
B - The mode of trial.	
V. Banishment by communes	6 - 7
A - Those in authority	
B - Those belonging to this class	
VI. The Administrative Process	7 - 11
A - Condition of those banished	
B - The privileges and rights they have	
C - The opinions of the Russian Government	
D - Major General Nikolai Branoff's Criticisms	
VII. The March to Siberia	11 - 13
A - Mode of traveling	
B - Distance	
C - Their Condition	
D - Their music and songs	
VIII. Detention in Siberia	13 - 15
A - Their privileges	
B - The Siberian Prison	
IX. Conclusion	16

To open your eyes and display before them the sufferings that are hidden behind the three words, "Siberian Exile System", would be far beyond any powers of mine.

Going back three centuries, we find historical records furnishing us evidence, that batches of exiles were compelled to travel through dense forests, to climb steep mountains, and to cross wild rivers to a land now known as Siberia, the land of the exiles, and there they were to build for themselves the cells, that must be their graves.

From that time up to the present day there has been a steady flow of exiles into Siberia. At the beginning of the century they numbered about 8000 every year. At the present day there are 19000 - 20000 exiled annually.

Think if you will what their sufferings and pains are, from the time they are thrown into prison, taken out and chained to iron rods, and started from Moscow for a two years march toward the mines of Siberia, until the day when broken down by hard labor and privation, they die at a distance of five thousand miles from their native homes, in

the hamlets of the far north. Think of you
 will of the sorrow and pains of those thou-
 sands of women, who follow their husbands,
 and for whom death is a release from
 a life of hunger, sorrow and humiliation.
 Of those who put an end to their wear-
 some lives by drowning in the clear waters
 of the Yenisei. And of those thousands
 who try to escape from Siberia, traveling
 through those dense forests, living on
 mushrooms and berries, but still press-
 ing onward inspired with the hope of at
 least seeing again their native homes, and
 kinsfolks.

Instead of dwelling longer upon their
 hardships, let us return and take up
 the different classes of exiles. There are
 no penitentiaries in Russia. If the penalty
 fixed by the "Russia Penal Code" to a
 crime is not greater than imprisonment
 for four years, the person serves out his
 or her sentence in one of the prisons of
 European Russia, because it would not
 pay to send them to Siberia, for so short
 a time. But however, if the crime calls for
 more than four years imprisonment, they

go to Siberia.

These exiles are divided into four classes as follows:—

1st. The hard labor convicts. 2nd. The penal colonists. 3rd. Those simply banished. 4th. The women and children who go to Siberia voluntarily with their exiled husbands and parents.

Those belonging to the 1st and 2nd classes are judicially condemned, and must remain in Siberia for life. They carry with them the deprivation of all civil rights. They lose at once all the privileges of their society or social station. They lose control over their property, their family, their person, and all rights to claim the protection of the laws, even when their life is endangered. Their property which belong to them before the condemnation, will either go to the legal heirs as if they were dead, or be kept by the state. They go to their destination in Siberia in five pound fetters, and with half shaved heads, while those of the third class are not disfigured.

Those of the third class retain some of their civil rights, and may return to their native

home in Russia, after the expiration of their banishment, at their own expense.

This third class consists of (a) - vagrants, that is persons without passports, and who can't declare their identity. (b) - persons who are banished by sentence of court. (c) - persons banished by the village communities to which they belong. (d) - persons banished by the administrative process, or the minister of the interior.

There are banished annually about 5000 by sentence of the court, 7000 by the administrative process, and about 5000 by the village communities.

The way they carry on their trials by court is not very well known to us, for they try to keep it down as much as possible - But we do know that murderers, thieves, robbers, tramps, those unable to pay their overbearing taxes, revolutionists, church wranglers, political reformers, educators, and thousands of others who haven't committed any serious offenses are thrown into those Russian prisons, there to remain from a few days upward to five years awaiting for their trial.

Right here is one place in particular where I wish to condemn the Siberian Exile System. Thousands are thrown into those Russia prisons every year, not knowing at the time whether they are innocent, and I am justified in saying that hundreds, yes even thousands of them are innocent. There those innocent people are confined, many of them upward to five years, before their turn comes for trial. The places where they are confined might well be called the Russian hells, for such they are. They are packed into damp rooms, the walls are covered with mildew, the floors are rotted in many places from their filth. The filth is dripping down from the rooms above them, and their cesspools are directly under their rooms. Hunger, blows, filth, and brutality are the chief characteristics, and essential features of every jail. The prisons are so poorly ventilated that they are sinks of typhus and typhoid fever. The dead are dragged out by the hundred, and new batches ushered in to fill the places of those removed by death. These are

absolutely true facts. If space would permit I could prove them by many instances. Such are the places where they are confined, and they are no better in one part of Russia than another.

Finally they are taken out for trial. A great many of them are tried in groups, for instance if a dozen or more are arrested at the same time, for the same cause, one person will do the testifying, and if he is found guilty, the whole group will be found likewise, although many of them are innocent. They have a very poor chance to prove their innocence, if such is the case. They have to plead their own cause. They don't have lawyers to help and work for them as we do. Those who sit in the court, and call themselves the men of justice and authority, do just what ever they please with them. Whatever they say and do is law.

~ Those banished by communes ~

The communes in Russia have a right to banish any of its members, who through bad conduct, or general worthlessness, have

rendered themselves a burden to society, and to their fellow citizens. Some of them may belong to forbidden societies; some may be in possession of forbidden books; some may have friendly relations with other more dangerous offenders; some may have been connected with disorder in school or college, or various other reasons for which they think it expedient to remove them from their homes. These exiles are not sent to the remote part of Siberia, as are the hard laboring convicts.

The administrative process as explained by George Kennan:— The process means the banishment of obnoxious persons from one part of the empire to another part, without the observance of any the legal formalities that in most civilized countries precede or attend deprivation of rights, and the infliction of punishment.

The person so banished may not be guilty of any crime, and may not have rendered amendable in any way to any law of the state: but if in the opinion of any of the legal authorities his presence in a particular place is prejudicial to social

order, he may be arrested without any warrant, and with the concurrence of the ministry or the interior, may be removed forcibly to any other place within the limits of the empire, and there put under guard for a period of five years. He may or may not be informed of the reasons of this summary proceeding, but in either case he is perfectly helpless. He can not examine the witnesses upon whose testimony his presence is declared to be prejudicial to social order. He can not summon friends to prove his royalty, and good character, without great risk of bringing upon them the same calamity, that has befallen him. He has no right to demand a trial or a hearing. He can not sue out a writ of habeas corpus. He cannot appeal to the public through the press. His communications with the world are so suddenly severed that sometimes even his own relations do not know what has happened to him. He is literally and absolutely without any means whatever of self protection.

The Russian government pretends that exile by the administrative process is not a punishment, but merely a wise precaution to restrain its people from doing wrong. But to tell the truth it is cruelly unjust, and is a punishment of barbarous severity.

Major General Nikolai Baranov, the governor of the province of Archangel, in his discussion of the administrative exile says:—"From the experiences of previous years, and from my own personal observations, I have come to the conclusion, that administrative exile for political reasons etc., is much more likely to spoil the character of a man than to reform it. The banishment or transition from a life of comfort to a life of poverty, from a life of society to a life in which there is no society at all, and from a life of activity to a life of compulsory inactivity, produces such ruinous consequences, that not infrequently, especially of late, we find the political exile going insane, attempting to commit suicide, and even committing suicide. All of this is the

direct result of the abnormal condition under which exile compels an intellectually cultivated person to live. There has not been a single case where a man suspected with good reasons of political untrustworthiness, and exiled by administrative process, has returned from such banishment reconciled to the government, convinced of his errors, and changed into a useful member of society, and a faithful servant of the home. On the other hand it may often happen that a man who has been exiled in consequence of a misunderstanding, or an administrative mistake, becomes politically untrustworthy for the first time in the place to which he has been banished - partly by reason of his association there with real enemies of the government, and partly as a result of personal exasperation. Furthermore if a man is infected with anti-government ideas, all the circumstances of exile, tends to only to increase the inflections, to sharpen the faculties, and to change a theoretical to a practical.

that is an extremely dangerous man. If on the contrary a man has been guilty of taking part in a revolutionary movement, exile by force of the same circumstances, develops in his mind the idea of revolution, or in other words produces a result directly opposite to that which it was intended to produce. No matter how exile by administrative process may be carried on, regulated and restricted, it will always suggest to the mind of the exiled person the idea of uncontrolled official licence, and this alone is sufficient to prevent any reformation whatever.

— The march to Siberia and to the land of the exile —

The men are chained together in groups of about twenty, and are placed at the head of the procession, with their wives and children following in the rear. Up to just a few years ago they did all of their traveling by foot, being on the road over two years. They are now transported in vehicles and barges as far as some of the important towns in Siberia, and then they march by foot the rest

of the way, which is something like 2000-25000 miles. The total distance is about 5000 miles, from their native homes in Russia. They march about twenty miles per day. In the evening they are rounded up and herded like sheep over night. On the every third day they are allowed to rest. The men are permitted to work some on these days, and thus they have a little chance to make a few pennies. They are very poorly clothed; the majority of them having only one cheap suit or dress. Their food is very poor. In fact it is just enough for them to live. There are only a few hospitals on the whole march, and these are in such a condition, that one wonders how any well person could possibly stand them. They are sinks of diseases. Men, women, and children, are mingled together in them. They are not kept clean from filth by any means. Filth, cries of distress and brutality, are the essential characteristics. The barges that they are transported in are made somewhat on the style of a steam boat, but are propelled by tugs. These barges are terrible places. They are very poorly ventilated, and are dirty filthy holes. The men

women and children are all crowded in together. It is useless for a person to attempt to mention all the brutal assaults and meanness that are carried on in them.

The march on the road to Siberia is attended by misery and sorrow far beyond the imagination of most Americans. They march through rain and sunshine. Go inspect the wretched places where they are confined over night; go take a glance in one of their bargos; go spend a few moments in their hospitals, where men, women, and children; the sick, the dying and the dead, are all lying together in their filth. Those places that are nothing but sinks of typhus and typhoid fever: Those places where the dead are dragged out by the hundred. Take notice of one of the drivers as he lays the lash on some poor soul, who is failing to keep up. Go and do this & say, and then only a moments reflection is needed to realize some of the terrible suffering and awful hardship that attend them on their long and wearisome march; then it is that you will think that it is a mystery

not that so many die, but that so many get through alive.

After reaching Siberia they are again confined in prison. In a few months all except the hard-laboring convicts are allowed many privileges. They are permitted to live in huts of their own, to work and make some money, and are allowed to visit one another and have a social time. If they continue to be peaceful they are given more privileges. Those of the hard-laboring classes and also many other men, are not allowed any privileges whatever. They are confined in prison, when not laboring.

Allow me if you please to take you through one of the prisons of the hard-laboring side. In the first place you will have to have a sponge securely tied over your nose, and well saturated with carbolic acid to drown out the terrible odor, and kill the germs of disease, that are floating around in the cells. The door is unlocked and you are ushered into a room, whose dimensions are about 30 feet by 40 feet,

and one made to hold about 45 persons, but instead of 45 persons, all the way from 100-200 and even more are packed into these cells. Your attention is attracted by the rattling of the chains, that are securely fastened around each of their ankles, and passing up to one that is fastened around the waist. There is not a sign of a piece of furniture in the room, except a large tub for their excrement. There are no benches in the room for them to sit on. There is not even a bunch of straw upon which they can rest their aching head. The air is suffocating and you have to rush back to the door to breathe some fresh air. The air is so foul, that you can see the horrible emanations which float through the room like a fog over a river. Such are the places where these hard laboring convicts are confined over night. About five o'clock in the morning they are taken out, given their breakfast, and are then taken to labor in the mines, until six or seven in the evening. They labor all the time in their chains, and of course

under guard. If they make any attempt to run away, a bullet is sent after them, which generally brings them to the ground.

In conclusion I will say as some one else has said, "The exiles of Siberia have absolutely nothing to look forward to, except a few years more or less, of hardships and privation, and at last a burial place in a lonely graveyard, where not a sympathizing tear for them is ever shed."