In the 1930s the Russian Far East had three large penal complexes: Dal'lag, Sevostlag and Bamlag. They arose as a consequence of the policy of mass state terror which developed from the late 1920s and early 1930s, and which resulted in a large increase in the numbers of prisoners. At this time leading state officials came up with the idea of creating a wide network of correctional labor camps, and special (labor) settlements in those regions of the USSR with labor shortages, with a view to accelerating the development of natural resources in these regions. These regions included the Far East, where it was proposed to use a forced labor army to colonize and industrialize certain regions, such as Kolyma and the PAM zones. The free labor force available in these regions was too small to carry out development in these regions at the rates planned by Soviet leaders in the 1930s.

A joint TsIK/SNK decree of November 6, 1929 ordered that those receiving sentences of over three years be sent to correctional labor camps (ITLs), and this was followed up on April 7, 1930 by an additional SNK decree. By spring 1930 there were already six territorial ITL directorates under OGPU control. This included the Far Eastern Camp Administration, or Dal'lag.2

Dal'lag

The roots of Dal'lag can be traced to four concentration camps, located in the city of Khabarovsk; 6 versts from Vladivostok station; on Askol'd Island; and on the banks of the Gulf of Tataria. In January 1930 this group received the title of “camps of special designation” (lageri osobogo naznacheniia, or LON),3 and was placed under the charge of the plenipotentiary of OGPU for the Far Eastern Krai (ULON PP OGPU DVK). After

the reorganization of OGPU in 1934 this organization was renamed the NKVD Administration for Far Eastern ITL and in August 1935 it was placed under the charge of UNKVD Department of Camps, Labor Colonies and Places of Imprisonment in the Far Eastern Krai (DVK).

Dal’lag was led for a lengthy period (1930-37) by L. Ia. Martinelli, who was arrested and repressed in 1937 as an “enemy of the people.” Although the Dal’lag administration was situated in Khabarovsk, the main body of prisoners in this camp in the early 1930s were transported from different regions to Primor’e. Vladivostok was the central distribution point, which in July 1930 allocated more than ten thousand prisoners to work in Vladivostok itself on construction and stevedoring work; to Nikol’sk-Ussuriisk and Spasske-Dal’nii; to gold extraction on Askol’d Island; to coal mining in Suchan and Artem; to timber collection in the taiga; and to fishing on the coast throughout the oblast’.4

In later years this wide spread of activities was extended to the Amur region. A division was created in the town of Komsomol’sk-on-Amur in 1932, and in September 1933 the Volochaevskii camp division was established to build the Khabarovsk-Komsomol’sk track and others.5

In October 1934 the total number of prisoners in Dal’lag comprised 59,900.6 By March 1936 the camp had ten divisions: Vladivostok; Artem; Khabarovsk; Komsomol’sk; Golubichnoe; Raichikhinskoe; Bolon’skoe; Padelinskoe; Sedankinskoe; Tungusskoe; and other camp points at: Sredne-Bel’skii; Birskii; Rozengartovskii, Khabarovskii.7

Towards the end of 1929 and the beginning of 1930 there were discussions in Moscow about the possibility of directing prisoners to Sakhalin for use by the enterprises of the Sakhalin Corporation. However the existence of the international border with Japan on the island complicated the resolution of this problem.8 Nevertheless in the second half of the 1930s a small colony was organized in Sakhalin oblast’ from a number of local prisoners who were charged with the construction of a roadway.

In this way, by the end of the 1930s the divisions of Dal’lag were spread across many regions of the southern zone of the Russian Far East. Dal’lag continued to exist as a unified entity until April 1939, when the

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7. Materialy otdela spetsfondov Informatsionnogo tsentra (OSF Its) UVD Khabarovskogo Kraia.