

on the procedure, he paraphrased Stalin's famous remark: "In Kolyma, 'Man is the most valuable capital.'" ²³

And indeed, a prisoner's life had no significant value. Another interviewee in Tjeknavorian's documentary recalled what happened after prisoners built a narrow road for horses to carry local herbs to the train station. In the terrible climate, the horses were overworked and exhausted, so the camp administrators decided to make the prisoners carry the loads instead, because if a horse were lost they would be reprimanded, but if a prisoner died they would simply fill out the proper form and be done with it. "Horses had some value, men did not."

Yet another interviewee, a prisoner who worked in the coal mines of Siberia, said that when part of a mine caved in, some 250 prisoners were buried under the debris. The inmates began digging to rescue them. It took them a while but they found nothing, so they had to dig even deeper. But the warders stopped them and sent them back to their regular jobs because the rescue operation would only reduce their daily output. The 250 prisoners were casually reported to have died in the accident.

There was no respect for the living, the dead or the living-dead. These last were referred to as *fitili* ("wicks"), burning like a candle to the very end, or as *dokbodyagi*, from the verb *dokhodit* ("to reach or attain"). That epithet was pure sarcasm: it meant "the dying were at last 'reaching socialism'." ²⁴

23 Vahram Alazan, «Տառապանքի ուղիներով» (Through the roads of suffering) (Yerevan: Khorhrdayin Grogh, 1990), pp. 136–137.

24 Jacques Rossi quoted in Applebaum, *Gulag*, p. 334–335.