

Ironically, despite all the inhumane conditions under which prisoners labored in the Gulag, there were many, especially among the Old Bolsheviks, who still believed in the triumph of communism and who maintained that its true face was marred solely by human conduct. Gurgen Mahari wrote that his fellow prisoner Andrei Slavine believed he was fighting for communism, albeit within the confinement of a Siberian labor camp. Slavine dreamt of communism, and when he closed his eyes, he saw the whole world lit up by its glory. He saw light in the hearts and souls of all humanity.²⁵

For such prisoners, communist ideology stood above everything else and they could not be convinced otherwise by the mishaps, the torture and the ill treatment they endured in the prisons and labor camps. As staunch communists, they considered themselves victims of the struggle for the victory of communism. The narrator of Valter Aramyan's «Կոլիմա» (Kolyma) recalls a prisoner who sang the “Internationale,” the Communist Party anthem, as he was taken from his cell to be executed.²⁶ Vahram Alazan never lost faith in communism and the Communist Party. Back in Armenia after spending eighteen years of his life in Soviet prisons and labor

25 See «Նախօրյակին» (On the day before), in Ajemyan (ed.), «Սիբիրական» (Of Siberia, or The Siberian), p. 109.

26 Valter Aramyan (1908–1994), «Կոլիմա» (Kolyma) (Yerevan: Armenian Writers Union, 2006), p. 18. This engaging “novel,” or rather, fictionalized true story, with its detailed and vibrant evocations of prison life and places and its accounts of well-known Armenian intellectuals and communist leaders who were exiled, imprisoned or shot, has been a treasure chest of knowledge and information for me. Aramyan's story of the notorious Kolyma camp complex in the far northeast of the Soviet Union was published posthumously. When did he write this novel which in my opinion is no less poignant than Solzhenitsyn's work?