

themselves—got most of the food before it came to the ordinary prisoners, who were always shortchanged on rations, much like my father was. Since he lacked the wherewithal to bribe anyone, he was at the mercy of tougher inmates. He must have gone to bed hungry so many nights because he had not been able to fulfill the day's norm, and unlike most prisoners, he could not beg, he could not cheat.

The miserable ration that deliberately kept the prisoners on the brink of starvation was a calculated method of continuous torture used since ancient times. But the Soviets were masters at incorporating all types of torture into the everyday life of the prison camps. In his discussion of the starvation method, Solzhenitsyn remarked, "How ancient it all is, how medieval, how primitive! The only thing new about it was that it was applied in a socialist society!"<sup>35</sup>

Over and above the routine methods of torture, there was another punishment that was the warden's prerogative if he felt the prisoner was disobeying him. He would put you in the "can," a very small, freezing-cold cell, also called the "cooler" by prisoners, a cubicle with a concrete floor and stone walls with no windows. Spending days in the can was alarming. You were denied of any kind of bedding—you weren't even allowed the sawdust-filled mattress and the thin, dirty blanket you had in the barracks—and you were given half the usual scant daily ration of bread.

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35 Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*, p. 115.