

father did not mention their names or else we, inattentive and careless, failed to register them. He said that he had explained to them what Dashnaktsutun is and laid out the Party's position against the Soviet regime in Armenia. He proudly recalled their response: "We were accused and exiled for being dashnaks without even knowing what a Dashnak was. But if Dashnaktsutun is what you describe, then we are proud of having been condemned as Dashnaks." Would my father have written about those rare moments of pride in the Gulag? Who were those people? Did they make it to freedom or had they perished and been forgotten in unnamed graves?

The purges of 1937 may have been the high-water mark of the persecutions in Soviet Armenia—and in the entire Soviet Union. But in reality, at least as far I am concerned, 1937 is just a symbol. The purges had no beginning and no end. Siberian prisons were thriving in the Tsarist Empire. The Gulag system was established in 1918 during Lenin's rule. Stalin expanded and perfected the system with unjustified arrests and banishments, creating the atmosphere of terror and suspicion that continued even after his death, at least until the arrest and execution of Beria. In her analysis of the rise and fall of the deadly labor camps in relation to the tides of war and ideology, Applebaum concludes, "The Great Terror left its mark on the mentality of camp guards and prisoners alike."³¹ And the system of government was built upon that mentality.

31 Applebaum, *Gulag*, p. 93.