

Top Soviet denounces Stalin's gulags

By Paul Quinn-Judge Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

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In a closed meeting, a Soviet analyst revealed that Stalin sent 17 million to labor camps. The disclosure seems to be part of a Gorbachev push to reduce rigid Stalinist economic control.

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Moscow

In an apparently unprecedented disclosure, a prominent Soviet economist has said that 17 million people passed through Joseph Stalin's labor camps and 5 million families were deported during Stalin's collectivization of agriculture.

Nikolai Shmelyov, a senior staff member of the Institute of USA and Canada Studies, gave the figures during a closed-door lecture to Soviet academics last week. The Monitor obtained a

tape of Mr. Shmelyov's remarks, given at a research institute attached to the Communist Party Central Committee.

Although Stalin died in 1953 and his cult of personality was denounced three years later, no official figures have ever been given for the numbers of people imprisoned in camps (gulags) or killed during his rule. Such discussion of the topic is extraordinary. (In a rare public demonstration, Latvians yesterday protested Stalin's deportation of thousands of their countrymen. **Story, Page 11.**)

Mr. Shmelyov presented the data to support an attack on what reform-

minded economists call the "administrative system" - the inefficient approach to economic management and planning that is expected to come under attack at the next party plenum. The plenum is scheduled for late this month.

Shmelyov's lecture, which follows hard on the heels of a controversial article by him on economic policy in the monthly *Novy Mir*, indicates that activist academics and writers are intensifying their campaign in support of Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms.

Shmelyov and other leading econo-

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mists are essentially calling for the de-Stalinization of Soviet economic planning. They are calling for the return to a more flexible – and they assert more Marxist – form of economic planning based on the policies pursued by Vladimir Lenin during the period of the New Economic Policy, which lasted from 1921 to 1928.

Stalin's "immoral system of management" had a catastrophic effect on agriculture, industry, and the war effort, Shmelyov said. Without Stalin's brutal collectivization, without the labor-camp system, and without "the badly waged, and nearly lost Finnish war [1939-40], then I am deeply convinced that there would never have been a second World War, at least on our territory," he said. The death of 20 million Soviet citizens during World War II could also arguably be viewed as an indirect result of Stalin's methods, he theorized.

The figure of 17 million labor-camp inmates was "unofficially known to many," Shmelyov said. And he criticized unnamed "recent theoreticians" who had tried to justify Stalin's mass repres-

sions in the 1930s on the grounds of economic efficiency.

"What did the 17 million people who passed through the system produce? Two canals, the expediency of one of which is very dubious. Tree-cutting, which could have been achieved much more cheaply by hired labor. And gold on the Kolyma River," in Magadan, in the far northeast of the Soviet Union, Shmelyov said.

The population handbook for

Stalin's 'immoral system of management' had a catastrophic effect on the Soviet Union. – Shmelyov

Magadan region in 1939 gave a figure of 3.3 million, Shmelyov noted. The handbook for 1959 – some three years after the closure of most labor camps – showed a population of 300,000. But the 300,000 people, working with the same technology, produced 1½ times as much gold, he said.

Shmelyov was equally scathing about other measures imposed by Stalin. The collectivization of agriculture had created a "monstrous machine" that led to the deporta-

tion of 5 million peasant families – accused of being rich farmers. Grain production dropped 40 percent after collectivization, he said.

The revelations will be welcomed by supporters of radical reform, who have argued recently that the classic system of centralized planning is not only inefficient and unproductive, but has little to do with real planning.

But the information will be deeply resented by others. During a recent visit to Magadan, a group of Western journalists pressed the party chief for a figure of the labor-camp population under Stalin. The official, Alexander Bogdanov, responded angrily that "this period is over, this page of history is closed. I don't see why we have to keep talking about it."

Shmelyov's estimates of the camp population are as high as many Western figures. A number of Western sources estimate that there was an average of 7 million to 8 million people in the camps in any given year between 1937 and Stalin's death. There have also been estimates that the death rate in Kolyma – with nine-month winters, permafrost, and temperatures that dropped as low as minus 76 degrees F. – may have reached 30 percent.