

# Trading Effort for Freedom: Workday Credits in the Stalinist Camp System<sup>1</sup>

Simon Ertz

Stanford University

[ertz@stanford.edu](mailto:ertz@stanford.edu) or [Simon.Ertz@gmx.net](mailto:Simon.Ertz@gmx.net)

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## Abstract

In this paper we focus on the economics of forced labor during Stalinism. We show that, despite the regime's ability to apply massive coercion, the camp system administrators used various incentives to raise labor productivity. The particular incentive system examined in this paper is the so-called workday credit system. Workday credits provided for a reduction in sentences for plan fulfillment and overfulfillment to motivate prisoners. An analysis of the economic implications of this instrument enables us to gain insights into the economic goals the camp system administrators pursued. We demonstrate that profitability (or loss-minimization) was a major concern for the administrators of the Stalinist prison camp system, although the strategies on how to achieve it changed over time.

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