

Original article

UDC 343.8

doi 10.46741/2686-9764.2025.69.1.008



## Forced Feeding of Persons Held in Russian Penitentiary Institutions: Origin and Development

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### Abstract

*Introduction:* the article describes the history of forced feeding of persons held in penitentiary institutions in Russia, namely those serving imprisonment and arrested before trial for crimes committed. *Purpose:* to determine when and why hunger strikes of convicts and detainees appeared in our country; how the Russian state reacted to such hunger strikes before the 1917 revolution; whether forced feeding of persons held in penitentiary institutions was used during the Soviet period. *Methods:* the main provisions of the article are based on the study of pre-revolutionary, Soviet and modern normative legal acts, works of legal scholars and historians, as well as memoirs of convicts. *Results:* hunger strikes of persons held in penitentiary institutions appeared as a social phenomenon in Russia in the first half of the XIX century. In pre-revolutionary Russia, there was no legislative regulation of the procedure for the actions of employees of penitentiary institutions in the event of a hunger strike by persons held in them. Cases of forced feeding in order to save the lives of starving people in the early XX century were juxtaposed with situations where the prison administration deliberately allowed prisoners to die of hunger. The practice of using forced feeding against people on a hunger strike in a penitentiary institution took place during the Soviet period. However, the legislative consolidation of the possibility of using forced nutrition and the establishment of the permissibility of such intervention in the event of an immediate threat to the life of a person on hunger strike occurred in the 1990s. *Conclusion:* the forced feeding of persons held in Russian penitentiary institutions has deep historical roots. Having been applied in the conditions of complete absence of regulation, forced feeding gradually gained its consolidation at the legislative level.

**Keywords:** forced feeding; artificial nutrition; convict; imprisonment; history; hunger strike; refusal of food.

5.1.4. Criminal law sciences.

**For citation:** Avdyukhin S.A. Forced feeding of persons held in Russian penitentiary institutions: origin and development. *Penitentiary Science*, 2025, vol. 19, no. 1 (69). pp. 65–73. doi 10.46741/2686-9764.2025.69.1.008.

### Introduction

Part 4 of Article 101 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation stipulates the possibility

of using forced feeding against persons sentenced to imprisonment who refuse to eat in the event of a threat to their lives. Similar provisions

are contained in Article 42 of the Federal Law No. 103-FZ of July 15, 1995 "On the Detention of Suspects and Those Accused of Committing Crimes". These norms, which were first consolidated at the legislative level in the 1990s, represent a response of the domestic legislator to hunger strikes of convicts, i.e. to a deliberate refusal of such persons from eating, which could eventually lead to their death.

At the same time, it seems obvious that the problem of prison hunger strikes has not arisen overnight, and previous generations of domestic legislators and law enforcement officers already had to decide for themselves whether to save the lives of people being on a hunger strike by applying forced feeding to them. Therefore, it would be interesting to find answers to a number of questions. When and why did hunger strikes of convicts and detainees appear in our country? How did the Russian state react to such hunger strikes before the 1917 revolution? Was forced feeding of persons held in penitentiary institutions used during the Soviet period?

#### *Methodology*

Since this article is devoted to the study of historical experience of the use of forced feeding of persons held in penitentiary institutions in Russia, its main provisions are based on the study of pre-revolutionary, Soviet and modern normative legal acts, works of legal scholars and historians. A special place among sources of this article is occupied by the five-volume work of M.N. Gernet "History of the tsar prison", a fundamental work that is unanimously recognized in Russian science as the most comprehensive study of the pre-revolutionary penitentiary system ever published by Russian scientists [1, p. 5]. What is more, memoirs of convicts and detainees were considered to study the practice of forced feeding in pre-revolutionary and Soviet Russia.

#### *Research*

##### *Hunger strikes of persons held in penitentiary institutions: origin of the problem*

As M.N. Gernet notes, the first collective prison hunger strike in Russian history was launched in 1827 in Siberia, at the Blagodatsky mine, by exiled convicts-Decembrists. The hunger strike lasted only two days and ended with a "complete victory for the prisoners" who

opposed the mine head's decision to deprive convicts of candles and the right to a communal lunch [2, p. 176]. Prison hunger strikes spread in Russia at the end of the end of the XIX century due to the changes that took place in the XIX century in the penitentiary system in general and the system of material and household support for persons held in penitentiary institutions, in particular.

Thus, the first regulatory legal act in the history of Russia stipulating the supply of food to the prison population was the Decree of Emperor Alexander I of October 26, 1822 "On the allotment of money from the treasury to feed prisoners in their places of detention", according to which prisoners were to be provided with food that met "minimum hygienic requirements for a diet of a healthy adult" [3, p. 47].

Until the adoption of this decree, the main source of food for persons held in penitentiary institutions had been citizens' donations, which led to a significant gap in the level of food security between prisoners. For example, M.N. Gernet notes that the size of alms with food and money in Moscow prisons allowed prisoners to be well-fed and "not look like hungry people" [1, p. 306], whereas convicts in the prison castle of Kamyshlov in the Perm Province were "in a bad position, since the food is poor and when there is no alms, prisoners live on bread crusts with water" [1, p. 349].

At the same time, even after the adoption of the 1822 Decree, the nutritional situation of persons held in penitentiary institutions was still alarming. N.S. Tagantsev describing in his "Lectures on Russian criminal law" the current state of prisons referred to the report of the Prison Board of Trustees for 1857 stating that prisoners' food was "extremely non-nutritious due to the allotment of money only for bread and cereals without meat" [4, p. 1,330].

It seems that the absence of prison hunger strikes in Russia until 1827 is directly related to the described state of the country's penitentiary system. First, the refusal to eat (hunger strike) as a conscious, purposeful action of a person held in a penitentiary institution can be carried out only in the presence of food itself, which, as shown above, was by no means guaranteed to convicts and detainees up to the XIX

century. Second, in the vast majority of cases, a person who has declared a hunger strike wants to oppose himself to the prison authorities and the state as a whole, whereas by refusing to eat food received as alms; starving people oppose themselves not to the prison administration, but to philanthropists who have decided to spend their own money on feeding people they do not personally know. Third, by starting a hunger strike, the convicted or detained person believes that, since his/her death is an undesirable event for the prison authorities, the prison administration will respond to his/her demands, thereby prompting him/her to end the hunger strike.

Meanwhile, such a logic can hardly be applied to the relations between the state and persons held in penitentiary institutions until the XIX century. Thus, an analysis of the provisions of the 1649 Cathedral Code, which was one of the most important sources of Russian law up to the middle of the XIX century, shows that isolation of criminals was considered the sole purpose of imprisonment and harsh living conditions of prisoners were used as a punitive measure [3, pp. 42–43]. Only the 1845 Code of Criminal and Correctional Punishments attributed deprivation of liberty to correctional punishments, i.e. punishments whose main purpose is to correct convicts, which led to changes in the attitude towards the material and household provision of prisoners. It was considered as one of the conditions for their correction [3, p. 48].

Accordingly, in the XIX century, the state started considering the death of a person held in a penitentiary institution not as a collateral damage when achieving the goal of isolating such a person from society, but as a circumstance hindering the achievement of the goal of correcting convicts. It is precisely this stance of the state in relation to criminal punishment goals that encouraged convicts and detainees to use a hunger strike as an effective way to achieve their goals.

#### *Forced feeding of persons held in penitentiary institutions at the end of the XIX century*

So, by the end of the XIX century, hunger strikes of persons held in penitentiary institutions had become a very common phenomenon. The use of forced feeding in relation to

starving people was one of the possible solutions of the problem.

The first case of forced feeding of prisoners is described in the memoirs of the revolutionary Feliks Kon who served his sentence in the Nizhny Kariya prison of the Nerchinsk penal colony in the 1880s. In protest against harsh treatment of one of the prisoners during her transfer to another prison, a group of women's prison inmates went on a hunger strike demanding dismissal of the commandant of penal colony Masyukov. On the ninth day of the hunger strike, one of the convicts Nadezhda Sigida was subjected to forced feeding by the decision of the authorities (in the work of F. Kon, as in many other pre-revolutionary and Soviet works, the term "artificial feeding" is used, which, however, does not fully reflect the essence of the phenomenon under consideration [5, p. 292]). At the same time, F. Kon notes that "being recently convicted and therefore less exhausted than others, Sigida endured a hunger strike better than some others" and artificial feeding was applied to her only so that Sigida, who had been doomed to a qualified death penalty, in case of death from hunger strike, would not escape from punishment imposed by the tsarist authorities. Before the hunger strike, N. Sigida insulted the commandant of the fortress with an action that, in accordance with Article 288 of the 1845 Code of Criminal and Correctional Punishments (as amended of 1866), resulted in the imposition of capital punishment, i.e. the death penalty, the specific type of which was determined by the court when passing the sentence [6].

F. Kon's version about motives for applying forced feeding to N. Sigida might seem far-fetched if it were not for the fact that forced feeding was not applied to other convicts on a hunger strike, even after the prison doctor telegraphed the governor on the 13th day of the hunger strike about serious concerns for the women's condition, on the 14th day – about gastric ulceration of one of the convicts, and on the 15th day about possible death of the convicts in case of delay in their feeding [7, pp. 20–21]. Moreover, the governor's response to the above-mentioned reports from the prison doctor has reached our days, the text of which leaves no doubt that the authorities did not in-

tend to take measures to save the lives of all starving people, “the administration does not care whether they eat or not. Continue to do as ordered” [8, p. 325].

Another case of the use (or rather, attempts to use) of forced feeding in the historical period under review can be found in the memoirs of the revolutionary anarchist P.A. Kropotkin, who described the lives of persons detained in the Trubetskoy Bastion Prison of the Peter and Paul Fortress. According to Kropotkin, the right to visits once every two weeks “was obtained due to the 1879 famous hunger strike, during which some prisoners in the Trubetskoy Bastion Prison refused to take any food for 5–6 days, responding with physical resistance to all attempts at artificial feeding” [9, p. 70].

Describing the hunger strike in the Trubetskoy Bastion Prison, Soviet historian A.V. Predtechenskii notes that on the fifth day of the hunger strike, the serf authorities nevertheless gave the starving a paper to file a complaint addressed to the chief of the gendarmes, who, arriving at the place of the hunger strike, said the following, “I deeply regret that you were given paper so soon and not forced to starve until you started eating” [10, p. 91].

The quoted words of the chief of gendarmes show that, as in the case of the hunger strike at the Nerchinsk penal colony, the purpose of using forced feeding was not to save the lives of persons held in penitentiary institutions. The leadership of the fortress tried to use forced feeding in order to quell detainees’ rebellion. However, after they failed, they allowed convicts to file a complaint to higher authorities.

*Forced feeding of persons held in penitentiary institutions at the beginning of the XX century*

Up to the beginning of the XX century, the problem of hunger strikes of persons held in penitentiary institutions, although it was gaining more and more coverage, was not regulatory fixed.

The circular of the Main Prison Administration No. 13 “On the duties of prison administration officials in relation to voluntarily starving prisoners”, published in the journal *Prison Bulletin* as of May 1908 can be considered the first official document reflecting the authorities’

reaction to this problem [11, p. 403]. In this circular, the General Prison Administration (GTU) provides an answer to the question of “whether prison administration officials are liable for an illness or a death of a prisoner, which has occurred as a result of the latter’s voluntary hunger strike caused by dissatisfaction with his/her demands”.

The GTU’s answer to the above question consists of two parts (theses), however, Soviet literature refers exclusively to the first part of this circular, “in view of the fact that the prisoner’s refusal to eat is an act of a completely voluntary nature and cannot be prevented by measures depending on the prison authorities, the latter cannot be held responsible for the consequences of such a refusal, even if it is the death of the prisoner”.

Quoting exclusively the above-mentioned part of the circular, the Soviet authors concluded that “by this decree, the local prison administration was authorized to ignore the prisoners’ decision to go on hunger strike” [8, pp. 32–33], calling the circular “a soulless piece of paper that sealed the fate of hundreds of young lives” [11, p. 30].

Meanwhile, the analysis of the circular shows that the content of the explanation given in it is by no means as unambiguous as it might seem at first glance. The second part of the document under consideration states that “if, however, there are signs of serious illness or extreme exhaustion in a starving prisoner, the prison administration is obliged to take measures to provide him/her with the necessary medical care”. Despite the 1908 GTU Circular absolved the prison administration of responsibility for the death of a prisoner as a result of a hunger strike, the document obliged them to provide medical care to a starving person. So, it allowed the use of forced feeding in relation of against such a person. In this regard, it is by no means accidental that after the publication of this circular, cases of forced feeding in relation to persons held in penitentiary institutions in order to save their lives were observed in Russia. So, in October 1912, four convicts, F. Andreev, I. Itunin, S. Il’inskii and D. Takhchoglo, were placed in the punishment cell of the Zerentui prison of the Nerchinsk penal colony

for failure to comply with the requirement to remove their caps. They went on hunger strike in protest against the regime applied to them. On the 11th day of the hunger strike, artificial feeding was applied in relation to Itunin and Andreev upon examination of the doctor I.A. Pakholkov, while two other convicts continued their hunger strike. S. Il'inskii was on hunger strike for 31 days [12, p. 198].

In 1912, four convicts held in the Orel penal colony also went on a hunger strike to protest their placement in a punishment cell. After 16 days of the hunger strike, the prison administration, at the request of a doctor, hospitalized all hunger strikers and "the convicts' lives were supported against their will with nutritional enemas" [13, p. 295].

In these two cases of forced feeding in relation to convicts, forced feeding was used at the request of a doctor at a time when the continuation of a hunger strike carried a real threat of death. It brings the described situations as close as possible to modern regulation of forced feeding of convicts in the Penal Code of the Russian Federation.

Meanwhile, as noted above, the 1908 GTU circular contained an internal contradiction: by imposing on the prison administration the obligation to provide medical care to persons on a hunger strike, it simultaneously absolved the prison authorities of responsibility for the death of a prisoner resulting from failure to provide such assistance. In this regard, this circular could serve as a justification for the non-use of forced feeding as a measure to save the life of a person held in a penitentiary institution who found himself on the verge of life and death. For example, in July 1911, in the same Orel penal colony, sailor Nikolai Simonenko, a participant in the Sevastopol Uprising of 1905, "starved himself to death" [13, pp. 147, 303]; a year later, in August 1912, his comrade sailor Ivan Pis'menchuk died as a result of a thirty-day hunger strike in the punishment cell of the Schlüsselburg fortress [13, p. 148].

Thus, it can be concluded that at the beginning of the XX century in the Russian Empire the actions of employees of penitentiary institutions in the event of a hunger strike were not legally regulated. The only official document

addressing this issue, the 1908 Circular of the General Prison Administration, contained an internal contradiction, since it simultaneously imposed on the prison administration the obligation to provide medical care to persons on hunger strike and absolved it of responsibility for death resulting from such a hunger strike. In this regard, the practice of prison authorities responding to hunger strikes organized by persons held in penitentiary institutions at the beginning of the XX century was not uniform: cases of forced feeding in order to save the life of a starving person were juxtaposed with situations where the prison administration deliberately allowed the death of a prisoner as a result of a hunger strike.

*Forced feeding of persons held in penitentiary institutions in Soviet Russia*

In the early years of Soviet rule, the problem of hunger strikes in penitentiary institutions was inferior in importance to the problem of insufficient food supply in such institutions. It is no coincidence that one of the first acts of the Soviet government in the field of penal law was the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR of January 23, 1918 "On improving food in Petrograd prisons", stipulating emergency measures to immediately improve the food supply situation in Petrograd prisons, as well as to transfer some convicts and detainees to provincial prisons [14, p. 41].

However, as the situation in the country became stabilized, the problem of prison hunger strikes again took on a significant scale. Thus, on November 25, 1925, the NKVD and the NKJ of the USSR issued a joint circular "On taking measures to eliminate hunger strikes in places of detention", in which prosecutors and inspectors of places of detention were instructed to take measures aimed at strengthening the rule of law in penitentiary institutions (to regularly attend places of detention; to promptly notify detainees of the investigation period extension; to promptly send complaints from detainees to the relevant authorities and institutions, etc.). At the same time, the administrations of places of detention were forbidden to provide any relief to persons who had already declared a hunger strike [15, pp. 142–143].

The analysis of this circular shows that in the early years of its existence, the Soviet government hoped to completely eradicate the problem of prison hunger strikes, thereby removing from the agenda the issue of treatment of persons on hunger strike. However, the Soviet government failed to achieve this goal.

The first regulatory document that formalized the possibility of using forced feeding in relation to persons on a hunger strike in penitentiary institutions was the Regulation on prisons of the NKVD of the USSR for the detention of persons under investigation, approved by the Order of the NKVD of the USSR of July 28, 1939 No. 00859. According to Article 44 of this regulation, if a person in custody declares a hunger strike, the head of a prison is obliged to immediately transfer him/her to solitary confinement and report the hunger strike to the investigating authority, as well as to the prosecutor supervising the prison. In the absence of special instructions from the prosecutor or the investigating authority within 72 hours, a doctor or an assistant physician applies measures of forced (artificial) feeding, carried by order of the prison head [15, p. 176].

The same NKVD order approved the Instructions for the application of certain articles of the Regulation on prisons, containing a detailed explanation of the “artificial feeding technique” carried out through the esophagus or through the nose using a special probe. The mouth of a defendant was opened with a mouth expander, the pharynx was lubricated with a cocaine solution to avoid coughing and vomiting, after which a wet probe with a funnel at the free end was carefully injected into the patient. A doctor poured warm water into the funnel to wash the stomach and then a food mass made of meat broth, milk, raw egg yolks, sugar, oatmeal and salt [15, p. 206].

It can be concluded that the appointment of the institution of forced feeding of detainees, fixed in the Regulations on prisons of the NKVD of the USSR in 1939, differed from the appointment of forced feeding in our days. Thus, Article 44 of the Prison Regulations was located in the Section “Penalties for violations of the prison regime” and assumed that, in the absence of special instructions from the investigator or

prosecutor, forced feeding would be applied to all detainees on a hunger strike after three days from the date of its announcement. At the same time, in order to make a decision on the start of forced feeding, it was not necessary to assess the health status of a starving person, in particular, to determine whether the continuation of the hunger strike at the time of the start of forced feeding posed a threat to his life. Hence, the main purpose of the use of forced feeding of persons held in penitentiary institutions in the historical period under review was not to save the lives of such persons, but to ensure compliance with the regime of the relevant institution.

As mentioned above, Article 44 of the Regulation on prisons of the NKVD of the USSR established for the first time the possibility of using forced feeding of persons in custody at the regulatory level: the previous provision, approved by NKVD Order No. 00112 of March 15, 1937, although it contained some requirements for the behavior of prison staff in the event of a hunger strike, did not mention possibilities of forced feeding. Meanwhile, our research has shown that the provisions on forced feeding, first enshrined in the Order of the NKVD of the USSR No. 00859 of July 28, 1939, were not a figment of the imagination of the authors of this document, but a normative consolidation of the practice already established by that time in Soviet penitentiary institutions.

For example, the Central Archive of the FSB of Russia contains a statement of November 8, 1930 filed by S.I. Krause, a technological engineer arrested in the Industrial Party case, addressed to the assistant prosecutor of the RSFSR protesting against detention and investigative methods. Among other things, Krause writes about starting a hunger strike on May 11, 1930. The resolution on this statement is the following: “to offer the head of the prison to artificially feed Krause if he does not give up his hunger strike. 8/XI” [16, p. 122].

According to the report of a former employee of the Directorate of NKVD in the West Siberian Region B.I. Soifer, in 1938, Sadovskii, a former employee of the Siberian camp, who had been on a hunger strike for 105 days, and Landovskii, an arrested employee of the Siberian Military District headquarters, who had been on a hun-

ger strike for 18 days, were subjected to artificial feeding in a prison hospital [17].

A.I. Solzhenitsyn also wrote in his book "The Gulag Archipelago" that forced artificial nutrition had been in high demand by 1937. So, according to the writer, on the 15th day of the hunger strike, artificial nutrition was applied to a group of socialists held in the Yaroslavl Central Prison. It is interesting that the description of the forced feeding procedure fully corresponds to the technique of artificial nutrition, which was later fixed in the order of the NKVD in 1939: "The mouth is opened with a plate, the gap between the teeth is widened, and the intestine is inserted. If a person does not swallow, the intestine is pushed further, and the liquid nutrient solution enters directly into the esophagus. Then the stomach is massaged so that the prisoner does not resort to vomiting" [18, p. 428].

Issues related to forced feeding of persons held in penitentiary institutions were reflected in later normative acts of the Soviet period: Order of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs No. 550 of August 16, 1958 declaring the daily allowance standards for prisoners held in correctional labor camps, colonies and prisons of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs; Instructions on the regime of detention in pre-trial detention facilities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs USSR approved by the Order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR No. 0470 of September 1, 1972; Regulations on medical care for persons held in correctional labor institutions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR approved by the Order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the RSFSR No. 125 of May 30, 1975; Instructions on the procedure for preventing offenses in correctional labor institutions and pre-trial detention facilities of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs approved by the Order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the RSFSR No. 113 of July 23, 1981. These by-laws, as well as the order of the NKVD of the USSR of July 28, 1939, regulated the procedure for employees of penitentiary institutions in the event of a hunger strike by persons held in such institutions, fixed the procedure for forced feeding and the allowance standards for persons subjected to such nutrition, but did not directly establish that forced feeding could be carried out only when

there was an immediate threat to life of a starving person [19, p. 27; 20, p. 43].

This circumstance gives grounds for the conclusion that the provisions on forced feeding that are fixed in Article 42 of the Federal Law No. 103-FZ of July 15, 1995 "On the Detention of the Suspected and Accused of Crimes" and Part 4 of Article 101 of the 1997 Penal Code of the Russian Federation have opened a new page in the history of the use of such measures as forced feeding of persons held in penitentiary institutions in Russia. The legislator fixed the very possibility of using forced feeding against people on a hunger strike and clearly established that such intervention could be carried out only if there was a threat to the life of a starving person.

#### *Conclusions*

Hunger strikes of persons held in penitentiary institutions as a social phenomenon appeared in Russia in the first half of the XIX century simultaneously with changes in the system of material and household support for such institutions and a change in the state's approach to the goals of criminal punishment. The first cases of forced feeding described in the literature in relation to persons on a hunger strike in penitentiary institutions can be found as early as the end of the XIX century, however, saving the lives of prisoners was not considered at that time as the main purpose of using this method of feeding. In pre-revolutionary Russia, there was no legislative regulation of measures conducted by employees of penitentiary institutions in case of a hunger strike. The only official document, the the 1908 Circular of the General Prison Administration, contained an internal contradiction, since it simultaneously imposed on the prison administration the obligation to provide medical assistance to a person on a hunger strike and absolved it of responsibility for the death of a prisoner resulting from such a hunger strike. In this regard, the practice of prison authorities responding to hunger strikes of persons held in penitentiary institutions at the beginning of the XX century was not uniform: cases of forced feeding in order to save the lives of starving people were juxtaposed with situations where the prison administration deliberately allowed prisoners to die as a

result of a hunger strike. The practice of using forced feeding in relation to people on a hunger strike in a penitentiary institution also took place during the Soviet period. Since 1939, it had been reflected in detail in subordinate regulatory legal acts. Meanwhile, the possibility of using forced feeding, as well as the establish-

ment of the permissibility of such intervention in the event of an immediate threat to the life of a person on a hunger strike, was first legally fixed in the Federal Law No. 103-FZ of July 15, 1995 “On the Detention of Suspects and Those Accused of Committing Crimes” and the 1997 Penal Code of the Russian Federation.

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*Received January 30, 2025*