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USSR: IRKUTSK LABOR CAMP FOR JUVENILE OFFENDERS DETAILED

Summary: A recent series on "educational-labor" camps for juveniles has appeared in the main youth organization newspaper, KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA. The articles present an unusually frank picture of the harsh and violent life in these camps and offer an assessment of the kinds and causes of juvenile crime in Soviet society as a whole.

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KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA on 3, 4, 5, and 7 August 1983 carries a 3,500-word account by I. Shirobokov on the Irkutsk educational-labor camp [vospitatel'no-trudovaya koloniya] for juvenile offenders. Titled "A Cure," the series focuses on an "intensified regime" camp, the harshest allowed by law for juvenile criminals. [Adult camps have four regimes: general, intensified, strict, and special.] While Shirobokov clearly wishes to portray success on the part of the juvenile facility in reforming its charges, he also presumably intends his descriptions of the harsh regime to deter potential juvenile offenders.

Description of the Internal Regime. Shirobokov opens his series by describing the camp: "A brick headquarters, fences, and guard towers. A few lamenting women with heavy sacks. Their children are nearby, beyond iron doors. Meetings with their sons will be brief, like a single instant." Though the camp does have greenery and even a pool, one inmate complains: "We have no time to enjoy them." The everyday life of the camp is described by a young man imprisoned for a second time [all those in the intensified regime juvenile facility are either "recidivists" or have been convicted of "an especially grave crime"]: "At 6 o'clock you get up, and you dress in 35 seconds-- and you are not allowed to sit down unless ordered until lights-out. You go to work in formation, to school in formation, and you are not permitted to go about the compound by yourself. Muster and roll-call on the parade ground, calisthenics no matter what the weather. And at any time they have the right to look through your personal belongings." Violators of the rules are placed in "isolators" as punishment. Shirobokov gives prominence to the brigade system, inmate self-management, and "socialist competition" within the camp as important factors in "genuine rehabilitation." Though Shirobokov makes no mention of guards or of any form of administrative coercion save the isolator, he does remind his readers that the camp administrator is "both an educator and a Chekist" [i.e., a policeman].

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58

Camp Violence. In recounting the biographies of several inmates and administrators, Shirobokov records instances of internal camp violence. The librarian Koroleva, for example, "had her head split open by 'the local children' [inmates]. It was a miracle she remained alive." Vandalism was common "before the arrival of the new administrator." At least two of the inmates resorted to self-mutilation to avoid labor. The inmate Shergin "asked for a razor blade from the authorities and while at class cut his wrist. They stopped the blood at the infirmary and punished him." Another juvenile, identified only as "Savage," swallowed a spoon to avoid work. Though Shirobokov is careful to speak of these incidents as long past or the work of an as yet unreformed inmate, he nevertheless leaves the reader feeling that the Irkutsk camp is an exceedingly violent place.

Juvenile Crime. Through the biographies of several youngsters, Shirobokov sketches a striking picture of juvenile crime in the USSR. Shergin, for example, was a member of a motorcycle and auto theft ring in Magadan; he eventually became part of a youth gang in Komsomolsk-na-Amur which was responsible for numerous "beatings and robberies" in a local park. Another inmate is described simply as "a murderer." Most are sentenced for "robbery, violence, theft, and malicious hooliganism." Shirobokov characterizes these youngsters as "sick, not criminal." He notes that a large portion of those incarcerated in Irkutsk must be treated for alcoholism. A majority of the inmates sentenced to three years or longer were raised by a mother alone, or by a mother and step-father. Often the parents of these children are themselves criminals or "parasites." Camp administrators and educators note with alarm the growing number of delinquents from "families that are extremely well off." One teacher complains that the feeling of "collective responsibility" once found in large families "has now been lost."

[A translation of Shirobokov's articles will appear in a future issue of the JPRS USSR Report: Political and Sociological Affairs.]