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Country: USSR

Subject: Significance of the Amnesty

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Place

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Date

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1. "...It was my intention to warn you against interpretation because the whole thing [the amnesty] did not seem clear at all. Every one of the Russians with whom I have spoken [DP's in the US] thought the amnesty was tremendously important, but they did not agree on its portent and significance because no one [of them] had found time to look up the penal code.
2. "This I have done now...Our findings show that the military offenses which are included [in the amnesty] cover quite minor matters-- everything important has been omitted.
3. "Article 58 of the code dealing with counterrevolutionary crimes is included in the amnesty, but of its 15 paragraphs there are only 3 which provide for sentences covered by the amnesty. The other 12 paragraphs either call for death sentence or for very long prison terms.
4. "The meaning of the amnesty is therefore (1) to recognize the necessity of blat, the black market, since practically all those condemned for embezzlement of kolkhoze and state property or for violations

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- 2 -

of the kolkhoze statutes are freed; (2) to win over most of those who were sent to labor camps or imprisoned for minor military offenses, really for no specific reason at all, after they are returned from occupied territories. Almost everybody here [DP's I have talked to in the US] think that at least 2 million people will be freed...When Russians do something, they do it in a big way. Two million is not many at all. Many more must be imprisoned or encamped for black market crimes alone.

5. "...While the main purpose of the amnesty must be to create goodwill for Malenkov and company, it still seems strange that the decree should not have said: 'This amnesty was something great Stalin had intended.' Without referring to him [Stalin] the man in the street is bound to say: 'The old buzzard is gone, good. Now they will give a little freedom.'
6. "But I agree that this is speculation--only it is not my speculation alone but everybody's, old and new emigres.
7. "I was personally interested in the amnesty and have been trying to find out what it meant...I believe it will be a big topic inside and outside the USSR for some time. It might be interesting to note who is included in the amnesty and who is left out and then to conclude that the amnesty is really a sop thrown to the elements of corruption."

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