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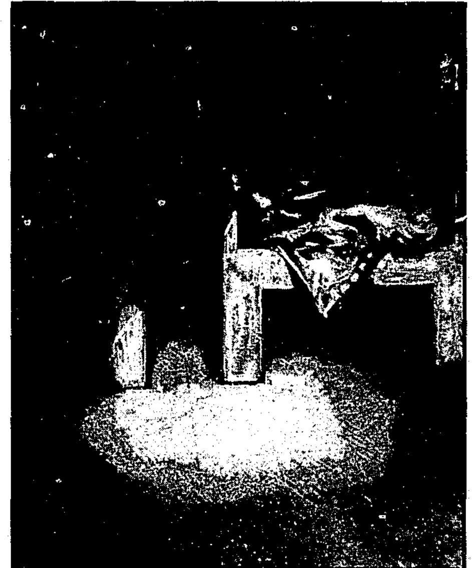


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# Inside Soviet Prisons

Office of the Procurator General. Both meetings were unusually candid, as Soviet officials were anxious to learn about the U.S. prison system and to hear our comments and criticisms regarding their prison system.

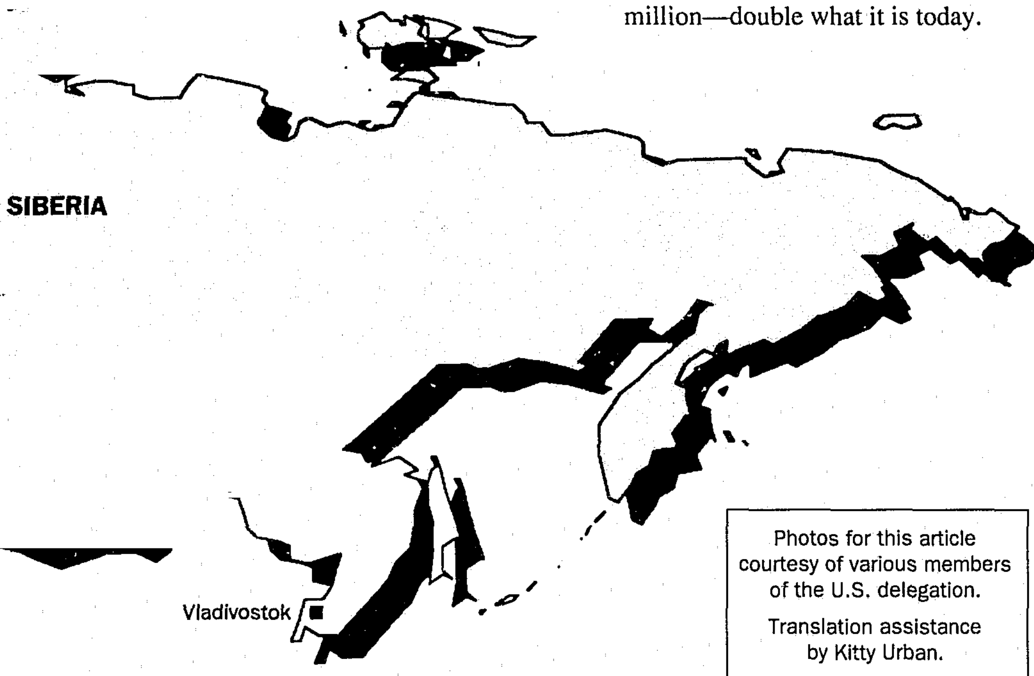
The Soviet Government's gracious assistance afforded us the opportunity to learn a great deal during our 6-day stay. The Soviet correctional system has more in common with the U.S. system than any of us had anticipated upon arrival. Nevertheless, the visit was short, and there is much left to learn. We hope that future official interchanges will enable the two countries to share information about the challenging problems of administering a humane prison system.

## The Soviet correctional system today

Fundamental transformations are taking place in Soviet Government and society. The criminal justice system is not insulated from these radical changes. To the contrary, the government is making great efforts to improve its criminal justice system while simultaneously facing the challenges of justice administration in a rapidly changing society.

According to the Minister of Internal Affairs, Vadim Bakatin, there are currently 761,000 inmates in the Soviet Union, held in 2,100 labor camps or prisons throughout the U.S.S.R. In addition, approximately 200,000 pretrial and unsentenced prisoners are in detention facilities (called "investigations prisons") and 160,000 alcoholics are committed to 250 treatment facilities.

Assuming that these figures are accurate, the number of prisoners in the Soviet Union is roughly comparable to that in the U.S., relative to the size of the total populations. That comparability is relatively recent, however; until 1985, the Soviet prison population was 1.6 million—double what it is today.




Photos for this article courtesy of various members of the U.S. delegation.

Translation assistance by Kitty Urban.

## Penal reforms and the changing Soviet society

The Ministry of Internal Affairs is now restructuring its penal system. Minister Bakatin emphasized two principal goals for penal reform. First, there must be a balance between the rights of prisoners and the rights of victims.

Second, the historic orientation of the prisons must be changed. In the past, prisons in the Soviet Union have been used to fulfill Soviet production quotas. Societal goals for imprisonment—retribution, rehabilitation, deterrence, and incapacitation—were subverted by the need to produce goods and services for Soviet society. Now, according to Minister Bakatin, the traditional purposes of imprisonment must supersede the nation's productive needs. This will be achieved through decentralization—both of the administration of prisons and of the Soviet economy.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs is working with the Soviet Parliament to reform criminal and penal laws. The first phase included an amnesty for nonviolent and political prisoners, as a result of which half the prison population was released. As a result of these reforms, the prison population was reduced from 1.6 million in 1985 to its present 761,000.

Today, the care with which this amnesty was implemented is being called into question as the Soviet Union experiences a very rapid increase in the crime rate. The crime rate climbed 31 percent last year and is now increasing at a rate of 20 percent.

An obvious explanation for this increase in crime is that certain offenders who pose a danger to society were inadver-

tently released in the amnesty. In addition, as Minister Bakatin noted, changes in all aspects of life in the Soviet Union, including economic and political changes, the questioning of traditional values, and the resurgence of ethnic nationalism, have generated greater willingness on the part of Soviet citizens to challenge authority. Increased expectations on the part of Soviet citizens and an impatience with the pace of economic reforms contribute to the growth in crime. Finally, just as the United States has a high rate of drug-related crime, the Soviets have a severe problem with alcohol. Indeed, we were told that 30-40 percent of crimes committed in the Soviet Union are alcohol-related.

According to Minister Bakatin, the climate in the labor camps and prisons has deteriorated since the release of nonviolent offenders because only the most dangerous prisoners remain; 350,000 of the 761,000 Soviet prisoners are second- or third-time offenders. Accordingly, Soviet prisons are increasingly difficult to administer. Yet the Ministry at the same time is anxious to proceed with its second stage of reforms—the humanization of the prison system, with a greater emphasis on reeducation and rehabilitation.

## Changes in prison administration

The Soviet Union has a centralized legal system, and all law is national law. Unlike the United States, the Soviet Union has no state governments, each with its own laws and administrative and political bodies, although reforms are moving in the direction of greater regional authority. Accordingly, there is a single organizational structure for the administration of the entire Soviet corrections system.

The Soviet Department of Corrections is within the Ministry of Internal Affairs; the Director of the Department reports to a Deputy Minister. The Department is ultimately responsible for the 2,100 labor camps and the small number of prisons operating in the Soviet Union and oversees the 400,000 employees working for the Department of Corrections throughout the system.* However, much of the responsibility for operating the penal system has been transferred to regional authorities in the 15 republics of the U.S.S.R. Whereas in the past there were 1,000 officials at the Central Department Headquarters in Moscow, there remain only 148.

Prisoners in the Soviet Union are assigned to labor camps and prisons by a classification system markedly different from our own. The labor camps are divided into four different "regimes": ordinary, strengthened, strict, and special. The regimes are apparently not distinguished by security considerations, but by the inmates' access to certain privileges. The number of letters, packages, and visits per year to which the prisoners are entitled varies according to regime. In addition, the prisoners' daily caloric intake is adjusted downward as the severity of the regime increases.

Most of the 761,000 prisoners are sentenced to labor camps. There are, in addition, a small number of facilities, perhaps no more than six, that the Soviets label "prisons." The prisons are reserved for the most serious offenses and difficult offenders. Prisoners there are housed in cellblocks, and the regimen is harsher than in the labor camps.

The court in the Soviet Union, instead of the Department of Corrections, determines a prisoner's classification, and it is part of the sentence. The more severe the offense, the more severe the regime.

*The Department of Corrections is also responsible for the nation's mental hospitals, which have been much criticized by human rights groups in the past, particularly with respect to the treatment of Soviet dissidents.

*U.S. delegation members with local officials and officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Left, Jack Eckerd; third from left, Elizabeth Fine; center, J. Michael Quinlan; third from right, Margaret Love; second from right, Charles W. Colson.*

Repeat offenders are also likely to be placed in a more stringent regime. Soviet law provides for a maximum sentence of 15 years' confinement for any offense, though a death sentence may also be imposed. We were told that about 30 to 40 executions took place last year. Once a prisoner is sentenced, the Department of Corrections identifies the specific facility for the prisoner's sentence from among those in the specified regime. Policy favors placement of prisoners in facilities close to their home and family.

The Office of the Procurator General serves as a general oversight authority in the Soviet penal system, much like an Inspector General's role in the U.S. Officials from the Procuracy have the right to enter any prison and investigate cases in which prisoners' rights may be violated. While on the one hand, the Procuracy's role is to contribute to the defense of the weakest, according to the Deputy Procurator General, its official position is one of neutrality. In addition, the Soviet Parliament, with its expanded authority, will begin to exercise oversight of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and thus over the penal system.

*Above: Margaret Love, J. Michael Quinlan, and Minister of Internal Affairs Vadim Bakatin. Right: The gate at Perm 29.*

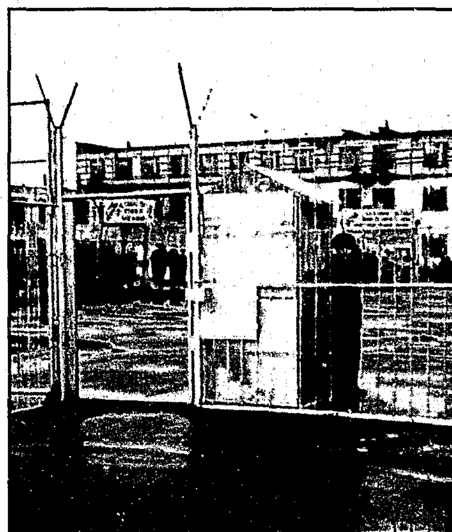
## Soviet Prisons—Usually Humane, Sometimes Grim

### Perm 29

Perm 29 is a 34-year-old "strengthened regime" labor camp in the Soviet region of Perm. The Perm region has 13 penal facilities: one educational colony for children; three women's colonies; a strict reinforced labor camp, Perm 35; two ordinary regime labor camps; four strict regime camps, and the two strengthened regime camps, including Perm 29. Three camps have been closed as prisoners have been released in recent years.

At the time of our visit, there were 900 inmates at Perm 29, which has a capacity of 1,300. According to the prison commander (who led the tour of the facility and then hosted us for discussion, cognac, chocolate, and tea), 800 of these prisoners have been convicted of crimes against a person and about 380 of murder.

Despite the fresh paint that we could smell throughout the institution and the fresh gravel covering the mud in the fenced-in yard, the prison facilities appeared run-down and the physical setting was rudimentary and grim. Nevertheless, there were clear indications that the facility was orderly and efficiently run.



The tour took us through educational facilities, where all inmates study to complete the 10 years of schooling required of all Soviet citizens, and where training in various trades was offered for prisoners who had no profession. As in all Soviet penal institutions, the educational staff works not for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but for the Soviet educational authorities.

As a strengthened regime labor camp, prisoners were entitled to 2,800 calories a day. (This compares with a diet in a U.S. Federal prison, which is not based on calories, but on nutritional content. ) The dining room had some tables at which inmates would have to eat standing up. According to the commander, it cost approximately 1 ruble a day to feed each prisoner. At an exchange rate of 6 rubles to the dollar, the per capita expenditure for food amounted to less than 17 cents per day. In addition, prisoners were permitted to spend 25 rubles a month in the prison shop, which sells some foods and items such as toothpaste.

We also toured the library, where there was a local radio station run by a prisoner; the auditorium, used for films and assemblies, and in which the commander indicated there had been a very well-attended religious service only days earlier; and the fenced-in courtyard and dormitory housing unit, where we had the opportunity to talk briefly with inmates. Curiously, inmates seemed puzzled about the existence of a library or the opportunity to borrow books from

it. Also, no prisoner confirmed that there had been a religious service earlier in the week.

Prisoners wore black uniforms and had shaved heads, and a high degree of discipline was evident. The 900 men were divided into separate housing units. The dormitory unit housed 169 inmates in crowded, but neat, double-bunk beds. Men in the unit's recreation room sat in an orderly fashion watching television. A few reading materials were available, including a newspaper written for the labor camps across the country. There was no evidence of any other recreation facilities or activities, either inside or outside the housing unit.

The Soviet officials were quite accommodating and agreed to show us the punishment cells, even though they were not on the scheduled tour. Punishment cells are referred to as "schizo's" (pronounced sheezo) in the Soviet Union. The isolation area was easily identifiable not only by its darkness, but by its stench. The commander offered to open up any of the dozen cells at random. Each punishment cell was 12 square meters in size, and would house up to four prisoners for 1 to 15 days, although officials said the average stay is about 5 days. Officials here repeatedly mentioned that prisoners are rarely placed alone in punishment cells because isolation is considered too grave a punishment. Benches for sleeping are folded up against the wall during the day and taken down at night. Prisoners can sit only on iron benches during the day. The cells have toilet facilities, and running water is made available at 7 a.m. daily.

Taking into account the spartan conditions, the dark, harsh punishment cells, and questions about prisoners' access to library facilities and religious services, the camp's conditions and programs were generally better than what we had expected. Although primitive relative to standards for correctional institutions in the U.S., conditions of confinement at Perm 29 were humane and not substandard relative to the surrounding community. The facility was clean and orderly, and administered in a professional manner.

## Perm 35

It takes about 6 hours to drive, over snow-covered roads, from the city of Perm to the infamous labor camp Perm 25, high in the Ural Mountains. A.M. Rosenthal of the *New York Times* and a representative from Helsinki Watch were the first Americans to visit this prison, in late 1988. Congressmen Wolf and Smith returned there in August 1989.

Perm 35 is a "strict regime" labor camp with a capacity of 400 prisoners. (At its peak, the prison held 250 inmates.) At the time of our visit, only 22 prisoners were held there. Other prisoners had recently been released as part of a nationwide amnesty program. Perm 35 attracted international attention when it opened in 1972 because of its high concentration of prisoners who were classified as "prisoners of conscience" by international human rights groups and concerned governments. The National Geographic Society and the *60 Minutes* news team reported on the severe conditions at this "gulag" in the weeks preceding our visit. Even with just a few remaining prisoners, Perm 35 is a living remnant of the Soviet past, and for that reason was worth the lengthy trip.

Previous foreign visitors to Perm 35 focused on the plight of specific imprisoned individuals. We did not revisit the question of whether the prisoners were properly confined, but, rather, examined the conditions of confinement.

Our most immediate impression of Perm 35 was its desolation. Amidst the snowdrifts, there was a small inmate population of 22 prisoners and a staff of 40. This contrasted markedly with another labor camp, several kilometers down the road, where 1,000 prisoners were held and there were signs of a bustling industry inside the barbed-wire fences. Moreover, according to the Perm 35 prison commander, nine inmates were

*Above: A worker in the Perm 35 factory.*
*Right: En route to Perm 35.*

scheduled for release and an additional three were being considered for early release. The commander said he would certainly recommend that the camp be closed rather than remain open for the other 10 prisoners, although the decision will be left to the Minister of Internal Affairs.

We first visited the factory, where half a dozen prisoners worked on heavy machinery under equally heavy supervision. According to the commander, prisoners at Perm 35 work 8 hours a day, 6 days a week, and have 1 hour to rest before dinner. It was impossible to talk with any inmate freely; correctional officers quickly appeared when we struck up conversations with prisoners, and at least one prisoner who conversed with us met with clear disapproval from the guards.

Everything about the labor camp reflected its small population. In contrast to the crowded living quarters at Perm 29, the Perm 35 residence had two spacious rooms with only nine cots to a room. Other prisoners were confined to the "schizo" or punishment cells, and two prisoners were ill in the infirmary. The temperature inside the living quarters was comfortable. The residential facilities were roomy but rudimentary, and there was little in the way of recreational activities—just a weight room of sorts and a room with a television set, although the remote location would undoubtedly interfere with the reception.

*Above and right: Scenes at Perm 35. The poster reads: "Work better to increase productivity and quality."*

The remoteness of Perm 35 raised questions concerning the availability of medical care. The labor camp had little in the way of modern medical equipment. An operating room and a dentist's chair looked like remnants of the 19th century. There was, we were told, a full-time doctor on staff.

The commissary shop for prisoners was well stocked, with canned goods, cookies, cigarettes, socks, toiletries, and writing materials; prisoners could spend 10 rubles a month and supplement their 3,000-calorie-per-day diet. In the apartment-like family visiting area, prisoners are allowed to receive 3-day conjugal family visits once each year. Only three members of the delegation were permitted to see the punishment cells—one small cell and one larger one where two prisoners were held. The larger cell had food on a table and many newspapers. Again, at the time of our visit, the temperature in the cells was comfortable.

We spoke with a number of prisoners in the visiting area in the presence of journalists (including a television camera that accompanied the delegation throughout the tour) and prison administrators. We had asked if we could conduct interviews in private, but were told that "it is the law" that the administrators listen in.

Prisoners told us about a number of problems with conditions in the camp. One prisoner indicated that it is impossible to avoid infraction of the rules (and therefore spending time in the punishment cell). He reported that since Congressman Wolf's August 1989 visit, he had been placed in isolation five times. Another prisoner told us that he had been in the punishment cell continuously for over a year; a third indicated that his stay in the "schizo" now exceeded 6 months. There were also reports that family visits are often denied and that prisoners have not received incoming mail. Finally, we noted that all the Perm 35 prisoners were very thin.

We had a number of concerns regarding the conditions of incarceration at Perm 35. First, the camp is located in a remote area, far away from many prisoners' families. This is compounded by the restrictions on mail and family visits. In addition, to the extent that confinement to the "schizo" is used routinely for minor infractions, the practice would not be acceptable in the United States. Nor would the long periods of confinement in the punishment cells. In addition, if facilities are not adequately heated, or punishment cells are intentionally kept at cold temperatures (as we were told is the case), conditions would be inhumane by U.S. standards.

On a positive note, the prison was orderly and neat, and the prisoners were occupied. Yet Perm 35 has a reputation that will survive the camp itself. Many prisoners believe that they are unlawfully imprisoned, and should not have to abide by the same rules as those convicted of property crimes or crimes of violence. We were encouraged by indications that the labor camp may be closed in the near future.

## Butyrka Investigations Prison

We next visited the Butyrka investigations prison in Moscow, one of the oldest prisons in the Soviet Union. Butyrka is located in an ancient fortress that was used by Peter the Great for military purposes. It was converted for use as a prison in 1787 and as such has housed many well-known revolutionary figures.

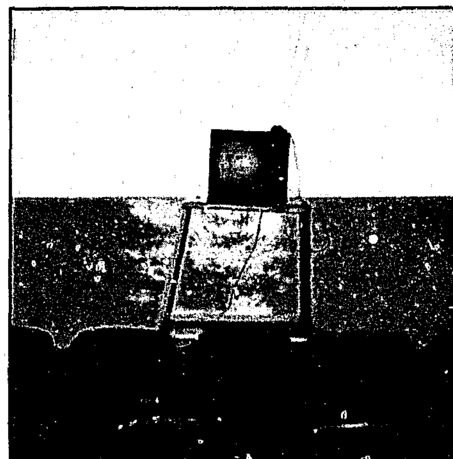
Butyrka was slated for demolition in the late 1950's. However, the Government instead built an apartment house adjacent to the prison to block any view of it from the street. The Butyrka prison is now a historical landmark and the prison commander repeatedly explained the difficulty he faces in gaining approval for renovations from the Government bureaus charged with protecting historic buildings. A 10- to 15-million ruble renovation has, however, finally been approved.

According to the commander, the number of prisoners at Butyrka totaled "a little more" than the facility's 3,500 capacity, and included about 450 women. Those detained at Butyrka are awaiting trial or transfer to another prison, and in some cases prisoners who are material witnesses in a trial are held at Butyrka. The average stay is 4 to 6 months, although more difficult cases may stay for up to 1 year. In addition, there is a work cadre of about 120 sentenced inmates.

Uniform rules govern all "investigations prisons"; as the commander explained, these prisons serve several tasks: to provide the authorities with all possibilities for investigation, to insulate society from dangerous criminals, and to prevent escapes.

Roughly 60 percent of the prisoners in Butyrka are held in common cells, each accommodating 20-25 persons, while 40 percent are in 1-5 person cells. Men are separated from women, repeat offenders from first-time offenders, those who committed "hard" crimes from those involved with less serious crimes, and adults from juveniles. In addition, all prisoners who are "inclined to excesses" are separated.

We were given a detailed description of the prison, but actually saw very little on the tour. There were virtually no prisoners to be seen anywhere in the institution (with the exception of one prisoner pressed with his face against the wall on the stairwell as we passed and one or two others who were in transit).



*Above and right: A dormitory and bathroom at Perm 35.*

We spent more time touring the prison museum than walking around the prison facilities.

The prison was indeed a fortress. Every door was solid and one could not see into or out of the cells or rooms. Prisoners inside the cells could call staff by pressing a bell. The delegation was shown an empty cell on the prison's special block that would accommodate one to five persons and an empty punishment cell, located in one of the corner towers. Regular cells are equipped with toilets, radios, mirrors, and running water. Prisoners leave their cells for showers every 7 days, and at that time the bedding is changed. These and other prison rules are posted on every cell wall.

Punishment cells at Butyrka hold prisoners in solitary confinement. Unsentenced prisoners can stay up to 10 days and nights in the cells, and sentenced prisoners for 15 days. On average, about seven prisoners are held in the punishment cells at any given time.

On the way into the prison, there are holding cells—really, closets—that are

not used as punishment cells, but would certainly serve the same purpose. We were informed that prisoners typically spend 1 hour or so in these "cells" while they are sorted for assignment to an area in the prison. Nonetheless, we felt that these closet-cells had the potential for grave abuse.

In the medical facility, prison officials proudly displayed their Soviet-made X-ray machine. The tour continued through an area in which the commander told us that behind each of the solid, closed doors, investigators were meeting with prisoners and working on criminal investigations. Finally, we were given a very detailed tour of the prison museum.

In short, we saw empty cells, closed doors, and relics, and had no opportunity to see how prisoners lived in the institution or what conditions of confinement were like. When the tour ended, we commented that with more than 3,500 prisoners, it was curious that as few as 2 or 3 prisoners had been seen during the entire tour. The commander explained that it is forbidden by law for anyone to see unsentenced prisoners, but agreed to bring us back into the prison, where we met with one sentenced prisoner who had been elected by his fellow prisoners as supervisor for the 120-prisoner work cadre. After a brief chat and a tour of the living area for the sentenced work cadre, the commander led us out of the prison through a side door.

Above: Perm 35. Right: A dormitory at Mozhaisk 5.

Why did the Government allow us to visit the prison, but place such severe restrictions on what we could see, in stark contrast to the openness of the two Perm facilities? We could only speculate about the reasons for this secretiveness, and surmised that they must relate to conditions inside the cell areas, the lengths of time prisoners are actually held before trial, and the nature of the charges. In addition, we were unable to confirm with inmates any of the staff's assertions about access to counsel, visitation, and other pretrial rights.

## Mozhaisk 5

Our next stop was a 40-year-old colony for women at Mozhaisk, a suburb of Moscow. Mozhaisk 5 is one of approximately 80 colonies for women in the Soviet correctional system, 40 of which are commanded by women. Mozhaisk 5 is headed by a male commander and two female assistants, who led the tour of the camp and who impressed us with their knowledge and professionalism, and their extremely comfortable and supportive interaction with prisoners. Most of the 380 military and civilian employees at the camp were women.

The 900 women prisoners at Mozhaisk 5 have been convicted of more serious crimes than had been the case for women in the past. Typical crimes today include state and property offenses, offenses against the person, and murder. Half of all women in Soviet prisons are serving time for property offenses. Women convicted of lesser crimes now have their sentences postponed and are essentially placed on probation. Those who fail to obey the conditions of their probation are sent to a labor camp such as Mozhaisk 5. While prisoners can be sentenced to Mozhaisk 5 for anywhere from 6 months to 15 years, the average sentence is 3.5 to 4 years, and prisoners range from 18 to 70 years of age. In fact, we were surprised by the number of older prisoners in the camp.

This year, the Soviet Government is conducting a bold experiment in seven women's colonies, including Mozhaisk 5. In addition to a new policy of awards—expanding the number and size of parcels women can receive, extending visiting privileges, and adding a 12-day furlough—it makes special provisions

for women who are mothers. Mothers are considered the heads of households, and under this experimental program, initiated in March 1990, pregnant women are released from prison at the time of childbirth and allowed to stay with the family until the child is 3 years old. At that time, if the mother has behaved well, the court decides whether to cancel the original sentence or lessen its severity. All women at Mozhaisk 5 are eligible to participate, provided they are not repeat offenders and are not sentenced for particularly violent or serious crimes.

While we were not intimately familiar with Soviet culture and norms, we felt that this experimental policy could unwittingly encourage pregnancies. This policy would be very controversial in the U.S., particularly if, as in this experimental program, conjugal visiting privileges were extended to nonfamily members. In addition, male prisoners in the United States would claim that women were receiving preferential treatment in violation of the equal protection requirements of the Constitution.

Mozhaisk 5 was without doubt the most impressive facility the delegation toured in the Soviet Union. Two members of the delegation had toured prisons throughout the world and found the level of prisoner morale and the administration of the prison to be among the best that they had seen anywhere.

While there were trees, birds, and signs of spring inside the labor camp compound, much was also done by both prisoners and administrators to make the camp a humane place. Personal touches were evident everywhere. In the education building, samples of children's clothes that prisoners had made were displayed on the classroom walls. The dormitories were crowded, but walls were covered with colorful posters and drawings, and pillows, curtains, and cloths were all hand-embroidered by the prisoners, who apparently took great care with their surroundings. Women on a dinner break sat in the television room or in the outside courtyard talking in small groups. In the auditorium, several women rehearsed for an upcoming concert—one stood at the piano singing along with an accompanist. The library was centrally located, well stocked, and apparently well used. We took particular note of the poster-sized prison newspaper, hand-made by prisoners and containing original articles and artwork. An artist showed us many previous editions of the newspaper, stored in a room at the library.

We talked easily with all the prisoners we approached. One woman who spoke English commented that she did not consider this to be prison, but a place where she lived and worked, although it was not her home. The administrators also seemed to chat freely with the prisoners. At one point a prisoner handed the commander a note with specific requests; he approved two and turned down one.

The medical clinic was filled with activity; we were told that the focus in medical treatment was on preventive care. At the time of the visit, there were a number of prisoners in the clinic awaiting outpatient care and 19 inpatient prisoners who were anxious to find out from the delegation or Soviet authorities if there was any news about when they would be released. General V.N. Kremenesky, a Deputy Chief in the Department of Corrections who accompanied our tour, indicated that an amnesty plan was awaiting approval at the Ministry.

A high point of the tour was the dining room, where we partook of the prisoners' soup, meat, kasha, and fruit tea. Women prisoners and officials appeared to enjoy our visit; one prisoner sat with us as we sampled the cuisine.

*Left: The clothing factory at Mozhaisk 5.*
*Above: Lunch in the cafeteria at Mozhaisk 5.*

Most notable, however, was the prison industry. On the day of our visit, the 300 or so women in the factory were making clothes for servicemen at railway stations. There was music playing; we were told that prisoners decide whether music should be on or off and what kind of music should be played. The women wore head coverings to comply with safety requirements and worked for net earnings of 90 rubles a month. In addition, they could receive good-time credits and increased earnings for production in excess of their quotas. At least 50 percent of each woman's earnings is kept by the administration to pay for living, food, and clothes. Some funds are deducted to repay victims of property crimes.

While overall morale in the colony seemed excellent, we found the punishment cells to be somewhat disturbing. Mozhaisk 5 has about 12 punishment cells, and the prison officials noted that they are used only as a last resort. The administration randomly opened the door to one of the cells; inside were five women dressed in nightgowns who were apparently as surprised to see us as we were to see them. One prisoner was particularly disturbed and began crying uncontrollably. The prison administrator tried unsuccessfully to calm her. The delegation was told that the young woman was in the "schizo" for refusal to work, although insolence, fighting, or stealing from other inmates typically landed prisoners in the punishment cells for up to 15 days—sometimes for protection from retaliation by other prisoners.

*Above: Working on the prison newspaper at Mozhaisk 5. Right: Courtyard at Mozhaisk 5.*

Our stay in the "schizo" ended abruptly when the young woman's crying turned into a hysterical episode or seizure. We commented that continuous confinement in the dark punishment cell for up to 15 days could have very deleterious effects. The consequences could be lessened, however, if, as the administration indicated, the women are not left in the cells all day, but get out to work and exercise in the punishment area compound.

Notwithstanding the concerns about the punishment cells, we found the institution to be very well run, with a balance of compassion and discipline, order and personal freedom, and opportunities for women to improve themselves, improve their surroundings, and keep productively occupied during their sentences. The visit to Mozhaisk 5 convinced us of the importance of providing prisoners with real opportunities for productive employment. Moreover, the administration showed concern for creating a humane environment.

## Mozhaisk Children's Colony

Our final visit was to the highly disciplined children's colony in Mozhaisk. There are 89 juvenile facilities in the Soviet Union; a total of 28,000 juveniles are in custody. Six of the camps are for girls and four are for serious, violent juvenile offenders. The Mozhaisk children's colony holds roughly 400 boys, aged 14-18, and provides them with education and professional training. All of the boys were serving time for property offenses. Sentences were 3 years on average, although most are released after completing one third of their sentence.

There are two general categories of juvenile prisons in the Soviet Union: one, including Mozhaisk, is for first-time offenders, and a second is for juveniles with previous records. Most first-time offenders are not sentenced to prison, but are given probation, and would only be sent to a colony such as Mozhaisk for violation of probation.

None of the Mozhaisk juvenile prisoners had been sentenced for violent crimes. Yet the atmosphere and physical surroundings at the colony were extremely basic. Boys were dressed in brown and black uniforms, some with red armbands, and most had shaved heads. About 300

of the boys were in school in the prison, completing their 10 years of education, or are in professional school learning steelworking, mechanics, or the assembly of radio equipment. The boys in the classroom were shy about striking up conversations, although several had questions regarding U.S. facilities for juveniles.

Prisoners were involved in production at the prison's six assembly plants and are required to work 4 hours a day if they are under 16 years of age and 6 hours a day if older. After the administration deducts expenses, the boys were left with 40 to 50 rubles a month. The boys worked together energetically and persistently in teams on assembly lines, and were rewarded for production in excess of their quota. In one factory, boys assembled light sockets; in another, loudspeakers.

In contrast with the school and industry sections of the prison, which were all cement, the residential area had trees and picnic tables. Still, the boys live in barrack-styled housing and there was little evidence of any recreation, other than a television room in each dormitory.

Tall fences surrounded the residential and industry sections of the prison to prevent escapes. Escape attempts were reported to be quite common; in fact, there was a boy in the punishment cell for an attempted escape. Unlike other prisons, where administrators made a point of noting that it is too difficult for a person to be alone in a punishment cell, and where administrators intentionally housed prisoners in groups—even in punishment cells—to provide them with company, this boy was in solitary confinement, and was clearly disoriented after 5 days in the cell by himself.

While not a nurturing, supportive environment, the children's colony at Mozhaisk was highly structured and disciplined. The boys there seem to have the opportunity to learn a skill and to spend their time productively. The colony may instill some discipline in the youths, most of whom seemed to have been sent there for stealing cars. Yet the regimen was severe for juveniles who are primarily first-time property offenders.

## General observations and lessons for the U.S.

While we did not discuss in advance of the visit what each of us expected Soviet prisons to be like, we agreed that in certain respects, conditions in the institutions we visited surpassed our expectations. More surprisingly, we were able to compare the two nations' prison systems and develop some ideas for the American correctional system.

■ *Conditions of confinement.*
Living conditions at many of the facilities visited would be considered substandard in the U.S. For example, whereas Federal prisoners and most State prisoners have virtually unlimited access to showers, Soviet prisoners can shower only once a week. However, the standard of living in the Soviet Union is substantially behind that in the U.S. Inmates in prison cannot live better than citizens in the surrounding community. Based on living conditions that the delegation observed in Moscow, Perm, and Mozhaisk, prison conditions appeared appropriate relative to community standards.

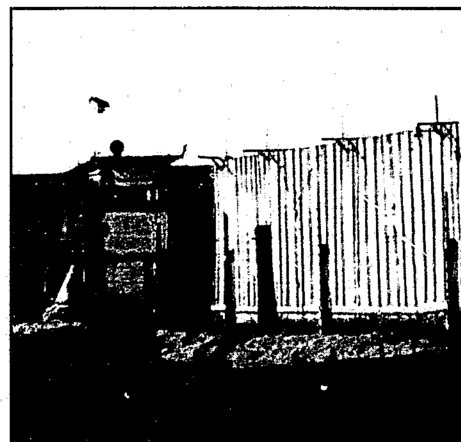
■ *Prison industries.*
A prominent theme that emerged in our visit was the importance of prison industries; 82 percent of Soviet prisoners are so employed. Mindful of the fact that labor should not be used as punishment, and of the volumes that have been written on the brutal work conditions imposed in the past on Soviet prisoners, the delegation was nonetheless favorably impressed with the compulsory work regimes at Perm 29, and at the women's and children's camps in Mozhaisk. Prisoners appeared productively employed in work that did not appear either

to be exploitive or generally regarded by the inmates as a form of punishment.

The difference between U.S. and Soviet prison systems with respect to prison industries is somewhat ironic. Whereas the Soviet Union has a problem of a shrinking prison workforce, the U.S. faces the difficult challenge of creating enough jobs for the rapidly growing inmate population.* The tales of exertion in Soviet gulags contrast greatly with complaints of inmate idleness in many U.S. prisons. "Factories within fences," a goal that American correctional institutions strive to achieve, is a reality in the Soviet Union.

Currently, about one-third of qualified Federal prison inmates in the U.S. are employed in industry programs, and just 5-10 percent of State inmates. The delegation was sufficiently impressed with the positive effect that the Soviet prison industry program has on morale, discipline, and administration that it returned with a renewed commitment to increasing employment opportunities for American inmates.

*In contrast to the Government funds used to run prisons in the U.S., Minister Bakatin indicated that the entire operating budget for Soviet prisons in 1989 was raised through prison production, and the full appropriation was returned to the Government.



*Mozhaisk Children's Colony: Left, at work in the prison factory; above, outside security; right, a classroom.*

■ ***Prison regimes.***
Soviet prisons and camps are divided into "regimes," distinguished in part by the number of letters and visitors prisoners can receive each year, and by the number of calories each inmate can consume each day.

We had serious concerns about the use of food and family communications as a form of punishment, and raised the issue of limitations on mail and visiting rights with Minister Bakatin, who noted that these are remnants of the old Soviet system that have yet to be revised. Supreme Soviet member Golik, another of the officials who met with us, indicated that new laws were being written, and questions such as ours would be addressed through penal law reforms.

■ ***Religious freedoms.***
For years, the beautiful cathedrals in and around Moscow have been without decorative crosses on their steeples. That is now changing; the churches that were for a long time museums of Soviet history are again being used as places of worship. Similarly, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has begun to implement new religious freedoms in prisons; we applauded these advances in our meeting with Minister Bakatin.

Prison administrators stated that prisoners could freely practice their religion. The members of our delegation associated with Prison Fellowship were given permission to hand out Bibles in the prisons visited. While it is unclear to what extent prisoners actually have access to religious ceremonies inside the prisons, the opportunity is there for outside religious groups to hold services.

■ ***Oversight of prison administration.***
We noted the positive trend toward greater oversight of the administration of the prison system. Currently, the Procurator General has a certain degree of oversight and review of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Yet there is a need for greater openness and public scrutiny of corrections. The Soviet parliament is developing its oversight role as it obtains greater autonomy from the executive branch of the Government. New freedoms for the press and greater press independence are contributing to the concept of public accountability on the part of administrators. In fact, a television news crew and newspaper photographer accompanied us into two prisons.

■ ***Punishment cells.***
A number of the punishment cells that the delegation saw were harsh, dark, and unpleasant. While prisoners are generally sent to punishment cells for no more than 15 days (although at Perm 35, at least one prisoner had been in the punishment cell for over a year for refusing to work), we felt that conditions

are unnecessarily punitive. In contrast to procedures in Federal prisons, we learned of no administrative process to ensure that prisoners are not arbitrarily or inappropriately sentenced to punishment cells.

On the one hand, the Soviet authorities displayed concern for the prisoners in punishment cells and hold them in groups of four or five to a cell, as loneliness and isolation are considered the greatest punishment of all. On the other hand, prisoners are often deprived of natural light, and the benches for sleeping are pressed against the wall during the day, leaving prisoners with only metal stools for sitting.

■ *Levels of unrest.*
While we did not see evidence of unrest in the prisons visited, Soviet officials noted that unrest and riots are on the rise as the concentration of violent prisoners increases. Correctional staff have increasingly been taken hostage and the authorities are grappling with how to address this problem.

In meeting with the Deputy Procurator General, we reviewed recent prison riots in the U.S. and the lessons learned about the use of force to counter prison rebellion. Since the Attica State prison uprising, the policy in Federal prisons has been to avoid use of force because it leads to greater bloodshed. Currently, the policy in the Soviet Union is to use force to counter prisoner rebellions.

■ *Discipline.*
While Soviet officials discussed the problem of prison unrest, the prisons and prisoners we visited were notable for their high degree of discipline. Prisoners' neat manner and appearance—for example, prisoners' shirts were buttoned up to the collar and their heads shaven—tidy dormitories, and regimented schedule evidenced a high degree of orderliness. Inmates watching television sat in rows. Prisoners with whom we spoke were quick to stand and respond politely.

■ *Family visiting.*
Family visits are limited to as few as one or two a year or as many as five or six a year, depending on the nature of the regime.* Certain visits, however, extend for 3 days and 3 nights. During these long family visits, the prisoners stay with their families in apartment-like areas inside the prisons. While U.S. Federal prisons allow more frequent family visits, there are no conjugal visits. We encouraged the Soviet Government to allow more frequent family visits, and came away with an interest in exploring anew the issue of conjugal visitation.

■ *Administrative remedies.*
According to the Office of the Procurator General, prisoners have the right to write to the Procuracy to seek relief for misconduct on the part of administrators or others violating their rights.* Administrators must forward all prisoner mail to the Procurator's office within 24 hours. Regional Procuracy offices receive about 75,000 prisoner claims and letters each year, although the Central Department Headquarters in Moscow receives only 11-12,000 letters, most of which are appeals of decisions by lower authorities.

We learned of no mechanisms for prisoners to seek redress directly within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, such as exist in U.S. prisons. Such administrative relief mechanisms could be very useful in resolving disputes internally, unless prisoners would hesitate for fear of retaliation.

■ *Medical care.*
Medical facilities generally appeared rudimentary. Moreover, according to the Deputy Procurator General, inadequate

*Juvenile camps allow somewhat more frequent family visits. In addition, the women's camps are experimenting with extra visitation privileges.

*Although if an inmate is found to be at fault instead of an administrator, the inmate may be punished.

*Left, A washroom at Mozhaisk Children's Colony. Above: A classroom at Perm 29.*

medical care is a chief complaint among prisoners. The Procurator's office, however, does not view medical care as a serious problem, as many individuals arrive in prison with "damaged health."

While medical care was of interest to us, there was insufficient opportunity to explore this issue in depth. It would be useful to learn more about the medical care afforded to prisoners in future exchanges, especially since the issue poses many difficult questions for administrators in the United States.

■ *Prisoners of conscience.*
While we did not focus on the question of prisoners of conscience, we did visit Perm 35, which has been noted for the political nature of its prisoners' offenses. Moreover, the U.S. Government and Members of Congress, including Representative Wolf, are concerned that the Soviet Government still does not adequately respect human rights. Accordingly, prisoners' rights and prisoners of conscience were a component of the official American delegation's visit. Mr. Colson raised a concern about the incarceration of prisoners of conscience at Perm 35 in our meeting with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. However, Minister Bakatin was not receptive to the discussion, and defended the Soviet Government's imprisonment of individuals who have violated Soviet law.

■ *Women's penal facilities.*
Soviet officials are experimenting with some bold reforms in women's prisons, and while certain experimental policies would be controversial in the United States, the fact that the Government is attempting to improve conditions in women's prisons through reforms and innovations is encouraging. The same degree of innovation and commitment will ideally be applied to men's facilities as well.

*Above: The operating room at Perm 35.*
*Right: Religious symbols have been restored to Moscow cathedrals.*

## Future steps in U.S.-Soviet criminal justice relations

Overall, we were encouraged with the course of Soviet prison reforms and found many positive elements in the current administration of the Soviet prison system. Mr. Quinlan invited Soviet officials to continue their discussion about prison administration by visiting the United States.

The entire visit was extraordinarily educational, and a very positive, friendly relationship was established. The Soviet and U.S. governments and their respective prison systems are certain to benefit from the delegation's visit and from future discussions regarding mutual efforts to improve criminal justice. ■

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