THE ORGANIZATION OF POWER IN SOVIET LABOR CAMPS

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Data for this study were produced by the Soviet Interview Project. This project was supported by Contract No. 701 from the National Council for Soviet and East European Research to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, James R. Millar, Principal Investigator. The analysis and interpretations in this study are those of the author, not necessarily of the sponsors.
"I am convinced that it is also finally
time to speak about what goes on in
corrective-labor institutions... The
rule of openness brooks no exceptions."
Literaturnaya gazeta, April 15, 1987

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This paper discusses a topic rarely dealt with in recent scholarly work. The contemporary lack of attention to the mechanisms of coercion has many reasons, not least of them the difficulty of finding good sources. Yet it is also a question of intellectual fashion. As noted by an author undertaking a comparative analysis of police power in society: "the study of the police as a political institution has fallen unto hard times for a number of reasons and has only recently begun to be resurrected as a worthwhile scholarly topic and a crucial theoretical question in analyzing the nature of the state and state rule."1

How power is exercised is a core question not only of political science but also of Soviet studies. It is studied here by focusing on a political microcosm, the Soviet labor camp system since Stalin. This lends itself to case study because it is a greatly underexplored Soviet institution and also because the administration and the management of men in prison "presents power relations with naked clarity."2 Many Soviet ex-prisoners have even claimed that "nowhere as well as in camp can you penetrate into the very core of a country's -- any country's -- political system."3 While this may be an overstatement, I agree with the American sociologist McCleery that "although the prison should not be taken uncritically as a society in microcosm, the comparative isolation of its social process from the impact of external variables provides a rare opportunity for systemic analysis."4

The question is how a small number of men organize to control a much larger number. The typical image of Soviet labor camps is that of a purely repressive institution characterized by the isolation and physical
coercion of inmates. But a closer look shows a more sophisticated organization of power by officials who put a premium on co-opting inmates and engaging them in self-policing. Yet the officially intended system of control is weakened in practice by some contradictory goals, faulty execution, and prisoner activity. When they have little choice, guards sometimes circumvent rules and compromise with prisoners, and there are elements of inmate power and true self-organization. As noted in the highly illuminating comparative literature on prisons, relations between captor and captive are interactive and complex.

Thus I not only analyze how power is exercised but also assess the sources and extent of limitations of control. I cannot hope to provide conclusive answers because sources remain limited, the subject matter has hardly been studied, and there is little existing theoretical work to provide guidance. Of the available theoretical writings those by comparative penologists and sociologists such as Erving Goffman who have analyzed "total institutions" generically have been most helpful. I also use the official Soviet literature on law and penal policy, existing Western scholarly work, and reports by reputable human rights organizations. As for primary sources, these consist of the huge store of samizdat documents, published accounts by ex-prisoners, and 30 in-depth interviews with former camp inmates undertaken under the auspices of the Soviet Interview Project. The sample made accessible through SIP is a good complement to dissident sources because it consists mostly of people who were imprisoned on criminal charges and regard themselves as having been normal Soviet citizens who ended up in camp primarily through bad luck. (More details on sample in Appendix 1.)

This paper is part of a broader study of Soviet labor camps since Stalin, and here I do not discuss what type of people end up in camps, how the camps have changed over time, and other aspects. For our purposes it suffices to note that the USSR has retained a network of labor camps for both criminal and non-criminal prisoners for the entire period since Stalin’s death. The number of prisoners is uncertain, but most Western sources agree that it is high in comparative perspective and that the inmate population has fluctuated between 1 and 3 million during the last thirty years.5
The discussion in this paper is in three parts. I first look at the organizational structure of labor camps since Stalin, then discuss the primary mechanisms of control, and finally inmate protests. In all these aspects there are some differences by sub-periods, by the type of camp, and by severity of the official camp regime. Wherever possible such differences are pointed out, but where this isn't done either a general pattern holds true or the data are insufficient for more detailed analysis.

I. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Soviet law authorizes four categories of "correctional labor colonies" (ispravitel'noe trudovye kolonii). Depending on the severity of their offenses and past records prisoners are sentenced to "ordinary," "intensified," "hard," or "special" regime camps. The more severe the regime, the worse the conditions and the harder the work. Some political and most religious prisoners are imprisoned in regular camps with criminals, but there are also separate political strict regime camps in Mordovia and the Urals.

1. Official administration

Soviet penal colonies are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and are staffed by its personnel. The staff consists of two basic groups: civilian employees hired from among the local population for specialized tasks and uniformed custodial officials organized in a military manner. Part of the latter are former army officers and others have been trained at special MVD police schools after attending a general trade school or institute. Many are camp officials only for lack of a better choice and are bitter about the lack of prestige of their job. Thus a Soviet newspaper report mentions a camp detachment leader who, "like many of his colleagues, when he meets someone for the first time he's in no hurry to tell them that he works in the colony."

Soviet labor camps have a dual identity as both prisons and production units and this is reflected in their organizational make-up. Each camp has a "living zone" and a "production zone." During most of their waking hours prisoners do hard labor. Since 1957 inmates have been organized in more or less permanent detachments (otriad) that live and work together. In the typical camp each otriaed consists of 100 to 130 prisoners (about 50 in
Each detachment is headed by a nachal’nik otriada who usually is a MVD lieutenant or captain. Euphemistically referred to as 'supervisor re-educators' detachment heads are responsible for prisoners in all regards: their work, how well they observe the rules and are disciplined, their condition, and their political and re-education work.\textsuperscript{11} The camp director too is responsible both for keeping order and filling production norms, but many of the other officials are primarily responsible for either order or production. For keeping order each camp director typically has a deputy in charge of "the regime" and another deputy is in charge of political re-education. Then there is a resident KGB operative with his section, a censors' office, and MVD officers in charge of the camp guards. The production personnel are headed by a "director of the ITU enterprise",\textsuperscript{12} civilian work supervisors and engineers. Camps also employ bookkeepers, teachers, medical personnel, and others.

It appears that the formal administrative hierarchy is close to the informal one and that even the KGB officers have less power than the camp director.\textsuperscript{13} He is informally referred to as "the boss" and former inmates of camps refer to him having a decisive influence over camp life. Nevertheless, there are limits to his power as well. One limit is set by the dual role of the camps as penal institutions and production units since achieving the goals of the one frequently conflict with those of the other. The performance of each camp director is measured by his superiors not only in terms of successful inmate "correction", but also in terms of economic productivity. Yet the organizational imperatives of fulfilling the plan economically may contradict those of fulfilling the plan socially. To give just one example provided by a respondent: the most responsible positions in camp enterprises are supposed to be filled solely by free workers, yet inmates with special skills are sometimes given such work if nobody else is available. This gives the inmate personal leverage and control that can be misused, for example, by a prisoner engineer put in charge of a camp's energy supply or repairs of the security system.

Organizational theorists argue that the behavior of persons occupying organizational roles is principally determined by the requirements of organizational maintenance and enhancement.\textsuperscript{14} Applied to camp officials
this means that they are eager to have prisoners work well, be disciplined, and avoid unsettling incidents. This need theoretically gives some power to inmates. As argued by Abel, even inmates of concentration camps have leverage over guards because "any ruling personnel is ... dependent upon its subject population in one way or another and this dependence insures that control can never be complete."15 There are other limitations to what is intended to be fool-proof organization, for example limitations set by human nature such as the corruptibility, venality, or humaneness of personnel.16

Similar points are made in other writings on prisons. Sykes argues that the power of guards can be undermined not just by prisoner resistance but by bad implementation: "Yet the system of power may be defective for reasons other than the fact that those who are ruled do not feel the need to obey the orders and regulations descending on them from above. Systems of power may also fail because those who are supposed to rule are unwilling to do so. The unissued order, the deliberately ignored disobedience, the duty left unperformed — these are cracks in the monolith just as surely as are acts of defiance in the subject population. The "corruption" of the rulers may be far less dramatic than the insurrection of the ruled, for power unexercised is seldom as visible as power which is challenged, but the system of power still falters."17

Looking at organizational power in this perspective we have to ask how diligent, corruptible, or humane are Soviet camp officials? More research is needed since the available data provide a contradictory picture. In political camps officials tend to observe formal rules more strictly because they are under closer scrutiny. Yet information on protests gets out in part due to the corruptibility of some guards, and some rules are circumvented in order to avoid more "trouble." (More on the latter below)

Official Soviet sources about the job performance of camp officials are very scarce. The "supervision of places of deprivation of liberty" is the charge of a special department of the procuracy, and in a rare article the head of this department for the RSFSR wrote in 1975 that his office frequently uncovers illegal activities of penal officials. Examples mentioned include the infringement of prisoners' rights, such as putting them into solitary confinement without due cause, and other camp officials
being too soft and giving pay for work not really done.\textsuperscript{18} The reason for the latter behavior is not explained, but our interviews suggest that it is linked to an informally negotiated arrangement between guards and inmates, presumably to make inmates work at a reasonable rate.

Yet the interviews also suggest that there is considerable variance in officials' attitudes toward their work and how strictly they observe the rules. Ex-prisoners emphasize that much depends on the approach of the camp "boss." The major type of differences seen was summarized by one respondent who had been in three camps: "I had three bosses. One cared only for production, and didn't care much what we did after work. He was okay. The other was a former army man. He was only interested in order; he was terrible. We would finish work and had to march in columns all the time. The third was a drunkard and mostly cared about vodka."

If a camp director is of the latter type mayhem develops giving a chance for the more corrupt elements among the guards — and the better organized criminals among the prisoners — to become the unofficial rulers. This situation may be rare, but a few respondents had experienced it. Prisoners seem to prefer the boss who focuses on fulfilling production plans because camp rules often are bent to achieve this. There is great dislike for disciplinarians. One woman who had been in a "model" criminal camp where the rules were observed to the letter reported that the effect was highly oppressive. There are also instances of sadists, "this type of work brings out the worst in people."\textsuperscript{19}

Officials treat collaborative inmates better and also those to whom they feel closer, such as former military officers or party members. The latter are likely to be approached by camp officials who try to co-opt them by playing on "you are one of us" feelings. Personal sympathies or antipathies also play a role as well as whether one has some influential friends or relatives. Generally antagonism between camp officials and inmates appears to be strong.

Very little information is available on the conscript soldiers who guard the camps. They are draftees who — although part of the Soviet Armed Forces — are assigned to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). The letters VV (acronym for "Internal Troops" in Russian) appear on the shoulders of their uniforms. As noted by Scott and Scott "these troops
were first formed in January 1918 and attached to the Cheka under Dzerzhinskii. Their functions — now and then — are to protect internal installations, such as labor camps, and to perform convoy duties."20

Most former inmates say that they had no direct contact with the conscripts; "the young men just stand on their watchtowers." Conversations are forbidden and typically the only opportunity for them is given when guards escort prisoners outside of camp.

One perceptive respondent noted that the isolation of conscript guards from prisoners is strict because the guards could be easily corrupted in light of their low pay of 3 rubles a month. He and a few others mentioned that on the occasions when contact was established the soldiers could be bribed to carry letters to relatives and bring back money or something else.21

The effectiveness of the external guards is not only limited by the extent to which they are corruptible, but also by the extent to which they ignore their duties or show some human kindness. Information on this is, again, fragmented. The guards are told that they are dealing with criminals or "enemies of the people" and many apparently take that to be true.22 Their most important duty is to see that no prisoner escapes and in this they appear to be quite successful. The guards are supposed to shoot when somebody breaks ranks during a transfer or touches the fence while in camp and there are reports of them having done so even when it is a clear case of a prisoner attempting suicide. However there are contradictory reports too, for example from a women's camp where "a woman in desperation threw herself at the fence, but the guards shot in the air."23

A few respondents mentioned that many of the conscript guards are non-Europeans. Other studies have noted that draftees from Central Asia and other minority areas are often assigned to serve as MVD troops. Many former Soviet citizens believe that this is part of a policy of exploiting ethnic animosities for the regime's purposes since such guards are seen as especially tough and cruel to Russians.24 Yet for many guards the prison camp experience must be traumatic; this at least is the picture provided in one of the few sources about camp guards, the literary account by Dovlatov who as a nineteen-year old draftee was assigned to be a guard. His book The Zone paints a haunting image of
the brutalizing effect on himself and others serving with him. "I just got my doors mixed up, and instead of ending up in the prisoner's barracks, I landed in the army ones. What I saw there shocked me completely."... "We lost our human aspect — being hungry, humiliated, tortured by fear. My physical constitution became weak. But my consciousness remained undisturbed. This was evidently a defense mechanism. Otherwise I would have died of fright. When a camp thief was strangled before my eyes outside of Ropcha, my consciousness did not fail to record every detail."25 Dovlatov disagrees with what he sees as a tendency to depict inmates as suffering tragic figures and the guards as monsters: "I detected a striking similarity between the camp and the outside, between the prisoners and the guards."26

A similar point about camp officials was expressed by a respondent: "Military officers were there for their whole life in that hell. The devils in hell — it's hot for them too."

Prisoners work together with some free workers but the official "measures of ensuring isolation of the prisoners" strictly limit the contact "in enterprises and production sites of corrective labor institutions." Civilians may be engaged as supervisors or as needed skilled workers, but their number may not exceed 15% of the number of working prisoners.27 The free workers must sign pledges that they will limit their contact with prisoners and our interviews suggest that many hardly speak to the zeks. They also appear to be less corruptible than the underpaid camp guards although some bring in tea, vodka, letters and other things. Most likely to do so are truckdrivers transporting goods in and out of camps.

2. Administration by co-opted inmates

Soviet labor camp officials go to great efforts to co-opt prisoners for various positions. Each work brigade of about ten prisoners is led by an inmate foreman who supervises the work and keeps timesheets. Some brigade leaders are selected because they have superior skills but others get the post because they are administration "pets" or cannot be used otherwise. There are reports that this sometimes happens with zakoninki, professional thieves who cannot work according to their thieves "law." Supervising others apparently doesn't count as work and duties presumably are neglec-
ted. In this instance camp officials compromised production goals for the sake of accommodating a group of convicts organized according to their own rules.

At a higher level there are inmate assistants of detachment leaders who assign work and write reports for the entire detachment. This position gives considerable power over the other inmates and facilitates the officers' task. It is characteristic of the organizational approach in the Soviet labor camps to co-opt inmates for various purposes. The organization of work is just one of these purposes and the most straightforward. There is also an intricate system of secret informers as well as formal prisoner "self-administration" (samoupravleniia). (For a graph illustrating the various organizational sections of the camps see Appendix 2)

The post-Stalinist camp system differs in several ways from that of the Stalinist era, one of these differences being the emphasis on formal inmate co-optation. A complementary major difference is that in the Stalin period camp authorities more deliberately -- but informally -- took advantage of the oppressive power of the professional criminals in the camps who terrorized the politicals. In the contemporary camp system this approach is only visible in the use of "pressure cells". (see below)

Self-administration bodies

The re-educational aspect of camps has been officially emphasized in the post-Stalinist era and this has led to some innovations in camp practice. Among these were 'prisoners' councils' a short-lived institution of the early Soviet years revived in 1954 and further reorganized in 1958. According to the Corrective Labor Code of the RSFSR, "in the aim of developing habits of collectivism in convicted persons serving in places of imprisonment and of encouraging their positive initiative, and also of making use of the influence of the collective for correcting and reeducating convicted persons, voluntary organizations of convicted persons shall be created in corrective labor institutions, working under the leadership of the administration of these institutions" (Article 45).

Official Soviet commentators as well as our respondents, leave no doubt that it is the purpose of the councils to assist the administration and that it has full control over them. To cite the Code: "Councils of
collectives of colonies and detachments shall be created from the number of persons who recommend themselves by their exemplary behavior and conscientious attitude to work and study. Councils of collectives shall be elected at general meetings of convicted persons or at meetings of their representatives, and shall be confirmed by the director of the colony. Furthermore, "decisions taken by councils of collectives shall be confirmed by the director of the colony or the head of the detachment respectively," and "voluntary organizations shall regularly undertake measures aimed at helping the administration of the corrective labor institutions in their work."

Ex-prisoners use a more direct language: "In the Soviet Union all elected positions are 'elected' by the officials, only collaborators took part." Several respondents said that there had been no elections and rejected the notion of even formal "self-administration." Even they, however, referred to inmate officials as the "helpers" of the administration. Overall, respondents who had been in various camps in various periods strongly concur on these questions.

One respondent had been the chairman of the sovet kollektiva kolonii in his camp. He said that he hadn't wanted the post, but was forced to take it because he was a former military officer and party member. As the head of all inmates, he commanded them, formed the work brigades, and assisted the camp director in matters involving internal order, culture, and plan fulfillment.

Officially, the prisoner council has seven to fifteen members as well as subsections for a) internal order, b) work and vocational training, c) cultural work, d) general education, e) physical culture, f) sanitation, g) food and commissary service. Its most visible segment is the camp militia and it is all that many ex-prisoners tend to mention when asked about inmate self-administration. The prefix "self" is understood less to denote individual initiative or autonomy than self-limitation; thus one respondent even used the term "self-guards" (samokhrana). Inmates co-opted into the "Internal Order Section" (sektsiia vnutrennego poriadka) wear red armbands with the letters SVP printed on them and are also called krasnopoviszochniki. They are a camp militia assisting the administration to keep the rules and impose order; it is connected to the camp KGB section.
and members report on fellow inmates. Resisting the SVP is punishable the same way as resisting a warder, yet its members are ostracized and even attacked by other prisoners if opportunities present themselves (such as during riots in criminal camps, see below). Former political prisoners denounce the SVP-men especially harshly for participating in the oppression of fellow inmates and liken them to the kapos in Hitler’s concentration camps.33

It is difficult to say how many prisoners join the aktiv but one former inmate of a political camp estimated that there were 200 in his camp with 3000 inmates. This number seems to be on the low side since others have indicated that there are more "activists" in criminal camps because politicals refuse to collaborate more often.34 The council is an effective instrument of the authorities because decisions have the appearance of the will of the prisoners’ collective. It facilitates co-opting other inmates and has power over them through means such as participation in parole decisions and the distribution of privileges. The trustees also establish unwritten laws in the camps, such as the practice of giving the inmate mailman delivering a parcel a share of its contents (interview).

Prisoners allow themselves to be co-opted for various reasons. Cooperation gives some direct benefits such as a man in the health section getting into the bathhouse without waiting in line. Formal rewards are dispensed by the administration and may entail an additional visit, a few more rubles for the camp store, or the chance for an early release. If one hopes for a commuted sentence it is crucial to be recognized as being 'on the path of correction' and social participation is taken as one indication of this. In a typical case a former Lithuanian partisan was refused a reduction of his 25 year sentence because he had not been "active": being unwilling to join the SVP this man joined the sanitary section, and succeeded in getting his sentence reduced.35 Situational factors also matter; thus one respondent joined the red armbands for two weeks after he had been in an especially brutal fight with criminals.

Several respondents emphasized psychological and background factors by saying that officials selected as their helpers those inmates most similar to themselves "they were those who were in for bribe-taking and other 'state crimes.'" Another respondent summarized: "they are those who
wanted to get out sooner, dirty scum who act against others for their own profit. They are toadies. They aren’t good people, but act nice, make connections and betray people.”

The official purpose is to use inmates to check disorder in camp and to reform criminals through social responsibility. This may be effective with some individuals but I agree with Amalrik that “in general the effect of ‘activism’ was destructive. Nothing cripples people morally quite so much as the realization that their own well-being can be gained only through the misfortunes of others, that the shortest route to freedom is one that prolongs the term of a fellow inmate.”

The co-optation of some inmates to control the others is typical of many total institutions and they use material as well as psychological rewards. The co-opted inmate is the prototype of the oppressed identifying with the enemy. Next to the well-known example of the kapos in Hitler’s concentration camps there are others such as the black drivers in the American slave community.

Self-policing through informers
One of the more reprehensible duties of the social “activists” is to inform on their fellow inmates. But not all prisoner self-policing through informers is open; there is also a network of secret informers. The informer system induces compliance and is a major element in the system of control within Soviet labor camps. It informs officials about what is going on among the prisoners; it makes the prisoners careful in what they say and do; and it increases mistrust among inmates and thus undermines group solidarity and self-organization. Many respondents volunteered the comment that in regard to the informer system the camps mirror Soviet society.

There is consensus that officials try to co-opt as many informers as possible and that they are quite successful in doing so. This work is organized by the KGB section, the operativnyi otdeI, and several respondents themselves had been approached to become a stukach. The camp oper receives reports continuously about what inmates are doing or saying. Some informers are blatant and make no secret of their meetings with the oper; others are suspected to be informers because they receive privileges.
Estimates are that only about half of the informers are recognized. As argued by one respondent "the prisoners knew about less than half of them or the method wouldn't have worked." However, if there are fewer informers they hide it more to be more effective and lower the risk of being beaten up or even killed.

If possible, inmates avoid informers. Known informers are sometimes attacked and beaten; killings appear to be relatively rare in the post-Stalinist period (although one respondent had been in a camp for criminals where an informer was raped and beheaded). The administration transfers informers to protect them and since "professional" informers too tend to move from one camp to another new transfers are often suspect.

Most ex-prisoners argue that the informer system is effective but more so in camps for criminals (especially so women's camps) than politicals. There are also reported to be fewer or no informers among religious prisoners. Evaluations of the effect of the informer system differ by the pervasiveness of informer presence. The usual estimate is that approximately one third or fourth of the inmates inform on others, but some respondents gave lower estimates and others cited numbers as high as fifty or seventy percent. In these instances respondents also said that the informer system was totally effective and inmates had to watch their every word and deed so as not to get into trouble. They are also liable to make strong statements such as "without this system the camps wouldn't work."

Many ex-prisoners --especially those who have been in camps for criminals, and women more than men -- said that the administration "knows everything," others merely said that it was well-informed and that one had to be circumspect in what one said or did: "You couldn't act anti-Soviet in any way in camp." Others thought that it was possible to have secrets. The KGB sometimes uses provocateurs to try to find out things prisoners want to hide. Yet success of co-optation is limited by countervailing activities and stigmatization by other prisoners. Informing clearly is negatively correlated with inmate solidarity and autonomous self-organization.

Interviews reveal that the question of informing is significant to the prisoner and sensitive to the ex-prisoner, especially if he or she was in a camp for criminals where it is more prevalent. Several former inmates
became agitated in denouncing the informer system, examples being: "Most people sell each other out, inform on each other"; and "that is what they (officials) mean by 'socialist re-education,' you have to inform on your neighbor before he informs on you. A people who views Pavlik Morozov as a hero can't be normal." One respondent was surprisingly emotional in denying that informers existed — possibly because he himself had become one (he was released early).

From the point of view of inmates, informing is always viewed as being based on a wish for rewards. Our data show that some informers are coerced by the administration, either psychologically or if they are in some trouble, but most indeed do it because it is "easy work" and they are rewarded by the administration. The ultimate reward hoped for is early release, but usually informers do it just to get more food. When one suffers from hunger constantly, food is a most effective incentive. In one pathetic case a young man in a political camp admitted to his fellow inmates that he had agreed to inform because the KGB official gave him chocolate. He was ashamed for being manipulated like a small child, but had been unable to resist.

MECHANISMS OF CONTROL

1. Rewards and punishments
As argued by Erving Goffman, "punishments and privileges are themselves modes of organization peculiar to total institutions." Soviet camp officials fit this model in that they use various rewards and sanctions to influence the behavior of inmates, and they do so intensively. The calculated manipulation of an intricate incentive structure is one of the most significant features of the post-Stalinist labor camp system.

Prisoners are rewarded or penalized on the basis of conduct as well as productivity. Most "rewards" are not true rewards but rather visits and similar rights that prisoners are officially entitled to but only receive if they fulfill three conditions: 1) participate in social activity, 2) fulfill work norm, and 3) have no disciplinary infractions. In practice this means that officials decide who is a deserving prisoner and who isn't, yet psychological pressure is exerted on the prisoner that his own "misbehavior" is the source of his suffering. The image the guards try to
project is that of benign paternalism — if the prisoner will be "good" he will be "rewarded."

The basic incentive structure is similar in all camps although its gradation differs depending on the severity of the camp regime; for example visits with relatives are an inducement everywhere but fewer visits are allowed in camps with a more severe regimen. Incentives are also differently applied according to the officials' assessment of a prisoner. The need for a differentiated and psychologically sophisticated approach to prisoners has been stressed by Soviet specialists since the 1960s. An individualized psychological approach is evident in political camps, less so in general camps.

As a rule, the power of positive inducements is emphasized although negative incentives and physical coercion continue to be used as well. The logic behind this approach can be shown in theoretical arguments or in the words of a perceptive former political prisoner: "Should the carrot or the stick be applied? I feel that the carrot is more effective; people more quickly yield to a positive inducement. The stick tends to be ineffective, especially among the real activists, for whom they even tended to be counterproductive. On others too there tends to be little effect in the short run, although there may be a long-term effect. It is difficult to fight forever, one's conscience is clean, but one starts to feel tired, think about one's life, family, profession, money, and this tends to prevent one from confrontations."

In the post-Stalinist camps officials rely mostly on the manipulation of rewards to ensure compliance. Punishments are used as a last resort. This approach is similar to the one taken against nonconformism in society at large. It appears to be due to the recognition that the effect of repression can be twofold: while it can be an effective deterrent, it can also be counterproductive and lead to increased opposition.

Western analysts of the mechanisms of control in prisons also have noted the role of rewards: "the prisoner must be led to share in the process of social control. Systems of incentives are the devices by which the custodian seeks to elicit voluntary conformity. Modern prisons are characterized by two systems of formal incentives: those that provide for early release, such as parole and time off for good conduct; and those that
make life within walls somewhat more bearable, such as gradation in custody and privilege.43

Outsiders cannot easily appreciate the terrible significance that the granting or withholding of a few minor privileges has for inmates of total institutions,44 yet one has to gain a sense of it in order to understand its inherent power. Interviews with former inmates of Soviet labor camps provide such a sense, and so does the reading of samizdat documents which often are nothing but desperate appeals by mothers and wives of prisoners.

The means of reward and punishment are simple, even primitive, and go to the core of the prisoner’s physical and emotional existence. Prisoners are fed very poorly and due to their perpetual hunger can easily be tempted by the promise of added rations, parcels, or food purchases from the commissary. Thus the giving or withholding of food is a major tool of power and the denial of an expected parcel or food purchase is an effective punishment. The range of punishment through hunger goes further in that the minimal camp rations are reduced when prisoners are put into punishment cells. To cite a respondent: "officially they can’t physically abuse prisoners, but it happened a lot. The most effective punishment was to cut the food rations in half and to put the prisoner in isolation with food only every second day."

The increased or decreased chance of a visit by family members also is a highly sensitive matter and therefore this "privilege" is widely and effectively manipulated by officials. It is especially effective because the denial of a visit is also a psychological trauma for the prisoner’s family and thus pressures the prisoner in two ways.45

Former inmates of political camps report that the officials applied different methods depending on their assessment of the psychological character of a zek. Examples are the KGB giving some special favors such as cigarettes, chocolates, or an easel and paints in the case of an artist. When the latter didn’t respond as expected, everything was taken away and her paintings burned. The KGB also tries to adjust its methods by nationality. One technique used with Balts and Ukrainians — most of whom are imprisoned for the defense of national and cultural rights — has been to take them to their home republics and expose them to cultural and personal temptations. These have included being allowed to see museums,
the opera, the seaside, restaurants, visit with their families, or, as in
the case of one Latvian dissident, the grave of his father. Even though
the psychological pressure on these "tourists from prison" is tremendous,
they typically have refused to knuckle under. 46

A Soviet official calls early parole the main stimulus in the resocial-
ization of prisoners 47 and this is confirmed by the interviews. The hope
for early release is a vital part of inmate psychology, although some
sentences do not allow the possibility of early release. In one such case
a respondent reported that the law was changed and she changed her
attitude and collaborated as an otriad organizer. Respondents differ in
their estimate of how often parole is granted. For politicals it appears
rare, but less so for criminals. One respondent suggested that early
release was also linked to the overcrowding of camps.

While early release is an effective incentive, an extension of the
sentence can be highly demoralizing. This form of punishment has always
existed when prisoners committed — or were alleged to have committed — a
new crime while in camp, but in the early 1980s a new article about
"malicious disobedience to the requirement of the administration of a
corrective labor institution" was added to the criminal code and subse-
quently used against recalcitrant political prisoners. 48

Stricter forms of punishment include 15-day solitary confinement in
punishment cells (shtrafnoi izolyator, called shizo or kartser for short)
or confinement for up to six months in punishment barracks (barak
usilennoogo rezhima or B.U.R in Russian). The latter is a particular form
of kartser, where prisoners are kept in cells but normally let out each day
to do manual work; because they work they also get a bit more to eat. 49

Conditions in the kartser are very harsh; hunger, cold, and sleepless-
ness are used as means of torture. One could cite many accounts, but two
should suffice. In 1982 the psychiatrist A. Koriagin reported to the UN
Human Rights Commission: "The food ration could not sustain a healthy human
organism... The cold made it impossible to sleep... nights were a
nightmare. There is a feeling of constant cold — our feet would freeze,
our heads were sheared, every part of the body suffered from cold. Cold
blew in from the window, the door was steel, the walls were cement, the
cold came through the cracks." 50 And a woman respondent who was imprisoned
among criminals and suffered a lot due to her "uncooperativeness" described it this way: "You are isolated in a concrete cell with no bunk or bedding. The temperature is specially controlled and is below freezing. You start shaking from cold as soon as you get into the cell. You have to sleep on the damp cement, get only water and soup every second day. You come out broken and ill for a very long time."

The severity of treatment in the punishment cells has been a prime topic of prisoner appeals and samizdat protests. Some of the conditions cited by respondents and in samizdat — such as the withholding of bedding — are confirmed by the newly available Rules of Internal Order which states that "persons confined in punishment cells are not given outer warm clothing. They are not provided with bedding. They are not led out for a walk."51

Sensitivity to deprivations is individual; for some the deprivation of sleep may be a more terrible torture than hunger, or there may be something even worse. One respondent noted that the kartser is toughest on smokers and the first law of solidarity was to try to get cigarettes to such people.

Punishment cells clearly involve intense physical abuse of prisoners but it is an indirect form of physical coercion. Direct physical coercion through beatings and other violence is relatively rare, especially in the political camps where it would trigger intense protests. But there are exceptions. Amnesty International and other sources52 have reported that prisoners of conscience have been subjected to beatings by guards and have suffered other ill-treatment. One notorious indirect application of physical force is by "pressure cells." In prison slang this refers to being deliberately put into a cell with violent criminals who have been given carte blanche for beatings and homosexual rape in order to break the prisoner's resistance to officials.53

Although physical coercion is important, the managers of many "total" relationships have recognized its limited effect. As one respondent noted: "it is important to recognize that there are no incessant tortures in the style described in cheap horror stories, because every torturer knows that the victim should be given at least a ray of hope. It is easier to break resistance that way." This insight existed even among the slavemasters of
the American South. The lash was the primary guarantee of slave obedience, yet: "Reason and persuasion, slaveholders argued, had to be among the primary instruments of slave management. Many of the planters asserted that the frequent punishment of slaves was an indication of bad management. According to one slaveholder, 'The best evidence of the good management of slaves, is the keeping up of good discipline with little or no punishment'."54 There are several ways of doing so.

2. Regimentation is a means of social control emphasized in the comparative prison literature and appears to be highly applicable to the Soviet case. The exercise of coercive power based essentially on force is just one aspect of control in the authoritarian prison, the maintenance of strict discipline is another: "A vital basis of social control lay in procedures of regimentation — frequent counts and assemblies — which imposed a psychology of domination and placed the subject in a posture of silence, respect and awe. Recognition of distinctions in rank was imposed in all inmate-official contacts by the requirements of a salute and special forms of address."55 Besides the forced deference pattern in interactions with officials, power is exercised by the loss of personal identity through uniformity of clothing, haircuts, etc., and the loss of privacy. Furthermore, "in a total institution... minute segments of a person's line of activity may be subjected to regulations and judgments by staff; the inmate's life is penetrated by constant sanctioning interaction from above... Each specification robs the individual of an opportunity to balance his needs and objectives in a personally efficient way and opens up his line of actions to sanctions. The autonomy of the act itself is violated."56

Thus the purpose of rules is broader than to maintain order and prisoners recognize this. In the words of the Christian activist Ogorodni- kov: "Camp regulations...are the alpha and omega of the whole system of penal measures taken against prisoners. At the root of camp regime lies an immoral and insatiable desire for power per se. Camp regime embodies the ideologues' secret intent to create a finished design for the Soviet society of tomorrow. It decrees uniformity in clothing, appearance, behavior, and way of thinking as an interim measure until full control over
these areas can be achieved." Discipline consists of many petty forms of coercion; its sum and total scale forms a sophisticated — and relatively modern — formula for domination.

Strict rules mean that inmates are under constant pressure, but under the guise of order and administrative legality. Extensive regimentation is most difficult to bear and inmates understand its broader political purpose. One illustration is provided by the repeated protests over nametags staged by women political prisoners in Mordovia in 1982. When the prisoner Osipova debated the issue with the official in charge the latter stated that the purpose of nametags was less to identify prisoners than to punish them and eliminate their arrogance. The official is also reported to have said that in a survey asking "which of the camp regulations are most difficult to bear?" most inmates in criminal camps cited the wearing of nametags.

That Soviet policy-makers themselves recognize regimentation as a tool of control is evident in it being graded according to the strictness of camps. It is lowest in the "colonies-settlements" where prisoners may "move about without having to line up in marching order, not have to wear distinguishing breast and arm badges, not have to have their hair closely cropped, or have to wear special clothing."

While rules control every aspect of the highly routinized camp life prisoners at the same time are uncertain about their details. Most facets of corrective labor institutions are formally regulated by a single, federal instruction — the "Rules of Internal Order." This document has never been published in the USSR and for years samizdat and Western specialists worked on reconstructing its content; a full official text became available only in 1986. And even though according to Article 23 of the Corrective Labor Code of the RSFSR, "the internal order shall be announced to all convicted persons," most ex-prisoners say that they were only informed of restrictions, their duties, work norms, and the daily regimen (poriadok dnia) which is posted on the walls of barracks. A typical comment is that "we were only informed of the regulations we had to observe; we didn’t know about any of our rights or regulations regarding food and similar things." Yet it also seems that many prisoners pick up bits of information about official regulations through experience and from
Access to the official Corrective Labor Code is also limited. Former prisoners explain the limited access to official regulations as well as the prohibition against mentioning conditions in camps in letters this way: "They are afraid of all information and also because it is an unlawful system even according to their own laws." Other likely reasons are that the administrators want leeway in applying rules; this became especially important in the early 1970s when confronted by the "legalistic" approach developed by political dissidents.

This leads to a significant theoretical point: rules are a double-edged sword in that they are supposed to be binding to both officials and inmates. If officials don’t observe them they can get into trouble with their supervisors, and yet, from the guard’s point of view, bending the rules to the advantage or disadvantage of the prisoners sometimes is the only way they can keep control. We’ll return to this point below when discussing prisoner protests.

3. Political and social re-education of prisoners

Soviet officials assert that prisoners are successfully "corrected" only if hard work and discipline are accompanied by "political education work." To cite: "Work in itself doesn’t give positive re-educational results among convicts if it isn’t accompanied by political-reeducation work and social participation." Next to the already mentioned forms of prisoner activism this means attending political lectures, working on the camp newspaper or participating in amateur entertainment. "Individualism" heads the list of attitudes officially designated as anti-social and it is to be eliminated by group activities supposedly voluntarily organized by the inmates. Samodeiatel’nost (self-organized activity) is another magic word in the vocabulary of camp officials similar to "self-administration."

In practice the official "self-initiated" activities are planned by camp officials. It is mobilized participation reluctantly engaged in by inmates who see no way of avoiding it or want to accumulate points for good behavior. Prisoners eager not to go against their conscience choose more innocuous activities such as joining a camp drama circle or choir.

But it is not enough for inmates to go through the motions of communal
participation, they are supposed to change attitudinally. The theme of lectures, movies, camp newspapers, and performances is coordinated toward this single goal. Thus camp newspapers feature moralizing stories about model prisoners earning early parole by overfulfilling the plan, regretting past misdeeds and being zealous activists. Slogans are displayed everywhere in camp about a prisoner's guilt toward his motherland, about honest work, and about conscientiously meeting the demands of society.

The attitudinally "corrected" prisoner is expected to condemn his past actions, support the authorities and espouse the official views. This has an especially ominous meaning for people with unorthodox personalities or political and religious convictions since they are pressured to change their beliefs and openly denounce them. Some prisoners break down and do so, others just go through the motions, and a third group remain recalcitrant or become even more so. They pay for it with great hardship.

It is typical for total institutions "that a dual language exists, with the disciplinary facts of life given a translated ideal phrasing by the staff that mocks the normal use of language." Many respondents make ironic comments about this and depict the psychological pressure exerted by a yearlong exposure to words that sound well but mask a grim reality. It is an Orwellian world best captured in the work of talented writers such as Dovlatov and Marchenko or the classic work of Franz Kafka who in his In the Penal Colony describes how a torture mechanism with a needle excruciatingly writes the words "BE JUST" into a prisoner's back.

The ex-prisoners' sensitivity to the gap between official phrases and reality as they experienced it is also evident in negative reactions to questions couched in official Soviet terminology. This became evident when we asked them to characterize the administration's approach to the "re-education" of prisoners. For many, the term itself was a red flag and they would answer only when it was explained that the use of the term was not prejudicial but aimed at getting respondents to explain how they had experienced it.

In this instance responses differed depending on whether the reference is to a political or general camp, and whether the respondent felt that he or she was at least partly guilty of a wrongdoing. People who had been in camps for criminals tended to emphasize the formal approach to "re-
education," such as the ubiquity of slogans and posters, whereas inmates of political camps reported more direct challenge to the views of prisoners. But in both types of camps making prisoners admit their guilt is the focal point for rehabilitation, and this means that prisoners in general camps are also pressured psychologically if they insist on their innocence.

Political lectures are a large part of resocialization efforts. Typically, they are held once a week, are obligatory, and absentees are punished. Most prisoners attend so as not to be penalized but many religious and political prisoners risk that and refuse out of principle. The lecture usually consists of the company officer repeating phrases from newspapers. One may debate the effectiveness of this, and many ex-prisoners specifically deny it, but there are other opinions too. According to Andrei Amalrik who was in a camp for criminals in Kolyma: "As a rule, nobody listened to the droning of the lecturer, as the propagandists themselves realized. They said, however, if at each lecture only one-thousandth of what we say gets into your heads, you’ll still be getting something. The zeks laughed at the lectures, the working Sundays, and the slogans. But they came to regard them as indispensable, like icons in a church; of itself, the repetitiveness of the ritual made one feel that it was necessary."67

Sometimes prisoners get fed up with the charade and ask hard questions to embarrass the lecturers. Whoever asks such questions is liable to get punished, but since officials are also embarrassed by such confrontations — especially if the lecturer is from the outside — they sometimes ask "troublemakers" to stay away. This illustrates inmate power in a small way.

III. INMATE PROTESTS AND SELF-ORGANIZATION

Camp officials try to inhibit the self-organization of prisoners because they see it as a threat to the "healthy" collective,68 but subgroups of prisoners nevertheless organize their own subcultures and distribution of power. This is the subject of another part of my study and can only be touched upon in passing as I focus on the main issue of concern here, namely the significance of prisoner protest.

Resistance to authorities in the prison can be quite passive in the
form of avoidance of duties, but here the focus is on active resistance in the form of complaints and protests. The individual complaints and group protests within camps usually deal with questions of food, visits, mail, conditions of work, etc. While these issues may appear to be of minor importance, they are, in fact, of crucial significance in the inmate perspective, as noted above. Yet in this instance major differences exist between various types of camps and over time. Criminal prisoners are much less adept in using complaint writing to their advantage than political prisoners and are much less likely to try to counterbalance official power by organized protest. If they do protest then it is typically by spontaneous shouting matches, strikes, or riots. As a rule organized protests occur primarily in camps for political prisoners and even there their incidence has varied over time.

Complaint-Writing: The only legal form of protest is the individual complaint about camp conditions to supervisory organs of the labor camps. It is notable that the "Internal Rules of Order" explicitly forbid group complaints. According to paragraph 33, "a prisoner lodges complaints and makes statements only in his own name and only on questions affecting him personally. To lodge complaints and make statements as a group or for other prisoners...is prohibited."69

The rationale for this is presumably a limitation of prisoner solidarity and strength, but it also protects the camp administration from more effective criticism which could make action by supervisory organs more likely. The administrative supervision of penal institutions is the responsibility of the Soviet procuracy and this includes review of prisoner complaints.70

In regard to complaint-writing there is a major difference between non-criminal and criminal inmates. The latter usually assume that there is little chance of success and some do not know how to write or format complaints. Others are compliant or intimidated. There are reports that prisoners who wrote too many complaints were punished for uncooperativeness or that letters never got out of camp.71

Political prisoners too have faced obstacles in the transmission of formal complaints, but they have worked relentlessly and resourcefully to make them into effective constraints on the power of camp officials.
Similar to the tactics used by civil rights activists on the outside, political dissidents in the labor camps have taken the formally established procedures at face value and demanded that they be observed in the name of legality. This embroils the camp officials in bureaucratic dealings and at the same time gives a morale boost to the prisoner.

Many political prisoners have turned effective complaint writing into an art form. One example provided by Amalrik is that when he complained about the starvation diet in his camp he chose not to appeal to humanitarian sentiments but rather to accuse the kitchen personnel of systematically stealing socialist property and demand punishment of the guilty parties. He had a partial success. Denouncing one official to another has been successfully used by others as well; another tactic is to flood the bureaucracies with short complaints to each of which they have to respond according to established administrative procedures. This has brought their bureaucratic machine to near standstill and resulted in concessions.

This is not to say that complaints per se are very effective. Hundreds of the complaints by prisoners and their relatives reproduced in the Arkhiv Samizdata reflect a lack of official responsiveness. Successes occur mostly if the complaint-writing is based on a well-thought out strategy or is part of a larger protest.

Protest in ordinary camps. When asked about protests, many respondents argued that they were inconceivable or that there were minor incidents only. A typical reply was: "Nobody wants to create difficulties for themselves and it is not advisable to protest." And awareness that it is forbidden to even write group complaints is widespread. As noted, many inmates of general camps believe that officials are well informed about what goes on among prisoners and some specifically add that this is why no organized protests or "plots" are feasible. There is a clear correlation between the effectiveness of the informer network and protests.

Therefore, if protests occur, they occur in the form of spontaneous strikes and riots. Protests typically are triggered by a change of conditions to the worse or a blatant abuse of prisoners. Often the result is that both prisoners and officials are punished and transferred -- the prisoners because they have misbehaved, and the officials because protests
are taken as a sign of their mishandling things. It seems that for this reason administrators try to avoid protests; one respondent who was close to officials reported that the camp director was always afraid of a bunt.

The examples of protests given by respondents include both minor and major incidents. Minor incidents include cases where transferred prisoners feel that the conditions in the new camp are too harsh and start to shout or commence a sit-down strike and end up with additional sentences. Prisoners also tend to refuse to work or cooperate when confronted by a new and abhorrent condition. One example from a women's camp is "when there were worms in the kasha. You could see the little black heads in your bowl. Everyone sat in the dining room and beat their spoons on the table. No one would eat it or go back to work. They sent the doctor in and she ate a spoonful to show that it was okay, but none of us would eat it. We got no punishment, but we also got no meal."

One respondent who was in a general hard regime camp reported that strikes occurred, "usually because the administration had beaten or abused a prisoner. Such strikes simply resulted in the head of the camp being transferred." Another ex-prisoner reported a major riot in an ordinary regime camp in Karelia in 1972. The riot was triggered by the accidental killing of a zek by a shot from a guardtower. "Everyone rose up. Everything was burned. The thieves (blatnyie) were killing the SVP-niks" (Internal Order Section men). As a result all inmates were given harsher sentences and the camp officials were either fired or demoted. This outcome illustrates the counterproductivity of brutality by officials and also the lack of success of inmate protests if it is just an eruption of pent-up frustrations. Results are different in political camps where the approach to protest is different.

Political protest

While protest in general camps typically occurs when something changes for the worse or a flagrant abuse occurs, a much more deliberate struggle for the rights of prisoners characterizes political camps. Over time, this struggle has been quite successful and has changed the balance of power.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to outline the history of political protest within the labor camps but two examples will indicate the main thrust of change over time. There was an intensification of protest
both in frequency and form in the course of the 1970s. One illustration from the political camps for men is that in the late 1960s and early 1970s prisoners circumvented the rule against group complaints by several prisoners filing the same individual complaint, but beginning with the mid-1970s they have just gone ahead and have sent group protests officially and unofficially.

An even more dramatic change occurred in the political camp for women in Mordovia which had few organized protests in the 1960s, but became more active in the 1970s and emerged as a veritable center of protest in the 1980s. Starting with the early 1980s the women political prisoners in Mordovia staged repeated protests, engaged in hunger strikes, and wrote numerous complaints, some of which reached the West. Probably because the camp became too much of a political embarrassment it was dissolved in early 1987. What greater success could a prisoner hope for?

How were the protests and successes possible? A principle reason is that "under certain conditions, the ability to resist power bravely became the equivalent of an ability to manipulate power." This idea has been the basis of the activities of Soviet dissidents since the late 1960s and has been reflected in their behavior in the camps. In the words of Bukovsky: "We had grasped the great truth that it was not rifles, not tanks and not atom bombs that created power, nor upon them that power rested. Power is dependent upon public obedience, upon a willingness to submit." Officially "a refusal of the convict to work is considered one of the sharpest violations of the regime," and work refusals have been one of the more frequently and successfully used forms of active protest by political prisoners. They have been undertaken either as a broadbased protest or to make a specific point such as the observance of religious holidays or Political Prisoner's Day, or because a job was unacceptable, such as the mending of the barbed wire.

Work refusals tend to be highly effective because they not only disrupt the official "re-education" program but also undermine the fulfillment of production plans. As noted by respondents, camp officials try to avoid strikes and confrontations involving work as much as they can. One ex-prisoner who had been in Mordovia in the early 1970s noted: "the administration wasn't interested in having conflicts all the time, because
that hampered work in the factory and the plan wasn’t fulfilled. That was a
way we could take revenge, which the administration knew very well and
therefore avoided repression, especially against the older inmates from the
Baltic and the Western Ukraine who were tremendous workers, they had
learned to work when their countries were still free."

Another prevalent form of protest by political prisoners is the hunger
strike. There have been many such strikes over the years, for many
reasons, and with varied rates of participation. Some examples reported by
the samizdat _Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania_ include hunger
strikes to protest the confiscation of a Bible from an inmate, the beating
of a fellow inmate, or the marking of the unofficial Political Prisoner
Day, October 30.82 When hunger strikes occur officials typically argue
that prisoners are "only hurting themselves," yet they are an important
weapon. Inmates have reported that "up till now this method has at least
drawn the attention of supervisory departments to the state of affairs in
the camp. It is only during a hunger strike, or immediately after it, that
representatives of higher bodies visit the camp and request an explanation
of conditions in the camp"83 and typically some accommodation follows.84

The success of many of these strikes is due to a number of factors.
For one there is the power of inmate solidarity. Even though officially
inmates are prohibited to write complaints — and of course protest — for
others, it has happened more and more over time. Many protests trigger a
chain reaction; i.e. somebody protests and is punished for it and other
prisoners start protesting in support of their comrade.85

Another crucial aspect is solidarity and publicity outside of camp.
Most protests by political and religious prisoners become known to their
supporters in the human rights movement. As a result there have been since
the late 1960s numerous protests outside of camp, such as by the various
Helsinki groups in the USSR.86 And this has usually triggered publicity
and concern abroad, embarrassing the USSR internationally.87

Once a protest has gained publicity outside camp, official Soviet
administrative organs are certain to get involved, if they haven’t done so
before. The official commissions sent in to check things out frequently
are not only interested in solving the problem at hand but also use the
opportunity for bureaucratic infighting and getting rid of rivals. Even if
things don’t go that far, officials try to avoid protests or keep silent about them because they appear ineffective and this hurts their careers. This point has been well-formulated in the theoretical literature: "to a large extent the guard is dependent on inmates for the satisfactory performance of his duties; and like many individuals in positions of power, the guard is evaluated in terms of the conduct of the men he controls." The guard loses points in the eyes of his superiors if he constantly has to use force to achieve compliance, "he becomes burdensome to the top officials of the prison bureaucratic staff who realize only too well that their apparent dominance rests on some degree of co-operation."88

As a result officials in political camps have become more circumspect in their behavior. This success has been achieved at a high cost: hunger strikes are difficult to bear and some participants have died due to cumulative deprivation and the most active participants generally pay with kartser and transfer to Vladimir or Christopol prison where conditions are especially harsh.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The underlying theoretical perspective of this paper is that even in total institutions such as prisons the intended system of power does not always coincide with the actual way power is exercised. In order to assess how far this thesis holds true I have outlined the main elements in the official organization of power in Soviet labor camps and have at the same time tried to assess its strengths and weaknesses in practice.

The main strength of the official organization of power in the labor camps is that the direct exercise of power by the administration is supplemented by co-opted inmate "self-administration," self-policing, and mobilization. By these means inmates are divided, made to control each other, and are "corrected" and resocialized. While co-optation exists in prisons the world over, it plays an unusually significant role in the Soviet labor camps; samodeiatel’nost (self-organized activity) and samoupravlenia (self-administration) are magic words in the vocabulary of the officials. They go to great efforts to co-opt prisoners in their exercise of power and at the same time undermine true self-organization by inmates. The ‘voluntary’ activities instigated by officials may in fact
be the main power source of camp officialdom and as such has not been recognized in the past. Studies of the Soviet political system have commented upon the role of "mobilization," yet it plays a unique and fascinating role within camps. It represents more than mobilization for the regime, it also has a preemptive role as well as a strong element of self-policing.

Co-optation not only provides added manpower and control within the camps it is also a major tool of resocialization. The most active inmates come to identify with the administration and others are pushed in that direction by more innocuous mobilization for social and political activities such as working in a sanitary section or on the camp newspaper. The means of achieving all this is the manipulation of an intricate system of rewards effective mostly because prisoners are held at such a low level of physical and emotional subsistence that even minor increments are a significant incentive. And, if needed, there are also effective negative incentives and punishments. As noted by one respondent, rewards in the form of food are a carefully thought out pressure tool; one gets increasingly better provisions, the more one cooperates with the administration. The highest stage is that of being an informer: "The inmate thus has the choice to be destroyed either physically or mentally."

Discipline and regimentation are other tools of control little recognized in the past. The details of legally established rules are kept from the prisoners and at the same time guards present them as being absurdly strict so that inmates live in fear and there always is a way to punish recalcitrance. Punishment is possible, for example, for a button being unbuttoned, headgear not being removed when meeting an officer, being late for roll-call, and many similar details of daily routine. Since it is impossible to conform in every detail, this mechanism allows for arbitrary pressure on inmates under the guise of order and administrative legality. Regimentation can be more effective than physical repression in keeping subjects in line and it is worth pondering the argument of one respondent that the same approach is used in post-Stalinist society at large.

What then are the weaknesses of this elaborate system? The principle one is that prisoners are not mere puppets but human beings who develop their own activities. Inmates devise ways to counteract the power of offi-
cials. Political prisoners have been most dedicated and successful in this by, for example, limiting the pervasiveness of informers in their midst, and by developing successful protests. They have learned to generate inmate power by taking advantage of weaknesses in the formal system such as incompetence and infighting among officials, sensitivity to publicity, and legal provisions about the administrative supervision of camp officials. Conditions in political camps are better than in general camps due to the resourceful and assertive activity of inmates based on the belief in the power of each individual to counteract coercion by refusing to submit. Although less purposeful and organized, regular prisoners also undermine the official system by recalcitrance and attempts to corrupt the guards.

Although there is insufficient information at this point it appears that the camp personnel constitutes a weakness in the official organization of power. Guards tend to be corruptible and many seem to have a low morale. The latter means that the official intent is frequently circumvented by negligence, too much drink, and other modes of human fallibility. Guards make unofficial deals with the prisoners to avoid trouble and fulfill the formal organizational requirements of the camps to produce "order" as well as economic goods. Such de facto negotiated relationships are necessary in part to reconcile the dualistic goals of the camp system. The camps have both an economic and a socio-political purpose, and this constitutes a structural weakness. Sometimes what advances the one doesn't advance the other.
Notes


4 McCleery p. 378.


7 It is beyond the scope of this study to comment on other penal institutions such as prisons or special settlement colonies.

8 Respondents tend to say that officials are uneducated; the only "hard data" I have found is that in 1966 among the nachal'niki otriadov in the RSFSR 11% had higher education and 42% had secondary specialized education, nothing being said about the rest. I.V. Shmarov, and Kuznetsov, F.T. Effektivnost' deiatel'nosti ispravitel'no-trudovykh uchrezhdenii (Moscow: Turidicheskaia literatura, 1968) p.169.

9 Current Digest of the Soviet Press, XXXV, no. 34, p. 10; also interviews.


11 Interviews; see also Shmarov, p.168

12 Shmarov, 148; "ITT" is the abbreviation for the Russian "corrective labor colony"; the same source also mentions that the camp director ranks higher than the enterprise director.

13 The political camps may be an exception. Compare Vladimir Bukovsky, To Build a Castle— My Life as a Dissenter (New York: Viking Press, 1979) p.332.


16 Ibid. pp. 154-5


18 V. Bolysov, "Ispol'zovat' vse sredstva prokurorskogo nadzora." Sotsial-isticheskaia zakonnost' 1975, no.3 (March) pp. 29-31. He also notes that effectiveness of the supervision by local representatives of the procuracy is low in several regions. Similar problems are referred to in G. I. Brovin and V. T. Mikhailov, Prokurorskii nadzor za zakonnost'iu ispolneniiia prigovorov, (Moscow: Juridicheskaia literatura, 1977) pp.38-39.

19 Interview. From this point on in the text interviews are the source if no other source is cited.


21 Another respondent reported about a soldier who was sentenced to 3 years for having sold a grenade for 60 rubles — people wanted grenades to fish with.

22 An inmate who was in camp between 1944 and 1957 stated: "The guards avoided conversations. After Beria's arrest there were some cases where soldiers asked forgiveness of the zeks saying that they hadn't known that innocent people were thrown into camps."

23 Another respondent reported "Once there was an uprising of soldiers against the officers, the soldiers opened fired on the officers club. The officers hopped onto a bulldozer and killed the soldiers."

24 Enders Wimbush and Alex Alexiev, The Ethnic Factor in the Soviet Armed
Forces (Santa Monica, Ca., RAND Corporation, 1982, pp.18-19.


26 Ibid p.46.


31 Article 46, p.345. There is no word about the rights of prisoners.

32 Bagrii-Shakhmatov, p.130. According to another Soviet author not all forms of activities are fully implemented in every camp, Shmarov, p.165.


35 Amalrik p. 308.

36 Amalrik p.181.


39 Interviews. Some informers are also rewarded after their release, for example by a good job or apartment.


41 He also noted the need to include a personality analysis in each prisoner’s file, Shmarov, pp. 7 and 23.


44 Goffman, p. 50-51.


46 Interviews,also Bukovsky, 66-7. The "individualized approach" apparently means — at least in case of political prisoners— that there is some sensitivity to the nationality issue where it helps the administration. Thus some cultural delegations from non-Russian republics have shown up in camps and each prisoner is at least sometimes approached by a KGB agent of his own nationality. Simas Kudirka and Larry Eichel, For Those Still at Sea (New York: Dial Press, 1978) pp.152-3.

47 Shmarov, p.175.


49 See,for example, Reddaway,p. 456.

50 AS 4785

51 Rules,Art.75 p.65; also AS 2598


54 Blassingame, p.245.

55 McCleery p.382, also 383.

56 Goffman, p.38.

57 AS 5744.


63 Shmarov, p.121.

64 Such papers rarely reach the West, but one example Znamia Truda, January 13, 1984 is available to the author. On attitudinal correction see also Brovin and Mikhailov, p.43.

65 Goffman, p.45.


67 Amalrik, p. 183.

68 Shupiliev, p. 188.

69 Rules, Art.33,p.46.

70 Gordon B. Smith, The Soviet Procuracy and the Supervision of Administration. Alphen aan den Rijn, the Netherlands: Sijthoff and Noordhoff, 1978) p. 20. See also Brovin and Mikhailov, pp. 50-51 where they also mention violations of this rule.

71 Interviews. See also Literaturnaya gazeta April 15, p.11; in at least one case complaints were even included in a charge against an inmate given an additional sentence while in camp, AS 4937.

72 Amalrik, p.115.

73 Bukovsky pp.33-37 and 256-7. Bukovsky taught inmates of a general camp how to write complaints and engaged them in major successful campaigns.

74 See for example AS 4787; AS 2647; and AS 5912.

Bukovsky who spent time in a camp for criminals between 1967-70 says that riots were common in the 1960s whenever conditions became unendurable and informers and other collaborators were killed. pp.249,260.

Some released prisoners have been expelled to the West (Osipova and Ratushinskaya); others were first transferred to other prisons or exile and then too released, for example Lagle Parek and Lidija Doronina-Lasmame. On the protests see for example AS 4967, and Amnesty International, "USSR: Conditions for Women Prisoners of Conscience in the 'Small Zone,'" London, July 1985. Photocopy. On the situation in the early 1960s compare Helena Celmina, Women in Soviet Prisons (New York: Paragon, 1986).

McCleery, p. 385.

Bukovsky, p. 32.

Shupilov, p.209.

The Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania no.48,50. See also AS 2598 mentioning serious punishments, including strict prison regime.

Chronicle nos. 24,48,54,55.

"Interview with Prisoners from Perm Camp No. 35." Survey 21, no. 4 (Autumn, 1975), pp. 210-211.

Several demands of political prisoners were met after a hunger strike in February 1969, especially the concession that certain punishments would only be instituted with approval of the Procurator. Reddaway, pp.206-7. About a success of major protests in a Perm political camp in 1973 over intolerable medical provisions see Bukovsky pp. 333-4 who also reports on a month long hunger strike started by forty prisoners and later joined by nearly everyone in camp, Bukovsky, p.337.

For example AS 2168,AS 2598.

Most members of the groups ended up in camp themselves. For examples of appeals by Helsinki groups see AS 2598.

Both times there was good publicity abroad and even prison guards listened to Western radio broadcasts commenting on events in camp. Bukovsky, p.337 and Interview,Camp35.

Sykes, p. 56; also Blassingame, p. 280.
APPENDIX 1

Interview Sample and Methods

General Approach
Soviet publications contain only scattered and limited information about the "corrective labor colonies." Given this difficulty, the primary data used in this study are intensive interviews with 30 ex-prisoners who left the Soviet Union between 1978 and 1985.

Knowledge about Soviet labor camps has always been based largely on information obtained from former inmates. Quite a few ex-prisoners have written their personal accounts or have responded to questions by scholars and human rights agencies. Wherever possible, I have checked information from my interviews with published sources. The extent to which corresponding data are available set a limit on the scope and depth of the individual lines of inquiry that can be pursued.

Interview research provides more than pure information; it also makes the researcher more aware of the significance of factors that can then be followed up in general sources with a better appreciation for nuances of meaning. For example, interviews clarify the role of early release as a major incentive for prisoners and thus general information on early release can be put into context.

Interviewing Methodology
Oral interviews were conducted based on a structured questionnaire consisting of more than one hundred open-ended questions. Most questions aimed at eliciting factual information, a few asked for evaluations. This type of interviewing is an iterative process; the questionnaire was slightly revised each time a point was clarified or new questions arose. Respondents were encouraged to expand on aspects they saw as significant. Interviews usually took 4 hours. Nearly all of them were conducted in Russian and a few in English or Latvian due to respondent preference.

The interviews focused on people who were imprisoned in the post-Stalinist era, but a few respondents were in camps before Stalin's death, or both before and after. The rationale here was to get statements that are comparative or can be used for comparative purposes.

Methods of Analysis
The transcripts of the interviews were systematically evaluated by subject areas. The intent was to use the interviews and other sources to assemble a composite picture of the main characteristics of the camp system. This is deemed to have been successful if all sources agree but wherever ambiguities remain these are discussed. Certain differences in accounts are to be expected due to differences in camp regime and type, different periods of reference, and different personal experiences and evaluations.

The paper includes few accounts of individual experiences, and respondent characteristics are summarized in tables only. This approach is linked to the obligation to safeguard the respondents' anonymity. Whenever individual statements or experiences are nevertheless cited due to their evocative nature, all biographical details that could lead to respondent identification are omitted.

As all interviewers know, respondents at times contradict themselves, typically if commenting about a question in two different contexts. Thus
one respondent answered a direct question by saying that there had been no
protests in his camp but then mentioned a sit-down strike when discussing
work difficulties. In such instances I attempted to summarize the main
thrust of the respondent's experience, but this example illustrates why
one has to be careful not to rely on single statements.

Problems of Selectivity and Bias
The general criticisms of emigrant interviewing as a research approach are
well known. Briefly, it is claimed that emigrants are not representative
of individuals who remain in the USSR, often have unusual social character-
istics (the selectivity issue), and that most are alienated individuals who
have rejected Soviet society and cannot be expected to give an accurate
account of their lives there (the bias issue). There is some truth in both
these assessments, but in my view the advantages of emigrant interviewing
outweigh the disadvantages. If used carefully interviews provide important
insights not otherwise available.

Furthermore, it would be a mistake to assume that most emigrants are
bitter regime enemies. For many, the main reason for emigrating is not one
of politics, but rather is linked to economic well-being, ethnic or
religious concerns, and family. The statements of respondents often are
surprisingly evenhanded and some emigrants are regime supportive, either in
full or in part.

The sample is selective in that it does not include hardened criminals
but rather people who ended up in camp for either political reasons,
circumstance, or minor infringements of the law. There is also a demogra-
phic selectivity discussed below. Nevertheless there is no reason to
assume that the experiences of the respondents are grossly atypical. The
sample is sufficiently diverse to provide a sense of what are general
experiences and the analysis is conducted accordingly.

Sample
The camp returnee sample located through the Soviet Interview Project has
the advantage of allowing access to a variety of people who regard
themselves as having been normal Soviet citizens and who would not have
recorded their experiences on their own. This is a significant complement
to existing materials on camps largely compiled by dissident ex-prisoners
who felt a duty or commitment to write about the topic.

This research resulted from a specialized intensive interview project
within the framework of the "Soviet Interview Project" conducting research
with recent emigrants from the USSR. SIP built a list of emigrants who had
come to the USA between 1978 and 1985 with the cooperation of domestic
resettlement agencies. (For more details see James R. Millar, The Soviet
Interview Project: History, Method, and the Problem of Bias, SIP Working
Papers, #22). Those emigrants who indicated that they had been in labor
camps constitute the basic sample frame population for my interviews.

Of a total of 135 identified camp returnees, 56 were of prime interest
to this study because they had been prisoners in the late Stalinist or
post-Stalinist period. Interviews were successfully undertaken with 25 of
these individuals. The others could not be interviewed because current
addresses were unavailable; it proved impossible to arrange an interview
due to time and travel constraints, due to the ill health or death of the
respondent; or due to a refusal to be interviewed. Most of the refusals
(9) mentioned fear of the KGB as the primary reason. In these instances our assurances of the strictest confidentiality and of the scholarly nature of the project were to no avail. Participation in the research project was, of course, entirely voluntary. In order to secure more cases a "snowballing" technique was used to reach respondents outside the basic SIP sample frame population. This resulted in 5 more interviews.

As Tables 1 to 3 illustrate the people interviewed represent a variegated group. Unavoidably, however, there is a problem of demographic selectivity. Respondents are disproportionately Jewish, from cities, relatively highly educated, and most were in the camps no later than the 1970s. There are few female respondents (women make up less than 10% of the camp population).

Strict confidentiality measures were taken to safeguard the identity of the respondents. Whenever there is the slightest risk that an item of information may lead to the identification of a respondent, we opted for omitting it from the account. The following tables summarize basic respondent characteristics.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender:</th>
<th>male: 24</th>
<th>female: 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age when arrested:</td>
<td>16 to 25: 10</td>
<td>26 to 35: 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of education:</td>
<td>10 or less: 10</td>
<td>more than 10: 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality:</td>
<td>Russian 10; Jewish 15; Other: 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region of residence</td>
<td>Moscow/Leningrad: 16; other RSFSR: 1; Other: 13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Characteristics of Labor Camps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of regime:</th>
<th>ordinary: 13</th>
<th>strict: 7</th>
<th>hard: 9</th>
<th>special: 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of camp:</td>
<td>primarily for criminals: 23</td>
<td>primarily for politicals: 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region:</td>
<td>Moscow/Leningrad: 6</td>
<td>Other RSFSR: 20</td>
<td>Other: 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* If respondent refers to two periods, both are counted.
Table 3. Respondents by Sentences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Official Charge</th>
<th>Years of Sentence</th>
<th>Type of Camp Regime</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Stalinist period; Anti-state activity, (Article 58)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>intensified</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to flee country</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>special</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Post-Stalinist period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Soviet agitation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>hard</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; and organization</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>hard</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Soviet propaganda</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>hard</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>hard</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violation of residency laws</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violation of hard currency laws</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>intensified</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>intensified</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smuggling</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misappropriation of socialist property</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>intensified</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stealing from state</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speculation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>intensified</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speculation (recidivist)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>hard</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speculation and bribe-giving</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>hard</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving a bribe</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military disobedience</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hooliganism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hard</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicular homicide</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>hard</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>intensified</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organizational Structure of Soviet Labor Camps*

Ministry of Internal Affairs

General officials
- camp director
- detachment leaders
- general internal guards

Specialized officials
- military guard officers
- KGB officer and assistants
- conscript soldiers
- censors
- officer in charge of the regime
- bookkeepers, medical staff, others
- teachers, instructors, others

A. Security/Control
B. Administration/"Re-education"
C. Work Supervision

"Council of the Collective"
- camp militia (SVP)
- secret "informers"
- sections for food and commissary, sanitation and hygiene, sports, camp newspaper, work and training

Co-opted inmates officials
- "nariadchiki"
- brigade leaders

*Draft: Do not duplicate, comments highly welcome.