
OTHER NATIONS

Moscow's Brand of Mercy

"Amnesty and Pardon in the Soviet Union" by Zigurds L. Zile, in *Soviet Union* (vol. 3, part 1, 1976), Publications Office, University Center for International Studies, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pa. 15260.

More than 180 general amnesties for criminals have been declared by the Soviet Union since the first was proclaimed at the Sixth All-Russian Congress of Soviets in 1918. Only nine have come since Stalin's death in 1953. How many people have been affected by these actions is not known, but it seems clear that amnesties play an important role in Soviet penal policy. Yet, observes Zile, a University of Wisconsin political scientist, no *precise* definition of amnesty appears anywhere in Soviet law.

Apart from Moscow's insistence that amnesty is merely "an expression of socialist humanism," Zile notes, the sketchy available facts will support almost any interpretation. Some amnesties seem to be public-relations moves. To celebrate International Women's Year, for example, the Kremlin freed large numbers of female convicts. But novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn claimed (in *Gulag Archipelago*) that, in at least one instance, amnesty served as a device to flush out potential dissidents: Cossacks responding to an amnesty offer were first given land, then arrested. Finally, Peter Maggs of the University of Illinois says that Soviet amnesties are simply granted "when prisoner detention facilities become overcrowded."

Ordinary criminals are the main beneficiaries. "Politicals" were excluded from both the amnesty of 1967, celebrating the October Revolution's 50th anniversary, and the two amnesties of 1975. "Soviet amnesty policy," Zile suggests, "distributes the rations of mercy in ways designed to condition human beings in the unquestioning acceptance of the established order."

A Bitter Pill

"The Great Pill Push" by Iain Guest, in *The New Internationalist* (Mar. 1977), 113 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201.

Faced with dwindling food supplies, endemic disease, and an "unacceptably high" birthrate, the government of Bangladesh embarked on a major population control effort shortly after the nation achieved independence from Pakistan in 1972.

With funds from the United States, the United Nations, and others, economic incentives have been devised to encourage family planning.