

OTHER NATIONS

*Social Security in the Soviet State*

"Tekuiushchie i perspektivnye problemy obshchestvennogo obespecheniia" [Current and long-range problems of social security] by V. A. Acharkan, in *Sovietskoe Gosudarstvo i Pravo* (no. 4, 1977), 121019, Moscow, G-19, ul. Frunze, d. 10.

The Soviet Union, like the United States, feels severe strains on its social security system. Pensioners total 45 million, more than double the 1960 figure; total benefits have risen 2,000 percent since 1950. Moreover, says Acharkan, director of research at Moscow's Institute of Labor, there is mounting evidence that Soviet retirement policies exacerbate the nation's labor shortage. (Russia's work force of 125 million is expected to grow at a rate of no more than 0.5 percent annually over the next decade.)

Under Soviet law, workers may retire as early as age 50. As Moscow tries to equalize retirement benefits (in the past 15 years, the minimum pension has increased by 50 percent, the maximum not at all), workers at the low end of the wage scale find early retirement more attractive. This is particularly true of farm laborers, who make up 25 percent of the total labor force. In the late 1950s, the proportion of rural workers who remained employed after the legal retirement age was twice that of urban workers; today, the reverse is true. One proposed solution to the labor crisis: encouraging more part-time work by aging pensioners and the disabled through economic incentives and, especially, improved working conditions.

Acharkan acknowledges that while Soviet social security funds are large, they are not limitless; with benefits ranging from 50 to 100 percent of wages, larger funds from general operating revenues must be devoted to sustaining the pension system. Worse, special benefits—for disability, dangerous working conditions, and length of service—are rising even faster than retirement pensions.

*Editor's Note.* In Acharkan's article, as in many Soviet commentaries, much hard data was missing. The figures on numbers of pensioners and work force expansion were supplied by the editors from current Western research.

*Spain's Democracy*

"Spain's New Democracy" by Stanley Meisler, in *Foreign Affairs* (Oct. 1977), 428 E. Preston St., Baltimore, Md. 21202.

Less than two years after Franco's death, King Juan Carlos and Premier Adolfo Suárez have legalized political parties and trade unions, allowed freedom of speech and assembly, and held Spain's first freely contested parliamentary elections since 1936.

Last June, 18 million Spaniards went to the polls to elect the bicameral *Cortes* (a Senate and a Congress of Deputies). The victory of Suárez and his center-right Union of the Democrat Center was widely expected; a more leftist outcome would probably have been unacceptable.