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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.

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to the military. But with a bare 35 percent of the vote, says *Los Angeles Times* correspondent Meisler, Suárez cannot claim to govern unilaterally. The Socialist Workers Party, led by young Felipe González, won nearly 30 percent of the vote and a role in what may become a competitive two-party system. Regional parties and extremist groups (including Francoists and communists) will have to watch from the wings.

But as Spain strives for representative government, the 300,000-man armed forces still openly exhibit Francoist tendencies. (The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces voiced its "general revulsion" over legalization of the Communist Party.) Fascist-trained civil servants, including the more than 100,000 *Policia*, are still in place. Politicians (and terrorists) in the country's two richest regions—Catalonia and the Basque provinces—continue to demand local autonomy. The economy is shaky. Annual inflation runs to 30 percent; almost a million Spaniards are out of work. These factors could slow or reverse the surprisingly robust democratic movement in Spain.

Meisler suggests one immediate reform: elimination of the army's traditional role in internal affairs by giving the military, instead, a "modern defense mission" under civilian control. This shift, he believes, would be encouraged by an invitation to Spain to join the NATO alliance.

Another View of Prague's Spring

"Czechoslovakia's Experiment in Humanizing Socialism: An Examination of Ideological and Tactical Implications" by Frank L. Kaplan, in *East European Quarterly* (Fall 1977), 1200 University Ave., Boulder, Colo. 80302.

Liberalization of Czech Communist Party rule under Alexander Dubcek in 1968—the so-called Prague Spring—brought an outpouring of public sentiment in support of the new regime. Opinion polls showed the Party gaining favor; newspapers, allowed to express themselves freely, called for revival of a multiparty system. This very success, writes Kaplan, professor of journalism at the University of Colorado, spelled disaster for Dubcek's experiment and precipitated invasion by Warsaw Pact forces in August 1968.

Initially, widespread economic failures under hard-line Premier Antonin Novotny gave impetus to the reform movement: In 1963, Czechoslovakia was the only industrialized nation to suffer declines in national output, national income, and real wages. That same year, Soviet-style Marxism came under attack at conferences of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers and the Union of Slovak Journalists. This wave of criticism culminated in rejection of Novotny's policies and adoption of Dubcek's "democratization" program in April 1968.

Despite Soviet accusations—and the urgings of some Czech journalists—the Dubcek regime had no intention of severing relations with Russia and its allies or of withdrawing from the 7-nation Warsaw Pact. To Moscow, the real issue, says Kaplan, was the revival of Czech