Correctional Services in the U.S.S.R.

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THE INTERNATIONAL SURVEY of Corrections which made my Soviet sojourn possible is a cross-cultural (to use a fashionable and not quite definable adjective) study of the great issues in the correctional field. Elsewhere I have described it as an enquiry into what the doers think and what the thinkers do in this parade ground of dilemmas which is the correctional field. If we define the issues for corrections in the west *and* for the east, we may possibly have some assurance that our generalisations will be enduring. After all, the basic elements of human existence we share in common on both sides of this inflamed world. Our question, then, was whether different methods of arranging these elements produced different results from which we might learn something to our advantage.

Now this is a good question. It is important to answer it, important enough to warrant the attention of a first-rate team of investigators for a considerable period of time. I spent three weeks in the Soviet Union, endowed with only a marginal knowledge of the language and the general knowledge of the country and its institutions which is possessed by any literate Westerner. Neither in time nor in language nor in specialised knowledge was I adequately equipped for the large-scale study which needs to be done. My limitations were apparent before I left and became more apparent as I found myself confronted with the intractable enigmas of Communist society. I saw my job as a reconnaissance, a hasty survey in which at least the appearances would be recorded. With this limited aim I was, I think, successful. But in what I have to tell you there are enormous gaps which someone should fill. Perhaps the most important finding I have to offer you is the indication that it can be done, given good-will and mutual confidence between the principal parties concerned.

I was in Moscow in September 1960, and I had gone with some apprehension. I was an enquirer into what, for Russians, is a very touchy subject, the persistence of crime in an evolving Utopia. The expulsion of Americans for various improprieties was so frequent that I could easily imagine myself in the headlines as the unintentional subject of an international incident. While I confess that I breathed

more easily when, the sojourn over, I touched down on Finnish soil, I must also add that I encountered neither hostility nor resistance in the pursuit of my mission. People whom I wanted to see made themselves available, sometimes at obvious inconvenience. Usually, there was an attempt to entertain me, culminating in toasts to Soviet-American amity—at least in the correctional field. The dire predictions of some of my friends that my luggage would be ransacked and my movements trailed did not materialise—unless the Russians are subtle beyond belief in their methods of surveillance. I left Russia with the strong impression that I had actually made some friends and that my return for further enquiries would not be unwelcome. Let it be clearly understood at this point that I am not volunteering for another mission to Moscow—though I sincerely believe that some colleague of ours should do so—and could with profit to all of us.

Enough of the background; let's proceed with the specifics. It seems to me that the best way of introducing you to the correctional scene in Moscow is to describe for you the foundations on which the Soviet correctional system rests. These are, first, the principles governing criminal responsibility, and, second, the principles governing the correction of responsible criminals. I must say a little about each because, to be understood, the account of what I saw must be linked to the foundations of the system.

A Western conference on criminology can hardly occur without incredibly intricate arguments on criminal responsibility. At least the Soviet solution to this problem has the simplicity of settled doctrine. I can dispose of it in a couple of surprisingly clear paragraphs. One morning in Moscow I visited the Institute of Forensic Psychiatry in the company of one, Gallina, a glum young woman from the Intourist Service. At the Institute I was faced with not one, but five of Moscow's most eminent psychiatrists, all eager to tell me, through my sulky little companion, about the subtleties of Soviet psychiatric achievements. Unhappily, neither the English, nor, I suspect, the Russian of my guide included such terms as "psychopath," "character disorder," "paranoid," or "hysterical," and conversation had a tendency to flag whilst one party or another cudgelled his or their brains to think of language for concepts which Gallina could handle.

But evidently the issue was simple. All persons who commit offences in the Soviet Union are responsible, with the exception of two categories. These are, first, the psychotic; and second, the brain damaged or epileptic. All other criminals must be held to full account and must suffer the full consequences required by the law. It is the forensic psychiatrist's task to determine whether the offender is responsible or not within the meaning of the two possible exclusions. He has no other task. He does not treat the responsible offender because there is no illness to treat. I was unwaveringly told that the Soviet psychiatrist holds that if

there is such a disease entity as psychopathy, it can only do harm for the psychiatrist to intervene. The psychopaths recover only if they are firmly given to understand that they are not sick. The interference of a doctor convinces the psychopath of his illness without offering a method of recovery.

I challenged this position as best a layman could. I presented such cases as the crime committed to obtain punishment for some unexpiated psychological guilt; the middle-aged shoplifter whose offences are occasioned by a need for attention from an indifferent world; the arsonist acting out deviated sexual drives. The response was invariably that all such persons are criminally responsible, and that there is no medical treatment which is in any way appropriate. For good measure I was told that some of my case analyses rested on Freudian theory. Soviet psychiatry completely rejects the theoretical position of Freud and his disciples. If Marx and Freud are thought by some to be the prophets of the new age, at least in the Soviet Union no other prophets are tolerated at the side of Marx. I gave up in my vain effort to unsettle the structure of Soviet forensic psychiatry. Pretty soon the chief psychiatrist's secretary came in with caviare sandwiches and tea from the Institute's samovar.

If the social restoration of the responsible offender is not the responsibility of the psychiatrist, in whose province does it fall? Continuing my enquiries, I discovered that a whole new science has been founded to provide for the rehabilitation of the convicted criminal. This is Corrective Labour Science, and at this point I must recapitulate a lecture delivered to me by Nikolai Alexeyevich Struchkov, a teacher of the new discipline at the Moscow Institute of Juridical Sciences.

Like a good many other Soviet phenomena, Corrective Labour Science rests on the work of one Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. In a little known document published in 1917, Lenin set forth the principles which Corrective Labour Science is expected to put into practical application. The little known document is entitled with characteristically elephantine precision: "Summary of the Essence of the Section concerning Punishments in the Judicial Point of the Party Programme of 1917." The Summary of the Essence may be reduced to five main points:

(1) The principle of conditional discharge should be exercised to the fullest possible extent.

(2) Court action against the criminal should, so far as possible, consist of social reprimand.

(3) Insofar as it can be safely permitted, punishment should be obligatory labour without deprivation of liberty.

(4) Penitentiaries must become places where the criminal is not merely isolated but, rather, where he is educated.

(5) Institutions must strengthen the educational aspects of their work with the support of the neighbouring community. This principle is interpreted to convey the importance of the

community's interest in and supervision of the institution.

In considering these points, it is worth while to reflect on the time that they were pronounced. Here was Lenin insisting on probation and after-care, on educational programmes, on the maintenance of the prisoner's self-respect, and on the integration of the prison community's life with the life of the community outside. He was insisting upon these reforms in 1917, when none of them had been more than suggested in the West. Some of these notions have not yet captured the attention of our correctional *avant-garde*. It is also fair to say that in the Soviet Union, despite the work of Corrective Labour Scientists, this aspect of Leninism has not been fully applied.

Well, these are the abstractions. Let us see how they are translated into systems. I shall limit myself to a discussion of institutions for the correction of adult offenders. These are of two general kinds. First there is the prison, now used for offenders awaiting trial and for the confinement of a very few extremely serious offenders. About ten per cent of all those confined at any one time are locked up in a prison. I was neither encouraged nor invited to visit such an institution and cannot report to you on the alleged rigours of the Lubianka. I had written to suggest an interest in visiting the famous Tagansky Prison. This proposal occasioned much innocent merriment amongst my colleagues. The place had been torn down. I could, if I liked, visit the site on which it had stood, there to see apartment houses rising, but it was not supposed that such an expedition would increase my understanding of Soviet Corrections. Second, there are the Corrective Labour Colonies, the fruit of the labours of the Corrective Labour Scientists. These come in three varieties; the strict, the general, and the mild. Most new colonists are placed in the general regime. If their conduct requires it, they may be transferred to colonies of the strict regime in which privileges are fewer and the work more arduous. I was told that there were no such colonies located at a convenient distance from Moscow. After successfully serving one-third of sentence on the general regime, a colonist may be transferred to the mild regime. Privileges are more abundant and include opportunities to live with one's family outside the purlieus of the colony whilst working in the colony shops. Fortunate prisoners with sentences of less than three years are placed directly in colonies of the mild regime. I was told that unfortunately I could not visit a colony of the mild regime because none were situated near Moscow for the obvious reason that it would not be appropriate to locate such an establishment near the capital of the Soviet Union. Obvious or not, my simple mind could not follow this apparent non-sequitur, and I was not much the wiser when told that the presence of such an institution in the vicinity of Moscow might vitiate the deterrent effect of punishment as defined in the Soviet penal code. I shall leave the explication of this proposition to

minds more accustomed to the convolutions of Russian thought than I have been able to become.

I was, however, after some hesitation, apparently to arrange clearances, allowed to visit Kryukovo, a colony of the general regime. Kryukovo is located about fifty kilometres from Moscow, and one bright morning I was whisked off in an immense Intourist limousine in the company of a young English-speaking lawyer and the Regional Supervisor of Corrective Labour colonies for the Moscow region, one Christov. On the way I asked Mr. Christov how many corrective labour colonies there were in the Moscow region. I was told that in 1960 there were four less colonies than there were in 1959. When I asked how many colonies there were in 1959, there was a moment's thought and then the reply, "malo, malo" . . ." (Very few). I was to find that all enquiries into the true statistical situation received the same elusive kind of response.

On down a muddy road, due for early surfacing, I was told, and presently we were at Kryukovo. The governor, Major Artamanov and his deputy were waiting at the gate for a ceremonial greeting, after which we were conducted to the Major's office in the brand new administration buildings, entirely constructed, it was explained, by inmate labour. The Institution itself was drably painted in dirty green, much of it in great need of the attentions of a painters' collective. Most of the buildings were rather like two storey nissen huts; the whole appearance was haphazard, not to say dilapidated. Along the walks were bright red placards on which were painted slogans and sayings by Lenin, Kalinin, Gorky, Krushchev, mostly extolling the virtues of study and the joys of socialist labour. Here and there were hoardings on which were displayed satirical cartoons deprecating sloth and slovenliness.

And so my day at Kryukovo began. In his chilly office, Major Artamanov submitted graciously to my interrogation about his programme and organisation. The basic facts about Kryukovo were quickly rehearsed. It is a Corrective Labour Colony of the general regime, housing a class of criminal described as "dangerous recidivists". Typical crimes were robbery, housebreaking, persistent hooliganism, and various crimes of violence. The Major could not give me a statistical breakdown of the population in respect to commitment offence, and in general shied away from questions which were too statistical. The average term in the colony was between three and five years; the range was from one to ten years.

As had been pointed out to me, the declining rate of delinquency in the U.S.S.R. had brought about the closing of four corrective labour colonies in the last year, in the Moscow region alone. This trend was having its effect on Kryukovo, too. Though the capacity of the place was 1,000, there were only about eight hundred inmates confined on the day of my visit. I essayed the witticism that the

Major and his staff were not achieving their work norms with so low a number of offenders to reform. The Major laughed genially and replied that he was one Soviet citizen who was trying to get out of work. Indeed, the happiest day of his life would be when Kryukovo could be closed entirely and he could return to his normal occupation as a machinist.

The staff of the institution, excluding teachers and factory foremen, was about seventy. This seems an austere inmate-staff ratio by any standards of comparison in the West. Major Artamanov was quite unfamiliar with our patterns of prison organisation and could not point to any features of the colony which would distinguish it so sharply from Western establishments serving the same purpose. But a discussion of the actual organisational forms readily made the reasons for the difference apparent.

Kryukovo is divided into four detachments, each of about two hundred inmates and each controlled by a commander, whose functions seemed to be like those of the English Assistant Governor, and a complement of between five and ten disciplinary officers. The detachments are further divided into workers' collectives, varying in size according to the number of inmates assigned to a particular shop. Members of collectives tend to work, eat, and sleep together, though of course some have special activities like school or committees which take them away from the collective.

But the special control features operating in this colony were peculiarly Soviet in form. The major relies especially on a *Section of Labour Correction*. This is an inmate committee taking active responsibility for the accomplishment of work assigned to the colony. Each collective is required to elect a member of the section on labour correction. It is the section's duty to keep the management of the colony informed of all situations which might be interfering with the productivity of the shops. This might be anything from an insanitary condition in the bath house to the obstructive behaviour of an un-co-operative comrade. While the section has no disciplinary powers, they can call an inmate before them for reprimand and may even go so far as to display cartoons in a wall newspaper ridiculing the conduct of a non-productive worker. The results, if the Major is to be believed, are remarkable. There are not more than two or three rule violations per week, and these are for such offences as spitting on the walks or smoking in prohibited places. It had been six months since there had been a fight amongst inmates, and that had ended in mutual apologies. The section on corrective labour may or may not be responsible for the good order and discipline of Kryukovo, but it must be allowed some of the credit for the control of an institution which would seem to be seriously understaffed to most of our disciplinary colleagues. Whether we could adapt this device to a Western institution is another matter; one can imagine the response of an American inmate

population to what would immediately seem an inmate elected committee of stool-pigeons.

Not only are inmates allowed an active role in the discipline of the institution, but also they are expected to play a part in classification. There is also an inmate elected Section of Professional and Vocational Education. This section is to keep management informed of the progress of training of inmates, of particular inmates whose training might be effectively changed, or inmates who are not responding to training as they should.

If these two sections seem to reflect radical differences between the prison cultures of the two sides of the iron curtain, I suppose their acceptability to Russian inmates may be attributed to special cultural differences which are developing in the whole Russian society. For the Russian worker belongs to a special primary group of considerable impact on his personal security and life-space. This is his workers' collective, which rewards good work and punishes bad work, which can discipline him for unbecoming conduct off the job, and which has a great deal of current importance in deciding when and where he shall live. One has an over-all impression of the Soviet culture as a nation of busybodies, a country in which it is a national duty to mind other people's business. I was not in the Soviet Union long enough to work out the details of this situation, but it seems quite clear that in the process of the state's withering away, the social control functions are to be taken over by workers' units. What happens to the cherished life-features of privacy and self-determination is another matter. Perhaps to the Russian these are not as essential values as they may be to us. After all, as one Russian artisan told me in another connection, what makes men different from each other is what makes them unhappy; one of the goals of communism is to make people more alike.

But let's return to Kryukovo. I asked the good Major about escapes. How many per year? The answer was forthright. We have never had an escape from Kryukovo. What, never? I enquired in the manner of the late Sir William Gilbert. No, never, replied the Major. He went on to enquire rhetorically—why should anyone want to escape from Kryukovo? Here a man has good food, good living quarters, good work at good pay, educational opportunities, good comrades, and regular visits from wife and family. Besides, there was a double barbed wire fence and an armed perimeter patrol with orders to shoot anyone attempting to approach the fence.

I was invited to tour the Institution, to go anywhere I liked and to see whatever interested me. Ordinarily I try to cut such tours as short as possible; after all one shoe repair shop is much like another; prison kitchens differ mostly as to smell, and inmate housing usually varies most significantly as to the quantity and nudity of the pin-ups permitted. But pretty clearly Kryukovo was another matter, an institution which really had some significant differences which had to be seen to be appreciated.

We began with the shops. These are poorly housed, rather dark, rather cold, and magnificently equipped with machinery which

was complicated, modern in design and highly productive, as I could see for myself from the crates of finished products. In each shop the inmates manning the machines were so busy that they scarcely looked up to look at the man from Mars who was being escorted around their work places. I asked if they always worked so hard, and was told that perhaps this was a day when they were working harder than usual because it was the last day of the month. They were trying to achieve or surpass work-norms assigned to them. I was shown the bulletin boards on which was diagrammed the achievement of the shop in respect to norms and the achievement of workers with regard to individual norms. Some, I noted, had surpassed their assigned norms by such figures as two hundred per cent.

Each man is paid in accordance with the standard paid for his trade outside the institution — I had almost said in free society — with deductions for room, board and services. They are free to do what they like with their earnings; they may send them home or not as they choose. Most inmates should leave Kryukovo with some savings, perhaps a good deal. Work is allocated by the various organisations of production; the corrective labour colony administration contracts with, for example, the trust which manufactures kitchen utensils for the manufacture of spoons, and a lot of them were being made at Kryukovo. Work is in two eight hour shifts, soon to be reduced to seven hours in accordance with the national lowering of the standard hours of work. There is absolutely no idleness at Kryukovo, and indeed the problem of late has been to get done all the work which has to be turned out.

Housing was odd. I was shown large dormitories containing as many as forty inmates. They slept in double bunkbeds, two units together with a locker between each four beds. All very neat and tidy, but why so close? Perhaps a little too close by Western standards? The Major was defensive; Soviet law prescribed that there should be a minimum of two cubic meters of air space per man in a dormitory and this certainly satisfied that requirement. Besides, the men only slept there; work, study, and recreation took place elsewhere.

The school building was austere and indifferently equipped. Most inmates attended, mostly with the objective of completing the ten-year school programme that is basic to Soviet education. Some had completed this requirement and had even gone to Moscow University to study engineering or other difficult subjects. The school was staffed by personnel from the local school district; I noted that the instructors on duty when I was there included several women.

We came next to the visiting building, where inmates could entertain their guests. This was a long pre-fabricated structure, perhaps sixty feet long by twenty wide. It was divided longitudinally. On one side was a table extending for most of the length of the building with chairs on either side so that the conventional prison visit could take place under conventional supervision. On the other side was a row of private rooms for the purpose of conjugal visits. The Major took me into one unoccupied room, a cubicle, really, containing

a bed, a chair and a dresser. There was a tea-pot and cups, and the Major explained that wives were expected to provide their own food when they visited. This was quite evident from the lingering cooking odours. We passed on, and as we were about to leave, the Major observed that one room was occupied. He knocked and opened, to reveal a disconcerted young man frantically getting into his clothes while his wife clutched the blankets around her and glared balefully at us. I could imagine the words with which the young lady expressed her discomfiture to her husband as soon as the door was closed. Whether this incident typified the sensitivity of the Major toward the feelings of his inmates I cannot say, but certainly it demonstrates one of the hazards—to the inmate—of conjugal visiting.

Finally we went on to the recreation building, a large gymnasium and theatre converted from a barracks type structure. The Major opened the door to the theatre section and paused indecisively, then invited me to follow with the whispered explanation that a comrades' court was in session. He had forgotten, perhaps in the excitement of having a visitor from America, that this was scheduled. I looked about and beheld about a hundred inmates, all looking fixedly at me with what we in American prisons refer to as the "dog-eye". I don't know what the British equivalent is, but I've seen it. On the stage were three members of the comrades' court, all looking very fierce and very much as though they didn't propose to allow their legs to be pulled. In front of them was one of the saddest looking specimens of humanity I have ever seen, a terrified young man whose knees were visibly shaking and whose teeth were chattering beyond control. The Major explained that this lad was about to be released, or was at least under consideration, and it was for the comrades' court to decide whether he was ready. This was done, ordinarily, in a public meeting of this kind with the applicants' comrades in attendance for his support and their edification. I felt that my intrusion in this critical scene was possibly even more inhumane than at the guest house, and left with silent wishes of good luck for the wretch who was undergoing this ordeal.

Release depends on the completion of training. No one leaves Kryukovo until he has finished an apprenticeship and taken an examination for journeyman status in his trade. If one already has a trade, so much the better; the chances of release in advance of the average of four years time served becomes reasonably good. But without a trade, the Soviet corrective labour scientist reasons, a criminal can scarcely experience the "joy of labour", to use a phrase which incessantly came through the interpreters to me. Other considerations matter, too, in particular the good opinion of staff and fellow inmates, but the completion of training is the *sine qua non*. Major Artamanov told me that formerly he had had the responsibility of determining release, but now, to his relief, this task had been transferred to the comrades' court.

After-care depends on the workers' collective which the releasee joins. Reports are sent to the colony by the secretariat of the collective and by the police so that if a revocation of the conditional

release is in order the luckless man can be sent for. But actually, the Major insisted, this happens in only two per cent of the cases. The more I challenged this improbable figure, the more certain he was that it was correct. Something of a point was made of the interest of the staff in the progress of individual releases. Since most of the inmates were released to Moscow or vicinity it was possible for the Major's staff to visit them after they left the institution and lend such friendly support as might be needed.

Another formidable support lay in the hands of the system. This was the requirement imposed by law on the local soviet of the district in which a man was to be released, that upon two weeks' notice the labour exchange had to find suitable employment for a releasee in his profession. I enquired about the consequences of a violation of this law and received a sort of incomprehension in reply, as though to say that administrative laws of this kind simply aren't violated in the Soviet Union.

What do we learn from what I saw? Without any way of evaluating what we saw and were told, nothing definite can be propounded. On several occasions I told various of my informants that I was perfectly prepared to believe all I was told if only I could see the kind of statistical analysis to which I am accustomed, the kind which Western social scientists take for granted. The best answer I received was to the effect that such statistics undoubtedly existed, but that the government in its wisdom did not see fit to publish them – therefore we must be satisfied with the government's assurances. Privately I doubt very strongly that anything like adequate statistics of crime and corrections are in existence, simply because a system of criminal statistics is an immensely difficult thing to administer and organise and the whole subject is not of major interest in the country.

I do think, however, that qualified students will be allowed to observe and discuss problems with these authorities. I think also that a picture which is internally consistent emerges from my observations. An institution is established which duplicates and parallels so far as possible the conditions, requirements, obligations and privileges of outside life for the inmate. It is assumed that the inmate is mentally responsible and not in need of treatment. It is further assumed that like all of us, he needs further education to assist in regaining self-respect and to make possible his restoration to a society which has rejected him. As few unnecessary burdens are imposed upon him as possible – over and above the immense burden of loss of liberty. Everything possible is done to mobilise inmate opinion and the inmate culture behind the administration. Everything possible is done to effect an orderly transition of the inmate from the colony to the community at large.

I submit that the system as conceived and described to me by the corrective labour scientists of Moscow is a rational one and appropriate for the present Russian culture. I only wish that we in the West were clever enough and concerned enough to develop a correctional system which would be equally appropriate for our cultures.