



LEONID BREZHNEV'S GULAG

Structure

The Soviet government's mechanisms of control, buttressed by its citizens' self-censorship, would not have exercised complete power over Soviet society had it not been enforced by the GULag (*Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei*, the "Main Camp Administration"). The GULag was an extensive system of punishment that originated in the earliest days of the Soviet Union to serve as a constant reminder of what could happen to people who deviated from the official party line. The GULag was made up of various components, beginning with prison and labor camps designed for political prisoners, followed by internal exile. Beyond these were the notorious psychiatric hospitals, hospitals in name only.

Political Labor Camps and Psychiatric Prisons

Depending on their sentence, political prisoners were either placed in labor camps alongside ordinary prisoners or were isolated in a special system of political labor camps, developed under Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev (1964–82) and Yuri Andropov, director of the KGB, who succeeded Brezhnev as premier (1982–84). The first of those political labor camps were opened in Mordovia, followed by others in the region of Perm; among those were several strict regime camps for men, as well as one for female prisoners. Political prisoners were also sent to prisons, such as those in Vladimir and Chistopol, as well as special psychiatric hospitals, where political prisoners were locked up for indefinite periods of time and subjected to cruel forms of torture. The separate penitentiary system was not to protect political prisoners from thieves and murderers but rather to isolate them and control them.

Trials

Political dissidents brought to trial were often charged and convicted of violating a specific article from the criminal code, such as Article 190, which was slander against the state and carried a penalty of up to three years of incarceration, or Article 70, anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, which could involve up to seven years of imprisonment plus five years of internal exile. The most serious charge, however, was treason, as defined in Article 64, which could ensue in capital punishment. In addition to the above, dissidents were also charged with "parasitism," usually stemming from the unemployment resulting from employers being prohibited from hiring such dissidents, as well as economic crimes, hooliganism, and other trumped-up charges. The trials, carried out behind closed doors, were a mockery; sentences were predetermined by party authorities and the KGB, with few chances for the accused to influence or appeal the sentence.