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## AT THE SUMMIT

# Labor camps thrive despite Soviet rhetoric, experts say

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The Soviet system of forced labor and imprisonment is flourishing despite the Soviets' recent efforts to obscure human rights violations, according to experts on the subject.

The Reagan administration continues to condemn the system, citing a critical 1983 interagency report, according to a government official who asked not to be identified. The report finds the forced-labor system to be a prime instance of Soviet failure to live up to obligations under international treaties and conventions.

"In maintaining its extensive forced labor system to serve both the political and economic purposes of the state, the government of the Soviet Union ... is contravening the U.N. Charter and failing to fulfill its solemn undertakings in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Anti-Slavery Convention of 1926," the report says.

The report says the Soviets are holding 4 million political prisoners and other criminals in the labor camps. In the Soviet Union, criticizing the state is a crime punishable by up to 10 years in a labor camp.

President Reagan is expected to bring up the subject of Soviet rights abuses in meetings today in Geneva.

"An essential element of the administration's concern is that the Soviets' use of forced labor for political and economic purposes violates fundamental human rights," said the official.

The Soviets have mounted a "counter-human rights campaign" to distract attention at the summit from Soviet rights abuses, according to Georgetown University Professor Roy Godson. The Soviets have accused the United States of violating the rights of Jews, blacks, American Indians and migrant farm laborers.

A new Soviet pamphlet says Jews in the Soviet Union are treated bet-

ter than any other nation, according to Herbert Romerstein, an expert on Soviet propaganda at the U.S. Information Agency. The pamphlet, which amplifies remarks made in France recently by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, also contends that Jews are mistreated in the United States, Mr. Romerstein said.

"They are obviously counter-attacking on the human rights issue" to support their "allegations of the mistreatment of the [American] Jews," Mr. Rommerstein said.

The administration estimates the Soviets run 1,100 forced labor camps, but other experts say the number of camps could be as high as 4,000.

Experts describe the Soviet forced-labor camp and prison system as a vast subculture within Soviet society. Its inhabitants include political prisoners — religious believers, Jews trying to emigrate, dissident scientists and artists — and other lawbreakers, such as petty criminals and murderers. They share a fate in what has become known as the Gulag Archipelago, a term coined by a famous Russian emigre, writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Avraham Shifrin, another leading chronicler of the Soviet prison camp system, says in his "Guidebook to Prisons and Concentration Camps" that the system consists of more than 2,000 labor camps in which most inmates work in freezing temperatures and live on starvation diets.

Besides the regular camps, Mr. Shifrin says there are several categories of special camps.

These include 119 camps for 10- to 18-year-old males and for women with children. Fifty-five camps are "psychiatric hospitals." In these, the Soviet secret police, the KGB, can place prisoners for up to three years without legal proceedings. Forty-one are "extermination camps," in which prisoners are forced to work at extremely hazardous jobs.

Mr. Shifrin, who says his father

died in a camp for the crime of telling an anti-Stalin joke, writes that the extermination camps come in three varieties. In some camps prisoners work in uranium mines and uranium enrichment plants with no protective gear. In others, prisoners work in nuclear weapons plants and

on nuclear submarine reactors. In others, they mine mica, polish glass or work with laquer enamels in unventilated areas.

Prisoners who work in the extermination camps "face a virtually certain death" after several months, wrote Mr. Shifrin, who spent 10 years in the camp system and now lives in Israel.

Experts say it is difficult for Americans to imagine the harshness of the Soviet prison-camp system when in the United States convicts share television sets and can maintain bank accounts.

"If such a thing [as the Gulag] existed here, corresponding to our population, there would be 2,000 camps into which people disappeared, about which no one spoke, and whose existence we denied constantly to the outside world," said Martin.

"Americans can't think like that until they wander into an Auschwitz and find the bodies."

Catholic theologian Malachi Martin, a Vatican expert and author who spent several years in the Rome studying the Soviet camp system in search of banished Soviet Catholics, said he doubts rights abuses in the camps will be the subject of a summit communique because the Soviet Union would never agree to "revise its system of death camps."

"The Soviets forbid talk about this as inimical," Mr. Martin said in an interview. "They will simply break the meeting up."

He said the Soviet gulags are not units of a penal system, but rather are 2,500 to 3,500 concentration camps set up to deal with popular dissent.

A few of the camps are simply remote villages with impassable

natural borders, he said. These camps are designed to "prolong life," Mr. Martin said.

"But the majority of camps are so harsh that, as one man said to me, 'The weak never survived,'" Mr. Martin said. "The hardship was meant to kill. It's a diabolical system."

Mr. Martin said the exile of Soviet nuclear physicist and human rights advocate Andrei Sakharov was "de facto prison" in the remote city of Gorky. Mr. Sakharov's plight is expected to be a topic of discussion at the summit.

Mr. Martin said President Reagan's election in 1980 and the advent of a Polish Pope in Rome led to a Soviet crackdown on dissent. Several Catholic "listening posts" behind the Iron Curtain disappeared during the last five years, he said.

Television producers David B. Aldrich and Lorraine Garnett have co-written a forthcoming documentary on the Soviet camp system called "Conspiracy of Silence: Human Rights in the U.S.S.R." Using figures

provided by the Senate Intelligence Committee and the U.S. Helsinki Human Rights Commission, they estimate that there are between 2,000 and 4,000 camps. Mr. Aldrich stressed in an interview that he considered the figures "conservative."

Victor Zolotarevski, a Russian emigre and filmmaker, said in an interview that a summit in November 1974 between former President Gerald Ford and late Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev took place near "at least 11" Soviet labor camps containing thousands of prisoners, in Vladivostok.

"The train in which Ford and Brezhnev held discussions, ate caviar and had a good time was running along the tracks [between] a string of labor camps," Mr. Zolotarevski said.

The Soviet Union, he said, used slave labor to build the new phased-array radar system at Krasnoyarsk, Siberia. The radar has been an obstacle to arms talks because it is regarded by the Reagan administration as a major violation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Mr. Shifrin reports that the remote region contains 68 camps, six prisons and two psychiatric prisons.

