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Foreign Intelligence Information Report

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REPORT CLASS. [REDACTED]

COUNTRY

USSR

DATE DISTR.

5 October 1983

SUBJECT

1. Use of Forced Labor in Mining, Railroad and Construction Enterprises
2. Location of Prison Camp and Exiled Ukrainian Nationalists Near Yamal Gas Field and Pipeline Area

DOI

1967-1979

REFERENCES [REDACTED]

SOURCE [REDACTED]

SUMMARY

A geophysical team sent to the Yamal gas field in 1967 observed a prison uranium mining work camp in the Polar Ural Mountains, a large operating prison in Labytnangi and a large population of exiled former Ukrainian nationalists in Salekhard. [REDACTED] states that it was a standard practice to send prisoners to work in uranium mines in lieu of execution, and that they usually died from leukemia within two years. During 1978 or 1979 summer workers on the BAM railroad line reported that thousands of prisoners were used for construction project work on the line. Prison labor was used at an industrial construction site in Uglich in 1971. There were numerous prison lumbering work camps in Gorkiyaskaya Oblast as of the 1970s. Some prison work colonies on the northern Dvina River have been relocated to remote areas further north.

5 TEXT: 1. In 1967 a geophysical team dispatched to the Tyumen gas field area from Moscow  
 4 to assist in laying out a route for the Yamal gas pipeline observed an operating prison  
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Approved for Release  
Date 15 MAR 1997

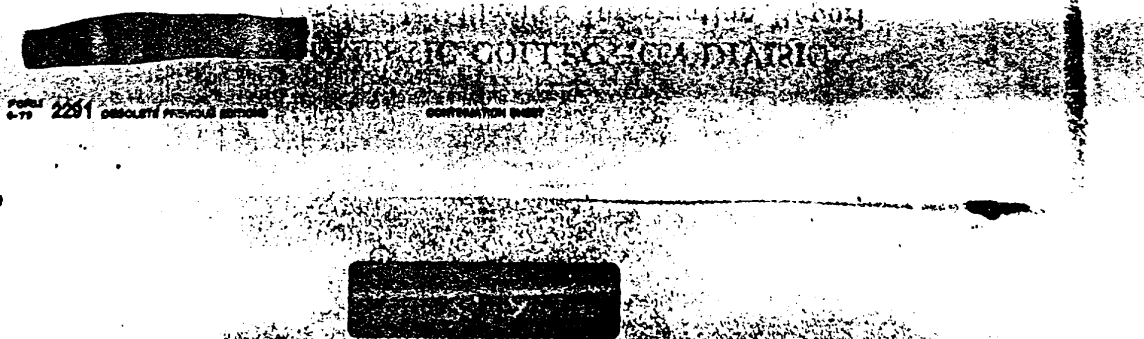
uranium mining work camp in the Polar Ural Mountains, a large operating prison in Labytnangi, and a large population of former Ukrainian nationalists (Bandaras) in Salekhard, near the mouth of the Ob River. The uranium mine was pointed out by the geophysicist who headed the permafrost sounding section of the team as the train they were riding passed by the site. The mine was adjacent to the railroad line and numerous prison workers were seen working with unmechanized equipment. The site was roughly 80 kilometers east of what the Soviets refer to as the Europe-Asia border and about 320 kilometers west of Labytnangi on the Moscow-Labytnangi railroad line. The team members who were told by the geophysicist that the men were prisoners assigned to forced labor at the camp assumed he knew this from earlier visits to the area. The geophysicist had spent considerable time in the Yamal gas field area and thus had travelled the route by train on numerous occasions.

2. The prison camp in Labytnangi was located on the western bank of the Ob River on the outskirts of the municipality. It was clearly visible from the train, and probably was not more than 200 meters away from the tracks. The prison consisted of a square compound about the size of an average city block in the United States that was enclosed by a wire fence and a second electrified fence and concertina. There were several guard post towers around the camp and there were machine gun emplacements in the towers. When the camp was viewed from a passing train in 1967 the towers were manned and the prison appeared to be in full operation. There was a patrol boat lying offshore in the river that was armed with a heavy machine gun and appeared to be guarding the riverside boundary of the camp compound.

3. As of 1967 a large Ukrainian nationalist population of Salekhard was indicated by the presence of many wooden houses with white walls. Entire streets were taken up by such housing and one of the geophysical team members counted at least 50-60 such houses in just one part of the town. (Comment: Any wooden house painted white and having the appearance of those seen in Salekhard was a clear indication that the residents were from the Ukraine. Ethnic Russians do not paint wooden houses in this manner.) One Salekhard resident born in about 1905 stated to a visiting team member in 1967 that he had completed a long prison term in Labytnangi or environs and had lived there for 10-15 years as a free worker, but that he and other Ukrainian nationalists were forbidden to leave the Salekhard area. Team members assumed that the prison facility observed from the train in Labytnangi was one of those to which exiled Ukrainian nationalists had been sent to serve their prison terms.

4. The geophysical team had been dispatched by an unspecified geophysical institute in Moscow. Some of the team members, including the group leader on the permafrost sounding section, were regular institute employees but others were university students or other personnel casually hired for the duration of a two month expedition for completing assigned route preparation tasks. The permafrost sounding section used ultra-long radio wave electronic equipment to take soundings

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that determined the depth of permafrost layers. Transceivers with ratings of 100 watts were used to transmit radio waves into geologic formations. The same gear was used to record the echoes and register the data. Their team had a core sampling section made up of geologists who took ground samples on the pipeline route. The team spent its first week of the tour in Salekhard and the following seven weeks in the field. They spent an additional three or four days in Salekhard at the end of the tour before returning by train to Moscow. The team consisted of about 22 people, 10 of whom were geologists and 10 of whom were geophysicists by training.

5. The [REDACTED] geophysicist stated to one of his team members in 1967 that convicted murderers were hardly ever executed anymore, and that in 99 percent of the cases people guilty of serious crimes such as murder were sent to work in the uranium mines in lieu of execution. He said that usually they lasted for about two years in the uranium mines before they died from leukemia. The team member, who lived in Moscow, subsequently heard similar accounts from several residents of that city. [REDACTED] Comment: Source cannot recall any further specifics on such mistreatment of prison laborers, but the information correlates with that provided by another Soviet [REDACTED] who in about 1968 observed a prison ship off the north coast of the Poluostrov Kanin peninsula on the Barents Sea. The [REDACTED] was serving aboard a Soviet military ship that was taking on fresh water at a remote radar and port facility. A radar operator stationed at the facility disclosed to him that the vessel was a civilian prison ship that made regular runs to Novaya Zemlya to deliver prisoners who were to be assigned to work tasks described as very hazardous to their lives. Presumably, the hazard came from radiation on Novaya Zemlya, either from past nuclear testing or from uranium or other hazardous mining activity. The clear implication of the remark was that the prisoners were likely to die as a result of the forced labor.)

6. During 1978 and 1979 three recent high school graduates disclosed to a senior scientific worker at the Institute of High Temperatures (IVT) in Moscow that they had worked alongside prison laborers during summer construction jobs on the Baykal-Amur Mainline (BAM) railroad in Siberia. Several of the students said that many thousands of prisoners were used for construction projects on the line. The disclosure came during a discussion in which the former high school students were complaining about the terrible working and living conditions they suffered while working on the project. They had volunteered for a summer work program where they earned 500 rubles per month for their efforts. They lived in tents while working on the project. The former students complained that the food they received was terrible. They added that, while their living conditions were bad enough, the prisoners lived under much worse conditions. They did not elaborate. At least one of the former high school students was a laboratory assistant at IVT who took that job after returning from the summer camp. It seemed implicit from their remarks that they had performed the work the previous year but they did not specify the time frame involved.

[REDACTED]

7. A Moscow visitor to the city of Uglich, on the Volga river in Yaroslavl Oblast, observed an industrial construction site in 1971 that was utilizing prisoners for forced labor. According to a local resident at the construction site, prisoners from unspecified locations were brought to the site under armed guard each morning and were taken back again in the evening. The construction site consisted of one unfinished factory building about 40 meters long and less than 25 meters wide that took up an area of about one-quarter of an average U.S. city block. There was barbed wire and concertina around the worksite and a guard post at the only entrance. The site was viewed on a weekend when there were no workers present. A resident of Sharanga municipality in Gorkiyevskaya Oblast, RSFSR, stated to a relative in 1978 that he had seen numerous prison work camps in Western Siberia during the 1970s. She said that the camps were all in wooded areas and that the prisoners were engaged in woodcutting activity. A male resident of Sharanga stated to a Moscow visitor to the town in 1979 that he had served a five-year term for hooliganism in a prison work camp on the Karelian Peninsula in about 1975. The Sharanga resident, a farmer born in about 1940, said that he had been sentenced for stabbing another man with a knife in an argument after the two had been drinking. The knife wound was not serious. **Comment:** It was not clear if the man had completed his term in 1975 or if he had been sentenced at that time and had served something less than the five years prescribed in the sentence.)

8. During 1979 a Moscow visitor to the village of Sharanga in Kirovskaya Oblast met numerous residents of the village who were former prison laborers at lumbering camps in forested areas of the oblast. At least some of the former prisoners had been sentenced for hooliganism. If there were political crimes involved with any of the prison terms, the individuals did not reveal it to the Moscow visitor.

9. During 1968 or 1969 a local resident at a summer fishing recreation area on the North Dvina River near Arkhangelsk told a vacationer that there were active forced labor prison colonies in the extreme northern reaches of the area. The remarks were prompted by comments made by the vacationer who had noticed a number of ruins from old pre-1953 prison labor camps in the areas where he fished along the Dvina. The local resident said that he remembered when the camps were dismantled after 1953, but that new camps had been constructed further north in uninhabited areas where they would not become known to civilians. Because he had travelled in these remote areas, apparently for fishing and hunting, the local resident said that he had seen these camps. He noted that Soviet citizens had been told that the camps were destroyed after the Stalin era, but he had observed that they simply had been moved out of sight. **Comment:** Source did not actually see any operating prison colonies in the Dvina River area.)

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