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SOCIOLOGY

Soviets Fight Crime

► **SOVIET RUSSIA'S CRIME** rate has been rising since World War II.

Authorities are striking back with a new "get tough" policy that includes stiffer prison sentences and an increase in the number of crimes punishable by death, the Bulletin of the Institute for the Study of the U.S.S.R., July, 1961, reports.

In May this year, a top-level decree extended the death penalty to include three crimes previously punished by imprisonment. They are embezzling state or public property on a large scale, habitually manufacturing and selling counterfeit money and securities, and terrorizing prison inmates or attacking prison personnel.

The changes, according to Y. Mironenko, spring from a spurt in both criminal and political offenses. Political crimes were called "counterrevolutionary" before 1958 but are now known as "especially dangerous state crimes."

The report quotes Soviet State Procurator-General R. Rudenko, commenting on embezzlement of state property, as saying that "such plunderers, as well as murderers, bandits and counterfeiters, must be punished without mercy, even to the point of shooting them."

The decree admits in effect that dangerous criminals in prison are capable of organizing other prisoner groups capable of intimidating other prisoners and even attacking staff members.

Soviet law now allows death by shooting for the three crimes made capital in the May decree, plus treason, espionage, sabotage, terroristic acts, banditry and certain forms of premeditated murders.

The Russians abolished the death penalty in 1947, but restored it in 1950 for treason, espionage and sabotage, adding the other offenses later. Before 1954, a ten-year prison term was the most severe punishment for any form of murder.

Additionally, longer prison terms are being given for many crimes and paroles are becoming harder to get. Judges who do not think prison terms are enough for political prisoners can add two to five years of exile, served at forced labor in distant, sparsely inhabited northern and eastern USSR areas.

There is a parallel drive against "anti-social, parasitic elements" in Soviet society, begun in 1957. If his neighbors or fellow villagers meet and decide he has to go, a man who is not working on the state's behalf—or who is "going through the motions" of work, but actually drawing his income from a private, unapproved source—can be sent into exile for two to five years.

This law is "designed to frustrate the attempts of the Soviet citizen to escape from the clutches of the Soviet economic system," Mr. Mironenko said. "Any attempt to live on one's own is a crime and must be punished."

Reports from the Soviet press indicate the existence of a definite class of professional criminals who have never worked and do not possess a permanent home. Since these "pro's" became adults after the Soviets seized power, their crimes must be regarded as "a social consequence of the Soviet system itself," rather than an outgrowth of pre-revolutionary conditions.

• Science News Letter, 80:142 August 26, 1961

PUBLIC SAFETY

Cars Since 1955 Safer

► **IF ALL** the automobiles on the nation's highways were post-1955 models, about 1,900 lives might be saved each year, Automotive Crash Injury Research of Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y., has reported.

Improved door locks make the difference. Beginning with 1956 models, manufacturers installed modified latch mechanisms less likely to spring open in an accident. Chances of fatal injuries are higher when an occupant is thrown from the car.

ACIR studied 14,135 American-made automobiles involved in accidents injuring at least one occupant of each vehicle. The cars included 8,606 manufactured before 1955 and 5,529 manufactured since.

Among the later models, researchers found, the frequency at which one or more front doors sprang open was reduced about 33%, the frequency of occupant ejection was reduced about 40%, and the number of dangerous or fatal injuries was reduced about 12%.

They estimate that the modified locks have achieved about 35% of the injury reduction possible if no doors came open at all, and the factor of being thrown from a

car in an accident was under complete control. On this basis, the annual saving in lives would total about 5,500 if "perfect" locks were designed and installed in all automobiles.

Deaths in U. S. traffic accidents totaled an estimated 37,800 in 1959, according to the National Safety Council, and an actual 36,981 in 1958, according to the National Office of Vital Statistics.

An earlier study by the Cornell group disproved the widely held theory that being "thrown clear" of a car during an accident improved survival chances. Among persons injured in 3,261 accidents, all involving pre-1956 vehicles, the percentage of fatalities was much higher for those who were "thrown clear" than for those who were not. Deaths reached 12.1% for ejectees, as against 2.5% for non-ejectees.

ACIR also estimates that general use of safety belts could cut traffic deaths by as much as 35%. The belts not only prevent passengers from being thrown from the car, but reduce injuries from being "tossed around" inside.

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