

REVIEW

PRIVILEGES FOR WORKERS IN THE SOVIET NORTH

[Review by Terence Armstrong* of L. Ya. Ginsburg and N. M. Smirnova, *L'goty rabotayushchim na kraynem severe* [*Privileges for workers in the far north*], Moscow, Yuridicheskaya Literatura, 1975, 216 p.]

In the Soviet Union persons working in remote northern locations have been offered, for more than 40 years, a series of privileges: extra pay, extra leave, better pension and other social security benefits, housing privileges. Since all such matters are determined in the last analysis by the government, regional differentials of this kind can be instituted as incentives to attract and hold labour. The publication under review provides the latest information on the privileges offered (there are many of them, and the level often changes), and it also fills in a number of details not given in the decrees instituting the privileges—details which emerge from the case law on the subject and from later instructions issued by certain government departments. The approach is broadly sociological rather than narrowly legal, but the authors are lawyers.

The decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of 26 September 1967 is still the main legal instrument (translated in *Polar Record*, Vol 14, No 89, 1968, p 215–17). But there has been an interesting addition to it. A new area, the European north, has been designated by an instruction of the State Committee on Labour [Goskomtrud] of 21 July 1972. Parts of the European north had been included in the 1967 decree, but the new area is larger, and workers in the added zones qualify for privileges at a level below those prescribed for the two main areas designated by the 1967 decree, the 'far north' and 'regions equated to the far north'. Thus the application of regional wage differentiation is being extended geographically.

It has been the general tendency over the years to extend these privileges, both by making more persons eligible and by raising the value of any given privilege. But one privilege—the extra leave—has in fact been steadily reduced. The entitlement now is less than half the number of days extra leave compared to the situation before the war. It could be argued that leave has been curtailed because conditions of work in the north have improved; but the authors are not much inclined to accept this.

There has been some doubt as to eligibility for the privileges. At first, only incoming workers who had signed contracts for a period of years qualified. Then eligibility was conferred step by step on persons already working in the north, on persons who went north on their own initiative, and on native inhabitants (a most important extension socially). But all had to be employees. Thus collective farm workers, unlike state farm workers, did not qualify. This book makes clear that they still do not receive the principal privileges, but that, as an exception, they were granted in 1971 the pension privilege (of receiving a full pension five years earlier than in the south). These workers are therefore still substantially worse off than almost all the others. Interestingly, persons under sentence of exile or banishment (*ssylka, vysylka*) are eligible for the basic privileges, as are former prisoners who have been rehabilitated or amnestied; but service personnel, and presumably also prisoners under sentence, are not. It is odd to find that the position of those who work shifts in the north, but are not permanently based there, is not entirely clear; this method of working may be considerably extended, and the author rightly contends that the law should be clarified.

The western reader will find it somewhat strange that the book speculates as to why the legislation was made to apply to some regions and not to others (it is indeed puzzling in some cases). It must be remembered, however, that no public debate, parliamentary or otherwise, accompanied the framing of the legislation, so that everyone, apart from the officials concerned in drafting it, is liable to be ignorant of the reasoning behind it.

The principal author, L. Ya. Ginsburg, makes some interesting speculations about ways in which the legislation might move in future. Retention of the whole system in broad outline is taken for granted. Recognizing that the major problem may be attracting people to the north, rather than holding them there, he notes the suggestion that the sliding scale of extra pay might be in diminishing, rather than equal, increments, with a specially big one in the first year. Similarly,

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he finds interesting the idea that the increments paid should be adapted more closely to the advantages or disadvantages of the place of work. These are two ideas which would play havoc with the existing system if they were introduced, but Ginsburg insists that they 'deserve attention'.

No legislation of this kind exists in the western world where, broadly, employers pay what they have to pay to get the right labour. But the Soviet system—which has shown itself to work, if not always perfectly—contains some ideas which western countries might find it useful to adapt to their own use.

AN INTRODUCTION TO GREENLAND

[Review by Sylva Gethin* of Michael Banks' *Greenland*. Newton Abbot, David and Charles; Totowa, New Jersey, Rowman and Littlefield, 1975, 208 p, illus.]

With Greenland becoming increasingly popular as a goal for travellers, ranging from Arctic veterans to British schoolboys, and also beginning to figure in travel operators' brochures, there is very likely a need for a general account of the country, easily available and written in English. There are of course a wealth of publications in specialized fields, as well as expedition reports of differing length and quality, but *Greenland* should cater for the requirements of those who need a good, if superficial, general survey. In its 200 pages it packs in a surprising amount of topics—general geography, climate, population, biology, history, economy, and the social problems encountered by a society in the process of rapid change. There is a fairly detailed section on exploration with separate chapters dealing with the east coast, the north and the ice sheet. The book is also, for once, up to date in its information, except perhaps when it is claimed that 'For the Greenlanders, integration with Denmark is a natural and logical step, and their best chance of surviving, unhurt, in the technological age. What is so very pleasant and unusual in these fractious times is that the union has every appearance of being a love match.' I fear this idyllic picture may be somewhat misleading. The pages of the Greenland newspaper *Atuagagdliutit*—which, by the way, appears every week these days, not every two weeks—are full of references to an emerging struggle for 'home rule', and a commission has just been appointed which will look into the possibilities of transferring certain areas of government to the provincial council of Greenland. In fact, the Greenland minister has been quoted as saying that Greenland home rule will be a reality by April 1979. If the drilling that is projected off the west coast of Greenland should eventually produce oil, conflicts seem unavoidable.

Due to the compression of the material the book has become somewhat dry and enumerative and hardly falls into the 'not to be put down' category, but as an introduction for the traveller or would-be student of the country it should serve well. There is, however, the usual quota of mis-spelt Scandinavian personal and place-names. That a few other errors have crept in, such as the placing of the Arctic Circle at 67° 30' on p 11, is perhaps due to the pressure of a deadline because the book is on the whole well documented. It is also well illustrated and has a useful, if short, bibliography and index. I would plead for the inclusion in the former of Henrik Rink's *Danish Greenland, its people and products*, especially as his *Tales and traditions of the Eskimo* is listed. It remains an extremely readable and informative classic and was reprinted in 1974, published by C. Hurst and Company, as indeed were the *Tales*.

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A TEXTBOOK ON SNOW AND GLACIERS

[Review by Hans Röthlisberger* of Friedrich Wilhelm's *Schnee- und Gletscherkunde*. Berlin, New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1975, vii, 434 p, illus. (Lehrbuch der Allgemeinen Geographie, Bd 3, Teil 3.)]

When L. Lliboutry was writing his classic *Traité de glaciologie* more than 10 years ago he found it difficult even then to keep abreast of contemporary glaciological literature in view of the ever-increasing number of publications on the subject. This new textbook by Friedrich Wilhelm,

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