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# DETOURS ALONG THE "PATH TO THE FUTURE": CRIME AND CORRUPTION DURING THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BAIKAL-AMUR MAINLINE RAILWAY (BAM), 1974-1984

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In the spring of 1974, thousands of young Komsomolites, railway personnel, and their children came to Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East to participate in the construction the "Path to the Future," the Baikal-Amur Mainline Railway (BAM).<sup>1</sup> These individuals strove to lay the rails of what the Soviet government described as the "Path to the Future." While BAM was intended to open the USSR's eastern reaches to economic development and greater prosperity, the state expected those struggling to build the railway (known as *bamovtsy*, "BAMers") to create a new, more progressive society among the pines and firs of the so-called "BAM Zone."<sup>2</sup> As construction on the railway and worker housing began in 1974, the new arrivals encountered onerous living conditions that few of them had ever experienced before, while officials in the Komsomol and other state organizations faced the dual challenges of fostering a pioneering spirit and a strong *esprit de corps* among the project's young builders. The Komsomol<sup>3</sup> leadership also struggled to provide a sufficient number

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1 This effort represented the third attempt to construct such a railway. Between 1932-1941 and 1943-1953 respectively, the first and second BAM projects were undertaken. These two endeavors were built by Gulag prisoners and, in the case of the second mainline project, with labor camp inmates and Japanese prisoners-of-war. The second BAM was abandoned after Stalin's death in March 1953. See Ol'ga Elantseva, "BAM: Nauchno-tekhnicheskoe obespechenie stroitel'stva v 30-e gody," in *Rol' nauki v osvoenii vostochnykh raionov strany: Tezisy dokladov i soobshchenii vserossiiskoi nauchnoi konferentsii (17-19 noiabria 1992 g.)* (Novosibirsk: Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, Sibirskoe otделение, 1992), pp. 225-227; "BAM: Pervoe desiatiletie," *Otechestvennaia istoriia* 6 (1994), pp. 89-103; "Iz istorii stroitel'stva zheleznoi dorogi Komsomol'sk-Sovetskaia Gavan' (1943-1945 gg.)," *Otechestvennye arkhivy* 3 (1995), pp. 90-100; "Kto i kak stroil BAM v 30-e gody?" *Otechestvennye arkhivy* 5 (1992), pp. 71-81; *Obrechennaia doroga: BAM, 1932-1941* (Vladivostok: Izdatel'stvo Dal'nevostochnogo universiteta, 1994); "Periodicheskaia pechat' BAMlaga," *Otechestvennaia istoriia* 4 (1993), pp. 167-175; *Stroitel'stvo no. 500 NKVD SSSR: Zheleznaia doroga Komsomol'sk-Sovetskaia Gavan' 1930-40e gody* (Vladivostok: Izdatel'stvo Dal'nevostochnogo universiteta, 1995).

2 The term "BAM Zone" refers to territory in Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East crossed by the mainline and includes those regions within the watersheds of Lake Baikal and the Amur River, the latter of which forms a major part of the Russian border with China. A region crisscrossed by a number of formidable rivers, including the Lena, Kirenga, Vitim, Olekma, Selendzha, Zeia, Bureia, and Amgun, the BAM Zone presented geologic, seismic, climatic, and epidemiological challenges to its would-be conquerors.

3 This is the commonly-used Russian term for the *Vsesoiuznyi Leninskii Kommunisticheskii Soiuz Molodezhi* [All-Union Leninist Communist Youth League].

of outlets for the BAMers' leisure time, the enjoyment of which was the "right" of every Soviet citizen, according to the state.

While building the "Society of Tomorrow" and a "Twenty-First Century Civilization," however, BAMers had to contend not only with the area's harsh climate, but also with the rigors of life in a far-flung collection of isolated communities that were often separated by bogs, impassible mountain ranges, and accessible only by helicopter even in good weather. Furthermore, BAM Zone towns lacked the basic infrastructural components of reliable electricity, sewage, and transportation – as a consequence of the BAMers' overwhelmingly youthful and demographically transient composition, they were also deficient in the societal networks of family and friends that hold together the fabric of all societies. This article examines how the Komsomol attempted to fill this societal and cultural void by manufacturing a protean "BAM civilization." More importantly, I determine why many everyday, mostly young BAMers<sup>4</sup> turned to crime and ultimately failed to become the harbingers of an Elysian culture that would blaze a path to communism that the rest of the Soviet Union would follow.

More than any other organization involved in the mainline's construction, the Komsomol shouldered the burden of selecting sufficient numbers of qualified members to send to the project, providing them with occupations that would ensure the mainline's completion within a decade, and policing those individuals who either failed to carry out their assigned duties, violated the law, or both. As construction progressed, the Komsomol became increasingly less able to fulfill any of these functions due to the growing size of the project and a chronic staffing shortage.

As the project's viability became more doubtful, the youth organization's leadership came to conceive of BAM not as a reward for exemplary Komsomolites, but as a repository for those cadres whose behavior it deemed to be too embarrassing or dangerous to be managed by their home Komsomol committees. Of those Komsomolites who experienced difficulties with the law, a statistically significant percentage (a cross section of Soviet and non-Soviet sources suggest 40 percent) were children of prominent party or government functionaries whose dismissal from the Komsomol would serve to embarrass their parents and the organization as a whole. Furthermore, the maximum age for Komsomol membership was thirty. After reaching this age, many former law-breakers simply disappeared into the local bureaucratic abyss after serving on

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4 Hilary Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture: A Nation's Constructors and Constructed* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 95. Pilkington's discussion of the Komsomol's weighty responsibility to produce "reconstructors of communism," whose duty was to promote "developed socialism," reflects the often overwhelming challenges faced by those who came to BAM for patriotic and ideological reasons. It is important to note here that while Pilkington focuses on Soviet youth of the mid-1980s and beyond, her observations regarding the apathy and palpable resistance of those who labored on such signature projects as BAM ring true for the 1974-1984 period as well.

the mainline. By the end of BAM's ten years of prominence in 1984, a surprising number of positions along the mainline were staffed by a ragtag collection of wayward Komsomolites who, for a multitude of reasons, could not be expelled from the BAM Zone. The presence of such uninspiring cadres helped to transform many citizens' perception of "Project of the Century" from an "All-Union Pace Setting Endeavor" to the butt of jokes, including "What sound does (Soviet leader Leonid) Brezhnev's head make when you hit it with a rail? BAM!" which were told across the country.<sup>5</sup>

## WHY BAM?

In looking at why the Soviet Union chose to undertake such a monumental effort as BAM, it is important to note that economic as well as political concerns pushed the Soviet leadership to promote BAM. Past experience had shown that involvement in a major project of this sort could help to legitimate the regime in the eyes of a new generation. Specifically, the regime used the mainline to deflect attention away from its crushing of the so-called "Prague Spring" in Czechoslovakia and ongoing attempts to silence dissent. Furthermore, in the aftermath of his predecessor Nikita Khrushchev's declaration that the Soviet Union would achieve communism by 1980, Brezhnev could not afford for BAM, one of the most prominent symbols of his "scientific-technical revolution,"<sup>6</sup> to be behind schedule.

Party and state economic officials in both Moscow and the BAM Zone also viewed the railway as an economic panacea that would convert the Soviet Union into a transport conduit for goods traveling between its Eastern European allies and the burgeoning Pacific Rim economies of Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, thus making the USSR an indispensable link in the movement of raw materials and finished goods across Eurasia. BAM representatives hoped that the mainline would allow vast quantities of Soviet petroleum and timber to be shipped to the energy-hungry and resource-poor Pacific economies while providing the USSR with high-quality consumer products, especially electronics, from East Asia.

Finally, as conceived by those in Moscow, the mainline served a mythic purpose as the "path toward communism" that would unite all Soviet citizens,

5 Iosif Raskin, *Entsiklopediia khuliganstviushchego ortodoksa* (Moscow: Stook, 1997), p. 67. References to the extent and popularity of BAM-based humor can be found in several post-Soviet BAM retrospectives, most notably G.I. Kogat'ko, ed., *Doroga, kotoruiu ne vybiral* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii tsentr ROSS, 1993). While the contributors to this volume are unanimous in their sentiment that a resurrected BAM can serve as an economic savior for a beleaguered Russia, they also agree that humorous impressions of BAM as illustrated by the above example revealed many Soviet citizens' lack of seriousness and contempt for the "Path to the Future."

6 This movement, a common propaganda theme throughout the Brezhnev years, stressed technological upgrading and increased scientific education among managers and workers in order to overcome shortcomings in planning and production.

regardless of their profession, ethnicity, or gender. The regime undertook BAM to ease tensions among a number of potentially disaffected groups, including youth, members of minority ethnic populations, and women. BAM was to be the thread that would bind these loose elements of Soviet society into a tightly knit cloth that would ensure the Soviet Union's long-term survival.

### SOURCES ON CRIME

After the Second World War, Soviet criminology had coalesced into a staid and highly rigid discipline that, along with most other academic realms, walked lock step with official precepts with very little divergence among scholars. A representative Brezhnev era perspective on hooliganism<sup>7</sup> and criminal tendencies among Soviet youth is *Preduprezhdenie prestupnosti nesovershennoletnykh* [The Prevention of Youth Crime], edited by V.N. Kudriavtsev of the USSR Academy of Sciences Institute of Government and Law.<sup>8</sup> This study, rooted in the fundamental Marxist-Leninist concept of the progressive nature of history, argues that man (*chelovek*) is perfectible and that only Soviet-style socialism can recast the offender in a superior form. *The Prevention of Youth Crime* differs from earlier studies<sup>9</sup> in its avoidance of a universal condemnation of criminal behavior in the Soviet Union as the product of nefarious bourgeois (read: capitalist) forces originating from outside the USSR that must be purged by any means necessary, including the use of violence. Instead, Kudriavtsev and his colleagues conclude that crime, regardless of its severity, frequency, or target, represents a "deviant" act that can be prevented by understanding the motive of the young perpetrator as the result of a lack of ideological education, which can be remedied through rehabilitation rather than coercion. Since motive is a function of one's environment rather than the psyche, the contributors maintain, the "criminal-deviant personality," including its subtype the hooligan, can be reformed within the Soviet Union's ever-progressing socialist society with a resulting erad-

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7 The word "hooliganism [*khuliganstvo*]" is a borrowed from the English term for a ruffian or hoodlum. In the Soviet context, the moniker "hooligan [*khuligan*]" describes those who instigate public disturbances and foment disorder. BAMer hooligans, whom I differentiate from the hardened criminals who were also present in the BAM Zone, struggled to find their identity and expressed their unwillingness to be molded by officialdom through their so-called "misbehavior."

8 V.N. Kudriavtsev, ed., *Preduprezhdenie prestupnosti nesovershennoletnykh* (Moscow: Iuridicheskaiia literatura, 1965).

9 These include V.E. Chugunov, ed., *Rol' obshchestvennosti v bor'be s prestupnost'iu: Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii s uchastiem prakticheskikh rabotnikov* (Voronezh: Izdatel'stvo Voronezhskogo universiteta, 1960); A.A. Gertsenzon, ed., *Voprosy metodiki izucheniia i preduprezhdeniia prestuplenii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1962); A.V. Kuznetsov, *Khuliganstvo i bor'ba s nim* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1962); A.B. Sakharov, *O lichnosti prestupnika i prichinakh prestupnosti v SSSR* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1961).

ication of an individual's desire to engage in wrongdoing. This rehabilitationist philosophy defined Soviet criminology until the Gorbachev years.<sup>10</sup>

While Kudriavtsev and his associates understood hooliganism as "deviant behavior," by the 1960s some Western scholars perceived the hooligans of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, both east and west, not as societal marginalia in need of rehabilitation, but often as unwitting cultural mouthpieces whose activities expressed the despair, conflict, and even aspirations of the "laboring classes," meaning those who held traditionally "blue-collar" jobs (to borrow an American term). Such social and cultural historians as Joan Neuberger, E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, and philosopher Michel Foucault advocated not rehabilitation for those on the societal periphery of Russia and Western Europe, but instead argued that these individuals deserve a legitimizing perspective that acknowledges both the deliberateness and rationality of what the Soviet criminologists deemed "deviant behavior."<sup>11</sup>

I have extended the work of these scholars to show that BAMers of both blue- and white-collar backgrounds who drank to excess, raped, stole, and engaged in bribery were not a small minority of troublemakers, but in fact represented the majority of the mainline's all-too-human population. Indeed, those within the Komsomol and other BAM Zone organizations who attempted to dictate the norms of morality were the true deviants within the frontier world of the project, while many who condemned the lasciviousness of their comrades were themselves often guilty of rank hypocrisy.

Regarding the issue of how to treat sources that cover such a culturally and socially specific phenomenon as crime in the Soviet Union, I have concluded that the vast majority of data on BAM Zone crime are "accurate" for the reason that most reports of wayward BAMers were kept classified after the resolution of a criminal case. An illustrative example is a 1979 secret letter writ-

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10 Other Brezhnev era studies of youth crime, hooliganism, and theft include N.F. Kuznetsova, *Prestuplenie i prestupnost'* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1969); G.M. Minkovskii, "Osnovnye etapy razvitiia sovetskoi sistemy mer bor'by s prestupnost'iu nesovershennoletnykh," *Voprosy bor'by s prestupnost'iu* 6 (1967), pp. 37-74; *Alkogolizm – put' k prestupleniiu* (Moscow: Iuridicheskaiia literatura, 1966); V.G. Tanasevich, ed., *Preduprezhdenie khishchenii sotsialisticheskogo imushchestva. Deiatel'nost' sledovatel'ia, prokurora i suda* (Moscow: Iuridicheskaiia literatura, 1969).

11 Some representative studies that attempt to restore purpose and intentionality to social categories, including youth and the unemployed, that earlier scholarship had labeled as prone to criminal activity include Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture, and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Robert W. Thurston, *Liberal City, Conservative State: Moscow and Russia's Urban Crisis, 1906-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origins of the Black Act* (London: Pantheon Books, 1975); Eric Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz* (New York: New Press, 1998); *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 3rd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd ed., trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

ten by A.A. Karamyshev, head of the Yakutsk city *Lineinoe otделение vnutrennykh del* [Line Division of Internal Affairs, commonly known by its initials LOVD], in which Karamyshev informed BAM chief Valentin Sushchevich that in the previous year Komsomol members had committed ninety-three crimes (nearly 20 percent of all offences that year) within his jurisdiction.<sup>12</sup> Karamyshev angrily noted that a number of regional Komsomol organizations had permitted many convicted felons, all of whom were Komsomol members in good standing, to be sent to the BAM Zone, and that these individuals continued to break the law as new BAMers. While crime on the mainline may have been underreported by the Komsomol, the amount of administrative attention given to discussing, adjudicating, and later cloaking each episode of worker malfeasance strongly suggest that the project's administration took BAMer "deviant behavior" seriously.<sup>13</sup>

### FOSTERING "COMMUNIST MORALITY" IN AN AMORAL CLIMATE

From 1974 to 1984, the Komsomol and its allied BAM Zone organizations noted with growing alarm that the behavior of many within the BAMer population, the majority of whom were under the age of thirty, failed to adequately represent the official image of the BAMer as a hardworking and morally upright Soviet citizen who maintained constant vigilance against "anti-socialist notions" and "deviant tendencies."<sup>14</sup> In an effort to curtail an array of "amoral behaviors," the Komsomol instituted a propaganda campaign that emphasized the experimental nature of life on the mainline as a "laboratory of socialist development" while promoting an amorphous notion of "communist morality," in which all BAMers, regardless of age or occupation, would grow together to form a cohesive and progressive society. Instead of teaching "communist morality" directly, the Komsomol leadership viewed the philosophy as a way of life that all the project's participants would follow instinctively upon their arrival in the "virgin taiga."<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the onus for maintaining this self-im-

12 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 27-M (Shtab TsK VLKSM na stroitel'stve BAM), op. 1, d. 144, ll. 1-4.

13 A helpful, if now dated, Western survey of Soviet criminology during the late 1960s is Walter D. Connor, *Deviance in Soviet Society: Crime, Delinquency, and Alcoholism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972). Connor traces Soviet approaches to deviance and concludes the state's reporting of rates of alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, and petty crimes such as theft of state property increased markedly after Stalin's death in 1953. He also speculates that the nation's absolute crime rate also rose by arguing that law enforcement agencies, crippled by a combination of institutional staidness and corruption within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, grew increasingly tolerant of non-political crimes in the post-Stalin years.

14 Sergei N. Zhelezko, "Stroiteli Baikalo-Amurskoi magistrali – ob'ekt sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 3 (1976), p. 104; Boris S. Starin, *Sotsialisticheskoe sorevnovanie stroitelei BAMa, 1974-1984 gg.* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1987), p. 42.

15 A. Iankovskii, "Taezhnyi desant," *Gudok*, 4 June 1974, p. 2.

posed code would fall upon the Komsomolites themselves, who would blaze the path to communism as the Soviet Union's foremost ideological pioneers.<sup>16</sup>

Among these moral and physical trailblazers, some were established troublemakers, while others who had never previously engaged in criminal activity began to run afoul of the law due in large part, based on my reading of local police, BAM Zone Interior Ministry, CPSU, and Komsomol reports, to the stresses associated with the area's primitive living conditions.<sup>17</sup> This turn to crime, corruption, and in some cases social unrest by formerly law-abiding citizens was the direct result of a serious deficiency in the number and quality of leisure outlets, including sports enthusiast groups, clubs, and voluntary associations that were available to the average BAMer. As a result, the profound lack of diversion led to high rates of alcoholism, rape, petty crime, and other "violations of public order" whose genesis and scope the BAM apparatus failed to comprehend or manage. It is important to note here that the BAM Zone was not the only area of the Soviet Union that faced increasing crime rates beginning in the mid-1970s.<sup>18</sup> Nationwide trends in law enforcement of incompetence, corruption, and apathy combined with the railway's relatively small law enforcement organs stretched the state's ability to regulate the BAMer population to the breaking point.

The project's overtaxed law enforcement network included the Ministry of Internal Affairs or MVD,<sup>19</sup> to which the Komsomol turned to help reign in its chaotic members. The fact that the MVD suffered from organizational and personnel problems of its own also undermined the project's prospects for success. Foremost among these was the serious corruption of MVD officials who were assigned to BAM as part of the Line Division of Internal Affairs and who investigated and prosecuted cases involving Ministry of Railways personnel or property. As with many Komsomolites and others with checkered pasts who were sent to lay the mainline's rails, the MVD headquarters in Moscow often transferred substandard officers to the BAM Zone, an area with which few officers were familiar and even fewer found desirable, in an attempt to rid itself of these

16 RGASPI, f. 1-M (Tsentral'nyi Komitet VLKSM (1918-1991 gg.), op. 2, d. 85, l. 21. Regarding the numerous "communist morality" campaigns which the Komsomol instituted outside of the BAM Zone, see Jim Riordan, "The Komsomol," in Jim Riordan, ed., *Soviet Youth Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 16-44.

17 See, for example, Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GA RF), f. A-501 (Ministerstvo kul'tury RSFSR, 1953-1991), op. 1, d. 7709, l. 66; RGASPI, f. 1-M, op. 45, d. 168, ll. 57-58; RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 58, l. 5.

18 Valery Chalidze, *Criminal Russia: Essays on Crime in the Soviet Union*, trans. P.S. Falla (New York: Random House, 1977). Chalidze, a prominent polymer physicist and Soviet dissident, co-founded the Moscow Human Rights Committee with Andrei Sakharov and Andrei Tverdokhlebov and co-edited the *tamizdat* (dissident publications produced outside the USSR) journal *The Chronicle of Human Rights in the USSR* from 1973 to 1982 after the Soviet government refused Chalidze permission to return to the Soviet Union after a trip abroad. See also Connor, *Deviance in Soviet Society*, pp. 10-11.

19 *Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del* in Russian.

individuals.<sup>20</sup> Thus, instead of engendering a sense of morality among the project's participants, daily existence in the BAM Zone for workers and law enforcers alike produced boredom and hardship that spawned lawlessness in some and immorality in others. Ultimately, rather than serving as a "laboratory of socialist development," BAM served to atomize a Soviet society that Moscow touted as the most progressive in the world.<sup>21</sup>

Aside from possessing a lackluster professional policing force, the Komsomol's other major problem lay in its inability to recruit quality cadres who were willing to serve as volunteers to build the railway. Specifically, those BAMers who served on the mainline for the standard three-year tour received substantial financial inducements in the form of hardship wages that were equal to three times the standard monthly rate, according to one's specialization and experience. In addition, BAM "veterans" received new car vouchers upon their departure from the project. None of the vouchers were ever honored by the Soviet government, however, and by the mid-1980s the BAM administration stopped issuing them altogether.<sup>22</sup> In an April 1975 report from Central BAM Segment Headquarters, twelve out of the twenty-two Komsomol organizations within BAMstroiput, one of the largest BAM construction trusts, did not bring any new workers to the project in 1974 and 1975.<sup>23</sup> BAMstroiput's answer to this dilemma was to screen a tedious three hour-long film, entitled *Chelovek i zakon* [Man and the Law], which contained interviews with law-abiding Soviet men and women, party members all, who discussed the joy with which they shouldered the legal responsibilities of Soviet citizenship. While the division's bosses believed that the film would instill a sense of "morality" in the worker population, not surprisingly the numbers of workers in attendance fell far short of official expectations.<sup>24</sup>

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20 Nikolai V. Nikitin, former BAMer and Tomsk Polytechnic Institute student, interview by author, 19 April 2000, Moscow; Iulia V. Argudiaeveva, *Trud i byt molodezhi BAMA: Nastoiashchee i budushchee* (Moscow: Mysl', 1988); E.V. Belkin and F.E. Sheregi, *Formirovanie naseleniia v zone BAM* (Moscow: Mysl', 1985); Vsevolod G. Kostiuik, Magniia M. Traskunova, and David L. Konstantinovskii, *Molodezh' Sibiri: obrazovanie i vybor professii* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1980); Liudmila M. Medvedeva, *Trudovaia i politicheskaia aktivnost' stroitelei Baikalo-Amurskoi zheleznodorozhnoi magistrali, 1974-1984 gg.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988); Sergei N. Zhelezko, *Sotsial'no-demograficheskie problemy v zone BAMA* (Moscow: Statistika, 1980); "Stroiteli Baikalo-Amurskoi magistrali – ob'ekt sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 3 (1976), p. 104.

21 Regarding Brezhnev's fanciful conception of the project, see Iurii V. Aksutun, ed., *L.I. Brezhnev: Materialy k biografii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1991); Leonid I. Brezhnev, *Pages from His Life* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982); Leonid I. Brezhnev, "Pobeda stroitelei BAMA," *Izvestiia*, 22 May 1975, p. 1.

22 Loren R. Graham, *The Ghost of the Executed Engineer: Technology and the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 83, 101.

23 RGASPI, f. 1-M, op. 65, d. 30, l. 1.

24 Ibid., ll. 16, 20; Connor, *Deviance in Soviet Society*, pp. 10-11.

The lack of “moral control” among the BAMers greatly concerned other mainline organizations as well, and many of them devoted significant resources to addressing the problem. For example, the BAM Zone CPSU apparatus reported in October 1975 that the city committee in the settlement of Ust-Kut had “failed to foster a good moral atmosphere” while allowing the pace of construction to slow to the point that projects slated to begin the following year had to be postponed due to the delay in finishing ongoing work. According to the committee secretary, the “moral climate” of Ust-Kut had degenerated to the point that “labor discipline [has] disappeared,” and he noted with some trepidation that the “antipodes of communist morality” were winning the “struggle to maintain civic order among the labor collectives.”<sup>25</sup> Such sentiments were not uncommon among BAM Zone party and governmental officials as all were concerned about their ever-loosening hold over their cadres. Despite their anxieties, however, the dilemma of how to reimpose “moral control” over the BAMers was never formally addressed either by the Komsomol BAM Construction Headquarters in Tynda or the Komsomol Central Committee in Moscow.

#### ATTEMPTS AT SELF-REGULATION: THE *DRUZHINY*

The BAM administration’s solution to crime, whether personal or state, petty or serious, was a near monolithic reliance on the standard criminological practices of “rehabilitation” and “prophylactic action.” With an overburdened and understaffed police force, the Komsomol found itself left with the primary responsibility for policing its young members as well as others who had joined the project. The methods the Komsomol employed were not of its own design, but rather national-level policies that were designed to encourage faith in the system among Soviet youth and also to channel the energies of young people away from hooliganism toward activities such as child “militias” and “deputy brigades” that the state deemed important in the maintenance of social order.

In a desperate bid to maintain control over what it considered to be a restive population, the BAM Komsomol Headquarters developed the concept of so-called “Discipline Days.” These were weekend festivals co-sponsored by local branches of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the district police in which specially-chosen “deputy brigades” led public gatherings designed to bring peer pressure to bear against those who violated public order and those who might be considering such an activity. While the Komsomol used “Discipline Days” to rehabilitate chronic drinkers, other types of violators were also compelled to meet with their peers as part of the normalization process. In the BAMer settlement of Urgal, for instance, some eighteen mentors encouraged “rehabilitated violators,” mostly convicted petty thieves, to work together with them to curb the incidence of further disturbances in the area.<sup>26</sup>

25 RGASPI, f. 1-M, op. 65, d. 30, ll. 16, 20.

26 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 168, ll. 52-54.

Another form of self-regulation undertaken by the Komsomol included the use of young adults and even children as surrogate law enforcement officers. In an eventually frustrated effort to combat a growing crime rate and proselytize among the youngest BAMers, the youth organization implemented a special BAM version of a child- and teenager-run policing organization known as the *druzhiny* (singular: *druzhin*), or young persons' militia, which was organized by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1958 to assist it in maintaining public order and combating hooliganism. The corps numbered over one thousand at its height. Its ostensible purpose was to assist law enforcement agencies in preventing all forms of crime.<sup>27</sup> The duties for BAM Zone *druzhiny* appeared in a 1975 handbook entitled "Instructions for the Organization of Operational Komsomol Young People's Militia Detachments along the BAM." It stipulated that all prospective members must be over the age of eighteen, come well-recommended by one's peers, maintain oneself in a "business-like and upright manner." Also, they must fulfill "the proper political, moral, and physical standards to fulfill the functions of defending public order." Above all, the BAM *druzhiny* swore to defend and protect "civic order" along with a pledge to engage in sporting events regularly.<sup>28</sup>

As conceived by Sushchevich and Colonel D.G. Postnikov, Sushchevich's equivalent within the BAM MVD apparatus, the *druzhiny* were to conduct themselves as examples of socialist morality and righteousness who would be emulated among the BAMer population young and old.<sup>29</sup> Specifically, these "citizen-police" were to serve as a "force for the preservation of social order... among the youth" of the BAM Zone by "combating drunkenness in all its forms, conducting raids to fight hooligan tendencies among youth, and to educate the entire BAMer population about the dangers of drink, idleness, and irresponsible conduct around railway and other transport facilities."<sup>30</sup> Sushchevich himself, however, admitted during his interviews with the author that many *druzhiny* did not take their responsibilities seriously. Furthermore, while the Komsomol lavished praise upon the young and mostly Slavic militiamen who received the "For Active Work in the Preservation of Social Order Award," most young people fell far short of the Komsomol's lofty expectations due to their greater interest in "socializing with members of the opposite sex" than patrolling among their peers.<sup>31</sup>

Along with the older teenage and twenty-something *druzhiny*, the Komsomol sought to include younger children in its amateur self-policing force. The Young Dzerzhinskiite youth movement<sup>32</sup> consisted of fourteen- to eigh-

27 In the BAM Zone, the Komsomol BAM Headquarters exercised operational control over the *druzhiny*.

28 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 22, l. 50.

29 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 50-51.

30 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 128, l. 68.

31 Ibid., ll. 68-70.

32 This group was named after Feliks E. Dzerzhinskii (1877-1926), the first head of the Soviet secret police, known originally as the Cheka and later known as the GPU and OGPU. Dz-

teen-year olds, along with a junior division of twelve- to fourteen-year olds known as the “Young Friends of the Police,” who served as liaisons between the police and children as a mostly self-regulated police force over youth in the “struggle to maintain public order.” The Komsomol emphasized the physical prowess of potential members, who had to demonstrate skills in marksmanship, swimming, and the

Russian martial art of *sambo*<sup>33</sup> as well as a knowledge of first aid. Before joining, each prospective member swore the following oath to an assembly of his or her peers:

I, a member of the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth League, upon entering the Feliks Edmundovich Dzerzhinskii Brigade, do solemnly swear to always carry the Dzerzhinskii banner high, to faithfully execute all requests and orders of my commander, to be honest, disciplined, and principled at all times, to never hesitate before hardship, to laugh at danger, to be trustworthy of my comrades, to struggle for the maintenance of civic order in my school and neighborhood. If I should violate this oath, then let my comrades scorn and punish me!<sup>34</sup>

As the project wore on, the BAM administration became more concerned with increasing the numbers of *druzhiny* and Young Dzerzhinskiites rather than their quality. As a part of the “I Am the Master of the Project” Campaign, nearly seven hundred Young Pioneer<sup>35</sup> age schoolchildren, who were divided nearly equally by gender, served as *druzhiny* within forty-four Dzerzhinskii Brigades in the city of Tynda between 1977 and 1979.<sup>36</sup> With the help of nearly four hundred Komsomol and LOVD “sponsors,” the young militia investigated thirteen crimes in the Tynda area, which led to the arrest and conviction of some nineteen individuals. The Dzerzhinskiites engaged in “prophylactic work” among their cohort and within the BAM laborer population to strengthen the ties between young people and the BAM Zone law enforcement organizations. These youth also published their own newspaper for children that employed humor to emphasize the respect all BAMers should show for their police force.<sup>37</sup> In 1977, Sushchevich applauded the efforts of nearly five hundred *druzhiny* in several BAMer settlements for opening “civil order stations” from which the

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erzhinskii was also head of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs or NKVD, which was subsequently renamed the KGB. This organization was reorganized after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and is currently known as the *Federal’naia sluzhba bezopastnosti* or Federal Security Service.

33 Derived from the Russian phrase *samozashchita bez oruzhiia* [self-defense without weapons], sambo is an internationally-recognized martial art whose techniques are based on the Japanese forms of judo and jujitsu.

34 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 45, l. 108.

35 The Young Pioneers, a junior division of the Komsomol, consisted of children from the ages of 7 to 16.

36 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 192, ll. 142-143 and RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 206, ll. 1-2.

37 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 144, l. 3.

young militiamen and women spoke against theft, alcoholism, and the need to preserve socialist morality.

Sushchevich, however, later turned critical in his evaluation of the *druzhiny*. In conjunction with the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Feliks Dzerzhinskii and the sixtieth anniversary of the formation of the Soviet police force, the young militia personnel were expected to reduce the frequency and severity of crime in their districts, but in fact rates of theft of both state and private property as well as hooliganism increased.<sup>38</sup> Sushchevich cited MVD figures that theft of government and private property within the BAM Zone had multiplied by a factor of three in 1976, hooliganism and murder had quadrupled, and rapes had doubled.<sup>39</sup> Under the rubric of petty theft, Sushchevich revealed a sharp rise in the number of offences committed in 1977 by Komsomol members and others under the age of thirty, including "petty hooliganism," "public drunkenness," "violation of internal passport laws," "illegal possession of firearms," "disregard for railway and automobile safety directives," and "violation of fire-prevention codes."<sup>40</sup> Despite his apparent candor, Sushchevich neglected the fact that the BAM administration's sole punishment for these offenses was either to fine the young perpetrators or to arrange a meeting between Komsomol officials and the offender's parents.

Ultimately, the ideal *druzhin* of Sushchevich and Postnikov failed to materialize. In the Severobaikalsk and BAM settlements, attempts by the voluntary militia to include younger citizens in their activities also failed. In several towns, *druzhiny* visited middleschoolers in a bid to recruit them for the Young Dzerzhinskiites, who would in turn "prevent violations of the law," but these ideologically-based trips fell into chaos after dozens of male schoolchildren publicly refused to join the organization.<sup>41</sup> In Tynda, libraries and other public buildings supposedly under the protection of the *druzhiny* became "dangerous places" after the young peacekeepers started selling black market goods while on guard.<sup>42</sup> For the adults of the BAM administration, their attempts to co-opt the *druzhiny* had failed as the supposedly best youth of the mainline became an added headache for those who faced the already thorny problem of youth disorder.

Owing to the *druzhiny* and others' chaotic nature of life along the mainline, the regime needed to find heroes and heroines that it could present through the local media to an occasionally disgruntled and often apathetic public. In August 1975, Aleksandr Kolesnikov, an MVD policeman, encountered a "drunken hooligan" who had been reported to the police by an observant citizen in Amur Oblast. After the officer attempted unsuccessfully to negotiate with the

38 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 144, l. 3.

39 Ibid., ll. 6-7.

40 Ibid.

41 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 110, l. 61. While probably also disenfranchised, female students were less vociferous about their dissatisfaction.

42 GA RF, f. A-501, op. 1, d. 7799, l. 39; RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 110, l. 84.

man into coming to the station peacefully, the drunkard fired a shot at Kolesnikov, who claimed to be “stunned” by his adversary’s aggressiveness. The officer decided not to return fire after thinking for a moment since he was standing close to an occupied apartment building. Without warning, a woman exited the building, and in trying to save her from certain death, Kolesnikov was shot in his left side by the assailant. Ignoring the pain, Kolesnikov and his fellow officers were able to apprehend the criminal, who the reading public learned, had been arrested several times in the past.<sup>43</sup> Through his selfless actions, the BAM press presented Kolesnikov an archetypal BAM hero whose bravery and compassion was to be emulated.

In 1980, G. Khakhanov, head of the Khabarovsk Krai LOVD, penned an obituary of Vladimir Timofeev, a MVD sergeant killed in the line of duty. While relaxing off-duty at home one evening, Timofeev received a phone call about a domestic disturbance at a nearby BAMer dormitory. Upon arriving at the dormitory, Timofeev was confronted by a drunken father who had beat his wife and twelve-year old daughter with a set of keys. Timofeev ordered the man to surrender the keys, but instead the man struck Timofeev on the head and proceeded to beat the policeman to death in a drunken rage. The BAM correspondent presented Timofeev’s death as an example of the heroism a typical BAMer, who had come to the mainline in search of a new life, could find not only in life but in a heroic death as well.<sup>44</sup>

If one considers official crime statistics to be somewhat credible, the number of BAMer police heroes should have been higher, but such representations as Kolesnikov and Timofeev’s constitute only a small portion of newspaper and other media coverage of life in the BAM Zone. This paucity can be explained by a number of factors, the most compelling of which is that the official media apparatus was wary about discussing violent criminal episodes in print, even if a positive spin was put upon the outcomes of these events. By confirming that crime was as much a part of everyday life in the BAM Zone as in the rest of the country, the local press would point to the lack of a progressive and futuristic (i.e. crime-free) society along the mainline. While this fact was known to all, the state was determined to stick to its own version of history where only a few BAMers died at the hands of deviants rather than confirm the obvious.

### ALCOHOLISM ON THE MAINLINE

In the years preceding the alcohol sales restrictions of the Gorbachev era,<sup>45</sup> the state enjoyed only a nominal control over the sale of spirituous liquors in

43 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 79, l. 84.

44 G. Khakhanov, “On pogib na postu,” *BAM*, 10 December 1980, p. 4.

45 In 1985, the Soviet government initiated a program to curb alcohol abuse that included a temporary prohibition and the reduction of the USSR’s alcohol-producing capacity. By 1987, however, these measures had largely failed due to bureaucratic intransigence and a turn to distilling homebrew (*samogon*) by many of the Soviet Union’s chronic alcoholics, who com-

the BAM Zone despite its official monopoly over this trade. Combined with boredom and a lack of alternative forms of entertainment, halfheartedly enforced strictures on the distribution of drink and the production of moonshine ensured that a sizeable number BAMers imbibed to excess not only in bars and clubs, but in their homes as well. A bulletin issued by Vladimir Kosei of the LOVD indicated that of all criminal cases reported in BAMer dormitories during the year 1977, nearly half were "related to drunkenness."<sup>46</sup> Another representative report delivered to the RSFSR Council of Ministers by GlavBAMstroi in 1975 revealed that out of two thousand total inhabitants of the BAM Zone town of Zvezdnyi, nearly five hundred people were sent to "medical sobering-up stations" [*medvoytrezviteli*] where they spent the night and then were released. Of these, fifty-nine were arrested for hooliganism, and seven for "criminal activity."<sup>47</sup>

In a 1974 communiqué to Komsomol headquarters in Moscow, Komsomol official Iurii Galmakov discussed the death of GOREM<sup>48</sup>-21 member Nikolai Gerasimov. While raising electrical lines with a co-worker, Gerasimov electrocuted himself by grabbing a live wire in an attempt to steady himself. The investigating commission concluded that Gerasimov's death was "alcohol-related," although the boss of GOREM-21 received only a "strong rebuke" for allowing Gerasimov to work while intoxicated.<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, administrators from GlavBAMstroi blamed Gerasimov's death on unspecified "technical deficiencies" rather than on incompetence or intoxication. Ultimately, the responsibility for investigating many on-the-job mishaps such as Gerasimov's were relegated to the Specialized Design-Technical Bureau (SKTB), which had no authority to prosecute or punish offenders.<sup>50</sup>

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posed more than half of the country's adult male population according to some observers. See Victor M. Sergeev, *The Wild East: Crime and Lawlessness in Post-Communist Russia* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp. 73-74; Connor, *Deviance in Soviet Society*, pp. 39-42. The temperance movement was not a new phenomenon in the Soviet Union. See also Kathy S. Transchel, "Under the Influence: Drinking, Temperance, and Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1900-1932" (Ph.D. diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996).

46 RGASPI, f. 1-M, op. 31, d. 888, ll. 131-132. I employ the term "dormitory" broadly to include both general-use accommodations for BAM workers that were built by the Ministry of Railway Construction and special Komsomol-sponsored and constructed "youth housing projects," known as *molodezhnye zhilishchnye komplekсы* or MZhKs, in which only Komsomlets (usually single) could reside.

47 GA RF, f. A-501, op. 1, d. 7799, l. 66; Connor, *Deviance in Soviet Society*, p. 44.

48 *Golovnoi remontno-vosstanovitel'nyi poezd* or Chief Repair and Restoration Train. GOREM-21 was a division of GlavBAMstroi.

49 RGASPI, f. 1-M, op. 31, d. 888, ll. 131-132 and RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 108, ll. 76-79.

50 Espousing a Leninist labor philosophy known as the "scientific organization of labor [*nauchnaia organizatsiia truda*]" and commonly known by the acronym NOT, the SKTB strove to accelerate the pace of construction while improving quality. See Starin, *Sotsialisticheskoe sorevnovanie stroitelei BAMa*, pp. 145-147.

Such incidents as the Gerasimov fatality were common in the BAM Zone, especially during the colder months in the area's harsh climate. One A.N. Kashirskii, a sleeper rigger,<sup>51</sup> was seen drinking at the *Iunost* [Youth] social club in Tynda and later disappeared during a heavy snowfall. None of Kashirskii's acquaintances realized he was missing until several hours later, and only following an intensive search did they discover his body frozen a few feet outside the club. The investigating Komsomol official labeled Kashirskii a "known instigator," and remarked that he often drank to excess.<sup>52</sup> In another incident, loader Aleksandr Safonov was killed by a passing train in 1974 as he tried to run from the Tynda rail yard to the conductor's hut, where a drinking bout was already in progress.<sup>53</sup> Edmund Miachislavovich, a previously exemplary member of the 18th Komsomol Congress Pace-Setting Brigade, became so intoxicated while serving as a foreman in the BAMer settlement of Kichera in 1978 that he died from alcohol poisoning. Although Miachislavovich had received several reprimands for his public drunkenness previously, the Kichera Komsomol organization never forbade or restricted Miachislavovich from purchasing alcohol due to his prominent stature and the fact that he had been decorated only months before as "Hero of Socialist Labor."<sup>54</sup>

Other representative BAMers whose abuse of alcohol resulted in social disorder included twenty-three year old Georgii Korneliuk, who before arriving in the BAM Zone had been convicted of aggravated assault. Although Korneliuk had spent a year and a half in prison for his offense, Komsomol officials dispatched him to the BAM Zone either erroneously by failing to check his records or intentionally to rid themselves of a troublemaker. Korneliuk paired with Petr Gridtsev, a old schoolmate from Kobrin, to "foment disorder" and distribute illegally obtained spirits among their colleagues within construction-erection subdivision [*stroitel'no-montazhnoe podrazdelenie*, hereafter SMP]-578.<sup>55</sup> Another former criminal, Aleksei Terekhin, arrived in Yakutsk after spending three years in a Voronezh Oblast prison for attempted rape. As a member of SMP-591, Terekhin resumed his previous pattern of behavior until his arrest and deportation from the BAM Zone in early 1979.<sup>56</sup>

In an attempt to stem the level of drunkenness among its workers, the BAM Zone Komsomol and MVD organs devised a series of "Discipline Days" to raise the level of BAMer consciousness regarding the amount of alcohol-related crime in the region. Those found guilty of committing petty crimes were

51 A sleeper is a piece of timber, stone, or metal that lies perpendicular to the rails and holds them in place.

52 RGASPI, f. 1-M, op. 45, d. 288, ll. 35-37.

53 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 108, ll. 76-79.

54 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 149, l. 55. One of the highest civilian decorations in the Soviet Union, the Hero of Socialist Labor award was given to a citizen who exceeded his or her work quota by a significant, often exponential, percentage.

55 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 206, ll. 14-15.

56 Ibid.

expected to meet with their peers to discuss their transgressions and formulate ways in which they could improve their behavior.<sup>57</sup> Within the SSMP<sup>58</sup> detachment *Ukrstroi*,<sup>59</sup> twenty-five upstanding cadres formed an “Anti-Drunkeness and Alcoholism Commission” whose members interrogated those accused of alcohol-related offenses, toured bars and social clubs where many BAMers socialized, and visited stores and kiosks where spirits were sold in order to verify vendors’ compliance with state alcohol sales rules.<sup>60</sup> A similar organization, in this case a “Commission to Combat Drunkeness and Alcoholism” worked within *Ukrstroi* to determine both the rate and type of alcohol-related misdemeanors and felonies committed among the organization’s members. Its tri-fold mission was to identify those charged with public intoxication, to determine what merchants had violated Soviet laws concerning the sale of alcohol, and to organize the subdivision’s anti-alcoholism campaign.<sup>61</sup>

Despite these efforts at mobilizing BAMers against alcohol abuse, the near total lack of enforcement of statutes restricting the sale of liquor contributed to an outbreak of “mass disorder” fueled by drink. A 1975 report related the exploits of three members of the prestigious N. Kedyshko First Belorussian BAM Construction Brigade.<sup>62</sup> The three Komsomolites organized a “night of collective drunkenness,” in which they spent their monthly wages to purchase vodka for themselves and their associates. After exhausting their supply of liquor, the trio beat a co-worker whose only crime was having a relationship with a young woman in whom the perpetrators had taken an interest. While BAM Zone officials recommended that the three be dismissed from the project, the national Komsomol organization refused to provide them with housing outside of the region, thus ensuring that the men would remain on the mainline.<sup>63</sup>

Deputy project chief Iurii Galmakov reported that three members of the Riazan Komsomolite brigade were to be expelled immediately from the BAM Zone for “constant drunkenness.” The three ignored the orders of their commissar and the train’s conductor to behave themselves while on a labor reassignment voyage and committed “drunken debauchery” by threatening the conductor and “insult[ing] and interfer[ing] with the relaxation of the passengers.” In a separate incident, the individuals in question jumped off a train traveling between Moscow and Khabarovsk and headed to the settlement of Shimanovsk on their own accord without first receiving permission to go there.

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57 RGASPI, f. 1-M, op. 45, d. 288, l. 49.

58 *Spetsializirovannoe stroitel'no-montazhnoe podrazdelenie* or Specialized Construction-Assembly Subdivision.

59 A BAM construction division based within the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

60 RGASPI, f. 1-M, op. 45, d. 288, l. 57. Curiously, not a single archival document I encountered specified the actual details of the alcohol sales guidelines.

61 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 168, ll. 57-58.

62 A wholly Belorussian formation analogous to the All-Union Komsomol BAM Construction Brigade.

63 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 35, l. 38.

After securing falsified documents by bribing an OVIR<sup>64</sup> officer and obtaining living space in a Shimanovsk dormitory, they got drunk repeatedly and “disturbed public order.” They entered neighboring rooms occupied by women, cursed at them, “leaned up against them, grabbed their skirts, and threatened them with physical violence and rape.” After the trio’s detainment by a surprisingly brave band of *druzhiny*, the other members of their detachment voted to dismiss the three from the brigade and return them to their previous place of work.<sup>65</sup> Such incidences of alcohol-induced sexual harassment were quite common in BAMer dormitories.

A similar incident involved young Tamara Davydochik, an upstanding graduate of the Minsk Higher Komsomol School who was sent by the Belorussian Komsomol committee to work with SMP-578, a mixed-gender detachment that specialized in railway engineering.<sup>66</sup> Upon her arrival in the BAM Zone, Davydochik demonstrated a “careless relationship” to her work and a low level of discipline. In 1975, Davydochik used her wages to buy vodka in a store and afterward organized a “massive sale of vodka and spirits,” which precipitated a “collective drunkenness” in which Davydochik was assaulted by her comrades once her money ran out. Unlike the aforementioned male violators however, Davydochik was expelled from SMP-578 for “engaging in amoral conduct.”<sup>67</sup>

In an effort to mold civic behavior through the use of negative psychology, the BAM press provided examples of behavior not to be emulated. A 1983 article in the newspaper *BAM* related the story of a particular BAMer who fell asleep with a cigarette following a drinking bout. The smoldering ash ignited a conflagration that killed him, his drinking companion, and destroyed the brigade’s wooden dormitory. The article’s author strove to put a positive spin on this tragedy by praising the surviving members of SMP-573, none of whom had training as carpenters or electricians, who managed to rebuild their dormitory from the ground up. In another misfortune, the improper use of firewood to heat a living compartment sparked a blaze that resulted in the deaths of two intoxicated laborers working with the chronically understaffed North Muisk Tunnel project. In the following month, two railway engineers were incinerated when the contents of a broken oil lamp started an electrical fire within their train.<sup>68</sup>

MVD detective V. Barichko reported a 1983 fuel tank fire that caused the destruction of imported machinery. The blaze, which began inside the Minis-

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64 *Otdel viz i registratsii* or Department of Visas and Registration. All Soviet citizens required an internal passport to travel within the USSR.

65 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 30, ll. 32-34.

66 While most BAMer brigades were single-sex formations, a select number of elite detachments contained both men and women.

67 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 35, l. 37.

68 “Prichina nechast’ia – khalatnost’,” *BAM*, 13 January 1982, p. 4.

try of Transportation's *Mosgidrotrans*<sup>69</sup> headquarters, was caused by the drunkenness of several staff members who while inebriated, allowed sparks from a heating stove to fall onto the wooden walls of the headquarters building, which in turn erupted in flame and soon spread to the fuel storage depot nearby. The resulting conflagration destroyed the *Mosgidrotrans* structure, a fueling station, and several pieces of heavy earthmoving equipment that were parked nearby. The station manager's sole punishment was to spend his weekends lecturing local schoolchildren on fire safety.<sup>70</sup>

In 1974, the Komsomol attempted to silence the story of a drunken locomotive engineer attached to Angarstroi who accidentally caused the explosion of a coal-fired locomotive after falling asleep at the controls. In the process of passing out after a drinking episode, the railwayman slumped over the engine's steam valve, allowing pressure to build inside the furnace. This led to a blast that killed both the conductor and a nearby signalman. The official efforts to deflect attention from this incident failed for the most prosaic of reasons, however, as the deafening sound of the explosion itself awakened the ten thousand residents in the nearby city of Ust-Kut.<sup>71</sup> While trumpeted by the state as examples of BAMer resiliency in the face of rare incompetence, such mishaps were all too familiar to those BAMers, and people throughout the Soviet Union, who had lost their homes and personal property in similar incidents.<sup>72</sup>

### SEXUAL CRIME, THEFT, AND REFUSAL TO WORK

The extent, severity, and frequency of sexual crime on BAM remains difficult to determine based on the limited treatment given to such incidents in the archival literature. Furthermore, such crimes as rape and molestation are completely absent from official secondary sources, and many rapes went unreported. Thus interviews and newly declassified documents play an important role in determining the minimum frequency and extent of this especially personal form of malfeasance.

A secret Komsomol report on sexual crimes committed by its workers in 1978 revealed that several groups of young men and even boys engaged in rape that year. The three profiled offenders, all of whom were under age thirty, participated in a gang rape. In an attempt to understand the motivation behind this incident, the Komsomol examined each youngster's family history and his activities after arriving in the BAM Zone. A common factor in each of the men's

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69 A specialized detachment within *Mostransstroi* that performed hydrology assessments of rivers before they were bridged by the railway.

70 V. Barichko, "Ogniu - zaslon! Legche predupredit'," *BAM*, 2 November 1983, p. 4.

71 Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii Irkutskoi oblasti (GANI IO), f. 127 (Perechen' vo-prosov obkoma KPSS Irkutskoi oblasti), op. 97, d. 38, ll. 7-8.

72 V. Natoka, "P'ianstvo - prichina bed," *BAM*, 2 September 1983, p. 4; Nikitin interview, 19 April 2000.

lives included the lack of a strong father figure and alcohol abuse. The youth organization chose not to imprison any of the three, but to “rehabilitate” them with the assumption that the three men’s “deviant nature” could be reformed. In a project where the recruitment of workers was difficult, the Komsomol strove to maintain all of the labor it could.<sup>73</sup>

Another sexual criminal with a representative story was carpenter Evge-nii Gromov, whose poor work record began with a “strict reprimand” for being absent from his job for five consecutive days in 1975 because of drunkenness. One night soon after his return, Gromov entered a women’s dormitory at the Shimanovsk Industrial Complex<sup>74</sup> and attempted to rape several females who were sharing a room. After several women stepped forward to bring charges, a plenum of Gromov’s comrades voted unanimously to dismiss him from the brigade and petitioned the Komsomol to return Gromov to his previous place of work.<sup>75</sup> Aside from his loss of occupation and residence, Gromov managed to avoid any further punishment.

Despite the efforts of the BAM apparatus to silence gossip, news of even more outrageous episodes of worker promiscuity circulated among understandably curious and occasionally shocked BAMers. One individual in a detachment from Volgograd was responsible for a 1979 outbreak of venereal disease that resulted in the unknowing infection of several females, who then spread the disease to others before learning of their condition. Another infected individual was determined to be “mentally deficient” after several women reported having “forced encounters” in which they were offered money in exchange

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73 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 168, ll. 46-49, 50-58, 64-69; Pilkington, *Russia’s Youth and Its Culture*, p. 163.

74 This facility, located in southern Amur Oblast, was the first and foremost Territorial-Industrial Complex (TPK) to be built in the BAM Zone. While its purpose was to provide the project with a convenient source of construction materials and processed fuels, the Shimanovsk production nexus never lived up to its potential. The main reason behind the failure of the Shimanovsk TPK was the unwillingness and inability of several state ministries, most notably the Ministries of Transportation, Transport Construction, and Fuels, to divert enough personnel and resources from the industries of the European USSR to allow the Shimanovsk complex to function independently. See Murad Adzhiev, *BAM i promyshlennyye komplekсы Vostoka SSSR* (Moscow: Znaniye, 1978); V. Berezovskii, “Kontury kompleksa,” *Izvestiia*, 22 January 1976, p. 2; G.P. Dobrovol’skii, A.A. Koshelev, and V.A. Khanaev, eds. *Toplivno-energeticheskii kompleks zony BAMa* (Irkutsk: Sibirskii energeticheskii institut SO AN SSSR, 1981); E. Kozlovskii, “Syp’evye komplekсы BAMa,” *Pravda*, 15 November 1978, p. 2.

75 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 30, ll. 42-44; RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 198, ll. 25-27; RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 243, l. 40. The system which Komsomolites used to vote for representatives or to condemn a comrade is described in Riordan, “The Komsomol,” p. 30. This procedure, in which ballots were cast openly and the candidates (or accused in this instance) were allowed to talk with each member before and after his or her vote had been tallied, underwent a fundamental revision in the late 1980s, a time when Komsomol membership declined dramatically.

for sexual favors. Many accused BAMers fled before they were to face “comrades’ tribunals” to answer for their misdeeds and were never heard from again. While the Komsomol blamed such incidences on the prevalence of alcohol, young male BAMers in particular were singled out for their debauchery and “reckless behavior.” Such sexual skulduggery, which was widely discussed among the BAMer population, stymied Komsomol efforts to recruit new young people and to convince those who were already in the BAM Zone to remain for another tour of duty in exchange for increased wages as well as special job and housing considerations upon their return home. For many law-abiding railway personnel, especially women, the stories of mass drunkenness, physical assaults, and rapes made BAM’s automobile vouchers and triple hardship pay much less appealing.

For those individuals who worked on BAM’s rails, the project offered an almost irresistible opportunity to steal, “borrow” scarce materials, or engage in bribery as a means to ameliorate one’s financial or material situation. As the signature construction endeavor of the Brezhnev years that possessed the General Secretary’s personal seal of approval, the mainline received large quantities of high quality machinery and electronics. The fact that a substantial percentage of these goods were imported and bore Japanese, European, and American “name brands” that were recognizable even to members of the supposedly “closed” Soviet society added a further inducement for even the most scrupulous but generally underpaid BAMer to at least dabble in thievery.

At the project’s midpoint in 1980, BAM Zone Procurator E. Kazakov noted a high level of theft of goods in BAM railway cars and warehouses. Kazakov remarked that the value of stolen construction materials from SMP-567’s building site totaled more than 100,000 rubles<sup>76</sup> and remarked that while nearly every brigade had experienced some theft, an average of 146,300 rubles of materials<sup>77</sup> was removed annually from each of the nearly four hundred individually-named BAM construction detachments. While it is difficult to estimate the relative value of the Soviet ruble during any given year, I employ the ratio of ten 1980 rubles to one 1980 U.S. dollar (for most of the USSR’s history, the official Soviet exchange rate hovered between \$1.50 and \$1.60 to the ruble, while the rate on the street ranged between three and ten rubles to the dollar until the collapse of the ruble in the Gorbachev years), resulting in an annual loss of \$14,630 worth of goods per brigade or a total of \$5,852,000 in 1980 dollars. When multiplied by the ten years in which these detachments were active, theft alone cost the project over \$58 million if one uses Kazakov’s conservative statistics. Finally, some kleptomaniac quartermasters appropriated dry goods and foodstuffs intended for workers’ settlements along with construction materials and

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76 Medvedeva, *Trudovaia i politicheskaia aktivnost’*, pp. 88, 90. Ironically, Medvedeva praised SMP-567 and its leader V. Vepriiskii specifically for their achievement of “N. Ostrovskii Brigade” status and recognition of its “For Labor Prowess (*Za trudovuiu doblesti*)” award.

77 RGASPI, f. 1-M, op. 65, d. 8, ll. 28-31.

sold them for personal profit instead. In most cases, the only punishment for such so-called “petty theft” was a small fine.

Stories of theft abound in the BAM archival literature.<sup>78</sup> A representative report from the Komsomol archive describes the “antics” of thirteen members of SMP-585 who were involved in a 1975 disappearance of tools, special winter clothing, and construction materials. After being questioned by Komsomol BAM headquarters about the missing items, the accused were unable to say what had happened to the goods. Although twelve members of SMP-585 were expelled from the Komsomol, the brigade’s leader received only a reprimand.<sup>79</sup> In a 1977 letter to the Komsomol Central Committee in Moscow, Iurii Galmakov, then the associate head of the BAM Headquarters, reported that dozens of vehicles, especially cars, were missing from many locations. Galmakov bemoaned the fact that the theft of these expensive and relatively rare conveyances belonged to brigades that worked in the remotest sectors of the BAM Zone, with some laboring hundreds of miles from any town or settlement. One project along the mainline suffered from automobile theft most acutely. In dozens of separate instances, workers who were laboring on the North Muisk Tunnel “borrowed” automobiles and other motorized conveyances, never to return. To guard their vehicles, some drivers were forced to sleep inside their trucks in winter, leading to a colossal waste of fuel and several cases of driver hypothermia. Galmakov echoed the sentiment of other BAM administrators by observing that each manager is concerned only with meeting his project’s quotas, and as a consequence some unscrupulous bosses “borrowed” vehicles to accelerate the pace of construction. Not only did Galmakov and his subordinates have to divert precious human and material resources in searching for missing vehicles, but also the deplorable condition of those “borrowed” vehicles that were returned made the chronic shortage of spare parts even more acute. After Galmakov repeatedly requested help from his direct superiors, he admitted that “The routine ‘borrowing’ of equipment [has] made meaningful construction work impossible.”<sup>80</sup>

While Galmakov failed to name any thieving individuals by name, a 1979 secret report implicated an official who maintained close ties with the Komsomol BAM Construction Headquarters in Tynda. The accused, one E.A. Efimov, obtained shipping manifests that were bound for BAM, including a curious collection of “motorcycles and rugs,” and “systematically diverted” goods to his “acquaintances and friends” in exchange for a percentage of the price when these items were sold on the black market. Efimov apparently had a weakness for Japanese stereo equipment, which he still possessed when Kemerovo Interi-

78 See, for example, RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 9, ll. 36-39; RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 42, ll. 1-2; RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 33, l. 19.

79 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 74, l. 121.

80 RGASPI f. 1-M, op. 81, d. 112, ll. 65-66; Valentin A. Sushchevich, former BAM head, interview by author, 4 October 1999 and 19 April 2000, Russian Youth Organizations Headquarters, Moscow.

or Ministry and OBKhSS<sup>81</sup> (Department for Combating Theft of Socialist Property) officials raided his residence.<sup>82</sup>

In 1978, BAM Zone security organizations investigated fifty-two instances of theft from railcars and warehouses. In the majority of these cases, the stolen materials were imported and of a “sophisticated nature,” which was BAM jargon for precision measuring equipment and electronics. No suspects were ever detained or arrested in any of these investigations, and a handful of Ministry of Transportation personnel deemed to have been irresponsible in their implementation of security measures, as with so many other corrupt bureaucrats, had to pay only small fines for their carelessness.<sup>83</sup> The culture of bribe-taking and skimming as well as the “fencing” of stolen merchandise on the infamous *chernyi rynok* [black market] was well ingrained among BAM conductors and freight loaders. Only with the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, was the true extent of theft by railway employees discussed openly.<sup>84</sup>

A 1979 investigation by the BAM Procurator’s Office discovered that a manager at the Komsomol BAM Headquarters acquired undisclosed “scare goods” in exchange for various luxury products including caviar and imported electronics. In another case, this individual gave motorcycles to his cronies rather than the survey teams and winners of “socialist competitions” in the region who had been promised the vehicles by the local Komsomol authorities.<sup>85</sup> When informed that Sergeev and his accomplices had stolen the motorcycles and they could not be recovered, several BAMers demanded automobile vouchers as compensation for their lost reward. Although the local CPSU organ grudgingly approved this request, the socialist competition winners never received their vehicles, as did most BAMers who were rewarded with such vouchers for their service with the project.<sup>86</sup>

Also in 1979, the Komsomol committee in the newly inhabited settlement of Severobaikalsk reported on a series of “raids” it had undertaken on the city’s stores in search of stolen goods that unscrupulous shopkeepers were trying to sell. In all, nine individuals working in seven stores were discovered to have stolen state property. When confronted by the local MVD, several of the guilty merchants offered bribes in exchange for leniency, another shopkeeper physically blocked the police from inspecting his store, while three others attempted to flee when the raiders approached. Also implicated as “engaging in the deception of the buying public and speculation” were an inspector from GAI,<sup>87</sup>

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81 *Otdel bor’by s khishcheniiami sotsialisticheskoi sobstvennosti*. See Connor, *Deviance in Soviet Society*, p. 194.

82 RGASPI, f. 1-M, op. 81, d. 285, ll. 3-4.

83 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 202, ll. 1-2; RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 207, ll. 41-42.

84 Nikolai N. Shtikov, Irkutsk Pedagogical Institute, former BAM Zone resident, interview by author, 7 May 2000, Irkutsk.

85 RGASPI, f. 1-M, op. 81, d. 285, l. 9. See also Graham, *The Ghost of the Executed Engineer*, p. 84.

86 Nikitin interview, 19 April 2000 and Graham, *The Ghost of the Executed Engineer*, p. 101.

87 *Gosudarstvennaia avtomobil’naia inspektsiia* [State Automotive Inspectorate].

the State Motor Vehicles Inspectorate, a high-ranking member of the OKOD,<sup>88</sup> as well as five inspectors from the OBKhSS, which was supposed to be preventing this type of crime.<sup>89</sup> The kingpin of the Severobaikalsk operation was one Viktor Kolontai, a driver with the *Nizhneangarsktransstroï*<sup>90</sup> automobile depot. Apparently, these “fencers” approached potential sellers of their stolen goods at discotheques and even Komsomol-sponsored “propaganda-agitational bonfires” where they could negotiate without drawing attention to themselves. Once a deal was agreed to, the parties met in the dormitory room of a third party who had been paid to stay out of his or her room and watch for the authorities while the exchange took place.<sup>91</sup> The fact that the sale and distribution of stolen goods within BAMer dormitories leads to the conclusion that the mainline’s administrators, while not all involved in theft themselves, were aware of its existence and were either too afraid of retribution to report it or, more likely, received bribes to ignore the goings-on in the “houses of workers’ solidarity.”<sup>92</sup>

In a 1979 communiqué, a frustrated Iurii Galmakov reported several instances of BAMers who, having disembarked in the BAM Zone, refused to honor their pledge to work on the railway during the previous year. Galmakov also noted that a “significant percentage” of Komsomol laborers and professionals invited to the project by their local Komsomol organizations never arrived while their sponsors either refused or were unable to provide any information as to their whereabouts. These apathetic BAMers included many Komsomolites from the Russian Republic who arrived in the BAM Zone, took one look around, and jumped on the first outbound train before they could be stopped. Ivan Malyshev from Estonia abandoned his post and stumbled off in a drunken stupor after engaging in “amoral behavior” with five women from his Komsomol detachment, which was building desperately needed housing in the newly founded town of Nizhneangarsk. Two eighteen-year old female radio technicians from the Latvian SSR<sup>93</sup> refused to operate equipment at the Nizhneangarsktransstroï headquarters and offered to have sex with the conductor in return for allowing them to stow away the next train home.<sup>94</sup>

A 1975 letter of condemnation issued by the BAM Komsomol Headquarters revealed much about the general sentiment shared by many of the project’s participants. Thirty-three year old Vladimir Poleshak deliberately avoided participation in the “party and social life of [his] collective.” Poleshak stopped

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88 *Operativnye komsomol'skie otriady družinnikov* [Operational Komsomol People’s Militia Detachment].

89 Chalidze, *Criminal Russia*, pp. 188-196.

90 A division of the USSR Ministry of Transportation based in the BAM Zone town of Nizhneangarsk.

91 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 185, ll. 81-82.

92 A. Skorobogatov, “Etazhi taezhnogo ansambliia dlia velikoi stroiki veka,” *Gudok*, 17 April 1976, p. 4.

93 *Sovetskaiia Sotsialisticheskaia Respublika* or Soviet Socialist Republic.

94 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 185, ll. 81-82.

working during the hardest period for his brigade, and demonstrated himself to be a person "concerned only with the material side of life."<sup>95</sup> The Komsomol recommended that he be dismissed from the BAM construction and his prized car voucher seized.<sup>96</sup>

### THE VERBITSKII AND SHCHERBININ "AFFAIRS"

As we have seen, corruption and graft were daily facts of life in the BAM Zone as in the USSR generally. Perhaps the most prominent and far-reaching of such scandals involved BAM Headquarters deputy head Iurii Verbitskii and Iurii Shcherbinin, head of the Nizhneangarsktransstroï housing construction division. In 1981, Verbitskii faced widespread public criticism for his lavish lifestyle and frequent junkets to Moscow and elsewhere far from the BAM Zone. The controversy began when a group of BAM Zone women accused Verbitskii of ignoring the "apartment question." Specifically, they charged Verbitskii with ignoring the acute housing shortage in the area and assigning scarce apartment space to his extended family. They also claimed that Verbitskii had forced many families with children to wait out the winter months in temporary housing, which often took the form of converted boxcars and prefabricated cargo storage containers.<sup>97</sup> One irate mother of four lamented Verbitskii's "inadequate, disdainful, and boorish attitude" toward those such as herself who had a critical need for more adequate housing. Others accused the BAM bureaucrat of appointing favorites, whom Verbitskii's critics described as "uneducated and illiterate non-party members," to fill vacant positions while more qualified candidates worked in jobs outside their specialty and skill level. That summer, Verbitskii drew even more ire when he was spotted leaving for Kiev in his personal car during a time when the BAM Zone population was facing a dire shortage of public services such as water and electricity. A team of local Komsomol officials dispatched to glean peoples' impressions of Verbitskii reported that he "allows things to break but cares not a bit to repair them."<sup>98</sup>

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95 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 35, l. 36.

96 Patrick Meney, *La Kleptocratie: La délinquance en U.R.S.S.* (Paris: Éditions de Table Ronde, 1982), pp. 121-169. Meney, a French journalist, categorizes such disenfranchised Soviet citizens as Vladimir Poleshak as "Les Déclassés," or the marginalia of Soviet society. This characterization is in direct contrast to the image of the BAMer as the highest evolution of *Homo Sovieticus* that was put forward by those both in the Soviet Union and abroad who defended the mainline from criticism. For example, the school-age "BAM buddies" of the Kichera settlement who are lionized by American socialist author Mike Davidow (1913-1996), himself a child of Bolshevik émigrés, exude none of Poleshak's crudely materialist sentiments or cynicism. See Mike Davidow, *The Third Soviet Generation* (Moscow: Progress, 1983), pp. 40-43.

97 Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*, p. 99.

98 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 264, ll. 1-2.

Amid the public's call for an official condemnation or even dismissal of Verbitskii, Komsomol head Dmitrii Filippov came to the defense of his embattled subordinate. In 1981, Filippov denied all of the accusations against Verbitskii and explained that his associate's absences, including a trip to North Korea, Vietnam, and the Philippines, were all work-related and thus unavoidable. Interestingly, Filippov promised to transfer Verbitskii to a Komsomol post in Moscow in an effort to appease the angry BAMers, but the Komsomol head later chose not to honor this pledge. Apparently, Filippov was concerned that rescuing Verbitskii would damage his own stature within the organization that he had run since Brezhnev's ascension to power in the late 1960s.

After Filippov's incomplete intervention on his behalf, Verbitskii could not manage to avoid further scandal after the events of 1981. In a 1982 report to the Komsomol Central Committee, an anonymous Internal Affairs official claimed that Verbitskii paid MVD officers throughout the BAM Zone to ignore crimes in which Verbitskii's "associates" stole various items for sale on the "black" or "gray" markets. The most damaging accusation made by the unknown whistleblower concerned a purchase by Verbitskii, whose monthly salary totaled three hundred rubles, of a set of "two Japanese stereo systems" valued at 2,500 rubles.<sup>99</sup> Another suggestion of financial impropriety on Verbitskii's part pegged the deputy BAM chief for his expenditure of 850 rubles on various gifts for a delegation of visiting West German Communists. Finally, another accuser claimed that Verbitskii spent over 1,000 rubles to fund "payments and advances" for his coterie to conduct "business" (a term that carried a pejorative connotation during the Brezhnev era).<sup>100</sup>

The end result of the "Verbitskii Affair" was not an expulsion of Verbitskii from the Komsomol or the CPSU, but rather a simple reprimand from his superiors. The Komsomol's leadership in Moscow chastised Verbitskii for "numerous deficiencies" in the conduct of his job as BAM's associate head.<sup>101</sup> It is conceivable that Verbitskii's actions caused considerable embarrassment to the project, and that public knowledge of his wrongdoing might have damaged the already poor reputation of BAM in the eyes of both Soviet citizens and foreigners alike beyond any hope of repair.

Ordinary BAMers' knowledge and disdain for the corruption they witnessed among their leaders, whom the Moscow bosses continued to herald as "moral compasses," were not confined to secret reports and soon spilled into the local press. The 1978 publication of an open letter to the BAM administration, published under the headline "The Labor Front is Absent" in the newspaper *Severnyi Baikal* [North Baikal], signaled that public sentiment was beginning to turn against some members of the BAM bureaucracy. The letter's au-

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<sup>99</sup> RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 264, ll. 3-7.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., ll. 14-18.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., ll. 20-21.

thor, a leader of a brigade attached to Nizhneangarsktransstroï, condemned his direct supervisor Iurii Shcherbinin for “fostering a climate of recklessness and danger” by skimping on construction materials while building workers’ dormitories. The writer continued his attack on Shcherbinin by accusing him of blatantly ignoring the welfare of his own charges by erecting dormitories that lacked even the most basic amenities, including adequate heating and running water, necessary to support the population of Nizhneangarsk. In commenting on the disappearance of scores of expensive cold-weather tools and earthmovers, Shcherbinin’s accuser described the sanitary conditions in the living areas along the north shore of Lake Baikal as “abysmal.” In a not-so-veiled innuendo, he also remarked that while Shcherbinin was enjoying the comforts of “his female personal secretary,” many average laborers had no choice but to turn to drink and other forms of “unproductive socialization” (i.e. gambling and sex) due to the lack of recreational facilities in the area.<sup>102</sup>

While the casual observer could interpret the controversies that swirled around Verbitskii and Shcherbinin as aberrations, criticism of lax building regimens and worker apathy, both public and private, resounded throughout the mainline’s territory. One of the earliest such castings of aspersions came from those laboring in the Western BAM Segment, which was the first of BAM’s five administrative divisions to see a substantial influx of new laborers in 1974. A group of some 300 Komsomolites arrived to find that they would have to build their own housing before beginning work on the actual railway that would serve as the economic backbone of the entire undertaking. To their chagrin, however, the Irkutsk battalions possessed neither the knowledge nor the proper materials to construct shelters that could withstand the raging winters of the area.<sup>103</sup> Writing to the editors of *Sovetskaia molodezh’* [Soviet Youth], the newspaper of the Irkutsk Oblast Komsomol Committee, the disenfranchised “trailblazers” expressed their dissatisfaction but also their desire not to publicize this embarrassing shortcoming in the mainline’s planning. The editors’ reply, which along with the Irkutsk youth’s original correspondence was never published in *Sovetskaia molodezh’*, was more concerned with damage control and with preventing an increase of laborer disenfranchisement than addressing the problems at hand.<sup>104</sup>

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102 RGASPI, f. 27-M, op. 1, d. 185, ll. 147-148.

103 Davidow, *The Third Soviet Generation*, pp. 15-56. Davidow ignores the climatic conditions of the area in his discussion of the Siberian landscape and instead chooses to note that “[BAM] will make the taiga an ally because it views its severe nature not as an enemy but as a potential friend” (p. 17).

104 GANI IO, f. 127, op. 100, d. 143, l. 8.

## CONCLUSION: THE ANTI-PANACEA AND UNDERSTANDING "DEVIANCY"

A profound consequence of the project's high level of corruption was the damage done to the official representation of the mainline as a panacea for a system increasingly dependent on exports of raw materials for revenue.<sup>105</sup> While some lucrative foreign trade did roll along BAM's tracks by the late 1970s, much of the revenue from the sale of these expensive goods ended up in the pockets of grafters instead of the hands of the aging and obsolete industries of the European USSR.<sup>106</sup> Although those who were aware of its shortcomings continued to view the railway as the "great connector" between the Soviet Union and the quickly growing markets of the Pacific Rim after its announced completion in 1984, skimming, the sale of stolen property for personal gain, and a public perception of general shadiness continued to haunt the endeavor. These factors helped relegate BAM to obscurity by the early 1990s.<sup>107</sup>

The presence of criminals, profiteers, and generally materialistic builders on the mainline revealed that BAM society was not as progressive or futuristic as the state purported it to be. Instead, the dynamics of crime and control that intersected in the taiga revealed that the peculiarities of Soviet human nature, not "communist morality," were ultimately the superior forces in defining the

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105 Victor L. Mote, "BAM After the Fanfare: The Unbearable Ecumene" in John Massey Stewart, *The Soviet Environment: Problems, Policies and Politics: Selected Papers from the Fourth World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, Harrogate, 1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 40-56.

106 Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 245. Brooks discusses the lack of "postwar dynamism," both social and economic, that increasingly plagued the Soviet Union until the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev.

107 Beginning in the mid-1990s, the sentiment that a refurbished BAM could serve to ameliorate Russia's financial woes was echoed by several post-Soviet commentators, most notably Yeltsin era Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, Putin era Speaker of the State Duma Gennadi Seleznev, and former Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Prime Minister Evgenii Primakov. See V. Chernomyrdin, "O pervoocherednykh merakh po stimulirovaniu ekonomicheskogo razvitiia zony Baikalo-Amurskoi zheleznodorozhnoi magistrali," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 1 July 1997, p. 5; G. Seleznev, "Postanovlenie Gosudarstvennoi Dumy o 25-letii nachala stroitel'stva Baikalo-Amurskoi zheleznodorozhnoi magistrali," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 22 April 1999, p. 1; E. Primakov, *Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 19 ianvaria 1999 g. No. 69. Voprosy khoziaistvennogo osvoeniia zony Baikalo-Amurskoi zheleznodorozhnoi magistrali* (Moscow: Respublika, 1999); Aleksei Baliev, "U BAMa – vtoroe dykhanie," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 1 July 1997, p. 5; O.A. Moshenko, ed., *BAM – budushchee Rossii* (Moscow: Rossiiskie zheleznnye dorogi, 1999); V.I. Mukonin, "VKSh-BAM: Doroga moei zhizni" in I.M. Il'inskii, *Nash strazh i svetoch: K 30-letiiu Vysshei komsomol'skoi shkoly-Instituta molodezhi 1969-1999* (Moscow: Institut molodezhi, 1999), pp. 209-225; Valentina Nikiforova and Ivan Sharov, "BAM i tablitsa Mendeleeva: K nesmetnym bogatstvam Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka vedet legendarnaia doroga," *Pravda*, 9 April 1999, pp. 1-2; Valentin A. Sushchevich, "Nas mnogo, veterany!" *BAM*, 3 August 1990, p. 2.

inhabitants of the BAM Zone. While such “immoral behaviors” as theft, rape, and graft were certainly not unique to the undertaking or to the Soviet Union, their frequency and the frankness with which the Komsomol apparatus reported them, if only within its inner circle, reveals that the state’s control over the populace may have been at its weakest in the BAM Zone, which not coincidentally was the farthest outpost from the center both geographically and culturally. It is ironic that while struggling to create a society that would exalt the best traits of socialism, including self-sacrifice and a rejection of materialism, the Komsomol and its attendant organizations actually helped to produce a retrograde, not dynamic, civilization. Within this social milieu, “socialist fire” was replaced by the most atavistic characteristics of humanity generally and contemporary Soviet society specifically. The state’s trust that the BAMers would intuitively chart a course toward a perfectible society was betrayed by a collection of young people who were not the “constructors of communism,” but in most cases were bored, lonely, looking for a way to improve their lives, or for a good time. These individuals were not deviants, but members of a generation who, only seven years after BAM faded from the public eye, took an active role in establishing new rules of social and cultural discourse in a post-Soviet environment in which once spurned qualities were now indispensable for survival. The persistence and even growth of criminal behaviors among the mainline’s population spoke volumes to the social and psychological condition of the Soviet Union as a whole, which by the mid-1980s had begun to experience personal crime at a rate that would eventually match that of the West.<sup>108</sup>

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108 Sergeyev, *The Wild East*, pp. 73-74.