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Soviet Amnesty Tales: Stories of Redemption, 1920s-1960s

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Abstract

From the 1920s to the 1960s, the Soviet Amnesty Commission significantly altered the way it decided cases and criminal detainees also presented very different forms of appeal. Specifically, the formula for rehabilitation changed from the 1930s to the 1940s. Before the war, a person could secure amnesty through a record of socially-useful labor and exceptional work performance. Once the war began, labor as the preeminent marker of state service was displaced. Petitioners now had to demonstrate sacrifice in the most intimate way, by describing the death or injuries of family members in combat, and the number of war wounds marked on the body. A more invasive and demanding government counted a petitioner's war wounds, and wanted to know the number of family members killed or maimed in service to the state.