Dignity or Death

THE FIGHT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE SOVIET UNION

by Ludmilla Alekseyeva

THE CRIME, TO MAKE A LIST OF BRO

How they plant dollars on men

Pyotr Grigorenko: The General.

Anatoli Marchenko: The writer.

Anatoli Shcharansky: The dissident

A YEAR AND A HALF ago in Helsinki, the Russians in company with all their European neighbours, signed a declaration of human rights which should have opened a new era in world affairs.
Freedom everywhere was to be guaranteed—freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief. The end of the cold war seemed to be in sight, the end of the Soviet police state and the start of a more relaxed era for everyone in Europe, East and West.
Realists knew it must work in the West because, in an open society, everything can be monitored. But who could guarantee, or even hope, that it could work in Russia?
A group of brave Russian citizens took on the perilous task of reporting when, and by whom, those guaranteed rights had been infringed.
And almost from the start the cynics about detente were vindicated. The volunteers were persecuted, hounded and imprisoned; and, if enough fuss was made in the West, they were driven from their country.
This is the story of one of those brave people.

One who got away . . . Ludmilla Alekseyeva, pictured in Munich yesterday

AS TOLD TO NICHOLAS BETHELL
EXPERT ON RUSSIAN AFFAIRS AND AUTHOR OF 'THE LAST SECRET'

YOU probably never think twice about words like freedom and rights. You don't have to. They've been part of your way of life for a long time.

But to most of us in Russia—ordinary Soviet citizens—they are words we don't expect to hear too often, especially from our leaders. You can imagine, then, how our eyes bulged when we read in *Izvestia* that Brezhnev had actually signed an East-West agreement in Helsinki, guaranteeing us freedom and rights.

It seemed too good to be true. You don't have to be a student of Russian politics to realise what a step that is.

Imagine how our friends from the subject peoples of Russia—Ukrainians, Latvians, Georgians and Jews—homed in on the paragraph which talked of 'equal rights and self-determination of peoples.'

Did this mean the minority nations of the Soviet Union were to be free from the dictates of Moscow?

And imagine how they read on to the passage about freer movement and contact with foreign countries.

Exiled in Siberia

You take all that for granted. We hoped for the best, but feared the worst.

But what could we do to see that the promises weren't broken? We talked about it and decided to call a Press conference on May 12, 1976. Not a Press conference for the State-controlled representatives of Pravda and Izvestia, but a meeting of Western journalists. We wanted the Western Press to report what we were doing and the results of our work. This was crucial to our plan.

There was another reason for our Press conference. On the one hand we knew that it would irritate the KGB enormously. But on the other hand we knew that it would protect us from the KGB, at least for a time. There is only one thing that limits the KGB's cruelty — the fear of bad publicity in the West.

Our aim, we pointed out, was simply to monitor how the agreement was working among our fellow men and women.

Professor Yuri Orlov, a well-known Soviet physicist, was made leader. We still consider him our leader though he's now under arrest.

Elena Bonner was another member. She is the wife of Dr Sakharov, an even more distinguished physicist, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

We were joined by Pyotr Grigorenko, who used to be a General in the Russian Army, and Alexander Ginsburg, who runs the Solzhenitsyn fund for helping political prisoners, and Anatoli Marchenko, who is exiled in Siberia for writing about his experiences in prison.

There were ten of us in all and several dozen more helping with typing and distributing documents.

The day after our opening conference Orlov was summoned to the KGB and told that we were an illegal operation.

He told them that, on the contrary, we were a legal body doing a proper job, monitoring an international agreement that had been signed by Leonid Brezhnev.

It was obvious that our work wouldn't be taken to kindly by the KGB. We knew that in advance — what we had no idea of in advance was what *form* their displeasure would take.

Before Christmas 1976 they left us more or less alone. Ginsburg was the one they pestered most, because after his five years in prison, he couldn't get registered to live in Moscow, even though he has a wife, two small children and an old mother there.

He couldn't get work either, because of his 'bad biography', until Sakharov gave him a job as his secretary.

The police kept visiting us and asking him why he wasn't in Tarusa, where he's registered. That probably seems silly and petty. But that's the law in Russia. According to that, he was allowed to visit Moscow only for three days at a time, so every fourth day he had to travel 100 miles to Tarusa and then come back.

Malva Landa, one of our members, has a son who teaches physical culture at the university. In November two KGB men suddenly visted him and told him that, unless his mother stopped working for the Helsinki group, they would find ways of making his and his wife's lives a misery. They said it quite openly.

Arrest of sympathisers

He was in despair. He had nothing to do with her work and it never occurred to him that such a thing could happen. Anyway, he knew that there was no way of persuading his mother to stop, so he just came and told her what had happened.

She made it known to the KGB that they were using her son as a hostage and that she had no intention of giving in to that sort of blackmail. That, for the time being, seemed to be the end of that. The KGB still weren't sure what to do about us. They soon made up their minds.

The real trouble began at Christmas. We'd been expecting it, because the KGB often do unpleasant things at Christmas. They know that for about 10 days at that time it's very hard for us to mobilise support in the West.

The correspondents are out of Moscow and Western newspapers don't appear. For instance, Dr Sakharov's close friend Sergey Kovalyov was arrested at Christmas time and so were many others. We knew about this and allowed for it.

On December 24 we heard that the KGB had arrested two of our sympathisers in Leningrad, Yuliya Voznesenskaya and Vladimir Borisov. Then on the evening of December 25 there were simultaneous searches in the flats of five of our friends in Kiev, members of the Helsinki group in the Ukraine.

The KGB men had removed all documents connected with the group and all personal papers.

But what alarmed us most was the use of that old KGB trick — in three of these searches they planted compromising material.

Nothing that would raise an eyebrow in the West, but 'damning' in Russia.

In Mikola Rudenko's flat they 'found' 42 American dollars. He told us that the first dollar he had ever seen in his life was the one that the KGB man pulled out of his desk.

Then they 'found' some pornographic pictures in the flat of Oles Berdnik, a well-known Ukrainian science fiction writer. I know that in the West it doesn't mean very much to be found with dirty pictures, but in Russia it's the sort of thing that can completely destroy a man's reputation.

And in Oleksa Tikhi's house they said that they'd dug up a rifle in the garden. It's quite absurd, but, of course, there's an obvious reason for these 'plants.' The KGB feel that it's not politically advisable to charge people for working for the Helsinki group. They think it might look bad. So they decided to try to present the members as common criminals or bandits. Rudenko and Tikhi are now under arrest.

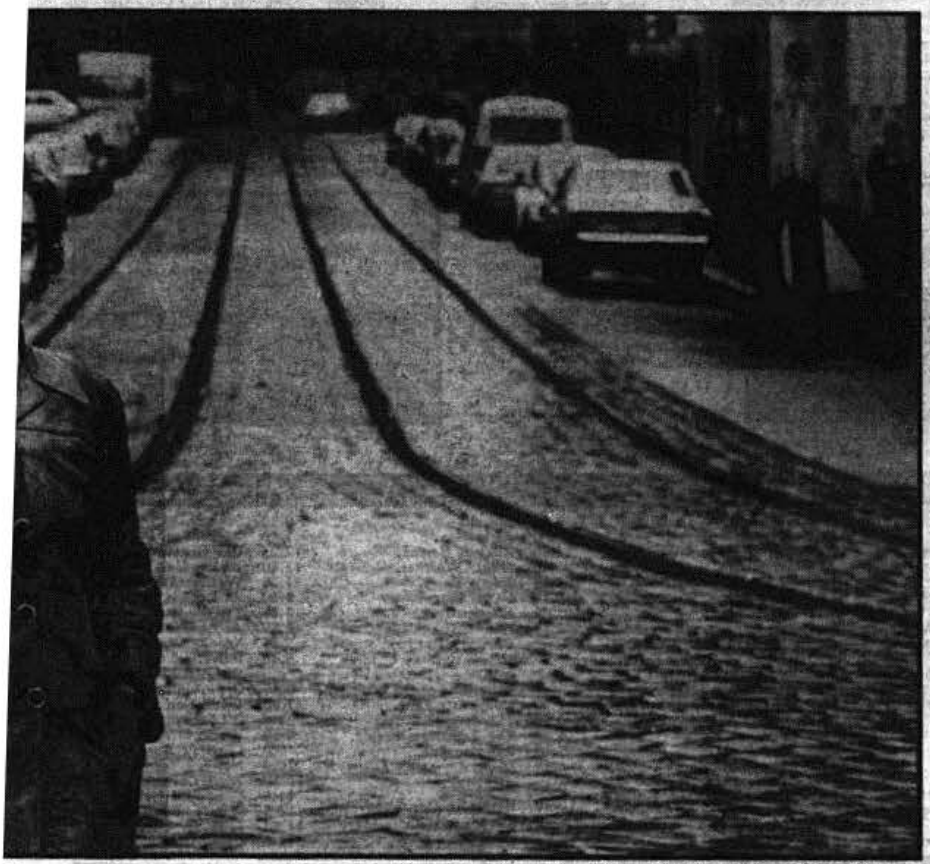
We worked hard during 1976 and produced a dozen or so documents.

A 'document' is a study of some

EN PROMISES...THE PUNISHMENT, PRISON AND EXILE

dirty pictures and who fight for freedom

Yuri Orlov : The leader. *Andrei Sakharov : The scientist.* *Alexander Ginsburg : The fund-raiser.* *Mikola Rudenko : The Ukrainian.*



Picture : MICHAEL HOLLIST

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specific problem of human rights in the Soviet Union. Each member has a speciality and researches his or her own subject. As an example . . . Document No. 1 was about Mustafa Dzhumilyov, who was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for supporting the right of the Crimean Tartars to return to the Crimea.

Send in bulldozers

The whole nation was deported *en masse* by Stalin during the war and, even though they've been rehabilitated, no Crimean Tartar is allowed to go back.

Now that's as racially discriminating as it's possible to be. And not only is it forbidden in the Helsinki agreement, but by Soviet law as well.

The Crimea authorities simply won't register a Tartar in a municipal apartment. And if he buys a house in the Crimea, they send bulldozers in and knock the house down. In Document No. 1 we mentioned several cases when this had happened, with photographs of the ruined houses and the families standing out in the open.

Apart from the documents, which took some time to prepare, we issued several dozen communiqués. This was when something happened suddenly and we needed to draw attention to some urgent matter.

I remember that our first communiqué was on May 20 about Valentin Moroz. He is a Ukrainian nationalist who spent six years in prison. They sent him to the Serbsky Institute, a special mental hospital, and we were afraid that they would simply declare him insane, like they did Pyotr Grigorenko, Victor Fainberg and others.

So we made a fuss, and I must say that it worked quite well. His case was taken up by the Western Press, Amnesty International and the World Council of Churches. Within a month he was declared sane. I'm sure that if we hadn't intervened he'd still be in the Serbsky Institute.

Another intervention of ours that I think worked well was Document No. 4, which is about religious education and children being taken away from their parents.

Soviet law says quite clearly that mothers and fathers have a duty to bring their children up in a spirit of 'Communist morality' and that if they don't they can be deprived of their parental rights.

We added a list of cases where this happened, about six, mostly Baptists. What the police do is perfectly legal, it's just that the law is barbaric, and it's certainly contrary to the Helsinki Agreement, which gives everyone the right 'to profess and practise religion, alone or in community with others.'

I hope that we may have convinced the Soviet authorities of this, because as far as we know there hasn't been a case since we issued Document No. 4.

Once the committee was off the ground, of course, the cases started to pour in.

Every month more and more people came, until Professor Orlov was seeing so many people that he wasn't getting any work done. Some of them came hundreds or even thousands of miles to Moscow to see a member of the Committee.

Either they wanted to emigrate, or they had news of arrests that they wanted us to publicise, or they were complaining about persecution of religious or national minorities. Some of them came as delegates, representing thousands of people.

Which is how we came to the case of the Pentecostals. Imagine that, because they try to bring up their children religiously, not a single one since the Revolution has been allowed into university.

Religious persecution

They're marvellous people. I got to know many of them, and there are 200,000 of them in the Soviet Union. Two of their communities sent us representatives, one from the northern Caucasus, the other from Nakhodka on the Pacific coast.

They held a council and decided that their position was intolerable so they want to emigrate, 7,500 of them. They asked us to find a country that would take them, an empty territory where they could cultivate and where they could practise their faith in peace.

We suggested in a Document that the United States—which came into being because of religious persecution—might consider taking these Pentecostals.

I studied history at Moscow University and for several years I worked as an editor in the Nauka publishing house. So the Committee gave me the job of editing the documents and organising the distribution. Our first six documents we sent by post to all the 35 governments which signed the Agreement, one copy to Mr Brezhnev, the other 34 to the various embassies in Moscow.

It was hellish work. For example, the Pentecostals Document had a supplement of names 500 pages long. Each document had to be copied by typewriter so that each country could have one.

And there was no photocopying machine : you can get seven years for using one of those !

If that was a problem, we had an even bigger shock coming. We mailed each document on an 'advise delivery' basis, which means that we should have got back 35 receipts for our 35 letters. But on each occasion we only got back one receipt, signed by Brezhnev's office. The ones we sent to the embassies simply weren't delivered.

House to house searches

I had to find other ways of getting our documents into the right hands and I'm glad to say that I succeeded.

All our documents are now in the West. I won't say how we got the material abroad because if I did the KGB would simply close that particular channel. I want to emphasise that right from the beginning everything our group has done has been legal under Soviet law. This is the way the Soviet dissident movement operates.

But the KGB don't see it that way. On January 4, a few days after the searches in the Ukraine, they searched three of the Moscow members' flats —Orlov's, Ginsburg's and mine.

They started simultaneously at 8.30 a.m. At Orlov's flat they rang the bell and he came to the door in his pyjamas. He'd been working until 3 a.m. and hoped to be able to sleep late. He asked them who they were through the door. They said they were the police and they had a search warrant.

He said : 'I'll just get dressed, then I'll open the door.' They must have thought that he was going to destroy some compromising material, because they immediately broke the door down. Eight of them burst in and they spent 17 hours searching his flat, leaving only at 2 a.m.

At Ginsburg's flat it was even more unpleasant. Usually they start searching in the room where you work. They go straight for your desk, then they work through the living-room, the bedrooms and leave the bathroom until last. But in this case one of them

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