

As Ludmilla Alekseyeva begins a new life of freedom, a warning for everyone in the West

Why Brezhnev must never be believed

LUDMILLA Alekseyeva has told the Daily Mail a terrible story. Or has she?

The Moscow dissident movement is under siege. Three of the ten members of her human rights group are in prison, not because they fought the Kremlin with terrorist violence, but because they wrote documents about the Helsinki agreement and spoke to the western Press.

The label 'American spy'—that old bogeyman of the Stalin years—has been pinned on a Jew whose only crime is to want to join his wife in Israel.

Leonid Brezhnev, speaking in Moscow on Monday, confirmed the drift back to the bad old days of spy-mania.

The dissidents, he says, are 'accomplices if not agents of imperialism, serving the 'subversive' interests of 'foreign intelligence centres.'

President Carter, after supporting these brave people, is attacked in Pravda and Izvestia. Mr Brezhnev pours scorn on 'Washington's claims to teach others how to live', and assures his cheering hand-picked audience: 'We will not tolerate interference in our internal affairs by anyone and under any pretext.'

Dark hints are murmured in Moscow about a return to the cold war and the dangers of nuclear conflict.

The Soviet wolf has howled and as usual started a panic among the sheep in the West. Doesn't Carter realise what he's doing? How can he put the peace of the world at risk for the sake of a few Moscow intellectuals?

Subtle

They knew what they were doing, didn't they? What business is it of ours how the Soviet Union runs its own affairs? Dr Sakharov is a brave man, but is he worth a war?

A few years ago Mrs Alekseyeva would have been shot for doing a tenth of what she's done. Things are slowly but steadily improving in Russia. Why should we complain about that?

One does not have to be a Kremlinologist to see how wide of the mark such questions are. The Soviet Union is not Hitler's Germany, Amin's Uganda or even Stalin's Russia. The KGB does not feed its victims to the crocodiles or put them into gas chambers, although their new habit of injecting them with painful drugs is a worthy refinement on the old-fashioned methods.

No, the main complaint against the Soviet government is not the number of its



Ludmilla: finding freedom in Munich

by
Nicholas Bethell

EXPERT ON RUSSIAN AFFAIRS
AND AUTHOR OF 'THE LAST SECRET'

political prisoners or the savagery of its physical tortures. It is something subtler than that. Its evil lies in the fact that for six decades, through a network of agents and part-time helpers several million strong, it has tried to crush the spirit of Russia, harnessing its people's genius to the greater glory and profit of one particular political line.

Everyone, it has decreed, must act and think socialism. Anyone who does not is an outcast or a criminal.

Of course, there are many in Russia who believe in communism and are content to devote their life's work to it. But anyone who is not content knows well what to expect. His first defiant steps will be noticed and he will be watched. Reports will be compiled, his telephone tapped and his mail opened before delivery. Then he will be called to the KGB and warned. He will be warned once only.

If he persists, he will be dismissed from his job and, with the State the only employer, unable to get another one. He now has no salary. He earns a little from time to time doing odd jobs.

Some of his friends, who admire his courage but cannot yet bring themselves to share his fate, will give him presents from time to time. Other friends will be called to the KGB, warned of the consequences of associating with such a dangerous character and black-mailed into spying on him.

If his children are at school, they may be 'sent to Coventry' by the other children on a teacher's instructions. If his children are at university they will probably be expelled.

His family will be divided. Some will stand by him, others

will tell him how much harm his activities have caused them all and will beg him to desist. It takes rare courage to fight on.

But are these people important? Why should President Carter write to Dr Sakharov or see Mr Bukovsky? Because he believes that the dissidents, though few in number, do represent something in the Soviet Union today and are the best hope that the rigid system will eventually change.

Some believe that President Carter has blundered. His interference is not only dangerous, they say, it also encourages the Soviet 'hard line' and undermines the 'liberals.' But there are others less optimistic about the ability of the Soviet system to change into something civilised.

Bitter

Non-communist political groups, they say, must be encouraged by the West and enabled to operate, within Soviet law and without violence. Unless these groups exist, there is no path of reform for the country to take.

The Kremlin will carry on making loud noises about 'interference.' They see every critic as an enemy, and are more frightened of typewriters than we are of machine-guns. And yet, while complaining bitterly about President Carter and articles such as this one, they lose no chance of playing what they see as their natural part in the affairs of Britain.

Their Embassy officials here attend trade union get-togethers. They provide our Co-sensit Party with free vodka and cheap holidays.

They advise us not to support the Conservative Party. Last year they even wrote to the Mayor of Kensington to prevent the erection of a war memorial.

They can hardly accuse us of starting something new. We are merely doing what they have been doing for years.

Mrs Alekseyeva and her friends simply asked Mr Brezhnev to fulfil his promises. He did not have to guarantee human rights at Helsinki. No one obliged him to say that he would allow Soviet husbands to join their wives overseas.

Shallow

True, if we had been dealing with a civilised country the question would never have arisen, but in fact Mr Brezhnev listened to the West on this point and signed accordingly.

He signed, but he broke his word. He could not be trusted to carry out even this little reform. What can one say of a man whose fears run so deep, whose human feelings are so shallow that he will separate husbands and wives, then imprison people who bring such cases to his attention? Who will ever believe anything he signs again?

There is one consolation at the end of this dismal story. The KGB did not succeed. One by one they are picking off the members of Mrs Alekseyeva's committee. But they cannot now destroy the documents, which are available in the West to show how the Soviet Union dishonours her agreements.

However much they persecute the other members, they can now accomplish no more than an act of revenge, which will be yet another proof of how far communist Russia is from the civilised standards they proclaim so loudly and hypocritically.