

POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE USSR

**NINA
STROKATA**

MICROBIOLOGIST

MEDICAL INSTITUTE

ODESSA, UKRAINIAN SSR

SENTENCED

On May 19, 1972, to four years of hard labor

NINA STROKATA

Excerpts from the article "Who is Nina A. Strokata (Karavanska)?"

(VI-th issue of the Samizdat "Ukrainian Herald," March, 1972)

"Nina Antonivna Strokata was born in Odessa on January 31, 1925. Her father, a Ph.D. in economics, taught in colleges and worked in research institutes. Being almost 83 years of age now, he is retired. Her mother died a few years ago.

Nina Strokata graduated with honors from the medical institute in Odessa with a degree in microbiology. At first she worked in the microbiological institute in Odessa, and then for six years as a physician in the southern regions of Ukraine.

From the early 1950's until May of 1971 she did microbiological research at the medical institute in Odessa. Lately she was also working on her doctoral dissertation. Much of her work was published in specialized journals and science digests in Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Rostov and other cities. She had a reputation of being a gifted scientist who handled her research assignments well.

SVYATOSLAV KARAVANSKY, WRITER, HER HUSBAND

In 1961 Nina Strokata married Svyatoslav Karavansky, who had been released a few months earlier from long-term imprisonment. After pleading for forgiveness of past transgressions, Karavansky was pardoned and released in the latter part of 1960. He returned to Odessa and began working in the field of literature and science.

Karavansky was arrested once again in November of 1965, supposedly for writing two essays in which he called the present language policy in Ukraine anti-Leninist and for appealing to the Party leaders of Poland and Czechoslovakia on behalf of political prisoners who were arrested in Ukraine during that year.

Since the prosecution had no valid justification for imprisoning Karavansky, a special decree was applied to his case, which stipulates that a person can be returned to prison without trial if he had been previously released from serving a 25-year term and did not show signs of "rehabilitation." Without trial, Karavansky was returned to prison to serve out the remaining nine years of his term.

DEFENDING PERSECUTED PERSONS FOR THEIR BELIEFS

It was at this time that Nina Strokata came to be widely known for her active part in the campaign for the defense of those persecuted for their beliefs. She began publicizing her husband's achievements in the fields of literature, science and journalism and acquainting the public with the circumstances of his latest arrest. She also went to the defense of others unjustly arrested, among them journalist-historian Valentyn Moroz.

While serving his term in Vladimir prison, Karavansky in 1969 was charged with other "crimes." He was accused of writing a number of articles while in prison. Special attention was given those articles which dealt with the 1941 mass execution of Polish officers (prisoners of war) at Katyn Forest.

WIFE'S DUTY TO DEFEND HER HUSBAND

A trial was held within the prison walls, and Karavansky's term of imprisonment was extended to a total of 33 years. As a witness at this trial, Nina Strokata defended her husband and accused those who had staged this inhuman trial. As a result of this, a special memorandum was sent to the medical institute in Odessa. In the memorandum Nina Strokata was accused of not trying to help in the "rehabilitation" of her husband and of siding with him. During a meeting of the deans, called to investigate this matter, Strokata pointed out that it was a wife's moral duty to defend her husband's interest, and that it was immoral to demand that she publicly condemn and renounce him. She drew an analogy between her present plight and that of wives of political prisoners during the Stalinist period. Further action against Nina Strokata was postponed because her help was needed in fighting an outbreak of cholera in this region. Early in 1971, however, attacks against Strokata surfaced again.

ARRESTED IN 1971

As a result of subsequent harassment (anonymous letters, interrogations, "talks," etc.) and inability to obtain work in her field, Strokata was forced to leave Ukraine. Toward the end of the summer of 1971 she left for Nalchyk (Kabardyno-Balkaria), where she received work teaching at a medical school. On December 8 of that same year, while returning to Odessa, Nina Strokata was arrested by the KGB. Agents searched her Odessa apartment and confiscated two poems written by her husband Karavansky (titled "The Heirs of Beria" and "Summer in Lviv"). They also took an old book on ethnography and a volume of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, published in 1966, in which the translator Dmytro Palamarchuk, in an autographed dedication, referred to Nina Strokata as a "Decembrist." Her apartment in Nalchyk was also searched. Strokata was charged with violating Article 62 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR, dealing with "anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation."

SENTENCED TO FOUR YEARS OF IMPRISONMENT

The 25th issue of *The Chronicle of Current Events*, a Russian language Samizdat publication, states that during Strokata's closed trial in May 1972, she was charged with disseminating "anti-Soviet" literature, which supposedly consisted of the following: a copy of a letter to Andrei Sakharov, the Soviet nuclear physicist and human rights leader in the USSR; two issues of the underground *Ukrainian Herald*; transcript of the trial of Pogruzalsky, who was tried for the burning of a library in Kiev; and a leaflet disseminated in Moscow by a tourist from the Nether-

lands. This issue of the *Chronicle* states that there was no direct evidence that Nina Strokata did, in fact, distribute this "anti-Soviet" literature and that the defendant refused to plead guilty; nevertheless, she received a four-year sentence.

INTERNATIONAL REACTION AND BREAST CANCER

As news of Strokata's imprisonment reached the West, members of various scientific organizations initiated actions in her defense. During the 1973 annual meetings of the American Society for Microbiology, held in Miami Beach, a petition which requested a re-examination of Strokata's case was circulated and signed by nearly 300 microbiologists. This petition was delivered to the Commission of Human Rights at the United Nations. Letters informing the scientific community about Strokata's imprisonment and the above petition appeared in *Science* (Vol. 181, 1973, p 300; Vol. 182, 1973, p 535), while the complete text of the petition appeared in *BioScience* (Vol. 23, 1973, p 690). During the same year, a similar action was undertaken by Canadian microbiologists.

Early in 1974, Nina Strokata was accepted as an active member of the American Society for Microbiology, the fourth such member from the USSR and the first from the Ukrainian SSR. The Society's official journal, *ASM News*, carried an ad in its February issue (Vol. 40, 1974, p 156), which asked members to write to Nina Strokata at her concentration camp address. Over 200 microbiologists, responding to information about her plight, sent cards addressed in Russian to her concentration camp. Since many were sent via registered mail, return receipt requested, it was possible to determine the final point reached by these cards. Although all cards were identically pre-addressed, some were returned from Moscow marked "incorrect address," while others reached their destination, Women's Camp ZhKh 385/3-4 in the Mordovian ASSR. These return slips were not signed by Strokata, but by a "censor." The results of this action and other news about Strokata appeared in the *ASM News* (Vol. 41, 1975, p 118).

In the middle of 1974, news reached the United States via Finland that Nina Strokata was very ill and had developed symptoms of breast cancer, but was being denied tests, diagnoses, or treatment by prison medical officials. As a consequence, during the 1st International Congress of the International Association of Microbiological Societies in Tokyo in September 1974, another petition was circulated and signed by over 500 microbiologists from thirty countries. This petition was forwarded to First Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. Possibly due to increasing publicity, Nina Strokata has been taken twice to Rostov for examinations, though it is not known by whom she was examined or what results were obtained. The World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations, in a letter appearing in the *ASM News* (Vol. 41, 1975, p 118), has also come to Strokata's aid. Since no private individual or organization is able to officially

approach the Soviet government, this Federation publicly offered to finance an attempt by the American Society for Microbiology to provide medicine, food, and clothing for Nina Strokata.

Many concerned individuals fear (a fear justified by reports from dissident circles in Moscow) that should publicity over Nina Strokata die down and should she survive her illness, her prison regimen will be tightened and new charges will be fabricated against her in order to impose a lengthened sentence.

STATEMENT

REGARDING THE FORMATION OF A CITIZENS COMMITTEE IN DEFENSE OF NINA STROKATA

Ensuing from the fact that lately the number of court prosecutions of citizens who openly express and defend their convictions in the USSR has been increased; that such prosecutions are unconstitutional in nature and in many instances violate socialist legality (publicity of trial, right of defense, etc.); that the very fact of the arrest of a Soviet citizen for the expression of his beliefs contradicts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and ratified by the Government of the USSR; that the official media either does not inform or misinforms the public about political trials in the USSR; that organized and purposeful action on the part of the public can contribute greatly to the improvement of these conditions—we have come to the conclusion, particularly in serious individual cases, of conducting organized actions in defense of citizens of the USSR persecuted for political reasons.

The arrest on December 8, 1971, by the KGB in Odessa of the scientist-microbiologist Nina Antonivna Strokata (Karavanska) is regarded by us as such an extremely serious case for the following reasons:

1. *This case concerns the arrest of a person well-known in Ukrainian and Russian democratic circles for her defense of social principles and justice;*
2. *This is a case of putting a woman into a prison condition with the obvious intent of condemning her to further incarceration of a more degrading nature. A healthy society would resort to this only in the most extreme cases (regardless of whether it be the American communist Angela Davis, or the Ukrainian patriot Nina Strokata);*
3. *This case concerns the arrest of a wife of a political prisoner who is serving a long term. She was arrested for the sole reason that, in spite of heavy pressure, she refused to renounce her husband and continued to defend his rights. (We, of course, realize that the prosecution will try to conceal this obvious fact and charge her with something like "dissemination" or "propaganda").*

The right to form a Committee for the Defense of Nina Strokata is guaranteed by the Constitution of the USSR, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Committee will act in accordance with Soviet laws.

The actions of the Committee will consist of: gathering facts, documents and other material pertaining to the "case" of Nina Strokata and bringing this information to the attention of the Government, the courts and representatives of the public; organizing, when need arises, a collection of signatures under the petitions in the defense of Nina Strokata; the collecting of funds to help Nina Strokata and her political prisoner husband who, because of her arrest, is deprived of all moral and financial support; demanding that all rights of the defendant, guaranteed by law, be honored (appointment of an attorney chosen by the committee of relatives of the defendant, the admittance of defense witnesses, a public defender, etc.); demanding a constitutionally guaranteed open trial, should trial be held; the guaranteeing that any sentence, if there be one, will be appealed; and of other actions, which might be found necessary during the course of the investigation and trial.

Should all these legal measures fail to bring the desired results, we will be forced to appeal to the United Nations Committee on Human Rights.

The activities of the Committee are to continue throughout the full term of Nina Strokata's imprisonment. It will cease to exist following her release.

All documents distributed by the Committee will be in two languages—Ukrainian and Russian—in their authentic texts.

We call upon the public to actively support the efforts of this Committee. Any questions in this case, as well as copies of appeals and protests, should be addressed to any of the undersigned.

December 21, 1971

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Pyotr Yakir—historian, Moscow.

Iryna Stasiv—philologist, Lviv, Kutusova 118, Apt. 12.

Vasyl Stus—writer, Kiev, Svyatoshyne, Lvivska 62/1.

Leonid Tymchuk—sailor, Odessa, Industrialna 44,
Apt. 4.

Vyacheslav Chornovil—journalist, Lviv, Spokiyna 13,
Apt. 1.

The above *Statement* was made at the time of the formation of the Citizens Committee in Defense of Nina Strokata by five Soviet citizens, four of them Ukrainians, and Russian historian Pyotr Yakir. The Committee was never able to do much for Nina Strokata, because within a few months, four of its members were themselves arrested. Iryna Stasiv, Vasyl Stus, and Vyacheslav Chornovil are at this moment serving terms in concentration camps on charges of "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda."

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