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Letters
From Political Prisoners

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Political Prisoner's Letter

An Open Letter to the President of the United States of America G. Ford

Mr. President,

I dare to think that the dialogue between West and East, which has somewhat widened in scope in recent years and received the name of détente, is the business not only of the leaders of states and parties but, first and foremost, of the people themselves.

However, while various strata of the citizens of the US can voice their evaluation of your efforts through numerous institutions in a democratic society (Congress, the press, public opinion polls, etc), the citizens of the USSR are completely deprived of such an opportunity for the prevailing social order in their country excludes the possibility of any internal dialogue under the threat of criminal prosecution and permits its citizens only to be silent or to "approve unanimously" the actions of self-appointed Party leaders. Yet the right to an independent evaluation of ideas and actions and to oppose is an inalienable human right affirmed by the present stage of the development of mankind and promulgated in international legal acts (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN). Even in societies that are more regimented than the present-day Soviet one no progress has been made towards a complete levelling of human personality and a standardization of thought, and opposition has not been eliminated for any significant length of time. There also exists an opposition in the USSR.

One of the indications of existence are the periodic repressive actions of the political police (KGB) and the existence of political prisoners in the state.

Citizens of the USSR know that even moderate criticism of the actions of the leading summit of the CPSU or of the sole ideology admitted in the state entails unavoidable persecution and possibly even imprisonment. It is clear, therefore, that for every one of us, political prisoners repressed for voicing opposition, there stand hundreds and thousands of people who think like we do and who have not lost their capacity for independent thought, but dare not express their views in public.

The leadership of the CPSU and the press that is fully subordinated to it react sensitively to everything that is said in the US on the question of détente, popularizing attitudes advantageous to themselves and combating the opposite point of view.

I think that you also, Mr. President, could take into account the opinion of the political opposition in the USSR, which is represented in the first place by political prisoners. I have the boldness to assert that

the thoughts expressed below are not only my personal ones but reflect the attitude to the problem of a wide circle of Soviet political prisoners of various nationalities.

In the first place, we still do not have a clear idea of what is after all meant by the often repeated phrase "international détente". If one does not see détente as a short-term campaign to meet the situation of the moment and as being of a tactical or even prestigious nature, but considers it a long-term action holding out the prospect of bringing relief to the whole of mankind, then it is clear that détente cannot in any way be reduced only to a certain restraint in the arms race or to an extension of trade. It is obvious that a firm international détente and the impossibility of a return to a policy of active confrontation can be secured not so much by military disarmament as by the demilitarization of the mind. Reality, however, shows that the Soviet leaders, especially Mr. Brezhnev, understand the matter differently.

Do you know, Mr. President, that the proclamation of the policy of international détente has been directly linked by the leaders of the CPSU to the suppression of any critical thought within the country? The Central Committee of the CPSU has put forward a thesis about an intensification in the ideological struggle against ideological subversion by world imperialism under the conditions of détente, very similar to Stalin's old thesis about the intensification of the class struggle in the USSR the nearer Communism approached. This thesis provided the theoretical grounds for the mass repressions of the 1930s-40s. Now too, practice does not lag behind theory. Beginning with 1972, a wave of political arrests and harsh sentences at unconstitutional trials (mostly *in camera*), the biggest one of the post-Stalin period, swept over a number of the Republics of the USSR (Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, the Baltic Republics). Extra-judicial persecutions have occurred on an even larger scale. In order to strengthen the role of the Army and the political police, for the first time in recent decades the ministers of defence and of the KGB have been introduced into the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU which has *de facto* become the supreme agency of state power in our country.

You, Mr. President, sign inter-state treaties not with the leader of the state but with the leader of the ruling party.

The campaign of repressions of 1972-73 in Ukraine was particularly massive and brutal. Scores of people were thrown behind bars or locked up in mental hospitals of the closed (prison) type. During this campaign traces of „ideological subversion“ were uncovered in poets' verses and in painters' pictures, in literary studies and in publicistic articles, even in intimate correspondence and in writers' working drafts. If something si-

milar were taking place in the US, in order to get your compatriots to learn "to unanimously approve" the actions of the authorities half of them would have to be put into prison and the other half turned into prison wardens.

KGB investigators do not even conceal from us, the prisoners of recent years, that they have set themselves the task of completely eradicating within several years all opposition which, so they say, obstructs the implementation of the policy of détente by openly discussing various sensitive problems of the USSR before the whole world. The punitive agencies are especially angered by attempts to raise the nationalities problem. Therefore, however paradoxical it may sound, we, the prisoners of 1972 and the subsequent years, consider ourselves to be the victims of the policy of détente, and so far one of its physically most tangible results.

It is for this reason that we, the political prisoners of the USSR, consider the US Congress Amendment to the Trade Bill to be particularly important and timely, although, if the Soviet press is to be believed, your attitude, Mr. President, to this amendment was negative. Soviet propaganda, sharply criticising the Congress Amendment which stipulated that the assuring of the freedom for citizens to leave the USSR be a condition of granting to the Soviet Union the most favoured nation status in trade and credits, calls this condition interference in the internal affairs of the USSR. We find such an interpretation of the law to be illogical.

The amendment does not raise the question of a change in the regime existing in the USSR or in its compulsory ideology. The question at issue is only the implementation of one of the axioms of democracy clearly expressed in Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. If, having ratified these documents for propaganda purposes, the leaders of the USSR at the same time do not wish to observe them, does not the same fate await the unsupported and loud declarations accepted in the course of the détente campaign? It is also clear that, when the critically thinking portion of Soviet citizens is given an alternative to the Mordovian and Perm camps and psychiatric hospitals, viz. a possibility of leaving for abroad, this without radically changing the existing regime in the USSR, may nevertheless bring about some humanization of it. This in turn, may become a prelude to a real, not paper, détente.

We, Soviet political prisoners, support the stand of the US Congress as being one that may have a positive influence on our own harsh fate of being potentially life-long prisoners of the system. On 1 March this year I personally wrote to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR renouncing my Soviet citizenship and petitioning them to let me go outside the boundaries of the USSR. Similar, but thus far unsuccessful re-

quests have been sent to Soviet institutions by Soviet citizens of other nationalities.

One would like to think, Mr. President, that, being genuinely concerned about the outcome of the process of international détente, you will, during your meeting with Mr. Brezhnev or through other channels, draw the Soviet leader's attention to the question of the freedom of citizens to leave the USSR and stress the impossibility of a lasting and firm international détente while the policy, adopted in the USSR, of suppressing all critical thought is maintained.

With respect,

Vyacheslav Chornovil
Ukrainian journalist, political prisoner

An Appeal to the Pope from Rev. Romaniuk

In the summer of 1975, the imprisoned Ukrainian Orthodox priest Vasyl Romaniuk, sent an appeal from captivity to Pope Paul VI, imploring the Holy Father to plead for the Ukrainian women and other victims, convicted during the Soviet Russian repressions against Ukrainian intellectuals in recent years.

"To His Holiness Paul VI, Pope of Rome, the Vatican.

From the repressed Ukrainian Orthodox priest Vasyl Romaniuk.

Your Holiness,

The violation of basic human rights in the USSR has assumed such great proportions in recent years that people are sent for long terms to concentration camps or psychiatric clinics for even the slightest displays of dissidence. In 1972 around 800 people were repressed in Ukraine alone; some of them received long sentences and are kept in concentration camps in Mordovia and the Ural region, while others were dismissed from their jobs, expelled from educational establishments or evicted from their apartments. A large proportion of those under repression are woman, some of which have received long sentences. Furthermore, the Soviet Themis* has paid no attention whatsoever to the fact that there are sick women and mothers of very young children in their number. The Soviet government pays a considerable amount of lip service to the ideas of peace and friendship between nations, and condemn the "Chilean Junta" in every way possible, while at home it savagely suppresses dissidence.

I regard it as my duty to ask Your Holiness to take note of this inhuman attitude adopted towards repressed women. Some twenty or

* Themis — goddess of law and justice in Greek mythology.

thirty women, under repression for their beliefs, are currently detained in a Mordovian concentration camp. There are Ukainian women amongst them whom I know about personally: Iryna Stasiv-Kalynets, the poetess; Iryna Senyk, the poetess; Nina Strokata-Karavanska, the doctor and biologist; Stefania Shabatura, the artist; Nadia Svitlychna, the teacher and philologist, and Oksana Popovych. The only "crime" of these women, as is the case with all those under repression, lies in the fact that they do not think in the way the "powers that be" would like them to.

I beseech Your Holiness to demand that the Soviet government puts an end to this violation of human rights, releases all those who are under repression and allows those who wish, to leave this terrible country. I must also mention that the women named above refused to work during International Womens Year as a sign of protest against the tyranny and lawlessness perpetrated against them, and have consequently been starved for a period lasting almost half a year in prison cells and in solitary confinement, and threatened with re-trial.

It has come to my knowledge that certain members of the Catholic and Protestant clergy have received a so-called "Lenin prize for promoting peace between nations", and therefore taking advantage of this opportunity, I would like to remind them that if they believe in the good intentions of the Soviet government, then they should try to influence it to stop the suppression of basic human freedoms and religious convictions, since only then will their high-flown statements about peace and friendship make any real sense. If the Soviet government refuses to comply with these demands then the obvious conclusion is that it has no desire for peace whatsoever, but is merely deluding worldwide public opinion, since without justice there can be no peace. In this case, those church members who received the above award ought to decline it.

A country where all justice has been quashed, where propagation of rampant atheism over the years has inculcated brutality into people, is incapable of peaceful relations and cooperation with other nations. I, for example, have written almost four hundred letters of complaint and appeals concerning the tyrannical and lawless acts committed against me. However, my pleas were in vain. They were met with cold inhuman response in all quarters; "You were convicted with good reason", I was told and, furthermore, there are people who have written thousands of such complaints and received no reply. This is a typical example of progressive Soviet cannibalism.

The Soviet Union is the fiercest opponent of Christianity (especially of Catholicism) and national and religious rites and traditions. A KGB official told me during my interrogation that, "the Church in the Soviet Union should cease to be active and go into decline. Consequently, we

regard those members of the clergy as undesirable, who painstakingly attempt to force their convictions upon the faithful, and we will fight against them". For the last three years I have been writing to every court for permission to receive a Bible. However, they informed me that I will not receive one: "We will not allow you to spread religious propaganda in this country". This is how freedom of conscience is manifest in the Soviet Union.

Your Holiness, it is impossible to enumerate all the facts concerning the suppression of human rights in the Soviet Union in this short appeal. In any case, it is not necessary to do so, since there are numerous documents in the West bearing witness to the awful crimes committed against peace and humanity by this government. My friends and I, therefore, hope that the Holy See will help in the formation of an international committee to investigate the violation of human rights in the Soviet Union. We also ask that we may be allowed to meet representatives of other nations, and that they might be made fully aware of all that is taking place in this country. I ought to remind Your Holiness that dissidents are not only sent to concentration camps and psychiatric hospitals, but some are even murdered. In 1970 Alla Horska, the artist, was murdered in Kyiv; this year an Orthodox priest was murdered in the Lviv oblast, and quite recently Volodymyr Osadchyj, brother of Mykhaylo Osadchyj, the Ukrainian writer currently under repression, was murdered in the town of Sumy. This list is not by any means complete. Even I was threatened with physical violence, and also a term in a psychiatric hospital, before my arrest. The governor of the Vladimir prison imparted the following 'wisdom' to me; "I'll tell you something; you anti-Soviets, should be sent to psychiatric hospitals, because you're abnormal. Can't you see what powers we possess, our tanks and our rockets. Nixon himself will be visiting us soon and soon America will be kneeling at our feet. Meanwhile, you've taken it upon yourselves to criticise the Soviet government. Normal people would certainly not get involved in this business."

Your Holiness, we appeal to the Vatican in great expectation. We appeal to all Christendom and everyone of goodwill, in this Holy Year, to raise their voice in protest against all the injustices mentioned in this appeal.

I, for my part, announce that on the 1st August 1975, I shall begin a hunger strike in protest against the cruelty and barbarity perpetrated against the dissidents, and against the refusal of the authorities to allow me to possess a Bible.

Father Vasyl Romaniuk."

V. Stus in Defence of V. Chornovil

The repressed Ukrainian poet, Vasyl Stus, now in a Mordovian concentration camp, has forwarded a declaration to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in defence of Vyacheslav Chornovil:

"The Ukrainian journalist Vyacheslav Chornovil recently suffered a very unpleasant experience. On the fifth day of the hunger strike which he began on 6th February 1975 while in solitary confinement in the Lviv headquarters of the KGB, some MVD*) officials entered his cell together with a KGB*) escort and announced that he was about to be transferred, in spite of his illness. Spent by hunger, Chornovil refused to make the journey, citing relevant legislation in his defence. His escorts then seized, handcuffed and gagged him, and after dragging him half-naked along the prison corridors and badly bruising his face, threw him into the cage of a prison van, where he fell unconscious. On regaining consciousness Chornovil asked for some clothing, but his pleas were only met with jeers. He was kept in this state for several hours in the cold cage. Then, after being taken to the railway station, he was escorted bare-foot through the snow, wearing only his underclothes, to a prisoners' wagon. Only then was he thrown some clothing.

This type of physical punishment is now becoming commonplace.

Without fear of exaggeration, I declare that this kind of treatment is only one step away from murder.

No other democratic movement of any other nation in the USSR, in fact, suffers from such widespread cruelty. These traditions stemming from the time of Stalin and Beria are stronger in Ukraine than anywhere else in the Soviet Union.

I demand that the tyranny of the KGB be ended and those responsible brought to justice.

3rd March, 1975."

(At the beginning of 1975 Chornovil was transferred from a Mordovian concentration camp to Lviv where an attempt was made to break his resistance and force him to recant. This attempt failed, and the above passage is a description of the beginning of his return journey to Mordovia.)

*) MVD — Ministry of Internal Affairs.

*) KGB — Committee of State Security.

Short Biographies of the People Mentioned

STUS Vasyl, born 1938, poet and literary critic, arrested in January, 1972 for "the distribution of false ideas which are a menace to the Soviet Nation and Social order". Sentenced in September, 1972 to 5 years imprisonment and 3 years banishment from Ukraine. At present serving his sentence in a Mordovian concentration camp.

CHORNOVIL Vyacheslav Maksymovych, born 1. 1. 1938, journalist. First arrested in 1966 and sentenced to 3 months imprisonment. Arrested again 3. 8. 1967 and sentenced 15. 11. 1967 to 3 years imprisonment. 12. 1. 1972 arrested for the third time and sentenced on the 9-12th April, 1973, in Lviv, to 7 years hard labour and concentration camps, and 5 years banishment from Ukraine. At present serving his sentence in a Mordovian concentration camp.

ROMANIUK Vasyl, born 1922 in the town of Chernivtsi Orthodox parish priest in the town of Kosmach, Ivano-Frankivsk province. First arrested in 1944 and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. His father died of starvation and his brother was murdered. Re-arrested in 1972 and sentenced to 7 years imprisonment and 3 years banishment from Ukraine. Serving his sentence in Mordovia.

SENYK Irena Mykhaylivna, born 1925. She is a renowned poetess. First arrested in 1946 and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment in concentration camps. Released in 1957 because of illness. Arrested for the second time in the summer of 1972 and sentenced in December, 1972, in Ivano-Frankivsk, to 6 years imprisonment and 5 years banishment from Ukraine. Irena Senyk is at present serving her sentence in a Mordovian concentration camp.

STASIV-KALYNETS Irena Onuphriyivna, born 1940, poetess. Arrested in

January 1972 and sentenced in July 1972, in Lviv, to 6 years imprisonment and 3 years banishment from Ukraine. Her husband, Ihor Kalynets, is also serving a long sentence of imprisonment, leaving their young daughter an orphan. Irena Kalynets is serving her sentence in a Mordovian concentration camp.

STROKATA - KARAVANSKA Nina Antonivna, born 31st January, 1927, in Odessa. She is a doctor and biologist. Arrested on the 18th December, 1971. Tried in Odessa between the 4th and 19th May, 1972. Sentenced to 4 years imprisonment. Her husband, Sviatoslav Karavanskyj, is also serving a long prison sentence. Nina Strokata is serving her sentence in a Mordovian concentration camp.

SHABATURA Stephaniea Mykhaylivna, born 1940, a painter and specialist of tapestry. Arrested in January, 1972, in Lviv and sentenced in early August, 1972, to 5 years imprisonment and 3 years banishment from Ukraine. She is serving her sentence in a Mordovian concentration camp.

POPOVYCH Oksana, born 1928 in Ivano-Frankivsk. She is a self-taught historian. First arrested in 1944 and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment in a concentration camp, where she became an invalid. Arrested again in 1974 and sentenced to 8 years imprisonment and 5 years banishment from Ukraine.

SVITLYCHNA Nadia Oleksiyivna, born 1942, teacher and philologist. Arrested on the 19th May, 1972, and sentenced late in March, 1973, in Kyiv, to 4 years imprisonment. Her four year old son was taken to a state orphanage because her husband, Danylo Shumuk, is also serving a long prison sentence. Nadia Svitlychna is serving her sentence in a Mordovian concentration camp.

OSADCHYJ Mykhaylo Hryhorovych born 22. 3. 1936, post and lecturer. Arrested 28. 8. 1965, and sentenced 18. 4. 1966 to 2¹/₂ years of concentration camps. Arrested again in January, 1972, and sentenced in September, 1972, to 7 years imprisonment and 3 years banishment from Ukraine. Serving sent-

ence in a Mordovian concentration camp.

HORSKA Alla Oleksandrivna, born 18. 9. 1929, an artist. On the 28th November, 1970, in the town of Vasylkiiv, near Kyiv, she was found murdered. The murder was committed by the KGB.

