

POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE USSR



USSR

SVYATOSLAV
KARAVANSKY

UKRAINIAN WRITER

MORE THAN 30 YEARS IN PRISON

FRIENDSHIP WILL DEVELOP SUCCESSFULLY AND INCREASE IN STRENGTH ONLY WHEN ALL THE NATIONS OF THE SOVIET UNION ARE ACCORDED EQUAL RIGHTS IN EVERY BRANCH OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE.

Svyatoslav Karavans'ky

SVYATOSLAV KARAVANS'KY

UKRAINIAN JOURNALIST,
TRANSLATOR, WRITER,
PHILOLOGIST

MORE THAN 30 YEARS IN PRISON

When Svyatoslav Karavans'ky is finally released from his imprisonment in a Soviet concentration camp in 1980, he will have spent more than thirty years in Soviet prisons and hard-labor camps. One might wonder about the nature of the crime that called for such harsh punishment--murder, perhaps? No, Karavans'ky is not a murderer; he is a political prisoner. Let us look at the life of this man.

EARLY LIFE

Svyatoslav Yosypovych Karavans'ky was born in 1920 in Odessa, Soviet Ukraine. In 1938 he graduated from a secondary school in his native city and enrolled in the Industrial Institute. At the beginning of 1939 he also enrolled in a correspondence course of the Institute of Foreign Languages. While still in secondary school he had written poetry and short stories and had tried his hand at translating. Because of his literary inclination he lost interest in his studies at the Industrial Institute. In 1940 he voluntarily left the Institute and joined the Soviet army, planning to enroll in the faculty of literature at the university in Odessa after finishing his service.

In the summer of 1941 Karavans'ky's army detachment was surrounded by the Germans, but Karavans'ky managed to escape and made his way back to Odessa. The city was then occupied by Rumanian-

ans. Svyatoslav Karavans'ky enrolled in the faculty of literature at the university and joined an underground group, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). The goal of OUN was the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state, free from Russian Communist and Nazi German domination. (The Soviet Constitution, incidentally, guarantees the right of each Union Republic to secede freely from the U.S.S.R.)

1945: SENTENCED TO 25 YEARS

When the Soviet Army recaptured Odessa in 1944, Svyatoslav Karavans'ky was arrested and charged with "anti-Soviet activity." During his interrogation Karavans'ky was promised freedom if he agreed to inform the secret police about attitudes among the students. When he refused, the Military Tribunal of the Odessa Region on Feb. 7, 1945, sentenced Karavans'ky to a twenty-five-year term of imprisonment. He served his sentence in many hard labor camps. He worked on the construction of a railway, felled trees, mined gold, worked on the construction of a highway.



Svyatoslav Karavans'ky

When after Stalin's death in 1953 conditions in the labor camps improved slightly, Karavans'ky resumed his literary work. He wrote poems, stories, and did translations. In 1954 he started to work on a major project, the *Dictionary of Rhymes in the Ukrainian Language*.

1960: AMNESTIED

After spending sixteen years and five months in

prison and in labor camps, Svyatoslav Karavans'ky was amnestied and released in December of 1960 on the orders of the camp administration. After his release Karavans'ky returned to Odessa where he completed a course for mechanics, specializing in the repair of calculating machines. In addition to working in factories, Karavans'ky also worked as a part-time correspondent for the magazine, *Ukraina*, and as a translator for a regional newspaper, *Chornomors'ka Komuna*.

PROLIFIC WRITER

Not satisfied with simply earning his daily bread, Karavans'ky completed the work started in the camp on the *Dictionary of Rhymes in the Ukrainian Language* (1,000 printed pages). This scholarly work received well-deserved praise from experts. Karavans'ky also translated the works of English authors (among them Byron, Shakespeare, Kipling and Shelley) and worked on a book, *The Biographies of Words*. In addition to this, he wrote many articles on linguistic problems for magazines and newspapers; prepared a collection of humorous short stories for publication; and, in agreement with one of the main publishing houses in Ukraine, began translating Charlotte Bronte's novel, *Jane Eyre*, into the Ukrainian language. Karavans'ky displayed such amazing energy for work, that it seemed as if he wanted to make up for the many years lost in Soviet prisons and concentration camps.

In 1961 Karavans'ky married Nina Strokata, a microbiologist at the Medical Institute of Odessa. In 1962 he enrolled in the correspondence department of the Philological Faculty of the Odessa University.

1965: SPEAKS OUT AGAINST RUSSIFICATION

In early 1965, noting the growing Russification of Ukrainian schools and universities, Karavans'ky wrote two articles and sent them to official authorities. Copies of the articles circulated among his friends.

One of the articles was in the form of an appeal to the Public Prosecutor of the Ukrainian SSR, asking for the indictment of the Minister of Higher and Special Secondary Education, Yuriy Dadenkov, on charges of violating the national rights of the Ukrainians by promoting the Russification of schools in Ukraine.

The other article, "About One Political Error,"

protested against the abolition of Ukrainian as a compulsory subject in all schools of the Ukrainian SSR. According to a law adopted in 1959, students of secondary schools where the language of instruction was Russian and not Ukrainian, were not obligated to study the Ukrainian language at all. The Russian language, on the other hand, was compulsory in all schools of the Ukrainian SSR. Karavans'ky claimed that this law gave preference to the Russian language in the Ukrainian SSR and discriminated against the language of the great majority--Ukrainian.

On September 4, 1965--a time when intellectuals were being arrested throughout Ukraine--Karavans'ky's home was searched by the KGB (Soviet secret police), but nothing illegal was found. On the next day Karavans'ky wrote a stong protest against this harassment and sent it to the authorities and to the press.

Sometime later Karavans'ky handed the consuls of Poland and Czechoslovakia copies of a petition intended for the leader of the Polish Communist Party, W. Gomulka, and for the President of Czechoslovakia, A. Novotny. The petition described the violations of Ukrainian national rights--rights that are guaranteed by the Soviet Constitution--- and also described the wave of arrests of Ukrainian intellectuals which took place in August-September 1965.

AUTUMN, 1965: REARRESTED AND SENTENCED WITHOUT A TRIAL

Although all his articles and petitions were written from the standpoint of Marxism-Leninism and were filled with quotes from the Soviet Constitution and from Lenin's writings, Karavans'ky did not escape the wrath of the Soviet authorities. For daring to speak out in defense of his nation and for daring to criticize those in power, Svyatoslav Karavans'ky was rearessted on November 13, 1965. Because there were no charges that could be brought against him at a trial, no trial was held. Instead, at the recommendation of the KGB, the Soviet General Prosecutor, Rudenko, revoked Karavans'ky's 1960 release. Without an investigation and without a trial Svyatoslav Karavans'ky was sentenced to eight years and seven months in severe hard-labor camps. This was the term that remained from his original sentence of twenty-five years. At the end of November, 1965, he was sent to a concentration camp in the Mordovian ASSR.

1965-1967: PETITIONS FROM LABOR CAMPS

In the camp Svyatoslav Karavans'ky wrote petitions to various Soviet authorities protesting his arrest and imprisonment without a trial. For this he was often placed in solitary confinement for a period of up to ten days. On October 8, 1966, he was imprisoned in the camp jail for a period of six months.

What was in these petitions that called for such severe reprisals? In a petition "To the Vice-Chairman of the Council of the Union of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR--Deputy M. Stel'makh" Karavans'ky, in February of 1966, wrote:

What else, if not a paradox, can one call the twenty-five-year prison term we still have in the USSR? Is this not a shameful contradiction of the human principles of Soviet law? For the new code (promulgated in the 1950's) has set a maximum term of fifteen years for all categories of criminals.

Further on in this petition Karavans'ky wrote that although the twenty-five-year sentence was abolished after the death of Stalin, a decree of April 10, 1960 gave the Prosecutor-General of the USSR the right to rearrest-at any time and without proof of guilt--a person who had been released before the end of his twenty-five-year term in prison and to sentence him to serve the remainder of his twenty-five years. Karavans'ky wrote that this decree is illegal because it contradicts the law that establishes fifteen years as the maximum punishment. He wrote the following:

I personally, having served sixteen years and five months of the twenty-five years, was released from camp on December 19, 1960. For five years I was free, having in no way violated Soviet laws....And yet, on November 13, 1965, I wrote a complaint concerning the Minister of Higher and Secondary Special Education of the Ukrainian SSR, Dadenkov, I was arrested....If the KGB were not satisfied with my conduct and if I in some way had violated the Soviet laws, I should have been tried. But no, I was not tried. I was arrested to finish the old term. Evidently there were no reasons for a trial. Why then was I arrested?

ON DISCRIMINATION AGAINST NATIONAL MINORITIES

Karavans'ky's petitions from the labor camps were not limited to the question of the illegality of his second arrest. Many of his petitions dealt with the lack of political and civil rights and with questions of national discrimination, carried out by the Soviet authorities against all the principles of the Soviet Constitution itself. In dealing with the nationality question, he did not limit himself to issues concerning Ukraine. For example, in a petition "To the Chairman of the Council of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR" Karavans'ky wrote the following:

This friendship (between nationalities of the Soviet Union) can develop successfully and grow stronger only if all the nations and peoples of the Soviet Union have equal rights in all branches of public and political life....It is precisely this that compels me to appeal to the Council of Nationalities with the request to take steps to remove outrageous vestiges of national discrimination which still occur in our life.

First of all, I wish to draw your attention to discrimination against the Jewish population, for the attitude toward the Jews is the litmus paper that shows the degree of international consciousness of a given society....And where are the Jewish theaters, newspapers, publishing houses, schools? In Odessa, where there is a Jewish population of 150,000, there is not a single Jewish school....Again, in Odessa where the Jewish population amounts to 25 per cent, only 3 to 5 percent of the students in institutions of higher learning are Jewish....

No less outrageous is the wholesale deportation of Crimean Tatars and of Volga Germans beyond the borders of their republics and the liquidation of their statehood.

In this same petition Svyatoslav Karavans'ky, a Ukrainian, deals with the injustices perpetrated against such nationalities as the Chechens, Ingushes, Kalmyks, Karachays, who, although rehabilitated and allowed to return to their native lands, were not permitted to repossess their old homes but had to buy new ones. Karavans'ky asked: "Why is this? The people were deported unjustly!"

Karavans'ky also attacks the deportations to Siberia of great numbers of Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians, and the mass influx of Russians into the Baltic States.

About the problems of his native Ukraine Karavans'ky wrote:

Great harm has been caused to the friendship among peoples by the perversions of the national policy in one of the largest republics of the USSR--Ukraine. The Russification of Ukrainian institutions of higher learning, carried out after 1937, was condemned and partly revised in Western Ukraine; but in Eastern Ukraine, the schools of higher learning are fully Russified even today...

The genuine friendship between peoples is thwarted by the practice of settling Russian populations in the towns of other national republics. Thus in the Ukrainian SSR, the Russian populace systematically increases from year to year and the Ukrainian one decreases....The appearance in Ukraine of large numbers of Russians (retired officers, retired KGB officials, and other privileged categories of citizens), who settle in towns and take over all the better positions, jobs, and professions, forces the native Ukrainian populace into low-paying work... Such unceremonious colonization of ancient Ukrainian lands promises only animosity.

SCHOLARLY WORK IN LABOR CAMP

Since his rearrest in 1965, during those brief periods when he was not sitting in the camp jail or in solitary confinement for writing his petitions, Karavans'ky managed to finish the translation of *Jane Eyre* and also wrote several chapters of his book, *The Biographies of Words*.

1967: TRANSFERRED TO VLADIMIR PRISON

Karavans'ky's petitions, in which he pointed out the illegality of his rearrest, criticized the Soviet nationality policy, and pointed out the lack of political and civil liberties, gained wide circulation in underground clandestine *Samizdat*. For writing these petitions Karavans'ky was transferred in 1967 from the hard labor camp to a prison in Vladimir, RSFSR. From there he supposedly tried to smuggle out more petitions to Soviet authorities, for which he was charged (in the fall of 1969) with "anti-Soviet propa-

ganda and agitation."

1970: SENTENCE EXTENDED TO A TOTAL OF MORE THAN THIRTY YEARS

A trial of Svyatoslav Karavans'ky was held in Vladimir prison itself in April of 1970. He was accused of writing a couple of petitions and a poem and of trying to smuggle them out of prison. Special attention at the trial was given to certain writings dealing with the 1941 mass execution of Polish officers (prisoners of war) at Katyn Forest, supposedly by the Soviet secret police.

Karavans'ky's wife, Nina Strokata, appeared as a witness at his trial. She defended her husband and accused those who had staged this inhuman trial. (Strokata was punished for this defense of her husband: In 1971 she was fired from her job at the Odessa Medical Institute, and in May of 1972 she was sentenced to four years imprisonment for "anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation.")

As for Karavans'ky, his trial in Vladimir prison in April 1970 ended with a sentence of eight years—five of them in prison and three in a hard-labor camp. This eight-year term is to run concurrently in part with the remainder of his original twenty-five-year sentence up to a maximum of ten years. Thus, when this talented Ukrainian writer, journalist, translator, and philologist is finally released sometime in 1980, he will have spent more than thirty years in Soviet prisons and hard labor camps. But there is always the possibility that he will then be charged with still a new "crime"—such as writing petitions and defending human and national rights which are explicitly guaranteed by the Soviet Constitution.

HOW CAN OUR YOUNG PEOPLE BE EDUCATED IN THE SPIRIT OF INTERNATIONALISM WHEN THEY SEE ENTIRE NATIONS DEPRIVED OF THEIR RIGHT TO NATIONAL AUTONOMY AND OF THEIR RIGHT TO AN EDUCATION IN BOTH THEIR NATIVE AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES?

Svyatoslav Karavans'ky

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF NATIONALITIES OF THE SUPREME SOVIET OF THE USSR

The true development and strengthening of friendship among the nations of the USSR demand that the following measures be quickly adopted and implemented:

CESSATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE JEWISH POPULATION.

RETURN OF STATEHOOD TO THE CRIMEAN TARTARS AND THE GERMANS OF THE VOLGA REGION.

RETURN OF ALL IMMOVABLE PROPERTY TO THE FAMILIES OF UNJUSTLY DEPORTED AND REPATRIATED NATIONAL GROUPS.

PERMISSION FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE BALTIC NATIONS, THE WESTERN UKRAINE, BYELORUSSIA, AND MOLDAVIA WHO WERE UNJUSTLY DEPORTED TO SIBERIA TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMELANDS.

INVESTIGATION OF THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE LATVIAN ARMY OFFICERS.

PROCLAMATION OF A GENERAL AMNESTY ENCOMPASSING ALL VICTIMS OF STALIN'S PERSONALITY CULT.

REMOVAL OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION AGAINST NATIONALITIES IN THE UKRAINE, BYELORUSSIA, MOLDAVIA, AND THE OTHER REPUBLICS.

CONDEMNATION OF THE DEPORTATION OF PEOPLES FROM THEIR NATIONAL REPUBLICS TO SIBERIA, AND OF THE SETTLEMENT OF THESE REPUBLICS WITH RUSSIANS.

REVIEW OF THE SYSTEM OF PASSPORT RESTRICTIONS, AND CONDEMNATION OF PASSPORT DISCRIMINATION THAT IS IN CONTRADICTION TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS.

REVIEW OF THE BORDERS OF NATIONAL REPUBLICS SO THAT THEY MAY CONFORM MORE CLOSELY TO ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTLEMENTS.

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