



NEWS FROM UKRAINE

Information About the Current Struggle For National Independence and Human Rights

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Valentyn Moroz Freed, Symbol of Ukrainian National Resistance

On April 27, Valentyn Moroz, 43-year-old Ukrainian historian and symbol of Ukrainian national resistance to Russian rule in Ukraine, arrived at New York with four other Soviet dissidents in a swap engineered by the US government and the USSR. Moroz's release, the result of personal intercession by President Carter and the State Department and of years of effort by Ukrainians in the free world, electrified the Ukrainian community. Moroz was given a hero's welcome.

Charged with advocating the secession of Ukraine from the USSR, Moroz was arrested in 1965 and sentenced to 4-years at hard labor. While in prison he wrote a powerful indictment of the KGB and of the Soviet concentration camps. After serving his term he was arrested once again in 1970 for writing "anti-Soviet" essays in which he attacked Moscow's destruction of Ukrainian culture and called for a reawakening of Ukrainian national life. Sentenced to 9-years imprisonment, he delivered a final statement before a closed court, predicting the continued growth of national consciousness in Ukraine and hurling a challenge at Soviet authorities, "We will fight."

In 1971 Moroz became seriously ill in Vladimir prison because of deliberate food poisoning by prison authorities. A year later he was assaulted by criminal inmates and knifed. Transferred to a Kiev prison infirmary, he was questioned by the KGB about other dissidents but refused to testify against them. In 1974 and back again in Vladimir prison, Moroz, subjected to torture and brutality by prison guards, began a hunger strike, vowing to go without food until death if conditions of his confinement did not improve. The hunger strike lasted for 145 days. In 1976 he was transferred to the Serbsky Institute as a prelude to confinement in a psychiatric ward but, after protests in the West, was judged to be sane and, in 1976, was transferred to a labor camp in Mordovia.

- Released along with Moroz was Yury Vins, a Baptist leader from Ukraine, sentenced to 5-years of prison for conducting an underground ministry and "defaming the Soviet state." Vins' son Peter is a member of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group in Kiev that documents Kremlin violations of human rights. Most of the Group's members have been arrested and Peter Vins himself, after finishing a 1-year prison sentence, was recently beaten by the KGB and threatened with death.

- Ukrainian sources report that Oles Berdnyk, one of the original members of the Kiev Helsinki Group, was arrested in March and is threatened with a long prison sentence. Berdnyk, a writer, poet, and philosopher, recently advanced the idea of a Ukrainian Spiritual Republic that would be a symbol of a new era of peace

A Thirteen Year Ordeal: The Reasons

Present events in Ukraine also constitute a turning point. The glacier of fear, which for many years immovably shackled the spiritual life of the nation, is breaking up.

Report From the Beria Reserve

Everyone was regarded a "nationalist" who was not indifferent to the fate of the Ukrainian language. In the towns of Eastern Ukraine it was even simpler to be included on the list of "nationalists"—it was enough merely to speak Ukrainian.

A Chronicle of Resistance

From the standpoint of the "realists" the Ukrainian cause has always been hopeless. That is why it has always been espoused by those who hoped against hope, those who were not frightened by the "hopelessness" of reality and stubbornly pursued their dream as "Israel followed the pillar of fire."

Amidst the Snows

If you think that by putting me in prison you will create some kind of vacuum in the Ukrainian national revival then you will be disappointed. Understand at last: There will be no more vacuum.

Instead of a Last Plea

I beg you not to call me a Russian dissident. I am a Ukrainian dissident.

To American reporters at New York press conference

and creative evolution and activity among mankind and which opposed as "criminal" the destruction of any nation for the aggrandizement of another.

- Another important member of the Kiev Helsinki Group, Lev Lukyanenko, has begun serving a 10-year sentence in Mordovia. His wife recently appealed to the West to save her husband, who has a serious stomach illness and is forced to work in extremely severe conditions. "I want to shout to the whole world to help my husband as quickly as possible out of this hellish camp and save him from the suffering that he is undergoing there," she writes. Lukyanenko's sentencing last July, immediately after the Shcharansky and Orlov trials, went almost unnoticed in the West.

Kvetsko On The Denationalization of Ukraine

Sentenced in 1967 to 15-years of prison and 5-years of exile for alleged membership in a Ukrainian nationalist organization, Dmytro Kvetsko has appealed to the Soviet Presidium to strip him of his citizenship and allow him to emigrate abroad after the completion of his sentence. The appeal, written two years ago but received in the West only late last year, sheds light on various aspects of Moscow's denationalization and russification policies in Ukraine. To combat the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in Western Ukraine, Moscow ordered large tracts of forests to be cut down and whole villages levelled so that the insurgents would not be able to find any refuge. The inhabitants of the towns and villages were either driven to cities outside Ukraine to find work or forcibly transported to distant Asian parts of the USSR. Thus, states Kvetsko, Ukrainian ghettos were formed in Vorkuta, Magadan, Kolyma, Karaganda, and throughout the entire Siberian region. Here the ghetto residents, deprived of any contact with their national culture, gradually become russified.

I know the price of the so-called fatherland that I "betrayed." From history I know that each occupying power brought us Ukrainians not only a new colonial yoke but also its own fatherland which we were forced to love and defend. My grandfather lived under Austrian rule. Austria was his fatherland. My father lived under Poland. Poland was his fatherland. I ended up under the USSR. The USSR is my fatherland...I "betrayed" the USSR. Better yet, I want to leave it. Nothing binds me to it. But that is not all. I believe the appellation "citizen of the USSR" brings me shame, degrades my dignity, stains my national honor. Why? Because there are no elementary human rights in the USSR. Brutal coercion and arbitrariness, spiritual oppression and total lawlessness dominate it.

Destruction and Russification

According to recent reports from Ukraine, in 1978 Soviet authorities destroyed the graves of Ukrainian soldiers who died in 1919 in the struggle against Polish occupation. The local residents had cared for the grave sites for many years and often decorated the graves and placed lighted candles on them. Most of the cemeteries in Lviv, Ternopil, and Ivano-Frankivsk (all in Western Ukraine) were simply levelled by bulldozers. In August and September 1977 historic Ukrainian musical documents were destroyed in Lviv. Reports from Ukraine early this year stated that authorities explained that the documents "accidentally" caught on fire during an inventory of the conservatory archive. Paralleling the physical destruction of Ukrainian culture and historical landmarks, last November the Ukrainian Ministry of Education made public a list of instructions to step up the teaching of Russian in all Ukrainian schools from the first grade to the university level. The move is seen by nationally conscious Ukrainians as another Kremlin attempt to russify the whole population.

KGB Murders?

Unable to stem the tide of Ukrainian dissent, the KGB has apparently turned to murder in what may be a revival of tried and true Stalinist methods. The following cases have reached the West in the last half year:

- On January 3, 51-year-old Heli Snehirov, a Ukrainian writer, died in a KGB prison in Kiev. KGB officers reportedly told Snehirov's wife that he had died of cancer, but dissident sources stated that Snehirov died from torture and forcible feedings which aggravated his already poor health. In 1977, Snehirov wrote an open letter to President Carter urging him to be firm with the USSR. He also sent an open letter to Brezhnev, accusing him of oppressing the Ukrainian people and lying to the world. Following his arrest in December 1977, Snehirov was reported in the Soviet press to have written a letter recanting his previous views. Ukrainian dissidents later reported, however, that Snehirov denied writing such a letter, that he was being subjected to torture by the KGB, and that he was paralyzed from the waist down because of his treatment.

- The body of Ukrainian rights activist, Mykola Melnyk, who died under mysterious circumstances, was found at the beginning of March in the suburbs of Kiev. Western news agencies reported that Melnyk committed suicide after his apartment had been searched by the KGB, but dissident sources are convinced that his death was somehow connected with the security organs and may have been perpetrated to frighten other dissidents. Melnyk was active in the Kiev Helsinki Group and for many years took part in the Ukrainian national and human rights movement. A historian by profession, Melnyk was fired from his teaching post in 1973 after he had attended a ceremony commemorating Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko at his grave in Kaniv. Prior to a similar ceremony in 1977, Melnyk was summoned by the KGB and forbidden to place flowers at the poet's monument. Melnyk refused.

- Last March, Rostyslav Paletsky, a 47-year-old artist from the Odessa region, was murdered in his home by an unknown man who apparently beat Paletsky to death after the latter refused to have a drink of whiskey with him. Local officials quickly spread a rumor that Paletsky died from a brain hemorrhage when he fell and hit his head. They claimed that Paletsky was drunk at the time and that both he and his wife were habitual drunkards. The Kiev Helsinki Group reported later, however that when Paletsky's wife came home, she found her husband lying in a pool of blood; his skull had been fractured and several ribs broken. Despite official recognition of his work, no newspaper reported his death. The Helsinki group noted that Paletsky was planning to apply for an exit visa to leave the USSR and that this fact was known to officials. Paletsky's paintings were popular throughout Ukraine and known in several other countries. The Informational Bulletin of the Kiev Helsinki Group compared the death of Paletsky to that of Alla Horska who also died in suspicious circumstances in 1970 and who was believed by Ukrainian dissidents to have been murdered by the KGB for her activities in the Ukrainian human rights movement. "The loss of these two artists," stated the Bulletin, "who had managed to make a contribution to Ukrainian art, is a national loss."

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Ukrainian Helsinki Group Continues To Function

In spite of the fact that most of its members have either been arrested or sentenced to prison, the Kiev Ukrainian Committee to Promote the Implementation of the Helsinki Accords continues to monitor violations of human rights in Ukraine and to issue information bulletins detailing illegal arrests, trials, and persecutions of Ukrainian dissidents. In a statement last year the Group compared the Soviet judicial system to that of Nazi Germany which, instead of being guided by the interests of humanity and justice, served

The Soviet Empire

Why didn't any of the participants of the Helsinki Conference notice [Ukraine's] absence? Is not Ukraine a member of the United Nations...? Was it not over its land, from upper Dnister to the lower reaches of the Donets, that Fascist tanks rolled? Western Diplomats...continue to call the Soviet Union "Russia"...The historical fact that the Russian Empire disintegrated long ago and that in its place was created a voluntary union of sovereign states was never assimilated nor psychologically fixed either in the West or in the USSR itself. Tradition took precedence over law...

The imperialistic past of Russia hangs like a dark shadow over these allied peoples, not allowing them to speak of their constitutional rights. That is why the personality cult, which in its worst form reproduced czarist authoritarianism, is substituted for another cult—the word "union" goes forth from the podium, but it is understood as "Russia." And that this has continued for six full decades is in no small measure the responsibility of Western leaders, for whom it was just as difficult to break away from age-old traditions as it was for the peoples of the Russian Empire.

Russia is glorified in hundreds of poems and songs...But if one tries to express his love for Ukraine in the same way, Mordovian camps or special psychiatric wards are the answer...

In truth, there is no more bitter fate than to be born a Ukrainian.

There is no doubt about one thing: In a civilized state these things cannot continue for very long. Such experiments can be conducted perhaps with confused or illiterate people, but there are fewer and fewer of these in the USSR. That is why we are convinced that in the end law will triumph over an imperialistic tradition. For in its legal foundation the USSR is still an empire.

Memorandum No. 2
Kiev Helsinki Group

the interests of the Third Reich. The members of the Group thanked those persons who have assisted the human rights movement in the USSR, but scorned those persons and institutions which, directly or indirectly, continue to support the "reactionary policies of Soviet leadership." Another document by the Kiev Group arrived in the West early this year. The Memorandum No. 2 (see excerpt above) was dated January 20, 1978 and addressed to the Belgrade Helsinki Conference. Among those signing the document were Oles Berdnyk, Lev Lukyanenko, Mykola Rudenko and Olesky Tykhy—all since arrested or imprisoned.

Arrests, Protests, Persecution

Almost every week brings instances of the KGB's harsh and lawless treatment of Ukrainian dissidents, their sufferings as well as their protests. The following is only a small sample:

Vasyl Ovsienko. Philologist and instructor in Ukrainian, the 30-year-old graduate of Kiev University was sentenced in February to 3-years of prison for refusing to let the KGB search his apartment and for being suspected of having contacts with famous Ukrainian dissident Lev Lukyanenko. At his trial Ovsienko accused the authorities of behaving worse than in the days of Stalin and Beria and stated that he was not afraid to speak the truth. "Why am I being destroyed?" he asked. "Because I have a high sense of justice and human dignity." Ovsienko has already served a 4-year prison term for "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda." In 1977 he wrote a letter to Soviet authorities, defending Ukrainian political prisoners and stating that to maintain communist views dogmatically is foreign to Ukrainian pluralistic spiritual traditions. He also said that he believed the secession of Ukraine and other republics from the USSR would be the best way to solve the nationality problem.

Vasyl Striltsiv. 50-year old teacher of English and Ukrainian. As a boy of 15, sentenced without cause to 10-years of labor camp. "Rehabilitated" after serving his sentence, Striltsiv headed a society for the preservation of Ukrainian cultural and historical relics, for which activity he was gradually hounded from his job. In 1977 he renounced his Soviet citizenship and asked for permission to emigrate to England. He became a member of the Kiev Helsinki Group because of the repressions in Ukraine of which he considered himself a victim and because the goals of the Kiev Group are, as he states in a letter to the Soviet Presidium, "to fight against the recidivists of lawlessness and cruelty."

Myroslav Symchych. Former soldier in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, sentenced in 1940 to 25-years imprisonment and, in 1969, to an additional 10-years for "anti-Soviet activity." Symchych is married and has two children whom he helps support with the little money that he gets in the labor camp. In 1976 he appealed to the United Nations Human Rights Commission to help his 72-year old mother who has no material means of support and is ill besides. "You have no way to stop the persecution of local authorities to which she is subjected as a punishment for my activities. You are not able to return to her the rights of a citizen or human being. I know all this. I ask only one thing—the right to life. Help my mother."

Bohdan Rebyk. Sentenced in 1967 to 3-years imprisonment and in 1974 to 7-years imprisonment for Ukrainian "nationalism." At his trial in 1974 defied the court, stating that he was not afraid of prisons or special regime camps and that his convictions about the rights of Ukraine would never change. He accused Russians of Ukraine-hating and of continuing czarist policies under the guise of "brotherhood." When the prosecutor tried to show that Ukrainians were among the most fortunate people on earth, Rebyk countered by pointing to the man-made famines of the 30's, the mass deportations of Ukrainians to Siberia from Western Ukraine in the 40's and 50's, and the miserable existence of Ukrainian collective farm workers. "This is not the result of good fortune," he went on. "It is the result of colonial policies."

Briefs

● Last fall Vasyl Sichko, a 22-year old journalism student at Kiev University, renounced his Soviet citizenship after being expelled from the University for his membership in the Kiev Helsinki Group. Sichko is the son of Petro Sichko who in 1977 finished serving a 25-year prison term for membership in an underground nationalist organization in Chernivtsi in Southwestern Ukraine. Both father and son became members of the Kiev Group and have been the victims of KGB repression ever since.

● "Neither Yakutia nor Mordovia can break our national spirit." So writes Oksana Hel to her father, Ivan Hel, Ukrainian political dissident incarcerated in Mordovia. Hel's daughter, a high school student in Lviv, wrote the letter after a visit to her father. The Hel family, wife, daughter, and grandmother, have been the victims of KGB harassment for refusing to denounce Ivan Hel's views. The letter was confiscated by the KGB after a search of the Hels' living quarters, and Hel's wife was accused by school officials of failure to bring up her daughter properly.

● A document of the underground Lithuanian National People's Front, smuggled out of the USSR and recently published in the *East-West Digest* calls for the independence of Ukraine and other subjugated peoples of the USSR. The group requests emigre organizations in the West to stage demonstrations against Soviet embassies and consulates in the free world and to publicize the group's manifesto and ideas. It also calls for a free democratic and socialist Russia without its "usual imperialistic designs" on Finland, the Baltic States, Poland, Ukraine, the Caucasus, and other states and nations.

● A group of Mordovian inmates has proposed forming an association for former political prisoners to assist its members and their families materially and morally. Since no end of political trials and repressions seems to be in sight in the USSR, the group feels that such an association is necessary to help dissidents survive. The proposal was made in a letter to Andrei Sakharov and the Kiev Helsinki Group and was signed by eight political prisoners, five of them Ukrainians.

Having rebelled against this whole empire of lies, I had one support—the knowledge that slavery is intolerable. I learned that...evil can be defeated that it can, and should be, resisted. For me the denial of bolshevism is not a revelation but a way of life. And it should not be opposed by silent passivity. No one will help us except we ourselves. To demand that we solve our problems in a democratic manner—that is the only alternative for a Ukrainian citizen.

● In a letter highly critical of first generation Ukrainian communists and of the Soviet system, 30-year old Valery Marchenko pledged that he will fight against bolshevism and for a free Ukraine. He criticized Ukrainian intellectual and party leaders for kowtowing to Moscow and for not resisting the economic exploitation of Ukraine and its russification. The letter was written to Marchenko's grandfather, a professor at Kiev University (see excerpt above).

● Having finished a 5-year prison term, Ukrainian dissident Vasyl Stus was accused by a party newspaper in Magadansk (where Stus is currently in exile) of being a "fascist." Stus defended himself at a special meeting at the coal mine where he worked by referring to himself as a Ukrainian patriot and a citizen of Ukraine. He stated that he was a poet and a translator, had written over twenty works, and was proud of his nation and of being a Ukrainian.

● A letter addressed to the International Red Cross by Ukrainian literary critic Yevhen Sverstyuk is circulating in the underground "samvydav" (self-publishing) press in Ukraine. Sverstyuk, sentenced to 7-years of camps and 5-years of exile for "anti-Soviet propaganda," asks the Red Cross to examine the treatment of political prisoners in the Soviet camps and gives a number of details about the brutal treatment (or lack of it) given to sick and suffering prisoners. Prisoners with serious illnesses, states Sverstyuk, are kept in isolation cells, forced to perform hard labor, or given inadequate or incompetent medical treatment.



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