

Documents of Ukrainian Samvydav

**WOMEN'S VOICES
FROM SOVIET LABOR CAMPS**

**SMOLOSYP SAMVYDAV SERIES
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WOMEN'S VOICES FROM SOVIET LABOR CAMPS

Smoloskyp begins its series *Documents of Ukrainian Samvydav* with this collection of letters written by Ukrainian women who are political prisoners in Soviet hard-labor camps. Though some of these letters were written as long ago as May 1973 and reached the West only recently, they are far from outdated. In fact, they are probably even more relevant in 1975—International Women's Year, proclaimed by the United Nations, for in them are dramatically brought together the issue of human rights, as defined in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which the Ukrainian women so often refer, and the special spiritual strength of women who have gone through the ordeal of illegal arrest, trial, and imprisonment, yet who remain unbroken and continue to confront the regime with protests, hunger strikes, and the writing of letters such as those contained herein.

The names of seven of the Ukrainian women-political prisoners are known. Five of them—Nina Strokata-Karavanska, Iryna Stasiv-Kalynets, Stefania Shabatura, Iryna Senyk, and Nadia Svitlychna-Shumuk—were tried and sentenced in 1972-73 on charges of "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" (Article 62 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian S.S.R.) and are presently imprisoned in Camp No. 3 near Barashevo, the Mordovian A.S.S.R. Another Ukrainian woman, Maria Palchak, is there also, serving a fifteen-year sentence for participating in the Ukrainian resistance movement. In March 1975 these six women were joined by Oksana Popovych, sentenced in February to eight years at hard labor under Article 62.

The letters of these women, written to Soviet officials, the UN, world organizations and prominent individuals, found their way into the Ukrainian *samvydav* and the Russian *samizdat*, and eventually reached the West.

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To Procurator-General R. A. Rudenko,
from Stefania Mykhaylivna Shabatura, a Ukrainian woman,
until her arrest a member of the Artists' Union.

Some Reflections on the First Anniversary of My Sentence

Poet V. Stus, literary critic I. Dzyuba, poet I. Kalynets, translator and literary critic I. Svitlychny, journalist V. Chornovil, artist S. Shabatura, poet M. Osadchy, scientist N. Strokata, poetess I. Kalynets (Stasiv), psychologist and literary critic Ye. Sverstyuk, and others about whose fate I was unable to learn anything because the phantom of the law had slammed the prison doors behind me. . . .

If citizen Procurator-General's hobby is neither fishing nor stamp collecting, he will remember that until 1972, and even during 1972, the names of those I was able to mention above could be found at art exhibitions and on the pages of publications of the national press on art, science, literary criticism, and others.

Today, if you, the Procurator-General of my country, do hear about them at all, it is only in reports about their trials, which swept over Ukraine this past year in a new wave.

The sentences imposed by the courts establish the guilt of the accused not at all convincingly; they nonetheless condemn people who are young, talented, and capable of creative work, to a senseless waste of time and energy in places of deprivation of liberty.

Already the camp administration considers itself the earnest defender of state interests, and demands that a member of the Artists' Union sew gloves with as much success as she once performed creative work.

But such a Maoist approach to the re-education of a creative intellectual in a workshop breeds a type of intellectual who no longer creates cultural treasures.

During the Middle Ages, the Inquisition burned for heresy either the artist or his works. In the second half of the twentieth century, artists are no longer burned or even shot. They are condemned to re-education in strict-regime camps. But this strict regime is that Inquisition pyre which consumes both the artist and that which he is capable of creating.

Throughout mankind's ancient history, that was not all of it. Plato was sold into slavery. Thomas More was beheaded. Chaadaev was made insane. Dostoyevsky groaned in the hard-labor "House of the Dead." Taras Shevchenko served his sentence without the right to draw or write (as a matter of fact, this form of punishment is today being inflicted upon me, an artist, in places of imprisonment, and not without your passive complicity). I. Yakir howled, he who, as he was going to his death, blessed his murderer Stalin. All those howled whose fate was decided by your predecessor, but I will not mention them—shame for the actions and inaction of your colleagues of those days awaits me here.

Our descendants will speak of our era as a time of great scientific and technological achievements, but not as a time of a harmonious development of individuality. How can there be talk of development when the blood vessels of culture are periodically severed in the offices of investigators and in courtrooms?

But how long can this go on with impunity?

Could it be that you share Sherwood Anderson's view that "Every human being on this earth is Christ and every one will be crucified."? If that is so, then I am ready to be crucified for my country and for my people, who have been prevented from standing upright to their full height, first by the hordes of Batu Khan, then by the oppressors from the "ruling house," and by the actions of your colleagues, past and present.

S. Shabaturo

December 7, 1973

Stefania Shabaturo, born in 1938, is an artist whose work in Ukrainian tapestries was highly acclaimed in official art circles before her stand in defense of Ukrainian historian Valentyn Moroz led to her arrest in January 1972. At the trial which saw her sentenced to five years of labor camps and three years' exile, she was accused of introducing political, "anti-Soviet" motifs into her art.

To Procurator-General R. A. Rudenko,
from Iryna Senyk.

In the solemn lines of the United Nations Charter, "We the peoples of the United Nations, full of determination to affirm anew faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person," in these lines lay the hope of entire peoples and of individual persons who because of various circumstances remained discriminated against up to the moment that the United Nations Charter was proclaimed.

The United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the ensuing international and legal documents were being drawn up at a time when in the camps of Pechora, Kazakhstan, Siberia and Kolyma suffered those to whom only the death of Stalin brought release.

The suffering of prisoners poured out not only in tears; it became the source of high aspirations for freedom and faith in progress. From the camps of that period, many went into poetry. But the works of former inmates were the result and product not of personal drama. Those who stepped upon the path of creativity amid the agonies of humiliations of the camps, at times merged into their milieu, sometimes struggled with it, and sometimes transcended it. In struggling with his milieu, with existing reality and the times, the poet seeks the real world, which he sometimes succeeds in discovering for himself and for his reader. Or the opposite may happen—he may build an artificial wall between himself and those for whom he should write, and this wall becomes a punishment and torment which no camp, past or present, can inflict.

I who have poured out the tears of my experience onto the lines of several hundred poems, written during my imprisonment in years which were difficult not only for myself but for my entire fatherland, I have lived to see poetry and poets put on trial. Therefore I who was once among the members of the OUN [Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists] ask you, the country's Procurator-General: Is it possible to discuss poetry in courtrooms?

By declaring a hunger strike for December 10, I wish to remind of that which has been forgotten since the formulation of legal documents of international scope which had promised so much.

I. Senyk

December 5, 1973

Iryna Senyk was 21-years-old when she was arrested for her participation in the Ukrainian resistance movement. During the ten years, from 1944 to 1954, that she spent in Siberian and Mordovian hard-labor camps, she contacted tuberculosis of the spine; she returned to Ukraine in the early 1960's as an invalid. She was again arrested in October 1972, probably because of her associations with Vyacheslav Chornovil, Valentyn Moroz, and Svyatoslav Karavansky, and because copies of her poems, written at the time of her first imprisonment, were found during searches of apartments of politically active persons. She received a sentence of six years in labor camps and five years of exile.

To the Procurator-General,
from Nina Strokata.

I do not think that our times place but one choice before a human being—whose epigon he is to be.

A long time ago, I made it a rule never to enter into a dialogue with those who, in a perpetual state of official euphoria, are capable of turning any dialogue into their own monologue. But sometimes I force myself to express my opinion on that which constitutes the retention of defects characteristic of the society in which I live.

I hope that you, the Procurator-General, have already paid due tribute to the festive pomp which dominates the lives of our state officials. Then please turn your attention to the disservices rendered, out of good intentions, perhaps, by those who took it upon themselves to prepare you and me for the next notable date of the current year—the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This Declaration did not possess the characteristics of an agreement that was international and consequently binding on the member nations of the UN. Therefore, during a period of twenty-five years, it was possible to exploit it in various ways as a political instrument. But this year saw the ratification of pacts, familiar to you, which trace their origins to the Universal Declaration. From that moment, all the organs of information became obsessed with one idea—to prove to all the citizens of the Soviet Union that there exist certain state (i.e., higher) interests, for the sake of which it is imperative to restrict civil and political rights. Precisely these restrictions are being passed off as the preservation of socialist democracy.

A corrective labor colony, offices of KGB investigators, or the halls of judicial proceedings are far from optimal stimuli rousing to open discussion. Therefore, without expressing any of the pros and cons which I hold, I will allow myself to propose that you read in the journal Novoye Vremya, No. 39, 1973, Yu. Reshetov's interpretation, "In the Name of Human Rights and Freedoms." And in reading it, turn your attention to the last lines of the left column. There you will read: ". . . in accordance with the covenant, the right to freedom of thought may be restricted . . ." If the right to control thought constitutes the essence of socialist democracy, then those who begin to reject the existence of such democracy will be justified. Or perhaps the control of thought is an extension of Article 62 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian S.S.R. (and the corresponding articles of the other republics), of which I am not aware because of my isolation?

Inasmuch as I do not expect an answer from you, I declare on December 10 a hunger strike in protest against all restrictions and persecution of thought.

Nina Strokata-Karavanska
December 10, 1973

Nina Strokata-Karavanska, born in 1925 in Odessa, graduated from the Medical Institute in Odessa, then went on to practice medicine and won ac-

claim as a researcher in microbiology. In 1965 her husband, writer and translator Svyatoslav Karavansky, was re-imprisoned for his political writings. Nina Strokata's refusal to renounce him, and her continued defense of him and other Ukrainian activists, led to her dismissal from work and arrest in 1971. At her trial in Odessa in May 1972 Strokata was sentenced to four years in hard-labor camps. She is reportedly in very poor health and very probably has breast cancer. Microbiologists in the West have taken up her cause; in May 1974 she was made a full member of the American Society for Microbiology.

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*To Procurator-General Rudenko,
from Nadia Svitlychna.*

The arrests of 1972 which culminated in trials with indictments based on Article 62 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian S.S.R. produced a large group of people to whom the sentences handed them gave an unwritten right to consider themselves political prisoners, inasmuch as Article 62 provides for punishment for actions directed against the political foundations of the U.S.S.R.

Thus I became a political prisoner, although I had considered the main concern of my life to be the upbringing of my son. In fact, I was deprived not only of freedom, but of motherhood as well. In this respect, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the General Assembly in 1948 and which served as the basis of the international covenant on the civil and political rights of man, ratified by the government of our country exactly in the year of my imprisonment, played no minor role.

An indiscreet faith in such solid documents as the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights led me to prison. It turns out that they conflict with the actual laws of our land and merely camouflage the real essence of those laws. For example, one of the articles of the Declaration stipulates that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." But Article 62 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian S.S.R. provides for punishment for actions consisting of "dissemination of ideas and opinions through any media" and for the circulation, preparation, or possession of literature of anti-Soviet content.

In my case, the advantage turned out to be not on the side of the constitutional guarantees of the freedom of speech and guarantees stemming from international human rights covenants. The advantage turned out to be on the side of the above-mentioned article of the Criminal Code, on the side of an article on the basis of which I was deprived of my freedom and my two-year-old son was orphaned. Therefore, having re-assessed my attitude toward the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I interpret it as a provocative document of international scope, which may serve as a trap for the credulous.

As a protest against the Declaration, I declare, on its twenty-fifth anniversary, December 10 of this year, a hunger strike.

*Nadia Svitlychna
December 10, 1973*

Nadia Svitlychna-Shumuk studied philology at Kiev State University, then worked at a Kiev radio station and as a librarian. In 1965 her brother, literary critic Ivan Svitlychny, was arrested and Svitlychna went to his defense by writing letters and signing petitions to authorities. She did the same in 1968 for Vyacheslav Chornovil. In 1970 she pressed for a thorough investigation of the murder of her good friend, the artist Alla Horska, even though there were strong indications that the KGB was behind the crime. When in 1972 her husband Danylo Shumuk, a former political prisoner, was again arrested for memoirs he had written about his previous imprisonment, Svitlychna refused to denounce him and actively defended him. This activity resulted in her arrest in April 1972. In March 1973 she was tried on a charge of "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" and sentenced to four years in hard-labor camps. She and Shumuk have a son, Yarema, now four.

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*To: the President of P.E.N. International, Heinrich Böll,
the President of the World Federation of Medical Workers,
the permanent representative VFIR at the UN
and trade union organizations, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies.*

New Year's greetings to you and your countrymen would be impossible without faith in a civilization whose ideal shall be the sanctity of human life. We, women who find ourselves in the kingdom of Grandfather Frost, firmly believe that these garlands of barbed wire will be scattered by the wisdom and ideals of our contemporaries.

*Respectfully,
Ukrainian women-political prisoners,
Mordovia, December 1973*

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To all our friends outside the interior zone [all those not imprisoned]. New Year's greetings, dear and faithful ones! May Happiness, Inspiration, Faith, and Freedom be yours!

Mordovia, December 1973

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*To the Secretary General of the United Nations:
An appeal.*

Stefa Shabaturova, born in 1938, sentenced to five years of prison camps and three years of exile, artist from Lviv.

Nina Strokata-Karavanska, born in 1925, sentenced to four years in prison camps, scientific researcher from Odessa.

Iryna Stasiv-Kalynets, born in 1940, sentenced to six years in prison camps and three years' exile, poetess from Lviv.

The day of January 12, 1972, marked the beginning of a new wave of repressions against Ukrainian intellectuals. We are being persecuted and imprisoned only because we, as Ukrainians, speak out in defense of the preservation and development of Ukrainian culture and language in Ukraine. All the arrests carried out in Ukraine during that year constituted violations by the Soviet government of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We are helpless against the lawlessness of the Soviet courts. We have been sentenced illegally and are presently confined in the Soviet political concentration Camp No. 3 in the Dubrovlag complex in Mordovia. We are not guilty of a single charge that has been brought against us. We are not asking for any favors, only for a real, just, and open trial with the mandatory participation of a representative of the United Nations.

May 10, 1973, Barashevo.

*Stefa Shabaturo
Nina Strokata-Karavanska
Iryna Stasiv-Kalynets*

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To the United Nations Commission of Human Rights.

In the camp for women political prisoners, 1975—International Women's Year began on December 12, 1974. Because we had attempted to mark Human Rights Day, they punished not only us, but also our young children, by depriving them of their sole annual visitation.

We, in reply, refused forced, compulsory labor, thereby protesting against laws which permit the degradation of human dignity and the punishment of children because of their mothers. Torn without any justification from our native land, we are completely prepared to endure all the hardships to which we have been condemned (deprivation of visits, the denial of the right to buy provisions, incarceration in punitive isolation cells for terms of thirteen to twenty-one days, and in the camp prison for three to six months), so long as we can preserve in ourselves the feeling of internal freedom.

In October 1974, one of the women political prisoners, Raissa Ivanova, a healthy person in all respects, was declared mentally ill and transferred to a psychiatric hospital . . . solely on the grounds that she would not renounce her beliefs. . . .

*We ask that representatives of the Commission of Human Rights come here to personally meet with us.
February 15, 1975*

*Iryna Stasiv
Stefania Shabaturo
Nadia Svitlychna
Nina Strokata
Odarka Husyak*

Iryna Stasiv was born in Lviv in 1940. She graduated from the university there, then lectured on Ukrainian literature and language and wrote children's books. She and her husband, the poet Ihor Kalynets, became active in the Ukrainian cultural and national rebirth and openly defended arrested Ukrainian intellectuals. Iryna was arrested in early 1972. In July of that year she was tried and sentenced to six years in labor camps and three years' exile for "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda." At a separate trial, her husband received a similar sentence.

Odarka Husyak was sentenced in 1950 to a 25-year term for participating, as a courier, in the Ukrainian national liberation movement. She spent nineteen years in Vladimir Prison, then in 1969 was transferred to the labor camp in Mordovia. In February 1975 she was released, after serving the full twenty-five year term of her sentence.

A certain attitude is reflected in the letters of the Ukrainian women, based on the belief that the actions for which they are imprisoned were lawful, that they were guaranteed by the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. and the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and that it is the Soviet regime and the authorities of the labor camps that violate both Soviet laws and the principles of human rights. This resolve not to compromise, but to stand on their principles, is further reflected in the conduct of the Ukrainian women in the labor camps, where during the course of 1973 they declared fifteen separate hunger strikes of up to seven days duration. Among these was a strike in protest against the camp administration's denial of Stefania Shabaturova's right to paint and another protesting the cancellation of Nina Strokata's visitation rights as punishment. In April 1973, Shabaturova, Iryna Stasiv, and Strokata appealed to officials to allow them to prepare for the upcoming celebration of Easter, in part, by going to Confession. The rejection of the request was accompanied by a lecture on the principle of separation of church and state. On December 10, 1974, the Ukrainian women presented demands to be granted the status of political prisoners. For their efforts, Iryna Senyk, Nadia Svitlychna, and Nina Strokata were placed in punitive isolation cells, Stasiv was deprived of her next visit (she was not put in a cell for reasons of health), while Shabaturova was given a half-year in the camp prison (reportedly, she had rebuked a camp official). In September 1974, responding to an appeal in the journal *Novoye Vremya*, Svitlychna, Stasiv, Strokata, and Shabaturova asked the camp administration for permission to send money they had earned to victims of the Chilean junta. This request was turned down. They also asked for permission to send delegates from among the women-political prisoners to the Congress of the International Democratic Federation of Women. Again they were turned down.

S M O L O S K Y P S A M V Y D A V S E R I E S

DOCUMENTS OF UKRAINIAN SAMVYDAV

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"Women's Voices from Soviet Labor Camps"

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