

They Speak for the Silent

In order that they may become part of the historical record of our time, NATIONAL REVIEW here makes public two documents as remarkable in their origin as in their content. They were written by two groups of Ukrainian political prisoners at the Soviet concentration camp complex located in Mordovia, about four hundred miles southeast of Moscow.

The original Ukrainian texts, dated September and October 1955, are painstakingly written, in a purple that looks rather like the old-fashioned "indelible pencil" marking, on pieces of linen cloth that may have been torn from the lining of a coat or dress. Such writing on cloth, which lends itself to concealment, is a classic underground device.

So concealed, the pieces of linen made their slow, hazardous journey westward. By stages that cannot, of course, be revealed, the documents finally reached a representative in Western Europe of the "Supreme Ukrainian Liberation Council" (UHVR), the governing committee of the Ukrainian underground. From Europe the documents were brought to Mr. Mikola Lebed, Secretary General for Foreign Affairs of the UHVR. Mr. Lebed is well known to us. We have inspected the original texts and gone over with him and his associates the history of their transmission.

The first of the documents is addressed to the United Nations, and Mr. Lebed is now endeavoring to bring it formally and forcefully to UN attention. The second, less formal, is intended primarily for Ukrainian refugees and émigrés in countries outside the Soviet Empire.

We call particular attention to the continuity here revealed in the internal measures of the Stalin and the post-Stalin regimes. The concentration camp system continues as a basic institution in the Soviet structure. The proclaimed amnesty of 1953 applied only to prisoners with sentences under ten years. Most of these were not allowed to return home, but were forced to remain as compulsory settlers in the penal regions.

These documents are the first to disclose that revolts in the camps began before Stalin's death. In the autumn of 1952 they were started in the Karaganda camp system by former soldiers of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the force that fought first against the Reichswehr and then against the Bolsheviks, and which still fights from the underground. The 1953 strike in the Vorkuta complex, hitherto thought to be the first, was led by three hundred of the insurgents who had been transferred from Karaganda. Further strikes followed in Noril'sk, Vorkuta again, the Kingir camps (in Kazakhstan), the camps of Verkhnoye-Imbatskoye and Mirnoye, from 1953 on into the present. The Kingir strikes lasted for two and a half months in 1954, and (according to the direct testimony of the Hungarian Dr. Fedor Varkonyi, here confirmed) were suppressed finally when the MVD used tanks to crush hundreds of the prisoners.

The first document asks: "Does the civilized world know that, over the mass burial sites of the prison camps, new camps and cities are built, canals are dug, and stadiums are erected, in order to obliterate the traces of these crimes?" This is presumably a thoughtful precaution of the Khrushchev-Bulganin regime as part of its preparation for receiving tourists and visitors from the West. We may recall that toward the end of World War Two, when it became probable that the Nazis were going to be defeated, the Gestapo carried through a similar construction program in the attempt to conceal the mass slaughters in their death camps.

An Open Letter

*To the United Nations, Division on Human Rights, and to the Entire Civilized World
From the Prisoners in Camps in the USSR*

We, the prisoners in the Mordovian special camps, wish to bring the following statement to the attention of the entire civilized world.

We, Ukrainians, are in favor of any movement whose aims are freedom and truth; we advocate cultural progress in all walks of life, and we stand behind self-determination for all nations, including the United Ukrainian State.

We have no desire to exaggerate the facts of the situation that has long existed in Ukraine. We do not ask for mercy or pardon. We demand our right to live under laws that should be recognized by the entire civilized world — the world of twentieth-century civilization. This civilization has been spearheaded by a number of humanitarian elements, from small groups on up through national leaders. They include the great world-wide organization, the United Nations.

Our Ukrainian nation, like a number of other nations, has come under the conquering heel of Red Russia. We have been deprived of the basic rights of existence. We have been driven into camps, with severe sentences of from ten to twenty-five years — not for criminal acts, as the Bolsheviks maintain before the rest of the world; not for arson, treason, or murder; but because we, like every freedom-loving people, demand our lawful rights in our own land.

The question therefore arises: Does the civilized world know about the conditions prevailing not only among us prisoners, but throughout our country? Does the civilized world know that, when we have served our sentences, we are exiled to the so-called virgin lands of Kazakhstan, Krasnoyarsk, and the Far North —

while they proclaim that it is volunteers and members of the Komsomol who go out to those areas?

Can the civilized world conceive of Ukrainian sovereignty without a Ukrainian government, without a Ukrainian army, and without the Ukrainian people? If Ukraine is sovereign — and she should be — why is there no army composed exclusively of Ukrainians? Why do Ukrainians serve their terms in the army beyond the borders of their country? Why are military units composed of Russians and other nationalities to whom the interests of the Ukrainian people are alien, if not directly hostile, stationed in our country? If we are traitors and if our punishment is just, why were we tried by “peoples’” or “military” courts, whose composition is certainly not Ukrainian? Why do we not serve our terms on Ukrainian territory, which was ravaged by the last war and is in need of reconstruction? Why do we have to work at the cultivation of wild, remote lands and forests, when there is such a need for our forces at home?

On Human Bones

Does the civilized world know that, over the mass burial sites of the prisoner camps, new camps and cities are built, canals are dug, and stadiums are erected, in order to obliterate the traces of these crimes? In Abez’ (Komi ASSR), Camps 1, 4 and 5 stand on former cemeteries. At Zavod 5 in Leplya (Mordovskaya ASSR), the first and second polishing shops, the technical laboratory, and the forge were erected on human bones. Does the world know about the mass executions of prisoners who only demanded their rights as political internees? (At Mine 29 in Vorkuta, Attorney-General Rudenko was in charge of the firing squads.) Is it known that, in Kingir (P. O. Box 392, Colonies 1 and 3, Kazakhstan), men and women demanding their lawful rights were charged by four tanks and crushed by them?

Does the civilized world know that Ukraine has suffered starvation for thirty-eight years, in addition to the artificial famine of 1933; that Western Ukraine has been inundated by floods, and that the people have been condemned to death by starvation, with no hope of aid from “humanitarian,

From the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 3. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude. . .

Article 5. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6. Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law. . .

Article 15. (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality. . . .

Article 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion . . .

Article 19. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression . . .

Article 20. (3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government . . .

peace-loving” Communist Russia? This at a time when millions of tons of grain are exported abroad for propaganda purposes, when all sorts of foreign delegations visit model collective farms (special display models) and factories in the USSR.

In the postwar period (1945-55), Russia has raised the level of light and heavy industry beyond the prewar level. This was accomplished by a toll of millions of prisoners. Those prisoners raised the issue of improved living conditions—an improvement essential for any creature that breathes air (after between nine and eleven hours of work in the mines, the prisoners were shut up like cattle in close, stinking barracks furnished with the well-known “slop buckets”). Some of these prisoners were shot, others were crushed by tanks. Many of them received additional sentences of from ten to twenty-five years and were put in jail, where they are to this day.

This is addressed to the civilized world of the twentieth century—a century of education and progress. We feel certain that anyone who reads these lines will experience revulsion and contempt for the “just and hu-

manitarian” Communist Party of Russia and the crimes committed against the nations it has enslaved.

We are not discouraged, because we know that our will for freedom is founded on natural law, and we believe that the entire civilized world will uphold us in our course.

Resolutions

Bearing in mind the foregoing points, we, the prisoners in the Mordovian special camps, have adopted the following resolutions:

I

a. A commission should be appointed for precise verification of the facts as we have stated them: that Attorney-General Rudenko and Deputy Minister of the MVD Maslennikov were distinguished by the cruelty of their conduct in Vorkuta and Noril’sk in 1953, and in Karaganda in 1954.

b. The fact that Camps 1, 4 and 5 in Abez’ (Komi ASSR) and Zavod 5 (Mordovskaya ASSR) were built on cemetery grounds should be verified. Similar cases are not hard to find—there are forty-four such camps in this area.

c. We demand that the cemeteries be put in order, that the buildings and plants on them be razed, and that memorials be erected to the dead, as a symbol of perpetual shame to the Red slaveholders. Since members of all nationalities of the world are numbered among the dead, a special international organization should be established for the purpose of erecting these memorials.

d. We demand comprehensive social security for the orphans, widows, and parents (if they are not fit for work) of these victims of cruel injustice; also for those persons and their families who have suffered complete physical disability in camps and are unable to provide for themselves and their families.

e. Since an entire family is held responsible for an offense committed by one member (they are all subject to exile, deportation, confiscation of property) and a man’s grandson as well as his son may suffer because of an act he himself committed, there have appeared castes of “reliables” and “unreliables.” The “unreliables” live under constant oppression, persecution and misery. We therefore demand that these people be given back their



rights as human beings, that they receive social security, and that they be permitted to return to their countries.

f. We demand that all persons who have served out their sentences be permitted to return to their native lands. We protest the passing of sentences up to twenty-five years on a mass basis, because such a sentence is a sentence for life.

g. All persons who underwent a second trial and were then transferred from camp to jail because of their participation in camp strikes or in any other form of mass or individual protest against the violation of their rights as political prisoners should be released from jail and their sentences annulled.

h. All desert lands, pits, mines, and forests that became part of the USSR after their discovery or cultivation should belong to the nations whose sons and daughters worked on them and strewed them with their bones.

II

a. We demand the establishment of an international control commission charged with the fair distribution of aid earmarked for underdeveloped countries and for disaster areas (including the USSR).

b. We are wholeheartedly in favor of extending aid to all those who need it—regardless of their nationality, religion, race, or political convictions. But we cannot agree that bread should be torn from the mouths of the starving and sent abroad as aid, when it is really for purposes of propaganda. This is done in the Soviet Union, at a time when millions of people are starving.

III

a. Whereas every criminal act against the enslaved nations is perpetrated with the knowledge of the Politburo and of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, we demand that the entire ruling class of the Soviet Union be brought before international justice.

b. Yezhov, Beria, Abakumov and

others, whose execution was ordered by the security organs in order to deceive people at home and abroad, cannot be held responsible for everything, because crimes against the enslaved nations continue to be perpetrated.

IV

We, Ukrainians, make the following demands on purely nationalist grounds:

a. All Russian nationals shall be required to leave Ukrainian territory. They shall not be permitted to return until such time as Russia abandons her dream of denationalizing, assimilating and eventually devouring Ukraine—until she ceases to regard herself as Big Brother. It is a distortion of reality and of historical fact to speak of “the union of Ukraine with Russia.” Ukraine has always been cruelly enslaved by Russia.

b. We concede the right of other nationals—unless they have been sent by the Russian Government for ag-

gressive purposes—to live on Ukrainian territory, enjoying equal rights with the Ukrainian people. Russians may live there only when they begin to be governed by general standards of morality.

c. As long as there are armed forces in the world, the only units stationed in Ukraine are to be composed exclusively of Ukrainians and under the command of Ukrainians; all soldiers and commanders not of Ukrainian extraction are to be withdrawn beyond the borders of our country. This also applies to the administrative and security organs of the MVD.

d. Anyone who violates the laws of Ukraine is to be tried before a Ukrainian people's or military court; if convicted, his sentence will be served within the national borders.

Note: We request that the citizens of the world be informed of this letter by the United Nations, Division on Human Rights.

We have signed with initials and pseudonyms, so as to forestall any possible consequences.

[Signed by initials and pseudonyms of five deputies from the women's column and eight deputies from the men's column of prisoners.]
30/IX/55

From Women Political Prisoners

To Ukrainians in the Free World

DEAR FRIENDS:

We want to take advantage of this opportunity to tell you in brief what the Bolsheviks say about you—our political émigrés of the last decade—in their so-called lectures and in recent articles in the press. We would also like to give the Ukrainians abroad who are not indifferent to our fate some idea of the conditions prevailing among political prisoners in special Soviet camps since the war.

Lectures on Ukrainian affairs are delivered by important officials in the Mordovian Party, and not by members of the administration of local special camps. The main point in what they have been saying about you is roughly as follows: Although the number of Ukrainian political émigrés in the last decade has been small, the group is

torn by dissension and split into many parties. They are politically shortsighted, and they no longer enjoy popularity among their people, whose support they have lost. They are not fighting for anything real—just for the capital letter “U.” The Bolsheviks cite the names of our most prominent political leaders abroad, calling them “the most despicable betrayers of the Ukrainian people.”

Lectures on Ukrainian affairs were recently discontinued. The reason may lie in the prisoners' dignified reaction to the Bolsheviks' tendentious distortion of historical fact. These lectures, held at unexpected times, caused us spiritual anguish. But at the same time, they were a welcome event, because they allowed us to think (correctly, we hope) that our

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