

# Dignity or Death

A YEAR and a half ago, Russian leader Leonid Brezhnev signed a treaty in Helsinki guaranteeing freedom and human rights. Did it mean the end of the police state? The persecution? The night arrests? A group of Russian citizens formed a committee to monitor what happened. As the list of broken pledges mounted, the KGB moved in on the group themselves.

This is the story of one of them — a woman who's just out of Russia and living in new-found freedom with her husband and son. She's a teacher and historian, and she's now full of hope that at the age of 51 she can rebuild her life in the West.

She told her story to NICHOLAS BETHELL.

by Ludmilla  
Aleksyeva

IF you have not lived in the Soviet Union, you cannot imagine what life is like for the ordinary man in the street.

You do not have to be guilty of an offence of any sort to find yourself imprisoned without trial and separated from your family and friends, often for years at a time.

I'll give you an example of a sad and typical case.

During the late 1940s there was a more-or-less permanent rebellion in the Ukraine. The rebel army was commanded by Roman Shukhevich, a Ukrainian nationalist, who became quite a hero among his own people.

This did not endear him to Moscow. Eventually, in 1950 Soviet forces trapped Shukhevich in a flat and he killed himself rather than be taken alive.

But the State does not give up so easily. They arrested his son Yuri, who was only 18 years old, and sentenced him to 15 years in the labour camps, just for being his father's son.

## Renounce his father

After ten wasted years they took him out of prison, put him in a suit of good clothes and brought him to Kiev where they gave him the finest food, showed him around the city and took him to the theatre.

Then came the crunch. They said to him: 'We want you to go on television and tell the people that you believe your father was wrong, that you renounce his ideas and his fight against Soviet power.'

'If you do, you'll be out of prison at once, you'll live in Kiev and have a fine life.'

He refused. He had taken no part in the fight, of course, he'd been too young, but family pride made it impossible for him to renounce his father. So they took him back to prison where he served a total of 18 years before being released in 1969 at the age of 36.

Even then his troubles weren't over. Being the son of Roman Shukhevich, he wasn't allowed to live in the Ukraine. They banished him to Naichik in the northern Caucasus where some happiness came his way

at last when he married and had two children.

Then, in February 1972, they arrested him again and gave him another ten years in prison on the trumped up charge that he was writing memoirs. You could hardly have blamed him had the charge been true. After a life like that who wouldn't write memoirs?

Yuri is 43 years old now, and out of the last 27 years he has spent 24 years in prison although he has never committed a crime or raised a finger against anyone.

The fact is that the situation in the Ukraine is far worse even than it is in Moscow. The Ukrainians are still nationalist and the authorities there really feel that they cannot relax their grip for a moment.

Once a Ukrainian is convicted of a political offence, they never let go of him, they arrest him again and again on some pretext, as they did Yuri Shukhevich and Ivan Svittichny, who was in Perm labour camp with Vladimir Bukovsky.

Several dozen of these persecuted people have contacted us and told us they want to emigrate. Our Document No. 12 is about them. They love their country, but they realise there's no life for them there.

Most of them have relatives in the United States or Canada and we want them to be allowed to join them under the 'family reunification' section of the Helsinki Agreement.

Two of our members, Vladimir Slepak and Anatoli Shcharansky, deal with the problems of Jews in Russia. It is very important for Jews to have the right to emigrate to Israel if they wish. Our committee believes, in fact, that all citizens should have the right to emigrate, as it says in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which the Soviet Union has ratified.

I can't understand the idea that a grown-up person is not allowed to decide in which country he would like to live. By what right does someone else decide these things for him. To me it's as bad as choosing a man's wife for him or laying down how many children he ought to have.

## Murdered by the Nazis

A terrible case of a Jew not being allowed to emigrate came to a head last year. Yefim Davidovich was a Jew from Minsk and all his family were murdered by the Nazis. He escaped only because he was away, serving in the Red Army when Minsk was captured. He fought very bravely, won a lot

# My phone was the KGB wait



LUDMILLA ALEKSEYEVA: This week sampling freedom in the West

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THEM DRIVE  
OUR LEADER  
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AND FOUR  
KGB CAR  
FOR JUST  
PROFESSOR  
OF PHYSICS

of medals and eventually became a colonel, which was a very high rank for a Jew to reach. But, after the war he became convinced that the Soviet Union was full of anti-Semitism, actually encouraged by the authorities, and in 1957 he uttered this charge in public.

He was immediately dismissed from the army, deprived of his pension rights and found himself unable to find work. Yefim was one of the first to apply when it became possible for a limited number of Jews to emigrate to Israel. But, characteristically, the authorities wouldn't let him go. They said he had had access to military secrets.

The photograph in our documents shows him and his friend, Lev Orlov, laying a wreath at a monument to the victims of the Minsk ghetto in May, 1975. It was an unofficial meeting attended by several hundred people—a very rare event in our country, especially in the provinces.

Yefim bravely made a speech about anti-Semitism and fascism, clearly hinting that Minsk was still under the influence of these two evil forces. He also kept up the battle to try to emigrate to a freer world.

Dr Sakharov raised his case again and again, but it was no good. After several heart attacks, he died in April 1976, a few days before he was due to make another speech of protest at the ghetto monument.

We also have cases of people who want to emigrate for economic reasons. Document No. 13 describes the cases of working men who are too poor to feed their families properly. They want to go to the West, where they know that wages are much

higher and workers have trade unions to protect their rights.

For instance, I studied the case of a lathe operator from Odessa who has to feed a wife and eight children on the equivalent of £25 a week.

Up to now, one of the weaknesses of our dissident movement has been our lack of contact with ordinary Soviet working men and women. But publication of the Helsinki text in *Levestia* and the publicity it gets in radio broadcasts from abroad have pointed many workers in our direction.

My husband and I are not Jewish, nor were we very poor, but we applied to emigrate some time ago. My husband's name is Williams. His family originated in Britain, then emigrated to America. Around 1850 his great-grandfather came to Russia to help build bridges for the first railway between Moscow and St Petersburg.

## Full of terrible lies

But we had no reason to believe that our application would be approved until January 5, the day after our flat was searched for no apparent reason. Then the visa office called quite suddenly and asked us to come and arrange our documents.

At first I said that this was too sudden and I told the office that we had decided to postpone our application. I felt awkward at the idea of emigrating when my friends were in such danger.

The days passed. Everything seemed quiet and it appeared that the authorities had decided not to take the

matter any further, not to make a scandal that would look bad at the forthcoming review conference in Belgrade.

So we all agreed that I should emigrate after all and become the Committee's representative in the West. My husband, my son and I filled in our applications on January 21 and on February 1 they were approved, creating what must be a record for speed in the Soviet visa office.

The next day, February 2, Moscow's *Literary Gazette* appeared with an article by Alexander Agatov, a vicious attack against Professor Yuri Orlov, a well known Soviet physicist and leader of our group and Alexander Ginsburg, who runs the Solzhenitsyn fund for helping political prisoners. Agatov used to be a dissident. We all knew him personally.

But at some stage he must have been brought under the control of the KGB. His article was full of terrible lies. For instance, he claimed he had seen, with his own eyes, Ginsburg carrying out currency dealings. This phrase on its own was enough to give the KGB grounds to arrest Ginsburg, and presumably Orlov, too.

We were sure they were going to be arrested, but we didn't know when, so we told Ginsburg to go and stay with the Sakharovs. There was just a chance that the KGB would be reluctant to arrest him there because of the fuss it would create in the foreign newspapers.

There was also just a chance that, if we could delay the arrests, the KGB would reconsider.

But Ginsburg is a religious man, a bit of a fatalist, and he said that if he was going to be arrested, so be it. The way he sees it, these things are decided by some higher Being, not by

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YURI ORLOV: This week out of reach of human rights . . . in Moscow's Lefortovo Prison

the KGB. Or maybe, understandably, he wanted to spend these last hours with his wife and children. Anyway, he wouldn't go to the Sakharova.

Orlov reacted differently. He was upset by all the drama, by being followed by teams of KGB men wherever he went, and by the cars lurking outside his flat. He told me, 'I'm getting out of Moscow for a week. They can arrest me there, if they want, but I need a rest.'

## Called in for interrogation

Somewhat he managed to slip out of the flat without being noticed and take a train from Moscow to the little village where he was born. The police must have caught on eventually that he was gone because they called to his wife, Irina, Vallkova, for interrogation and questioned her. She refused to tell them where her husband was. 'It's because of you people that he's gone away: he needs a rest from you,' she said defiantly.

They eventually arrested Ginsburg on February 3. He went out to try to telephone Sakharov or me to ask if we could find someone to attend a political trial in Ryazan the next day. But neither of us got the call. The secret police nicked him up in the street before he could reach us.

His wife waited and waited, but he didn't come back. She went to the police station where they told her they had no record of her husband being arrested.

Finally, just before midnight, she went to the local KGB station and

they admitted that they had arrested her husband and taken him to Tarusa, where he is registered.

She was worried because he had just recovered from pneumonia. It was very cold and he had gone out to phone without a coat. She collected some warm clothing together and took the first train in the morning to Tarusa to give it to him.

As for Orlov, it was obvious that the KGB were all over the place looking for him. There were men standing in his doorway and men looking in through his windows (he lives on the ground floor).

The whole area where Orlov and Ginsburg live, within a minute of each other, was like a castle under siege. There was a complete ring of cars, more KGB men than passers-by.

## Under observation

But at the same time my flat, which is about half an hour's walk from theirs, was quite peaceful. The car that had been keeping me under observation for months had gone away for some reason. Probably it was because I'd just received my exit visa. I was, so to speak, off their books and out of their hands.

There was one marvellous thing in the whole terrible business. As soon as Ginsburg was arrested, people poured in to see me and the other members asking 'Do you need any help? Is there anything I can do?'

I've never known it to happen

before. Of course, there are hundreds of people in Moscow on the edge of the dissident movement, even thousands, but in the past when there's been trouble they've usually sided away.

This time it was exactly the opposite. In the most heart-warming way, people offered to help us with typing, running errands, even signing documents, which is the most dangerous of all. Within a day or two we had 300 signatures in support of Ginsburg, without even trying. People just came to see us and signed.

As for my poor telephone, the only one in the group still working (almost all the others had been switched off by the KGB), it rang all the time with concerned supporters asking: 'Are you getting up a Ginsburg petition? I want to sign it.' If we'd had time to go out and look for signatures, we'd have got thousands.

Orlov was still sitting in his little village. He had been right to go away. He needed time to think and prepare himself, and perhaps to give the KGB a chance to change their minds.

But on the other hand he didn't like it, because he wanted to know what was happening in Moscow. For instance, he didn't even know that Ginsburg was under arrest. After a few days he couldn't stand any longer the feeling of being cut off and he came back to Moscow. He knew it would not be safe to go to his own flat, so he decided to come to ours because we were leaving and less likely to have KGB men watching us.

Orlov arrived at my flat at about 3 p.m. I was out, but a friend of mine was there working on some documents. She opened the door, and there was Orlov with his finger pressed against

his lips. She realised that she mustn't say his name, she mustn't react at all.

He wrote on a piece of paper: 'Go and get Ludmila.' She found me at General Grigorenko's flat and explained, again by writing on a piece of paper, that Orlov was in my flat.

I returned immediately, but before I went in I had a really good look around. There were no cars, no agents and no one had followed me. I'm very good at spotting them and I'm sure on this occasion I didn't make a mistake.

We carried out our 'conversation' on pieces of paper. I even wrote down such innocent questions as: 'Would you like some tea?'

## 'Talking' on paper

I went out and called two American correspondents. At 8 p.m. they arrived on the scene. We then had to decide whether he should speak to them or carry on 'talking' on pieces of paper.

In the end we decided that this would be undignified and that it might be misinterpreted by the Americans as an attempt to get round the law, which is something we never do. So Orlov spoke, telling them that he was tired of being watched the whole time.

We agreed that it would be safest if he left our flat with the Americans and would make it more likely that he could get away. We and the Americans had a good talk for about a quarter of an hour, and for the first time that day I wasn't interrupted by telephone calls.

In the end it was this that made

me suspicious. I picked up the receiver. It was dead. Orlov was getting ready to leave with the Americans. I said: 'I'll just take a look outside.'

I went out—and there they were, four men standing in the hall and more men sitting in parked cars around the block. Obviously they'd heard Orlov's voice on their equipment and surrounded the house.

I went to a call-box, rang the exchange and asked whether my telephone was out of order. After a pause a man came on the line and said no, it wasn't out of order. It had been switched off because I had been using it 'for anti-State purposes'.

## Spirit him away

For some reason they didn't come to arrest Orlov that evening. We thought we might be able to spirit him away during the night, but at one point my son opened the door and there were two men standing right next to it.

The police finally came early the next morning. I whispered to Orlov the suggestion that we should force them to break the door down. He said: 'No, let them in.' I think that if he'd been in his own flat he'd have refused to open it, but he was embarrassed to think of this happening to a friend.

I opened the door and ten men burst in. They found Orlov sitting in a chair in our living-room. He asked for their warrant, and, when they said they had not brought one, I think for a moment he thought of refusing to go with them.

But there was my mother in the flat. She is very old and she had been very upset after the search. I think that was why he decided chivalrously not to make a fuss.

They huddled around him while he dressed, guarding him as if he was a dangerous terrorist, not a 56-year-old professor of physics who had written a few documents. A few minutes later I looked out of the window and watched them drive away, ten men and Orlov in four KGB cars.

## Battle for freedom

Since last May our committee has compiled 19 documents and 77 communications about human rights in the Soviet Union. Our leader, Professor Orlov, is in Moscow's Lefortovo prison. Ginsburg is in prison in Tarusa. Slepak and Shecharansky were searched again on March 4 and treated very roughly by the KGB.

The terrible news that Shecharansky was under arrest reached us on March 15. Only six of our original ten members are now free in Moscow.

But our material is in the West. It has all been translated, printed and distributed to all 33 Governments. I think that it provides a convincing record of the human-rights situation in the Soviet Union today—something which the United States and other countries are fully entitled to raise in Belgrade in September.

More members have rallied to the committee in Moscow to do the work of the members who are temporarily out of action. It has been a tense and difficult year, but I have high hopes for the future of our movement and I believe that our work has not been without value in the battle for human freedom.