

Over Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Vladimir Bukovsky

Vladimir Bukovsky, 35, served a total of twelve years in Soviet mental institutions and prisons for dissident activities. He was first arrested in 1963 for distributing proscribed literature, including *The New Class* by Yugoslav dissident Milovan Djilas, and for having organized an unofficial exhibition of abstract paintings. As a result he was confined to the Serbsky Institute for Forensic Psychiatry, infamous for mistreatment of critics of Soviet society, and was later transferred to "fifteen months of hell" in the Leningrad prison psychiatric institution.

Released in February, 1965, Bukovsky became an energetic leader of the Moscow dissident community and was arrested in December of that year for leading demonstrations protesting the jailing of dissident writers Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuri Daniel.

Shunted off again to a series of notorious mental hospital prisons located in Liublino, Stolbovaya Station, and the Serbsky Institute, he was released without an official explanation in 1966, perhaps partly as a result of

active campaigns on his behalf in the U.S. and Europe.

Bukovsky next was seized by Soviet police in January, 1967, for leading a demonstration in Pushkin Square on behalf of four other arrested dissident leaders and sentenced to three years in corrective labor camp.

Released in January, 1970, Bukovsky painstakingly compiled case histories on the misuse of Soviet psychiatric institutions to detain dissidents and subject them to surgical and chemical lobotomies, which was made public in Paris in March, 1971, along with his letter to international psychiatrists. His next arrest followed some three weeks later and brought a twelve-year prison sentence.

Despite harrowing prison conditions and desperate personal health, Bukovsky managed in detention to collaborate with fellow prisoner Semyon Gluzman, a psychiatrist, in writing "A Dissident's Guide to Psychiatry," a primer on the medical and psychiatric abuse of dissidents in Soviet mental institutions. As Bukovsky's

health deteriorated his mother began a relentless letter-writing campaign to Western political leaders that made her son the then best-known victim of the Gulag Archipelago.

In December, 1976, Bukovsky was released in exchange for the Chilean Government's release of political prisoner Luis Corvalan, leader of the Chilean Communist party. The exchange had first been proposed by Andrei Sakharov, leader of the Soviet dissident movement.

Bukovsky's book on his years in Soviet dissidence and detention, tentatively titled *Reflections of a Man in Handcuffs*, will be published this year by Viking Press and Bantam Books.

The following is the text of Bukovsky's recent speech to a New York State AFL-CIO luncheon honoring him. Contemporary news of Soviet worker dissidence—miners and waitresses now express to Western journalists the protests that had once been heard only from artists, writers, and scholars—gives his remarkable witness special poignance.—*The Editors*

Tens of thousands of books have been written about the Soviet Union—about its industry, agriculture, the political system, and its history. Even about prisons, concentration camps, and insane asylums there is a lot of literature. And yet, in talking with various persons in the West, I have realized how little is known here about Soviet life.

This is not surprising. When one tries to understand the life of another country, one automatically compares it with the life of one's own. But life here, in the free countries, is so different from life in the Soviet Union that such comparisons merely serve to confuse. Even those foreigners who travel to the Soviet Union for a short time and can see our life with their own eyes usually understand nothing about it.

The visitor is struck above all by the calm and quiet in the Soviet Union. There is no unemployment; no strikes or street processions; no terrorists—nobody seems to be seizing hostages. People walk about quietly; stores do business; cars travel the streets. And if you judge by Soviet newspapers, television, and radio, there are no robberies, murders, car accidents, natural disasters.

Similarly, the average Soviet citizen totally misunderstands life in the Western countries, about which he learns from Soviet newspapers, movies, and books. More than anything else the Soviet press writes about

strikes and unemployment in the West. And this is totally incomprehensible to ordinary Soviet people. Many of them seriously believe that you are dying of hunger, because in the Soviet Union only a person facing death from starvation could decide on such a desperate measure as a strike.

In 1962 in Novocherkassk the workers went on strike because their pay was cut and prices were raised on food at the same time. The workers and their families went to the City Soviet building with a petition. This was a totally peaceful procession, but it was met with machine-gun fire. Dozens of people were killed and wounded. The organizers, including the women among them, were later condemned to be shot or to fifteen years of imprisonment. In 1976 in the city of Riga four workers were sentenced to up to three years in prison after a strike brought about by the lack of meat in the stores.

The Soviet Union has signed various international conventions recognizing the right of workers to strike, but it has not bothered in its own legislation to formulate this right. Moreover, a strike is regarded as a "gross group violation of public order," for which one can be imprisoned for up to three years. This is the penalty for a completely peaceful strike, for the refusal to work. But methods of struggle such as sit-downs, picketing, etc., are punished according to the article entitled "mass

disorders'' with sentences of up to fifteen years or death.

The fictitious Soviet labor unions exist to prevent a real workers' movement from springing up. They do not protect the workers from hunger, arbitrary rules, and exploitation. The labor unions in the USSR are part of the Party and governmental apparatus, and they are not concerned with the protection of working people but with the carrying out of Party-governmental plans. Workers' complaints to the labor unions are passed on by them to the Secret Police. In the verdict of the court on the political case of truck driver Vladimir Pavlov (Maikop, 1972) Pavlov's complaint to the district council of labor unions was used as proof of his guilt. This is not surprising because for many years the chairman of the Soviet labor unions was the chairman of the KGB.

In 1964, for distributing forbidden literature, I was declared insane and placed in the prison psychiatric hospital. There I met, among other political prisoners, a French Communist. At the end of the Fifties he had emigrated from France to the Soviet Union to do his bit for the building of communism. He was a shoemaker by profession, and he found a job in a shoe factory in Moldavia. He worked for several months and was amazed at the low pay and bad working conditions, and he began to persuade the other workers to declare a strike. He assured them that the Communist party would support their demands because the Communists always defend the interests of the working class. For such "subversive activity" he was arrested, but because it was embarrassing to try a French Communist he was declared to be insane.

An even stranger impression is created among Soviet workers when they read the papers about your unemployment. They find it very hard to believe that people are paid money for not working. We have plenty of unemployed people ourselves, but the authorities consider that a person is himself at fault if he cannot find work. Such people are declared to be "parasites" and are sent to Siberia to work at low-paid labor. In the course of sixty years of terror the Soviet worker's habit of struggling for his rights has been broken. Of course this is not easy for a stranger to understand. The following anecdote is very popular in the Soviet Union:

A Western trade unionist visiting the USSR as a guest could not understand why Soviet workers don't strike. "They don't want to," Soviet officials explained to him. "If you don't believe us, go and talk to them yourself. Try to provoke them into striking."

The workers at one factory were called together, and the foreign guest addressed them: "Beginning tomorrow you will work twice as hard and will be paid half as little. Who votes in favor of this?" Everybody voted in favor. "Who is opposed?" Nobody was opposed.

The Western trade unionist was surprised but continued the experiment. "In view of the fact that under this new system we won't need so many workers," he said, "half of you will be discharged. Who is in favor?" Everybody voted in favor.

At this point the trade unionist lost patience completely. "But we will not be able to feed those who don't work, and

thus everybody who is discharged will have to be hanged. Who is in favor?" Again, everybody voted in favor.

But suddenly one of the workers raised his hand and requested permission to ask a question. "Only one thing isn't clear to me," he said. "Will the rope for the hanging be provided by the government or must we bring our own?"

This is a very sad joke, but what do oppressed people have to console themselves with other than bitter jokes about their own situation? Accustomed to lack of rights, Soviet workers prefer to steal from their place of work anything that can be sold on the black market in order somehow to feed their families, but they do not dare make open demands. This is very useful to the authorities, for in this way everybody is guilty and everybody can be tried—not for his political convictions, but for theft. In general, crime in the country is widespread. Alcoholism, drug addiction, and prostitution flourish.

There is a total of three million prisoners in the country, a little more than 1 per cent of the population. Such a high percentage of convicts is artificially supported by the government, mainly out of economic considerations. A prisoner is cheap labor, easily shifted by the authorities from one branch of the economy to another, sent to do the most difficult and unprofitable work in underdeveloped parts of the country with a difficult climate, places to which free labor could be attracted only by the offer of high pay. It is no accident that in the Voronezh District in the southern part of the USSR, where I was in the Sixties, there were only ten camps (about ten thousand prisoners), but in the Perm District in the northern Urals, where I was in the Seventies, there were about fifty camps (about fifty thousand prisoners). Approximately the same number are present in the Kirov, Tyumen, and Sverdlovsk districts and in the Komi ASSR.

Thus were created all of the so-called "great projects of communism." Dams, canals, roads, northern cities. It was mostly forced, hand labor, with very little mechanization—given our backward technology, this was completely efficient. The average pay of a prisoner is sixty to eighty rubles per month; free workers on the same job would receive 140 rubles.

From the prisoners' pay 50 per cent is withheld to pay for the guards, and half the remainder is applied to camp food, clothes, and upkeep. Thus the actual pay of a prisoner comes to fifteen to twenty rubles a month. Of this sum he can spend three to seven rubles on food and essentials at the camp shop. Labor is stimulated not by encouragement, but basically through various punishments for insufficient work or nonfulfillment of norms. Prisoners are most commonly punished by hunger and by incarceration in the special jail within the camp.

These millions of people have been removed from the sphere of normal consumption, which, in view of the constant shortages of goods in the USSR, is quite convenient for the regulation of demand. Spoiled, rotten goods, for which there is no demand in the general population, are supplied to the prisoners. In other words, if a general amnesty were suddenly to be

declared, this would cause economic catastrophe in the country. Hence from the time of Stalin's death there have been no amnesties. Instead of amnesties there was invented in Khrushchev's time a shortening of the prisoner's term (and, in later years, conditional sentencing), with obligatory transfer to "construction work in the people's economy." This category of prisoner is practically impossible to count. People so transferred are usually those with short sentences (up to three years), and are assigned the hardest, most poorly paid labor. If, before the end of his conditional sentence, such a prisoner breaks the rules in any way, he is sent to a camp to serve out his entire sentence.

Prisoners are used in the most varied projects. The products of their labor are often included in the general stream of Soviet exports, and when you see Soviet products in an American market you can be sure they contain a portion of slave labor. Some people here in the West try to prove that for people in backward countries the problem of human rights is not as essential a problem as the struggle with poverty. I do not think that these two problems can be separated; lack of rights gives rise to poverty, and poverty strengthens the lack of rights.

It is precisely for this reason that the movement for human rights in the Soviet Union, along with purely intellectual rights, defends the rights of workers. More and more workers are joining our movement. They understand that only thus can the vicious circle of lack of rights and poverty be broken. We are witnessing the beginning of a process that will lead us to freedom, a process of working people recognizing their rights and their human dignity. The fate of our peoples will depend on your position, on your solidarity and support. In the last analysis the fate of the whole world depends on this. I would like to thank American workers for their support, of which we were always conscious. It was the strength of your solidarity that swung open the doors of my prison cell.

It is not easy to understand from the outside what goes on in the Soviet Union. But is it only lack of understanding that moves, for instance, American businessmen when they supply the Soviet Union with credit, the latest technology, and modern industrial equipment? Everybody knows now that the greatest project of Stalin's five-year plans, on which the slave labor of prisoners was used, were created with the application of Western, mostly American, technology. Every time the inefficient Soviet economy needs re-equipment and support, Western countries readily come to its aid. It is difficult to understand that in the last analysis any economic aid to the Soviet Union or the East European countries that is not made conditional on definite and strictly observed demands serves only to strengthen the totalitarian regime. It's a strange thing, but when the talk is about Chile or Rhodesia, there are no doubts. Everybody knows what has to be done.

It is absolutely evident that Western capital investments in the USSR, which are calculated to exploit cheap labor, are directly harmful to the interests of Western workers. I am certain that American labor unions have at least *the right* to investigate all cases of investment of

American capital in the USSR and the conditions of labor and pay in the areas to which American capital is applied, and that they will not allow profit to be made from the lack of rights of Soviet workers. After all, it is no accident that the Final Act of the Agreement on Security and Cooperation in Europe, signed in Helsinki, links economic relations to the observance of human rights.

The Helsinki Agreement has created in the USSR and the other countries of Eastern Europe a broad movement for its strict observance. In Moscow, in the Ukraine, in Lithuania, in the Caucasus, groups to monitor the observances of the Agreement have been created. The members of the Soviet Helsinki groups collected a considerable body of information on the violation of human rights in the USSR and presented this material to the governments of the thirty-five countries that signed the Agreement. At present more than half the members of these groups have been arrested for their activities, which speaks all the more convincingly about the intentions of the Soviet Government.

Now, however, with the Belgrade conference in session to discuss the observance of the Helsinki Agreements, one gets the impression that the delegations of most of the Western nations have completely forgotten why they have gathered there. Precisely at the moment when an account should have been demanded from the Communist oppressors, the Western governments become remarkably bashful in their statements about human rights. It looks to some of us as if the Western countries signed the Helsinki Agreements just for fun, to cover their deals with the Soviet Union with those vague formulas!

Equal exchange of people and information is one of the basic principles of the Helsinki Agreements. We have always and consistently demanded its observance. But we demanded a real exchange, not a fictitious one.

Delegations of Western parliamentarians, genuinely elected by their peoples, travel to the Soviet Union. Labor union leaders genuinely representing the interests of the workers go there. And who do the Soviets try to saddle you with under the guise of their being parliamentarians and labor leaders? Party offices, secret police agents—that is, the executioners of our people, those who shot down the workers at Novochoerkassk, those who keep members of the human rights movement rotting in jail. Since when do the hangmen represent the hanged? Who needs such "exchange of people"? It merely lends respectable coloring to phony Soviet institutions, but it does not help our nations to understand each other better.

The American labor unions have invited to their convention as fully authorized and genuine representatives of our people those who, at the risk of their lives, struggle against lack of rights and against persecution in their country—the Soviet workers Vladimir Borisov, Anatoly Marchenko, and Valentin Ivanov; the physician Alexander Podrabinek; the writer Nadezda Mandelstam; the scientist Andrei Sakharov. Just such an exchange of people would aid security and cooperation in Europe. In the name of my comrades in the struggle for human rights I thank the workers of America for this invitation!