

X/15 RUSS

PROTEST LETTER OF LIDIYA CHUKOVSKAYA TO
MIKHAIL SHOLOKHOV

F-92

MUNICH, 16 November 1966 (Communist Area Analysis Department:
USSR)

DELIVERED TO: The Directorate of the Rostov Unit of the
Communist Party
The Directorate of the Union of Writers
of the RSFSR
The Directorate of the Union of Writers
of the USSR
The Editors of Pravda
The Editors of Izvestiia
The Editors of Literaturnaya Gazeta
The Editors of Literaturnaya Rossiya
The Editors of Molot

TO: Mikhail Sholokhov, Author of "Quiet Flows the Don"

Addressing the 23rd Congress of the Party, you, Mikhail Alexandrovich, mounted the tribune not as a private person, but as a "representative of Soviet literature."

Thereby you gave to every writer, including me, the right to pronounce judgment on those thoughts which you expressed as if in our name. Your speech at the congress may truly be called historic. Through all the many-centuried existence of Russian culture, I cannot recall another writer who would, in your fashion, publicly express regret, not that a sentence imposed by the courts was too severe, but that it was too soft.

But not only the sentence grieved you: The very court procedure to which Daniel and Sinyavsky were subjected failed to suit you; you found it too pedantic, too strictly legal. You would like the courts to judge Soviet citizens without restraining themselves by the code, to guide themselves not by the law but by a "sense of justice." This admonition stunned me--and, I have reason to believe, not me alone. Our people paid with millions of innocent victims for Stalinist scorn of the law. Persistent efforts to return to legality, to the precise observance of the spirit and

(P.T.O.)

the letter of Soviet law, and the success of these efforts are a priceless victory for our country in the last decade. Yet this very victory you would take from the people. True, in your speech to the congress, you placed before the courts as a model not those comparatively recent times when mass violations of Soviet law occurred, but rather a more distant past when the law itself, the very code had not yet been established: "The memorable 20's." The first Soviet legal code was instituted in 1922. The years 1917 to 1922 are remembered by us for heroism and greatness; but they were not distinguished by the rule of law, indeed they could not be so distinguished: the old order was destroyed, the new not yet established. The custom adopted then, judging on the basis of a "sense of justice," was appropriate and natural to times of civil war, right after the revolution; but it is in no way to be justified on the eve of the 50th anniversary of Soviet power. To whom and for what is this necessary, to return to a "sense of justice," which is in essence instinct, when law has been established? And, in the first place, whom do you dream of judging with this super-severe court which was unconstrained by the articles of the code and was applied in the "memorable 20's"? --Writers, first of all... For some time, you, Mikhail Alexandrovich, have had the habit in articles and speeches of speaking about writers with disdain and crude mockery. This time you outdid yourself. The sentencing of two cultured people, two writers, neither enjoying good health, to five and seven years at hard labor beyond their strength--that is in essence a sentence to sickness and, perhaps, to death--strikes you as insufficiently severe. A court judging them not by the articles of the criminal code, independent of them entirely --faster, simpler! --would have invented, you propose, a sterner punishment, and you would be happy.

Here are your actual words:

"Had these rascals with black consciences been caught in the memorable 20's, when judgment was not by strictly defined articles of the criminal code, but was guided by a 'revolutionary sense of justice', oh, the punishment meted out to these turncoats would have been quite different. Yet, if you please, we even hear talk about the harshness of the sentence."

(MORE)

Yes, Mikhail Alexandrovich, along with many communists of Italy, France, England, Norway, Sweden, Denmark (whom you somehow call "bourgeois defenders" of the convicted), along with leftist social organizations of the West, I, a Soviet writer, talk, dare to talk, about the inappropriate, completely unjustified severity of the sentence. You said in your speech that you are ashamed of those who petitioned for clemency, proposing to go bail for the convicted. However, I, to tell the truth, am not ashamed of them or of myself, but of you. They, by their appeals, carried on the glorious tradition of Soviet and pre-Soviet literature; but you, by your speech, excommunicated yourself from this tradition. Even in the "memorable 20's," i.e., from 1917 to 1922, when the Civil War raged and they judged by a "sense of justice," Alexei Maximovich Gorky bent all the powers of his authority not only to save writers from hunger and cold, but also to get them out of prison and exile. He wrote dozens of letters of intercession, and, thanks to him, many writers returned to their desks. This tradition--the tradition of intercession--was not born yesterday in Russia, and our intelligentsia is justly proud of it. The greatest of our poets, Alexandr Pushkin, was proud that he had "summoned mercy to the fallen." Chekhov, writing to Suvorin, who dared to slander Zola, the defender of Dreyfus, explained to him: "Assume Dreyfus guilty,--and Zola is nevertheless right, since the cause of writers is not to accuse, not to persecute, but to stand up even for the guilty, even when they are convicted and are to be punished.... Of accusers and prosecutors... even without them there are many who cast blame."

The cause of the writer is not to persecute, but to advocate. This is what Russian literature teaches us through her best representatives. This is the tradition you violated when you loudly complained that the sentence was not harsh enough.

Think of the meaning of Russian literature.

The books created by the great Russian writers taught and teach people, not simplistically, but deeply and subtly, a many-

(P.T.O.)

faceted social and psychological appreciation, to penetrate into the complex sources of human error, transgression, crime, and sin. In this emotion lies, for the most part, the humanizing significance of Russian literature. Remember the book of Fyodor Dostoevsky about penal servitude "Notes from the House of the Dead," the book of Lev Tolstoi about prison "Resurrection"? Both writers peered deep into human souls, human destinies, and social conditions. It was not for supplementary judgement of the judged that Chekhov made his heroic journey to the isle of Sakhalin, and his book proved profound. Remember, finally, "Quiet Flows the Don" --with what deep understanding of great social change occurring in the land and of minute movements of the shattered human soul the author treated the errors, mistakes, and even crimes committed against the revolution by the novel's heroes! From the author of "Quiet Flows the Don" it was amazing to hear the crude, blunt question--turning a complex, living situation into a simple, elementary one--the question which you addressed to the delegates of the Soviet Army: "How would you have handled it if traitors appeared in some unit?" That is simply a direct call for martial courts in times of peace. After all, why bother about which precise article of the criminal code Sinyavsky and Daniel broke; why try to imagine precisely which aspects of our recent reality were subjected to satirical depiction in their books, which events impelled them to take up the pen, and which qualities of our current, contemporary reality did not permit them to publish their works at home? Why do we need psychological and social analysis here? To the wall with them! Shoot them in 24 hours!

To hear you talk, one would imagine that the convicted had peddled anti-Soviet pamphlets or proclamations, that they sent abroad not their own literary works, but at the very least the plans of a fort or a factory.... By this replacement of complex conceptions with simple ones, by this unworthy play on the word "treason" you, Mikhail Alexandrovich, have again betrayed the duty of the writer, whose obligation always and everywhere is to

(MORE)

157
elucidate, to bring to the consciousness of everyone the full multivariety and contradiction manifested in literature and history, and not to play on words, intentionally and maliciously overlooking and oversimplifying events.

The judgment of Sinyavsky and Daniel met all the external formalities demanded by law. From your point of view, in this was its failing; from mine, its virtue. But nevertheless, I reject the sentence handed down by the court.

Why?

Because the very arraignment of Sinyavsky and Daniel before a criminal court was illegal.

Because books, belles lettres, stories, novels, tales, words, weak or strong, talented or mediocre, false or true, are the province of no court, civil or martial, except the court of literary and social judgment. The writer, like any Soviet citizen, can and should be judged in criminal court for any infraction--only not for his books. The writ of criminal court does not run to literature. To ideas one counterposes ideas, but not camps and prisons.

This is what you should have declared to your listeners if you had indeed mounted the tribune as a representative of Soviet literature.

But you held forth as an apostate from Soviet literature. History will not forget your shameful speech.

But literature will avenge herself, as she takes reprisal against all who shun the duty she imposes. She has sentenced you to the supreme penalty that exists for an artist--to artistic sterility. And no honors, no money, no national or international prizes will lift this infamy from your head.

LIDIYA CHUKOVSKAYA

mbw) 1724/66