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USSR: Dissent

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ANOTHER BOUT OF REPRESSION IN THE USSR

Summary: In mid-January 1972, the largest wave of arrests and house-searches in the USSR since December 1970 was reported. In the Ukraine Chornovil and Svetlichny were arrested, while Dzuba's house was searched, as well as the flat of Pyotr Yakir in Moscow. The action includes a case in Leningrad, and upwards of forty victims may be involved. This paper explains the background and attempts to find a reason for the current bout of nervousness and repression in the Kremlin.

The biggest wave of repressive action in the USSR since the arrests connected with the alleged attempt at hijacking an aircraft in December 1970 took place last week. Preceded by a number of house searches carried out by the Ukrainian KGB, including a search of the house of Ivan Dzhuba, the prominent literary critic, it appears to have begun in earnest on January 12, when seven people were arrested in Lvov. (1) Among them were Vyacheslav Chornovil, the author of "The Chornovil Papers."

On the following day, the action spread to Kiev, where another four arrests were made, and this time the most prominent victim was Ivan Svitlichny, another literary critic. All are so far charged with "spreading deliberately false fabrications defaming the Soviet state," for which the maximum penalty is three years imprisonment.

On January 14, there were eight police raids on homes in Moscow, including the flat of Pyotr Yakir, the prominent member of the civil rights movement who is the son of the Red Army general liquidated in 1937.

Pyotr Yakir was told by the KGB men who searched his apartment that the action was connected with a case in Leningrad, about which nothing is yet known except that it was referred to as "No. 38." (2) There is some reason, therefore, for thinking that there may be about forty separate people involved, although the Moscow raids have not, apparently, yet led to arrests. But since the KGB were searching for papers, books and documents, of which they removed a large number from Yakir's flat, it seems probable that they are accumulating the evidence for future arrests in the capital.

This marks the first occasion on which administrative action has been taken against Yakir, who in recent years has seemed to be protected by his famous name and by the Party's guilty knowledge of the terminal injustice perpetrated against his father during Stalin's purge of the Red Army leadership.

The issue in the Ukraine is apparently the age-old problem of "Ukrainian nationalism," which is known to have caused Pyotr Shelest, the hard-liner who is First Secretary of the Ukrainian CP, to make several threatening and ominous speeches in recent months. Chornovil, for example, has only been at liberty for about two years since his last release, having been sentenced to detention in November 1967 for his detailed account of at least fifteen trials of Ukrainian writers, scientists, lecturers and others in the nationalist faction.

Ivan Dzhuba, whose house was searched by the KGB, has been in the spotlight since 1969, when a study written by him called "Internationalism or Russification?" led to his expulsion from the Kiev branch of the Ukrainian Writers' Union. (3) Dzhuba himself denies that he is a nationalist, but he would not deny that he is against excessive Russification. It is the latter stand which has probably led to the KGB's invasion of his home on this occasion. Dzhuba was a member of the group of Ukrainian writers called the Shestidesyatniki (the "men of the sixties"), which had a program of cultural freedom and active propagation of the national language as a defense against the intrusion of Russian.

Ivan Svitlichny has long been of interest to the KGB. A university lecturer from Lvov, Mikhail Osadchy, who was sent to prison for two years in 1965 as a nationalist, has written an autobiographical novel, Bilmo, (4) in which he graphically describes his interrogation by the KGB concerning Svitlichny.

Surely the conversation was not only about literature? You certainly talked about politics as well. He must have had comments, asserted or denied something. Of course, we understand that you didn't say anything like that to him, but he told you, and you as an honest and respectable man should tell us everything....

Svitlichny owns a large library, which books did he lend you? Which did you take home? You, as an educated man, must have noticed that he had a number of rare books which could have been given to the Academy's library. Why did he not do so?.... Everybody complained that the article "The Trial of Pogruzhal'sky" was confiscated from you, that the library was burnt, that valuable books were destroyed which were much needed by the Ukrainians. Why didn't Svitchny replace the burned books? He could have helped the public much more than by merely lending them to you; and then you pass them on to someone else and so it goes -- you know -- the whole irresponsible gamut.

At the 1965 trial of Osadchy, Svitchny was called as a witness, and part of the indictment against Osadchy claimed that he had "received anti-Soviet literature from Svitchny." It looks as though the new trials now pending will be remarkably reminiscent of the 1965 one, and also of the trial of Shevchenko (the Ukrainian national poet, 1814-1861) under the Czars. Osadchy recalls bitterly that the examiners more than a hundred years ago put the same questions to Shevchenko as the magistrate had to him:

Why did you write the poems?.... Who are these people, and why did you mention their names in your letters?

Truly it can be said that with Russian and Soviet attitudes to nationalism, plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

One of the reasons for the raid on Yakir's flat in Moscow was probably the KGB's desire to take revenge on him for his memoirs, the first part of which is called "Childhood in Prison," and describes his fourteen years in Stalin's jails after the arrest of the whole family in 1937. (5) So far only the first part has appeared, covering the years 1937-1944, and the KGB may be understandably anxious to prevent the second part, which presumably covers 1937-1944, and the KGB may be understandably anxious to prevent the second part, which presumably covers 1944-1951 from appearing even via Samizdat.

But there is also a direct link between Yakir and the Ukrainian arrests, in that one of those arrested in Kiev is Leonid Plyushch, who is known to have signed several protest petitions in which Yakir had played a prominent part, and to which he was a co-signatory.

The savage sentence passed on Vladimir Bukovsky, who has spent a quarter of his life in jail and is now behind bars again for another seven years, with five more in exile to follow, and the public attack in Literary Gazette last week on Solzhenitsyn taken together with the expulsion from the USSR of Congressman

J.H. Scheuer for merely calling on Professor Lerner (a distinguished Jewish cyberneticist who has been dismissed from his job for asking to be allowed to emigrate to Israel) all seem to indicate that the Kremlin is having a bad fit of nerves at present. No adequate explanation of this nervousness has been forthcoming, if one excludes Pravda's article by B. Bolshakov on January 13, which finds Messrs. Strauss-Hupe, Kintner, and Possony guilty of declaring an eternal conflict against the USSR, Mr. Dean Rusk of fanning liberalism among the CPs of Eastern Europe, the West of "inciting" the nationalist fever in the Croatian Party, Messrs Rostow, Whitman, Tinbergen and Sorokin of founding the "convergence theory," Prof. Brzezinski of "bridge-building," Herman Kahn of predicting a "softening" of the Soviet regime, Dr. Morton Schwartz of foreseeing "one-party pluralism" in Czechoslovakia, and the anti-communist strategists in general of encouraging "dissidentstvo" in the socialist countries.

The fact that Bolshakov leaves the word for dissidence in English, giving it only a Russian ending, suggests strongly that the present Politburo gambit is to try to blacken the civil rights movement and the nationalists in the USSR by smearing them with the charge of collusion with foreign powers. Bolshakov argues that Sik, Loebel, Garaudy, Fischer et al are only followers of the "renegade Kautsky," who also believed in convergence between "democratic capitalism" and "democratic socialism." He fears the use made by "the cohorts of anticommunism," i.e., Maoism, since Mr. Sulzberger revealed that in the early fifties the State Department had foreseen that the Maoists might one day be "as unfriendly to Russia as to the USA."

Bolshakov is especially worried about the differentiated approach now used by the West towards the socialist countries, because of a "secret memorandum" from USIA dated 1967, which advocated "using every opportunity to strengthen Mao's supporters because the USA desired his group to remain in power since its work is directed against the CPSU and other CPs." This "memorandum" was dug up by Bolshakov out of the columns of a weekly published in Ceylon called "Tribune"!

The serious aspect of this type of fabrication is that it indicates the true source of the Kremlin jitters -- the obsessive fear that President Nixon may get on fairly well with Chairman Mao when it comes to containing the USSR. This fear is apparently so great that the present moment, when even the most liberal ruling Party in the world finds itself compelled to purge its nationalists (in Croatia) on a large scale, when Husak is carrying out a wave of arrests of dozens of Czechoslovak liberals, and when the Chinese Party is busily sweeping away the remnants of Lin Piao's followers, is seen as an opportunity to settle accounts with some of the dissident leaders in Moscow, Leningrad and the Ukraine.

The one common feature in this unedifying spectacle is, apparently, that no ruling Communist party of any hue is strong enough to tolerate opposition, even when it is expressed by legal means and even when it operates within the bounds of the constitution.

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- (1) Reuter, 14 January 1972, citing Ukrainsky Vysnik.
 - (2) Reuter, 15 January 1972.
 - (3) See CAA Report No. 0441, "The Case of Ivan Dzhuba," RFER, 16 January 1970.
 - (4) Suchasnist, Munich, Nos. 11 and 12, November and December, 1971. See CAA Report No. 1253, "Bilmo-Glaucoma," RFER, 3 January 1972.
 - (5) Russkaya Mysl, Paris, 28 October 1971, 11 November 1971, 2 December 1971.