
Shelkov's Daughter Protests: An Open Letter to Brezhnev

Vladimir Shelkov, the late leader of the True and Free Adventists, was arrested in Tashkent on 14 March 1978. Various of his relatives were in the flat at the time, including his son-in-law I. S. Lepshin, who was also arrested. In an Open Letter to Leonid Ilich Brezhnev, Shelkov's daughter Dina gives a description of the KGB search which accompanied the arrests. She protests at the callous behaviour of the KGB officer who supervised the search and at the confiscation of purely religious literature and objects of material value.

In this letter we are making it known that on 14 March this year a violent, despotic and cruel reprisal, a crying injustice, took place in our home. Vladimir Andreyevich Shelkov (83 years old), Chairman of the All-Union Church of True and Free Seventh-day Adventists, and Ilya Sergeyevich Lepshin were seized and arrested.

Having broken into the house by means of deception, sending an unidentified mob of more than 20 so-called "official representatives", men from the KGB, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Prosecutor's Office stated that they would be carrying out a search. With insults and threats, they pushed us all into one room (those of us at home were my very aged 83-year-old father, my seriously ill husband, my two sisters-in-law, niece and aunt, and my two children). We were forbidden to make the least move into the rest of the house and, after an armed guard had been set over us, they proceeded to carry out the search.

The shame and horror of it! The things that went on then!

They brought in crow-bars, spades, tongs, axes, pincers, saws, mine-detectors, metal hoists, probes, powerful lights, cameras, firearms, walkie-talkie radios, motors and so on. They broke through the ceilings, demolished the chimneys, breached and took up the floors, hollowed out and pulled down walls, tearing down the plaster; they dug huge, deep holes under the floors (up to 2 metres in depth), broke up the asphalt paving, dug up the whole courtyard and breached ceilings, walls and floors in neighbouring buildings. They investigated all cesspools and toilet bowls, in a word, it was as if a bomb had gone off. This act of plunder was presided over by German Vasilevich Ponomaryov, criminal procurator and junior counsellor of justice at the Tashkent Procurator's Office. All the others taking part in the pogrom categorically refused to give their names or official positions, though we asked them more than once to show us their identity cards. G. V. Ponomaryov, as the person in charge of the search, also refused to name the others, saying "What do you need their names for? So that you can write about us afterwards?" My father said "Yes, we shall write about you, as all your actions are unjust and illegal".

The procurator would not allow any of the residents to be present in the rooms being searched. Even the "witnesses" were deprived of this legal right and only looked on from afar. Such an unceremonious, unjust

ban harshly tramples underfoot the right to be present at all the investigator's activities during the search. When this illegality was pointed out to Ponomaryov, he rudely told us to mind our own business, as he was a lawyer and knew what he was doing.

Ponomaryov behaved insolently and despotically, bragging and blustering, saying "I just have to say the word and the world will turn upside down". And he kept showing he was boss. For him, no laws or limits existed — he was going to do what he wanted by force because he was in charge.

We protest against this illegal search, as the warrant was made out for only one person, but the search was carried out contrary to law and justice by other persons, in violation of Art. 55 of the Soviet Constitution, concerning the inviolability of the home.

Our seriously ill mother, in whose name the search warrant was made out, was in hospital at the time, in a hopeless condition. We had been taking turns to watch at her bedside around the clock, but during the four-day search we were categorically forbidden to go to her by procurator Ponomaryov.

When the hospital authorities sent a mes-

sage saying that our mother was dying and that we should come at once, heartless, cruel Ponomaryov remained deaf to all our requests and pleas to be allowed to visit our mother. Only after prolonged and insistent demands was I taken to the hospital, accompanied by two procurators and two officials (whose names were not given), but I was not allowed in to see my mother: Ponomaryov himself went in and obtained the required improved report on mother's satisfactory condition from the surgeon in charge. I was forcibly pushed back into the car; no one paid the slightest attention to my pleas and prayers to see my mother and I was taken back to the house, which was still being searched.

My husband, I. S. Lepshin, is seriously ill; he has to stay in bed and suffers from severe heart attacks and migraine every day. He has two or three attacks a day, migraine and heart pain at the same time. During the search his state of health took a sharp turn for the worse, medical help was vitally necessary, but the inhuman, cruel criminal-procurator Ponomaryov showed the icy coldness of his soul in this case as well, not allowing emergency medical aid to be called. How-

Amnesty International and Adventists

Amnesty International, an organization which won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1977, has many times spoken out on behalf of Adventists imprisoned in the Soviet Union. Amnesty has made one of its principal objectives the unconditional release of "prisoners of conscience," persons who have not used or advocated violence and are detained for their beliefs, color, sex, ethnic origin, language or religion. One way Amnesty's 250,000 members in 134 countries work for their release is to form groups that adopt specific prisoners, whose cases the group documents and publicizes.

In 1978, Amnesty produced a booklet,

USSR: Protestants in Prison, which gave details concerning 12 prisoners of conscience. Three of them were described as Seventh-day Adventists, adopted by Amnesty groups in Belmont and Somerville, Massachusetts, and Tarrytown, New York. During 1980, in both its *Annual Report* and a volume devoted to *Prisoners of Conscience in the USSR: Their Treatment and Conditions*, Amnesty refers to specific Seventh-day Adventists imprisoned for refusing to perform military service or operating unofficial printing presses. Details often indicate that True and Free Seventh-day Adventists are involved, but Amnesty's reports do not always make clear to which Adventist group the prison-

ever, when he saw that the matter might end badly, he summoned his *own* medical workers. After they had given him an injection, the sick man felt even worse. I was no longer capable of watching this kind of mockery and asked to see the ampoule from which the injection had been given, but the nurse and her gang rudely pushed me back.

After this my husband was put in an ambulance and driven off to an unknown destination. I only know that a KGB man got into the ambulance with him and began to try to persuade him to co-operate with them, promising him freedom. What cynicism!

We are extremely perturbed at the hard-hearted, inhuman behaviour of the KGB officials, their amorality and sadism. Who taught them to behave like this? After all this, how are we to understand your words, Leonid Ilyich?: "Respect for right and law must be each man's personal conviction. This applies especially to the actions of state officials. Attempts to get round the law or ignore it, no matter why, cannot be tolerated. Nor can we tolerate violations of individual rights or damage to citizens' self-respect. For us as communists, upholders of the highest human ideals, this is a matter of

principle." (*XXIV Congress of the CPSU, Moscow, 1971, p. 81.*)

Very eloquently said! But in practice, what you have so often condemned still goes on. Is this not just play-acting?

You, comrade Brezhnev, said in your speech to the Central Committee of the CPSU on 24 May 1977: "We know, comrades, that certain years after the adoption of the present Constitution were clouded by unlawful acts of repression, violations of the principles of socialist democracy, of the Leninist norms of Party and state life. This was contrary to the provisions of the Constitution. The Party decisively condemns those practices and they must never be repeated."

One of the victims of that unlawful Stalinist repression was our father, who was sentenced three times for his purely religious life and his just and legal struggle against the atheist dictatorship, and who spent 23 years of his life in camps and prisons.

And now our father has been arrested again. My husband has also been arrested.

Is it turning out, then, that "certain" dis-

ers belong. Amnesty does not discriminate among Seventh-day Adventists when it adopts prisoners of conscience.

The Amnesty group in Lanarkshire, in the western part of Scotland, adopted Mariya Zinets, a True and Free Seventh-day Adventist serving a three-year term in a labor camp for distributing a brochure answering charges made by the Soviet press against Vladimir Shelkov. The Lanarkshire chapter drafted a petition asking for the release of this prisoner of conscience and expressed particular concern for Mrs. Zinets' health; she was suffering in the labor camp from swollen legs, bronchial asthma and continual heart pains.

On March 2, 1981, a delegation composed of Mrs. Margaret Conway, a Catholic member of the Lanarkshire Amnesty chapter who organized the protest, the Reverend E. G. Towson, representing the

Congregational Union of Scotland, and the Reverend James Boyle, Secretary of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Glasgow, traveled to London and called at the Soviet Embassy to the United Kingdom. At first, a spokesman refused to pass on any request for information. Finally, however, he agreed to initiate inquiries about the case with higher authorities. He accepted from the delegation a petition to Leonid Brezhnev on behalf of this Adventist, supported by virtually all denominations in Lanarkshire and Glasgow, and signed by 4,000 Scotsmen.

Chapters of Amnesty International throughout the world continue to be active on behalf of Seventh-day Adventist prisoners of conscience. Ten chapters in the United States alone have adopted as many Adventist prisoners.

tant years in the past, which were clouded by illegal acts of repression contrary to the provisions of the Constitution, have today once again become acceptable after the adoption of the new Constitution?

In addition, during the search Ponomaryov threatened my father with *special* punishments, tortures and *new experimental methods of interrogation*, saying, "When he's there, with us, he'll tell us everything and pay for everything in full", "Now he'll start talking in a different style".

How long will those empty but profuse declarations continue — proclaiming that "tomorrow" will be better than "yesterday"? "Yesterday", all right, some comrades in some places were still "acting contrary to the provisions of the Constitution", but today, fortunately, the Party has condemned this and tomorrow it must not be repeated! Have faith, honest people, wait in hope, but meanwhile . . . the usual godless carousal continues — state atheist robbery in broad daylight, arrests and bloodshed. And is this arbitrary violence not more than a merely local affair?

All this has convinced us yet again that religion is a crime in our country and that believers are arch-criminals. Owning religious literature is forbidden by state godlessness. So Ponomaryov, looking at a pile of religious books, said "I'm very hard on criminals, I hate them". This was while he was still in our house, long before the preliminary investigation — but we were already criminals! Is this not just arbitrary power?

We firmly protest against such violent acts of terrorism and demand full observance of justice and the laws, as expressed in the teaching of Lenin, the Constitution of the USSR, international agreements, the Declaration of Human Rights and the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference. Are all these humane and equitable international legal norms now being proclaimed and published abroad just so much empty air? We don't want to believe that.

This whole act of banditry, carried out by insolently shameless KGB men, went on for four days.

The search warrant stated that "the residence of V. F. Shelkova may contain stores

of manuscripts, libellous literature, machinery designed to print or reproduce such literature, and objects and documents which may be relevant to the case".

As a result of the search, all purely religious literature was confiscated: Bibles, psalms, books dealing with moral and spiritual subjects, religious poetry and tape-recordings, tape-recordings of sermons and psalms, and all our savings down to the last penny. As for libellous literature, for confiscation of which the warrant was made out, we have never had any. The confiscated literature was purely religious in content and was not directed against Soviet power.

We firmly protest against the unjust and baseless accusations that purely religious literature is libellous in content, as it does not attack Soviet power but is directed only against the dictatorship of state atheism, which is in its own way the state religion of the godless class. State atheism now artificially broadens the category of crimes and makes criminals out of innocent religious citizens. State atheism initiates illegal repression of the freedoms of all freely believing Soviet citizens belonging to purely religious denominations: the freedoms of conscience and belief, with their indivisible attributes — freedom of speech, of the press and of assembly.

We firmly protest against the illegal, baseless arrest of the very old Vladimir Andreyevich Shelkov and the seriously ill Ilya Sergeyevich Lepshin.

We protest against the illegal search.

We protest against the barbarous and criminal actions of those who carried out the search (or robbery).

We firmly protest against the illegal confiscation during the search of:

- 1) purely religious literature;
- 2) literature dealing with law and rights;
- 3) objects of material value;
- 4) savings;
- 5) other objects of material and cultural value (photographs, slides, tape-recordings, etc.).

We firmly protest at the cruel repression and violence directed against all dissent in thought and religion by the dictatorship of state atheism in our country.

Let us put an end to shameless state

atheism in the USSR!

We decisively protest against the enslaved, weak position of the True and Free Christians of our land.

Down with the criminal Legislation on Religious Cults of 1929-75, which enslaves religious people!

We demand:

- 1) that the executioners threatening their chosen victims, the honest, innocent believers of our country, should be made to stay their hand;
- 2) that the unfortunate victims of the militant violence of state godlessness, V. A. Shelkov and I. S. Lepshin, should be released immediately. Criminal charges against them must be dropped;
- 3) that everything confiscated during the illegal, baseless search-robbery should be returned;
- 4) that we should be compensated and reimbursed for all the material damage done during the search;

5) that such harassment by force of religion and believers in the USSR should cease.

We are seriously concerned at the state of health of the very old V. A. Shelkov and the seriously ill I. S. Lepshin and we fear for their lives and safety. If either of them comes to an untimely end (as Ponomaryov threatened during the search), the whole responsibility will be yours and we are informing you of this.

If our legal protests and rightful demands are not taken into consideration, we shall be forced to inform all socialist countries and world public opinion as a whole about this arbitrary act of violence.

With respect,
Dina Vladimirovna Lepshina
Vladimir Vladimirovich Shelkov
(and all relatives of those arrested)
Tashkent, Soyuznaya 56
19 March 1978

An Interview with Alexander Ginzburg

by Tom Dybdahl

Alexander Ginzburg was interviewed for SPECTRUM by Tom Dybdahl on October 30, 1980, at the home of Dr. Hans Wuerth, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Ginzburg, long active in the human rights movement in the Soviet Union, along with four other political prisoners, was exchanged on April 27, 1979, for two convicted spies. One of the founding members of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group and the editor of

the first samizdat literary journal, Ginzburg has been arrested, tried and imprisoned for his human rights activities in 1960, 1967 and 1977.

Spectrum: How did you meet Shelkov?

Ginzburg: In 1968, I was taken to the labor camp where he was. He had only a week left to serve in that camp; we spent a week together. After that I only saw him once for a very short time.

Spectrum: Did you correspond?

Tom Dybdahl, a member of SPECTRUM's Editorial Board, is a full-time book editor living in Allentown, Pennsylvania.