
Adventist Prisoners in the Soviet Gulag

by Catherine Fitzpatrick

Between April and October 1988 Helsinki Watch has confirmed the release of eight True and Free Adventists. Three—possibly four—Sabbathkeeping Adventist prisoners of conscience remain imprisoned in the Soviet Union. All belong to the True and Free Adventists (see articles on pp. 25-40).

Who They Are

Bei, Valentin Vasilievich—Arrested no later than 1983. To be released no later than 1990. Art. 247 (desertion from the army). Wife: Anna Nikolayevna Bei, children: 343250 Krasnodarsky kray, Seversky rayon, St. Novodmitrievskaya, ul. Rechnaya, 1. Criminal camp, address not known. According to the Soviet government, no information is available on this prisoner.

Krivoberets, Timofei Ivanovich, b. 1940—Arrested April 19, 1978. Sentenced March 1979 to eight years reinforced-regimen and five years exile. To be released April 1991. Arts. 174-2 (bribery), 196 (forgery) believed to be trumped-up as punishment for activities in Seventh-day Adventist church. Co-defendants: G. Astashova, S. Bakholdin, A. Yutsevich. Wife: Yelena Krivoberets, three children, mother: 487310, Kazakh SSR, Chimkentskaya obl., g. Saryagach, ul. Chapa-

yeva, 37. Exile, address not known.

Motrya, Ivan Fyodorovich, b. 1941—Arrested March 17, 1983, and sentenced April 26, 1983 to three years standard-regimen and five years exile. To be released December 24, 1990. Art. 227 (“violating person and rights of citizens under the guise of performing religious rituals”). Wife, three children, including minor daughter: 295727, Ukrainian SSR, Zakarpatskaya obl., Tyachevsky rayon, s. Uglya. Suffers from varicose veins. Exile address: 418360, Kazakh SSR, Uralskaya obl., s. Karatobe, ul. Rabochaya.

(?) **Spalin, Rikhard Albertovich**, b. 1937—Arrested August 13, 1978. Sentenced to seven years standard-regimen labor camp. Arts. 92-2 (“theft of state property”), 162 (“illegal enterprise”), Art. 190-1 (“anti-Soviet slander”). Circulating religious literature, organizing underground print shop for Seventh-day Adventist independent publishing house called True Witness. Reportedly rearrested in labor camp in 1985 under Art. 188-3 (“habitual disobedience of demands of labor camp administrator”). To be released not later than 1988. No release confirmed. Epilepsy, heart disease, high blood pressure, chronic headaches. Criminal camp address not known. According to the Soviet government, no information is available on this prisoner.

How to Help

The following points of advice are intended to launch you on your own letter-writing campaign. If you should need additional advice or information on prisoners,

Catherine Fitzpatrick is the research director of Helsinki Watch in its national office in New York. Fitzpatrick has traveled to and lived in the Soviet Union. Helsinki Watch, a part of Human Rights Watch, monitors domestic and foreign compliance with the human-rights provisions of the Helsinki Accord.

please write the following organizations:

USSR News Brief

Das Land und Die Welt e. V.
Schwanthalerstrasse 73
8000 Munich 2
West Germany
tel. (89)-530514

Keston College, U.S.A. (religious prisoners)
P.O. Box 1310
Framingham, MA 01701
tel. (617) 226-7256

Amnesty International
322 Eighth Avenue
New York, NY 10001
tel. (212) 807-8400

Sending telegrams is a faster, more effective, and more reliable way of appealing to Soviet authorities. A very brief telegram of a few lines is not expensive. You can call the toll-free number 1-800-257-2241 to send a telegram or what is called a "night letter" (less expensive). It is charged to your telephone bill.

Letters take longer and more easily go astray. If sent, they should go "registered, return-receipt requested" (certified is for domestic mail) so that it can be determined if the letter reaches the addressee and so that the post office takes it more seriously. This costs about \$3.50. Letters can and should be written in English and need not be written in Russian or other languages of the Soviet Union. They should be brief and politely worded.

Frequent, short, objectively stated inquiries will be taken more seriously than long-winded, angry, emotional diatribes or condemnations. Each letter should be individualized to be noticed. The most effective letters are those sent on business stationery or on the letterhead of a civic organization or professional society. Letters need not be typed; handwritten notes are often more convincing because of their simplicity.

Soviet authorities take letters from foreigners seriously; they have a very widespread, professional bureaucracy that sends these on to the proper authorities. You can address your letter

simply to General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Kremlin, Moscow, USSR. If a prisoner's address is available, you should write directly to the prisoner at his or her labor camp address. Even if this does not reach him or her (the chances are almost nil that it will), but reaches the KGB or prison authorities, it will signal to them that the prisoner has support. A personal letter of concern expressed directly to an individual prisoner shows the authorities that people care. You can also write to the prisoner's family; here, the chances are

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slightly higher than the letters will reach them.

For more dedicated groups that plan to do frequent writing, here are points of information to request from Soviet authorities:

- Status of prisoner; released or detained.
- Address of labor camp or prison or exile place if not known.
- Health condition of prisoner.
- Nature of sentence (article in Criminal Code, activity for which sentenced, etc.)
- Copy of trial transcript and sentence (never issued by authorities, but worth trying).
- Status of visiting, letter-writing, letter-receiving, and reading and exercise privileges.

Always send copies of all correspondence to the Soviet Embassy, 1125 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. The Soviet Ministry of Justice has stated that information on prisoners' lists has been issued to its embassies abroad and is available on demand. This method of finding out about prisoners has rarely been tried and should be encouraged. Efforts can also be made to call the embassy and set up appointments with diplomats to discuss individual prisoners. Numbers that can be tried for information at the embassy: (202) 347-1355; 347-1347; 328-3234.

Keep calling and be persistent.

The State Department is now regularly involved in Soviet-American bilateral meetings on human rights and is regularly handing over lists of prisoners to Soviet officials. A prisoner will get more or less attention depending on how much public support seems to be generated for an individual prisoner.

Copies of letters to authorities or prisoners need not be sent to Helsinki Watch. But if any

correspondence *from* Soviet authorities or prisoners or families comes, it should be sent immediately to Helsinki Watch.

Address correspondence to:

Ambassador Richard Schifter
Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights
Human Rights Bureau, Room 7802,
Washington, D.C. 20520.
Tel. (202) 647-2126.