

Voices of Freedom in the Soviet Union

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Vladimir Bukovsky

Vladimir Bukovsky in Prison

Vladimir Bukovsky, before his last sentence to 12 years of imprisonment and exile, was able to report to Western journalists about the terrible treatment he and others received in Soviet mental hospitals and prison camps.

In 1963 he was arrested for possessing two photocopies of *The New Class*, written by the anti-Communist Yugoslav author Milovan Djilas.

For that he was tried in absentia and sent to two mental asylums, where he spent, in his own words, "fifteen months of hell."

"There were about 1,000 men in the asylum, political prisoners and insane murderers," says Bukovsky. "The sick raved, the healthy suffered." One of his cellmates was a maniac who had murdered his

wife and children, then cut off his own ears.

Bukovsky usually kept out of the way of other prisoners, and was later moved to a larger ward where he made friends with a French Communist and an Australian of Latvian origin. Both had believed Communist writings about the good life in the Soviet Union and immigrated to see it first-hand. Shocked at the pay in a Moldavian shoe factory, the Frenchman had urged the workers to strike. "Communism will never condemn the working class fighting for its rights," he argued. He was condemned to three years in the asylum.

The Australian, disillusioned by life in Moscow, had simply tried to leave. He was told that since he was of Latvian origin, he was a Soviet citizen and could not go. He spent his days shouting, "Bloody fogs!" at the guards.

"Only the crafty survived," Bukovsky says. "You had to be nice to the guards, you had to make friends with them, you had to bribe them. Otherwise, they can beat you until you're nearly dead and tell the doctors you misbehaved. Or they could recommend medical punishment. They beat the Ukrainian every day, just tied him up and kicked him in the stomach. Sometimes they would put inmates in padded isolation cells and beat them almost continuously. I know of several men who died after this, and the clinic on the floor above us was always full."

However, the worst was medical punishment, which would often turn normal people into idiots or even human vegetables. Doctors would inject a drug that produced severe stomach cramps, fever, intense pain and a temperature of 104. The sickness lasted two or three days and left the inmate very weak.

Another drug reserved for serious misbehavior induced sleep and dulled the brain. Inmates were punished with ten days of daily injections. They woke up as human vegetables. Some regained their senses after two months, others did not.

Bukovsky was released in February 1965, shortly before his twenty-second birthday. He had lost weight, he had a heart murmur and rheumatism, "but otherwise I was all right; I was still sane."

Once back in Moscow he began to work again in the dissident movement, carrying on his underground work exposing the inhumanity of the Communist regime.

"You must have friends in this type of work," he explains. "The KGB follows you all the time and sometimes they pull you in for questioning. If no one knows about it you just disappear.

"But if your friends know you've been arrested you're reasonably safe.

"They tell others. They attend the trial. They know the length of your sentence, and they know when you are supposed to be released. Stalinistic methods don't work anymore.

The authorities don't want a big scandal. They have to maintain a semblance of legality."

On December 2, 1965, Bukovsky was arrested again for organizing a demonstration protesting the imprisonment of Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel.

He was released in August 1966, but was again arrested on January 26, 1967 for organizing another demonstration protesting repression of Soviet intellectuals. This time he was tried as a criminal and sent to the Bor Labor Camp 300 miles south of Moscow.



Soviet Concentration Camp Inmate

The Bor camp, with 1500 men, was surrounded by watchtowers with armed guards, coils of barbed wire and a free-fire zone. The guards could shoot any inmate seen in the zone. "It could have been worse," Bukovsky says. "It could have been in Siberia," "Whenever the prisoners heard of a man beaten up by guards we would riot. We just screamed, banged things, broke chairs and doors, and made a racket. After a few riots like that they stopped beating us." However, more refined punishments were used. Loitering "unproductively," failing to doff one's hat to a guard, talking back-all merited being placed on a strict regimen. This entitled suspension of all visiting and parcel privileges, a cutback in the food ration, and a ban on shopping at the camp store. "They got you where it really hurts most-in the belly," Bukovsky observes.

More serious misbehavior earned fifteen days confinement in solitary-in small, unlit cages without toilet facilities and with virtually no food. Bukovsky was in solitary five times and he insists, "I was not a particularly troublesome prisoner." Once a week, camp inmates were required to attend two hours of political instruction. Most welcomed this as a break from work and dozed through lectures on Communism. Bukovsky refused to attend. The chief political officer discovered his absence near the end of Bukovsky's three-year sentence. He was promptly put in solitary. After fifteen days the political officer asked him why he wouldn't attend the lectures.

"You don't believe in God," Bukovsky replied. "If someone forced you to go to church would you go?" Finally, Bukovsky was released. Once back among his fellow dissidents, he continued in the struggle for human rights.

However, Bukovsky is once again back. Realizing in prison better than most what the consequences of his actions might incur, he still continues to insist: "The people have to know what is happening here. The world has to know."

On January 5, 1972, Vladimir K. Bukovsky was sentenced to seven years in prison and five years of exile for dissident activities. Bukovsky has already spent more than six years in prison and psychiatric hospitals for his defense of human rights in the Soviet Union. Here are excerpts from his closing address to the court prior to his sentencing to 12 years imprisonment and exile:

MOSCOW Before my arrest there was constantly a tail on me. I was pursued, threatened with murder, and one of those following me lost his self-restraint to such an extent that he threatened me with his service weapon.

While under investigation I petitioned for a criminal case to be instituted against these people. I even gave the number of the official car in which these people traveled around behind me and presented other facts which made it possible for them to be sought out.

However, I never received an answer to this request from those departments to which I sent it ...

As far as the detective is concerned, he, instead of examining my complaint and giving me an answer, sent me to the Serbsky Institute of Forensic psychiatry for medical examination.

The investigation department of the KBG very much wanted me to be found irresponsible. How convenient! Then there would be no case about me, no need to construct a charge and here there would be no need to prove the fact of commission of a crime. The man is just sick, mad.

And only on Nov. 5, after pressure was exerted by the public, a new medical commission pronounced me healthy. There you have trustworthy proof of my assertion-which is called slanderous here in court- that on the instruction of the KBG psychiatric reprisals are set up against dissenters.

In accordance with my right to defense, I demanded that the lawyer Dina Isakovna Kaminskaya be invited for my defense in court.

No lawyer was given me.

It took my 12-day hunger strike, a complaint to the prosecutor general, to the Justice Ministry and the Communist party Central Committee, and also new, active intervention by members of the public before my legal right to defense was finally fulfilled and I was given lawyer Shveisk, who was invited by my mother.

The trial proceedings today have also been conducted with numerous procedural infringements. The indictment, in which the word "slanderous" is used 33 times and the word "anti-Soviet" 18 times, contains no concrete indications of which facts are slanderous among those I communicated to Western correspondents and which materials that I allegedly distributed are anti-Soviet.

I allegedly handed over these materials in the presence of Volpin and Chalidze (Aleksandr Yesenin-Volpin, son of poet Sergei Yesenin, and Valeri Chalidze, a physicist and member of an unofficial Soviet civil rights committee.) However, my demand that these two people be called as witnesses was not met.

Furthermore, not one of the eight people I called who could confirm the authenticity of my assertions on the facts of confinement and conditions of detention of people in special psychiatric hospitals was summoned to the court.

What were all these provocations and crude procedural violations needed for, this stream of slander and unfounded accusations? What was this trial needed for? Only to punish one person?

No, there is a "principle," a kind of "philosophy" here. Behind the accusation presented, there stands another, unrepresented. With the reprisal against me they want to frighten those who try to tell the whole world about their crimes.

Our society is still sick. It is sick with the fear which has come down to us from the Stalin era. But the process of the public's spiritual enlightenment has already begun and cannot be stopped.