

Soviet Psychiatric Prisoners

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By Sergei Grigoryants

MOSCOW

In Magadan, on the shore of the Okhotsk Sea, Valentina Bondarenko's husband, a police sergeant, took to drinking and went on drinking bouts with his police chief. In time, he stopped spending nights at home. Finally, Valentina Bondarenko decided to divorce her husband, but he wanted to have a house, along with a beautiful wife, in reserve. After half a year of threats, the sergeant saw that he could not keep his wife, and he wanted vengeance. So he came to an agreement with his chief and with a doctor from a psychiatric hospital, and put his wife away there.

In Makhachkala, in the northern Caucasus, Aleksandra Sokolova, a wife and nurse, abandoned her husband and two daughters, six months and one and one-half years old respectively. He brought up the children, but after five years the wife decided to take them from her husband. With the aid of her doctor-girlfriends and a friend of her mother who was a colonel in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, she had her former husband

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placed in a psychiatric hospital. The children were kidnapped and carried off to a frontier zone where Mr. Sokolov would not be permitted.

In Erevan, Vozgen Ayrapetyan was a tunneler on a canal construction project. His boss constantly cheated him; to silence any protest, he was brutally beaten, fired while he was ill,

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slandered and imprisoned. By chance he came upon inspectors from Moscow and was freed, but he could not get a job nor be registered to live in Erevan again. He did not have the money for a bribe.

In Moscow, Vozgen Ayrapetyan complained everywhere. In the wait-

ing room at the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda a staff member took pity on him. She gave him a note with an address: They will help you there, she said. He went there without knowing where he was going and rang the bell at a strange door with a little window. The little window opened, and, holding the little piece of paper, he asked whether he was in the right place. Come in, he was told; the door opened and quickly closed with a bang. Mr. Ayrapetyan found himself in a psychiatric clinic.

It's much easier to put people away in a psychiatric hospital than in prison. Any policeman, nurse, deputy general procurator or journalist in the waiting room of Komsomolskaya Pravda can do it. Anyone with some sort of standing in society or who simply knows doctors and psychiatrists can do it — and does do it.

According to official data, nearly five million people are listed on the psychiatric register in the Soviet Union. During the next two years, the authorities intend to take up to two million of them off the register. That means that they were and have remained healthy, notwithstanding all the torture.

But it is not at all rare that people who end up in psychiatric hospitals seriously do fall ill. Carrying out the will of their client, the doctor-jailers immediately begin treating virtually all healthy people with forced magnesium sulfate injections — without

any anesthetics. Sometimes they give five or six shots at a time. A person's body temperature rises right away, his legs and arms, where the shots are given, become virtually paralyzed and the agonizing pain lasts for many hours.

The editors of the journal Glasnost have reason to think that in addition to torture in psychiatric hospitals, criminal experiments are still being performed on healthy people forcibly put in them — and, incidentally, also on ill people.

The rules for putting people in psychiatric hospitals are being changed a little bit. These hospitals are no longer to be subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the K.G.B. Some people are starting to be freed from them. Some are being taken off the psychiatric register; to be on it officially permits a healthy person to be placed in a psychiatric prison at any time and to be deprived of all rights.

Recently, Meditsinskaya Gazeta (The Medical Gazette) reported that people who had been freed from psychiatric hospitals were murdering doctors. It is well known that especially bestial guards are sometimes murdered in the camps.

It is also well known that in the Soviet Union no laws protecting human rights are executed. In the absence of a free press and democratic institutions, there is no one who could oppose arbitrary rule.

Those who have sent healthy people to psychiatric hospitals by a wave of their hands are keeping their posts. The doctors who betrayed their medical duty and even violated existing instructions by putting healthy people in hospitals and torturing them remain on the job. These people work as they did before, they have the same acquaintances as before and will offer each other little favors as before. No law frightens them as long as they are the ones looking after its implementation.

On Jan. 24, the director of the monstrous Serbsky Institute of Forensic Psychiatry — where Vladimir Bukovsky, Pyotr Grigorenko and hundreds of thousands of others were declared insane and as a result spent many years in psychiatric prisons — met with representatives of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights.

The director, Dr. Georgi V. Morozov, announced that there is no psychiatric abuse in the Soviet Union, that not only Western but also Soviet journalists slandered psychiatrists and that the authorities did not intend to change anything in Soviet psychiatry. The criminal is defending his right to murder.

Without social control over psychiatric hospitals, without the help of international medical organizations, it is clearly impossible to stop the torture of millions of people who are guilty of nothing. □