

## THE ROLE OF DISSENT IN THE SOVIET UNION SINCE 1953

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The Soviet Union became a closed totalitarian society in 1929 when Joseph Stalin emerged as its sole dictator. He effectively exterminated all opposition, instilling fear and submissiveness into almost 200 million citizens. After his death in 1953 came the “thaw”; people slowly began to voice their opinions and concerns. The subsequent rulers then tried to maintain conformity through harassments and reprisals, yet a fraction of the population—the intelligentsia—had already broken away. These individuals, the “counter-thinkers,” later formed the Dissident Movement and fought for freedom in Soviet society.

Initially, despite their small numbers, the dissidents were successful in terms of resisting literary and artistic repression and overcoming the “shell shock” of Stalinism. Then, during the 1960s and 70s, they were ruthlessly persecuted and found little support in their fellow citizens. However, they made contact with the West and transmitted information about human rights violations in the USSR to the world.

Even though the dissidents have always remained a tiny group, the author believes that they have contributed significantly

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to the present policies of openness (*glasnost*) of the new Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. Thus, the thesis of this essay: even in a closed totalitarian society, moral opposition by the few constitutes a force that can eventually transform that society and maybe even serve to democratize it. It will be recognized that outside support was essential in the dissenters' struggle, and proved that they were able to achieve results through persistence, not through compromises or agreements.

The author will attempt to trace the origins of Soviet dissent and offer her own analysis of its progress.

In order to understand Soviet dissent it is essential to grasp the atmosphere in which it was born and struggled to survive.

The strength of a totalitarian regime lies in, as A. Sakharov described it, "the inertia of fear and passivity."<sup>1</sup> In the Soviet Union this was well known. Stalin had succeeded in cultivating the New Soviet Man—one who obeys and accepts—through fear. The authoritarian system existed due to his submissive cooperation and servile unanimity.

"Every individual from childhood on must absorb the axiomatic fact that never in any circumstances will he be able to influence the regime one jot," writes Bukovsky in his autobiography. "It is immovable, infallible and intransigent, and the entire world is left with no choice but to accommodate itself to this fact. You may humbly beg forgiveness, but never demand your due."<sup>2</sup> Such unspoken rules, enforced by propaganda, easily turned into belief, then into tradition. Under Stalin people conformed in order to survive; afterwards they reproduced "the behavioral stereotype that is appropriate to their society."<sup>3</sup>

Most of the people in the USSR adjusted to the standard of the New Soviet Men they were meant to be: they worked within the establishment and sought no independent ideas; they knew that their future depended wholly upon the state and the KGB (secret police) working next to them; they knew that the only way to insure the fate of their families was through obedience and

proper behavior.<sup>4</sup> They also knew that their ultimate freedom was acting as a collective whose duty is “to help, with all its might, to maintain and consolidate the authority and power of its motherland.”<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, not everyone completely conformed. Many adjusted only outwardly, keeping their private thoughts to themselves. They have been labelled “intellectual schizophrenics”<sup>6</sup> for leading dual lives: being dissenters in the mind, they were capable of denouncing those with whom they sympathized for personal reasons.

The actual dissidents could not bear schizophrenia and broke with the system, openly holding opinions that differed from the official ones. That portion of society was always extremely small,<sup>7</sup> yet it was also the most courageous one. This moral break usually cost the dissenter his material and physical well-being; he acted knowing that sooner or later his activity “will lead to an interview with the secret police, loss of his job, perhaps exile or camp.” He also knew that he would not make a revolution or even gain approval. He only hoped “to enlarge people’s awareness of how their government really operates and to increase their uneasiness and inner embarrassment at the kind of system under which they live.”<sup>8</sup>

Even though most of the dissidents belonged to the intelligentsia, their opinions were discredited as those of “bums and parasites who not only don’t make up a significant group in our society, but are simply not characteristic of its workful and peaceful environment.”<sup>9</sup> Their problems and demands were thus easily referred to as “artificial,”<sup>10</sup> as posed by “undisciplined malcontents, who should indeed be suppressed.”<sup>11</sup> It is in such an atmosphere that the dissidents have managed to survive and work.<sup>12</sup>

We live without feeling the ground under our feet  
 Ten paces away and our voices cannot be heard  
 But everywhere one hears the voice of the Kremlin Mountaineer  
 The destroyer of life and the slayer of peasants.

Osip Mandelstam<sup>13</sup>

This poem, written under Stalin, cost its author his life: of the six people who heard it, at least one reported him to the KGB.<sup>14</sup>

Dissent is not new to Russians; it has existed in their country since Peter the Great. However, what was possible then, under the Tzar, was unthinkable under Stalin. “Any members of any contemporary organizations could be saved only through complete inactivity.”<sup>15</sup>

When Stalin died on March 5, 1953 his country was spellbound after all the mass terror. Yet with his death, “dissent ceased to be a manifestation of an irrational and suicidal impulse and became again something which required merely considerable courage.”<sup>16</sup> At first, the “inertia of fear” was difficult to overcome for it had been firmly imbedded in everyone’s minds:

DON'T THINK.

IF YOU THINK, DON'T SPEAK.

IF YOU SPEAK, DON'T WRITE.

IF YOU WRITE, DON'T SIGN.

IF YOU THINK, SPEAK, WRITE AND SIGN-

DON'T BE SURPRISED!!!

(a circulating Soviet maxim.)

De-Stalinization began as people shed the shell of the New Soviet Man. This was a slow process since Russian people were never accustomed to individual liberty. Throughout history they have “consistently demonstrated their preference for authoritarian government as a check against ‘anarchy,’ a political condition westerners might refer to as democracy.”<sup>17</sup> In 1953 very few realized that the power of the regime rested upon common willingness to accept it, and that “each individual who refused to submit to force reduced that force by one 250-millionth of its sum.”<sup>18</sup>

The first short-lived “thaw” began in 1953 as the limits of freedom were tested through literature. Articles started to appear,

raising suppressed ideas about art and culture. Khrushchev did not want to be like his predecessor, so he tolerated openness up to a certain point. His aim was to end mass terror but to keep a closely controlled society.

The thaw continued through 1956. In February, Khrushchev denounced Stalin in his famous secret speech. Many took courage from it, for it “legitimized” their writings and creations. By that time numerous little circles of three-seven members had already sprung up in the large cities. These discussion groups of students, intellectuals, and artists overcame the spell of fear and enjoyed their new freedoms. Some even attempted to circulate foreign books and magazines, to listen to the western radio, and to collect facts of Soviet history. The roots of Soviet dissent were forming. Later that same year, however, after the Hungarian uprising, harsher internal measures were taken. Censorship was re-introduced and thousands of protesting students were expelled in Leningrad and Moscow.

On July 29, 1958 a monument to the poet Mayakovsky was unveiled in Moscow. Every evening people gathered there to read some of his work—as well as their own poems—and stayed for the discussions that followed. “We were fighting for the concrete freedom to create,” writes Bukovsky, “and it was no accident that many of us...later merged with the movement for human rights. We all got to know each other in Mayakovsky Square.”<sup>19</sup>

Soon the meetings were no longer allowed by the police. The KGB’s answer to persistence was expulsion, provocation, persecution, and searches. Once, even snow plows were used to keep the people away! Most of those who lost their jobs at that time were vilified in the newspapers for parasitism, yet thus received some publicity. The Criminal Codes of 1958 and 1960 reformed criminal procedure, thereby making unemployment an excuse for imprisonment. In May 1961 the Supreme Soviet called for “the intensification of the struggle against individuals who wade (sic) socially useful work and lead an anti-social and parasitic life.”<sup>20</sup> A vicious cycle was starting, where one couldn’t work because of one’s ideas, and was then labelled a nuisance and imprisoned.

This was an ingenious policy for the regime.

After the meetings were discontinued, information exchange became crucial. Samizdat<sup>21</sup> (self-publishing) was born when copies of poetry were distributed in Mayakovsky Square. In the 1960s it connected the loose ends of dissent appearing under Khrushchev into a network, helped the spread of ideas, promoted free speech and opened up the facets of life distorted by official propaganda.<sup>22</sup> To adhere to the movement it became enough to openly express one's independent and critical views on political, cultural, ethical and philosophical matters. Samizdat communication became a force against the official repression of freedom of creation, and united the opposition to the regime.

No, not for us can it be to spread bullets  
 But to mark the significant dates  
 The Epoch created poets  
 And they the soldiers create.<sup>23</sup>

Up to 1964 we have witnessed the development of public opinion, not yet actual dissent. People were becoming accustomed to the relative stability and security; they kept meeting, discussing, distributing Samizdat—all to resist further tyranny. But in 1965 the “freeze”—the new repression—came, as Khrushchev was pushed out and replaced by Brezhnev. De-Stalinization could not have been carried too far, for it would have undermined the legitimacy of the Soviet system.<sup>24</sup>

A wave of arrests began in the Ukraine in August 1965, and in September two writers—Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel—were arrested in Moscow. Their crime was publishing Samizdat. At the same time, censorship increased and public discussions were banned. Many intellectuals were indignant and decided to oppose such measures. On December 5, 1965—Soviet Constitution day—several friends gathered in the Pushkin Square with slogans “Respect the Soviet Constitution!” and “We demand an open trial for Sinyavsky and Daniel!” This was the first free demonstration in the USSR since 1927, and it was broken up fast.<sup>25</sup>

The trial opened on February 10, 1966. Only selected spectators were permitted to attend, making it the first show trial of the post-Stalin era. Sinyavsky and Daniel were tried under article 70, which forbids “agitation or propaganda carried on for the purpose of subverting or weakening the Soviet Regime,”<sup>26</sup> introduced in 1958-1960. Neither pleaded guilty and they were then sentenced to seven and five years of hard labor respectively.

This act by the regime was meant to intimidate the brave. It was accompanied by “indignant letters from agronomists, milkmaids, steelworkers” published in the papers, to produce a picture of nationwide condemnation.<sup>27</sup> The result was the opposite. The closed trial provoked an interest in legality rather than fear among the dissenters. The Soviet Constitution of 1936 “listed an impressive array of individual and political rights, yet no Soviet citizen in his right mind would have thought of invoking them.”<sup>28</sup> In 1966 the intelligentsia refused to tolerate the fact that writers and poets were sent to labor camps. Many individuals<sup>29</sup> made the connection between their rights and intellectual freedom and united together through the links established in 1958. Their new aim was to make the authorities obey their own laws.

Another unheard-of response was public protest. A cycle had started, whereby as more and more joined the protests and became arrested, more protested on their behalf. In March 1966, three petitions were signed by famous figures in Soviet cultural and scientific life to warn the Politburo that its actions were not approved. The signers (including Sakharov<sup>30</sup> and Solzhenitsyn) were labelled parasites, yet their petitions reached the West, aroused criticism, and injured the Soviet image abroad.<sup>31</sup>

To counter this embarrassment, in September 1966 the XXIII Congress denounced the protestors and introduced articles 190-1 and 190-3 into the Criminal Code. One of them prohibited group activities “involving a flagrant breach of public order or explicit refusal to submit to the lawful demands of authority;” the other condemned anti-Soviet slander and its “dissemination in written, printed, or any other form.” “Slander,” Bukovsky adds,

“was a word that could be applied to everything the authorities didn’t like.”<sup>32</sup>

These articles were frequently used at the closed trials of petitioners and demonstrators. The courtrooms were packed with special people; defence lawyers had to have an approved permit to deal with political cases and usually simply agreed with the accusations, pleading only for lighter sentences. Once, a trial was reported in the press before it had taken place—with all the results! “The authorities hadn’t told the paper that it had been postponed, but it got the sentences right just the same.”<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, the western correspondents helped the dissenters to break the Soviet monopoly of information. Samizdat was expanding; smuggled out news was broadcast back to the USSR by radio stations such as the Voice of America. The regime was constantly exposed as a violator of human rights; few unfair acts passed without a public outcry. “We had witnessed for the first time the power of glasnost<sup>34</sup> and had been convinced by it, and had seen the fear and confusion of the authorities... Our sole weapon was glasnost—the rest depended on the individual’s conscience,” writes Bukovsky.<sup>35</sup> That is how in 1966 the word ‘glasnost’ was first used in its present context. The ten year struggle against censorship ended, turning into a struggle for human rights.

We cannot judge criminals with justice!

That would mean exonerating them all!!!

Math teacher Nozhkina.<sup>36</sup>

The United Nations declared 1968 as the International Human Rights Year. This was a very significant year for the dissidents because their movement was established and made itself heard. 1968 was a year of culminating activity and major events.

At first, the movement was very disorganized and weak. Many groups had different goals and rarely cooperated. Reaching out to the general public was very difficult as well: Russian culture

(with some help from propaganda) played its part. The majority had no wish to be enlightened, nor did it seek to fight for freedom.

The movement was composed mainly of middle and upper classes. One-half had academic jobs;<sup>37</sup> one-fourth were artists, writers, actors; one-eighth—engineers and technicians; one-tenth—publishers, teachers, doctors, lawyers; one-twentieth were workers and students; one-hundredth—in the military.<sup>38</sup> Outside the mainstream<sup>39</sup> there were many other (and much more numerous) movements in the USSR at this time: the National Self-determination Movement contained 187,000 Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians, Georgians, and Armenians; the Movement for Religious Liberty numbered 290,000; the Movement of the Deported Nations, such as the Crimean Tartars, included 130,000 members. The most successful of all was the huge Jewish Emigration Movement. However, even when one puts these figures together, the dissenting portion of the population was just a tiny fraction of the whole. The regime had no difficulty in controlling it.

In 1968 more emphasis in Samizdat was being placed on documentary and journalistic writing. Publishers received open letters, speeches, commentaries—taking on a role of public informers. A bi-monthly publication called *The Chronicle of Current Events* was born. Its aim was impartially to inform people in the field of human rights.

Everything that the *Chronicle* stood for can be summed up as glasnost.<sup>40</sup> It became the voice of dissent. Its editors worked in constant fear of raids, always changing duties. The authorities prevented people from getting in touch with the *Chronicle* by declaring those they considered to be involved as nonexistent in phone books, blocking their mail and telephones.<sup>41</sup>

On January 8, 1968 the closed “Trial of the Four”—or the Ginzburg-Galanskov trial—took place. Four people were arrested for their involvement in Samizdat and given unlawful and inhumane sentences. When about 1000 intellectuals protested the closed trial, this reply was given: “They couldn’t be permitted to make their anti-Soviet statements in the presence of Soviet people;

they couldn't be permitted to force our people to listen to such slander... We don't know all the reasons, we must trust our institutions and not be suspicious of them."<sup>42</sup> Protestors were harassed and expelled from their institutions, yet despite the ever growing number of arrests, more professional people joined the dissenters in their attempts to smuggle information abroad.

The famous Prague Spring of 1968 was full of excitement as the events in Czechoslovakia were developing. Many were filled with hope for change for the first time since the October Revolution. On August 21, 1968 these hopes were dashed as Czechoslovakia was invaded by Soviet troops. This was a turning point in the struggle of the dissenters. Quite a few decided that emigration rather than moral opposition was the answer to their problems. Others, however, went on with the fight.

On noon of August 25, the most outspoken protest against the aggression took place in the form of a sit-down demonstration in the Red Square. One of the participants, N. Gorbanevskaya wrote to the *Chronicle*:

At midday we sat on the parapet at Execution Place and unrolled banners with the slogans LONG LIVE FREE AND INDEPENDENT CZECHOSLOVAKIA, SHAME ON THE OCCUPIERS! ...Immediately a whistle blew and plainclothed KGB men rushed at us from all corners...shouting 'They're all Jews!,' 'Beat the anti-Soviets!' We sat quietly and didn't resist. They tore the banners from our hands...beat V. Fainberg in the face until he bled and knocked his teeth out...in the car they beat me...I refuse to give evidence on the organization and the conduct of the demonstration since it was peaceful and didn't disturb public order...My comrades and I are happy that we were able to...if only for a moment, to interrupt the torrent of barefaced lies...to show that not all citizens of our country are in agreement with the violence which is being used in the name of the Soviet people.<sup>43</sup>

The participants of the Red Square demonstration were sentenced under articles 190-1 and 190-3. Some were declared insane and confined to psychiatric wards.

Officially there is no political dissent in the USSR. There are only the anti-social attitudes of the few, who are either talked out of their activities or classified and punished as “abnormal,” or parasites and hooligans—and therefore attracted by the West’s licentious ways—or finally as outright agents of some anti-Soviet organization abroad.<sup>44</sup>

The punishment of these non-violent citizens—political prisoners—was appalling. The dissidents, like A. Marchenko, attempted to reveal all details: sentences of 12-15 years were common, hard labor was forced, conditions were dreadful. “The daily ration contains 2400 calories, enough for an 11-year-old child, and has to suffice for an adult doing physical work day after day for 15-25 years,” reported the *Chronicle*.<sup>45</sup> Any letters of complaint were always returned to those against whom they were written, “so that they could be checked.” The usual response was: “The punishment was justified,” or “the assertions have not been confirmed.”<sup>46</sup>

The camp administration had unlimited opportunities to apply physical and moral pressure, as this was legitimized in 1961: “...our legislation and our Soviet conception of law look upon people who have attacked the conquests of the October Revolution as having committed a most serious offence against their people and as deserving severe punishment rather than any kind of indulgence or forbearance.”<sup>47</sup>

The psychiatric hospitals were preferred by the regime because there painful and demoralizing drugs could be applied legally and the sentences had undetermined lengths.<sup>48</sup> Most patients were diagnosed with “sluggish schizophrenia”—a vague condition. Doctors were chosen by their willingness to make such diagnoses.

Despite the dangers, the number of supporters grew. The *Chronicle* worked hard to expose abuses in confinement. Foreigners helped as well. When three Englishmen tried to distribute leaflets demanding the liberation of Soviet political prisoners, all were deported from the country.<sup>49</sup> More than anything, a link-up

with the population at large was feared. That is why the dissidents were loudly condemned as traitors to the fatherland. But these measures were not sufficient: by 1968 around 1000 well-established citizens were petitioning, as compared to a dozen in 1965. The movement was generating publicity and gaining foreign support. Armed with a voice and steadily increasing in size, it matured by 1968. Dissent could no longer be crippled by arrests.

In May 1969, to unify the existing circles, the Action Group for the Defence of Human Rights in the USSR was formed in Moscow. Its members appealed many times to the UN Commission on Human Rights, yet “the employees of the UN office in Moscow refused to accept the letters, declaring that they couldn’t accept anything from private individuals.”<sup>50</sup> On October 3, 1969, all of the UN centers were instructed to refuse further petitions. This was a major setback for the dissidents.

The documents still reached the West—through foreigners, diplomatic pouches, students (who were rarely surveilled), and phone calls (using a code language). Several public organizations in Europe were supportive, among them Europa Civilita (Rome) and Kuratorium Geistige Freiheit (Bern). But, since the West generally focused its attention on group activities (demonstrations, petitions), support and interest were weakened as the Action Group’s members were confined to hospital wards, and sent into labor camps and exiled.

Several demonstrations took place in 1969. For example, in April, the Mayakovsky Square meeting was held once again. “Read Mayakovsky at home! It’s forbidden to form groups!,” the Police shouted. “Forbidden by whom?”—“You know by whom!”<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the more radical components of the movement—such as the Baltic Fleet officers—threatened the regime with terrorism in the name of the people.

In November 1970, A. Sakharov, V. Chaldize, and A. Tverdokhlebov formed the Moscow Committee for Human Rights to continue the work of the Action Group. They wrote appeals, collected signatures for petitions, and attended trials. Sakharov’s reputation allowed the Committee to survive, so it succeeded in

affiliating with several international human rights organizations.

The 1970s saw the emergence of collective dissent with certain political objectives, outside the control of the Party. It had grown to such an extent that it could no longer be tolerated. The movement faced new repression via new methods and tactics; repression was so strong that soon only a few were left “as proof of the regime’s forbearance and humanity.”<sup>52</sup>

During this time the groundwork for the *détente* was being laid and the period of improved relations between the US and the USSR began. However favorable on the outside, *détente* nevertheless allowed for another internal freeze to take place in the Soviet Union and proved disastrous for the dissidents. Depending on foreign status they were either expelled or allowed to emigrate. For example, Solzhenitsyn was forced onto a plane and flown out in 1974. This was the Party’s new policy: letting the dissidents out resulted in international good will, while the country was also ridding itself of troublemakers and weakening opposition considerably.

It is speculated that in the name of better relations the Nixon administration assured the Politburo that Soviet repression would not be made into a public issue.<sup>53</sup> Those dissidents who were not well-known suffered from the crackdown known as Case 24. “The authorities seemed more impudent because they feel that with *détente* they can now ignore Western public opinion,” said Sakharov.<sup>54</sup>

A part of Case 24 was the decision to suppress all major Samizdat activities. In January 1972 several hundred interviews were conducted against the *Chronicle* and it was silenced for two years when two members broke down during questioning. Without coordination dissident activity was reduced immediately. Show trials resumed, people within the movement turned one against the other. Many were completely demoralized as their ranks were being devastated with no response from the West. Even the ever helpful radio started to play more music and less news from September 11, 1973.<sup>55</sup>

During this silence, only Sakharov's and Solzhentisyn's statements were heard, but a KGB media campaign against them was launched very soon. Only then the West spoke up and eased the repression. The importance of its actions was once again shown: each period of silence meant losses, every ounce of pressure meant hope.

The *Chronicle* emerged again in May 1974. By then, at least one-half of the original dissenters had been neutralized through intimidation, imprisonment, emigration, exile, exhaustion, or death. New laws were passed banning secretive printing and use of duplicating apparatus, as well as giving the authorities the power to extend labor camp sentences by up to five years.<sup>56</sup>

Case 24, hand in hand with the *détente*, almost returned dissent to 1953. Any organizations, such as the 1974 Fund to Aid Political Prisoners in the USSR, were quickly dispersed, yet the KGB didn't succeed in exterminating the movement. Activity was just reduced to the essential—the “invisible region”<sup>57</sup>—such as helping prisoners' families and secretly disseminating information. The public phase of dissent seemed to be over.

After 1974, the rates of arrest for dissidents were lowered in all categories. The Politburo needed to stabilize *détente* by successfully completing the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The accords were signed in Helsinki in August 1975, trading Western acceptance of the Soviet division in Europe in return for guarantees of various human rights.

The accords were published in the USSR, reviving the dissidents. Immediately, the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group was formed by Yuri Orlov. It played a great role in East-West relations, revealing Soviet non-compliances such as further abuse of psychiatry for political repression and persecution of religious believers. The group also checked people out for “normality,” so that their asylum confinement was more difficult.

The second generation of dissent was supported by its increasingly wide geographical base. This was no longer a “tiny dwindling group of dissidents in the capital.”<sup>58</sup> For example, from

1968-1972 the *Chronicle* reported news from thirty-five different places, and by 1981 it mentioned 142 in a single issue.<sup>59</sup> Ideas were spreading even to the countryside. By 1976-77 four more Helsinki Watch Groups were formed in different cities and succeeded in unifying different branches of the movement.

The authorities soon became alarmed. "The editors of the newspapers and journals receive numerous demands from Soviet people that, at last, firmness be shown and the dissidents silenced. It has been decided to imprison the 50 most active dissidents and to deal severely with their associates. It is time to show strength and not pay attention to the West," said an official speaker.<sup>60</sup> However, the Helsinki signatories were now obliged to observe Soviet domestic behavior, so in December 1976, President Carter launched his Human Rights Campaign. The very first arrests provoked an outcry and out of the fifty only twenty were detained.

In 1978, the Soviet Union was for the first time publicly accused of human rights violations at the Belgrade Conference. This time, Brezhnev decided to disregard the West and to maintain control. The 1979-80 "pre-Olympic" crisis started as the country was ridding itself of malcontents who may have spoiled its image. Members of the Helsinki Groups were arrested one by one. The repression accelerated to 200 arrests per year after December 1979, unnoticed due to the storm of condemnation about the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Sakharov was sent into exile, sentences were lengthened, physical abuse (especially of women) increased, the jamming of radio was reimposed, and the number of contacts with the West was significantly reduced. Finally, a Soviet press campaign announced the final crushing of dissent.

The dissidents again became defenseless as the regime stopped paying attention to the West and their community went completely underground. Even though most of the original dissidents were gone, the police still arrested hundreds of less-known people—not only political but religious dissenters, "and even practitioners of yoga."<sup>61</sup>

The dissident movement as it started in 1953 was virtually over, yet it had fulfilled its duty. From about 1982, in its place came

the widespread criticism of the regime, such that could never again be suppressed. Discussions now extended from the faults of the Soviet system to possible future changes. “Now, albeit with caution, everybody curses the authorities, makes sarcastic remarks in lines and in street cars, and doormen and members of the Central Committee crack political jokes.”<sup>62</sup>

We drink to the success of our hopeless cause.<sup>63</sup>

—traditional Russian dissident toast.

The history of the dissident movement in the USSR can be illustrated by ‘thaws’—when state control eased, causing upsurges in activity, followed by ‘freezes’—repressions. Dissent started as intellectual opposition to totalitarian restrictions in the field of art and literature, and later turned into a political struggle for human rights. The dissidents had many various goals, yet shared the desire for legality, freedom of speech, thought and action. Samizdat—their voice—proved itself invaluable in uniting the different branches of the movement into concrete opposition to the system.

Soviet dissidents have always maintained a realistic approach to their cause. They never expected a revolution, for throughout history they have remained a minority in action if not in thought, and were hardly about to gain the support of the Soviet general public. The dissidents’ numbers could not significantly threaten the totalitarian system that ruled their society: the authorities could afford to ignore them or to answer with all possible means of repression.

According to the official explanation, dissidents “are unconcealed enemies of socialism” who “exist only because they are supported, paid, and praised by the West.”<sup>64</sup> The dissidents turned to the West because of the unresponsiveness of their own government to demands for guarantees of basic human rights. Reaching out and gaining Western support was very important, for without it the dissidents would have continued to be ignored and exterminated, while the reality of Soviet society would have remained unknown to the world.

The history of the movement showed that pressure and straightforward protest from abroad achieved far greater results than all attempts at cooperating and compromising with the regime. The Western concern for human rights, the flow of Western publicity constituted outside glasnost—a force of organized opposition that was sometimes lacking inside the country itself.

The dissidents have attained the highest level of opposition possible in a totalitarian state, and their achievements must be viewed within that framework. They broke with the system and became its conscience in the name of freedom and justice; they acted knowing the price they would have to pay. They have succeeded in breaking Stalin's "inertia of fear," the regime's control of information, the image of Soviet public unanimity and lately, they have witnessed the coming of Glasnost—their most sought-for goal in the struggle with the Soviet regime.

The current situation in the Soviet Union is interesting and exciting. Mikhail Gorbachev—the General Secretary of the USSR since March 1985—has become famous for his policy of openness and "glasnost." For the first time in 70 years one can witness a certain degree of intellectual and spiritual freedom and read about issues that were never discussed before—drugs, theft, catastrophes, alcoholism, inflation, corruption, and inefficiency of many institutions—in newspapers. Self-criticism is encouraged, a law of religious freedom was recently passed, many political prisoners (including A. Sakharov) were released, and even military concessions—including withdrawal from Afghanistan—were made.

Today world opinion about "glasnost" is split. Many are optimistic, believing that the regime has simply grown old and is no longer able to repress everyone. On the other hand, although many unprecedented changes are occurring in the USSR, most of the ex-dissidents do not trust them out of their experience. To them "glasnost" is just another thaw that was unavoidable due to the economic stagnation of the country. A major part of the present policies is "perestroika," or restructuring the whole society to rid it of the corruption which came with totalitarianism.

Politically, many things are not changing. There is still only one political party and recently power was consolidated through creation of the position of President, combining control over foreign policy with party control. Some of the authors of glasnost now abroad are maligned in the press as traitors, and not all political prisoners have been released. For the ex-dissidents, change means complete democratization, not only loosening of control. "He (Gorbachev) doesn't want to change the system, he wants to save it along with his skin!" says Bukovsky.<sup>65</sup> They expect that once the economy is back on its feet, another freeze will come.

It is currently impossible to say whether the changes are genuine, and whether as a result of Gorbachev's policy, the USSR will become a more humane and democratic society. It is possible, however, to see that the dissidents certainly influenced these changes. They have demanded glasnost two decades before it became official, and they secured Western support for such processes by revealing their society to the world. Today, Gorbachev "uses our same slogans to please the population," says Bukovsky. "People who now form his policy have been associated with the human rights activists. They remember what we were fighting for."<sup>66</sup>

"Glasnost" is, for one thing, a direct consequence of the efforts of the Soviet dissenting intelligentsia who invented it, fought for it, and suffered for it—despite all repression. The Soviet dissidents have proved that even in a totalitarian society—as existed in the USSR since 1929—moral and legal opposition by a few is a strong force that can eventually help to open that society up and influence the democratic changes within it.

What future is there for dissent now that "glasnost" is here? According to Bukovsky, it will expand into all areas—geographical, industrial, social—"all on the same basis we've created."<sup>67</sup> Today, as long as there remains a reason for the dissenters to exist, it is unlikely that they would ever give up their struggle.

- <sup>1</sup> A. Sakharov, My Country and the World (New York: Vintage Books, 1975) p. 29
- <sup>2</sup> V. Bukovsky, To Build a Castle-My Life as a Dissenter (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1978) p. 248
- <sup>3</sup> A. Zinoviev, The Reality of Communism (New York: Schocken Books, 1981) p. 67
- <sup>4</sup> Sakharov, p. 29
- <sup>5</sup> E. Kolobkova, Propaganda Sovietskogo Obraza Zhizni (Moscow: Moskovsky Rabochii, 1987) p. 30
- <sup>6</sup> R. Pipes, Survival is not Enough (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984) p. 61
- <sup>7</sup> The movement contained at most 10,000 participants throughout its history, not including the aforementioned “apolitical supporters of ordinary human decency.” A. Brown, ed., The Soviet Union since the Fall of Khrushchev (New York: The Free Press, 1975) p. 129
- <sup>8</sup> A. Ulam, Russia’s Failed Revolutions (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1981) p. 421
- <sup>9</sup> Zinoviev, p. 17
- <sup>10</sup> D. Kerimov and G. Maltsev, Politika—delo kazhdogo (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Politliteratoury, 1986) p. 30
- <sup>11</sup> L. Baradat, Soviet Political Society (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1986) p. 376
- <sup>12</sup> As Vladimir Bukovsky, a dissident, later wrote: “I despised Soviet Man—not the one depicted on posters or in Soviet Literature, but the one who existed in reality—who had no sense of pride, nor a sense of personal responsibility, who was capable of tackling a bear alone with a pitchfork but who shrank away and broke into a cold sweat at the sight of a policeman, who would betray and sell his own father to avoid his superior thumping his fist on the desk at him. The tragedy was that he existed inside every one of us, and until we could overcome this Soviet Man within, nothing in our life would change.” Bukovsky p. 78
- <sup>13</sup> O. Mandelstam, 1933
- <sup>14</sup> Ulam, p. 403
- <sup>15</sup> L. Alexeeva, Soviet Dissent (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985) p. 11
- <sup>16</sup> Ulam, p. 403
- <sup>17</sup> Baradat, p. 385; see also Ulam, A. Russia’s Failed Revolutions

<sup>18</sup> Bukovsky, p. 33

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 146

<sup>20</sup> as translated in Bukovsky, p. 150

<sup>21</sup> “Most Samizdat publications are blurry carbon copies on crackly onionskin paper devoid of pictures, color, and even margins in most cases so as to make the best use of scarce materials. The language is direct and simple, a deliberate departure from the pomposity of *Pravda* and its sister papers. Facts, figures, dates, and details fill these bulletins, another studied departure from the official press emphasis on exhortation, empty rhetoric, and vague phrases.” D. Shanor, Behind the Lines (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985) p. 121

<sup>22</sup> Some manuscripts were smuggled abroad unapproved, and were called Tamizdat (publishing out there). This was considered an anti-Soviet act, and many couldn’t accept such disregard for internal censorship. The first one to do so was Pasternak, with his *Doctor Zhivago*. Others—like Solzhenitsyn—soon followed. It is also interesting to note that almost every Soviet Nobel prize for literature went to a dissident who couldn’t publish freely in the USSR.

<sup>23</sup> as quoted in Bukovsky, p. 163

<sup>24</sup> M. Sorrentino and F. Curcio, Soviet Politics and Education (New York: University Press of America, 1986) p.178

<sup>25</sup> As reported in the Chronicle of Current Events #6 of February 28, 1969. Compiled and translated by: P. Reddaway, ed., Uncensored Russia (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972) p. 71 \*in the future noted as Chronicle x, Reddaway xx

<sup>26</sup> as translated in Bukovsky, p. 274

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 257

<sup>28</sup> Ulam, p. 421

<sup>29</sup> People like: Alexander Esenin-Volpin, Vadim Delone, Natalya Gorbanevskaya, Petr Grigorenko, Alexander Ginzburg, Larissa Bogoraz, Pavel Litvinov, and others...mostly those who later became known as ‘official’ dissenters.

<sup>30</sup> The father of the Soviet Hydrogen Bomb.

<sup>31</sup> By using the West, the dissidents “sought to play on the embarrassment that could be caused to the authorities when in trials of well-known people police, prosecutors, and judges could be shown to be violating legal procedures and principles, adherence to which would have minimized KGB repression.” Ulam p. 421

<sup>32</sup> Bukovsky, p. 274

<sup>33</sup> A. Dallin and C. Rice, ed., The Gorbachev Era (Stanford: Stanford Alumni Association, 1986) p. 100

<sup>34</sup> Glasnost—Russian for publicity, openness, loudness—later to become the slogan of the official Soviet government policy under Mikhail Gorbachev.

<sup>35</sup> Bukovsky, p. 273

<sup>36</sup> quoted from Political Diary #14 (April 1968), R. Medvedev, ed.; and translated in Cohen, S. An End to Silence (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1982) p. 263

<sup>37</sup> Scientists and mathematicians were overrepresented because of a greater job security and their privileged position in Soviet society. Also, A. Sakharov explains: “We are trained in classical logic, in the dispassionate observation and analysis of facts, whereas Soviet politicians, lawyers, historians, etc. are taught the method of justifying a predetermined conclusion.” Sakharov, p. 10

<sup>38</sup> Dallin, p. 96

<sup>39</sup> Otherwise known as the Democratic/Human Rights/Dissident movement.

<sup>40</sup> On the cover of the Chronicle was the text of Article 19 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” see also Reddaway, P. Uncensored Russia

<sup>41</sup> Chronicle #5 explains: “The Chronicle is in no sense an illegal publication, and the difficult conditions in which it is produced are created by the peculiar notions about law and freedom of information which...have become established in certain Soviet organizations...The Chronicle cannot...give its postal address on the last page. Anyone who is interested...can pass on the information to the editors...Simply tell it to the person from whom you received the Chronicle, and he will tell the person from whom *he* received the Chronicle, and so on. But do not try to trace the whole chain of communication yourself, or else you will be taken for a police informer.” Reddaway, p. 54

<sup>42</sup> A. Novozhilova, as quoted in Political Diary #43, Cohen, p. 261

<sup>43</sup> Reddaway, p. 99

<sup>44</sup> Ulam, p. 424

<sup>45</sup> letter by A. Marchenko (April 17, 1968) as quoted in Reddaway, p. 187

<sup>46</sup> response by R. Zakharov of the Red Cross of the USSR to A. Marchenko (April 29, 1968) as quoted in Chronicle #2, Reddaway p. 191

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191

<sup>48</sup> The worst remedy was 'ukrutka': "the prisoner would be tightly wrapped from feet to armpits in a wet sheet or strips of canvas. As the material dried out, it shrank, inflicting terrible pain on the prisoner, and scorching his body all over. Usually the prisoner would quickly lose consciousness...nurses would loosen the roll-up and tighten it again." Bukovsky p. 206

<sup>49</sup> Chronicle #2, Reddaway p. 92

<sup>50</sup> Chronicle #8, *Ibid.*, pp. 150-1

<sup>51</sup> Chronicle #7, *Ibid.*, p. 415

<sup>52</sup> Ulam, p. 424

<sup>53</sup> This was never confirmed but there was no protest from the West against the arrests. A. Brown, ed., The Soviet Union Since the Fall of Khrushchev (New York: The Free Press, 1975) p. 133

<sup>54</sup> as quoted in J. Rubenstein, Soviet Dissent (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980) p. 187

<sup>55</sup> Rubenstein, p. 188

<sup>56</sup> Shanor, p. 125

<sup>57</sup> Reddaway, p. 375

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 416

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 416

<sup>60</sup> as quoted in Baradat, p. 376

<sup>61</sup> as quoted in Alexeeva, p. 389

<sup>62</sup> S. Grigoryants, 1982 as quoted in Baradat, p. 376

<sup>63</sup> Baradat, p. 376

<sup>64</sup> Pravda (1977) as quoted in Rubenstein, p. 269

<sup>65</sup> Vladimir Bukovsky, Soviet ex-dissident, Washington, D.C., personal interview, 8 June 1988.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

