

FILE

VLB

16 May 1980

I am replying on the Prime Minister's behalf to your letter to her of 14 May about the current campaign to suppress human rights in the Soviet Union.

Your letter is receiving attention and a reply will be sent to you as soon as possible.

MICHAEL ALEXANDER

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14th May, 1980.

From Professor Leonard Schapiro and Mr. Peter Reddaway.

Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
London, S.W.1.

Dear Prime Minister,

We write to you because we are now convinced that the current Soviet campaign to suppress human rights is the worst ever (i.e. since dissent became organized 15 years ago), and that even in the present state of East-West tension it would substantially help the cause of human rights in the Soviet Union if you and other members of the government were to speak out strongly and persistently to denounce the Kremlin on this issue. We have been pleased to see that Douglas Hurd and Norman St. John Stevas have recently spoken up. Naturally, our allies ought to do likewise, and we have been in correspondence with Dr. Brzezinski, who is very sympathetic and apparently pushing this view in the White House.

One of us has recently been doing research for an academic article on Soviet policy towards dissent. Regarding the year 1977, the year of the last big crack-down, and President Carter's admirable leading of the Western campaign of protest, the firm conclusion reached is that this campaign was remarkably successful. It would probably have been even more successful if Mr. Carter had not apparently been convinced by the consensus view of most politicians and journalists that he had gone too far and the campaign had been counter-productive.

In fact, the evidence shows clearly that the Kremlin started the 1977 purge with the intention of suppressing, in particular, the Helsinki Monitoring Groups. But when the Western protests about the arrest of Professor Orlov and others reached an unprecedented volume, it hastily retreated before it had arrested even half the dissenters on its list. As a result, most of the Helsinki and other groups survived, continued campaigning, and repeatedly expressed their gratitude to Mr. Carter and the other Western defenders who had saved them from much heavier losses.

Now the new purge is in full swing - to cleanse the country of dissent before the Olympics - yet Western voices are muted. Thousands of dissenters throughout the USSR have been subjected to systematic KGB intimidation for the last year - dismissals from work, threats of arrest, beatings-up by official thugs - and over 200 who have refused to be intimidated have been subject to long-term arrest or psychiatric internment. A dozen important dissenting groups are on the verge of extinction. The documentation on all this is voluminous.

Between now and the Olympics we expect the figure of 200 to rise sharply - unless a strong Western protest campaign develops very quickly. Can you help to give a lead? We hope so, as we believe such a campaign to be not only morally right but also in the best interests of the Western Alliance. Dissenters are the best educators of the Western public about the nature of communism, and also one of the few internal restraints on the regime.

Yours sincerely,

Leonard Schapiro.
Peter Reddaway

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