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The Communists are Jailers

Letter to Freedom

Mollie Steimer

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Retrieved on 8th November 2022 from archive.org

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Comrades and Friends:

Lozovsky, Chicherin and Trotsky are deliberately lying when they say that no anarchists are being held in prison, as you can see in the attached report on the persecution of anarchists and other left revolutionists. It is surely not in their interest to let the world know that communist prisons are overflowing with political prisoners today just as in the days of the czar. So they hide the truth with impudence.

When I reached Russia at the end of 1920, I found many of my anarchist comrades in jail. The few who were still free were so frightened that they did not want to get together for fear that the government would suspect a “conspirative” meeting. I immediately concerned myself with the fate of those in prison and did what I could to help them. But it is more difficult to help a political prisoner in Soviet Russia than in any capitalist country. The communists very rarely put a political opponent on trial. During my stay in Russia hundreds of rebellious idealists were sent to prison, to concentration camps or to exile. Very few of them ever had a trial. Ordinarily, the local political department sends a package of accusatory papers to

the administrative committee in Moscow, and this committee decides the issue in the “absence” of the accused.

Often people are arrested and accused in secret. In such cases, the efforts of relatives to learn where the victims are being held are frustrated because the political department refuses to give them any information. An eloquent example is the case of David Kogan and Ivan Akhtirsky, two old anarchists who were active during and before the revolution in Russia. Remaining faithful to their ideals they continued their anarchist propaganda under the soviet “government”. These two comrades were arrested in October, 1922. Since then, relatives and friends have been trying to find out where they are, but in vain.

No one knows what happened to these two idealists. Are they alive? Have they been shot? We do not know, and the omnipotent officialdom refuses to say what has happened to them. When Maria Veger — Akhtirsky’s comrade — tried to get information about him, the chief of the St. Petersburg political department, Maysing, answered, “Forget about him! You will see Akhtirsky when you will be with him in person.”

A great many political prisoners are sick with scurvy, malaria, tuberculosis because of the terrible conditions in the prisons: dampness, dirt, lack of fresh air and nutrition. A week does not pass without a hunger strike somewhere, or an attempt at suicide to protest the miserable treatment to which they are subjected in the communist jails.

The help that we can give the prisoners is to provide them with food, clothing, tobacco and books. We need funds to carry on. I address this appeal to all men and women with a sense of justice to help the imprisoned revolutionaries who are suffering today in Russia’s jails.

Friends and comrades: I speak to you in the name of the idealists who have given their lives for a cause that they sincerely believed would liberate mankind from its unhappy existence. Give them your hand in their hour of need. Help them morally as well as materially. Protest against the continuing persecu-

tion of revolutionists in “socialist” Russia. Don’t be deceived, and don’t let others be deceived by the shameless lying propaganda of the Communists.

Mollie Steimer, May, 1924